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Epicurean Gardens in William Temple and John Wilmot

THE GREEK PHILOSOPHER EPICURUS, who died around 270 years before the birth of Christ, lived and taught in an Athenian garden. A teacher who welcomed women and slaves as disciples and friends, he held pleasure to be the highest end of life, and asserted that temperance best ensures such pleasure. For him, the universe was a concourse or dance of atoms, and the gods—though they existed—displayed only indifference to human welfare. So firmly was Epicurus associated with the precincts of his garden that his teachings may shade into his environs: he becomes, in retrospect, the genius of a place. This Epicurean place is both rhetorical and material. William Temple, who lived from 1628 to 1699, notes in his essay on the topic: “Epicurus passed his life wholly in his garden; there he studied, there he exercised, there he taught his philosophy.”¹ Epicurus’s garden offered a place that, given the universality toward which his philosophy aspired, could be recreated anywhere or at any time. In fact, the classicist Peter Green has called Epicureanism the only missionary philosophy produced by the Greeks.² William Temple and John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester (1657–1680), evoke gardens as settings for idiosyncratic variations on Epicurean philosophy. Temple’s garden partakes of both the physical and metaphysical. Fostered from a single root, the garden and philosophy virtually share a common origin. Temple himself retires to the fact and idea of a garden when frustrated in his career. Wilmot’s St. James Park is much different: a terrain of promiscuous combinations. Beyond the immediate

¹ William Temple, *Five Miscellaneous Essays by Sir William Temple*, ed. Samuel Holt Monk (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1963) 10. Parenthetical page references are to this edition.

² See *Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1990) 624. Green adds, “It is no hyperbole to speak of the ‘Epicurean gospel.’”

precincts and abrupt couplings of the park, the possibility nevertheless remains that aptly assorted lovers may contrive an original garden space of intimacy, moving through *eros* (desire) to *philia* (friendship), as though just this progression in this order were the way to true love. But in Wilmot's poem, friendship—an Epicurean value, though here imparted a powerfully sexual inflection—is, at least according to the speaker, betrayed. Together, Temple and Wilmot demonstrate the elasticity of Epicurean doctrine in the later seventeenth century.



Though both were intimates of Charles II, to compare Temple and Wilmot may seem an operation almost as random as comparing apples and oranges. Their personal mores diverged widely. An engineer of the 1668 Triple Alliance (whereby Sweden, Holland and England formed a league against Louis XIV), Temple sometimes excelled as a diplomat; the court wit Wilmot's rakish misbehaviour and scandalous verse brought him equivocal fame and infamy, making him the model for figures in Restoration drama such as Etherege's Dorimant and Behn's Willmore.³ But for my proceedings, I may borrow a licence from Temple himself, who in the course of his essay "Upon the Gardens of Epicurus; or, Gardening, in the Year 1685" actually does discuss in detail the varying traits of apples and oranges, not to mention other fruit. Invoking Vergil, Temple's prose pursues a georgic and meditative course, now denotative and now figurative in its register; Wilmot's poem "A Ramble in St. James Park" belongs to the category of satirical love elegy, Catullus as well as Ovid being perhaps tutelary spirits. Some local sense of what the authors construe as tactical Epicureanism may be deduced from their works. But, beyond Epicurus, what unites Temple and Wilmot with each other in their writings is a preoccupation with aetiologies and with fecundity—gardeners' topics. Temple organizes his essay around the ideas of temper, temperateness and temperance; Wilmot, around concepts of sterility and imitation. Both writers implicitly cherish the advent of an original and unified moment, in which reason, sense and feeling cohere, and in which—analogously to Epicurus's philosophical garden—outer and inner factors coincide.

³ Henry Wilmot, John's father and the first Earl of Rochester, earned his son an enormous margin of tolerance, by reason of extraordinary loyalty to Charles in extraordinary circumstances, such as the sojourn in the boughs of the Boscobel oak after the rout at Worcester in 1651.

Samuel Holt Monk remarks that Temple “was in sympathy with the ethical system of Epicurus as it had been reinterpreted for Christian Europe by the French cleric and philosopher Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655).”⁴ Temple opens his essay “Upon the Gardens of Epicurus” with the aetiology of human wishes, which is also the aetiology of philosophy. What source do our wishes have? It is reason that “furnishes us with . . . variety of passions, and consequently of wants and desires” (1). Reason originates a multitude of passions—can reason then help to satisfy them? How ought we adequately to divert our exorbitant desires? The usual response to the urgency of the passions, Temple argues, is to busy ourselves in the acquisition of riches, although humanity began by mere subsistence: “they lived by the hour, or by the day” (1). But even the wealthiest and most powerful of human beings—Caesar, Semiramis—retired to gardens. Gardens offer a bounded exercise ground, so to speak, for reason and passion, in which these rivals may achieve a rare and rich confederacy.

Philosophy and the garden resemble each other. A garden anticipates and fulfills the demands of the senses: “the most exquisite delights of sense are pursued in the contrivance and plantation of gardens; which, with fruits, flowers, shades, fountains, and the music of birds that frequent such happy places, seem to furnish all the pleasures of the several senses, and, with the greatest, or at least the most natural perfections.” Sensuous wish and sensuous gratification happen almost simultaneously. From this literal garden, with its advantages, Temple moves to the origins of philosophy. People have searched for “a nearer and surer way to the ease and felicity of life, by endeavouring to subdue, or at least to temper their passions, and reduce their appetites to what nature seems only to ask and to need. And this design seems to have brought philosophy into the world” (4). The garden ideally answers the demands of sense, making it a “happy” place; philosophy analogously anticipates and satisfies the passionate demands of reason. Therefore the best habitat for philosophy is the garden: “The sweetness of air, the pleasantness of smells, the verdure of plants, the cleanness and lightness of food, the exercise of working or walking; but above all, the exemption from cares and solicitude seem equally to favour and improve both contemplation and health, the enjoyment of sense and imagination” (10). The garden holistically nourishes: sense, feeling and reason fuse and function concertedly. The harvest of contentment is continuous and easeful, so that in a sense Homer’s garden of Alcinoüs (to which Temple makes reference [13]) becomes a reality: from a palpable garden, whatever

⁴ See Temple, “Introduction” xix.

the season, impalpable Epicurean fruit may be plucked.⁵ The crop ripens incessantly. Priority in time is, moreover, connected to priority in virtue: gardens are “the most ancient and most general of any sorts of possession among mankind” (11).

Temple emphasizes the first beginnings of gardening and philosophizing. Origins preoccupy Temple also on the level of etymology. He derives the Latin *hortus*, “garden,” from *ortus*, “rising, source” because a garden “perpetually furnishes some rise or production of something new in the world” (34). So the garden has the double benefit of the deepest antiquity in human experience and of continuous self-renewal, fecundity, benign innovation. Temple famously wrote “An Essay upon the Ancient and Modern Learning”; although he came out in favour of the ancients, in the case of gardens past and present are synthesized agreeably. As Richard Faber observes, “In garden design Temple takes up his familiar ground as a liberal conservative, carrying on an established tradition, but not too rigidly and with an insight into the fashions of the future.”⁶ Faber adds that Temple himself set actual gardening precedents, apparently introducing (for example) four varieties of grape into England.

Like the garden, etymology participates vividly in both the present moment and the past: it explores the connections between the old meanings of words and new significances. Temple’s etymological enthusiasm leads to a telling excursus on the meaning of the Latin word *mala* (14-15). Ordinarily, such a word would be translated “apples.” Here, in what seems a lexical exercise, Temple may actually touch on Epicurean questions of happiness and of fertility. He quotes Vergil’s *Georgics*:

Media fert tristes succos, tardumq; saporem
Faelicis mali; quo non praesentibus ullum,
Pocula si quando saevae infecere novercae,
Auxilium venit, ac membris agit atra venena.

This passage he translates as:

⁵ Alcinoüs’s garden is describe in book VII of *The Odyssey*: “But without the courtyard ... is a great orchard of four acres Therein grow trees, tall and luxuriant, pears and pomegranates and apple-trees with their bright fruit, and sweet figs, and luxuriant olives. Of these the fruit perishes not nor fails in winter or in summer, but lasts throughout the year; and ever does the west wind, as it blows, quicken to life some fruits, and ripen others; pear upon pear waxes ripe, apple upon apple” (Homer, *The Odyssey*, vol.1, trans. A. Murray [London: William Heinemann, 1916] 241).

⁶ Richard Faber, *The Brave Courtier: Sir William Temple* (London: Faber & Faber, 1983) 141.

Media brings forth pois'nous herbs, and the flat taste
 Of the blest apple, than which ne'er was found
 A help more present, when curs't step-dames mix
 Their mortal cups, to drive the venom out.

Dismissing the notion that *mala* here means “apples” in the modern acceptance of the word, Temple pauses to wonder whether the Vergilian fruit is in fact the citron or the orange. Whatever its true identity may be, this exceptional fruit effectively detoxifies. *Felix*, the epithet modifying *malum*, can mean “fertile,” “happy” or “blessed”; concepts of fecundity and of felicity thus coincide. Vergil’s “blest apple,” in the context of Temple’s essay, is surely by association the proper produce of the happy man, the Epicurean immunized against an immoderate world of poisons.⁷

Temple’s essay is resolutely historicist. He discusses ancient frequenters of gardens, such as Caesar, but he situates his own garden essay in the present, the year 1685—four years after he retired, with some embitterment, from diplomacy. Gardening, he remarks, is “grown into such vogue, and [has been] so mightily improved in the three or four-and-twenty years of his majesty’s reign, that perhaps few countries are before us either in the elegance of our gardens, or in the number of our plants” (20). Here he connects the Epicurean ideal of temperance to the national climate—a temperate one. Charles II himself is quoted on the topic:

I must needs add one thing more in favour of our climate, which I heard the King say, and I thought new and right, and truly like a King of England that loved and esteemed his own country: ... he said he thought that was the best climate, where he could be abroad in the air with pleasure, or at least without trouble and inconvenience, the most days of the year, and the most hours of the day; and this he thought he could be in England, more than in any country he knew of in Europe. And I believe it is true, not only of the hot and the cold, but even among our neighbours in France, and the Low Countries themselves, where the heats or the colds, and changes of seasons, are less reatable than they are with us.” (21)

Temple speaks of “the temper of our climate” (22), its nice balance between the hot and the cold. The most temperate climate is implicitly the most reliably philosophical, the most trustworthily Epicurean. The monarch may “be abroad in the air with pleasure ... most days of the year”: England’s climate

⁷ For a classic study of the type of the happy man, see Maren-Sofie Røstvig’s *The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal*, vol.1 (Oslo: Norwegian Universities Press, 1962).

maximizes pleasure. It answers by its delectable moderation to Epicurus's standard of hedonism.⁸

The georgic literal-mindedness of Temple's essay coincides perfectly with its philosophical bias, when he takes up the Epicurean adjuration to act *secundum Naturam*. A prospective gardener ought to consult the physical genius of the place (27–28):

Greater sums may be thrown away without effect or honour, if there want sense in proportion to money, or if nature be not followed; which I take to be the great rule in this, and perhaps in every thing else, [in] the conduct not only of our lives, but our governments For my own part, I know not three wiser precepts for the conduct either of princes or private men, than

—Servare modum, finemq; tueri
Naturamq; sequi.”

The Latin tag means “observe due measure, keep the end in view and follow nature.” It applies to national policy and horticulture equally. On this ground Temple the diplomat and Temple the gardener coincide.

Temple's essay shuttles throughout between practical and philosophical advice. The reader learns about grafting and about how to combat “lice of the vine” (“prune your trees as close as you can, especially the tainted wood, then . . . wash them very clean with a wet brush, so as not to leave one shell upon them that you can discern” [32–33]). This advice—measures against infestation, against the malignant fecundity of pests—matches the more general Epicurean outlook, which mandates, according to Horace in his *Epistle* 1.18, quoted by Temple, that a person seek *Quid curas minuat, quid tibi reddat amicum*, “what lessens care, what makes thee thine own friend.” A person should “choose his course of life by his own humour and temper” (34). “Temper” appears in this context as an inward quality in search of an outer analogue or regimen, whereas elsewhere (as a noun) it denotes the character of a climate and (as a verb) identifies the lauded activity of chastening the passions, which may infest us as lice our vines.

Temple associates the garden at the conclusion of his essay with choice: “The measure of choosing well is whether a man likes what he has

⁸ Charles II's Epicureanism is predictably less moderate than Temple's: “All appetites are free,” he once said, “and God will never damn a man for allowing himself a little pleasure” (quoted in Cephas Goldsworthy, *The Satyr: An Account of the Life and Work, Death and Salvation of John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester* [London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2001] 78).

chosen; which, I thank God, has befallen me” (34). Temple’s final words, intended as an apology for his “retreat,” are a panegyric of fruit: “no part of diet, in any season, is so healthful, so natural, and so agreeable to the stomach as good and well-ripened fruits” (35). Perhaps Temple reverses the fall in a literal way when he especially praises “apples, which, with cherries, are of all others the most innocent food, and perhaps the best physic” (36). What occasioned the fall of man is here celebrated for its “innocence”—a potentially ethical quality—as well as for its concrete medicinal properties, recalling the *felix malum*, the happy, the fertile, the blessed apple of Vergil, a sovereign curative against the potency of poisons.



For Temple, the *locus amoenissimus*, the most pleasant garden, of his life was Moor Park as he recollected it from the mid-1650s, “a model . . . beautiful and perfect” (28). This garden he likely associated with his beloved wife, the brilliant letter-writer Dorothy Osborne. To call something new after something old is to innovate and to conserve at one and the same time—a version of Temple’s characteristic gesture. In homage to the original Moor Park, which was established by the Countess of Bedford, he gave his own last garden the same name. He had his heart buried in a silver box beneath the sundial there. John Wilmot’s recorded relation to sundials was more intemperate: he once drunkenly smashed Charles II’s. Wilmot’s St. James Park is predictably a burlesque sort of garden paradise, prime soil for erotic irresponsibility. Yet even here the moral significance of choice remains. Temple’s conception of choice is like Rasselas’s or even Candide’s—the choice of life. Wilmot addresses instead the choice of lovers. Despite latitude for promiscuity, the heart retains its primacy, too, though it is not buried beneath a sundial—it is betrayed. Temple’s gentleman gardener is not solitary, but neither is he dependent much on the approbation of others. Wilmot’s speaker discloses a ferocious investment in sex, in reputation, and therefore in society. But friendship, too, engages him.

Like “Upon the Gardens of Epicurus,” Wilmot’s “A Ramble in St. James Park,” dating from the 1670s, situates itself consciously in the present, and it concerns itself, moreover, with aetiologies and with fertility. Temple has permission from his genre, the essay, to ramble among topics and among various discourses; Rochester’s rambler is not an essayistic figure, but more like a cruiser in the present-day sense of the word, yet a cruiser who, like a Roman love elegist, favours and furiously mandates *eruditus luxus*, refined debauchery. In fact, Cephias Goldsworthy finds “A Ramble in St. James Park” so angry that he wonders, “Perhaps it was an early manifestation of

mental imbalance caused either by mercury poisoning or by syphilis.”⁹ The poem links gossip and sex from the start (1–2): “Much wine had passed, with grave discourse / Of who fucks who, and who does worse.”¹⁰ Talking about sex assumes almost the importance of sex itself. Sex offers an exemplary occasion for both publicity and intimacy; whatever else results from sexual activity, it predictably begets rumour.

Leaving a tavern called the Bear, the speaker goes “out into St. James’s Park” (7). This park began in the thirteenth century as the site of the St. James leper hospital, whence its name derived. Henry VIII used it as a deer park, Elizabeth I as the site of pageants; Charles II had lawns laid and avenues of trees planted. Ignoring history, Wilmot’s speaker launches into a mock-Ovidian aetiology or *aition* (9–20):

But though St. James has th’honor on’t,
 ’Tis consecrate to prick and cunt.
 There, by a most incestuous birth,
 Strange woods spring from the teeming earth;
 For they relate how heretofore,
 When ancient Pict began to whore,
 Deluded of his assignation
 (Jilting, it seems, was then in fashion),
 Poor pensive lover, in this place
 Would frig upon his mother’s face;
 Whence rows of mandrakes tall did rise,
 Whose lewd tops fucked the very skies.

William Temple nationalizes temperateness, though not necessarily temperance, by associating it with his country and his hardy monarch Charles II, who could go abroad most days of the year. In a gesture of mock-patriotism, Wilmot nominates a Pict as the aboriginal planter of St. James Park. Perversity, but not sterility, marks these first beginnings: incest and masturbation, the latter begetting metamorphic offspring. Even onanism is fecund, then, producing half-arboreal and half-human mandrakes. These phallic plants aspire to the sky, with apparent success converting what they grow toward into the object of their lust. Perhaps these ambitious vegetables stand in relation to ordinary trees as a mock literary form to the genres and protocols that it apes.

⁹ Goldsworthy, 164. Goldsworthy emphasizes the significance for Wilmot’s health of his course of treatment for venereal disease at Madame Fourcard’s in 1669.

¹⁰ Parenthetical page references refer to David M. Vieth’s edition, *The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1962).

The question of imitation arises naturally in connection with the theme of reproduction; whatever is reproduced must suggest in some way its origins, as Temple's Moor Park presumably did the Countess of Bedford's. Wilmot's speaker observes, "Each imitative branch does twine / In some loved fold of Aretine, / And nightly now beneath their shade / Are buggeries, rapes, and incests made" (21–24). Here imitation succeeds—at least in the terms of the world that this poem projects. In the sixteenth century, Pietro Aretino published an erotic treatise with famously ingenious illustrations. As though on the model of these illustrations, the boughs "twine"; their amorous contortions seem obliquely to spur an ardour of effectual imitation among the varied men and women who frequent St. James Park. Temple considered the merits of grafting pears; Wilmot's speaker revels, rather, in the grafting of classes (25–32):

Unto this all-sin-sheltering grove
Whores of the bulk and the alcove,
Great ladies, chambermaids, and drudges,
The raggicker, and heiress trudges.
Carmen, divines, great lords, and tailors,
Prentices, poets, pimps, and jailers,
Footmen, fine fops do here arrive,
And here promiscuously they swive.

Temple praises a garden in Cape Town that concentrates within its space the plants of all quarters of the compass, a formal promiscuousness worthy of wonder: "in this one enclosure are to be found the several gardens of Europe, Asia, Afric and America" (30). Temple calls this plot of ground "a modern Hesperides"; Wilmot's speaker, contrastingly, admires the crowded compression and commission of all "sins" and all sectors of society in one place.

"A Ramble in St. James Park" pursues some of the conventions of the love elegy; the beloved appears under the Ovidian *nomen falsum* of Corinna, and perhaps she is the same Corinna of "The Imperfect Enjoyment." She appears in mock-courtly guise as a woman who might have "dropped from heaven that very hour, / Forsaking the divine abode / In scorn of some despairing god" (38–40). Temple loves the paradoxically innovating antiquity of the garden, the way in which this ancient form and practice can accommodate new hybrids and fresh specimens. Wilmot's speaker deplores the want of innovatory energy—wit, invention—in Corinna and the three suitors who woo her in St. James Park. She is, after all, a *docta puella*, a learned girlfriend, out of the tradition of love elegy—like Propertius's Cynthia. A wit, she should choose to consort with wits, or at least with the forthrightly

appetitive. But the men whom Corinna selects in St. James Garden exemplify sterility. Sterility in this poem is an insufficiency to the emergent and the contingent. It is a want of intellectual originality or of physical vigour; it is a failure to unite in the moment the inward and the outward, to engage to their fullest reason, feeling or sense—to manifest wholehearted intensity. Wilmot's speaker has wanted to create and continue to nourish with Corinna a sort of erotic Hesperides, hovering between publicity and intimacy—as must all affairs in the circle of Charles II's court wits. But Corinna's suitors amount to social climbers, and little else.

She seems in the end to accept these three suitors by consenting to enter a hackney coach in their company. Who are they? The first, the apparent leader, is a "Whitehall blade" who

Converts abortive imitation
To universal affectation.
Thus he not only eats and talks
But feels and smells, sits down and walks,
Nay looks, and lives, and loves by rote,
In an old tawdry birthday coat. (57–62)

Given the forms that it assumes in St. James Park, sex will not likely result in literal offspring, in children—or at least the begetting of children is hardly intended as the primary motive of assignations occurring there. What is "abortive," therefore, is "imitation."¹¹ For example, Corinna's first suitor has heard in the rumour mill what Charles II likes to eat (49–52):

He had heard Sir Edward Sutton
Say how the King loved Banstead mutton;
Since when he'd ne'er be brought to ear
By's good will any other meat.

If Temple and Wilmot value the unification of principles (the garden and philosophy; wit, love and lust), then Corinna's first suitor provides a negative instance of coherence: from his diet to his lovemaking, he acts "by rote" (61). Rote is a form of repetition without originality. Originality thus preoccupies Wilmot both on the level of aetiologies (here is how St. James Park came to be) and on the plane of spontaneity (wit disdains to live by rote). As Marianne Thormählen has pointed out, the Whitehall blade's "senses, his reason, and his actions are all completely subjugated" to social

¹¹ According to John F. Moehlmann (*A Concordance to the Complete Poems of Jhon Wilmot, Earl of Rochester* [Troy: The Whiston Publishing Company, 1979]), the epithet "abortive" appears nowhere else in the Earl of Rochester's extant poetry.

ambition.¹² He hopes, in short, that his strenuous but inane imitation will result in his own advancement. Corinna offers a means to such advancement; her erotic allure, not to say her potential as a friend, is almost irrelevant.

Corinna's second suitor steals pocket-handkerchiefs (63–68):

The second was a Grays Inn wit,
A great inhabiter of the pit,
Where critic-like he sits and squints,
Steals pocket handkerchiefs, and hints,
From's neighbor, and the comedy,
To court, and pay, his landlady.

The zeugma that makes this man a thief at once of handkerchiefs and of witticisms marks him as an imitator without innovation. Just as diligently consuming the king's favourite dish, mutton, can bring a person no closer to the essential monarch, so a stolen handkerchief or judgement evidences no personal style, let alone originality. Though no one seems to have made the connection, Corinna's second suitor may recall the Asinius Marrucinus of Catullus's poem 12:

Marrucine Asini, manu sinistra
non belle uteris, in ioco arque uino,
tollis lintea neglegentiorum.
hoc salsum esse putas? Fugit te, inepte:
quamuis sordida res et inuenusta est ...
quare aut hendecasyllabos trecentos
expecta, aut mihi linteum remitte,
quod me non mouet aestimatione,
uerum est mnemosynum mei sodalis.

Asinius Marrucinus, you abuse your left hand
when, wine and laughter distracting us,
you nab the napkins of the unsuspecting.
Think that's witty? Think again, idiot.
The act is dirty, it lacks charm ...
Therefore expect a lengthy satire—
or give me my napkin back.
The cost doesn't bother me,
the thing's a souvenir from a friend.¹³

Catullus here resembles Wilmot, in that his speaker discounts the objective, vulgar costliness of a stolen object—its value, that is to say, as an indicator

¹² See Marianne Thormählen, *Rochester: The Poems in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993) 97.

¹³ My translation. I rely on Fordyce's edition of Catullus.

of social status. Instead, he emphasizes its unique worth, by reason of the feeling reposed in it. Wilmot's speaker invests such authentic sentiment in Corinna: she does not furnish a means to an end; she *is* the end, in herself. Wilmot's apparent ingenious echo of Catullus supplies an example of intelligent imitation—the modernization of an old *topos*. Only a fool thinks that an opinion may be stolen as readily as a handkerchief: this variety of literalism is related to the first suitor's error, namely the persuasion that dietary conformity with the preferences of the king offers a plausible way of gaining purchase on the court circle.

The third suitor appears as a manner of apprentice to the preceding pair (69–74):

The third, a lady's eldest son
 Within a few years of twenty-one,
 Who hopes from his propitious fate,
 Against he comes to his estate,
 By these two worthies to be made
 A most accomplished tearing blade.

To be pupil to such men as these is once again to imitate—and to imitate from social ambition. Learning is a form of imitation, and clearly this student will learn by rote from those who themselves have learned by rote. This course of education represents, once again, reproduction without innovation.

Marianne Thormählen identifies as particularly vexing to the speaker of "A Ramble in St. James Park" Corinna's susceptibility to flattery (75–78):

One, in a strain 'twixt tune and nonsense,
 Cries, "Madam, I have loved you long since.
 Permit me your fair hand to kiss";
 When at her mouth her cunt cries, "Yes!"
 In short, without much more ado,
 Joyful and pleased, away she flew,
 And with these three confounded asses
 From park to hackney coach she passes.

Wilmot's speaker invokes the gods: "Gods! That a thing admired by me / Should fall to so much infamy" (89–90). It will be recalled that Corinna began in the poem as a person close to them in her divine aura. He remarks that Corinna has fallen to "infamy" (90). What kind of infamy? She has turned "damned abandoned jade / When neither head nor tail persuade" (99–100). She is "a whore in understanding/A passive pot for fools to spend in!" (101–02). According to the Epicurean standard of hedonism as modified in the context of this poem, high wit or simple physical vigour or

(best of all) both in combination ought to condition the choice of sexual partners (91–98):

Had she picked out, to rub her arse on,
Some stiff-pricked clown or well-hung parson,
Each job of whose spermatic sluice
Had filled her cunt with wholesome juice,
I the proceeding should have praised
In hope sh' had quenched a fire I raised.

What so incenses Wilmot's speaker? Not sexual jealousy, as conventionally understood. An authentic rustic or a robust cleric is imaginable as a worthwhile sexual partner—sexual partner, and nothing more. But the ambitious fools with whom Corinna consorts may learn the speaker's secrets, his intimate ways, endangering them by publicity, opening them to barren imitation. Wilmot himself famously assumed disguises, on one occasion passing himself off as Dr. Alexander Bendo, a fictitious Italian pathologist. In this persona, Wilmot showed an actor's ironic awareness of how pretenders may be mistaken for the real thing:

If I appear to anyone like a counterfeit I ought to be constru'd a true man, who is the counterfeit's example, his original, and that which he imployes [sic] his industry and pains to imitate and copy: is it therefore my fault, if the cheat by his wits and endeavours makes himself so like me, that consequently I cannot avoid resembling him?¹⁴

Counterfeits and originals clearly fascinated the versatile Wilmot, who succeeded for a time in his masquerade as Alexander Bendo. In "A Ramble in St. James Park," Corinna seems to be taken in by cheats. The speaker worries that she may betray

The secrets of my tender hours
To such knight-errant paramours,
When, leaning on your faithless breast,
Wrapped in security and rest,
Soft kindness all my powers did move,
And reason lay dissolved in love! (127–32)

Just like the king with his mutton, Wilmot's speaker may furnish information and a pattern for the adepts of stupid social climbing. If Charles II's tastes can be noised abroad and emulated, so can the most intimate

¹⁴ Quoted in Graham Greene, *Lord Rochester's Monkey* (London: Bodley Head, 1974) 111.

practices and remarks of anyone's life. The hyper-personal, fertile moments when between the speaker and Corinna "reason lay dissolved in love" may be alienated from their actor, and reconstituted by ambitious fools.

What defines the Epicurean garden, then, in "A Ramble in St. James Park"? Implicitly what may be created, above and beyond the locale, beyond the promiscuous crassness of St. James Park, is ideally a private garden, a secret garden, a garden space between two lovers who tolerate each other's involvement in lesser, though tasteful, sexual liaisons. This inter-subjective garden is more post-coital than coital. The historical Epicurus advocated *philia*, "friendship," more than *eros*, "desire"—although women were prominent among his followers. Wilmot's speaker seems to have discovered what he believed was true friendship, *philia*, through and just beyond the impulsion of desire, *eros*. Not all animals are sad after intercourse. Wilmot's speaker is characteristically relaxed, happy and trusting, the faculty of reason dissolved in the passion of love.

William Temple discusses an actual acreage, in which the retired statesman may steadily harvest, Alcinoüs-like, a crop of contentment within the bounds of a garden. Retirement as a model depends on the relinquishing of attachments beyond the garden wall, a retrenchment of social ties. Temple once attempted to bring entire societies into relation, as when he realized the Triple Alliance of 1668; but his gentleman gardener eschews such tasks in an Epicurean abnegation of worldly involvements. As for Wilmot, the true fruit of sex seems to be not pleasure in the obvious erotic or orgasmic sense, but the trusting repose achieved subsequent to, and as a result of, the sexual act.¹⁵

Wilmot's speaker is thus rendered vulnerable by Corinna's acceptance of her three abortively imitative suitors. These suitors will be privy to the speaker's intimate thoughts, actions and habits. As a result he, too, will supply an object for sterile imitation. Significantly, it is at the very time when Corinna will manifest her archetypically feminine, biological fertility—when she becomes "limed," or pregnant—that Wilmot's vengeful speaker promises to sterilize her prospects entirely (153–64):

But my revenge will best be timed
 When she is married that is limed.
 In that most lamentable state
 I'll make her feel my scorn and hate:
 Pelt her with scandals, truth or lies,
 And her poor cur with jealousies,

¹⁵ This reading could be supported by adducing Wilmot's love elegy "The Imperfect Enjoyment," which features a *docta puella* also called Corinna.

Till I have torn her from her breech,
 While she whines like a dog-drawn bitch;
 Loathed and despised, kicked out o' th' Town
 In some dirty hole alone,
 To chew the cud of misery
 And know she owes it all to me.

Wilmot's speaker imagines Corinna deprived of any status whatsoever, "despised, kicked out o' th' Town"—the nightmare, presumably, of her three determinedly empty-headed wooers. He hopes that she will be ruined as the object of anyone's pursuit for any reasons, erotic, intimate or ambitious. The depth of the speaker's passion for Corinna may be read negatively by the intensity of this blast of hatred. The "dirty hole alone" is the loneliest and most degraded of lodgings, a token of the consequences of full exposure to the malice of society—an excommunication effected through cruel publicity. The "hole" is also a version, perhaps, of her sexual organs, which Wilmot's speaker next mentions: "And may no woman better thrive / Who dares prophane the cunt I swive!" (165–66). Here the implicit divinity of Corinna recurs, but as a quality in the possession of her lover, who may determine what is profane and what not. The Epicurean standard of hedonism requires the exercise of judgement. A curse lights on the woman who, in the speaker's opinion, fails to uphold this standard. Contrastingly, William Temple concludes his essay with a kind of blessing—a celebration of fruit, its wholesomeness, the *felix malum hominis felicitis*, the happy man's happy apple.



Both Rochester and Temple interest themselves in aetiologies. Temple looks for precedent among the great in cultivating gardens. He also looks to etymology to determine which fruits were which, in the view of the ancients. Rochester's interest in aetiology differs. He invents a mock-aetiology of St. James Park, and perceives the origins in base imitation of some of Corinna's suitors' manners. What is important to both writers is a form of philosophical fertility. Temple looks for a gardenesque temperance that fosters mild and perennial fertility. Rochester looks for an intimate fertility that arises from the experience in sex and love of an aesthetically unified moment—an experience truly inimitable, despite the efforts of people such as Corinna's vapid suitors. Failing such a moment Wilmot's speaker prefers the experience of one pure pole, either of love or of lust. Original wit is the spontaneous crop Rochester cherishes, moderation the crop Temple advocates. Rochester finds and cherishes a version of Epicurean *philia* through *eros*: after orgasm, reason

and passion deliciously commingle in true friendship. Temple discovers in Epicurus the tenets of a georgic mode of life that balances originality and tradition with oxymoronic, gentle intensity. Epicurus himself postulated a swerve—a *clinamen*—that gave to the motions of atoms an element of randomness, allowing them to form compounds. Epicurean philosophy itself swerves as it travels through history, forming distinctive and intriguing compounds in the hands of writers such as William Temple and John Wilmot, each of whom imparted a unique *clinamen* to the doctrine that they absorbed.