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Rochester: The Poems in Context

Marianne Thormählen

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Rochester: The Poems in Context Marianne Thormählen
The reputation of John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, as a rake has imparted an air of dilettantism to his poetry. By contrast, Rochester: The Poems in Context emphasizes his sharp, restless intellect, a more powerful driving force in his poems than the sensual appetites stressed by previous critics. Marianne Thormählen uncovers his familiarity with, and sly allusions to, events and leading characters in Restoration politics; his awareness of trends in science, theology and philosophy; his acute representations of contemporary mores; and his commitment to high standards in literary craftsmanship. A more complex picture of Rochester emerges: that of a serious artist tackling major issues during a particularly turbulent period in English history. Alongside its literary analyses, the book offers insights into late seventeenth-century culture: religious discord, the position of women scholars and poets, military matters, statecraft and foreign affairs under Charles II, and developments in philosophy and science.

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