

Books

Goodwin Wharton

by J. Kent Clark

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IN THE MARVELOUS MUSICAL show he wrote for Lee DuBridge, Caltech's J. Kent Clark, professor of literature, introduced a song entitled "The Woman Behind the Man." The lyrics were so complicated only Kent could sing them. "There's a woman behind the man behind the plot behind the plan behind the triumph or the random situation," the song began. Now he's written a book to illustrate his point.

The man was Goodwin Wharton, second son of Philip, Lord Wharton, who served as a lieutenant in the Parliamentary Army during the Puritan Revolution against Charles I and became a leader of the Whig coalition after the restoration of the Stuarts. Lord Wharton's children found their father, as Kent writes, "easier to honor than to obey, easier to obey than to love, and easier to love than to please." This was particularly so for Goodwin after his father forced him to surrender his claim to the manor of Wooburn, a fine estate his mother, Jane Goodwin Wharton, who died in 1658 when Goodwin was but five years old, had arranged for him to inherit. Goodwin didn't get along with his father, in part because Lord Wharton favored Tom, Goodwin's older brother, and in part because Goodwin seemed always to need financial aid. He was kept impoverished by a series of disastrous business ventures including unsuccessful but expensive experiments designed to turn baser metals into gold.

Goodwin's fortunes did not

improve until 1689 when, at the age of 36, he was elected to the House of Commons. King William had succeeded James II, and Goodwin's younger brother, Henry, had died, leaving a safe Wharton seat open in Parliament. Goodwin's hard work thereafter was rewarded as his father paid his debts and King William made him a Lieutenant Colonel of the Cavalry and ultimately Lord of the Admiralty. Like his brother Tom, Goodwin became a respected Whig politician. Following the death of Lord Wharton in 1696 (after a reconciliation between father and son), moreover, though Goodwin did not inherit Wooburn, he became wealthy and lived well until his own death in 1704.

The Woman Behind the Man was Mary Tomson Boucher Lawrence Parish, whom Kent describes as "one of the most imaginative and versatile women that England has ever produced." Kent might have added that Goodwin was one of the most gullible men, for Goodwin believed whatever Mary told him regardless of how outlandish. Mary told him, for example, that she talked regularly with a George Whitmore who had been hanged for highway robbery outside of Ludgate Prison some years before. Through George, Mary said she learned wondrous things including the location of hidden treasures and of a fairy kingdom near Heathrow. Needless to say, Goodwin wanted to speak with George directly, but Goodwin couldn't see George even when "Mary announced George's presence and indicated that he was 'standing before her' . . ."

Goodwin was forced to launch his arguments at the apparently empty air. Then, since George refused to talk with him directly, he was obliged to leave the room while George made his answers,

which could sometimes be heard, indistinctly, through the door and which Mary later repeated for Goodwin's benefit.

Goodwin met Mary, a very common woman, "in her sorry little lodging in a poor beggarly alley and a very ill house" shortly before his 30th birthday. He was referred to her because she had a reputation "for wisdom in abstruse matters" such as speaking to angels. "Whether the subject was astrology, alchemy, buried treasure, pharmacology, or the making of lucky charms," Goodwin found that she gave "very smart answers" to all his questions, and he soon proposed that she "detach herself from the lowly people who sought her advice" and form a partnership with him. For her part, Mary found security in her alliance with this young nobleman. For 20 years, Mary led a willing Goodwin through a maze of inaccurate predictions and occult misadventures, including a love affair with Penelope, the invisible queen of the fairies, and conversations with angels and the Lord God Himself, who usually spoke (through Mary) in verse:

For when tomorrow thou has got a
name
It shall be to thy family an everlasting
fame
When they see that they will their
pardons crave
And be much sorry for the ill that to thee
done they have.

Mary even induced Goodwin to believe that he was a father several times over. The day after Goodwin and Mary first made love,

. . . Mary announced that she was pregnant. Her condition, she explained, had been easy to diagnose, since she had been pregnant many times before. Furthermore, she said, she knew the child

would be a boy! Since she had learned "by a maxim" how to produce children of either sex. . . .

Mary was then 53; Goodwin was 30. "And only two nights later, she reduplicated her feat. . . [and] announced she had again conceived of another boy." Over 20 years, Mary claimed to have borne something like 50 of Goodwin's children, only one of whom Goodwin ever saw, and he was borrowed for the occasion.

For 20 years Goodwin believed he could work miracles, including seducing three successive queens of England, raising sunken treasure, and winning great military victories. Mary's prophecies were almost always wrong, but Goodwin believed in her and, therefore, in himself. He was a marvelous example of a late 17th-century Englishman, full of superstition and exuberance.

The evidence that Goodwin believed what Mary told him is chronicled in a 530-page autobiography and journal Goodwin wrote largely for the benefit of his oldest, non-existent son. This autobiography-journal is in the Huntington Library in San Marino, where Kent labored for more than a decade between Caltech committee meetings, classes, and other chores. Kent also spent considerable time in England and France searching archives, libraries, and galleries and walking the ground Goodwin had walked. His scholarship is impressive and his product is factual, instructive, entertaining, wonderfully whimsical, and, because it is written as only Kent can write, delightful.

Many regard Kent Clark as Caltech's unofficial Poet Laureate, and many of Caltech's extended family will want to enjoy this *magnum opus* of this perceptive, sensitive, literate, literary professor. □ — Robert W. Oliver, *Professor of Economics*.