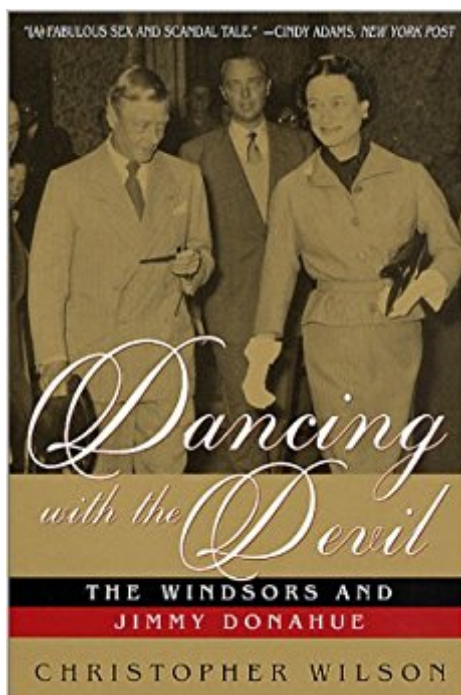


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Dancing With The Devil: The Windsors And Jimmy Donahue



Synopsis

The story of the Duke and Duchess of Windsor is one of the most romantic of all time: Edward VIII abdicated his throne and gave up an empire so that he could marry the woman he loved, American divorcee Wallis Simpson. Very few people suspected, and even fewer actually knew, that the Duchess cuckolded him "and almost gave him up" for a gay playboy twenty years her junior. Blond and slender, Jimmy Donahue was the archetypal post-war playboy. He could fly a plane, speak several languages, play the piano, and tell marvelous jokes. People loved him for his wit, charm and personality. The grandson of millionaire Frank W. Woolworth, Jimmy knew he would never need to work. Instead, he set about carving for himself a career of mischief. Some said evil. Gay at a time when the homosexual act was still illegal, Jimmy was notorious within America's upper class, and loved to shock. Though press agents arranged for him to be seen with female escorts, his pursuits, until he met the Duchess of Windsor, were exclusively homosexual. He was thirty-five when he was befriended by the Duke and Duchess of Windsor in 1950. The Duchess was fifty-four, and despite the difference in age, there was an instant attraction. A burgeoning sexual relationship "a perverse sort of love" was formed between Jimmy and the Duchess. Together with the Duke, they became an inseparable trio, the closest of friends. As Jimmy had planned, the royal couple became obsessed with him. With information from surviving contemporaries, *Dancing with the Devil* is the extraordinary tale of three remarkable people and their unique and twisted relationship.

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Customer Reviews

I read all the reviews of this when it came out a few years ago, and am only mildly disappointed to find that the full copy (obtained at The Strand: hard cover, last copy) tells me nothing new other than that Jimmy Donahue didn't much apply himself at Choate. This is biography lite, highly entertaining, scantily referenced and hence easy to capsule into a 500-word review. Not a great book or a good book, but a fun book. The sort of book you or I could write over a long weekend simply by Googling a few names and following sources referenced in Wikipedia. In fact, I suspect that is how Christopher Wilson wrote it. He's not big on apparatus. There is a bibliography, true, but it consists mostly of books by names on the order of Charles Higham (you know, the guy who claimed Errol Flynn was both homosexual AND a Nazi spy!). Almost no footnotes, of course. Wilson has a slim grasp on history altogether. He thinks King Charles II was executed (he wasn't). He passes on, as accepted fact, the posthumous tale about how Cardinal Spellman of New York was a notorious homosexual and cruised for new partners to "deflower" after the noon Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral. On one page Wilson tells you that the Duchess of Windsor underwent a hysterectomy, on the next he relates the old camp rumor that she was a genetic male with AIS; apparently he doesn't know enough to note a contradiction. The book seems to have originated in an earlier biography of Barbara Hutton, Jimmy's first cousin and fellow heir to the F. W. Woolworth fortune. There was almost as much information about Jimmy in that book as there is here. The juiciest bit, which Wilson repeats and expands upon before discrediting, is about the sailor whom Jimmy picked up at Cerutti's in 1945.

Jimmy Donahue, the grandson of F.W. Woolworth, was a study in contradictions from his boyhood to his early death at fifty-one. He seemed to have embarked on a life's voyage of wanton greed mixed with a certain masochism and devil-may-care chutzpah. He was handsome, a gifted piano player, unabashedly gay and yet managed to coax or coerce the Duchess of Windsor to fall violently in love with him. He was thirty five, she was fifty five. Like Wallis he required non-stop entertainment, all night parties, sumptuous food, dancing to big-name bands. Like Wallis (and the Duke) he rarely read a book, and had been kicked out of Choate for failing to study and for frequent absences which were engineered by his own mother who missed him when he was away at school. His mother Jessie controlled his finances and opened wide her purse at intervals. Jessie was thrilled by Jimmy's relationship with the famous Windsors, and poured money into the Windsor coffers by paying for their hotel bills, their cruise ship tickets, their sumptuous dinners, the works. The Duke and Duchess and Jimmy went everywhere as a most peculiar menage a trois, all three being financed by Jimmy's mother. Jimmy and Wallis fell in love on the Queen Mary sailing from New York

to Cherbourg. "The Duchess became about mad with the pleasure Jimmy gave her", perhaps the only explanation for Wallis' behavior with a homosexual who had previously flaunted his preference. The affair lasted four years and three months as the author Wilson informs us more than once. Wilson mentions that Wallis was "in her prime" even thoroughly middle-aged; however, it's quite certain Wallis had had at least one face lift which Author Wilson does not take into account. The poor Duke doesn't come off well: "his teeth were yellow and crooked..."

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