



The Marquess of Bath, as ever in his element, surrounded by a selection of admiring friends
Right: Lord Bath and his wife Anna Gael, in 1992



'I heard the wifelet crashing towards my room, shouting "She's in there, I'll kill her". I was so alarmed I jammed a chair under the door knob'

residence, there were complaints from neighbours, quiet bourgeois families who own summer villas poised on a rocky cliff above the Mediterranean.

Why is there violence in the Bath ménage? The recent eruption of a physical fight between wifelets at Longleat House is a more open manifestation of the guerrilla warfare that goes on interminably in Alexander Thynn's complicated home life. I discussed domestic violence with him during interviews for my biography of the Marquess, which was published in November 2010. He told me that he often slaps his wife, Anna Gael, the Marchioness and the mother of his two children. We then discussed other occasions on which he has witnessed wifelet violence, sometimes directed against himself. 'One 1960s wifelet used to hurl herself at me, scratching and biting.' Did he hit back? He told me, 'Hitting women is not a great pleasure in my life.'

Beneath the charm and the bonhomie, Bath is a very angry man. He is furious with his father, and many times demonstrated his rage by standing up, red-faced, fists pumping as he described incidents in his relationship with him. Was this violence evident in his early years? As a child he was sent to a gym by his father to learn boxing. He was later a boxing Blue at Oxford and he was also an army champion during his national service.

There was female violence around him

in his nursery days when Miss Vigers, a governess, feuded with his adored Nanny. But the *casus belli* in his relationship with women is his anger with his mother, Daphne. He sees her as a beautiful, flighty figure, the mistress of many men.

The anger goes back to the way he saw Daphne behave during his father's absence while away at war. He wrote about this in a fictionalised form, describing the orgies the fictional mother organised with servicemen from military bases near Longleat. He often referred to his mother's 'clientele' in his interviews with me. He did so disparagingly, as if she were a whore.

In his eyes, she betrayed him. But Alexander admits he betrayed his mother when his father returned wounded from El Alamein. The nine-year-old boy had seen many strange men in dressing gowns in his mother's bedroom and wanted to test whether this was correct behaviour or not. He confronted his parents with what he had seen, which resulted in the breakdown



Lord Bath strikes a pose in the 1960s

of their marriage. The breakdown of Alexander's relationship with his father also originates around this time.

Bath devised his ideas of polygyny after a double betrayal. The first was from his mother who, after the war, took a lover – in Alexander's view, he stole Daphne's love away from him. He was terribly jealous. The lover, Xan, was also called Alexander – Xan was a war hero who was everything Alexander would have wanted to be had he himself been able to succeed as a soldier.

At the same time, Alexander also had a deep 'first love' relationship that went wrong. Davina Merry is the debutante who resembles his mother in the first portrait on his staircase wifelet gallery. He jokes, 'My Bluebeard's gallery'. Bluebeard of course murdered his mistresses.

But could Alexander be killing his wifelets softly in another way? Some think watching his women fight might be a secret sport. Their jealous behaviour might also give the insecure man who was rejected in his youth by his mother and his first love, the reassurance that women care for him.

Some women in Bath's circle say that Alexander likes to humiliate women and to set them against each other. One of them told me, 'He doesn't intervene. He lets these Rottweilers attack the others'. ♦

♦ *The Marquess of Bath* by Nesta Wyn Ellis is published by Dynasty Press, £13.99.