

ROCHESTER'S 'LADY ANN PART' AND SIX LETTER DATINGS

HAROLD LOVE

Jeremy Treglown's valuable and usually accurate edition of Rochester's letters offers the following version of part of a letter written by Rochester to his wife, probably in 1672:

wee therefore doe command thy benigne acceptance of these our letters in what way soever by us inscribed or directed, willing thee therewithall to assure our sole daughter & heire issue female, the Lady anne part. of our best respects¹

Lady Anne was their infant daughter. The editor glosses 'part' as '(mock-legal) party'. However, the passage has been misread: what Rochester actually wrote was 'Lady anne fart' — a much more plausible reading that hardly requires a gloss. Rochester's 'p's and 'f's do at times resemble each other, but the 'p's in the letter do not, as here, rise above x-height.

The editor has also overlooked that six letters have postmarks giving the day and month of posting. These are in the form of a bisected circle with the abbreviation for the month in the upper half and the day of the month in the lower half. The dates are as follows:

Letter editorially dated May 1668 to Lady Rochester, pp.52-3 'MA 12'

Letter editorially dated ?1669 to Lady Rochester, p.55 'MA 6'

Letter editorially dated 1671-2 to Lady Rochester, p.64 'AV 6'

Undated letter to Lady Rochester, pp.83-4 'MR 3'

Letter editorially dated ?Autumn 1676 to Lady Rochester, pp.139-40 'FE 22'

Letter dated by Rochester 'Nov: the 20th', pp.170-1 'NO 21'

These dates are of limited use in that they fail to indicate the year. A careful study of seals and handwriting might permit further resolution.

Melbourne

NOTE

1. *The Letters of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. Jeremy Treglown (Oxford, 1980), p.82. Like the other letters referred to, this is part of the collection brought together as BL MS Harl. 7003. Folio references, in each case, are given by Treglown.

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