

A New Source for Rochester's "My dear Mistris has a heart"

HAROLD LOVE

Rochester's lyric "My dear Mistris has a heart" has been known so far only from *Miscellany, being a Collection of Poems by Several Hands* (1685) [85mc],¹ an anthology compiled by Aphra Behn. The poem does not appear in any contemporary manuscript source, and the attribution rests entirely on the title given to it by 85mc, "SONG By the Earl of Rochester." It was first added to the canon in the semi-authorised edition of Rochester's more respectable writings published by Jacob Tonson in 1691 as *Poems etc. on Several Occasions*, which derived its text from 85mc. The absence of a manuscript source is significant in that nearly all Rochester's other lyric verse had extensive scribal transmission in the personal miscellanies and professionally compiled anthologies of clandestine satire current at the time.² It was absent from the authorial "liber carminum" I have hypothesised as the source for a number of subcollections of these poems.³ That none of his editors has seen fit to question the attribution is presumably owing to the quality of the lyric, which has inspired several musical settings.⁴

However, a second source exists that was missed by my edition of Rochester and that raises interesting questions concerning distribution and authorship.⁵ This occurs in Henry Bold's *Latine Songs with their English and Poems* (1685) [85ls].⁶ Bold's text, which departs significantly from that in 85mc is as follows:

SONG IV.

I.

My dearest Mistress, hath an heart,
Kind, as those soft looks she gave me;
When with her resistless arts,
And her Eyes she did inslave me.

¹ *Miscellany, being a Collection of Poems by Several Hands* (London: J. Hindmarsh, 1685), 43–44.

² Discussed in Harold Love, *English Clandestine Satire 1660–1702* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

³ In "The scribal publication of Rochester's songs," *BSANZ Bulletin* 20 (1996): 161–80.

⁴ Those by Tommaso Giordani and Thomas Arne are included in *Songs to Phyllis: A Performing Edition of the Early Settings of Poems by the Earl of Rochester (1647–1680)*, ed. Steven Devine and Nicholas Fisher (Wyton: King's Music, 1999), 19–21. There is also a fine four-part glee setting by Reginald Spofforth (1769–1827).

⁵ *The Works of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. Harold Love (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁶ Henry Bold, *Latine Songs with their English and Poems* (London: John Eglesfield, 1685), 14–16.

But her Constancy's so weak, 5
She's so wild and apt to wander,
That my Jealous heart will break,
If that we live one Day asunder.

II.

Melting Joys about her move,
Killing Charms, and wounding blisses, 10
She can arm herself with love,
And her lips can Charm with kisses,
Angels listen when she speaks,
She's my delight and mankinds wonder,
Yet my Jealous heart she breaks, 15
If that we lye one night asunder.

Bold has also supplied a parallel Latin translation, which is a useful gloss on his interpretation of the English:

CANT. IV.

I.

*Cor est meo Corculo,
Gratum, sicut cilium dedit.
Quando Amatorio,
Oculisque me subegit.
At adeò est mutabilis 5
Levis, aptaque vagari,
Ut Cordia [Cardia in original] foret fragilis,
Ab illa Diem separari.*

II.

*Hanc Circumdant Gaudia,
Beatitudo, incantatio, 10
Flammillis armat Lumina,
Labra Capit Suaviatio,
Loquens Angelos tenet,
Lux mea est, et admiranda,
At Cor suspicax Franget, 15
A me si noctem separanda [seperanda in original].*

The variants between the two English versions are as follows. The lemma is the 85^{mc} reading as given in my edition:

1 dear] dearest has a] hath an
2 Soft] Kind kind] soft

3 Love's] her Art] arts
 7 wou'd] will
 8 Should] If that
 10 Pleasures] Charms, and
 11 dress her Eyes in] arm herself with
 12 Arm] Charm
 14 all] and
 15 But] Yet would break] she breaks
 16 Should we live] If that we lye day] night

Some of the *85ls* readings are dubious. In stanza II the repetition “Charms”/“Charm” and the reversal of “arm” and “Charm” suggest an attempt to repair an earlier error in transmission that was perhaps the result of anticipation from line 10 to line 12. The alternation of “Art” and “arts” in line 3 creates a bad rhyme but by the same token “breaks” in line 15 creates or preserves a good one. (In addition, *85mc* has the misprint “moves” at the beginning of line 9.) The other variant readings could all conceivably be authorial. The “live one Day”/“lye one night” variant in line 16 is particularly striking in that it transforms the poem from a “polite” lyric about a flighty but putatively chaste mistress into a love song about a courtesan. It also introduces a characteristic Baroque antithesis between lines 8 and 16, which has been partially reproduced in the Latin (*Diem ... noctem [day ... night]*), though there the verb remains the same. The quantity of variation makes it unlikely that *85mc* was derived from *85ls*, though we cannot dismiss the possibility that something closer to the *85ls* version had been tidied up by Behn for presentation to a cultured, mixed-sex readership (see below). Derivation in the opposite direction is ruled out by Bold having died on 23 October 1683.

We should note that the Bold version need not have reached print in the form left by its original author. The fluidity of texts in the drollery tradition, to which Bold's volume shows strong allegiance, has been amply demonstrated by Adam Smyth, while manuscript transmission quickly led to its own forms of verbal slippage.⁷ In addition, the collection had been edited by the poet's brother, William Bold, under circumstances described in his preface. The poet had left only “indigested, foul, torn, scattering Papers, and those in such disorder, that, after, they came to my hands, (though kept together with all the care could be improv'd), yet of some Songs it may be that one *Canton* came to my hand as this day, and peradventure (five Months after) I might be so fortunate as to get the rest, or most part of it together, and

⁷ Adam Smyth, *“Profit and Delight”: Printed Miscellanies in England 1640–1682* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004), 81–91. See also Timothy Raylor, *Cavaliers, Clubs, and Literary Culture: Sir John Mennes, James Smith and the Order of the Fancy* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), 207, 290–91. On manuscript variation, see Harold Love, “Fixity versus Flexibility in ‘A song on Tom of Danby’ and Dryden’s ‘Absalom and Achitophel,’” in *Agent of Change: Print Culture Studies after Elizabeth L. Eisenstein*, ed. Sabrina Baron, Eleanor Shevlin and Eric Lindquist (Hartford, CT: University of Massachusetts Press, forthcoming).

some utterly disjointed till reduced as they now are (I hope) not very lamely by my weak Genius." Copies distributed among friends had to be retrieved where possible from those friends. One group "were very hardly recovered out of the hands of an illiterate welch Cook wench, who had designed to sacrifice them to the hoary Hen on the Spit."⁸ In other words, the text may not have been in pristine condition when it reached William Bold, and both he and his brother could well have introduced readings of their own.

As regards authorship, we need to consider two possibilities: whether the poem might be a composition by Bold rather than Rochester, and whether both sources might simply have appropriated an anonymous lyric, with one giving it by implication to Bold and the other, perhaps merely on behalf of its quality, to Rochester. In opposition to any claim for Bold, it should be recorded that he was a shameless plagiarist. Jonathan Pritchard notes:

Wit a Sporting in a Pleasant Grove of New Fancies (1657) was the first work to appear under Bold's initials but the volume is a comprehensive piracy. ... Much of the first fifty pages is taken *verbatim*, but in a reordered sequence, from the secular section of Thomas Beedome's *Poems Divine and Humane* (1641); Robert Herrick's *Hesperides* (1648) is the source for many more items scattered throughout the rest of the volume. In making those poems his own, Bold regularizes Beedome's spelling and changes the names of the addressees (and, thus, the titles), lineation, and even the wording of Herrick's verse.⁹

Furthermore, no authorial claim is made for the English poems collected in *Latine Songs*. While some are indeed by Bold, the majority are popular verses of the time that would be immediately recognised as such by readers. Ballads such as "Chevy Chase" and "The gelding of the Devil" rub shoulders with catches such as "Oh the merry Christ Church bells" and "Fie nay prithee John," state poems such as "Under five-hundred kings three kingdoms groan," and polished lyrics such as Suckling's "Why so pale and wan fond lover?" Moreover, none of these are attributed to an author. What is claimed for Bold, and is the justification for the volume, are his witty Latin versions of these well-known pieces. A claim for his being the author of "My dear mistress" could hardly be sustained on the mere basis of its appearance in *Latine Songs*.

The new discovery does, however, demand that we look more closely at *85mc* in order to ask whether this was the kind of publication into which an otherwise unknown poem by Rochester might have found its way. The collection is an important one historically in its anticipation of the formula that underlies the successful Dryden-Tonson miscellanies of the following decade, which is to say that

⁸ *Latine Songs*, A4v-5r.

⁹ Jonathan Pritchard, "Henry Bold," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/2789> (accessed 29 January 2007).

it is composed of predominantly new work by a variety of poets, with well-known names mingling with those of younger university men, that it contains a strong admixture of translations from Latin, Greek and French, and that it is addressed to women as well as male readers, which means that it carefully avoids scurrility. These features reflect its experienced compiler's clear view of its readership. (Behn has also contributed a characteristically two-edged dedication which finds ample room for her high-Tory politics.) Behn seems to have known Rochester quite well and was close to many others who had also known him, including theatre professionals she worked with as a playwright. At least two former mistresses, Sarah Cooke and Elizabeth Barry, would have been among her theatre associates. Her high respect for Rochester is indicated by her "On the death of the late Earl of Rochester," which follows "My dear mistress" in the volume.¹⁰ Behn specifies an author for about three-quarters of the contents of *85mc* (most of the exceptions are translations), and in no testable case does this attribution appear to be incorrect. In this respect the volume is in sharp contrast to the drolleries studied by Smyth, which pay little respect to literary ownership.¹¹ I regard it as unlikely that Behn would have added a fake attribution to an anonymous poem: she must have had some good reason for publishing the lyric under Rochester's name. On the other hand, if she had acquired a copy with a number of the *85ls* readings, it is conceivable she would have felt justified in polishing the text to remove anything that clashed with the Wallerian smoothness cultivated by Rochester or that was simply unsuitable for the clearly envisaged readership of her anthology. On this basis a future editor of Rochester might well wish to reinstate some *85ls* readings.

Monash University, Melbourne

¹⁰ *Miscellany*, 45–49.

¹¹ "Profit and Delight," 73–78.