'Sounding of the Voice': Interpreting the Earl of Rochester's Epilogue to *Love in the Dark* through an Analysis of Matthew Locke's Musical Score to *Psyche*

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Abstract

This article explores the Earl of Rochester's Epilogue to *Love in the Dark* through the music drama *Psyche* by Thomas Shadwell set to music by Matthew Locke. Rochester's text and Locke's score are explored within the wider context of rivalry between the Duke's Company and the King's Company. A musical analysis of Locke's score will reveal a conflict between music, libretto and speech that lies at the heart of Rochester's criticism of *Psyche*.

On 10th May 1675 the first performance of a new play, *Love in the Dark* was recorded by the King's Company at the Theatre Royal. The playwright was the minor courtier Sir Francis Fane, who dedicated the play to the notorious libertine the Earl of Rochester, boasting that Rochester had helped Fane through 'partial recommendations and impartial corrections'.[1] Rochester is praised as 'an Enthusiast in wit', 'a Poet and Philosopher by Revelation' and 'so great a Luminary' that 'if there were a beam of Knowledge, immediately deriv'd from God, upon any Man, since the Creation, there is one upon your self'.[2] Such hyperbole is a typical address to Rochester, who has often been seen as the *arbiter elegantiarum* of the Restoration theatre, and possibly accountable for the upsurge in libertine plays in the period.[3] *Love in the Dark* was the latest play in a fierce rivalry between the King's Company and the Duke's Company. In the early 1670s this rivalry had intensified sharply after the Duke's Company moved to a new location in Dorset Gardens, sandwiched between the house of correction for lewd women and the debtors' sanctuary of Whitefriars.[4] The King's Company mocked the move, which they saw as downmarket and vulnerable to association with the reputed philistinism of 'city' audiences.[5] However the new theatre provided the Duke's Company with a technological superiority which, armed with the finest restoration theatre composers, including Matthew Locke, Louis Grabu and John Bannister, could produce the most lavish and daring experiments in early music dramas.

Immediately following Fane's death in 1691, an epilogue to *Love in the Dark* was published for the first time. The play's dedication and Fane's subsequent contribution of a masque for Rochester's re-write of *Valentinian* has constituted the main evidence for Rochester being the author of the epilogue.[6] The epilogue opens with an attack on the new superficial theatricalities of the Duke's performances, dismissing such effects as magical incantations ('charms'). This comparison was pertinent in the fragile context of Restoration politics, when magic had acquired a diminished status as a means of generating legitimate knowledge, due to its association with radical politics and social change.[7]

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[1] Francis Fane, *Love in the Dark, Or, The Man of Bus'ness: A Comedy: Acted at the Theatre Royal by His Majesties Servants* (London, 1675).
[2] Fane, *Love in the Dark*.
[3] D. Farley-Hills, 'Rochester and the Theatre in the Satires', in *That second bottle: essays on John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. by Nicholas Fisher (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).
[4] Harold Love, 'Who Were the Restoration Audience?', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 10 (2015) p. 34.
[5] John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, *Selected Poems*, ed. by P. Davis (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 97.
[6] See Wilmot, *Selected Poems*, p. 97.
[7] P. Gouk, *Music, Science and Natural Magic in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 142.

The epilogue opens with the declaration:

> As charms are nonsense, nonsense seems a charm,
> Which hearers of all judgment does disarm;
> For songs and scenes, a double audience bring,
> And dogg'rel takes, which two eyed Cyclops sing.
>
> (lines 1-4)

Rochester asserts that the 'songs and scenes' at the Duke's, which bring in a full house ('double audience') are no more than superficial masks to 'dogg'rel' and theatrical integrity. Such a statement is a continuation of a long traditional in Augustan satire and criticism descending through Horace, Ben Jonson, Dryden and Pope, who all attack the excessive elaboration of stage business at the expense of verbal art and unity of design.[8] Further investigation into the scene of 'two eyed Cyclops' to which Rochester refers also reveals an attack against the incongruities between text and music found in the musical experimentation of the Duke's Company's early music dramas.

The epilogue is a direct reference to *Psyche*, a bold new play by Thomas Shadwell, set to music by Matthew Locke. It refers to the opening dance and song at the beginning of the play's third act in which monstrous blacksmiths perform a dance and in which Vulcan ('two-eyed Cyclops') then sings a solo and leads them in a drinking song. *Psyche* was an immensely daring and innovative work, heralding the first systematised attempt at a musical and dramatic scheme which subsequently became a characteristic style of English opera.[9] It was a bold new counter-attraction to London's vogue for French opera and made a significant contribution to the establishment of London as the largest single marketplace for musical performance in early eighteenth-century Europe.[10] It also capitalised upon the legalised performance of music in public following the Restoration and built upon the work done by earlier plays, which had introduced music as a more important element of dramatic performance.[11] *Psyche* was a financial success for the company, continuing the considerable return of investment to shareholders who had gambled on the move to Dorset Gardens.[12] Shadwell was unapologetic as to its commercial appeal stating openly in the preface that 'I do not, nor ever did, intend to value myself upon the writing of this Play.'[13] He further claims to have scribbled it down in five weeks, ignoring its faults since:

> Correcting the plays faults would not be worth the pains since there are so many splendid Objects in the Play, and such variety of Diversion, as will not give the Audience leave to mind the Writing.[14]

The 'variety of Diversion' clearly made a significant impact. Many years later in his theatrical history *Rosicius Angelicanus* of 1708, the theatre prompter John Downes recalled the stunning visual and aural impact of *Psyche* which 'came forth in all her ornaments; new Scenes, new Machines, new Cloaths, new French Dances'.[15] Shadwell's hasty writing did not go unnoticed by Rochester however, whose epilogue drew attention to the aural vulgarities of actors 'in whose mouth's nonsense' appeared due to poor

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[8] See R. Selden, 'Rochester and Shadwell', in *Spirit of wit : reconsiderations of Rochester*, ed. by Jeremy Treglown (Hamden: Archon Books, 1982), p. 183.

[9] C. Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 297.

[10] Gouk, p. 58.

[11] E. Dent, *Foundations of English Opera : A Study of Musical Drama in England during the Seventeenth Century* (New York : Da Capo Press, 1965), p. 52.

[12] See L. Hotson, *The Commonwealth and Restoration Stage* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), p. 232-8.

[13] Thomas Shadwell, *Psyche: A Tragedy* (London, 1675).

[14] Shadwell, *Psyche*.

[15] John Downes, *Roscius Anglicanus*, ed. by Robert D. Hume, Judith Milhous, and Society for Theatre Research, new edn, (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1987).

delivery and confused speech. Combined with gestures not sufficiently adapted to their dramatic contexts, he announces that 'of such awkward actors we despair':

> In Comedy their unweigh'd Action mark,
> There's one is such a dear familiar spark,
> He yawns, as if he were but half awake;
> And fribling for free speaking, does mistake.
>
> (lines 20-23)

Such improvised and clumsy performance ('unweigh'd Action') is once again centred on oral delivery. Yawning and stammering ('fribling') their lines without elegance ('free speaking') is too great an offence for Rochester to be distracted by Shadwell's desire to 'entertain the Town with variety of Musick, curious Dancing, splendid Scenes and Machines'.[16] As a thoroughly practical piece of rhetoric, designed to secure approbation from the audience, the epilogue played a role in publicly highlighting a collision in oral delivery, which we can understand in more depth by looking at the play's musical score.

Given *Psyche*'s importance in the development of music drama, it is surprising that no attempts have been made to understand Rochester's epilogue further through the musical score to which it directly refers. Doing so enriches our interpretation of the epilogue as a reaction to the lack of synergy between music and text in *Psyche*. Music is often used in the play to heighten dramatic effect and the musical episodes are crucially important, since they advance the plot as well as the spoken dialogue. This is one of the great differences between *Psyche* and later musical dramatic works of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century. In later works, considerable care is taken to differentiate between musical text and spoken text, while in *Psyche*, no such distinction exists, hence music can continue the drama, rather than suspend it for a musical interlude.[17] The score by Matthew Locke was published in a handsome quarto with the proud and defiant title *The English Opera; or The vocal musick in Psyche, with the instrumental therein intermix'd. To which is adjoyned the instrumental musick in the Tempest.*[18] Figure 1 shows 'Vulcan's Song in the Palace of Cupid' to which Rochester directly refers in the epilogue. It is the moment in which Vulcan interrupts the blacksmiths' dance with a rousing song.[19]

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[16] Shadwell. Although Farley-Hills has argued that 'Fribling' was defined in Bailey's *Dictionary* (4th edition, 1728) as 'impertinent, trifling', suggesting a more appropriate implication of an overall 'trifling' delivery rather than specifically poor oral delivery. See D. Farley-Hills, 'Rochester and the Theatre in the Satires', in *That second bottle : essays on John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. by Nicholas Fisher (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

[17] Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage*, p. 5.

[18] *The Tempest* was a later play for which Locke had composed music.

[19] Recommended listening for this track is: Matthew Locke, *Psyche*, New London Consort, cond. by Philip Pickett (L'Oiseau-Lyre, 444 336-2, 1996).

Figure 1: Matthew Locke, 'Vulcan's Song in the Palace of Cupid', from *The English Opera; or The vocal musick in Psyche, with the instrumental therein intermix'd. To which is adjoyned the instrumental musick in the Tempest* (London: Ratcliff and Thompson, 1675).

The score is in a triple metre (three beats to each bar), matching the dactylic verse rhythm that follows the opening word of each line. It is sung in a spritely tempo, accompanied by instruments which fill in the musical harmonies according to a ground bass which is given in the score. The setting of words to individual notes is largely left to the singer, whose vocal line must combine Locke's melody with Shadwell's verse. The

first verse presents few problems as its structure enables the singer to place the first beat's emphasis on important words in the verse:

> YE **bold** sons of **Earth** that att**end** upon **Fire**,
> make **hast** to the **Pal**ace lest **Cu**pid should **stay**;
> you **must** not be la**zy** when **love** does req**uire**;
> for **Love** is im**pa**tient, & **brooks** no de**lay**,
> when **Cu**pid you **serve** you must **toil** & must **sweat**,
> re**do**uble your **blows**, and your la**bour** re**peat**.[20]

Locke's score presents a few cases where the music obfuscates the verse. He places a crotchet and two quavers in a descending scale on 'lazy', creating an obscure ornamental gesture on a relatively unimportant word, whilst leaving 'impatient' in the subsequent line fairly bare and unornamented. Whilst the melodic structure does contain some gestures which match the verse - such as a descending sixth on 'serve', matching a kneeling gesture - the verse indicates an incongruence between music and text, suggesting that Locke composed without attention to Shadwell's verse. Following the briefest of instrumental interludes ('Retornello'), Vulcan launches into the second verse, in which this lack of synergy is most clearly exposed. The meaning is seriously compromised by the music, when Shadwell's verse is forced into Locke's rigid form and 'inherent heaviness and clumsiness of style.'[21]

> The **vig'**rous young **God**'s not with **laz**iness **serv'**d
> He **makes** all his **Vas**sals their **dili**gence **shew**,
> and **noth**ing from **him** but with **pains** is des**erv'd**,
> The **brisk** youth that **falls** on, and still **foll**ows his **blow**
> is **his** favourite **still**. The con**side**rate **fool**
> He as **use**less lay **by** for a **pi**tiful **Tool**.[22]

In order to make the verse fit with the music, the singer is forced to snatch words and create emphases in awkward, unnatural places within the line, thereby limiting the music's potential to enhance the drama. The rapidity required to fit the words 'on, and still' in the fourth line diminishes their meaning, whilst the next line is ruined by a musical downbeat on 'his' and 'still', wrenching out these unimportant words to the subordination of the word 'favourite'. The musical phrasing that worked for the first verse breaks up the second by temporarily resolving the music at 'blow' before the sentence is even completed.

These issues reflect a rigidity of musical composition that is all the more perplexing for the fact that they could so easily have been resolved. In spite of Shadwell's claim that his verses were made with an ear to music and that music was an art of which 'I cannot but have some little knowledge, having been bred for many years of my Youth to some performance in it',[23] much of his text does not demonstrate an adaptation to musical requirements. Simply by removing the word 'still' from the fourth line of the second verse, or removing the second non-essential 'must' from fifth line of the first verse, the clarity of the vocal line would improve significantly. It would have avoided the emphases on non-resonant 's' consonants in 'still' and 'must', while giving more space to communicate the essential message of the text. The fact that Locke's music allows for little characterisation of Vulcan through words, is further indication that the text and music were written each with little consideration of the other.

Aside from deliberately trying to counter London's vogue in French opera, *Psyche* also served to ameliorate what was later recognised as the chief liability of the genre: the awkward passing from speech into song. Much of the criticism of early music-drama and works written after *Psyche* was focused on the necessary shift between dialogue and

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[20] Emphasis added in order to show placing of the heavy first beat of each bar.
[21] Dent, p. 120.
[22] Emphasis added in order to show placing of the heavy first beat of each bar.
[23] Shadwell, *Psyche*.

lyrics: the shift between ordinary dramatic speech and verse specifically written with music in mind. Yet it is precisely this lack of accommodation for the adjustments required in setting verse to music that led to the obscurity created in Vulcan's song.

Following an analysis of the musical and textual discrepancies between Locke and Shadwell's collaboration, Rochester's epilogue can be read as a further critical engagement with these issues. Immediately after mocking their 'fribling for free speaking', Rochester continues his insult on the actors:

> False accent and neglectful Action too
> They have both so nigh good, yet neither true,
> That both together, like an Ape's mock face,
> By near resembling Man, do Man disgrace.
> Through pac'd ill Actors, may perhaps be cur'd,
> Half Players like half Wits, can't be endur'd.
>
> (lines 24-29)

The crucial element in good performance according to the text is a balance and commingling of acting and oral delivery, including singing. 'False accent' is the act of misplacing the rhythmic stress when speaking lines of verse, or the pronunciation of text against the grain of prosody in pursuit of expressive realism, whilst 'neglectful Action' is a form of on-stage negligence. The following line ('They have both so nigh good, yet neither true') concedes that these two attributes can in fact be virtues of acting style in certain contexts.[24] It might seem from this statement that the obscure emphases and awkward movements caused by the music in Vulcan's song might instead be regarded as a virtue, yet Rochester's statement displays a more subtle and complex commentary on stage acting. The passage advocates the necessity of balance: expressive realism must be a conscious decision on the part of the actor. It is not synonymous to an accidental imbalance of textual and musical elements, which results in a crude form of 'false accent'.

Evidence of Rochester's flexibility in approach to stage acting, and his divergence from the formality of the King's Company - in which *Love in the Dark* was performed, and to whom the epilogue was addressed - can be found in his subsequent coaching of the actress Elizabeth Barry. A few months after the premier of *Love in the Dark*, Rochester urged Barry to prize expressive realism over formal correctness in gesture and pronunciation. A more experimental application of stress, accent, action and sonority was the focus of her new style and Barry was praised at the time for 'perfectly changing herself as it were into the Person, not merely by the proper Stress or Sounding of the Voice [i.e. 'accent'], but feeling really, and being in the humour, the person she represented, was supposed to be in'.[25] Gesture matched sound, voice, action and accent, resulting in resonance and theatrical synergy. Through Barry, Rochester had perfected the mismatch of elements that was the cause of greatest offence in *Psyche*. The claim that 'By near resembling Man, do Man disgrace' is resonant of such a mismatch, resulting not in a correct 'sounding of the voice', but a play of confused actors ('Through pac'd ill'), driven to their state by the concessions forced by Locke's score.

Vulcan's song, whilst not indicative of the entire play, provides a specific point of conflict in this early experimentation of music on the stage. Matthew Locke's musical score enriches our understanding of Rochester's response to a work which, in spite of its faults, has been argued as having come much closer to pushing England into the

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[24] Wilmot, *Selected Poems*, p. 95.
[25] See S. Hampton, 'Rochester, The Man of Mode and Mrs Barry', in *That second bottle: essays on John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. by Nicholas Fisher (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 177. Rochester's tutorship of Barry is also a matter of dispute. See Hampton.

operatic mainstream than did Purcell's major stage compositions.[26] It also provides the means through which other early music dramas and experiments can be explored. Rochester's final lines draw together the company rivalry, importance of music and mockery of *Psyche*'s popularity. The 'merry Citizen' - common crowd drawn by the Duke's new location - is in love with the first line of the first musical number in the play ('Psyche, the Goddess of each Field and Grove'). Though the 'graver fops' are condemned to remain in the lesser theatre, the daring experiment and great significance left much for Rochester to envy:

> Oh how the merry Citizen's in love
> With—
> Psyche, the Goddess of each Field and Grove.
> He cryes i' faith, methinks 'tis well enough,
> But you roar out and cry, 'Tis all damn'd stuff.
> So to their house the graver fops repair,
> While men of wit find one another here.
> (lines 69 - 74)

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[26] Price, *Henry Purcell and the London Stage*, p. 297.

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