

MS 86 of the Fellows' Library, Winchester College: Mixed-Use, Mixed Hands, and a Mystery

Though it would be nice to say, with Lucia Dacome,¹ that the eighteenth-century notebook currently shelved as MS 86 in the Fellows' Library of Winchester College was a model of the mind, it is in fact a mess, provoking instead reflections on the many different types of writing which cannot be included in the idea of the commonplace book, however generously you interpret the term,² and showing that the frequent essays of advice on record-keeping and indexing may after all have been counsels of despair.³ The effect here is more of leaving a CCTV camera on in a room which you thought to be unoccupied. Nevertheless, it seems to be possible to make some conjectures, including, perhaps, a contribution to a long-standing debate over authenticity.

The book is clearly not a pocketbook, being heavy, quarto size, and stoutly bound with green-coloured cardboard. It seems more suited to sitting on a desk, and though it has been used from both ends, at different times and I think by different people, their apparent purposes fit that location. In 1734 M. H. Hallows (who adorns the title page with a flowing signature, and 'her book') seems to have used it as an exercise book, not so much to do her sums (her 'cyphering', as she calls it), but to display their incredible beauty in her best handwriting. At the other end the picture is more confused, but the clearest usages are the accounts pages of some property in Hoxton, dated 1753 and with the left and right pages marked with a bold **Dt** and **Ct**, for 'debit' and 'credit'. Around the accounts, however, someone or rather, many people have used the available pages in a much less business-like way.

The accounts, which should be the most revealing part of the manuscript, are the aspect most difficult to trace or re-imagine. The initial handwriting and content suggest that M. H. Hallows was the person who transcribed a frequently-commonplacéd poem from a dying lady to her husband,⁴ but who also received love poems (which seem to be original) in the course of a season in London, and who crossed out the part of the attribution which would too clearly reveal the circumstances in which she received them. As Anne Kugler writes in the introduction to her *Errant Plagiary: The Life and Writing of Lady Sarah Comper* (California, 2002): 'But there are degrees of privacy, both in terms of the breadth of the audience and the time frame for revealing one's work. "Private" is not an absolute, in terms of meaning a total lack of any audience anywhere or at any time. Between an audience of one, the writer, and an audience of the public in general are the intermediate possibilities of writing for family and writing for friends. Both of these limited audiences might induce a writer to include or suppress things differently than might be the case if the writing were directed at a wider public, or at no-one at all'.

MS 86 of the Fellows' Library of Winchester College participates in this ambiguity, with the mixed use and mixed hands suggesting that the notebook existed in a place that could not be safely secured. The three poems which seem to be the result of a season in London⁵ are copied first, then attributed, as if copied out of a letter, and the attributions themselves are altered, partly presumably to keep them anonymous, but also in a way which reveals the transcriber's shifting

¹ Lucia Dacome, 'Noting the Mind: Commonplace Books and the Pursuit of the Self in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Journal for the History of Ideas* 65 (2004), pp. 603-25.

² David Allan, *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England* (Cambridge, 2010).

³ Such as that transcribed by Earle Havens in "'Of Common Places, or Memorial Books": An Anonymous Manuscript on Commonplace Books and the Art of Memory in Seventeenth Century England', *The Yale University Library Gazette* 76 (2002), pp. 136-53.

⁴ 'A Letter from a Lady to her Husband after she was given over by the Physicians'. It begins: 'Oh you, who all my worldly thoughts employ, / Thou pleasing source of every earthly joy; / Thou tend'rest husband, and thou dearest friend / To thee this fond, this last adieu I send', and is the subject of a detailed attempt to attribute it by Matthew Steggle (<<http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/06-3/stegmoul.htm>>), and is, for example, in Gabriel Lepipre's commonplace book (Bodleian, MS Eng. poet. e. 40).

⁵ The second laments that the writer must leave his beloved 'when the Splendid Tide / Of Thames reflects St. James's pride, / A ready prey to silken Sparks / That glitter thro' the gaudy parks'.

emotions. A passionate poem, beginning plaintively 'Still are you only mine?' and ending 'My world's epitome is you', is footnoted 'By a Gentleman to a Lady, on a slight Acquaintance', but the original subscription is crossed out: so far I can only read 'by a Young Spark', which sounds dismissive, but less so than the crushing verdict of 'a slight Acquaintance'. It is interesting that here the idea of creating a miscellany, or private anthology, has led the writer naturally to follow the copying of a favourite (and maybe fashionable) poem with the transcription of private poems which she also wishes to preserve, if only as a trophy from an unvalued conquest.⁶

Someone else then took over the notebook—the ink is darker, the hand larger and messier—and after leaving a page blank, transcribed a poem idealising perfect male friendship⁷, and the Acts at Burghmote of Maidstone Free School, which he copied from the collection of a fellow antiquary and local historian, 'Mr Bye', former schoolmaster.⁸ The donor's pencil note in the cover⁹ suggests that he thought that 'S Russel' (he assumes of Maidstone) owned the book, but he must surely have been persuaded to buy it—as I was to read it—by the possibility that M. H. Hallows was Mary Hallows, the much-criticised housekeeper¹⁰ of Edward Young, the Wykehamist poet of *Night Thoughts* (1742; 1745). Unfortunately it has so far been impossible to trace any further connection in the manuscript with Mary Hallows, who was the daughter of a clergyman friend of Young's, and became his housekeeper in 1748.¹¹ There is not much reason to connect 'S Russel' with the Maidstone records either, however, as the name appears at the other end of the manuscript, beside the transcription of a letter supposedly written by the notorious seventeenth-century poet, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, on his deathbed: 'Communicated to S-Russell, by the Revd Mr Broughton Hatton Garden'.

I think, though cannot yet prove, that all the religious content of the other end of the book, varied though it is, is the work of one person, also with some antiquarian leanings, and interested in the personal operation of Christianity on the individual. There is absolutely no way of telling whether this is a man or a woman, and we have to detach it from the accounts, because the transcriptions themselves are fitted awkwardly around the accounts pages, both in 1753 and 1764, suggesting activity after the latter date. In fact, if the scribe waited until the publication in book form of the poetical works of 'Christopher Jones, a woolcomber in Devon', whose poem 'Midnight Thoughts' is transcribed, this part of the manuscript post-dates 1782, the year in which that volume was published, although Jones says himself in his preface that he has previously published poems in newspapers ('the Public may be assured, he never intended to trouble them with the humble effusions of his fancy, otherwise than in a corner of a newspaper'). 'The Golden Rules of Pythagoras', in the version by Nicholas Rowe used here, was current from 1732 onwards,¹² so gives no further clue, and the hymns for various sacraments and times of day seem to be original (and are certainly extremely poor). They do, however, participate in the new, more personal style of hymnody, involving not a straightforward summary of some part of scripture, but an account of the personal effects of Christianity on the individual, begun by Isaac Watts' memorable effusion

⁶ See the discussion of placing within a miscellany in Marcy L. North, 'Amateur Compilers, Scribal Labour and the Contents of Early Modern Poetic Miscellanies', *English Manuscript Studies* 16 (2011), pp. 82-111, at p.97.

⁷ 'Damon and Pythias: or, Friendship in Perfection': 'Pyth. Tis true (my Damon) we as yet have been / Patterns of Constant Love, I know; / We've stuck so close, no third cou'd come between, / But will it (Damon) will it still be so?', published in John Norris, *A Collection of Miscellanies*, 9th ed. (London, 1730).

⁸ This is my assertion, and not provable.

⁹ Rev. Peter Hall, who gave c. 2000 items to the Fellows' library of Winchester College during the first half of the nineteenth century.

¹⁰ See for example John Kidgell's scurrilous novel *The Card*, published anonymously in 1755, whose author was a former curate of Edward Young's, clearly bearing something of a grudge against Mary Hallows, whom he calls Mrs Fusby, and presents as ludicrously as he knows how.

¹¹ Daniel Hallows, rector of All Hallows, Hertfordshire (d. 1741; Young wrote his epitaph) (*ODNB*).

¹² First published London, 1704, but with a different first line: 'First worship God th'eternal three and one'. Rowe's version as given in 1732, 1740, 1750, looks the same as this. But note the shift from 'to the gods' (Rowe) to MS 86's 'to Almighty God'.

published in 1707: 'When I survey the wondrous Cross, / On which the Prince of Glory died, / My richest gain I count but loss, / And pour contempt on all my pride'.

The user of the notebook who inverted M. H. Hallows' cyphering practice and started from the other end seems to have been primarily preoccupied by religion, in particular, the idea of conversion and salvation. This is most strongly suggested by the careful transcription of the five letters which Anne, Dowager Countess of Rochester, and protective mother of her famous libertine son, wrote to her sister-in-law, Lady St John, describing his last illness and dramatic repentance. Jeremy Treglown in his edition of Rochester's correspondence made his transcription of them (in Appendix II) from a manuscript in the British Library (MS Add. 6269, fol. 33), but it appears that the mid-eighteenth-century owner of MS 86 in Winchester College Fellows' Library may also have seen them. Both accounts repeat the introductory preface, clearly contemporary, 'copied from the originals in the hand of Mrs Meredith, granddaughter to Lady St. John'; the particular interest of this eighteenth-century copy is that it appears that the writer has attempted to imitate the seventeenth-century hand of the original documents. The first published copies appear (as Appendix II) in John Jebb's 1833 edition of Gilbert Burnet's *Lives, Characters and an Address to Posterity*, which contains *Some Passages of the Life and Death of John, Earl of Rochester*, rushed out by Burnet in 1680, the year of Rochester's death and miraculous conversion. John Jebb, however, has the letters from a different copy, albeit one with an impressive eighteenth-century literary pedigree of their own: "They were copied by Mrs. Chapone, mother-in-law of the famous authoress, from the original autograph letters, in the possession of Mrs. Meredith, grand-daughter to Lady St. John; and came by descent, into the possession of Mrs. Chapone's grand-daughter, the present Miss Boyd".

The letters' presence in this manuscript notebook therefore has a dual interest: they combine a further record of the strong religious interest in conversion narratives which continued all through the eighteenth into the nineteenth century,¹³ with evidence of the preoccupations of an amateur eighteenth-century antiquary, intent on recreating not just the content, but the physical appearance of the documents being copied. The handwriting—printed and with letters formed on an italic model—not only differs from other eighteenth-century hands in the notebook, but lapses occasionally mid-epistle into its more flowing and cursive 'natural' hand, thus giving away the strain of re-creation. I am grateful to Jonathan Morton of New College for showing me a photograph he had taken of a similar, if more polished, attempt from the same century: Horace Walpole's cod medieval hand in his transcription of a medieval manuscript of *The Romance of the Rose*. A comparison of the hand in the Rochester transcriptions with the seventeenth-century female italic hand of Elizabeth Jocelin as seen in BL Add MS 27467, fol. 8v ('The Mothers Legacie'—reproduced in *English Manuscript Studies* 9 (2001), p. 141), and more directly, the look of Anne Rochester's signature as occurring in bundle 16 of C 103/263 in The National Archives, makes it very tempting to propose that these letters could have been copied from the originals.

The antiquarian interest deepens with the addition of a last letter in this section of the notebook: a transcription, in the same 'seventeenth-century' hand, of the disputed letter from Rochester himself to 'D Tho Pierce of Magdalen College Oxon'.¹⁴ The reviewer of Treglown's edition of the Rochester letters, Robert D. Hume declares himself 'a bit more dubious than Treglown about the pious letter of July 1680 to Dr. Thomas Pierce',¹⁵ which exists only in an unauthenticated copy;¹⁶ Treglown himself says, 'While this letter cannot be attributed to Rochester with absolute certainty, the plea "Take heaven by force. And let me enter with you as it were in disguise" seems too idiosyncratic to have been invented. Even so, both these letters [also the one

¹³ See in particular Robert G. Walker, 'Rochester and the issue of Deathbed Repentance in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century England', *South Atlantic Review* 47 (1982), pp. 21-37.

¹⁴ Published in *The Gentlemen's Magazine* in 1752 as 'The Penitence of the Earl of Rochester', but in modernized spelling—so almost definitely not the source. p. 563, Vol.22

¹⁵ In *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 16 (1983), pp. 353-56.

¹⁶ Bodleian Library, MS Ballard 10, fol. 28.

to Burnet, in his mother's hand but signed by Rochester] need to be considered in the light of the general questions raised in the Introduction about the stage-management, as it can seem, of Rochester's final months'.

MS 86 states a different source, however: one which suggests that its owner knew others like him interested in trying to interpret an earlier time: 'Copy from Mr Bagshaws ms.' (This and everything below still in the recreated seventeenth-century hand, thus part of the transcription, and not the comment of the transcriber.) 'It is beleived this Letter was addressed to D. T. Marshall Rector of Lincoln College Oxon & afterwards Dean of Glocester. It appears from Parson's Sermon p.23 yt my Lord had a great sense of his obligations to Marshall for his charitable & frequent visits & prayers. These three Divines with Mr Fell are ye only Clergy mentioned, as having any Connection with Ld. Rochester. And whereas my Lord in ye beginning of his Letter writes of the Natural Mildness [sic] of his Correspondent, query whether that was part of Dr Pierce's acknowledged character?'

I wish to add a further observation. So far as I can tell, Treglown, and others, all accept that this letter was directed to Dr Thomas Pierce *at Magdalen College Oxford* (my italics) in or around July 1680. No-one, however, seems to have commented on the unlikelihood of its ever reaching him, since he had left the college under something of a cloud, over the appointing of the new President, among other things, in 1672,¹⁷ and had by 1680 been Dean of Salisbury for five years. Why is this not part of the authenticity debate? It is possible, of course, to speculate that Pierce retained an address at the college (though in the circumstances this seems unlikely), or that Rochester was, contrary to his mother's presentation of his state, so far impaired in mental capacity by this point that he had no idea where Thomas Pierce might now be found (this seems ridiculous in a world in which we can presume that someone else addressed and sent his letters). But the annotation to the letter in this copy suggests a much more likely addressee, whether the letter is in fact by Rochester or an inspired fake. Thomas (the 'D' of 'D. T.' being 'Dr') Marshall was the Rector of Lincoln College, Oxford until May, 1680, and thereafter held simultaneously as one of his benefices the living of Bladon, just beside Woodstock,¹⁸ where Rochester was dying. And, as Mr Bagshaw (or possibly, as follows, the Mr Broughton mentioned in connection with 'S-Russell' earlier) comments, Pierce was a notoriously bad-tempered man—Jon Parkin, in his *ODNB* entry, describes his presidency of Magdalen as 'characterised by discord and conflict'—whereas K. Dekker writes of Marshall: 'His most important contribution to oriental studies consists of his generous assistance to others'.¹⁹

So having initially hoped to uncover a connection between Rochester and Bagshaw via the Fanshaw family, because a Bagshaw (Henry: 1631x4-1709) served a Fanshaw (Sir Richard: 1608-1666) as chaplain, and another, less virtuous Fanshaw visited Rochester in the last months of his life, to the Dowager Countess's disgust, and spread the news that Rochester was indeed deranged, and his so-called conversion the ravings of a madman; and because Sir Thomas Fanshaw died in Hatton Garden, the area of London named in the mysterious exchange between S-Russell and 'the Revd Mr Broughton'—notwithstanding all of this, it looks in fact as if, by another route, the anonymous transcriber of the Rochester conversion letters has left a little more information than we previously had about these last, contested months in Rochester's life. And if 'the Revd Mr Broughton' is, as seems possible, Thomas Broughton, who was reader to Middle Temple Church (hence resident in Hatton Gardens) from 1727–1744, when he moved to Bristol, we may be able to come a little closer to dating the transcripts. Ruth Smith says, 'He contributed 120 articles (those signed "T") to the first three volumes of *Biographia Britannica* (1747-50), mainly on English divines, scholars and poets, notably Dryden, whose miscellaneous works he edited (*Original Poems and Translations*, 1743)'—though not, alas, so far as I can tell, the

¹⁷ *ODNB*, s.n. 'Pierce, Thomas' (by Jon Parkin).

¹⁸ Less than two miles away, even if you circumnavigate Blenheim Park.

¹⁹ *ODNB*, s.n. 'Marshall, Thomas' (by K. Dekker).

entry on Rochester, which appears to be anonymous.²⁰ The 1886 *Dictionary of National Biography*, however, has another candidate, who brings us back to the more Methodist tenor of the hymns of MS 86: Thomas Broughton, divine, secretary to the SPCK from 1743 until his death, in 1777, in—where else?—Hatton Gardens, at the Society's house there.

The 'acknowledged character' of the keeper of this part of the notebook can nevertheless still only be the subject of conjecture. The inclusion of a 'Hymn of St Bernard's to the Holy Jesus', alongside 'Prince Eugene's Prayer', the Rochester conversion letters, and what appear to be some self-penned hymns, suggests a conventional participant in the new religious enthusiasm of the time; some pages of carefully blocked and delineated Hebrew perhaps a desire for deeper biblical study. But these are fitted around the two sets of accounts, as if the writer began and then neglected orderly financial record-keeping, and later, finding some pages conveniently blank, set to work on a new project. This is however clearly not a waste-book, in Francis Bacon's use of the term,²¹ as the seventeenth-century documents have been carefully laid-out and, as I suggest, copied with an eye to their photographic preservation. Right at the end of this section, it appears that the manuscript has changed hands yet again. Appropriately, however, the poem, 'On New Years Day By William Wilson Esqr.', combines an active and a godly spirit, suggesting the intention to continue the exploratory, if eclectic, habits preserved in the notebook thus far. It begins,

Behold another year! My lease renew'd
By thee, all-gracious, merciful, & good;

and ends:

Be long or short the time I have yet to run
As thy decree Great God thy will be done.

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²⁰ ODNB, s.n. 'Broughton, Thomas' (by Ruth Smith).

²¹ See Angus Vine, 'Commercial Commonplacing: Francis Bacon, the Waste-book, and the Ledger', *English Manuscript Studies* 16 (2011), pp. 197-218, at p. 197.