# *JEAN ARMOUR'S "DOUBLE AND ADIEU"*

Thomas Crawford*

The Aberdeen folk-singer Jeannie Robertson includes in her repertoire the following version of the English folksong "Rolling in the Dew" (Robertson 1960):

I

"O what wad ye dae if I were to lay ye doon,
Wi' your reid and rosy cheeks and your curly black hair?"
"I'd be fit enough to rise again, kind sir," she answered me,
*Rolling in the dew maks a milkmaid fair.*

II

"What wad ye dae if I were tae bairn ye,
Wi' your reid and rosy cheeks and your curly black hair?"—
"For you wad be the daddie o't, and I wad be the mither o't, kind sir," she answered me,
*Rolling in the dew maks a milkmaid fair.*

III

"But what wad ye dae if I were to run away,
Wi' your reid and rosy cheeks and your curly black hair?"
"For the deil would run after you, kind sir," she answered me,
*For rolling in the dew maks a milkmaid fair.*

This is considerably earthier than the "polite" version, "Dabbling in the Dew", now current in England, and sung, for example, by the Sussex singer Shirley Collins (1957):

I

"O where are you goin' to, my pretty little dear,
With your red rosy cheeks and your coal black hair?"
"I'm goin' a-milkin', kind sir," she answered me,
*For its dabblin' in the dew makes the milkmaids fair.*

* Senior Lecturer in English, University of Auckland, New Zealand.

II

"Suppose I were to buy you, my pretty little dear,
A green silken gown and a ribbon for your hair?"
"O no kind sir, with that I don't agree,"
*For it's dabblin' in the dew makes the milkmaids fair.*

III

"Suppose I were to buy you, my pretty little dear,
Fine shoes and silken hose and a carriage and pair?"
"O no kind sir, with that I don't agree,"
*For it's dabblin' in the dew makes the milkmaids fair.*

IV

"Suppose I were to wed you, my pretty little dear,
With your red, rosy cheeks and your coal black hair?"
"O then I'd be your wife, kind sir," she answered me,
*And it's dabblin' in the dew makes the milkmaid fair.*

Hamish Henderson, in his note to Jeannie Robertson's recorded version of "Rolling in the Dew", quite correctly treats the song as a typical instance of folk-song borrowing. Both words and tune pass from one nation to the other, and are transformed in the process:

> Scotland, like Ireland, has a rich store of English folk-songs which have found their way into alien surroundings and have become acclimatized to a greater or lesser extent among the bens, glens and bothies. *Rollin' in the Dew* is a curious example of a song which is in process of assimilation, and still bears unmistakeable marks of its southern origin. (Henderson 1960).

Jeannie's words are much closer to a West of England version in the Baring-Gould MSS (Reeves 1960:85) than they are to Shirley Collins':

Where are you going, my pretty fair maid,
With your red and rosy cheeks and your nut-brown hair?
Oh 'tis I am going a-milking, kind sir, she answered me,
A-rolling in the dew makes the milkmaid so fair.

Shall I go with you, my pretty fair maid?
Yes 'tis you're kindly welcome, kind sir, she answered me.

Supposing I should lay you down, my pretty fair maid?
Oh then you must help me up again, kind sir, she answered me.

Supposing you should prove with child, my pretty fair maid?
Oh then I must find a father for it, kind sir, she answered me.

Supposing I should run away, my pretty fair maid?
Oh then I must run after you, kind sir, she answered me.

Supposing I should run too fast, my pretty fair maid?
Then the Devil shall run after you, kind sir, she answered me.

The Shirley Collins version itself appears to be connected with the bowdlerised texts purveyed by Cecil Sharp early in the present century. In *Folk Songs from Somerset* (Sharp and Marson 1905:67), Sharp states that the "words and air" were "from Mr. John Swain, of Donyatt." However, the words actually printed were not the traditional ones, but were specially composed for the occasion by Marson. This illustrates another process which occurs again and again in the history of popular song: poetical creation in the folk-song medium, by means of the retention of some old elements, the recombination of others, and the transformation of the song by means of "amendments", "emendations" and the invention of new stanzas. Marson's stanza i and his refrain are traditional. The "green silken gown" and the "carriage and pair" ("grey gallant pair"), common to the Collins and Marson versions, probably go back to an earlier polite text: but Marson's last three stanzas seem entirely his own:

IV

Suppose I were to feast you, my pretty little dear,
With dainties on silver, the whole of the year?
O no sir, O no sir, kind sir, she answered me,
For it's dabbling in the dew makes the milk-maids fair.

V

O, but London's a city, my pretty little dear,
And all men are gallant and brave that are there—
O no sir, O no sir, kind sir, she answered me,
For it's dabbling in the dew makes the milk-maids fair.

VI

O fine clothes and dainties and carriages so rare
Bring grey to the cheeks and silver to the hair,
What's a ring on the finger, if rings are round the eye?
But it's dabbling in the dew makes the milk-maids fair.

Marson's stanzas—essentially those of an "art" song, a literary incrustation on the folk tradition—received additional currency from being reprinted in (Baring-Gould and Sharp n.d.:48), a work "made to the requirements of the Board of Education", and no doubt many people who learnt them at school now regard them as genuine folk words.

In his *English Folk-Songs*, Sharp printed yet another version, embodying some lines from the nursery-rhyme text in Halliwell's *Nursery Rhymes of England* (1842). He there notes (Sharp 1920:xxiii-iv) that "the traditional words, which vary but little, are very free and unconventional"; that sometimes it is "strawberry leaves" that "make the milkmaids fair", as in the text in *Mother Goose's Melodies for Children* (Boston, ed. 1719); and that the song is very popular "all over England". Now G. and P. Opie (1952:282-3) note that "in one of the early broadsides in the Pepys collection 'Strawberry leaves make maidens fair' is given as the tune to *A Merry New Jigge*, so the song would seem to have been known in the reign of James I."

Cecil Sharp preserved some of the original versions in his MSS, from which it is clear that they belonged to the same complex as the Baring-Gould MS and the Jeannie Robertson songs. Here is one which Sharp took down from John Swain on Christmas Day 1909 (Reeves 1958:100):

Where shall I meet you my pretty little dear
With your red rosy cheeks and your coal black hair
I'm going a-milking kind sir she answered me
But it's dabbling in the dew where you might find me.

Shall I carry your pail then my pretty little dear
O no sir O no sir I'll carry it myself

Suppose I was to kiss you my pretty little dear
That would be no harm sir she answered me

Suppose I was to throw you down my pretty little dear
So you must help me up again kind sir she answered me

Suppose you're in the family way my pretty little dear
You'll have to stand the father of it sir she answered me

Suppose I was to run away my pretty little dear
Then I must run the faster kind sir she answered me

Suppose I was to run too fast my pretty little dear
O the divil would fitch you back again she answered me

"Roving in the Dew" in Butterworth (1913*a*:18) is a conflation of two versions, one supplied by Mrs. Cranstone of Billingshurst, the other by Ralph Vaughan Williams. In some ways it is like Sharp's nursery version, and it is interesting that Butterworth's stanza v runs:

"Suppose I ran away from you, my pretty fair maid,
Red rosy cheeks and coal-black hair?"

"The devil may run after you, I will stand and laugh at you,
For roving in the dew makes the milk-maids fair."

Now in his note to "The Posie" in the Interleaved *Scots Musical Museum* (Laing MS II: 210-11) Burns says that he got the tune from a song which he took down from "a country girl's voice", and that at the same time as he recorded the tune he took down the words. He gives three specimen stanzas:

There was a pretty May & a milkin she went,
Wi' her red, rosy cheeks & her coal-black hair:
And she has met a young man a comin o'er the bent,
With a double and adieu to thee fair May.

O whare are ye goin, my ain pretty May,
Wi' thy red rosy cheeks & thy coal-black hair;
Unto the yowes a-milkin, kind Sir, she says,
With a double & adieu to thee fair May.

What if I gang alang wi' thee, my ain pretty May,
Wi' thy red, rosy cheeks & thy coal-black hair;
Wad I be ought the warse o' that, kind sir, she says,
With a double & adieu to thee fair May.

Dick (1908:124) erroneously rejects this note as spurious. The MS exists in the Laing Collection, University of Edinburgh, and its existence was brought to the attention of the general public in 1922 by Cook.

Writing to George Thomson on 19 October 1794, Burns identified the "country girl" as Jean Armour: " 'The Posie', is my composition; the air was taken down from Mrs Burns's voice.—It is well known in the West Country, but the old words are trash". (Ferguson 1931:II 266).

It would appear, then, that a song with certain affinities

to one which Hamish Henderson states is still, in the 1960's, "in process of assimilation", was well known in one part of Scotland nearly two hundred years ago, for Jean Armour's ditty belongs to the same total complex as Jeannie Robertson's "Rollin' in the Dew". Nevertheless, they are not the same *song*. Jeannie Robertson's song is descended from those English versions with "Rolling in the Dew" in the refrain, and containing a stanza stating that the Devil would chase the young man if he were to abscond. Jean Armour's song goes back to those English songs with "Dabbling in the dew" in the refrain, and is unlikely to have contained a reference to the Devil. Burns would never have transcribed "Dabbling in the Dew" as "With a double and adieu" if either he or Mrs. Burns had access to a printed source. Furthermore, had the version orally transmitted in the eighteenth century Ayrshire contained a reference to Burns's favourite character, the Deil, we can be fairly sure that he would not have omitted to transcribe at least that stanza, and that he would probably have had a higher opinion of the words.

It is interesting to notice, as typical of the folk-process, that the English dairymaid has been transformed into a ewe-milker; and this very transformation seems to reflect the social conditions of the early eighteenth century rather than those of Burns's own time, when Ayrshire cattle were already beginning to dominate the agricultural scene (Handley 1953:73, Strawhorn 1950-4:155-7). It seems possible, then, that the actual borrowing may have taken place, at the very latest, in the first half of the century: this would allow time for the song to become "well known in the West Country". The refrain "With a double and adieu to thee, fair May" suggests that the very idea of "dabbling in the dew" was alien to the Ayrshire lasses of the time, owing to the disappearance of pre-Reformation May Day customs; and possibly, even, that the verb "dabble" was an unfamiliar word. As taken down by Burns, the refrain may have the connotation "with two acts of intercourse on the bent": if so, it serves to underline the ephemeral character of the sexual rencontre, which is so much a part of the traditional English versions. The sense of "double" here may be that of double, *sb* 6, in the N.E.D.: "A sharp turn in running, as of a hunted hare; also of a river; fig. an evasive turn or shift in an action, argument, etc." The N.E.D. quotes Johnson, Rambler No. 96, "The quick retreats and doubles which Falsehood always practised"; and it cites Scott for

allied senses of both the noun and the verb, thus showing that the connotation was familiar in Scotland. "Dabble" does not occur at all in Reid's *Concordance to Burns*.

It would appear, then, that a song from this complex entered Scottish oral tradition at least twice. The earlier song derived from that large class of variants with "Dabbling in the Dew" in the refrain; the later one, from the "Rolling in the Dew" group. On each occasion the song became transformed into a genuinely Scottish song, reflecting, in ways that are often indefinable, Scottish rather than English ironies and ways of looking at life, as in the indescribable assurance of "I'd be fit enough to rise again," as sung by Jeannie Robertson, or the peculiarly Scottish sauciness, arising from the intonational associations of the dialect words, in Jean Armour's "Wad I be ought the warse o' that". It is interesting to note, as a further illustration of the complexities of popular lyric, that yet another song existed in Burns's Scotland with close affinities to the "Dabbling in the Dew" group. It is "Kind Hearted Nancy" in Herd 1776:176, and it comprises a light-hearted flyting dialogue between Nancy and "Sla cow'rdly Wilsy," in which the girl always gets the better of the argument. Burns either did not know this song, or had forgotten it, or failed to make the connexion between it and Jean Armour's words. Stanzas iv-vii run as follows:

But what gif I shou'd lay thee down?
Quo' WILSY, quo' WILSY;
What gif I should lay thee down?
Quo' sla cow'rdly WILSY.

And what gif I can rise again?
Quo' NANCY, quo' NANCY;
And what gif I can rise again?
Quo' kind hearted NANCY.

O but what if I get you wi' bairn?
Quo' WILSY, etc.

If you can get it I can bear't,
Quo' NANCY, etc.

In stanzas viii-xi Wilsy asks where they'll get a cradle ("There's plenty o' wood in Norway" is the answer), and a cradle-belt (" Your garters and mine"); and the last stanzas, xii-xv, return

to a course which is parallel to that of the "Dabbling in the Dew" group:

Then whar'l I tye my beastie to?
Quo' WILSY, etc.

Tye him to my muckle tae,
Quo' NANCY, etc.

O what gif he should run awa'?
Quo' WILSY, etc.

Deil gae wi' you, steed and a',
Quo' NANCY, etc.

He would be a bold critic indeed who would pronounce *Kind Hearted Nancy* other than a Scottish song, yet its forbears too are English; it has been influenced by the same question and answer sequence as in the Baring-Gould and Cecil Sharp MS versions of "Dabbling in the Dew".

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## APPENDIX

### *The Cornish Version of "Rolling in the Dew"*

In the journal of an institution so much concerned with Celtic literature as the School of Scottish Studies it may be of some interest to readers to note that there exists a Cornish version of "Rolling in the Dew", one of the more striking of the pitiful fragments which constitute the relics of the Cornish language in the post-mediaeval period. This is found in a manuscript written by the Cornish antiquary Thomas Tonkin in 1725, and purporting to have been recorded in 1698 from the singing of one Edward Chirgwin or Chygwyn of Carclew according to a note in the *Archaeologia Cornu-Britannica* (1790) of William Pryce, who printed the song from Tonkin's MS. An account of this poem by "H.W.L.", with an edition, will be found in *Y Cymmrodor* 6 (1883), pp. 89 ff.; and also in H. Jenner's *Handbook of the Cornish Language* (London 1904), p. 36 f. It will be noted that this version belongs to the group which attributes the cosmetic properties in question to "strawberry leaves", not "dew"; as in the Pepys collection.

The poem begins *Pelea era why moaz, moz, fettow, teag,* and the refrain is *Rag delkiow sevi gwra muzi teag.* In the second

lines the Tonkin MS. reads *gen agaz peddn du ha agaz blew mellen*, "with your black head and your yellow hair", but Pryce apparently knew a version which read *gan agaz bedgeth gwin*, "with your pale face", for the first four words, which makes better sense in the context; the "black head" agrecs, however, with the "black hair" of the Scots and most of the English versions. The following is a translation:—

"Where were you going, fair maid," said he,/"with your pale face and your yellow hair?"/"Going to the well, sweet sir," she said,/'for strawberry leaves make maidens fair."

"Shall I go with you, fair maid," said he,/"with your pale face?" etc./"Do if you wish, sweet sir," etc.

"How if I lay you on the ground,/with your pale face?" etc./"I'll get up again, sweet sir," etc.

"How if I get you with child,/with your pale face?" etc./"Then I will bear him, sweet sir," etc.

"Whom will you find to father your child,/with your pale face?" etc./"You'll be his father, fair sir," etc.

"What will you get for clothes for your child,/with your pale face?" etc./"His father shall be tailor, fair sir," etc.

KENNETH HURLSTONE JACKSON