

6. “From Rosy Bowers”

From *The Comical History of Don Quixote* (1694)

Written by Thomas d’Urfey

From rosy bow’rs where sleeps the God of Love,
Hither, ye little waiting Cupids, fly:
Teach me in soft, melodious songs to move,
with tender passion, my heart’s darling joy.
Ah! Let the soul of music tune my voice,
to win dear Strephon, who my soul enjoys.

Or if more influencing
Is to be brisk and airy,
With a step and a bound,
and a frisk on the ground,
I will trip like any fairy.

As once on Ida dancing,
Were three celestial bodies,
With an air and a face,
and a shape and a grace,
Let me charm like Beauty’s goddess.

Ah! ’This in vain,
death and despair must end the fatal pain,
cold despair, disguis’d like snow and rain,
Falls on my breast!

Bleak winds in tempests blow,
My veins all shiver and my fingers glow,
my pulse beats a dead march for lost repose,
and to a solid lump of ice, my poor fond heart is froze.

Or say, ye Pow’rs, my peace to crown,
shall I thaw myself or drown?
Amongst the foaming billows,
Increasing all with tears I shed,
On beds of ooze and crystal pillows,
Lay down my lovesick head.
Say, say, ye Pow’rs, my peace to crown,
shall I thaw myselfe or drown?

No, I’ll straight run mad,
that soon my heart will warm;
When once the sense is fled,
Love has no pow’r to charm.

Wild thro’ the woods I’ll fly,
Robes, locks shall thus be tore;
A thousand deaths I’ll die
ere thus in vain adore.

6.1 Textual analysis

"From Rosy Bowers" is about the love-sick woman Altisidora who is trying to seduce Don Quixote away from his betrothed Dulcinea. When she fails in this, she experiences extreme heartbreak.

"From Rosy Bowers" has a text where you can find multiple references to mythological creatures and places. Already in the first line "From rosy bowers where sleeps the God of Love" who refers to Eros, who according to Greek mythology is the God of love (Store Norske Leksikon, 2011). Eros is, according to the text, in a flowerbed near Altisidora. The fact that Altisidora believes Eros, a full-grown man, is in a flowerbed is the first sign you get that this woman does not see the world quite as others see it. The next sign you get is the introduction of small flying gods of love. She asks if they can teach her how to move and sing to seduce her beloved Don Quixote. In the text, Don Quixote is referred to as Strephon, which was a common name to use on a masculine figure, often a lover or a shepherd (Wordnik, n.d.).

After the introduction in the first part, Altisidora goes on to listing things she believes can help her to seduce Don Quixote.

"Or if more influencing / Is to be brisk and airy, / With a step and a bound, and a fresh on the ground, / I will trip like any fairy."

Altisidora continues listing things also in the next verse, and here Ida is mentioned. This is a mountain in Crete who, according to Greek mythology, was the place Zeus was raised by nymphs (Store Norske Leksikon, 2009). Altisidora also sings about "celestial bodies", this is one of the names to use in different forms of the gods (Pantheon, n.d.).

After a lot of joy and positive references to the mythology, the text suddenly shifts to a more dramatic and negative mood. Altisidora sings about an unpleasant wind that storms past her, and she suddenly finds herself very cold. Her fingers are glowing, the pulse beats perishing in a declining pace and her heart freezes into a solid lump of ice. When she does not get her beloved, she might as well lie down to die. Then a new thought is introduced, and she asks the higher powers ("ye Pow'rs") for advice. "Shall I thaw myself or drown?" Should I thaw and come to life, or let drown in my sorrow? She sings about the foaming waves that grows higher

and higher with her falling tears. She is laying in great discomfort on a bed of mud and on a cushion made of crystals.

Suddenly she completely changes pace, and decides to live. In the verse "No, I'll straight run mad" she says that love no longer has power over her fate. In the next verse "Wild thro' the woods I'll fly," she sings that she will break all chains and locks that hold her down, and rather die a thousand times than to love in vain.

This kind of heartbreak and irrational feelings was at the time it was written a sign of madness. She seems to break out of it in the end, but by then it might have been too late (Scull, 2015). One cannot with absolute certainty know whether Purcell and d'Urfey found the inspiration for this particular piece from their visits to Bedlam or not. It is however well documented that both of them repeatedly visited the institution, and maybe they found the inspiration for this role while conducting one of their visits (Chambers, 2009).

6.2 Musical analysis

The vocal music Purcell writes is often in the style of a recitative, as a way of bringing the flow of the spoken language in to the music (Price, 1984). "From Rosy Bowers" is a good example of this. The piece consists of five different sections, each representing a state of mind and a feeling. d'Urfey, according to Edmondstone Duncan, explained the different feelings and moods in the beginning of the score like this:

"a Mad Song: by a lady distracted with love... performing in the tune all the degrees of madness"

"sullenly mad, mirthfully mad (a swift movement), Melancholy madness, Fantastically mad and Stark mad"

Although the different parts of the piece express several emotions such as joy, sorrow, dismay and anger, Purcell has mainly stayed in the key of C Minor. This is traditionally viewed as the key of melancholy and sadness (Holman, 1995). As can be seen by d'Urfeys own comments to the music and text, all the emotions and parts of the piece are associated with madness.

Given this and the traditional meaning of the key, it may be natural to think that Purcell viewed C Minor as a key that represented the madness of Altisidora.

The first part of “From Rosy Bowers” is in the style of a recitative, a style that in this time was very popular in Italy and most likely where he got his inspiration from. The recitative is written and upwards going, which traditionally is the way one would write to bring out a positive mood. The upwards moving and positive figures can be viewed as her shout to God and Amore and the joys they bring to her life. This theory is also supported in the text. The rising E^b Major chord in the second line are helping to increase the tension, which is then dissolved with rapid downwards going sixteen notes (“Hither, ye little waiting Cupids, fly”, Example 4).

Although Purcell mostly writes the different parts in C Minor, one can find examples where he wanders in to different keys to either express a particular feeling or to underline the text. An example of this can be found in bar 12, where he changes the key with accidentals rather than a pure key change. With this he achieves a fluent and almost unnoticeable change from a happy mood to a more desperate one. In bar 24 the piece moves quickly in to an aria. This new part he has introduced also uses tempo as a way of changing the mood, as the part is written down as twice as fast as the recitative (Vivace). This aria part is written down in a clear C Minor. The high tessitura, the downwards going intervals and the large upwards going leaps in the melody also contributes to this part having a more desperate, nervous and hysterical feel to it.

In bar 45, the aria suddenly returns to the recitative style again, but this time a more uncertain mood emerges. Purcell has written short lines with small intervals, rapidly interrupted by small or sometimes bigger breaks. The part begins in C Minor, but the chromatically descending lines in the piano creates confusion in the tonality (bar 45-51). It is not until the cadenza in bar 55 we have with certainty arrived in E^b Major. In the next five bars the piano holds the E^b Major chord, but it again starts moving chromatically in bar 60. It is not until bar 69 that we again return to C Minor.

The next part, from bar 69, is again an aria. This time with a lot of repetitions, also with a high tessitura and mostly small intervals. This part shares a lot of similarities with the second part of the piece, but because of the secure stepwise written base line in the piano, one gets a

feeling of calmness. The way it is written also gives a natural feeling of it moving forward. In bar 73 Purcell again presents the recitative style, but this time it only lasts for four bars, and he has now written in C Major. One can get the feeling that Altisidora is more confident and secure in her thoughts and the emotional discussion she has been having with herself. Purcell here manages to strengthen Altisidora's newfound confidence in herself and her thoughts with upwards going intervals, coloratura and longer lines in Major. This piece is characterized by quick changes, and the ending is no different. It ends with the vocal and the piano together, in a clear and firm way.

It is exciting to see how Purcell handles the text when working with a writer and theme like this, and it is easy to see that he has a great amount of respect for the work that d'Urfey did. There is never any doubt as to what mood or feeling he wants to portray, but at the same time, there are not a lot of directions or restrictions on how the piece should be performed. I think this gives a lot of freedom to the performer to make madness into something personal, and this may be one of the reasons why this music is still performed today.