

The Disappointment

“The Disappointment” is Behn’s free adaptation of a French poem by Jean Bénédict de Cantenac. It is often taken as a kind of response to Rochester’s “The Imperfect Enjoyment,” and it might be, but it is hard to tell; there was a mini-genre of such poems that express the point of view of disappointed lovers, and Behn might be responding less to Rochester’s poem than to poems *like* it, erotic poems written from the point of view of men that do not much take account of the women involved. Like many poems in this period, it was first circulated in manuscript for some time—how long, we cannot be sure—before it was first printed. Interestingly, the poem was first printed in an edition of Rochester’s poetry in 1680 as though it was by Rochester; it was finally credited (correctly, we assume) to Behn when it was republished in her collected *Poems on Several Occasions* in 1684. That is the text we use here.

1.

One Day the *Am'rous Lisander*,
By an impatient passion sway'd,
Surpriz'd Fair *Cloris*, that lov'd Maid,
Who cou'd defend her self no longer;
All things did with his love conspire,
The *gilded* Planet of the Day,
In his *gay Charriot*, drawn by Fire,
Was now descending to the Sea,
And left no light to guide the World,
But what from *Cloris* brighter Eyes was hurl'd

2.

In a lone *Thicket*, made for love,

Silent, as yeelding Maids consent,
She with a charming languishment,
Permits his force; yet gently strove;
Her hands, his *Bosome*, softly meet,
But not to put him back design'd,
Rather to draw him on inclin'd,
Whilst he lay trembling at her Feet;
Resistance, 'tis too late to shew,
She **wants** the pow'r to say—*Ah!* what d'you do?

3.

Her bright Eyes sweet, and yet severe,
Wher Love, and shame, confus'dly strive,
Fresh vigor, to *Lisander* give;
And whisp'ring softly in his Ear,
She cry'd—cease—cease—your vain desire,
Or I'll call out what wou'd you doe?
My dearer Honor, ev'n to you,
I cannot—must not give—retire,
Or take that life, whose chiefest part,
I gave you with the Conquest of my Heart.

4

But he, as much unus'd to fear,
As he was capable of Love,
The blessed Minutes to improve,
Kisses her Lips, her Neck, her Hair!
Each touch! her new desires Allarmes!
His burning trembling *Hand* he prest,
Upon her melting Snowy Breast,
While he lay panting in his Armes!
All her unguarded Beauties lye,
The *spoiles*, and *Trophies*, of the Enemy,

4

And now without respect, or fear,
He seeks the Object of his Vows.
His love no modesty allows.
By swift degrees, advancing where.

His daring *Hand* that Altar seiz'd,
Where Gods of Love, do Sacrifice!
That awful *Throne!* that Paradise!
Where Rage is tam'd, and Anger pleas'd?
That living *Fountain*, from whose *Trills*,
The melted Soul, in liquid drops destils!

6.

Her Balme Lips, encountring his,
Their *Bodies*, as their Souls they joyn'd,
Where both in *transports* unconfin'd,
Extend themselves upon the *Moss!*
Cloris, half dead, and breathless lay,
Her Eyes appear'd like Humid light,
Such as divides the *Day*, and *Night*,
Or falling Stars, whose Fires decay;
And now no signs of life she shows,
But what in short-breath'd sighs, returns and goes.

7.

He saw how at her length she lay,
He saw her rising *Bosome* bare;
Her loose thin Robes, through which appear,
A shape design'd, for love, and play
Abandon'd by her Pride, and shame:
She does her softest sweets dispence,
Off ring her Virgin, innocence,
A *Victim*, to Loves sacred flame.
Whilst th' o're ravisht Shepherd, lyes,
Unable to perform the Sacrifice.

8

Ready to tast a Thousand joys,
The too transported hapless Swayne,
Found the vast pleasure, tur'd to rain:
Pleasure! which too much love destroys!
The willing Garment by he laid,
And Heav'n all open to his view.
Mad to possess, himself he threw,
On the defenceless lovely Maid!

But oh! what envious Gods conspire!
To snatch his pow'r, yet leave him the desire!

9.

Natures support, without whose Aid,
She can no humane being give;
It self now wants the *Art* to live;
Faintness, its slacken'd *Nerves* Invade,
In vain th' enraged Youth assay'd,
To call his fleeting Vigor back;
No motion, 'twill from motion take,
Excess of love, his love betray'd,
In vain he toyles, in vain commands.
Th' Insensible, fell weeping in his Hands.

10.

In this so Am'rous cruel strife,
Where Love, and Fate, were too severe.
The poor *Lisander*, in despair,
Renounc'd his Reason, with his life.
Now all the brisk, and Active fire,
That shou'd the nobler part in flame,
And left no spark for new desire;
Not all her naked Charms cou'd move,
Or calme that Rage, that had debauch'd his love.

11.

Cloris, returning from the Trance,
Which love and soft desire, had bred,
Her tim'rous hand, she gently laid,
Or guided by design, or chance
Upon that Fabulous *Priapus*,
That Potent God (as Poets feign)
But never did young Shepherdess,
(Gath'ring of Fern, upon the Plain)
More nimbly draw her Fingers back,
Finding beneath the Verdent Leaves a Snake;

12.

Then *Cloris*, her fair hand withdrew,
Finding that God, of her defiers,
Disarm'd of all his pow'rful Fires;
And cold as Flow'rs bath'd in the Morning Dew;
Who can the Nymphs confusion guess?
The blood forsook the kinder place,
And strew'd with blushes all her Face,
Which both disdain, and shame express;
And from *Lisanders* Armes she fled,
Leaving him fainting, on the gloomy Bed.

13.

Like Lightning, through the Grove, she hies,
Or *Daphne*, from the *Delphick* God;
No print upon the Grassy Road,
She leaves, t'instruct pursuing Eyes;
The Wind, that wanton'd in her Hair,
And with her ruffled Garments plaid,
Discover'd in the flying Maid;
All that the Gods e're made of Fair.
So *Venus*, when her Love, was slain,
With fear, and hast, flew o're the Fatal Plain,

14.

The *Nymphs* resentments, none but I,
Can well imagine, and Condole;
But none can guess *Lisanders*, Soul,
But those who sway'd his Distiny:
His silent griefs, swell up to Storms,
And not one God, his fury spares,
He curst his Berth, his Fate, his Stars,
But more the Sheherdesses Charmes;
Whose soft bewitching influence,
Had damn'd him to the *Hell*, of *Impotence*.