Title: “To Discourse by Letters”: Women’s Epistolary Modes and the New Science

Summary: In considering the conference theme of collectivity, this workshop will facilitate conversation by examining how early modern women positioned themselves as participants in scientific discourse through their letters. Ranging from personal missives to public dedicatory letters prefacing literary works, these texts reveal the deliberations and maneuverings involved in staking a claim in the scientific landscape.

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Description of the workshop:
This seminar will invite participants to think broadly across epistolary modes of women’s engagement with the new science during the seventeenth century. We are interested in how scientific pursuits are cast as collective, discursive endeavors through varying iterations of epistolary genres, including dedications, petitions, fictionalized discourses, and even familial communication. In addition to Behn’s dedication to Somerset accompanying The Emperor of the Moon (1688), required readings will include Lucy Hutchinson’s dedication to the Earl of Anglesey from her translation of De Rerum Natura (1675), a brief selection from Margaret Cavendish’s Sociable Letters (1664), and two translated letters from Maria Celeste Galilei to her father, Galileo Galilei (1630, 1633).

These texts from four women writers, spanning from the 1630s through the 1680s, have quite a few significant points of connection. All deal, in varying ways, with questions of circulatory knowledge as inspired by the new science, considering scientific apparatuses like the telescope and other optic lenses (on both material and satirical levels) and scientific theory, particularly Lucretian atomism. As such, these texts also raise questions of attitudes toward gender in the period as they applied to appropriate realms of scientific exploration, evoking some of the distinctions in knowledge-making between more “domestic” scientific arts like scientific receipts or even the materialist slant of telescopic work, and providing safely domestic sites for female exploration distinct from higher theoretical work. One perspective on the gendered division of labor between material and theoretical scientific pursuits is illustrated in Aston Cockayne’s poem
to Alexander Brome (1658), in which he urges Brome to finish his translation of *De Rerum Natura* before Hutchinson does because Lucretius’s content is too bold “t’appear in womens rimes, / the task is masculine.” Hutchinson’s translation, and her decision to gift it to Lord Anglesey, impugn Cockayne’s scornful assessment of the suitability of women’s verses for high theory. At the same time, the excerpt from Cavendish’s *Sociable Letters* seems to problematize this divide, providing a receipt-like letter that discusses the mixing of “dust” and “water” as a sort of exemplary digression in between two letters considering atoms and vacuum.

In addition to their scientific stakes, however, these are also deeply social texts, negotiating status, seeking patronage, and evoking different sorts of interpersonal relationships (both real and imagined). As such, they ask us to consider how scientific discourses not only necessitated, but also constituted the making of inter-hierarchical relationships, situating questions of science as a vital backdrop for seeking authorial agency, often on shifting political sands—for Hutchinson, those of a profoundly-changed restoration England, and for Behn of a political landscape on the eve of the Glorious Revolution.

We invite discussion on the epistolary form as versatile and fluid, a genre that frequently presents nexuses of scientific, authorial, hierarchical, and social navigation. For example, although Maria Celeste Galilei’s letters are primarily a personal communication to her father, they also contain glimpses of material scientific practices inside of a nunnery in the form of receipts. Hutchinson’s letter to Anglesea attempts to discredit Lucretian atomism, yet the letter illuminates a conflict between the translation’s dubious content (according to Hutchinson) and its quality, which she implicitly underscores by presenting it as a gift, putting intellectual and social merit at odds. Cavendish’s collection of letters explores the epistle as a literary form, employing the spirit of the genre in order to inhabit various stances on science, literature, and social relationships. Behn’s dedicatory letter to Somerset, which prefaces her *Emperor of the Moon* (1687), works to assert her authorial presence, and this maneuvering can be seen a stepping stone to her satirical critique of modes of scientific inquiry in the drama.

In order to explore the epistolary navigation of these women in various social, political, and intellectual arenas, we would like to consider the following questions:

- How are scientific discourse and the epistolary (and possibly dramatic) genre inflected by one another?
- How are religious and political debates dramatized and satirized through these scientific discourses in plays like Behn’s *Emperor of the Moon*?
- How do Behn, Cavendish, and Hutchinson engage in epistolary negotiations of authorial agency, socio-political capital, and scientific authority and patronage? Are there other women writers from this period who engage in similarly multivalent negotiations? (Particular writers to consider might include Elisabeth of Bohemia, Henrietta Maria, and Mary Sidney.)
- How did Maria Celeste’s letters surrounding Galileo’s journey to Rome (for his arraignment) provide evidence of her intervention with the political and religious conflicts at the heart of his scientific discoveries/disruptions?
• How does our mediated access to these texts (often as digital and/or translated documents) influence our understanding of the ways these knowledge networks functioned?

We will begin by providing context about our seminar readings (approximately 10 minutes), and will then invite participants to work together in small groups centered around each letter, discussing their observations about authors, formats, and content (15+ minutes). During this time, participants will exchange ideas in a small, collaborative setting before sharing their findings with the larger group. This large group discussion (30+ minutes) will encourage participants to make connections across the reading selections. Finally, we will invite participants to introduce any additional outside readings. We also hope to provide an opportunity for participants to share their knowledge about these writers and their contemporaries.

Readings:
Our pre-circulated readings will facilitate discussion by offering a curated selection that we hope illustrates the flexibility of the epistolary genre. Our letter selections offer multiple voices and demonstrate the varying methods women letters writers deployed in order to engage in scientific discourse. We welcome workshop attendees sharing their own letter discoveries from digital or archival sources as we discuss how early modern women in science negotiated their position as participants and authorities in their own right.

Please find our reading selections below. Links to full collections are also provided for those interested in further reading.

1. Two letters sent in 1630 from Maria Celeste to her father, Galileo. For all letters, please go to: http://galileo.rice.edu/fam/daughter.html
   Letter 1: http://galileo.rice.edu/fam/letters/2nov1630.html

2 November 1630

Most Beloved Lord Father

I am sure you know better than I, Sire, that tribulations are the touchstone where we test the quality of God’s love. Thus, to whatever extent we can patiently bear the trials He doles out, then in that same measure do we promise ourselves possession of the treasure of His love, which comprises our every good.

I beseech you not to grasp the knife of these current troubles and misfortunes by its sharp edge, lest you let it injure you that way; but rather, seizing it by the handle, use it to excise all the imperfections that you may recognize in yourself; so that you rise above the obstacles, and in this fashion, just as you penetrated the heavens with the vision of a Lyncian, so will you, by piercing also through baser realms, arrive at an awareness of the vanity and fallacy of all earthly things: seeing and touching with your own hands the truth that neither the love of your children, nor pleasures, honors or riches can confer true contentment, being in themselves ephemeral; but that only in blessed God, as in our final destination, can we find real peace. Oh what joy will then be
ours, when, rending this fragile veil that impedes us, we revel in the glory of God face to face? By all means let us struggle hard through these few days of life that we have left, so as to be deserving of a blessing so vast and everlasting. Wherefore it appears to me, my dearest Lord Father, that you must keep to your own right path, availing yourself of opportunities as they present themselves, and especially those that allow you to perpetuate your beneficence toward those who repay you with ingratitude, for truly this action, being so rife with difficulty, is all the more perfect and virtuous: indeed I think such behavior, far above any other virtue, renders us in God's image, since, as we know from experience, while we go about offending His Divine Majesty all through the day, He responds by constantly showering us with blessings: and if He chastises us now and then, He does so for our greater well-being, in the manner of a good father who keeps his son in line with the whip. Something of the same seems to be happening now in our poor city, where, spurred on as we are by our dread of the danger hanging over us, at least we amend ourselves.

I do not know whether you have heard, Sire, of the death of Matteo Ninci, brother of our Suor Maria Teodora, who, according to what her brother Alessandro writes, had not been ill more than 3 or 4 days, and made his passage very much in God's grace, as far as it was possible to understand. The others in the household still have their health, I believe, but they are all sorely tried by their great loss. I suspect you must feel as shocked as we do, Sire, remembering what a well-mannered youth he was, and how very lovable.

But then, not wanting to give you only the bad news, I must tell you also that the letter I wrote, on Madonna's behalf, to Monsignor Archbishop, was very well received by him, and she had a courteous reply with an offer of all his protection and aid.

Similarly, two requests made last week to the Grand Duke and the Grand Duchess Mother have both produced a good outcome, as we received from Her Highness on the morning of All Saints' Day [November 1] a donation of 300 loaves of bread, and orders that we send someone to collect a moggio [eighteen bushels] of grain for us, which greatly alleviates Madonna's anxiety, for she did not have so much as a seed tox to sow.

Pardon me, Sire, if I annoy you excessively with my lengthy chatter, but, beyond your encouraging me through demonstrations of proof that you enjoy my letters, I consider you my Devoto (to speak in our parlance of patron saints) in whom I confide my every thought, and share all my joys and sorrows; and, finding you always ready and willing to assist me, I ask you, not to fill all my needs, because they are too numerous, but to please see to those that are most pressing at present: for, with the chill weather coming on, I will surely grow numb with cold, unless you help by sending me a warm quilt to protect me, since the one I have now is not mine, and its owner wants to use it herself, as is only right. The one that you sent, Sire, along with the woolen blanket, I leave with Suor Arcangela, who wants to sleep alone, and I respect her wishes. But I am left with only one cotton coverlet, and if I wait until I have earned enough to buy a quilt, I will neither get one, nor survive this winter: therefore I beg this benevolence of my beloved Devoto, who, as I know so well, will not be able to bear the thought of my suffering: and may it please the Lord (if it be for the best) to keep him with me for a long time to come, because, after he goes, I am left all alone in this world. But indeed it weighs heavily on me that I cannot offer him a proper exchange for his generous gifts! I will endeavor at least, or rather more
than ever, to importune blessed God and the Most Holy Virgin that he be conducted into Paradise; and this will be the greatest reward that I can give him for all the good he has done and continues to do for me.

Here are two small jars of electuary for safeguarding against the plague. The one that has no written label is composed of dried figs, nuts, rue and salt, held together with as much honey as was needed. You may take it every morning, before eating, in a dose about the size of a walnut, followed immediately by drinking a little Greek or other good wine, and they say it provides a marvelous defense. I must admit that it has been overcooked, because we did not consider the tendency of the figs to harden. The other mixture is also to be taken by mouthful in the same manner as the first, but it has a harsher taste. If you decide to make regular use of either one, we will try to prepare them with greater skill. You say in your letter, Sire, that you mean to send me the telescope; I suppose that you have since forgotten, and therefore I remind you of it, as well as the basket in which I sent the quinces, because I am diligently working to find more of them for you. With that, to close, I send you greetings with all my heart together with our usual friends.

From San Matteo, All Souls' Day [November 2] 1630.

Your most affectionate daughter,
S. M. Celeste

Letter 2: [http://galileo.rice.edu/fam/letters/20aug1633.html](http://galileo.rice.edu/fam/letters/20aug1633.html)

20 August 1633

Most Beloved Lord Father

When I wrote to you about your coming home soon, Sire, or your otherwise remaining where you are for a while longer, I knew of the petition you had made to his lordship the Ambassador, but was not yet aware of his answer, which I since learned from Signor Geri when he came here last Tuesday, just after I had written yet another letter to you, enclosing the recipe for the pills that by now must surely have reached you. My motive for addressing you in that seemingly distant fashion had grown out of my frequent discussions with Signor Rondinelli, who all through this period has been my refuge (because, as practical and experienced as he is in the ways of the world, he has many times alleviated my anxiety, prognosticating for me the outcome of situations concerning your affairs, especially in cases that seemed more precipitous to me than they later turned out to be); once during those discussions he told me how people in Florence were saying that when you departed from Siena, Sire, you would have to go to the Certosa, a condition that displeased every one of your friends; yet he saw some good in going along with those orders, as I understand the Ambassador himself did, too, for they both suspected that soliciting too urgently for your direct return here, Sire, might bring about some negative consequence, and therefore they wanted to allow more time to elapse before entreating again. Whereupon I, fearing the worst could all too easily come to pass, and hearing you were preparing to petition yet again, set myself to write to you as I did.
If ever I fail to make a great demonstration of the desire I harbor for your return, I refrain only to avoid goading you too much or disquieting you excessively. Rather than take that risk, all through these days I have been building castles in the air, thinking to myself, if, after these two months of delay in not obtaining the favor of your release, I had been able to appeal to her Ladyship the Ambassadress, then she, working through the sister-in-law of His Holiness, might have successfully implored the Pope on your behalf. I know, as I freely admit to you, that these are poorly drawn plans, yet still I would not rule out the possibility that the prayers of a pious daughter could outweigh even the protection of great personages. While I was wandering lost in these schemes, and I saw in your letter, Sire, how you imply that one of the things that fans my desire for your return is the anticipation of seeing myself delighted by a certain present you are bringing, oh! I can tell you that I turned truly angry; but enraged in the way that blessed King David exhorts us in his psalm where he says, Irascimini et nolite peccare [Be angry, but sin not]. Because it seems almost as though you are inclined to believe, Sire, that the sight of the gift might mean more to me than that of you yourself: which differs as greatly from my true feelings as the darkness from the light. It could be that I mistook the sense of your words, and with this likelihood I calm myself, because if you questioned my love I would not know what to say or do. Enough, Sire, but do realize that if you are allowed to come back here to your hovel, you could not possibly find it more derelict than it is, especially now that the time approaches to refill the casks, which, as punishment for the evil they committed in allowing the wine to spoil, have been hauled up onto the porch and there staved in according to the sentence pronounced by the most expert wine drinkers in these parts, who point out as the primary problem your practice, Sire, of never having broken them open before, and these same experts claim the casks cannot suffer now for having had some sunshine upon their planks.

I received 8 scudi from the sale of the wine, of which I spent 3 on six staia of wheat, so that, as the weather turns cooler, La Piera may return to her bread baking; La Piera sends her best regards to you, and says that if she were able to weigh your desire to return against her longing to see you, she feels certain her side of the scale would plummet to the depths while yours would fly up to the sky: of Geppo there is no news worthy of mention. Signor Rondinelli this week has paid the 6 scudi to Vincenzio Landucci and has retained two receipts, one for last month, one for this: I hear that Vincenzio and the children are healthy, but as for their welfare I do not know how they are getting along, not having been able to inquire after them from a single person.

I am sending you another batch of the same pills, and I greet you with all my heart together with our usual friends and Signor Rondinelli. May Our Lord bless you.

From San Matteo in Arcetri, the 20th day of August 1633.

Most affectionate daughter,
S. Maria Celeste


Letter 1:
MADAM,
You desire me to Explain that Chapter of Atomes, which is before my Book of Philosophical Opinions, but truly I cannot Explain it more Clearly than I have done, which is, that I thought this World could not be made out of Atomes, but if it was made by Atomes, they must be both the Architects and Materials, neither could they do that Work, unless every Atome was Animated with Life and Knowledg, for an Animated Substance is a Living, Knowing Substance, which Life and Knowledg is Sense and Reason; and thus every Atome must have a Body, which is a Substance, and that Substance Sense and Reason, and so Probably Passions and Appetites, as well as Wit and Ingenuity, to make Worlds, and Worlds of Creatures, as also Passions and Appetites that Sympathize and Antipathize, as not only to Create, but to Dissolve the Self-creating Figures, which Sympathy and Antipathy might cause the Continuation of the World, for if they did always agree, there would be no Change, and if they did always Disagree, there would be a Confusion. But I have written so much of Atomes, in my Book of Poems, as I cannot well write more of that Small, though Infinite Substance; wherefore leaving them to Better Judgments, Learning, and Rational Arguments than mine, I rest,

Madam,
Your faithful Friend and Servant.

CLX.

Letter 2:
MADAM,
You desire me to give my reason why much Cream is apt to make a Cake Heavy, I say, the same reason that much Butter makes Pye-crust Heavy, for it is much Moisture that causes such things to be Heavy, like as Dough is much Heavier than when it is throughly Baked, for the Fire Drying up the Moisture, causes it to be Light; also when the Sun Drinks up the Moisture of the Earth, it causes it to be Dusty, and Dust is Lighter than Water, and much Lighter than Dirt, which is Earth and Water mix'd together, for although Rarified VVater is so Light as to Ascend, yet when VVater is an United Body, it is Heavy, even so Heavy, as to Descend Weightily; Indeed Vapor one may say is the Dusty Part of Water; but leaving Dust and VVater, I return to Cake and Pye-crust, Cream and Butter; the more Cakes and Pies are Baked, the Lighter they will be, and much Lighter, if the Flower be Dried before it is Mix'd, and by reason Cream and Butter are of a very Moist Nature, when there is much of them in Cakes, and such like Meats, it is not easily Dried up, which makes them require so much the more Baking and VVorking; but many Good Huswifes put the Fault in the Cream and Butter, when it is the Fault of the Oven, and many Impatient Huswifes will have their Cake before it is Baked, they will not stay the time, their Appetites being Hotter than their Ovens; but there is an Old Saying, Too much Cost Spoils a Pudding, and in my Opinion, it is too much Hast that Spoils it, for Good Ingredients VVell ordered, cannot be Amiss. But, Madam, having had no Practice, I cannot have much Skill in these Meats, and 'tis Probable my Cook can give better Reasons than I can, yet howsoever to Obey your Commands, I have given you my Opinion, and rest,

Madam,
Your faithful Friend and Servant.

CLXI.
Letter 3:  
MADAM,

YOU desire my Opinion whether there be a Vacuum or not, I have written of it in my Former Books, as in my Poems, Olio, and Philosophical Opinions, and cannot write More, nor Better of it, than I have done there, unless I had more Learning, or Judgment, or VVit, or Conceptions, or Understanding; but yet to Satisfie you, I'll send you the same Opinion, or but little different, which is, that if there were no Vacuum, but that all the Universe were full, only the Gross Bodies Moved in the Thin Bodies, as is held by many they do, then the Places of each Solid or Bulky Body must be fitted just to their Measures, and their Places must be Supplied so, as when they Move, the Liquid, or Rare Bodies must Contract and Dilate, according to the Motion of those Bulky Bodies, to fill up their former Places, or following Places, and to Contract, to make Room and Place for those Solid and Grosser Bodies, otherwise there would be a Vacuum, or a Stoppage of all Natural Motions. But I cannot conceive how the Thin or Rare Matter, can Contract or Dilate, if there be no Vacuum, for to my Reason, there must be a Space to Dilate, and Contract into, so as the Rare Parts must be Porous to Contract, and there must be Empty Places, or Space to Dilate, and if they say the Space or Place is the Place or Space where the Solid Bodies were in, which they fill up as soon as they Moved out, yet the Space or Place must be Empty before the Rare Bodies Enter, for two Bodies cannot be in one Place at one Time, and if the Great, or Solid Bodies, leave no Places or Spaces, but alwayes Move in Full Matter, I cannot Imagine how they should Move if all Places be Full, although they should move in Rare, or Thin Matter, for as I said, the Thin Matter must be Porous to Contract and Dilate, to make VVay, or Fill up, for if there were not Pores, or Spongy, or Hollow Spaces and Places, that which is Liquid and Rare would be as Firm as Brass or Glass, nay more, for those, no doubt, are Porous, for if there were no Vacuum, every part would be Press'd, and Joyn'd into a Firm Body or Substance, nay surely there would be great Confusion amongst all the Works of Nature. But why may not Dilatation and Contraction cause Vacuum to be sometimes more, and sometimes less? But one would think there were no Vacuum in Nature, because Nature is Forced, or seems to be so, as to make VVay for Life by Death, as if she had no Room, or Space for Life, but what was caused by Death. But leaving these Empty and Filling Opinions, I rest,

Madam,

Your faithful Friend and Servant.

3. Lucy Hutchinson’s dedication to the Earl of Anglesey from her translation of De Rerum Natura (1675). For the full text, we suggest using a library login to access Oxford Scholarly Editions Online. Otherwise, please see: https://www.she-philosopher.com/library/hutchinson-ltr_Pt2.html

To the right honorable

Arthur Earle of Anglesey

Lord Keeper of his Majesties Privie Seale

and one of his Majesties most honorable Privie Councell
My Lord

When I present this unworthy Translation to your Lordship, I sacrifice my shame to my obedience, for (though a masculine Witt hath thought it worth printing his head in a lawrell crowne for the version of one of these books) I am so far from glorying in my six, that had they not by misfortune bene gone out of my hands in one lost copie, even your Lordships command, which hath more authority with me, then any humane thing I pay reverence to, should not have redeemed it from the fire. Had it bene a worke that had merited glory, or could my sex (whose more becoming vertue is silence) derive honor from writing, my aspiring Muse would not have sought any other Patrone then your Lordship, the justly celebrated Mecenas of our dayes, where Learning and ingenuitie finds its most honorable, I had allmost sayd, its only refuge in this drolling degenerate age, that hath hissd out all sober and serious studies; which your Lordship not only cherisheth in others, but are your selfe so illustriously eminent in that most honorable acquisition of Learning, that tis the noblest crowne of any worke, to gaine your Lordships approbation. And therefore, since I did attempt things out of my owne Sphaere, I am sorry I had not the capacity of making a worke, nor the good fortune of chusing a subject, worthy of being presented to your Lordship, whose dedication, might gratefully have renderd some of the honor it receives in its acceptance. As your Lordships command will vindicate me from arrogance in offering so unworthy a peice, to such a hand; So I beseech your Lordship to reward my obedience, by indulging me the further honor to preserve, wherever your Lordship shall dispose this booke, this record with it, that I abhorre all the Atheismes and impeties in it, and translated it only out of youthfull curiositie, to understand things I heard so much discourse of at second hand, but without the least inclination to propagate any of the wicked pernitious doctrines in it. Afterward being convinced of the sin of amusing my selfe with such vaine Philosophy (which even at the first I did not employ any serious studie in, for I turnd it into English in a roome where my children practizd the severall quallities they were taught with their Tutors, and I numbred the sillables of my translation by the threds of the canvas I wrought in, and sett them downe with a pen and inke that stood by me; How superficially it must needs be done in this manner, the thing it selfe will shew) but I say afterward as my judgement grew riper, and my mind was fixt in more profitable contemplations, I thought this booke not worthy either of review or correction, the whole worke being one fault. But when I have throwne all the contempt that is due upon my author, who yet wants not admirers, among those whose religion little exceeds his, I must say I am not much better satisfied with the other fardle of Philosophers, who in some pulpitts are quoted with devine epithetes. They that make the incorruptible God part of a corruptible world, and chaine up his absolute freedome of will to a fatall Necessity; That make nature, which only is the Order God hath sett in his workes, to be God himselfe, That feigne a God liable to Passion, impotence and mutabilitie, and not exempt from the vilest lusts; That believe a multiplicitie of Gods, adore the Sun and Moone and all the Host of Heaven, and bandy their severall deities in faction one against another; All these, and all the other poore deluded instructors of the Gentiles, are guilty of no lesse impiety, ignorance and folly then this Lunatick, who not able to dive into the true Originall and Cause of Beings and Accidents, admires them who devizd this Casuall, Irrationall dance of Attomes. So farre yett wee may usefully be permitted to consider the productions of degenerate nature, as they represent to us the deplorable wretchednesse of all mankind, who are not translated from darknesse to light by supernaturall illumination, and teach us that their wisedome is folly, their most vertuous and pure morallity fowle defilement, their knowledge ignorance, their glorie shame, their renowne contemptible,
their industry vaine, all their attainments cheates and delusions, their felicities unsubstantiall
dreames and apparitions, and their lives only a varied scene of perpetuall woe and misery. This is
the best account I can give of the best of them, who toyld themselves in vaine to search out
Truth, but wandred in a Maze of Error, and could never discover her by Natures dimne candle,
which provod only an Ignis fatui to lead them into quagmires and precipices, and to this day is
no better to their admirers, who manifest they are still in their naturall blindnesse, and never saw
the Sun, that can see extoll corrupt gloworms. I am perswaded, that the Encomiu
ms given to
these Pagan Poets and Philosophers, wherewith Tutors put them into the hands of their pupils,
yet unsetled in the Principles of Devine Truth, is one greate means of debauching the learned
world, at least of confirming them in that debauchery of soule, which their first sin led them into,
and of hindring their recovery, while they puddle all the streames of Truth, that flow downe to
them from devine Grace, with this Pagan mud; for all the Heresies that are sprung up in Christian
religion, are but the severall foolish and impious inventions of the old contemplative Heathen
revivd, and brought forth in new dresses, while men wreck their witts, striving to wrest and
pervert the sacred Scriptures from their genuine meaning, to complie with the false and foolish
opinions of men. Some of them indeed acknowledge Providence, A devine Originall and
Regiment of all things, an internall Law, which oblies us to eternall Punishment if wee
transgresse it, and shall be rewarded with present peace of conscience, and future Blessednes if
wee obey it; But though they have generall notions, wanting a revelation and guide to lead them
into a true and distinct knowledge, of the Nature of God, of the Originall and Remedie of Sin, of
the Spring and nature of Blessednes, they set up their vaine imaginations in the roome of God,
and devize superstitions foolish services to avert his wrath, and propitiate his favour, suitable to
their devized God, inventing such fables of their Elizium and Hell, and the joyes and tortures
of those places, as made this Author and others turne them into allegories, and thinke they treated
more reverently of Gods, when they placd them above the cares and disturbances of humane
affaires, and set them in an unperturbed rest and felicity, leaving all things here, to Accident and
Chance, deniing that determinate wise Councell and Order of things they could not dive into, and
deriding Heaven and Hell, Eternall Rewards and Punishments, as fictions in the whole, because
the instances of them in particular were so ridiculous, as seemd rather stories invented to fright
children, then to perswade reasonable men; therefore they fancied another kind of heaven and
hell, in the internall peace or horror of the conscience, upon which account they urg’d the persuite
of vertue and the avoyding of vice, as the spring of joy or sorrow, and defin’d vertue to be all
those things that are just equall and profitable to humane Society, wherein this Poet makes true
religion to consist, and not in superstitious cerimonies, which he makes to have had their
originall from the vaine dread of men, imputing those events to the wrath of Gods, which
proceeded from naturall Causes whereof they were ignorant, and therefore sings high applause to
his owne wisedome, for having explord such deepe misteries of Nature, though even these
discoveries of his are so silly, foolish and false, that nothing but his Lunacy can extenuate the
crime of his arrogant ignorance. But ’tis a lamentation and horror, that in these dayes of the
Gospell, Men should be found so presumptuously wicked, to studie and adhere to his and his
masters [i.e., Epicurus] ridiculous, impious, execrable doctrines, reviving the foppish casuall
dance of attoms, and dening the Soveraigne Wisedome of God in the greate Designe of the
whole Universe and every creature in it, and his eternall Omnipotence, exerting it selfe in the
production of all things, according to his most wise and fixed purpose, and his most gratious,
ever active Providence, upholding, ordering and governing the whole Creation, and conducting
all that appeares most casuall to us and our narrow comprehensions, to the accomplishment of
those just ends for which they were made. As by the study of these I grew in Light and Love, the little glory I had among some few of my intimate friends, for understanding this crabbed poet, became my shame, and I found I never understood him till I learnt to abhorre him, and dread a wanton dalliance with impious bookes. Then I reapd some profit by it, for it shewd me that senselesse superstitions drive carnall reason into Atheisme, which though Policy restreins some from avowing so impudently as this Dog, yet vast is their number, who make it a specious pretext within themselves, to thinke religion is nothing at all but an invention to reduce the ignorant vulgar into order and Government. My Philosophers taught me, by their owne instance, that unregenerate, unsanctified reason makes men more monstrous by their learning, then the most sottish brutish idiots; while they employ the most excellent giifts of humane understanding, witt, and all the other noble endowments of the soule, as weapons against him that gave them. This gave me a dreadfull prospect of the misery of lapsed nature, whereby I saw, with sad compassion, the uncomfortable shadow of death wherein they consume their lives, that are alienated from the knowledge of God. I saw the insufficiency of humane reason (how greate an Idoll soever it is now become among the gowne-men) to arrive to any pure and simple Truth, with all its helps of Art and Studie. I learnt to hate all unsanctified excellence, if that impropriety of expression may be admitted, and to run out of my monstrous selfe, to seeke Light, Life, knowledge, tranquillity, rest, and whatever else is requisite to make up a compleate blessednesse, and lasting felicity, in its only true and pure devine fountains. As one that, walking in the darke, had miraculously scapd a horrible precipice, by daylight coming back and discovering his late danger, startles and reviews it with affright, so did I, when I, in the mirrour of opposed truth and holinesse and blessednes, saw the ugly deformitie, and the desperate tendency of corrupted nature, in its greatest pretences, and having by rich grace scapd the shipwreck of my soule among those vaine Philosophers, who by wisedome knew not God, I could not but in charity sett up this seamarke, to warne incautious travellers, and leave a testimony, that those walkes of witt which poore vaineglorious schollars call the Muses groves, are enchanted thicketts, and while they tipple att their celebrated Helicon, they lose their lives, and fill themselves with poyson, drowning their spiritts in those pudled waters, and neglecting that healing spring of Truth, which only hath the vertue to restore and refresh sick humane life. To conclude, let none, that aspire to eternall happines, gaze too long, or too fixedly on that Monster, into which man by the sorcerie of the devill is converted, least he draw infection in att his eies, and be himselfe either metamorphosed into the most ugly shape, or stupified and hardned against all better impressions, as dayly examples too sadly instance.

But I say not this to your Lordship, though I leave it in your books, as an antidote against the poyson of it, for any novice who by chance might prie into it. Your Lordship hath skill to render that which in it selfe is poysonous, many wayeres usefull and medicinall, and are not liable to danger by an ill booke, which I beseech your Lordship to conceale, as a shame I did never intend to boast, but now resigne to your Lordships comand, whose wisedome to make the defects and errors of my vainly curious youth pardonable, I relie on much more then my owne skill in searching out an apologie for them, and your Lordships benigne favour to me, I have so many wayeres experienced, that it would be greate ingratitude to doubt your Lordships protection against all the censures a booke might expose me to. And while I am assurd of that, I bid defiance to aniething that can be sayd against.
My Lord,

Your Lordships

most devoted obedient

humble servant

L H


TO THE

Lord Marquess

OF

WORCESTER,&c.

MY LORD,

IT is a common Notion, that gathers as it goes, and is almost become a vulgar Error, That Dedications in our Age, are only the effects of Flattery, a form of Complement, and no more; so that the Great, to whom they are only due, decline those Noble Patronages that were so generally allow’d the Ancient Poets; since the Awful Custom has been so scandaliz’d by mistaken Addresses, and many a worthy Piece is lost for want of some Honourable Protection, and sometimes many indifferent ones traverse the World with that advantageous Passport only.

This humble Offering, which I presume to lay at your Lordships Feet, is of that Critical Nature, that it does not only require the Patronage of a great Title, but of a great Man too, and there is often times a vast difference between those two great Things; and amongst all the most Elevated, there are but very few in whom an Illustrious Birth and equal Parts compleat the Hero; but among those, your Lordship bears the first Rank, from a just Claim, both of the Glories of your Race and Vertues. Nor need we look back into long past Ages, to bring down to ours the Magnanimous deeds of your Ancestors: We need no more than to behold (what we have so often done with wonder) those of the Great Duke of Beauford, your Illustrious Father, whose unshaken Loyalty, and all other eminent Vertues, have rendred him to us, something more than Man, and which alone, deserving a whole Volume, wou’d be here but to lessen his Fame, to mix his Grandeurs with those of any other; and while I am addressing to the Son, who is only worthy of that Noble Blood he boasts, and who gives the World a Prospect of those coming Gallantries that will Equal those of his Glorious Father; already, My Lord, all you say and do is admir’d, and every touch of your Pen reverenc’d; the Excellency and Quickness of your Wit, is the Subject
that fills the World most agreeably. For my own part, I never presume to contemplate your Lordship, but my Soul bows with a perfect Veneration to your mighty Mind; and while I have ador'd the delicate effects of your uncommon Wit, I have wish'd for nothing more than an Opportunity of expressing my infinite Sense of it; and this Ambition, my Lord, was one Motive of my present Presumption, in the Dedicating this Farce to your Lordship.

I am sensible, my Lord, how far the Word Farce might have offended some, whose Titles of Honour, a Knack in dressing, or his Art in writing a Billet Deux, had been his chiefest Talent, and who, without considering the Intent, Character, or Nature of the thing, wou'd have cry'd out upon the Language, and have damn'd it (because the Persons in it did not all talk like Hero's ) as too debas'd and vulgar to entertain a Man of Quality; but I am secure from this Censure, when your Lordship shall be its Judge, whose refin'd Sence, and Delicacy of Judgment, will, thro' all the humble Actions and trivialness of Business, find Nature there, and that Diversion which was not meant for the Numbers, who comprehend nothing beyond the Show and Buffoonry.

A very barren and thin hint of the Plot. I had from the Italian, and which, even as it was, was acted in France eighty odd times without intermission. 'Tis now much alter'd, and adapted to our English Theatre and Genius, who cannot find an Entertainment at so cheap a Rate as the French will, who are content with almost any Incoherences, howsoever shuffled together under the Name of a Farce; which I have endeav'rd as much as the thing wou'd bear, to bring within the compass of Possibility and Nature, that I might as little impose upon the Audience as I cou'd; all the Words are wholly new, without one from the Original. 'Twas calculated for His late Majesty of Sacred Memory, that Great Patron of Noble Poetry, and the Stage, for whom the Muses must for ever mourn, and whose Loss, only the Blessing of so Illustrious a Successor can ever repair; and 'tis a great Pity to see that best and most useful diversion of Mankind, whose Magnificence of old was the most certain sign of a flourishing State, now quite undone by the Misapprehension of the Ignorant, and Misrepresentings of the Envious, which evidently shows the World is improv'd in nothing but Pride, Ill Nature, and affected Nicety; and the only diversion of the Town now, is high Dispute, and publick Controversies in Taverns, Coffee-houses, &c. and those things which ought to be the greatest Mysteries in Religion, and so rarely the Business of Discourse, are turn'd into Ridicule, and look but like so many fanatical Stratagems to ruine the Pulpit as well as the Stage. The Defence of the first is left to the Reverend Gown, but the departing Stage can be no otherwise restor'd, but by some leading Spirits so Generous, so Publick, and so Indefatigable as that of your Lordship, whose Patronages are sufficient to support it, whose Wit and Judgment to defend it, and whose Goodness and Quality to justifie it; such Encouragement wou'd inspire the Poets with new Arts to please, and the Actors with Industry.'Twas this that occasion'd so many Admirable Plays heretofore, as Shakespear's, Fletcher's, and Johnson's, and 'twas this alone that made the Town able to keep so many Play-houses alive, who now cannot supply one. However, my Lord, I, for my part, will no longer complain, if this Piece find but favour in your Lordship's Eyes, and that it be so happy to give your Lordship one ours Diversion, which is the only Honour and Fame is wish'd to crown all the Endeavours of,

My Lord,

Your Lordship's
Most humble, and

Most Obedient

Servant

A. Behn.