



Moving Beyond the Pandemic: English and American Studies in Spain

Francisco Gallardo-del-Puerto,
M^a del Carmen Camus-Camus &
Jesús Ángel González-López (Eds.)



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**MOVING BEYOND THE PANDEMIC:
ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES
IN SPAIN**

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(editors)**

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Exemplary elite: the Revolution of 1688 and the rhetoric of dramatic dedications

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Abstract

This chapter provides a discussion of the dedications of plays that female members of the aristocracy were addressed in the period 1660-1714. It is my contention that the practice of dedicatory writing functioned as other forms of propaganda, such as court masques and portraits, and that this strategy not only benefitted playwrights but also their patronesses, who welcomed the social recognition acknowledged by their clients. Moreover, I explain how the growing importance attached to morality in the mid-1690s became apparent in dedications: the idealisation of the patronesses' physical beauty in the reign of Charles II was replaced by a greater emphasis on female virtue in the texts published after the Revolution of 1689. In this paper, a number of dedications addressed to women of the Churchill family are considered to demonstrate that these ladies were praised for their modesty, presenting them as devoted wives, while celebrating the military victories of the duke.

Keywords: dedications, gift-exchange, drama, Restoration theatre, aristocratic women

The study of dedications of plays addressed to women and the rhetorical motifs used in these texts reveals a significant change concerning the panegyric of their patronesses: after the Revolution of 1688 aristocratic women no longer expected to be praised for their alluring beauty (as it had been the case with the dedications of plays written during Charles II's reign). Instead, and because of the change in morals and the general anxiety over improper behaviour that sprang in the 1690s, in the epistles written in this decade the emphasis of the praise of the dedicatee was placed on their virtuousness. To illustrate my point, I am going to examine the dedications of drama that Sarah Churchill, duchess of Marlborough, and her daughters, Henrietta Godolphin, countess of Godolphin, and Mary Montagu, duchess of Montagu, received.

Before discussing the epistles, I would like to introduce the study of dedications and explain the effectiveness of the patronage system in late-seventeenth-century theatre. Because of the interest Charles II and his court had in drama, theatrical activity was vigorously resumed and playgoing soon became one of the preferred past times of the royals and the nobility. At the same time that play publication increased, dedicatory writing came to be considered a customary practice fully expected by readers. This is manifestly confirmed by the data: between 1660 and 1714, 352 plays (out of a total of 565) contained a dedicatory epistle, that is 62%.¹

¹ These references are based on an examination of all plays published between 1660 and 1714. I have revised all the works listed in the Harbage-Schoenbaum-Wagonheim's *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700* (1989) and Burling's *A Checklist of New Plays and Entertainments on the London Stage, 1700-1737* (1993), including manuscript plays.

Publication date	Author, title of play	Patroness
1700	Boyer, <i>Achilles</i>	Sarah Churchill, duchess of Marlborough
1704	Trapp, <i>Abra-Mule</i>	Henrietta Godolphin, countess of Godolphin
1706	Trotter, <i>The Revolution of Sweden</i>	Henrietta Godolphin, countess of Godolphin
1712	Philips, <i>The Distrest Mother</i>	Mary Montagu, duchess of Montagu
1714	Heidegger, <i>Arminius</i>	Henrietta Godolphin, countess of Godolphin

Table 1: Dedications of plays addressed to the duchess of Marlborough and her daughters, the countesses of Burlington and Godolphin

Dedications afforded playwrights an occasion to cement patronage relations by making them public and derive new profits. That meant that dramatists could add about 5-10 pounds to their earnings, these being limited to the third-night benefit (45 pounds or more), provided that the play was successful enough to be acted for three nights; and the payment for publication rights (which amounted to 10 pounds or a little more). This approximate estimation of playwright's takings (and it can be nothing but rough because of the scarce data that has been preserved) is given by Judith Milhous and Robert Hume in "Playwrights' Remuneration" and *The Publication of Plays in London* (2015).

Nonetheless, patronage and dedicatory writing in the seventeenth century cannot be reduced to purely economic phenomena. The name of patrons (particularly, names of noble families) written on title-pages page brought honour to the author. The panegyric, which some nineteenth-century scholars misinterpreted as artificial flattery, was one of the staple strategies for the enhancement of literary works at the time. Praising the dedicatee was a rhetorical convention and was completely justified within the context of dedications. To be most effective, both in the eyes of patrons and readers, the rhetoric of dedications (mainly, the dedicatee's panegyric) needed to be carefully devised so as to express the asymmetrical relation between patron and client in the most deferential and flattering terms. When offering their plays to a noblewoman, competent dedicators resorted to the divinisation of the dedicatee, that is, they characterised their patroness as being of divine nature and they articulated this hyperbolic praise through a variety of themes, many of which were drawn from Renaissance Neoplatonism. In the years of Charles II's reign, the idealisation of the patroness was based on the traditional social function of beauty as an instrument that confers prestige on a noble household or the court. This instrumentalisation of beauty unsurprisingly intensified in the Caroline period, because of the necessity of restoring the glory of the monarchy and the nobility after the Civil War and the Protectorate period. This glorifying use of beauty is also evidenced in the series of portraits known as the 'Windsor Beauties', which were painted by Sir Peter Lely and commissioned by Anne Hyde, first duchess of York.

As a means to contrast the rhetoric of the panegyric of patroness in plays published during the reign of Charles II with those printed after the Revolution of 1688, an extract from the epistle of Settle's *Ibrahim* (1677), to Elizabeth Monck, is used as an example. The duchess of Albemarle is idealised on the basis of her beauty and other virtues, which make her "so Divine a subject" for poetry (A2v). Lady Albemarle surpasses the female protagonist and has

allowed her to win the love of the duke: “Your Grace has all her Vertue, without the allay of her Vanity; and this advantage above her, that Your Grace possesses those Charms which Story never attributed to Roxolana; Her Beauty could subdue, but not secure her Solyman. But your Graces Victories are more compleat” (A2v). Settle then portrays the Albemarle as the epitome of spousal felicity, complimenting his dedicatee for being a loyal wife:

For if our English Chronicle (spight of the fashionable liberty of a Licentious Age) would Character the perfect happiness of a Princely Pair, it must describe the Influence of the Dutchess of Albemarle over the unalterable Affections of her Lord: And as in Duty to such eminent Virtues; & such infinite Perfections, even the most ill-natur'd Age unanimously speaks of your Grace with Veneration. (A2v-A3)

Settle continues to divinise his patroness, underscoring her righteousness and unspotted reputation: “to secure that Fame your Virtues have so justly acquired, your Grace is as Cautious in the Preservation of it: But so impregnable are your Sacred Principles of Honour, that your Graces Care in that, is but like His, who raises Bulwarks to defend that Town, which of it self before was inaccessible” (A3). Settle’s dedication of *Ibrahim* to Elizabeth Monck illustrates that the extolment of the patroness’s beauty was a staple strategy to derive prestige for one’s work. It is also significant that the duchess is presented as a virtuous, married woman, a role which is similarly emphasized in the epistles written in the reign of William and Mary.

After the death of Charles II, whose reign had come to be seen as morally decadent, and the short-lived rule of his overtly Catholic brother James II, the accession of William and Mary brought a new moral tone in agreement with the values of their Whig supporters (some of them being the newly wealthy and middle-rank people). Different sectors of society imposed a demand on the elite to fulfil its theoretical role as national examples of virtue, manners and religion, while denouncing the depiction of the lewd and profane aristocracy on the stage (Hudson 6). The societies for the reformation of manners are indicative of this renewal of some of the old puritanic attitudes. In response to the widespread attacks on the irreverence and indecency of Restoration drama, which culminated with the publication of Jeremy Collier’s scathing pamphlet *A Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* in 1698, playwrights not only had to defend drama’s place in society, but also portray exemplary models of behaviour. Similarly, in their dedications offered to noblewomen, authors shifted the emphasis to their patronesses’ virtuousness. This strategy was maintained during the reign of Queen Anne, who continued William and Mary’s attempt to reform morals.

The Churchills held considerable influence in the 1680s onwards. All members of the family were appointed to prominent offices at court: Sarah, duchess of Marlborough, was appointed lady of the bedchamber after Anne’s marriage to Prince George of Denmark in 1683, and then groom of the stole in 1685. Moreover, once Queen Anne succeeded to the throne, Lord Churchill was made a Knight of the Garter, master-general of the ordnance and captain-general of her Majesty’s land forces (Dalton 15). Sarah herself became mistress of the robes, groom of the stole, keeper of the privy purse, and ranger of Windsor Park, perceiving a total salary over £6,000 per annum (Falkner). Their daughters Henrietta, Anne and Mary were appointed ladies of the bedchamber. As a reward for Churchill’s successful summer campaign in the Netherlands, Queen Anne created him marquess of Blandford, Dorset, and duke of Marlborough on 14 December 1702 (Cokayne 8, 493). Additionally, Anne granted the duke £5,000 a year for her lifetime, although, soon afterwards opposition in parliament forced the queen to withdraw her request for payment of the grant.

It is not surprising then, given their preeminence at court, that the Churchills were addressed dedications of plays. In fact, it became vital for them to secure positions at court and

to acquire honours and wealth, in order to show that they enjoy the queen's favour and that they were able to influence her. In fact, as Rachel Weil has argued, the duke and his son-in-law Sidney Godolphin only benefitted from the support of the Whigs because they believed that they had full support of Anne (*Political Passions* 192). They did take advantage of having the queen's favour: Lady Sarah exerted her power filling "the court with her own relations, dependents, and personal servants" (Bucholz, *Augustan Court* 75). Having an interest in literature and drama, the duchess also demonstrated her immense political influence by supporting authors, and the duke, even though he was not offered dramatic dedications, he was a keen promoter of the theatre: for instance, the opera *Camilla* was staged "expressly for Lord Marlborough" in March 1709 (qtd. in Avery 188). In addition, several pieces were composed on the occasion of Marlborough's victorious battles, such as a new prologue to Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* in August 1704 and a new song by Jeremiah Clark in December 1706 (Avery 72, 135).

In the dedication of *Achilles* (1700), Abel Boyer highlights the duchess's role as dutiful wife, which easily leads to a panegyric of her husband: "I mean that truly conjugal Friendship and Affection with which you accompany this Great Man in His Absence from His native Country, and share with him in all the Cares and Inquietudes his Extraordinary Merit has brought upon him" (n.p.). The author insists on the duke's "many Glorious Campaigns and uninterrupted Successes" and celebrates the political stability which, among other advantages, allows England to "cultivate the Politer Arts" (n.p.): "Not all the Security we enjoy by our safe and honourable Peace, can make us unmindful of the Gratitude we owe to your Name" (n.p.). By praising Lord Churchill, Boyer is implicitly currying his favour, for he had previously dedicated the duke a translation of *Ductor Historicus* (1698), a historical work by Pierre Le Lorrain de Vallemont, in which he acknowledged the family's constant encouragement. The epistle dedicatory to Sarah Churchill is a sign of gratitude, for the duchess had shown great interest in the work, as the publisher comments in the Advertisement: "That the Dutchess of Marlborough, who at that Time bore an irresistible Sway, bespoke the Comedy then in Vogue, during the Run of *Iphigenia in Aulis*" (A2v).

In the dedication of *The Revolution of Sweden* (1706) to Henrietta Godolphin, Trotter's praise of her patroness goes hand in hand with that of her noble family.² The author similarly extols her father, foregrounding his military achievements and presenting him as the bulwark of anti-absolutism in Europe: "All Europe look on the English Forces, whilst under the Conduct of the Duke of Marlborough, as the Guardians of their Liberty" (A2v). The author extends her praise to the lady's family by marriage, pointing out that she is "Happily Ally'd" and wishing that the young countess would give birth to "a Glorious Race, who possessing all that's Excellent in both their great Predecessors, may prove to Posterity all that we now admire in them, Our Ornaments in Peace, our Strength in War" (A3). By alluding to this popular maxim which describes the loyal warrior in Tacitus *Germania*—"in pace decus, in bello praesidium" (XIII, p.150)—Trotter presents herself as a protégé of the Marlboroughs and manifests her

² It appears that the duchess of Marlborough attended the premiere and praised the tragedy, for which the author offered it to the duchess's eldest daughter, Henrietta. Trotter's acquaintance with the Marlboroughs may have come about through her brother-in-law, Mr Inglis, who was a physician-general in the army. Moreover, the playwright was closely involved with the Marlborough circle and became a close associate of Bishop Burnet and his third wife, Elizabeth, a friend of the duchess. In fact, Trotter's letters demonstrate that she had contact with the duke (Kelley, *Catharine Trotter* 21). For instance, on 23 June 1707 she wrote that "he [Trotter's brother-in-law, Mr. Inglis] . . . sends me word that the Duke of M. desired I should go to Mr. St. John in his name" (*The Works*, 223).

Whig allegiance, for the *Germania* was a staple text in Whig propaganda, which was used to support the moral superiority of the Anglo-Saxon stock and their defence of freedom.³

In other epistles, Henrietta Godolphin is for the most part commended on account of her modesty, her ancestry and her intelligence. In the dedication to *Abra-mule* (1704), Trapp briefly alludes to the topos of the lustre of her name (“For what could reflect more Lustre on this Poem, than so celebrated a Name prefix’d to it?” A2v) and extols her modesty: “But I perceive I am in Danger of disoblising Your Ladiship, while I am doing You that Justice which will be highly pleasing to every Body but Your self” (A3). He also highlights her beauty and pays his respects to her family, which he depicts as being “remarkable, above any other, for giving so much Beauty to the court, and so much Courage to the Field; the one to Adorn, the other to Defend Your Country; the one to Triumph at home, and the other abroad” (A3v). Trapp explicitly argues that noblewomen were expected to show the greatness of their lineage through their beauty and noblemen through their military achievements.

In the dedication to *Arminius* (1714) Heidegger similarly praises Lady Henrietta for her modesty, while underscoring her good taste, which he interprets as a sign of her inner virtue. Moreover, he employs the topos of the impossibility of portraying her qualities adequately and the topos of the lustre:

Madam, that this Elegance of your Taste is not the least part of your Character, since it shows you have that Harmony in your Soul which is attended by all other good Qualities. And here, Madam, I am tempted to mention those Virtues which render you so agreeable; but they are So great in their Native Lustre, that the Attempt to describe them, wou’d shew the utmost Vanity. (A2v)

The youngest daughter of the Churchills, Mary Montagu, also received an epistle. In the dedication of *The Distrest Mother* (1712), Ambrose Philips foregrounds her beauty, justifying his offering to the duchess on account of her “refined Taste” and “the peculiar Life and Ornament” her presence adds to all company (A3v). He resorts to the topos of the heroine to stress the physical appearance of his dedicatee and subtly implies a Neoplatonic conception of beauty, referring to its light and power: “The Charms that shine out in the Person of Your Grace, may convince every one that there is nothing unnatural in the Power which is ascribed to the Beauty of Andromache” (A3v-A4). Like other authors who addressed female members of the Churchill clan, Philips praises the duke of Marlborough and his military prowess, arguing that, since “great and shining Characters of Antiquity” are represented in his play, he must dedicate it to “a Person, whose Illustrious Father has, by a long Series of glorious Actions, (for the Service of his Country and in Defence of the Liberties of Europe) not only surpassed the Generals of his own Time, but equalled the greatest Heroes of former Ages” (A3v).⁴

³ As Reginald Horsman has shown, after the Revolution of 1688 a Whig view of history emerged, according to which a golden age of good government had existed in England prior to the Norman Conquest (14). Horsman points out that “the Conquest had eroded English liberties, but had been followed by a long struggle for the restoration of good government, of which the foundation had been the Magna Carta and the capstone the seventeenth-century victories over the usurpations of the Stuarts” (14).

⁴ Weil has also pointed out that in Whig propaganda Marlborough was portrayed as acting for the public good. The duke’s personal letters are filled with references to his lack of ambition, his desire to abandon the magnificence of court, and “a weary resolution to continue serving out of love for queen and country” (*Political Passions* 190). Dedications also contributed to form the duke’s public persona. In fact, some of the authors that addressed dedications to the Marlboroughs were Whigs themselves, such as Joseph Addison.

Female agency in the realm of theatrical patronage needs to be reassessed in the light of the number of epistles that they were offered and the use of their rhetoric to defend drama's place in society. The growing importance attached to morality in the mid-1690s became apparent in dedications, due to playwrights' concern for defending drama's place in society and securing their livelihood. Authors tried to obtain the support of powerful protectors in their epistles, even after having received high earnings for their works. Dedications were a customary practice fully expected by readers and the kernel of these texts was the patron's panegyric, which benefited both authors and dedicatees. The members of the Churchill clan were extolled in dedications of plays, which functioned as a public display of their magnanimity in supporting the arts. Moreover, authors offered their respects to the duke of Marlborough, celebrating his military victories and presenting him as a national hero.

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