

## Dédicace de *The Plain Dealer*

**Auteur : Wycherley, William**

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Contributeurs

- Borfotina, Adelina (Stagiaire)
- Lochert, Véronique (Responsable de projet)

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## To my LADY B—

Madam,

**T**HO I never had the Honour to receive a Favour from you, nay, or be known to you, I take the confidence of an Author to write to you a Billiet doux Dedicatory; which is no new thing, for by most Dedications it appears, that Authors, though they praise their Patrons from top to toe, and seem to turn 'em inside out, know 'em as little, as sometimes their Patrons their Books, tho they read 'em out; and if the Poetical Daubers did not write the name of the Man or Woman on top of the Picture, 'twere impossible to guess whose it were. But you, Madam, without the help of a Poet, have made your self known and famous in the world; and, because you do not want it, are therefore most worthy of an Epistle Dedicatory. And this Play claims naturally your Protection, since it has lost its Reputation with the Ladies of stricter lives in the Play-house; and (you know) when mens endeavours are discontenanc'd and refus'd, by the nice coy women of Honour, they come to you, To you the Great and Noble Patroness of rejected and bashful men, of which number I profess my self to be one, though a Poet, a Dedicating Poet; To you I say, Madam, who have as discerning a judgment, in what's obscene or not, as any quick-sighted civil Person of 'em all, and can make as much of a double meaning saying as the best of 'em; yet wou'd not, as some do, make nonsense of a Poet's jest, rather than not make it bawdy by which they show they as little value Wit in a Play, as in a Lover, provided they can bring t'other thing about. Their sense indeed lies all one way, and therefore are only for that in a Poet which is moving, as they say; but what do they mean by that word moving? Well, I must not put 'em to the blush, since I find I can do't.

†

## The Epistle

do't. In short, Madam, you wou'd not be one of those who razish a Poet's innocent words, and make 'em guilty of their own naughtiness (as 'tis term'd) in spight of his teeth; nay, nothing is seene from the power of their imaginations; no, not their Husbands, whom they Cuckold with themselves, by thinking of other men, and so make the lawful matrimonial embraces Adultery; wrong Husbands and Poets in thought and word, to keep their own Reputations; but your Ladyship's justice, I know, wou'd think a Woman's Arraigning and Damning a Poet for her own obscenity, like her crying out a Rape, and hanging a man for giving her pleasure, only that she might be thought not to consent to't; and so to vindicate her honour forfeits her modesty. But you, Madam, have too much modesty to pretend to't; tho' you have as much to say for your modesty as many a nicer lie; for you never were seen at this Play, no, not the first day; and 'tis no matter what Peoples lives have been, they are unquestionably modest who frequent not this Play: For, as Mr. Bays says of his, that it is the only Touchstone of Mens wit and Understanding; mine is, it seems, the only Touchstone of Womens Virtue and Modesty. But hold, that Touchstone is equivocal, and, by the strength of a Lady's Imagination, may become something that is not civil; but your Ladyship, I know, scorns to misappli a Touchstone. And, Madam, tho' you have not seen this Play, I hope (like other nice Ladies) you will the rather read it; yet, lest the Chambermaid or Page shou'd not be trus'ted, and their indulgence cou'd gain no further admittance for it, than to their Ladies Lobbies or outward Rooms, take it into your care and protection; for, by your recommendation and procurement, it may have the honour to get into their Closets: For what they renounce in publick often entertains 'em there, with your help especially. In fine, Madam, for these and many other reasons, you are the fittest Patroness or Judge of this Play; for you shew no partiality to this or that Author; for from some many Ladies will take a broad jest as chearfully as from the watermen, and sit at some downright filthy Plays (as they call 'em) as well satisfy'd, and as still, as a Poet cou'd wish 'em elsewhere; therefore it must be the doubtful obscenity of my Plays alone they take exceptions at, because it is too bashful

## Dedicatory.

ful for 'em ; and indeed most women hate men, for attempting to halve on their Chastity ; and Baudy I find, like Satyr, shou'd be home, not to have it taken notice of. But, now I mention Satyr, some there are who say, 'Tis the Plain-dealing of the Play, not the obscenity ; 'tis taking off the Ladies Masks, not offering at their Petticoats, which offends 'em : and generally they are not the handsomest, or most innocent, who are the most angry at being discover'd :

—————Nihil est audacius illis  
Deprehensis ; iram, atq; animos à crimine sumunt.

Pardon, Madam, the Quotation, for a Dedication can no more be without ends of Latine, than Flattery ; and 'tis no matter whom it is writ to ; for an Author can as easily (I hope) suppose People to have more understanding and Languages than they have, as well as more Vertues : But why, the Devil ! shou'd any of the few modest and handsome be alarm'd ? (for some there are who as well as any deserve those Attributes, yet refrain not from seeing this Play, nor think it any addition to their Vertue to set up for it in a Play-house, lest there it shou'd look too much like acting.) But why, I say, shou'd any at all of the truly vertuous be concern'd, if those who are not so are distinguis'd from 'em ? For by that Mask of modesty which women wear promiscuously in publick, they are all alike, and you can no more know a kept wench from a woman of Honour by her looks than by her Dress ; for those who are of Quality without Honour (if any such there are) they have their Quality to set off their false Modesty, as well as their false Jewels, and you must no more suspect their Countenances for counterfeit than their Pendants, tho, as the Plain-dealer Montaigne says, Els envoy leur conscience au Bor-del, & teinnent leur contenance en regle : But those who act as they look, ought not to be scandaliz'd at the reprobation of others faults, lest they tax themselves with 'em, and by too delicate and quick an apprehension not only make that obscene which I meant innocent, but that Satyr on all, which was intended only on those who deserved it. But, Madam, I beg your par-

## The Epistle

don for this digression, to Civil Women and Ladies of Honour, since you and I shall never be the better for 'em; for a Comic Poet, and a Lady of your Profession, make most of the other sort, and the Stage and your Houses, like our Plantations, are propagated by the least nice Women; and as with the Ministers of Justice, the Vices of the Age are our best business. But, now I mention Publick Persons, I can no longer defer doing you the justice of a Dedication, and telling you your own; who are, of all publick-spirited people, the most necessary, most communicative, most generous and hospitable; your house has been the house of the People, your sleep still disturbd for the Publick, and when you arose twas that others might lye down, and you waked that others might rest; The good you have done is unspeakable; How many young unexperienc'd Heirs have you kept from rath foolish Marriages? and from being jilted for their lives by the worst sort of Fils, Wives? How many unbewitched widowers Children have you preserv'd from the Tyranny of Stepmothers? How many old Dotards from Cuckoldage, and keeping other mens wenchies and Children? How many Adulteries and unnatural sins have you prevented? In fine, you have been a constant scourge to the old Lecher, and often a terror to the young; you have made concupisence its own punishment, and extinguish'd Lust with Lust, like blowing up of Houses to stop the fire.

Nimirum propter continentiam, incontinentia  
Necessaria est, incendium ignibus extinguitur.

There's Latin for you agtin, Madam; I protest to you, as I am an Author, I cannot help it; nay, I can hardly keep my self from quo'ing Aristotle and Horace, and talking to you of the Rules of writing, (like the French Author,) to shew you and my Readers I understand 'em, in my Epistle, lest neither of you should find it out by the Play; and, according to the Rules of Dedications, 'tis no matter whether you understand or no, what I quote or say to you, of wrintin'; for an Author can as easily make any one a Judge or Critic<sup>h</sup>, in an Epistle, as an Hero in his Play: But, Madam, that this may prove to the end a true Epistle Dedicatory, I'd have you know 'tis

not

## Dedicatory.

not without a design upon you, which is in the behalf of the Fraternity of Parnassus, that Songs and Sonnets may go at your Houses, and in your Liberties, for Guinneys and half Guinneys; and that Wit, at least with you, as of old, may be the price of Beauty, and so you will prove a true encourager of Poetry, for Love is a better help to it than Wine; and Poets, like Painters, draw better after the Life, than by Fancy; Nay, in justice, Madam, I think a Poet ought to be as free of your Houses, as of the Play-houses; since he contributes to the support of both, and is as necessary to such as you, as a Ballad-singer to the Pick-purse, in convening the Cullies at the Theatres, to be pick'd up, and carry'd to Supper and Bed at your houses. And, Madam, the reason of this motion of mine is, because poor Poets can get no favour in the Tiring Rooms, for they are no Keepers, you know; and Folly and Money, the old Enemies of wit, are even too hard for it on its own Dunghill: And for other Ladies, a Poet can least go to the price of them; besides, his Wit, which ought to recommend him to 'em, is as much an obstruction to his Love, as to his wealth or preferment; for most women now adays, apprehend Wit in a Lover, as much as in a Husband; they hate a Man that knows 'em, they must have a blind easie Fool, whom they can lead by the Nose, and as the Scythian Women of old, must baffle a Man, and put out his Eyes, ere they will lye with him, and them too, like Thieves, when they have plunder'd and stript a Man, leave him. But if there soon's be one of an hundred of those Ladies, generous enough to give her self to a Man that has more Wit than Money, (all things consider'd) he woud think it cheaper coming to you for a Mistress, though you made him pay his Guinney; as a Man in a Journey, (out of good husbandry) had better pay for what he has in an Inn, than lye on free-cost at a Gentleman's House.

In fine, Madam, like a faithful Dedicotor, I hope I have done my self right in the first place, then you, and your Profession, which in the wisest and most religious Government of the World, is honour'd with the publick allowance; and in those that are thought the most unciviliz'd and barbarous, is protected, and supported by the Ministers of Justice; and of you, Madam, I ought to say no more here, for your Vertues deserve a Poem rather than an Epistle,

## The Epistle

or a Volume intire to give the World your Memoirs, or Life at large, and which (upon the word of an Author that has a mind to make an end of his Dedication) I promise to do, when I write the Annals of our British Love, which shall be Dedicated to the Ladies concern'd, if they will not think them something too obscene too; when your Life, compar'd with many that are thought innocent, I doubt not may vindicate you, and me, to the World, for the confidence I have taken in this Address to you; which then may be thought neither impertinent, nor immodest; and, whatsoever your Amorous misfortunes have been, none can charge you with that heinous, and worst of Womens Crimes, Hypocrisy; nay, in spight of misfortunes or age, you are the same Woman still; though most of your Sex grow Magdalens at fifty, and as a solid French Author has it,

Apres le plaisir, vien't la peine,  
Apres la peine la vertu;

But sure an old sinner's continency is much like a Gamester's forswearing Play, when he has lost all his Money; and Modesty is a kind of a youthful dress, which, as it makes a young Woman more amiable, makes an old one more nauseous; a bashful old Woman is like an hopeful old man; and the affected Chastity of antiquated Beauties, is rather a reproach than an honour to 'em, for it shews the mens Vertue only, not theirs. But you, in fine, Madam, are no more an Hypocrite than I am when I praise you; therefore I doubt not will be thought (even by your's and the Play's Enemies, the nicest Ladies) to be the fittest Patroness for,

Madam,

Your Ladyship's most obedient,  
faithful, humble Servant, and

*The Plain-Dealer.*