Charles Cotterell: Preface to Poems by the Most Deservedly Admired Mrs. Katherine Philips, the Matchless Orinda

Charles Cotterell (1615-1701) was a well-known Royalist and courtier, who served as Master of Ceremonies in the courts of both Charles I and Charles II. He was also an established literary figure, primarily as a translator of French romances. He became a friend of Katherine Philips when he tried to court her friend Ann Owen ("Lucasius") after the death of his wife and Owen's husband. His courtship failed, but he remained friends with Philips, who gave him the coterie name Poliarchus, and asked his help in restoring her husband James's seat in Parliament (he had been suspended for his alleged role in sentencing a Royalist to death, and probably more generally for his work on behalf of the Cromwellian government in the 1650s). That too did not work out as hoped: James Philips was pardoned, but had to resign his seat, which Cotterell then took up. Cotterell also helped out Katherine Philips when her poems were published without her consent in 1663 by Richard Merriam, the "Stationer" mentioned below. That edition was suppressed with Cotterell's assistance, though some copies remained in circulation. After Philips's sudden death due to smallpox in 1664, Cotterell, very likely with the support of her widowed husband James, supervised the publication of a handsome edition of her works, which became the basis of all editions that followed. His praise of the matchless "Orinda," taking her coterie name and raising to be a kind of symbol of the virtuous women writer, also helped establish the terms under which Philips was long remembered.

THE PREFACE.

Ween the false Edition of these Poems stole into the light, a Friend of that incomparable Ladys that made them, knowing how averse she was to be in print, and therefore being sure that it was absolutely against her consent, as he believed it utterly without her knowledge, (she being then in Wales above 150 miles from this Town) went presently both to the Gentleman, who licens'd it upon the Stationer's averment that he had her leave, and to the Stationer himself for whom it was printed, and took the best course he could with both to get it suppress'd, as it presently was (though afterward many of the Books were privately sold) and gave her an account by the next Post of what he had done. A while after he received this Answer, which you have here (taken from her own hand) under that disguised Name she had given him, it being her custom to use such with most of her particular friends.

Worthy Poliarchus,

It is very well that you chid me so much for endeavouring to express a part of the sense I have of your obligations; for while you go on in conferring them beyond all possibility of acknowledgment, it is convenient for me to be forbidden to attempt it. Your last generous concern for me, in vindicating me from the unworthy usage I have received at London from the Press, doth as much transcend all your former favours, as the injury done me by that Publisher and Printer exceeds all the troubles that I remember I ever had. All I can say to you for it, is, that though you assert an unhappy, it is yet a very innocent person, and that it is impossible for malice it self to have printed those Rimes (you tell me are gotten abroad so impudently) with so much abuse to the things, as the very publication of them at all, though they had been never so correct, had been to me; to me (Sir) who never writ any line in my life with an intention to have it printed, and who am of my Lord Falk?land's mind, that said,

He danger fear'd than censure less,
Nor could he dread a breach like to a Press.

And who (I think you know) am sufficiently distrustful of all, that my own want of company and better employment, or others commands have seduc'd me to write, to endeavor rather that they should never be seen at all, than that they should be expos'd to the world with such effrontery as now they most unhappily are. But is there no retreat from the malice of this World? I thought a Rock and a Mountain might have hidden me, and that it had been free for all to spend their Solitude in what Reveries they please, and that our Rivers (though they are babling) would not have betray'd the follies of impertinent thoughts upon their Banks; but 'tis only I who am that unfortunate person that cannot so much as think in private, that must have my imaginations rifled and exposed to play the Mountebanks, and dance upon the Ropes to entertain all the rabble; to undergo all the raillery of the Wits, and all the severity of the Wise, and to be the sport of some that can, and some that cannot read a Verse. This is a most cruel accident, and hath made so proportionate an impression upon me, that really it hath cost me a sharp fit of sickness since I heard it, and I believe would be more fatal but that I know what a Champion I have in you, and that I am sure your credit in the World will gain me a belief from all that are knowing and civil, that I am so innocent of that wretched Artifice of a secret consent (of which I am, I fear, suspected) that whoever would have brought me those Copies corrected and amended, and a thousand pounds to have bought my permission for their being printed, should not have obtained it. But though there are many things, I believe, in this wicked impression of those
fancies, which the ignorance of what occasion'd them, and the falseness of the Copies may represent very ridiculous and extravagant, yet I could give some account of them to the severest Cato, and I am sure they must be more abus'd than I think is possible (for I have not seen the Book, nor can imagine what's in't) before they can be render'd otherwise than Sir Edward Deering says in his Epilogue to Pompey.

?No bolder thought can tax
Those Rimes of blemish to the blushing Sex,
As chaste the lines, as harmless is the sense,
As the first smiles of infant innocence.

So that I hope there will be no need of justifying them to Vertue and Honour; and I am so little concern'd for the reputation of writing Sense, that provided the World would believe me innocent of any manner of knowledge, much less connivance at this Publication, I shall willingly compound never to trouble them with the true Copies, as you advise me to do: which if you still should judge absolutely necessary to the reparation of this misfortune, and to general satisfaction; and that, as you tell me, all the rest of my friends will press me to it, I should yield to it with the same reluctancy as I would cut off a Limb to save my Life. However I hope you will satisifie all your acquaintance of my aversion to it, and did they know me as well as you do, that Apology were very needless, for I am so far from expecting applause for any thing I scribble, that I can hardly expect pardon; and sometimes I think that employment so far above my reach, and unfit for my Sex, that I am going to resolve against it for ever; and could I have recovered those fugitive Papers that have escap'd my hands, I had long since made a sacrifice of them all. The truth is, I have an incorrigible inclination to that folly of riming, and intending the effects of that humour, only for my own amusement in a retir'd life; I did not so much resist it as a wiser woman would have done; but some of my dearest friends having found my Ballads, (for they deserve no better name) they made me so much believe they did not dislike them, that I was betray'd to permit some Copies for their divertisement; but this, with so little concern for them, that I have lost most of the originals, and that I suppose to be the cause of my present misfortune: for some infernal Spirits or other have catch'd those rags of Paper, and what the careless blotted writing kept them from understanding, they have supplied by conjecture, till they put them into the shape wherein you saw them, or else I know not which way it is possible for them to be collected, or so abominably transcrib'd as I hear they are. I believe also there are some among them that are not mine, but every way I have so much injury, and the worthy persons that had the ill luck of my converse, and so their Names expos'd in this impression without their leave, that few things in the power of Fortune could have given me so great a torment as this most afflictive accident. I know you Sir, so much my friend, that I need not ask your pardon for making this tedious complaint; but methinks it is a great injustice to revenge my self upon you by this Harangue for the wrongs I have received from others; therefore I will only tell you that the sole advantage I have by this cruel news, is that it has given me an experiment, That no adversity can shake the constancy of your friendship, and that in the worst humour that ever I was in, I am still,

Worthy Poliarchus,
Your most faithful, most obliged Friend, and most humble Servant ORINDA.

Cardigan, Jan. 29. 1663/4

She writ divers Letters to many of her other friends ful of the like resentmentments, but this is enough to shew how little she desired the fame of being in print, and how much she was troubled to be so expos'd. It may serve likewise to give a taste of her Prose to those that have seen none of it, and of her way of writing familiar Letters, which she did with strange readiness and facility, in a very fair hand, and perfect Orthography; and if they were collected with those excellent Discourses she writ on several subjects, they would make a Volume much larger than this, and no less worth the reading.

About three months after this Letter she came to London, where her Friends did much sollicite her to redeem her self by a correct impression; yet she continued still averse, though perhaps in time she might have been over-rul'd by their persuasions if she had lived.

But the small Pox, that malicious disease (as knowing how little she would have been concern'd for her handsomness, when at the best) was not satisfied to be as injurious a Printer of her face, as the other had been of her Poems, but treated her with a more fatal cruelty than the Stationer had them; for though he to her most sensible affliction surreptitiously possess'd himself of a false Copy, and sent those children of her Fancy into the World, so martyred, that they were more unlike themselves than she could have been
made had she escaped; that murtherous Tyrant, with greater barbarity seiz'd unexpectedly upon her, the true Original, and to the much juster affliction of all the world, violently tore her out of it, and hurried her untimely to her Grave, upon the 22. of June 1664.

she being then but 31 years of age.

But he could not bury her in Oblivion, for this Monument which she erected for her self, will for ever make her to be honoured as the honour of her Sex, the emulation of ours, and the admiration of both. That unfortunate surprise hath rob'd it of much of that perfection it might else have had, ha?v'ing broke off the Translation of Horace before it was finish'd, much less review'd, and hindred the rest from being more exactly corrected, and put into the order they were written in, as she possibly her self would have done, had she consented to a second Edition. Tis probable she would also have left out some of those pieces that were written with less care and upon occasions less fit to be made publick, and she might also have added more: but all industry has been us'd to make this Collection as full and as perfect as might be, by the addition of many that were not in the former impression, and by divers Translations, whereof the first has the Original in the opposite Page, that they who have a mind to compare them, may by that pattern find how just she has been in all the rest to both the Languages, exactly rendring the full sence of the one, without tying her self strictly to the words, and clearly evincing the capaciousness of the other, by comprising it fully in the same number of lines, though in the Plays half the Verses of the French are of thirteen syllables, and the rest of twelve, whereas the English have no more but ten. In short though some of her Pieces may perhaps be lost, and others in hands that have not produc'd them; yet none that upon good grounds could be known to be hers, are left out; for many of the less considerable ones were publish'd in the other; but those, or others that shall be judged so, may be excused by the politeness of the rest which have more of her true spirit, and of her diligence. Some of them would be no disgrace to the name of any Man that amongst us is most esteemed for his ex?cellency in this kind, and there are none that may not pass with favour, when it is remembred that they fell hastily from the pen but of a Woman. We might well have call'd her the English Sappho, she of all the female Poets of former Ages, being for her Verses and her Vertues both, the most highly to be valued; but she has call'd her self ORINDA, a name that deserves to be added to the number of the Muses, and to live with honour as long as they. We might well have call'd her the English Sappho, she of all the female Poets of former Ages, being for her Verses and her Vertues both, the most highly to be valued; but she has call'd her self ORINDA, a name that deserves to be added to the number of the Muses, and to live with honour as long as they. Were our language as generally known to the world as the Greek and Latine were anciently, or as the French is now, her Verses could not be confin'd within the narrow limits of our Islands, but would spread themselves as far as the Continent has Inhabitants, or as the Seas have any shore. And for her Vertues, they as much surpass'd those of Sappho as the Theological do the Moral, (wherein yet Orinda was not her inferiour) or as the fading immortality of an earthly Lawrel, which the justice of men cannot deny to her excellent Poetry, is transcended by that incorruptible and eternal Crown of Glory, wherewith the Mercy of God hath undoubtedly rewarded her more eminent Piety. Her merit should have had a Statue of Porphiry wrought by some great Ar?tist, equal in skill to Michael Angelo, that might have transferr'd to posterity the lasting image of so rare a Person: but here is only a poor paper shadow of a Statue made after a Picture not very like her, to accompany that she has drawn of her self in these Poems, and which represents the beauties of her mind with a far truer resemblance, than that does the liniaments of her Face. They had sooner performed this Right to her memory, if that raging Pestilence which, not long after her, swept away so many thousands here and in other places of this Kingdom, that devouring Fire, which since destroy'd this famous City; and the harsh sounds of War, which with the thunderings of Cannon, deaфин'd all ears to the gentle and tender strains of Friendship, had not made the Publication of them hitherto unseasonable. But they have out-liv'd all these dismal things to see the blessing of Peace, a conjuncture more suitable to their Nature, all compos'd of kindness; so that I hope Time it self shall have as little power against them, as these other storms have had, and then "Ovid's conclusion of his Metamorphosis may with little alteration, more truth, and less vanity than by him to himself, be applied to these once transformed, or rather deformed Poems, which, are here in some measure restor'd to their native Shape and Beauty, and therefore certainly cannot fail of a welcome reception now, since they wanted it not before, when they appeared in that strange disguise.