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Katherine Philips and the 'stigma of print'

In January 1664, *Poems: by the incomparable Mrs. K.P.* appeared for sale at Richard Marriot's bookshop at St. Dunstan's Churchyard in Fleet Street. Within days, the new poetry collection sent ripples of scandal through literary London. The octavo volume flew off the shelves, with the fifty-four extant copies that survive today attesting to its red-hot popularity. But a week later the author wrote to her friend Dorothy Temple complaining: 'I utterly disclaim whatever he [i.e. Marriot] hath so unhandsomely expos'd.' She then hastily sent a furious letter to another more powerful ally, the courtier Sir Charles Cotterell, claiming that she 'never writ any line in my life with an intention to have it printed'. 'I am so innocent', she protested, '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.'

Denying all knowledge of the publication – let alone her involvement or connivance – the author told Cotterell: 'I know not which way it is possible for them to be collected, or so abominably transcrib'd as I hear they are.' And with a generous splash of hyperbole to top it off, she told her friend: '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.' But there are good reasons to doubt the lady who doth protest too much – and there is more to this Restoration literary scandal than meets the eye.

Cotterell and the MP and civil war veteran John Jeffreys visited Marriot's shop in an attempt to force him to withdraw the book. The intimidation tactics worked, up to a point: Marriot paused sales but vigorously protested his innocence. That was no surprise: Marriot was a highly respected publisher of considerable pedigree. Everything about the 1664 *Poems* appeared above board. It was entered into the Stationers' Register on 25 November 1663 and properly licensed before being brought to market. As

far as Marriot was concerned, the edition was prepared according to the strict legal requirements of seventeenth-century publishing.

Marriot was no cowboy printer. In fact, he came from impeccable bookselling stock. Richard's father John Mariott joined the trade in 1616 and published works by John Donne, Michael Drayton, and Philip Massinger. Taking over his father's business, Richard published at least ninety books during his career, including the first five editions of Isaak Walton's phenomenally popular *The Compleat Angler* (1653) which was praised by Samuel Johnson, the most important literary critic in England. The 1664 *Poems* demonstrated Marriot's professionalism: the text was high quality, carefully set, and clearly drawn from a reliable manuscript source. Between the poet and publisher, someone was not telling the whole truth. We know about Marriot's career, but who was 'the incomparable Mrs. K.P.?'

The daughter of a cloth merchant, Katherine Philips was a precious child, so 'mighty apt to learne' that she 'had read the Bible thorough before she was full four yeares old', according to the Restoration biographer John Aubrey. As a teenager, Philips moved to Wales and married the landowner James Philips. Katherine lived the rest of her life in the small town of Cardigan. There she became entranced by *préciosité,* a French style of royalist coterie manuscript poetry introduced to the English court by Henrietta Maria, the wife of Charles I. Yet 'Orinda' (the pen name by which Philips became known) was drawn into political discourse thanks to her husband's position as an MP. James showed his moderation in serving under the Cromwell Protectorate and then again in the parliament of the restored Charles II – but Katherine developed staunch royalist sympathies. In a poem 'Upon the double Murther of K. CHARLES I', written around 1650 in response to 'a Libellous Copy of Rimes' (now lost) by the Puritan preacher Vavasor Powell, Philips wrote:

> Great Charles his double misery was this,
> Unfaithful Friends, ignoble Enemies.
> Had any Heathen been this Prince's foe,
> He would have wept to see him injur'd so.

> His Title was his Crime, they'd reason good
> To quarrel at the Right they had withstood.
> He broke God's Laws, and therefore he must die;
> And what shall then become of thee and I?

Philips artfully sets up a conflict between republican fundamentalism ('He broke God's Laws, and therefore he must die') and royalist pragmatism ('And what shall then become of thee and I?') Orinda's razor-sharp, parodic ventriloquism turns Powell's self-righteous regicidal dogma back on itself by implying John 8:7: 'hee that is without sinne among you, let him first cast a stone.' It seems Aubrey was close to the truth: Philips certainly knew her scripture, and well enough to wittily throw the Bible back in the face of the holier-than-thou preacher Powell.

Philips swiftly garnered attention among royalist circles as a rising star. Her poems circulated so widely in manuscript that Peter Beal, the editor of the four-volume *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* (1980–93), says Philips represents 'one of the best documented centres of MS circulation in the seventeenth century'. But the plot of the Marriot scandal thickens when we discover that the writer who apparently 'never writ any line in my life with an intention to have it printed' had by 1664 appeared in just about every conceivable printed format.

In fact, Philips burst onto the scene, making her debut in print aged just nineteen. Signed 'K.P', Philips's commendatory verse for the posthumous *Comedies, Tragi-Comedies, with Other Poems* (1651) of William Cartwright was not just the only verse by a woman published in the volume, but was the first of fifty-four tributes to the royalist martyr Cartwright, who died of camp fever in Oxford in 1643. Royalists knew perfectly well who 'K.P' was. The wife of the loyalist politician Sir Edward Dering, another contributor to the volume and later a close friend of Orinda, had attended Mrs Salmon's school in Hackney with Philips in the 1640s. In the same year, a poem 'To the most Excellently accomplish'd Mrs K. Philips', extolling Philips's 'high perfections' and 'miracles in poetrie' was published in Henry Vaughan's *Olor Iscanus* (1651). Emboldened by this endorsement, Philips wrote two verses for Henry Lawes's *Second Book of Ayres* (1655) and signed them proudly with her full name: 'Mrs Catherine Philips'.

Orinda's growing renown as a print author in the middle years of the seventeenth century is confirmed by Sarah Jinner who, in her popular 1658 almanack, identified the author behind 'K.P.' in the Cartwright folio. Leading Philips scholar Elizabeth Hageman has said that Philips was 'a public poet almost a year before her translation of Pierre Corneille's *La mort de Pompée* (1644) was performed on the Dublin stage' in 1663. But as her publications in the 1650s demonstrate, Philips's entrance into the public sphere via print occurred earlier than Hageman realised.

Indeed, Philips's star continued to rise. Her 'Ode. *On Retirement*', written for the leading poet Abraham Cowley, was published in the miscellany *Poems, by Several Persons* in 1663. In return, Cowley wrote a Pindaric 'On *Orinda's* Poems', further burnishing her reputation among the royalist literati. In the same collection, an anonymous verse entitled 'To Orinda' said:

> If there be *Helicon,* in *Wales* it is.
> Oh happy Country! which to our Prince gives
> His title, and in which *Orinda* lives.

The unsigned poem is, in fact, by Robert Boyle, Earl of Orrery. It begins by detailing Philips's rise to fame:

> When I but knew you by report,
> I fear'd, the Praises of th' admiring Court
> Were but their Complements, But now I must
> Confess, what I thought Civil is scarce just.
> For they imperfect Trophies to you raise,
> You deserve Wonder, and they pay but Praise

Orrery's lines show that by 1663 Philips's reputation preceded her in the most exalted context of them all. Orinda was known 'by report' and paid 'Praise' by an 'admiring Court', and her Welsh connections put her in the same breath as 'our Prince'.

Later that year, she became fully established as a literary star. Orrery had been instrumental in bringing Philips's *Pompey* to the Dublin stage in

a lavish production in February, and the performance was an emphatic success. The play was swiftly printed in Dublin in April by John Croke. The English printer Henry Herringman then wrote to Philips asking for 'leave to reprint [the play] at London'. Croke contested, and he and Herringman argued bitterly over the London publishing rights, clearly expecting the venture to be hugely profitable. Croke prevailed and it was his *Pompey* that was reprinted in London in June 1663. Whilst the printed playbooks do not carry her name, Philips's authorship was common knowledge, as evidenced by the stream of letters sent to her by friends and strangers in praise of the work. One of these even came from Edmund Waller, who had worked with Charles Sackville and Sir Charles Sedley on a rival translation of *Pompey* in 1664.

It is no stretch of the imagination, then, to describe Philips as a literary celebrity by 1664, when, on the cusp of finishing her translation of Corneille's *Horace,* she died of smallpox. *An elegie upon the death of the most incomparable Mrs. Katharine Philips, the glory of her sex,* written by 'J.C.' extolled her 'Soaring Fame'. This renown was due not only to the circulation of her poems in manuscript. At her death, Philips was not only a 'coterie' poet but a writer vastly experienced in print publication; her readership included not only a private community but a public audience. Orinda's work had appeared in just about every physical format: broadside, miscellany, songbook, folio, on stage and in two printed playbooks, and, of course, in a single-author collection. Why, then, did Philips reject Marriot's collection so strongly?

Repudiating the 1664 *Poems* was an urgently necessary gesture for a woman with elite aspirations – especially one whose middle-class, Puritan background was at increasingly embarrassing odds with her growing fame in the royalist literary world. Among aristocratic writers, what the literary critic Edward Arber called the early modern 'stigma of print' still exerted some influence. Aristocratic men risked embarrassment if they were seen attempting to court popular success and pandering to the tastes of the populace – that was something little people did, people like middle-class poets from Wales, say.

But for a seventeenth-century woman, the stakes were even higher. The 'stigma of print' for men may have dwindled, but women were still attacked for even daring to write at all. Richard Lovelace, for instance,

branded Margaret Cavendish a 'prostitute' for publishing her *Poems and Fancies* (1653), using depressingly familiar misogynist tropes:

> Now as her self a Poem she doth dresse,
> And curls a Line as she would do a tresse;
> Powders a Sonnet as she does her hair,
> Then prostitutes them both to publick Aire.

Unlike Cavendish, who occupied a position of power and privilege as the Duchess of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Philips's humbler background meant she needed to be even more careful about how she came across to her readership.

So, was Philips lying? Did she in fact give her 'secret consent' to Marriot? The 1664 edition was far from 'abominably transcrib'd', as Philips claimed. In fact, scholars now agree that the 1664 *Poems* was based on manuscripts that must have originated with Philips or her close circle. This is because the poems in Marriot's edition display only the tiniest differences to those published in *Poems, by the most deservedly Admired Mrs Katherine Philips The Matchless Orinda* (1667), a posthumous collection prepared by Cotterell, the friend of Philips who stormed into Marriot's bookshop to demand a halt to sales of his edition in 1664. We will probably never know for sure who was telling the truth in the scandal, but Philips certainly had more reason to disavow the edition than Marriot had to pirate it.

The fascinating coda to this affair is that more than 350 years later we still lack a reliable edition of Philips's work. This is a scandal in its own right. In her time Philips was, according to the title of her posthumous collection, 'most deservedly Admired', and she was lauded as 'The Matchless Orinda' by fellow royalists. Elizabeth Hageman and Andrea Sununu are supposed to have been preparing an edition of Philips's poems, plays, and letters for Oxford University Press since 2004, but there is no sign the project will be completed.

Patrick Thomas's 1992 edition for Stump Cross Books is unfortunately of little use. Germaine Greer, who prepared the text for publication, later told how 'there was one manuscript source, a series of contemporary copies (some autograph) and various contemporary printings of which

Thomas had no knowledge', and admitted it hadn't 'occurred to me to take the liberty of systematically reviewing Thomas's work or questioning his methods'.

Thomas's single most important mistake (and Greer's most fatal assumption) was in basing the edition on Philips's manuscripts and ignoring the 1664 and 1667 printed editions altogether. Whilst manuscripts are of course important, they should not be considered the sole basis for an edition of a text written – and crucially, published – at a time when conventions of orthography, punctuation, language, typography, and formatting were as central to the meaning of work as the 'text itself'.

D.F. MacKenzie's pioneering work in the discipline now known as the 'history of the book' means scholars today are aware of the signifying power of what were once thought to be incidental features, from initial capitals to commas, full stops, and colons. It means that we now see 'the book as an expressive form', the materiality of which is central to literary meaning.

If manuscripts represent private communication, printed books record a text's life in the public sphere. Original editions contain vital information for historians and literary critics about the production, circulation, marketing, and reception of texts. Only by paying attention to these physical features can we fully appreciate the book and the text as a crucial node in wider social, literary and political networks, or what Robert Darnton called the 'communications circuit', which includes not only authors and readers but patrons, dedicatees, editors, illustrators, compositors, publishers, printers, and booksellers.

Literary production has and will always be multi-agential. Writing never emerges *ex nihilo* but is enmeshed in a complex fabric of professional, political and personal relationships, without which literature is not just impoverished but artificially unmoored from the world. We will never know who was at fault in the scandal of 1664 – but it is certain that Marriot could not have acted alone. If Philips did work in secret to publish her poems, it must go down as one of the cleverest publicity stunts in English literary history. For now the scandal has subsided, we are left only with the 'Soaring Fame' of the most deservedly admired and incomparable Mrs K.P., the Matchless Orinda.