

**AUTOELOGIO Y MECENAZGO TEATRAL: LAS
DEDICATORIAS DEL TEATRO DE LA RESTAURACIÓN
INGLESA (1660-1700)**
**SELF-PRAISE AND DRAMATIC PATRONAGE: THE PRACTICE OF
DEDICATIONS IN THE RESTORATION THEATRE (1660-1700)¹**

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Resumen: La práctica de las dedicatorias fue especialmente profusa en las publicaciones teatrales en la segunda mitad del XVII en Inglaterra. El apoyo de los poderosos era primordial, dada la precaria situación de los dramaturgos profesionales. Sus honorarios consistían únicamente en las ganancias de la tercera función y el pago por los derechos de publicación. Las dedicatorias ofrecían a los autores la ocasión de afianzar la relación de mecenazgo haciéndola pública, obtener nuevos beneficios, incrementar su prestigio, o incluso tratar de paliar la falta de éxito escénico. El presente trabajo analiza una de las estrategias más utilizadas con este fin, el recurso al autoelogio, abordando la mención de alabanzas y favores recibidos ya sea del dedicatario o de otras personas influyentes.

Palabras clave: dedicatorias, mecenazgo, autoelogio, teatro de la Restauración, drama del siglo XVII

Abstract: The practice of dedications was widespread in printed playtexts during the second half of the 17th century in England. The support of the great was paramount, given the precarious situation of professional playwrights. Their earnings consisted only in the third-night benefit and the payment for publication rights. Dedications afforded authors an occasion to cement patronage relations by making them public, derive new profits, enhance their prestige, or even try to compensate for the lack of success on the stage. The present work analyses one of the strategies most often employed for this purpose in dedicatory epistles, the resort to self-praise, focusing on references to acclaim and marks of favour shown by either the dedicatee or other influential people.

Keywords: dedications, patronage, self-praise, Restoration theatre, seventeenth-century drama

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The *Oxford English Dictionary* records that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the word *patron* was used to refer to “a well-known person who accepts the dedication of a book,” this meaning being derived from the primary sense of “a person standing in a role of oversight, protection, or sponsorship to another.”² In this period, within the realm of the theatre, literary patrons could examine and revise playtexts, protect dramatists from detractors and rival factions, introduce and recommend novice authors to the theatre managers, attract large audiences and ensure the success of premières, among many different favours. The practice of including a dedicatory epistle when printing the text was intimately linked to the patronage system, for dedications provided a space to reinforce or renegotiate the relationship between patrons and authors. Since the publication of Ben Jonson’s *Workes* in 1616, which included dedications for each of his plays, drama had acquired greater value in the literary market and dedications had become customary. In fact, more than half (267 out of 432) of all the texts issued between 1660 and 1700 incorporated a dedicatory epistle, even minor genres as drolls and masques³.

Dedications bear witness to the currency and efficacy of patronage as a cultural practice in Restoration theatre, contrary to the picture that some scholars have attempted to paint. The support of the powerful was necessary, due to the precarious situation of dramatists. Most of them were not formally bound to a company and did not enjoy a regular salary. Their earnings consisted only in the third-night benefit (if the play was staged and was successful enough to last that long) and the payment for publication rights (as long as the bookseller-publisher thought it possible to sell the play). Dedicatory epistles afforded dramatists an occasion to cement patronage relations by making them public, derive new profits, enhance their prestige, or even try to compensate for the lack of success on the stage. The present essay analyses one of the strategies most often employed for this purpose in dedications, the resort to self-praise, focusing on references to acclaim and marks of favour shown by either the dedicatee or other influential people. It is my contention that the recurrence of this topic demonstrates that patronage exercised a central role in structuring social relationships, providing both financial and social support to dramatists in Restoration England.

² “Patron, n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, June 2017. <http://www.oed.com> (Accessed 8 August 2017).

³ These figures are based on an examination of all the plays printed between 1660 and 1700 listed in the Harbage-Schoenbaum-Wagonheim *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700*. London, New York, 1989.

The first studies on Restoration patronage, which date back to the mid-nineteenth century, underestimated the substance of the patronage system and stressed, by contrast, the growing professionalisation of the book market in the eighteenth century. Restoration authors were seen as struggling to assert their creative independence while begging patrons for money on which to subsist. The complaints that some of them expressed in dedications and epistles to the reader were interpreted to prove that patronage was in decline⁴. Moreover, since these scholars did not generally approve of the licentiousness of some patrons, they considered that the compliments they received in dedications were exaggerated, false and unjustified. Alexandre Beljame, for instance, concluded that the system of patronage was demeaning to authors and that the aristocracy was not genuinely attracted to literature: “A society with so base and so narrow a conception of literature could hold its writers in no high esteem. It thought of them only as entertainers and mountebanks, people in whom you took but little interest except so far as they amused you. Such interest as Charles II’s Court showed for them, was wholly selfish, superficial and devoid of sympathy.”⁵

One of the major drawbacks of early studies on patronage was that scholars underestimated its importance on purely monetary principles: it was generally assumed that the meagre funds of the crown could not sponsor literature in a direct and effective manner. Nevertheless, more recent research has shown that a comprehensive understanding of patronage cannot be based exclusively on its monetary dimension, for this definition derives from a post-capitalist interpretation of the phenomenon, which is anachronistic and, therefore, erroneous. In her seminal study of the Restoration dramatic dedication, Deborah Payne has argued that the support that most playwrights needed and sought was not only financial but also social. Reducing patronage to its financial aspect, in Payne’s words, “assumes that patronage entails solely the transmission of funds from the court to artists, a narrow economic definition indeed and one which fails to take into account patronage’s central importance as a value system structuring social relationships.”⁶ Furthermore, as Payne has also stressed, the networks of patronage were not

⁴ For instance, in the dedication of *The Soldier’s Fortune* (1681) to the bookseller Richard Bentley, the author, Thomas Otway, mocks the conventional praise of the dedicatee and complains about the little remuneration that playwrights receive for a dedication: “For, Mr. Bentley, you pay honestly for the Copy; and an Epistle to you is a sort of an Acquittance, and may be probably welcome; when to a Person of higher Rank and Order, it looks like an Obligation for Praises, which he knows he does not deserve, and therefore is very unwilling to part with ready Money for.”

⁵ BELJAME, Alexandre: *Men of Letters and the English Public in the Eighteenth Century, 1660-1744: Dryden, Addison, Pope*. London, 1881. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1948, p. 127.

⁶ PAYNE, Deborah C.: “The Restoration Dramatic Dedication as Symbolic Capital,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 20, 1990, p. 30.

circumscribed to the court: in the Restoration theatre world, all those capable to exercise influence (peers and the gentry, politicians, theatrical managers, actors, dramatists and booksellers) acted as patrons and, as a result, received dedications. Generally, the fact that statesmen and commoners began to be addressed in dedicatory epistles has been interpreted as the demise of patronage, when, on the contrary, these changes indicate its vitality and development—even though the growth of the reading public, among other factors, made possible the establishment of a market for literary property along the eighteenth century.

Payne, and later Dustin Griffin, have attempted to apply Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of economy to literary patronage, and have shown that by looking at patronage as an investment of symbolic capital it is possible to understand how this system worked⁷. Payne has explained that in seventeenth-century society the boundaries between non-economic and economic capital were often blurred and, in fact, non-economic capital could be accumulated, invested and converted into economic capital. For this reason, according to Payne, we can only begin to appreciate the culture of dramatic patronage by extending economic calculation, in Pierre Bourdieu's words, "to all goods, material and symbolic, without distinction, that present themselves as being *rare* and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation."⁸ Aristocrats inherit both their fortunes and a symbolic capital of social prestige. Professional dramatists, in turn, can acquire a portion of each if their works are successful on the stage and appreciated by wits and connoisseurs; then, they may try to augment both their economic and symbolic capital with a dedication addressed to an influential Maecenas. By presenting their works as tributes to their patrons, they bid for the patrons's protection and influence, and the prestige of their family name. Furthermore, even when the performance turned into a fiasco, playwrights might attempt to compensate for their misfortune blaming these failures on rivals and critics, while requesting the patron's protection, which could convince readers that their lack of success was unjustified.

For dramatists, the support of the great and of literary connoisseurs—who, given that wit and taste were considered the prerogatives of gentility, tended to coincide—was a matter of necessity, due to the precarious economic situation of theatrical activity and the competitive climate that characterised the Restoration stage. As Paulina Kewes has argued, the late seventeenth-century stage offered professional playwrights little

⁷ Cf. PAYNE, Deborah C.: "The Restoration Dramatic Dedication as Symbolic Capital," *ibid.*, and GRIFFIN, Dustin. *Authorship in the Long Eighteenth Century*. Newark, 2013.

⁸ BOURDIEU, Pierre: *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge, 1977, p.178

remuneration and stability: the majority of them were not formally bound to a company and therefore did not enjoy a regular salary; their earnings consisted in the third-day benefit (if the play had been thought promising enough to be staged and was indeed successful to last that long) and the payment for publication rights (as long as the publisher thought it possible to sell the play)⁹. Moreover, since only two companies (the King's and the Duke's) were operating for most of the period, whereas the number of aspiring dramatists was sufficiently large, the theatrical scene was marked by strong competition¹⁰. In this context, having the recommendation of a patron who could ease access to the theatre managers was not only beneficial but almost essential; in fact, as Robert Hume has revealed, between 1660 and 1665 "at least fifteen of the nineteen plays are by friends, relatives and insiders."¹¹

Therefore, the remuneration that dramatists would receive from staging their pieces comprised the profits from the third day (once the house charges had been discounted); after 1690 a second benefit was introduced (on the sixth day) and from 1700 onwards playwrights were paid the proceeds from every third performance. For this reason, dramatists had a strong interest in filling the house and they would bring their friends and acquaintances to the benefit performances; they would even sell tickets, sometimes at a higher rate¹². In addition, authors were entitled to sell the publication rights of their texts to bookseller-publishers as soon as the play was staged, which allowed them to increase their uncertain theatrical benefits. For this, they would normally receive a single payment of approximately £20, based on the quantity that Joseph Trapp was paid by Jacob Tonson for his *Abramule* in 1703¹³.

Patrons could contribute to augment the author's earnings: they could recommend a play and ensure its success on the stage, thus increasing the box office receipts. Furthermore, when they received a dedication, they would reward authors for

⁹ KEWES, Paulina: *Authorship and Appropriation: Writing for the Stage in England, 1660-1710*. Oxford, 1998, pp. 17-20.

¹⁰ At the Restoration, Charles II issued patents to Thomas Killigrew and William D'Avenant to establish the King's and the Duke's, the only theatrical companies functioning between 1660 and 1682. In this year, the King's was absorbed by the Duke's, forming the amalgamated United Company, which operated until 1695. At this time, the theatrical monopoly was broken: the actor Thomas Betterton obtained from King William a royal licence which enabled him to open a new theatre.

¹¹ HUME, Robert D.: "Securing a Repertoire: Plays on the London Stage 1660-65," in *Poetry and Drama, 1570-1700: Essays in Honour of Harold F. Brooks*. London, 1981, p. 167.

¹² KEWES, Paulina: *Authorship and Appropriation*, op. cit., p. 19.

¹³ MILHOUS, Judith and HUME, Robert: *The Publication of Plays in London*. London, 2015, pp. 397-409.

their tribute with a monetary gift, which would customarily be £5 or £10.¹⁴ Dedicating plays to a wealthy patron could offer authors additional and larger benefits, such as an invitation to a country estate. This was the case of the professional dramatist Thomas Shadwell, who was supported by the Duke and Duchess of Newcastle from the beginning of his career. In his dedication of *The Humorists* (1671) to the Duchess, Shadwell refers to the estate of Welbeck as a sanctuary for poets, and he repeats this phrase in his dedication of *The Libertine* (1676) to the Duke. In these epistles, the dramatist not only expresses gratitude towards his patrons for their previous invitations, but he also seems to imply that he desires to be entertained there again. Moreover, he publicly boasts of the close personal relationship that he enjoys with the Duke and the Duchess, which contributes to his own literary reputation and honour. The Earl of Dorset also showed hospitality to writers, receiving them at his two country houses in Copt Hall and Knolle, where they would find bank notes hidden under their plates at dinner¹⁵.

In order to aspire to such honours, dramatists would carefully choose the language of their dedications. The conventional praise of the patron was indispensable to propitiate the dedicatee as well as to remind readers of the honourable qualities that the he or she possessed, and which ultimately influenced the reception of the play. Other than this, authors resorted to a number of topics in order to display the symbolic capital that their works had accumulated on the stage. One of the most varied and recurrent topics that dramatists employed for this purpose was self-praise, that is, references to acclaim and marks of favour shown by either the patron or other influential people. These were used to confirm the dedicatee in extending patronage to the author by enumerating all the various instances of praise that the play had elicited, and also to convince new potential patrons to favour it by purchasing a printed copy. With the purpose of showing the abundance and variety of this topic, a classification, together with several examples is offered below.

Self-praise references may be classified on the basis of the person who has originally expressed them: the dedicatee or someone else. Obviously, these two types could be combined in order to produce a cumulative effect which would stress the quality and literary merit of the piece. Additionally, a further classification can be drawn according to the moment in which the acclaim was uttered, that is before or after the

¹⁴ This is the standard quantity provided by Beljame based on the fact that Dryden made from a play £100 at best. Beljame also calculated the third-day benefit at £70 and £20 or £25 for the sale of the manuscript. Cf. BELJAME, Alexandre: *Men of Letters...*, op. cit., p. 121.

¹⁵ WILSON, John Harold: *The Court Wits of the Restoration*. Princeton, 1948. p. 23.

production of the play in the public theatres. Within the first category comprising instances of praise expressed by the dedicatee prior to the staging of the play, four different varieties can be distinguished: 1) the patron encouraged the dramatist during the composition of the play; 2) read the script; 3) made amendments to the text; 4) organised a private rehearsal. As regards to the last type, the dedication of Thomas D'Urfey's *The Comical History of Don Quixote, part one* (1694) to the Duchess of Ormond provides a notable example. The author thanks his patroness for "the Honour your Grace, and the rest of the Nobility and Gentry did me to see this Play in its Rehearsal or Undress." The reference in the dedication is the only evidence of the rehearsal, which was most probably intended to propitiate influential members of the aristocracy to attend the play's premiere and enhance its popularity. It is worth mentioning that the Duke had supported D'Urfey by introducing him to King Charles at the performance of his comedy *Madam Fickle* in 1676, the year in which his career as a dramatist took off¹⁶.

The second category –favours bestowed after the performance of the play– also includes four types: 1) the patron enjoyed the production of the play; 2) attended several performances; 3) asked for a copy of the text; 4) protected the author against critics. The second type can be illustrated with the dedication of Edward Ravenscroft's *The Citizen Turned Gentleman* (1672) to Prince Rupert, who, according to the author, was present almost each of the "thirty times it has been acted." The author thus boasted of the patron's approval and his own success. Indeed, as John Downes, the prompter of the Duke's pointed out, this comedy had an unprecedented long first run: "it continu'd Acting 9 Days with a full House."¹⁷ Theatrical records, moreover, show that Ravenscroft's *The Citizen* was acted at least thirty times before 1675, and that it became a stock comedy for several decades¹⁸.

The various topics contained in these two categories are generally reinforced through a number of strategies which were employed to confer authority on the dedicatee to judge the literary value of the play. These strategies insisted on the patron's wit, taste or skills, and they could also cumulate, as a means to produce a stronger rhetorical effect. We can distinguish four different strategies: 1) the patron is a court wit; 2) writes 3) has a

¹⁶ RITCHARD, Jonathan Pritchard: "D'Urfey, Thomas (1653?-1723)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.fama.us.es/view/article/8313, accessed 9 Aug 2017] D'Urfey also dedicated the comedy *A Fond Husband* (1677) to the Duke.

¹⁷ DOWNES, John: *Roscious Anglicanus*. London, 1987, p. 69.

¹⁸ Although theatrical records are scarce and therefore incomplete, Ravenscroft's comments on the popularity of his comedy were well grounded, for the entries in *The London Stage* confirm that the play was regularly performed between its premiere and 1675. Cf. VAN LENNEP, William (ed.): *The London Stage, 1660-1800. Part One*. Southern Illinois University Press, 1965, pp. 185, 195, 196, 200, 222, 223.

quick wit; 4) or excellent conversational skills. The dedication of Nathaniel Lee's *Mithridates* (1678) to the Earl of Dorset exemplifies several of these strategies. Dorset was one of the closest courtiers to King Charles, with whom he enjoyed a debauched lifestyle, he was recognized as a generous patron, and he had participated in a collaborative translation of Corneille's *La mort de Pompée*, which was staged in 1663. In the dedicatory epistle Lee referred to the Earl's wit and judgment as "the truest and most impartial I ever knew," as well as to the literary skills of his patron: "Your thoughts in some select Poems I have seen, are rich and new, . . . your Expressions justly strong, your words Emphatical, as chosen men for an Enterprize of Glory . . . ; Your Writing dazzles with clearness and Majesty." By insisting on the qualities of his dedicatee, Lee attempted not only to praise the Earl, but also to capitalize on his popularity in order to impress his potential readers.

With regards to the acclaim expressed by influential and important members of society, these may be divided into two main groups, again depending on whether they were produced prior to the premiere or afterwards. Among the first group, we find three variations: 1) the King read the script; 2) the King read it and amended it; 3) members of the nobility read it. An example can be found in John Dryden's dedication of *Aureng-Zebe* (1675) to the Earl of Mulgrave, another member of the intimate circle of King Charles's friends. According to the author, Mulgrave read and corrected the script, and he enjoyed it so much that he gave it to the King, who also read it and made some amendments. The second group—praise received after the production—includes a single class: 1) the King enjoyed the performance of the play. This can be illustrated with the dedication of John Leaner's *The Country Innocence* (1677) to Sir Francis Hinchman, in which he claims that both the King and Hinchman liked it when it was staged.

In addition, a third broad category of self-praise can be discerned: the one including references to the acclaim of the audience. Examples of these can be found in the dedications of Dryden's *Marriage a la Mode* (1673), Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1675), Shadwell's *Epsom Wells* (1673), *The Virtuoso* (1676) and *Bury Fair* (1689), D'Urfey's *Don Quixote, part one* (1694) among many others. Furthermore, there are even some cases, though not many, in which the author felt so pleased and satisfied with the play that he asked the dedicatee to show it to another eminent person. Lee, for instance, in the dedication of *Mithridates* requested Dorset that he recommend it to Catherine of Braganza, who had shown interest in the play: "Mithridates being in your hands, desires to be laid at the Feet of the Queen. Her Majesty, who is the Sublimest

Goodness, and most merciful Vertue that ever blest a Land, has been pleas'd to grace him with her Presence, and promis'd it again with such particular praises, the effects of her pure Bounty, that shou'd he not express his Gratitude almost to adoration, he wou'd deserve another Fate, when he is next represented, than what he has hitherto receiv'd." Lee used a subtle tactic to solicit the Queen's favour, for protocol established that permission was needed to offer a dedication to the royal family, and a negative could be disastrous to a dramatist's career¹⁹.

In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of patronage relations, I would like to analyse the manner in which playwrights resorted to dedications to profit from and increase their symbolic capital. In the dedication of his first play, *Love in a Wood*(1672), William Wycherley addressed an influential member of the court, the Duchess of Cleveland, the king's *maitresse en titre* in the 1660s. The comedy had been successful and brought the author acquainted with the wits. The play had also caught the attention of the beautiful and notorious lady, who saw the play on two occasions and asked for a copy of the text. In the dedication, Wycherley referred to himself as her greater admirer and, in a rakish and playful tone, boasted of the favours that he had received from her, most certainly alluding to their romance. The support of the Duchess was fundamental to Wycherley's career both as a playwright and courtier. His liaison with the Duchess secured him the patronage of her cousin the Duke of Buckingham, who made Wycherley a member of his equerry and soon afterwards captain-lieutenant of his own company²⁰.

On the other hand, dedications could also be used in an attempt to change the fate of a play. This was the case of John Banks's dedication of the *Island Queens* (1684) to the Duchess of Norfolk. This tragedy was banned, presumably owing to its controversial depiction of the rivalry between Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart. The fact that the play was not staged seems to have impoverished the playwright, given that most of an author's remuneration depended on third day benefits. In the dedication Banks expressed his gratitude to the Duchess, who had "the Honour to peruse it in Sheets," and to her father, the Earl of Peterborough, who protected it against Banks's enemies and interceded on his behalf before the Duke of York. Banks insisted that he had incorporated the amendments suggested by the Duke, who approved it to be publicly performed. Nevertheless, the play would not be staged until 1704, after a thorough

¹⁹ Cf. BEIJAME, Alexandre: *Men of Letters...*, op.cit., p. 80.

²⁰BENNETT, Kate: "Wycherley, William (*bap.* 1641, *d.* 1716)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Sept 2015. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.fama.us.es/view/article/30120> (Accessed 11 Aug 2017)

process of revision; the new version, entitled *The Albion Queens*, proved popular and run for seven nights²¹. The support of the Duchess and her family was decisive for Banks, since he could only aspire to financial benefit from the publication, which indeed needed the protection of powerful patrons—as well as their symbolic capital—to be recommended to readers.

Two dedications by Thomas Shadwell also deserve some comment. These were addressed to the Earl of Dorset, who became his patron after the death of the Duke of Newcastle. Shadwell had been pushed aside from the theatres after the production of *The Lancashire Witches* (1681), controversial for its whig propaganda and anti-Catholic satire. The text was cut by the censor, although Shadwell published the original version; given its partisan nature, it is not surprising that the author did not include a dedication. After being silenced for seven years, Shadwell took advantage of the new political climate of 1688 to produce a new play, *The Squire of Alsatia* (1688) which had an astonishing run of thirteen days and brought the author the sum of £130 for his benefit²². In the dedication to Dorset, Shadwell alluded to the support that he had received from the Earl when composing the play: “the first Act of it was written at Copt-Hall; and Your Lordships Approbation of it (whose Wit and Judgment have ever been unquestion’d) encourag’d and inspir’d me to go on: When I had finished it, . . . Your Lordship, upon the perusal of the whole, was pleas’d to say that you thought it a true, and diverting Comedy.” In addition, Shadwell recreated the success that the play had received on stage: “so great, as was above my expectation . . . having fill’d the Theatre so long together: And I had the great Honour to find so many Friends, that the House was never so full since it was built, as upon the third day of this Play; and vast numbers went away, that could not be admitted.” Later on that year, Dorset, the Lord Chamberlain, awarded the post of Poet Laureate to Shadwell²³. In the dedication of his next play, *Bury Fair* (1689), Shadwell showed his gratitude to the Earl for his new position: “I Who have been so long and so continually oblig’d by your Lordship, have ever fresh Occasions of acknowledging your Favour and Bounty to me, and cannot be silent of the late great Honour you have done

²¹BRAYNE, Charles: “Banks, John (1652/3–1706),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.fama.us.es/view/article/1297> (Accessed 11 Aug 2017)

²²BENNETT, Kate: “Shadwell, Thomas (c.1640–1692),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2009. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.fama.us.es/view/article/25195> (Accessed 11 Aug 2017)

²³ The former poet laureate was John Dryden, but he lost his offices at the accession to the throne of William and Mary in 1689 unable to take the oath of allegiance, for he had converted to Catholicism in the year 1685. Cf. HAMMOND, Paul, “Dryden, John (1631–1700),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2009. <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.fama.us.es/view/article/8108> (Accessed 22 Aug 2017).

me, in making me the King's Servant; but must publish my Gratitude for that, and all the rest of the great Obligations I have receiv'd. Your Lordship not only makes use of your own Power, but of that which the King has entrusted you with, to do good to Mankind, which you ever delighted in." Shadwell remained in this position until his death in 1692 and produced three other plays: *The Amorous Bigotte* (in 1690), *The Scowlers* (in late 1690 or early 1691), and *The Volunteers* (posthumously staged and published in 1692).

In conclusion, the writing of dedications was a common practice during the Restoration, since it conferred on playwrights a symbolic capital (especially when the dedicatee was an important member of the nobility), which could be "cashed in" to obtain many favours which go beyond the mere pecuniary gift: social support, protection from detractors and a point of access to the patron's network of connections. Dedications allowed dramatists to consolidate their position in the literary field and also ascend in the social scale, which was fundamental given their precarious economic situation and the strong competition among them. Having access to a patron's network of connections could assure the production of their texts on stage, the approval of the audience and a considerable remuneration. Authors would resort to dedications not only when their works had been favourable received, but most importantly when they had been banned or turned into a failure. Showing that their plays had been unjustly criticised and that they had the approval of an eminent person provided them with an opportunity to derive a small benefit. Therefore, although the Restoration period has generally been conceived as the preliminary stage of the eighteenth-century print-dominated literary market, the abundance of dedications, together with the different social extraction of the dedicatees, the variety of dramatic genres in which they appear, and the diverse topics that they explore demonstrate the liveliness of the patronage system²⁴.

²⁴ The author will like to acknowledge her gratitude to the University of Seville (Plan Propio de Investigación) and the Junta de Andalucía (P11-HUM-7761) for funding this research.