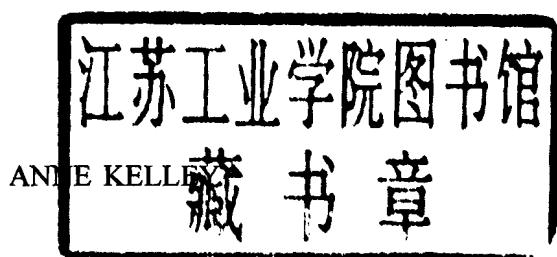




# Catharine Trotter

An early modern writer in the vanguard of feminism



**Ashgate**

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## CATHARINE TROTTER

The subject of this book is an important but neglected English woman writer, whose published output included plays, prose treatises and a novel. This volume is the first comprehensive study to examine the complete range of Trotter's writing, and to analyse the inter-relationship of her literary and philosophical output.

Trotter stands out as an extraordinary woman of her time. Five of her plays were performed on the London stage between 1695 and 1706. In 1702, her *Defence* of John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was acclaimed in England and abroad. She is further distinguished by her radically feminocentric stance: the author contends that she took positions more feminocentric than her predecessor, Aphra Behn, or her female contemporaries, including Mary Pix and Delarivier Manley.

The wide sweep of Kelley's study foregrounds certain critical concerns which demonstrably shaped Trotter's writing throughout, most notably the importance of rational integrity as an ethical position, and especially the significance of principled rationality as a route toward empowerment for women. Using material from Trotter's original, unpublished letters, Kelley discusses her work in the context of the period and the circle of intellectuals with whom she was in contact, such as playwrights William Congreve, George Granville, and George Farquhar, as well as philosopher John Locke.

This reading not only provides a social, political and epistemological landscape within which to situate her writing, but also fleshes out the life of a woman writer in a period which saw the burgeoning of published work by women.



Mrs Catharine Cockburn

(Eighteenth-century engraving: unknown engraver after unknown artist).  
Reproduced by courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London (RN 47398).

# Acknowledgements

I doubt whether I would have embarked on this book were it not for the inspiring pioneering work of Elaine Hobby, Jacqueline Pearson and Janet Todd in the field of early modern women's writing. While working in this area, I have benefited personally from the expert guidance of many gifted scholars, particularly Derek Hughes, Jacqueline Pearson and Mary Waldron. I am also very indebted to Jeslyn Medoff for her meticulous reading of my manuscript and her informed and constructive comments, which were invaluable in completing this book. My greatest debt, without doubt, however, is to Sarah Hutton for drawing my attention to Catharine Trotter in the first place, and for being an unfailing source of expert help and advice. I would like to thank my editor, Erika Gaffney, for her unstinting support, and Pat FitzGerald for patiently guiding me through the intricacies of CRC. My thanks are due to the staff at the British Library and Cambridge University Library for their considerable help, and to the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, for permission to quote from MS. Locke c. 3, fols. 235 and 236. My thanks also go to the British Library for allowing me to quote from manuscripts held in their collection, and to Professor Stuart Brown of the Open University, who graciously agreed that I could quote from his unpublished essay 'Philosophy as a Woman's Subject (1690–1710)'. Finally I would like to acknowledge the support of all my friends and colleagues, especially Carol Banks; and most importantly my family for their bemused tolerance of my obsession with Catharine Trotter.

Some of the material in Chapters One and Six has appeared in an earlier form in my article "‘In Search of Truths Sublime’: Reason and the Body in the Writings of Catharine Trotter", in *Women's Writing*, 8:2 (2001). I would like to thank the publisher for permission to reuse this material.

# Notes

I have occasionally used an asterisk symbol after a folio number. This is to distinguish the second of two folios with the same number in the British Library Birch manuscript collection. This situation usually occurs when a series of leaves of a small folded letter have been allocated only one folio number. The use of the asterisk was suggested by the curator of manuscripts at the British Library.

I have followed the normal practice of historians in the dating of manuscript letters, starting the year at 1 January.

*To my family*



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# Introduction

Catharine Trotter is an important and neglected woman writer whose published output includes drama, a novella, poetry, and philosophical and theological works. She had five plays performed on the London stage between 1695 and 1706. In 1702, her *Defence of the Essay of Human Understanding, written by Mr. Lock* was acclaimed in England and abroad. For the next forty years she engaged in spirited philosophical debate with male contemporaries. Her work bridges the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – not only is she an important voice in Restoration literature, but her consistent emphasis on reason as a guide for human behaviour, together with her belief in the intrinsic benevolence of humanity, place her work in the vanguard of Enlightenment thought. She is distinguished among women writers of the early modern period for her radically feminocentric stance, insisting, in all her works, on women's capacity for rational thought and behaviour. Her unconventional writing career adds another dimension to our understanding of the position of the woman writer and intellectual in this period.

Trotter was born in London, probably in 1674,<sup>1</sup> in a period of political turbulence which culminated in the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Her published writing spanned her life, from her teens to her death in 1749. Towards the end of her life, some of her influential associates<sup>2</sup> initiated a project to

1 Biographical information about Trotter is given in 'The Life of Mrs. Cockburn', in *The Works of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn, Theological, Moral, Dramatic, and Poetical. Several of them now first printed. Revised and published, with an Account of the Life of the Author*, ed. Thomas Birch, MA, FRS, 2 vols (London: printed for J. and P. Knapton, 1751). Cockburn was Trotter's married name, and the name under which much of her philosophy was written. In the 'Life of Mrs. Cockburn', Birch states that she was born in London on 16 August 1679. The inscription on her gravestone bears this out, describing her as 'in the 70 year of her age' on 11 May 1749. The birthdate of 16 August 1679 has always been assumed to be correct. However, my recent research for the *New Dictionary of National Biography* has turned up an entry of baptism for 'Katherine Trotters, daughter of David Trotters, gentleman, and his wife Sarah' on 29 August 1674 in the Register of St Andrew, Holborn. Trotter's name, her parents' names, the month and place of birth all tally with Birch, but the year is five years earlier than in his biography. This suggests to me that the date of birth given in Birch is questionable. The entry in the *New DNB* will read 1674?–1749.

2 Primarily Thomas Sharp, Archdeacon of Northumberland; Mr William Warburton, later Bishop of Gloucester; and a Dr Keenes. A letter from Sharp to Trotter, dated 14 October 1748, discusses the contents of the collection 'Have you heard yet whether the 3 plays found at London are different from those you have? If they be, why should only three be published according to Dr. K. when One Volume will fairly hold ye five, & a few poems besides ...?' (British Library, Birch Collection, Additional MS 4264, f. 93v).

publish her work, together with a brief biography, to be edited by Thomas Birch. Originally, this collection was intended to include all her drama, together with her philosophical writing, extending to three volumes.<sup>3</sup> Practical considerations eventually restricted the collection to two volumes, containing only one of the plays, but all her philosophy and the bulk of her poetry and letters. It was eventually published by subscription in 1751, two years after her death, as *The Works of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn*.<sup>4</sup>

Most of what we know about Catharine Trotter's life comes from the biographical details in the *Works*. 'The Life of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn' forms the opening section (pp. i–xlvi) of Volume One, firmly positioning Trotter as a learned and exemplary woman within her social, literary and philosophical environment, a persona which has been reproduced in succeeding critical works, largely determining the received view of her. The image of the erudite scholar is confirmed by the particular selection of texts reprinted in the *Works*, which virtually ignores Trotter's literary writing in favour of philosophy and theology. Over the centuries, most readers would have had access to her texts only through the *Works*, so it is easy to see how a distorted view of her writing has been perpetuated. One of my intentions in this book is to correct this bias by presenting a fuller and more integrated picture of her entire canon.

Birch would appear to be a fairly reliable source of basic biographical information, although it has not been possible to validate all the data in his 'Life'. We do know, however, from surviving letters and documents in the Birch manuscript collection at the British Library, that Trotter and her husband were closely involved with the project in the two years leading up to her death, and that her son was in close contact with Birch after 1749.<sup>5</sup> Additionally,

3 In his letter to Catharine Trotter, Sharp suggests that John Locke's letter to Trotter should be published 'at ye head of ye 3d. Vol. wch shd contain all those p. [papers] in which he is concern'd ...' (BL Add. MS 4264, f. 93v).

4 See footnote 1 for full details of *The Works of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn, Theological, Moral, Dramatic, and Poetical*. This collection is hitherto referred to as *Works*.

5 The Birch manuscript collection includes printed copies of Trotter's published texts, on some of which she has written explanatory footnotes, clearly in preparation for publication in the *Works*. An example of this is the printed copy of her *Defence of the Essay of Human Understanding, written by Mr. Lock*, with handwritten footnotes, which can be found in BL Add. MS 4267, ff. 45–91. Apart from such additions, initiated by Trotter, Birch has adhered faithfully to the published texts, except for expanding abbreviations and making some minor changes in punctuation and capitalisation. Undoubtedly the involvement of the family helped to protect the integrity of the *Works*. BL Add. MS 4244, f. 47 lists documents delivered on Thursday 12 October 1749 by Mr Cockburn (John Cockburn, Trotter's son), and there is subsequent correspondence between Birch and John Cockburn regarding the mechanics of publishing the *Works*, mainly to be found in BL Add. MS 4302, ff. 290–2.

some details of her interests and activities are confirmed by her extant letters.<sup>6</sup> The letters reproduced by Birch in the *Works* are accurate transcriptions of the manuscripts, but are frequently heavily edited to remove personal or domestic references, the implications of which are discussed below.<sup>7</sup>

According to Birch's biographical narrative, Catharine Trotter's parents, Sarah Ballenden and David Trotter, were both Scottish:

She was the daughter of Captain *David Trotter*, a *Scots* gentleman, and commander in the royal navy, in the reign of *Charles II*, and of Mrs. *Sarah Ballenden*, who had the honour of being nearly related to the noble Lord of that name, and to the illustrious families of *Maitland*, Duke of *Lauderdale*, and *Drummond*, earl of *Perth*.<sup>8</sup>

Most of these details can be validated from documentary evidence. David Trotter was a naval captain who had served under Charles II,<sup>9</sup> but died from the plague at Scanderoon in 1684.<sup>10</sup> His widow was left to raise Catharine and her older sister in straitened circumstances, despite her connection to three powerful Scottish aristocratic families, as Birch describes. The details of Sarah Ballenden's genealogy can be verified by manuscript letters to her from the Earl of Perth, the first on 3 April 1671, in connection with procuring a place for her husband, and the second, a later, undated, note commiserating with her on his death.<sup>11</sup> A further window into Trotter's family background can be found in an undated manuscript petition presented by her mother to Queen Anne concerning a pension to recompense her for the loss of Captain Trotter while in active service to Charles II. This had apparently been granted by the King in his lifetime, but had lapsed under James II, and William and

- 
- 6 All Trotter's extant letters are contained in the Birch manuscript collection. Despite extensive enquiries at Public Record Offices and Episcopal archives, no further letters or papers have come to light, except the wills of both Trotter and her husband, the Reverend Patrick Cockburn. Both these documents are appended to this book.
  - 7 Chapter Six looks in detail at the implications of Birch's selective editing of Trotter's correspondence.
  - 8 Thomas Birch, 'The Life of Mrs. Catharine Cockburn', in *Works*, vol. 1, p. ii.
  - 9 A manuscript letter from Capt. David Trotter to the Earl of Essex, dated 19 June 1673, (BL MS. Stowe 202, f. 132) confirms his post.
  - 10 The probate of David Trotter's will, registered in the prerogative court of Canterbury, is dated 9 February 1684 (BL Add. MS 4265, f. 185).
  - 11 These letters can be found in BL Add. MS 4265, ff. 189–90 and ff. 188–188v respectively. The earlier letter describes the Earl of Perth's petition to Lord Lauderdale on behalf of Sarah Ballenden, specifically stating 'I have told My lord Laud: of your Relation to him, & me' (BL Add. MS 4265, f. 189v).

Mary. Anne had reinstated it through the offices of the Duchess of Marlborough, but the payment was evidently erratic:

That his Majesty K. Charles II had a particular kindness for Captain Trotter, and gave a very favourable Reference to the Admiralty for a Pension to his Widow, which yet the Kings death presently after put a stop to, neither had she any Consideration of her Losses in the two Succeeding Reigns. But your Majesty upon your happy Accession to the Throne was pleas'd to grant your Petitioner a small Pension of Twenty pds per Ann. Which was constantly paid by the Dutchess of Marlborough into the hands of the Lord Bishop of Sarum for her use: And upon the Dutchess's Removal from Court, Application being again made to your Majesty, Your Majesty was graciously pleas'd to promise that it should be continued & paid as formerly.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly the petition had been prompted by Sarah Churchill's absence from Court. Whether or not this refers to her official dismissal in 1711 or one of her many earlier prolonged absences is not clear. On 7 July 1705 Trotter wrote to Thomas Burnet of Kemnay,<sup>13</sup> referring to some business at Court, which may be a clue to the date of the petition:

The business I was engaged in, was to obtain a gift by an interest I have at Court, which would have been a settlement for my life; but, though I did not succeed in the particular I aimed at, another favour was done for me, which will make me easier than I was, at least for some time.<sup>14</sup>

A letter to John Locke from Elizabeth Burnet, third wife of Bishop Gilbert

12 BL Add. MS 4265, ff. 186–7.

13 Birch erroneously refers to Thomas Burnet of Kemnay as 'George Burnet' throughout Trotter's *Works*. Thomas Burnet died in 1729, leaving only one son, George. This mistake over the names may have arisen through confusion with the name of this son. E.S. de Beer, in his important work, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, 8 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), has correctly identified Thomas Burnet from his manuscript correspondence with John Locke. For a full family history of Thomas Burnet of Kemnay, which confirms his identification through internal evidence from his letters to Trotter, for example his relationship with Bishop Gilbert Burnet and the Electress Sophia of Hanover, his imprisonment in the Bastille, etc., see Colonel James Allardyce (ed.), *The Family of Burnett of Leys, with Collateral Branches, from the MSS of the late George Burnet L.L.D. Lyon King of Arms*, Aberdeen University Studies, No. 4 (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen, 1901), Chapter 5, 'Burnetts of Kemnay', pp. 118–29. In his correspondence with Catharine Trotter, Burnet signs himself 'T. Burnet', or 'T. Burnet of Kemnay', for example BL Add. MS 4264, f. 118v.

14 *Works*, vol. 2, p. 186. (This is the second p. 186 in vol. 2 of Birch, as the page numbering is repeated in error from pp. 177–92.)

Burnet, confirms both the details of Trotter's family background, and the arrangements which had been made for the payment of the pension to Mrs Sarah Trotter.<sup>15</sup> This business is particularly interesting in that it highlights one of the links between Trotter's family and both the Marlboroughs and the Burnets, connections which formed part of an important social and political network for Trotter.<sup>16</sup> The unmistakable importance of the pension for the family also points to a prevailing concern in Trotter's life – her precarious financial position. Her marriage in 1708 to the Reverend Patrick Cockburn, son of the Scottish cleric John Cockburn,<sup>17</sup> did little to alleviate this situation in the long term. Initially, the couple moved from London to Nayland, Suffolk, where Patrick Cockburn had obtained the curacy. In 1713 they returned to London when he was licensed as curate of St Dunstan's in the West, Fleet Street, on 7 February. Unfortunately, his conscience prevented him from taking the oath of abjuration on the accession of George I in 1714, as a result of which he lost the post, and his family suffered great financial hardship for twelve years, during which time he earned a small living from teaching. In 1726, he was persuaded to take the oath by both his father and the Lord Chancellor, Peter King, John Locke's second cousin and protégé. In November of that year, Cockburn was appointed to the episcopal congregation of St

15 She writes 'her Father ... was a Capatin of a ship in K Jeames time & dyed about the time of the revolution; I think he was a scoch man, as her Mother is a scoch women, who aplying her self to the Bp in hopes to gett some old arear, I came to that litle acquaintance I have which is seeing her Daughter three or four times. They were left in mean curcumstances ...', letter from Mrs Elizabeth Burnet to John Locke, 20 June 1702, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford, MS. Locke c. 3, fol. 235.

16 I explore Trotter's connections with the Marlboroughs and the Burnets in Chapter One, pp. 21–3.

17 John Cockburn was an eminent Scottish cleric, a committed Protestant, who had left Britain in 1690 to attend the court of James II at St Germain in France, but was forced to leave as he refused to convert to the Roman Catholic faith. In 1698 he was appointed English Episcopal chaplain at Amsterdam, a post which he held until 1709, when he returned to England. In 1714 he was given the living at St Mary's Northolt, in Middlesex, where he remained until his death in 1729. He was the cousin of Henry Scougal, the author of *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, 1677, a work much admired by Bishop Gilbert Burnet, who wrote a preface to it. The family connection with Scougal was strengthened in 1726, when Patrick Cockburn published an edition, the sixth, of *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, including Scougal's 'Nine Discourses', most of them previously unprinted.

Thomas Birch describes John Cockburn's life fairly accurately, except that he states Cockburn 'at last collated to the rectory of *Northaw* in *Middlesex*, by Dr. *Robinson* bishop of *London*, at the recommendation of queen *Anne*' (Birch, 'Life' in *Works*, vol. I, p. xxxiii). According to the *DNB* entry for John Cockburn, he was rector of Northolt, then known as Northall, rather than Northaw, as Birch states. The *DNB* information is almost certainly correct, as Northolt is in Middlesex, whereas Northaw is in Hertfordshire.

Paul's Chapel in Aberdeen. The fortunes of the family were further enhanced when he was also given the living of Long Horsley in Northumberland, from which he was able to draw an income, although nonresident. In 1737, however, there was another major upheaval for the family when Cockburn was forced by the Bishop of Durham to take up residence in Long Horsley and forfeit the living in Aberdeen, with a subsequent reduction in his income. Both Trotter and her husband died at Long Horsley – Patrick Cockburn in January 1749, followed only four months later by his wife on 11 May of that year – and were buried in the churchyard there, alongside their youngest daughter, Grissel, who had died in 1742.

The bulk of Trotter's literary writing was published during the years before her marriage, when she was living mainly in London. After 1708, however, practical considerations alone ruled out direct engagement with the literary world of the capital. She had no work published between 1707 and 1726, possibly because of the demands of her children and undoubtedly some parish responsibilities as a curate's wife in the early years of her marriage. After 1726 and the family's removal to Scotland, she concentrated mainly on philosophical writing, exploring concerns that had always been evident in both her literary and philosophical work, as I discuss below.

Trotter's first authenticated work is a poem written in 1693 to Mr Bevil Higgons (nephew of George Granville, later Lord Lansdowne), on his recovery from smallpox, published for the first time in the *Works*. This was followed, in the same year, by a more considerable piece, a novella, *The Adventures of a Young Lady*, her anonymous contribution to a collection entitled *Letters of Love and Gallantry and Several Other Subjects, All Written by Ladies*, which was published by Samuel Briscoe.<sup>18</sup> Although anonymous in this edition, the novella, retitled *Olinda's Adventures: Or the Amours of a Young Lady*, was attributed to 'Mrs. Trotter' in a 1718 collection published by Briscoe: *Familiar Letters of Love, Gallantry and Several Occasions*. Some critics have challenged the attribution to Trotter, an issue which I discuss in Chapter Two.

Her best known literary writing is undoubtedly her drama, which has attracted the most critical attention. Four tragedies and one comedy were staged in London between 1695 and 1706. Like many plays of this period, they enjoyed only a short initial run, and were not revived, with the exception of the comedy, *Love at a Loss, or Most Votes Carry It*, 1701, which was produced several times in the late twentieth century. Only one play, *Fatal Friendship*, 1698, was included in her *Works*.

18 *Letters of Love and Gallantry and Several Other Subjects, All Written by Ladies*, 2 vols (London: 1693, 1694), vol. I, 1693.



Trotter wrote a number of short poems and songs in this period, some of which may have been associated with the plays. Unfortunately, the only extant music scores (for *Love at a Loss* and *The Unhappy Penitent*)<sup>19</sup> do not include words, so it has not been possible to check this. Additionally, she wrote panegyrics on two of the Duke of Marlborough's famous victories: Blenheim (1704)<sup>20</sup> and Ramellies (1706).<sup>21</sup> These songs and panegyrics are all contained in her *Works*. Birch did not include her contribution to *The Nine Muses*,<sup>22</sup> although he did reprint a later work of poetic criticism which evolved from this,<sup>23</sup> and her poem 'To Mr. Congreve, on his Tragedy, *The Mourning Bride*'.<sup>24</sup> Birch has also included the translation of a rapture composed in Latin by St Francis Xavierius,<sup>25</sup> and what I consider to be her most important poem, composed in 1732, and addressed to Queen Caroline, the wife of King George II, on the occasion of the Queen's setting up busts of famous philosophers in the Hermitage in her garden at Richmond.<sup>26</sup> Trotter's poetry confirms her involvement with particular literary and social circles, and in some cases her obvious wish to be involved in political events. As it does not form a major part of her *oeuvre*, I have not made her poetry the focus of separate consideration as I have the other genres within which she wrote. Instead, I have introduced particular poems, where relevant, into my discussion of

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- 19 *Love at a Loss*, Act music by Mr Godfrey Finger, in *Harmonia Anglicana* (London: Walsh, 1701), Lbm b. 29.a.; *The Unhappy Penitent*, Act music by Daniel Purcell, in *Harmonia Anglicana*, Lbm. d. 24.
- 20 'On his Grace the Duke of Marlborough's Return from his Expedition into Germany, after the battle of Blenheim, 1704', in *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 561–4.
- 21 'On his Grace the Duke of Marlborough, after his victory at Ramellies, in 1706', in *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 566–7.
- 22 *The Nine Muses, Or, Poems Written by Nine Severall Ladies Upon the Death of the late famous John Dryden, Esq.* (London: 1700) was a collection of poems by female writers to mark the death of John Dryden. Trotter wrote in the persona of 'Calliope: The Heroick Muse'.
- 23 Trotter's later poem is prefaced by an explanation of its inception: 'Having joined with others of my own sex to write upon Mr. Dryden's death, under the several names of the *Nine Muses*; I was some time after addressed from Ireland by some lovers of poetry, as to a Muse, desiring my inspiration: To which these verses were sent in answer. *Calliope's* directions how to deserve and distinguish the Muses inspirations' (*Works*, vol. 2, pp. 559–61).
- 24 'To Mr. Congreve, on his Tragedy, the *Mourning Bride*', *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 564–5.
- 25 'The rapture of an affectionate soul to Jesus on the Cross, composed in Latin by St Francis Xavierius; paraphrased. *O Deus, ego amo te, &c.*', *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 575–6.
- 26 'A Poem, occasioned by the busts set up in the Queen's Hermitage; designed to be presented with a book in vindication of Mr. Locke, which was to have been inscribed to her Majesty', *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 572–5.