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**Lady Damaris Masham,
liberty, reason and the love of God**



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1. *The salon at Oates*

Damaris Cudworth Masham was the inspiring muse of the intellectual life at the manor of Oates¹. She had a privileged link with John Locke for over a decade. The philosopher enjoyed a healthy haven with the Masham family, as well as the friendship and stimulating intellectual curiosity of Damaris. Together with the reserved and prudent Locke, turned her house at Oates into a meeting point, a location designed for the “Rational Conversation” available for a number of overseas scholars and the English friends. Damaris wrote to Leibniz in August 1704:

Rational conversation with mutual Good will, has the greatest charms that I know in life, and I have hitherto been very happy in respect of that enjoyment².

This salon was marginally virtual, as it brought together both the visitors of the philosopher and his correspondence network linked by both Locke and by Damaris to the intellectuals, the politicians and the cultivated or “curious” individuals of their time. Pierre Des Maizeaux, Frans Limborch the son of the theologian from Amsterdam, Pierre Coste the friend, the translator and the tutor of lady Masham’s only son, as well as Edward Clarke, Peter King, the third Earl of Shaftesbury, William Popple, Lord Peterborough (later Marlborough), and Isaac Newton were among the most assiduous and famous visitors of the “salon” at Oates.

There were a number of personalities and personal friends living on the Continent who would have liked to spend time with Locke and Lady Masham, and yet could not reach them on a number of instances. These included Benjamin Furly who planned the visit on several occasions, but never showed up at the salon at Oates. (Even his son did, repeatedly). Actually, Furly regularly reminded Locke about the friends that he had met at Furly’s circle, at the “Lantaarn” club,

¹ My gratitude goes to Sarah Hutton for her invaluable advice and suggestions. An earlier version has been presented at the invited symposium *Women on Liberty 1600-1800*, Monash University-Prato Centre, Italy, 30 June - 2 July 2014. Cfr. L. Simonutti, *Damaris Cudworth Masham: una Lady della Repubblica delle Lettere*, in *Scritti in onore di Eugenio Garin*, Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore, 1987, pp. 141-165; S. Hutton, *Damaris Cudworth, Lady Masham: between Platonism and Enlightenment*, in «British Journal for the History of Philosophy», 1993, 1, pp. 29-54; L. Simonutti, *Dalla poesia metafisica alla filosofia lockiana: Damaris Cudworth, Lady Masham. Con tre poemi*, in G. Totaro (ed. by), *Donne, filosofia e cultura nel Seicento*, Roma, Collana scientifica del CNR, 1999, pp. 173-199; *The Philosophical Works of Damaris, Lady Masham / A Discourse Concerning The Love of God, Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Vertuous or Christian Life*, ed. by J.G. Buickerood, Bristol, Thoemmes Continuum, 2004; J. Broad, *A Woman’s Influence? John Locke and Damaris Masham on Moral Accountability*, in «Journal of the History of Ideas», 2006, 67, 3, pp. 489-510. See also *Women and Liberty, 1600-1800: Philosophical Essays*, ed. by J. Broad and K. Detlefsen, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2017.

² Lady Masham to Leibniz, 8 August 1704, G.W. Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, Berlin, 1887 [Reprint Olms, Hildesheim, 1978], vol. III, p. 361. See also Luisa Simonutti, *Circles of Virtuosi and “Charity under Different Opinion”: The Crucible of Locke’s Last Writings*, in *Studies on Locke: Sources, Contemporaries, and Legacy*, ed. S. Hutton and P. Schuurman, Dordrecht, Springer, 2008, pp. 159-175.

as well as the most recent English-Dutch political events. The case of Philippus van Limborch was similar. The letters of Molyneux, and above all those to Limborch on the unity of God, and the letter from Limborch to Locke, published in the French and Dutch editions in the early decades of the eighteenth century testify how intense was the dialogue between Locke and his correspondents, as well as the matters that they covered.

The friendship between Lady Masham and Locke occurred probably towards the end of 1681, after their first meeting. The intense epistolary exchange, which followed, and finally their very close intellectual relationship that materialized through the years at Oates, together with the neoplatonic and Cartesian component, set the coordinates that constrained the philosophic and pedagogic reflections of Lady Masham. Their letters offer the main source of details available for sketching both the relationship between the two personalities and the intellectual training of Damaris Cudworth. The legacy of the Masham family as well as the personal archives of Damaris have been scattered and dispersed, which prevents any reconstruction of the years of her youth and her intellectual formation through letters or documents. This legacy was very significant as it includes a portion of the inheritance left by Locke both to Damaris and to her son Francis and the objects and the documents that had belonged to her father Ralph Cudworth³.

The influence of Locke on the thought of Damaris was perceptible, but, none the less, his intellectual relationship with this young woman exposed to neoplatonic thought had a significant impact on the intellectual biography of the philosopher, along with the exchange of letters with her relatives and friends and along with the meetings he had later with the visitors at the salon at Oates. When Locke became the host at the Masham's home, the correspondence between the philosopher and the gentlewoman ceased and with it the record of their important comments on the philosophical, pedagogic and ethical matters instigated by their mutual readings and the letters of friends and correspondents. The significant influence of Locke's reflections on the works of Damaris Masham is still being analysed. The intriguing question of course, is to determine if there could have been an influence of Damaris on Locke, and we assume that the initial answer is positive. Clearly it is difficult to spot and isolate a specific influence by Lady Masham in the works of Locke, and yet it is undeniable that the passionate conversations started by the visitors at the "salon at Oates" had a significant influence on these personalities as well as on the English and the Continental culture of that time.

³ Most of the inheritance of Cudworth's widow was left to the daughter Damaris Cudworth Masham and to the Masham family of Oates where the widow of the philosopher lived until her death. Ralph Cudworth left to his son John Cudworth his whole library, except for a few volumes left to his wife. John Cudworth, when he died in 1727, left almost all his belongings to the nephew Francis Cudworth Masham that he loved, the son of his sister Damaris Masham. See the documents of the Cudworth family and the copy of the testament of Ralph Cudworth kept at the Christ College in Cambridge.

This paper explores the image that Damaris offered after the death of the philosopher about their intellectual relationship and discusses the representation of their intellectual alliance and Lady Masham as a personality as detailed by her son and by a few of their affectionate friends.

2. *After Locke: the Damaris letters*

There are not many letters from Damaris Masham available to us: those addressed to Philippus van Limborch and to Jean Le Clerc and kept at the Library of the University of Amsterdam and those addressed to the third Earl of Shaftesbury and kept at the Public Record Office of Kew are among the most significant. Damaris to Jean Le Clerc addressed the best-known letter on January 12th 1705.

In response to requests from the editor of the «Bibliothèque choisie»⁴, who wished to publish a faithful and detailed biography in the memory of the mutual friend, Damaris answered:

When you conjur'd me *by the memory of our dead Friend* to assist you what I could in transmitting to Posteritie his Character, you [were] not, I think sensible how great a part my Friendship for him when alive, makes me now take in any honour paid to his Memory: And your request to me [came] later than my desire that such a monument should be erected to him as is preferable *to ones of Marble*. It is easie for me (in such a manner as I am capable of expressing it) to represent an Idea so deeply impress'd in my Mind that Time can never obliterate it⁵.

A few paragraphs later, exalting their friend's moral and cultural qualities, Damaris confirmed: «If Mr. Locke's Company was exceedingly acceptable to all sorts of men, it was no less so to Ladies; nor was any man better received than he by those of the best Quality». The long letter offered plentiful biographic details and included long excerpts from Damaris admired recollection of Locke. Jean Le Clerc drew extensively from this document when he prepared the portrait of Locke, and in the final pages of the *Eloge*, he used large excerpts from Lady Masham's letter, freely translated into French.

Le Clerc had presented and defended her father's work, the *True Intellectual System of the Universe* from the adverse criticism of Pierre Bayle, and that resulted

⁴ *L'Eloge de feu Mr. Locke* appeared in «Bibliothèque choisie, pour servir de suite à la Bibliothèque universelle», 1705, 6, pp. 342-411.

⁵ University Library Amsterdam (ULA), MSS J. Le Clerc, Epistolary, Damaris Masham to Jean Le Clerc. Damaris Masham continues in her letter of January 12th 1705: «His great Penetration, the strength of his Judgment, and the wonderful Perspicacitie, and clearness which was in all his Notions: for when I am writing to one who is so great a Master himself, and consequently so much a better Judge of all these Tallents of a good writer as you are it would be doubly impertinent in me to say any more. I only beg that in reflecting upon this part of our Friends Character it may not be forgotten by you that he properly Possess'd all These, with many other rare Qualities without that any one of them ever appear'd (if I may so say) to Possess him. He was a profound Philosopher». See also M.G. Sina - M. Sina (ed. by), J. Le Clerc, *Epistolario*, Firenze, Leo Olschki, 1987-1997, 4 vols., II, pp. 497-498.

in Damaris' grateful friendship⁶. Nonetheless, after reading Locke's *Eloge* printed in volume VI of the «Bibliothèque choisie» delivered to her by Le Clerc, she rebuked the author for reading too much into a few of her paragraphs and smearing the image of Locke that she had offered.

I have read over the Article concerning Mr. Locke with Pleasure, and find my self mention'd therein very much beyond my merits. The last Reason you give for publishing this *Eloge* in your Introduction to it, was not the least for which I wish'd you might do so: and a proper example could never surely be found to stop the mouth of such Persons as you speak of, who imagine that *Piété n'est pas compatible avec La finesse du raisonnement et l'étude de la Philosophie*. In that Part, wherein you have been pleased to cite my words there are two Places in which you have not rightly taken my meaning: the one whereof it is possible that want of Clearness in my expression might be the cause of, rather than want of sufficient knowledge in you of the English Tongue. Wherever I have heard what You have writ on the subject of Mr. Lock's spoken of, I find that it gives (as your writings use to do) a great deal of Entertainment, and Satisfaction⁷.

Damaris was right. Minor misunderstandings and distortions in the French translation of her letter stand out when the quotations available in the English translation of the bibliography published in London in 1706 with the title: *The life and character of John Locke*, is compared with the original letter in English dated January 12th 1705 from Damaris Masham to Le Clerc. In the introductory lines of the biography of the philosopher, Le Clerc had publicly recognized his debt to the lady:

Cette illustre Dame, digne fille d'un des plus grands hommes d'Angleterre (je veux dire de Mr. Cudworth) a eu le temps de connoître Mr. Locke a' fond, pendant qu'il a été chez elle; et comme elle est parfaitement capable de juger des gens, les lumières que j'ai reçues d'elle me servirent beaucoup à faire le portrait de ce grand homme⁸.

Besides, Le Clerc had dedicated the last words of the *Eloge* to remember the esteem that Locke had for her:

I shall only adde, That several Books have been father'd on him, of which he was not the Author, and that he has left a Note of those that are his, but bear not his Name, of which we have already spoken. For instance, they made him the Author of a little *English Treatise of the Love of God*, which was written by a very worthy Person, and for whom he [Locke] had a very great Esteem⁹.

⁶ Damaris Masham to Jean Le Clerc, (ULA), MSS J. Le Clerc, *Epistolary*, Damaris Masham to J. Le Clerc, June 18th 1703 together with a letter from his son Francis; Damaris Masham to J. Le Clerc, May 1704. See J. Le Clerc, *Epistolario*, cit., II, pp. 389-390.

⁷ Damaris Masham to Jean Le Clerc, (ULA), Letter of June 21th 1705. See J. Le Clerc, *Epistolario*, cit., II, pp. 558-559.

⁸ *Eloge de feu Mr. Locke* in «Bibliothèque choisie», cit., p. 344.

⁹ J. Le Clerc, *The life and character of John Locke*, trans. T.F.P., Gent (London), 1706, p. 31.

Esteem and admiration that Locke expressed repeatedly, for instance in the letter dated March 13th 1691, addressed to Philippus van Limborch¹⁰. Damaris Masham had a short but warm correspondence with Limborch in the first years of the eighteenth century¹¹. The first letter from Limborch to her highlights his gratitude for the hospitality and the friendship shown the Masham family to Limborch's son, Frans. Lady Masham's reply contains a detailed affectionate appreciation and admiration for the young Dutch host. The following letters highlight the esteem and the friendship that had been really strengthening through the epistolary exchange. Then Limborch finds the words to demonstrate his condolence for the loss of their common and affectionate friend, Locke. At that point Lady Masham asks him about the theological and social character of the Dutch Arminianism, for information, still unknown to her, of Locke's life during the years spent in Netherlands, including his reading whom he met and about his mysterious journey to Cleve in 1685. Actually Limborch never failed to express, at the end of his letters addressed to Locke, his devotion and esteem for both Lady Masham and Locke.

3. *The intellectual legacy of Damaris. The letters of Totty and Limborch*

Philippus van Limborch testifies his admiration for the culture and the generosity of the friend that had just disappeared, with heart sore words in a letter dated 1708 addressed to Francis, the son of Damaris, for whom she used the affectionate sobriquet Totty, as did Locke who was very fond of him, and their most intimate friends¹². On September 30th in same year, Francis Cudworth Masham, answered with a heavy heart:

Je n'aurois pas tant tardé a vous rendre mes très humbles remerciemens de la letter que j'ai eu l'honneur il y a quelque temps de recevoir de vôtre part, n'étoit que je sçavois comment me resoudre à ecrire sur un sujet qui me cause une affliction si sensible, et don't le souvenir ne s'effacera jamais de mon Esprit. Il m'est impossible Monsieur de vous exprimer la perte que viens de faire, car j'ai perdu non seulement une Mere qui m'aimoit avec la derniere tendresse, mais aussi qui étoit très capable de me donner toujours des avis qui m'auroient été d'un très grand avantage tout le Cours de ma vie. Lorsque je fais Reflection que cette Mere qui m'étoit si chère, n'est plus, je ne sçai Presque où j'en suis tant je suis touché de sa perte; Mais pourtant je sens bien que c'étoit mon devoir de moderer ma Douleur, et de me consoler de cette pensée, qu'elle ne sent plus ces douleurs qu'elle souffroit pour quelques Mois avant sa mort, et qu'elle est presentement delivrée d'une Maladie don't je n'avois que de très foibles esperances qu'elle pouvoit jamais se remettre. Le meilleur moien donc qui me reste de temoigner mon affection et ma Reconoissance, c'est de metre en pratique les excellens avis de ma très chere Mere, et de tacher toujours d'imiter son Exemple ansi bien que celuy de mon

¹⁰ Locke to Limborch, 13 March 1691, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, Edmond S. De Beer (edited by), 8 vols., Oxford, Oxford UP, 1976-89, IV, letter n. 1375, pp. 237-238.

¹¹ The letters available are dated from 1701 to 1706.

¹² Limborch to Francis Cudworth Masham, 1708 (UBA, Mss: III D 16: 128).

Grand Père afin que je ne fasse jamais rien qui puisse deshonnorer la memoire de ces personnes qui me sont si cheres¹³.

As this letter testifies, Damaris gave her very dear Totty an excellent education and valuable advice good for the whole life, which is an undeniable testimony of the key role and the intellectual autonomy that she expressed in her writing on the education of youth.

4. *Discourse concerning the Love of God*

In 1696 Damaris Masham published the *Discourse concerning the Love of God* which had a wide circulation on the continent thanks both to the French translation that Pierre Coste printed in Amsterdam in 1705 and to the review printed by Jean Le Clerc in the same year in the «Bibliothèque choisie»¹⁴. This work does not fit within the typical continental seventeenth century spiritual trend, focused on Augustine's view on the love of God as a form of self disregard, a state of being mystically abandoned to the love of God. Nor does it fit with a negative view about men becoming the breeding ground for all vices, who could be saved only by the irresistible grace of God, linked both to the Jansenist religiosity and to the most rigid protestant theology concerning predestination. Actually it emerged from a flow of discussions with John Norris, who had mistaken the author for Locke, notwithstanding the different tone and themes. In other words this was not the usual devotional piece, so common at that time, which tried to portray the love of God as a form of fanaticism, or perhaps as a sophisticated metaphysics.

Jean le Clerc highlighted, in a comment to the first French translation, that this was an answer to those who disregarded any form of love for God's creatures, and focused their attention only to God, as only God causes our feelings. Those «Sensible objects» wrote Norris «are not the efficient but occasional Causes of our pleasing Sensations»¹⁵, and the creatures are not the efficient cause of any pleasure or distress, as everything comes from God, who can be the only focus of our love. No foundation in reason or the holy books can be found for this philosophical view and interpretation of the Gospels, according to Damaris Masham who saw any distinction between love of benevolence or love of desire as groundless, as this is just

a Name given to that Disposition, or Act of the Mind, we find in our selves towards any thing we are pleas'd with; [...] and cannot be distinguish'd into different Acts of

¹³ F. Cudworth Masham to Limborch, 30 September 1708 (UBA, Mss: M 32c).

¹⁴ J. Le Clerc, «Bibliothèque choisie», 1705, 7, art. X.

¹⁵ The phrase of John Norris is quoted in D. Masham, *Discourse concerning the Love of God*, London, A. and J. Churchill, 1696, p. 17. See also J. Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, 1st ed.: ch. 5 «Damaris Masham», pp. 114-140; J. Broad - K. Green, *A History of Women's Political Thought in Europe, 1400-1700*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009.

wishing well, and desiring; which are other different Acts of the Mind, consequential to Love, according to the difference of the Object¹⁶.

She points out that the philosophical conjectures of Malebranche and Norris, do a disservice to our aspiration towards the divine by despising us, his own creatures, and by claiming emphatically that it is God who is the cause of everything within ourselves, and that all we can see is in God. The lack of consistency and the vicious circularity of the theories of these two authors is enhanced when they try to prove that the creatures are not the efficient cause of their perception, on the assumption, still to be proven, that we can see everything in God.

En effet – writes Le Clerc in his comments – si nos yeux ne servent de rien pour voir, ni nos oreilles pour ouïr, et que leurs organes soient en eux mêmes aussi peu propres à nous faire voir et ouïr, que si nous n’en avions point, parce que Dieu fait tout immédiatement; sa Sagesse dans la formation de ces organes, s’en va en fumée et tout ce qu’on dit de l’ordre et de la beauté de l’Univers ne sont que de vaines declamations¹⁷.

Both Masham and Le Clerc, stress with a note of irony that all the humans were wrong until these two thinkers, Malebranche and Norris were able to shed light, in the seventeenth century!

According to Masham, clearly «we cannot Love God *with our Souls and with our Minds*, that is, with the Application of our Understanding and with a reasonable Love, without loving him above all his Creatures; Because he is infinitely more lovely; And every ones reason, when he consults it, must always assent that he is so»¹⁸, and yet even this duty, this act of obedience prescribed by religion «is plainly what reason requires» and can find consent in all the powers and faculties of human mind.

Reason therefore has a strong influence on the will, and is the requirement for virtuous behaviour. Free will, freedom to act are the pillars of moral practice and this has as its goal the happiness of human beings. Education contributes to the proper use of reason, enabling us to follow the principles of morality in all stages of life. In comments about the two thinkers, Malebranche and Norris, detailed in the writings of lady Masham, her account of the construction of knowledge, the nature of ideas and perceptions, her acceptance of the role of reason in shaping human will, the obedience that we owe to God, all show a strong Lockean influence¹⁹.

¹⁶ D. Masham, *Discourse concerning the Love of God*, cit., pp. 18-19.

¹⁷ J. Le Clerc, «Bibliothèque choisie», 1705, 7, art. X, p. 387.

¹⁸ D. Masham, *Discourse concerning the Love of God*, cit., p. 44.

¹⁹ It will need to wait until the end of the Eighteenth century to emerge in women’s thinking awareness of “a politics of virtue” as defined by Suellen Diaconoff, and to answer «to the contradictions of a society that cast them simultaneously as *assujéties* and *souveraines* (ruled or ruler). In fact, the challenge for intellectual women in the eighteenth century was to find a means of accommodating both the abstract Cartesian split between mind and body (“the mind has no sex”) together with the real fact of their exclusion from universalist discourse, and the Enlightenment ideal of equality. Their challenge was to rearticulate for their purposes the Cartesian

According to Damaris Masham, God created man as a rational creature, and we ought to live according to the laws of reason, that we cannot violate without disrupting the order that he created and without offending the Creator God. Man has a social destiny and we cannot offend the divine wisdom assuming that religion precludes this approach and expects the breakdown of society. The claim of Malebranche and Norris concerning the love of God, the immediate cause of all our sensations, could disrupt any link, any obligation to social life²⁰. This issue was not covered in the *Discourse concerning the Love of God*, but it would be discussed in the second work of lady Masham, focused on the Christian life of the young²¹.

5. *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Vertuous or Christian Life*

Besides the *Discourse concerning the Love of God* (London 1696), Damaris Masham wrote the *Occasional Thoughts in Reference to a Vertuous or Christian Life*, which she published anonymously, in 1705. In the *Occasional Thoughts* Lady Masham analysed the role of the education of young people in their future moral and happy existence. The book was written a few years earlier and she decided to get them printed in 1705, only after Locke's death, motivated by the pleasant and stimulating conversations at Oates. At the opening the volume Damaris wrote:

There is no so constant and satisfactory a Pleasure, to those who are capable of it, as Rational Conversation gives: And to me, deprived of that Enjoyment, the remembrance thereof, is, in my present Solitude, the most delightful Entertainment. Wherein some of my leisure hours will not, I hope, be misspent, should this engage me to prosecute such Thoughts as were lately suggested to me by others²².

Damaris was aware that the acquisitions of knowledge and intellectual progress are the foundation and guarantee of virtuous and devoted behaviour, both

dualism that split mind *and* body, intellect *and* emotion, the mental and material, while promoting a view of woman as both mind *and* body, both intellect *and* sexuality. Cartesianism notwithstanding, popular perception had tended to ascribe to females only one-half of the equation – body, emotion, material – while rational, universalist discourse had simultaneously absorbed and excluded them, acknowledging women as potentially intellectual equals, but physical creatures of difference, diametrically opposed to men» (S. Diaconoff, *Through the reading glass. Women, books, and sex in the French Enlightenment*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2005: *Introduction*, pp. 5-6).

²⁰ D. Masham, *Discours sur l'amour divin, où l'on explique ce que c'est, et où l'on fait voir les mauvaises conséquences des explications trop subtiles que l'on en donne. Traduit de l'Anglois*, Amsterdam, H. Schelte, 1705, pp. 261-262. See also R. Penaluna, *The social and political thought of Damaris Cudworth Masham*, in J. Broad - K. Green (ed. by), *Virtue, Liberty, and Toleration*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2007, pp. 111-122.

²¹ Cfr. in general on this topic: O. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe, 1500-1800*, London, Alfred A. Knopf, 1995. On the role of reason in knowledge of the existence and nature of God and in ethics moral, see M.P. Lascano, *Damaris Masham and "The Law of Reason or Nature"*, in «The Modern Schoolman», 2011, 88, 3/4, pp. 245-265.

²² D. Masham, *Occasional Thoughts In reference to a Vertuous or Christian Life*, London, A. and J. Churchill, 1705, pp. 1-2.

in private and public life. Her philosophical and pedagogical educational model was geared specifically towards a female audience, towards mothers who bear most of the responsibility for the care of the children, for the education of youth, which represented a key ethical role within the society.

The improvements of Reason, however requisite to Ladies for their Accomplishment, as rational Creatures; and however needful to them for the well Educating of their Children, and to their being useful in their Families, yet are rarely any recommendation of them to Men; who foolishly thinking, that Money will answer to all things, do for the most part, regard nothing else in the Woman they would Marry²³.

Lady Masham supports the intellectual education of women against the prejudices of fathers and husbands²⁴. Otherwise, silly fathers and ignorant mothers will keep on educating their daughters to follow the traditional opinions rather than to use reason²⁵. The *Occasional Thoughts* provided a critical answer, probably unsystematic, to the ethical and practical handbook by François Hédelin²⁶ and in general, to the handbooks of good behaviour for women widely promoted at that time²⁷. The *Occasional Thoughts* were an expression of the philosophical maturity of Lady Masham, the result of her syncretic reflection, of her interpretation

²³ D. Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, cit., pp. 161-162. Diaconoff points out: «To gain entry into discourse, female intellectuals needed to use current language of culture, but at the same time they also sought to establish a new and efficacious ideal for women. Hence, they, too, would dismiss the old corrupt model of the aristocratic society woman (an object of scorn for men and women alike), while proposing a more accessible and democratic ideal, that of virtue. Social standing would not depend on money or title or background, but rather on the belief in values of goodness, fortitude, and commitment (rather than selfishness, privilege, and inconstancy). The path to this new ideal would be charted through a new consciousness and a revised notion of the female self that did not depend on men or on religious practice – through neither was disqualified – but rather on education and particularly a self-education that began with reading» (S. Diaconoff, *Through the Reading Glass*, cit., pp. 6-7).

²⁴ Cf. D. Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, cit., 197.

²⁵ Ivi, p. 162.

²⁶ F. Hédelin, *Les Conseils d'Ariste à Célimène, sur les moyens de conserver sa Réputation. Pièce très Curieuse*, published in Paris on 1677 and printed again in The Hague, A. Arondeus, 1687.

²⁷ See: P. Crawford, *Women and Religion in England, 1500-1720*, London and New York, Routledge, 1993, and N.H. Kleeble, *The Cultural Identity of the Seventeenth-Century Woman. A Reader*, London and New York, Routledge, 1994. Angus Martin in his study of the «Journal des dames» effectively summarizes the topics of literary genres that were dedicated to women in the second half of the Eighteenth century: «The male and female novelist reviewed by the *Journal des dames* cover an eclectic range of types of fiction. There are substantial articles on classical and biblical epics in prose, on fairy tales and allegories, on philosophical tales and dreams, on narratives set in the newly fashionable Middle Ages or recounting amorous adventures in the Orient. The majority of works, however, are concerned with the traditional preoccupations of the genre: love, marriage, family; many, as we have seen, are constructed around a central heroine or indeed a heroine-narrator. At the same time reviewers place considerable stress on moral judgments, on the maintenance of traditional values, and on the suitability of subject matter for female readers». A. Martin, *Fiction and Female Reading Public in Eighteenth-Century France: "The Journal des dames (1759-1778)"*, in «Eighteenth-Century Fiction», vol. 3, Iss. 3 art. 3, <http://digitalcommons.mcmaster.ca/ecf/vol3/iss3/3>, pp. 1-18, p. 11.

of neo platonism of philosophy in general, and of Locke's epistemology and pedagogy²⁸. In her work she utilizes both the epistemological system presented in the *Essay* and Locke's pedagogical concepts to draw her own concept of knowledge and her ideas about religion.

To see what light we receive from Nature to direct our Actions, and how far we are Naturally able to obey that Light; Man must be considered purely as in the state of Nature, viz. as having no extrinsic Law to direct them, but induced only with a faculty of comparing their distant Ideas by intermediate Ones, and Thence of deducing, or inferring one thing from another; whereby our Knowledge immediately received from *Sense*, or *Reflection*, is enlarged to a view of Truths remote, or future, in an Application of which Faculty of the Mind to a consideration of our own Existence and Nature, together with the beauty and order of the Universe, so far as it falls under our view, we may come to the knowledge of a *First Cause*; and that this must be an *Intelligent Being*, *Wise* and *Powerful*, beyond what we are able to conceive²⁹.

The reference to Locke's works on education and religion contained in this work³⁰, (ideas expressed in the *Discourse Concerning the Love of God*) prompted Leibniz's comment: «M. Coste me fait assez connoistre que Mylady Masham en est l'auteur elle même: ses sentiments sont assez conformes à ceux de M. Locke»³¹. The intellectual affinities and the explicit reference to Locke's work caused the attribution of these two works to him. Even more explicitly, the new edition of 1747 of the *Occasional Thoughts*, was published with a new title with Locke's name on the title page³².

While corresponding with Locke, through all those years, Damaris Masham, never hesitated to distance her reflections from certain principles of knowledge and from Locke's moral, and she had offered a disenchanting analysis of the *Abregé* of the *Essay*, printed in 1688, in the «Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique». Rather than just offering an opportunity to make a non-controversial syncretic match between the Neoplatonism and Locke's philosophy, the thought of Lady Masham and her work bring a critical perspective characterized by a lively intellectual confrontation and a statement of an autonomous and rationalistic philosophy and ethics.

²⁸ For a content analysis see L. Simonutti, *Dalla poesia metafisica alla filosofia lockiana: Damaris Cudworth, Lady Masham*, cit.; S. Hutton, *Debating the Faith: Damaris Masham (1658–1708) and Religious Controversy* in A. Dunan-Page - C. Prunier (edited by), *Debating the Faith: Religion and Letter Writing in Great Britain, 1550-1800*, Dordrecht, Springer, 2013, pp. 159-174; Ead., *Religion and Sociability in the Correspondence of Damaris Masham (1658-1708)*, in Sarah Apetrei - Hannah Smith (ed. by), *Religion and Women in Britain, c. 1660-c.1760*, London, Ashgate, 2014, ch. 7.

²⁹ D. Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, cit., pp. 60-61.

³⁰ See for example D. Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, cit., p. 109, p. 185, p. 196.

³¹ Leibniz to Th. Burnet, 22 February 1707, in G.W. Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, Berlin, 1887, [Reprint 1978, cit.], vol. III, 313.

³² J. Locke, *Thoughts on Christian Life*, London, T. Waller, 1747. The foreword and the text were modified, after that point.

6. *The letters of Coste and Shaftesbury*

Locke's translator and friend, Pierre Coste, planned to offer an intellectual portrait of Damaris Cudworth Masham in the French presentation of her *Discourse*, but he realized that his portrait could hardly get close to the original.

Le talent de bien penser et de bien écrire, cette justesse, cette pénétration d'Esprit qui vous fait entrer dans les Questions les plus subtiles de la Philosophie et de la Théologie, dont Vous voyez bientôt le fort et le faible, sont les moindres de vos Qualitez. Que ne puis-je peindre ici tant de rares Vertus que j'admire depuis long temps, cette douceur, cette générosité, cet Esprit d'équité qui vous fait estimer le Mérite par tout où vous pouvez le découvrir, cette application constante à chercher les occasions de rendre service, et toujours de la manière la plus obligeante, cet empressement sincere pour vos Amis ; ou pour tout dire en un mot, que ne puis-je faire voir comment Vous avez hérité des grandes qualitez du célèbre Monsieur CUDWORTH, vôtre Pere ? Mais je n'ai garde de m'engager dans une entreprise si délicate. Je suis persuadé, qu'après tous mes efforts, ceux qui Vous connoissent, trouveroient la Copie fort au dessous de l'original : et peutêtre même que ceux qui ne Vous ont jamais vûë prendroient l'ébauche que j'aurois fait, pour un Portrait fait à plaisir, qui ne subsista jamais que dans mon Imagination³³.

The role played by Coste at Oates as a translator of the works of Locke and Damaris and as tutor of the only son of Lady Masham and Sir Francis Masham is well known. He became their friend and a faithful associate even though the intellectual link with Locke was tense and rough occasionally as detailed by the biographer of Coste, De La Motte. But the death of Locke and the maturity of his pupil radically changed the life of Pierre Coste. «Francis Masham est à Londres; J'y suis aussi, mais je ne suis plus auprès de lui. Il est présentement son propre Directeur»³⁴. Actually in a late reply dated January 1705 to the third Earl of Shaftesbury, who had been repeatedly asking for a letter from him, Coste described his sorrow for leaving the pleasant safe harbour at Oates:

Je dois répondre à plusieurs de vos lettres, et si la mort de Mr. Locke et le désordre ou m'a jetté la nécessité ou je me trouvais peu de jours après de quitter Oates, et de vivre à Londres, qui est pour moi une solitude affreuse, ne m'excusoient en quelque manière, je serais tout à fait indigne de la peine que vous avez pris de me donner si souvent de vos nouvelles³⁵.

Yielding to Shaftesbury's request for a detailed account of the death of Locke, Coste described melancholically: «l'effet que la mort de Mr Locke a produit à Oates, vous le sçavez mieux que personne, vous qui avez été long-temps témoin de l'amitié qui étoit entre lui et Madame Masham»³⁶. The interest shared by the Earl both for the human and the intellectual character of Locke is clearly detailed

³³ D. Masham, *Discours sur l'amour divin*, cit., Epître à Madame Masham.

³⁴ Coste to Shaftesbury, 23 January 1705 (Kew, The National Archives, Public Record Office Ms. 30.24.27.18).

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

in the correspondence exchanged by the Earl with Coste and with Pierre Des Maizeaux. Actually both Coste and Des Maizeaux kept Shaftesbury up to date about the biographies dedicated to Locke: the *Eloge* written by Le Clerc, who was defective and unreliable on a number of parts according to Coste, and the *Eloge* that Coste had published, also in 1705, on the «Nouvelles de la République des Lettres».

Often Lady Masham suffered from a melancholic mood which caused the interruption of her correspondence³⁷. She attributed this to a Welsh ancestor who embraced stoicism, to her separation from Charles, her beloved brother, appointed to manage the Company of East India, or to the sudden disappearance of her friends. However her own philosophical reflections were unequivocally characterized by the conviction that: «The Love of my Friends Therefore and the Best Kinds of Useful Knowledge so far as I am Capable of it, will still Possess my Heart as much as ever They did»³⁸. The authoress assumed that the “useful knowledge” has a theoretical, practical and pedagogic content that bring an intellectual and spiritual agreement necessary for the training of each person³⁹. The solidity of her cultural background, the depth of her poetic and philosophical interests, the role played by her intellectual relationship with Locke were the basis for Lady Masham’s growth from the condition of ‘absolute ignorance’ and isolation where she was tied originally by her marriage and the family commitments⁴⁰. She absorbed the neoplatonic sources and the works of John Smith, she approached maturity through her correspondence with Locke and which became the theoretical foundation for her “philosophical salon” at Oates.

³⁷ In Spring 1683 she attributed her temporary silence to “a Pure Crossness”, *The Correspondence of John Locke*, cit., II, p. 585.

³⁸ *The Correspondence of John Locke*, cit., II, p. 727. Letter from Lady Masham to Locke, August 14th 1685.

³⁹ He brought up the “usefull Knowledge” several in the letters and in his works, see: *The Correspondence of John Locke*, cit., III, p. 431 and D. Masham, *Occasional Thoughts*, cit., pp. 6-7.

⁴⁰ A few months after her marriage with sir Francis Masham, dated probably 22 June 1685, Damaris criticized her new condition: «And yet I cannot but Acknowledge that as to some Things Matrimonie and Familie Cares have Alter’d me very much. Though I was Always Dull, I find that I am now a Thousand times more so than formerly; And the little Knowledge that I once had, is now exchang’d for Absolute Ignorance; I am taken off of All that I once did Know, and Understand; and Have nothing at All in lieu of it; Tis in Vain that you bid me Preserve my Poetry; Household Affaires are the Opium of the Soul and it is impossible for me to make use of that Preservative unless I can Recover first from this Lethargie that I am now in». *The Correspondence of John Locke*, cit., II, pp. 757-758. Letter from Lady Masham to Locke, November 14th 1685.



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– **Lady Damaris Masham, liberty, reason and the love of God**

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ABSTRACT

Damaris Cudworth Masham was convinced that the “useful knowledge” has a theoretical, practical and pedagogic content. Man has a social destiny and we cannot offend the divine wisdom assuming that religion precludes this approach and expects the breakdown of society. Reason therefore has a prominent character on the will and free will is the pillar of moral practice. This thought reveals an affinity with the Lockean concept of “person” and “identity” and the central role of individual liberty for love of God and for an ordered and social life. Thanks also to her intellectual relationship with Locke, her “philosophical salon” at Oates become the meeting point for overseas and English scholars, such as Jean Le Clerc, Pierre Des Maizeaux, Pierre Coste, the III Earl of Shaftesbury. Through original sources the paper focus the intellectual legacy of Damaris Masham.

KEYWORDS

D. Masham; J. Locke; Virtuous behavior; Useful knowledge; Philosophical salon

SOMMARIO

Lady Damaris Masham, la libertà, la ragione, l'amore di Dio. Damaris Cudworth Masham era persuasa che la “conoscenza utile” avesse un contenuto teorico, pratico e pedagogico. L'uomo ha un destino sociale e non possiamo offendere la saggezza divina pensando che la religione permetta la rottura della società. La ragione ha quindi un carattere preminente sulla volontà e il libero arbitrio è il pilastro della pratica morale. Vi è qui un'affinità con il concetto lockiano di “persona” e di “identità” e del ruolo centrale della libertà individuale per l'amore di Dio e per una ordinata vita sociale. Anche grazie alla relazione intellettuale con Locke, il “salotto filosofico” ad Oates divenne un punto d'incontro per studiosi stranieri – Jean Le Clerc, Pierre Des Maizeaux e Pierre Coste – e inglesi, come il III Conte di Shaftesbury. L'articolo mette a fuoco l'eredità intellettuale di Damaris Masham attraverso il ricorso a fonti originali.

PAROLE CHIAVE

D. Masham; J. Locke; Comportamento virtuoso; Conoscenza utile; Salotto filosofico

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