SIGNIOR DILDO

([December] 1673)

Anne, Duchess of York died on March 31, 1671. On November 21, 1673, the Duke's second bride, Marie Beatrice d'Este, Princess of Modena, arrived in England with her mother, the Duchess Regent of Modena, and an entourage of Italian priests, ladies, and gentlemen. The new Duchess's arrival was the occasion for "Signior Dildo." On January 26, 1674, Walter Overbury wrote to Sir Joseph Williamson at Cologne, "Sir Nicholas Armourer] sent your excellency a song of a certain senior that came in with the Dutchesse of Modena . . . it reaches and touches most of the ladys from Westminster to Wapping" (Williamson Letters, II, 132).

The artificial priapus, here aggrandized as "Signior Dildo," was not a novelty in England, but after the appearance of this popular ballad, it was often referred to only as the "signior." For example, in the epilogue to The Mistaken Husband, September, 1675, an actress says,

To act with raw boys is loving without men.
What will not poor forsaken women try?
When man's not near, the Signior must supply.

Again, in "The Ladies' Complaint to Venus" [1691] (Lansdowne MS. 852, f.43) Venus complains,

I am told with a vast long signior
Some matrons do ease
Their lust and do please,
Though they have not been lain with these ten years.

"Signior Dildo" was first printed in Poems on Affairs of State, 1703. Attributing it to Rochester, David M. Vieth included the satire in his The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester (Yale, 1968). The ballad acquired many additional stanzas by later hands;
You ladies all of merry England
Who have been to kiss the Duchess's hand,
Pray, did you lately observe in the show
A noble Italian called Signior Dildo?

The Signior was one of her Highness's train
And helped to conduct her over the main,
But now she cries out, "To the Duke I will go;
I have no more need for Signior Dildo."

At the sign of the Cross in St. James's Street,
When next you go thither to make yourselves sweet
By buying of powder, gloves, essence or so,
You may chance get a sight of Signior Dildo.

You'll take him at first for no person of note,
Because he appears in a plain leather coat,
But when you his virtuous abilities know,
You'll fall down and worship Signior Dildo.

My Lady Southeske, Heaven prosper her for't,
First clothed him in satin, then sent him to Court.
But his head in the circle he scarcely durst show,
So modest a youth was Signior Dildo.

The good Lady Suffolk, thinking no harm,
Had got this poor stranger hid under her arm;
Lady Betty by chance came the secret to know,  
And from her own mother stole Signior Dildo.

The Countess of Falmouth, of whom people tell  
Her footmen wear shirts of a guinea an ell,  
Might save the expense if she did but know  
How lusty a swinger is Signior Dildo.

By the help of this gallant, the Countess of Rafe  
Against the fierce Harry's preserved herself safe;  
She stifled him almost beneath her pillow,  
So closely she embraced Signior Dildo.

That pattern of virtue, her Grace of Cleveland,  
Has swallowed more pricks than the nation has land;  
But by rubbing and scrubbing so large it does grow  
It is fit for just nothing but Signior Dildo.

Our dainty fine duchesses have got a trick  
To dote on a fool for the sake of his prick;  
The fops were undone did their graces but know  
The discretion and vigor of Signior Dildo.

The Duchess of Modena, though she looks high,  
With such a gallant is contented to lie,  
And for fear the English her secrets should know,  
For a gentleman usher took Signior Dildo.

The countess o'th' Cockpit (who knows not her name?  
She's famous in story for a killing dame),  
When all her old lovers forsake her, I trow,  
She'll then be contented with Signior Dildo.

Red Howard, Red Sheldon, and Temple so tall  
Complain of his absence so long from Whitehall.  
Signior Bernard has promised a journey to go  
And bring back his countryman, Signior Dildo.
Doll Howard no longer with his Highness must range,  
And therefore is proffered this civil exchange:  
Her teeth being rotten, she smells best below,  
And needs must be fitted for Signior Dildo.  

St. Albans with wrinkles and smiles in his face,  
Whose kindness to strangers becomes his high place,  
In his coach and six horses is gone to Bergo  
To take the fresh air with Signior Dildo.  

Were this Signior but known to the citizen fops,  
He'd keep their fine wives from the foremen of shops;  
But the rascals deserve their horns should still grow  
For burning the Pope and his nephew Dildo.  

Tom Killigrew's wife, North Holland's fine flower,  
At the sight of this Signior did fart and belch sour,  
And then her Dutch breeding farther to show,  
Says, "Welcome to England, Mynheer Van Dildo."

He civilly came to the Cockpit one night  
And proffered his service to fair Madam Knight.  
Quoth she, "I intrigue with Captain Cazzo.  
Your nose in mine arse, good Signior Dildo."

This Signior is sound, safe, ready, and dumb  
As ever was candle, carrot, or thumb;  
Then away with these nasty devices and show  
How you rate the just merits of Signior Dildo.  

Count Cazzo, who carries his nose very high,  
In passion he swore his rival should die,  
Then shut up himself to let the world know  
Flesh and blood could not bear it from Signior Dildo.  

A rabble of pricks, who were welcome before,  
Now finding the porter denied 'em the door,
Mischievously waited his coming below,
And inhumanly fell upon Signior Dildo.

Nigh wearied out, the poor stranger did fly,
And along the Pall Mall they followed full cry.
The women, concerned, from every window,
Cried, "Oh, for Heaven's sake, save Signior Dildo!"

The good Lady Sands burst into laughter
To see how the ballocks came wobbling after,
And had not their weight retarded the foe,
Indeed 't had gone hard with Signior Dildo.

17. Southeske. Anne (Hamilton), wife of Robert Carnegie, third Earl of Southeske, was successively mistress to Philip, Earl of Chesterfield, and to James, Duke of York. For her relations with York, see Grammont, I, 166-70.

21. Lady Suffolk. Barbara (1622-81), a daughter of Sir Edward Villiers and second wife of James Howard, third Earl of Suffolk, was Groom of the Stole to Queen Catherine.

23. Lady Betty. Lady Elizabeth Howard was the second daughter of Lord and Lady Suffolk. Against her parents' wishes she married Thomas Felton, a Groom of the Bedchamber, in July, 1675. For her character, see below "Ballad on Betty Felton."

25. Falmouth. Mary (Bagot), once Maid of Honor to the Queen, was the widow of Charles Berkeley, Earl of Falmouth, slain in a sea battle with the Dutch, June 3, 1665. Lady Falmouth had a very bad reputation, but in 1674 she married Charles, Lord Buckhurst (later Earl of Dorset). She died in September, 1679.

28. swinger. A very powerful person.

29. Rafe. Elizabeth (1647-90), widow of Josceline Percy, eleventh Earl of Northumberland (died May, 1670), married on August 24, 1673, Ralph ("Rafe") Montague.

30. Harry's. Perhaps "Harry's" membrum virile. Vieth suggests that the allusion may be to Rochester's friend, Harry Savile. At a house party at Althrop in September, 1671, Savile stole to Lady Northumberland's bedside in the dead of night and wakened her with his passionate declaration. Terrified, she rang her bell and Savile fled. See "Questions and Answers from Garroway's Coffee-House" (POAS, 1716, III, 67).

Q. How came Montague to gain the widow from Savile?
A. The one was witty in going to bed; the other wiser in cutting the bell-ropes.

33. Cleveland. Barbara (Villiers), now Duchess of Cleveland; see Appendix.

34. land. Variant: "than the ocean has sand," Dyce MS. 43, 1, 120.

37. duchesses. Probably the poet had in mind three Court ladies: the Duchess of Cleveland; Louise Keroualle, now Duchess of Portsmouth, who had displaced Cleveland as chief royal mistress; and Frances, widowed Duchess of Richmond.
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41. *Modena*. Laura d'Este, Duchess of Modena, who had accompanied her daughter to England, left for Italy early in January, 1674.

45. *Cockpit*. "The countess" was probably Anna Maria, widow of Francis Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury (see Appendix). She was indeed a "killing" dame in the sense that at least three men—Giles Rawlins, William Jenkins, and her husband—had died in quarrels about her. When the Duke of Albemarle died, January 3, 1670, Anna-Maria's lover, George, Duke of Buckingham, with whom she had been living openly for two years, moved into Albemarle's apartments in the Cockpit, an appendage to Whitehall Palace.

49. *Red Howard*. Anne (c. 1656–1703), younger daughter of William Howard, fourth son of Thomas, Earl of Berkshire. Anne became a Maid of Honor to the Queen in November, 1673. In the seventeenth century red hair was considered a blemish. *Red Sheldon*. Frances Sheldon, daughter of Sir Edward Sheldon, was a Maid of Honor to the Queen. *Temple*. Philippa Temple was a Maid of Honor to the Queen; see Appendix, Temple.

51. *Bernard*. Sir Bernard Gascoigne, English by ancestry but a Florentine by birth, had served in the armies of King Charles I. He was an adventurer and a skilled diplomat, recently English Resident at Vienna.

53. *Doll Howard*. Dorothy (c. 1652–1701), elder daughter of William Howard, fourth son of Thomas, Earl of Berkshire, was successively a Maid of Honor to the Duchess of York (Anne Hyde) and to Queen Catherine. In December, 1675, she married Col. James Graham. According to John Evelyn (July 11, 1675) Dorothy was "a most virtuous and excellent creature."

57. *St. Albans*. Henry Jermyn (c. 1604–84), formerly chamberlain to Queen Henrietta Maria (and her reputed lover), was now Lord Chamberlain of the Royal Household. He had been created Earl of St. Albans on April 26, 1660.

59. *Bergo*. Variants: Bargo, Borgo, and Pergo. Vieth glossed Borgo as a town in northern Italy. But surely St. Albans would not take a coach and horses to Italy, nor would he travel so far just for fresh air. Probably his destination was Bergholt, East Suffolk, sixty-one miles from London. St. Albans' country mansion, Rushbrooke Hall, was in Suffolk.

64. *burning*. Papier-maché images of the Pope were regularly burned on November 5, the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot. For the burning of the dildoes, see Butler's "Dildoides" (MS. Firth C. 15, p. 3) with its MS note, "This poem was occasioned by a parcel of dildos brought from France, hid under other commodities, and being discovered was ordered to be burned." On January 26, 1671, Harry Savile wrote to Lord Rochester that at the custom house "has been lately unfortunately seized a box of those leather instruments your lordship carried down one of, but these barbarian farmers [of the revenue] voted them prohibited goods, so that they were burned without mercy, notwithstanding that Sedley and I made two journeys into the City in their defense" (Rochester-Savile Letters, p. 31).

65. *Killigrew*. Charlotte, daughter of John de Hesse, of Holland, married (as his second wife) on January 26, 1665, Thomas Killigrew (1612–83), wit, playwright, a Groom of the Bedchamber, and Master of the King's Company of Players.

70. *Knight*. Mary Knight, a famous singer and a minor member of the royal seraglio, had a house in Pall Mall.

71. *Cazzo*. Italian cant name for penis.

89. *Lady Sands*. Probably Lady Lucy Hamilton Sandys, an intimate of Nell Gwyn, and often at Nell's house in Pall Mall. Lady Sandys may have been a daughter of George Kirke by his wife, Anne (Killigrew) (see Westminster Abbey Registers, p. 218).