

INTRODUCTION

Dava Sobel has had a lifelong fascination with Galileo and her latest book, *GALILEO'S DAUGHTER: A Historical Memoir of Science, Faith, and Love*, brings the famous scientist vividly to life while offering a unique perspective on his trial for heresy and subsequent years under house arrest.

Just as Sobel made John Harrison's search to determine longitude a compelling story for modern readers in *Longitude*, she makes Galileo's scientific struggles and achievements fresh and alive through her own knowledge of the history of science and the insightful letters of his daughter, which Sobel has translated from the original Italian.

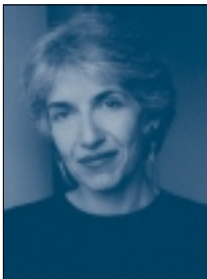
When she was thirteen Galileo placed his oldest daughter, Virginia, in the Convent of San Matteo in Arcetri, a mile from Galileo's home in Florence, where she took the name Maria Celeste and devoted herself to the hard, poverty-stricken life of the Poor Clares. They corresponded regularly and 124 of her letters to Galileo still survive (his letters to her were most likely destroyed).

Maria Celeste's letters reveal an intense devotion between father and daughter and chronicle the momentous events of Galileo's later career. They also provide keen insight on Galileo's theories of the heavens, his trial for heresy, and his abjuration and eventual punishment. Sobel goes beneath the science-versus-religion symbolism to reveal how the social, psychological, and political aspects of Galileo's trial all converged in an inevitable showdown.

The turbulent time in which Galileo and Maria Celeste lived is a vivid background for their stories. Sobel skillfully renders the horrors of the bubonic plague as it swept through Italy, the toll of the Thirty Years' War, the difficulties of travel and communication between cities in Italy, as well as the flamboyant ways of the Medicis, who were Galileo's patrons.

In *GALILEO'S DAUGHTER*, Sobel reveals a personal side to Galileo that has never been presented before, while rescuing an extraordinary woman from the depths of history.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dava Sobel, an award-winning writer and former *New York Times* science reporter, has contributed articles to *Audubon*, *Discover*, *Life* and *The New Yorker*. She has also been a contributing editor to *Harvard Magazine*, writing about scientific research and the history of science.

Ms. Sobel has maintained an interest in Galileo since her youth and *GALILEO'S DAUGHTER* fulfills her ambition to plumb the renaissance scientist's life and times, and her recent desire to learn more about Galileo's relationship with his daughter, Suor Maria Celeste, a Poor Clare nun. In researching this book, she traveled to Italy four times and translated original documents, including 124 letters from Maria Celeste to her famed father.

Ms. Sobel is the recipient of a 2000 Christopher Award for *GALILEO'S DAUGHTER*, and her best-selling book *Longitude* won several awards, including the "Harold D. Vursell Memorial Award" from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and "Book of the Year" in England. Also in recognition of *Longitude*, Ms. Sobel was made a fellow of the American Geographical Society. The PBS program NOVA produced "Lost At Sea—The Search for Longitude," a television documentary adaptation of *Longitude*, and NOVA is currently developing a television documentary of *GALILEO'S DAUGHTER*. A film dramatization of *Longitude*, which stars Jeremy Irons and Michael Gambon, will be released in the United States in summer 2000.

Lecture engagements have taken Ms. Sobel to speak at The Smithsonian Institution, the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, The Folger Shakespeare Library, The Los Angeles Public Library, and The New York Public Library. She has been a guest on NPR's "All Things Considered" and "Fresh Air," as well as C-SPAN's "Booknotes."

Dava Sobel lives in East Hampton, New York.

THE CONVENT'S GREATEST NEED: A LETTER FROM SUOR MARIA CELESTE TO GALILEO



Most Illustrious and Beloved Lord Father,

I was hoping to be able to respond in person, Sire, to everything you said in your most solicitous letter of several days ago. I see, however, that time may prohibit us from meeting before you take your leave, and so I am resolved to share my thoughts with you in writing. Above all, I want you to know how happy you made me by offering so lovingly to help our convent. I conferred with Madonna and other elders here, all of whom expressed their gratitude for the nature of your offer; but because they were uncertain, not knowing how to come to a decision among themselves, Madonna wrote to our Governor, and he answered that, since the convent is so impoverished, alms were needed more than anything. Meanwhile I had several discussions with one particular nun, who seems to me to surpass all the others here in wisdom and good will; and she, moved not by passion or self-interest but by sincere zeal, advised me, indeed beseeched me to ask you for something which would undoubtedly be of great use to us and yet very easy for you, Sire, to obtain: that is to implore His Holiness to let us have for our confessor a Regular or Brother in whom we can confide, with the possibility that he may be replaced every three years, as is the custom at convents, by someone equally dependable; a confessor who will not interfere with the normal observances of our Order, but simply let us receive from him the Holy Sacraments: it is this that we require above all else, and so much so that I can hardly express its crucial importance, or the background circumstances that make it so...

But because I know, Sire, that you cannot, on the basis of a simple word from me, make such a demand, without hearing from others more experienced in such matters, you can look for a way, when you come here,

to broach the question with Madonna, to try to get a sense of her feelings on the matter; and also to discuss it with any of the more elderly mothers, without, of course, exposing your reasons for mentioning such things. And please breathe not a word of this to Master Benedetto, since he would undoubtedly divulge it to Suor Chiara, who would then spread it among the other nuns, and thus ruin us, because it is impossible for so many brains to be of one mind; and as a consequence the actions of a single person who might be particularly displeased by this idea could thwart our efforts. Surely it would be wrong to let two or three individuals deprive everyone in the group of all the benefits, both spiritual and practical, that could accrue from the success of this plan. Now it is up to you, Sire, with your sound judgment, to which we appeal, to determine whether you deem it appropriate to pose our entreaty, and how best to present it so as to achieve the desired end most easily; since, as far as I am concerned, our petition seems entirely legitimate, and all the more so for our being in such dire straits.

I made it a point to write to you today, Sire, as this is rather a quiet time, and I think the right time for you to come to us, before things get stirred up again, so that you can see for yourself what may need to be done in respecting the stature of the older nuns, as I have already explained. Because I fear imposing on you too heavily, I will leave off writing here, saving all the other things to tell you later in person. Today we expect a visit from Monsignor Vicar, who is coming to attend the election of the new Abbess. May it please God to see the one who bends most to His will elected to this post, and may He grant you, Sire, an abundance of His holy grace.

From San Matteo, the 10th day of December 1623.

*Most affectionate daughter,
S. M. Celeste*

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS

§ What impressions or ideas did you have about Galileo before reading Sobel's book? Did the book change any of your opinions, and if so, how?

§ In what ways did the insertion of the full-length letters of Suor Maria Celeste, and the excerpts from the Rule of Saint Clare and the testimony from Galileo's trial, affect the narrative flow of the story?

§ If you have ever carried on an in-depth correspondence with a friend or family member, compare that experience to keeping in touch by telephone or e-mail. Is long-hand letter writing becoming a lost art?

§ How would you characterize Galileo's behavior as a father to each of his children? Was Galileo's relationship with Suor Maria Celeste an ideal father-daughter relationship?

§ What part did Galileo's frequent bouts of illness play in his personal and professional decisions?

§ Which aspects of convent life at San Matteo were most surprising or disturbing?

§ Who are the heroic figures in the story? Was Castelli a hero? Signor Geri? Suor Luisa?

§ Which arguments did Galileo employ to reconcile his scientific discoveries with his religious beliefs? How do these compare with the current stance of the relationship between science and religion?

§ How do you think Galileo would react to the news that pope John Paul II had called for a reexamination of his affair?

§ Given the suggestion in one of Suor Maria Celeste's letters that she wrote out the final manuscript for Galileo's "Dialogue," how do you imagine the two of them might have worked together? How do you think each of them expected the final product to be received?

§ Censorship constituted a routine part of the publication process of the 17th century. What part does it play today?

§ For what crimes or infractions was Galileo brought to trial? Did his accusers see him as truly a heretic or merely disobedient?

§ Viewed in this age of televised court cases, what did you think of the legal process of Galileo's trial?

§ Why did Galileo abjure his belief in the Copernican system? What do you think would have happened—to him and his family—if he had refused to abjure?

§ Can Galileo's arguments in defense of the Copernican model of the universe be applied to recent debates about the teaching of evolution in the classroom?

§ Which scientific ideas of Galileo's turned out to be wrong? How could incorrect assumptions lead him in the right direction for establishing modern science?

§ Is it possible for us to look at the culture of the 16th century—its class system, the options available for women, commonly held views on how diseases are spread—without imposing a 21st century perspective?

§ Can you see any similarities between the 17th-century reaction to the bubonic plague and modern responses to the AIDS epidemic—in terms of popular superstitions, medical treatments or government intervention?

§ Galileo believed that the Bible was a book about how to go to heaven—not how heaven goes. Do you agree with him?

For more information, visit
www.galileosdaughter.com

PRAISE FOR GALILEO'S DAUGHTER

"Sobel is a master storyteller....What she has done, with her choice of excerpts and her strong sense of story, is bring a great scientist to life."

—*The New York Times Book Review*

"Sobel seamlessly recounts history as wonderful narrative filled with outsized characters all marching toward a booming climax."

—*The San Diego Union Tribune*

"*Galileo's Daughter* is a remarkable work for the beauty of the writing and the clarity of the time and relationships it creates."

—*The Denver Post*

"Sobel does wonders clearly explaining scientific principles... [She] is a most original writer, with a reverence for history and storytelling."

—*USA Today*

"[Sobel is] a virtuoso at encapsulating the history and the politics of science."

—*The Wall Street Journal*

"A wonderfully told tale."

—*Newsweek*

"An intimate and compelling biography of the great scientist [that] moves beyond his world-altering achievements into the heart of his family, his foibles, and his radical beliefs."

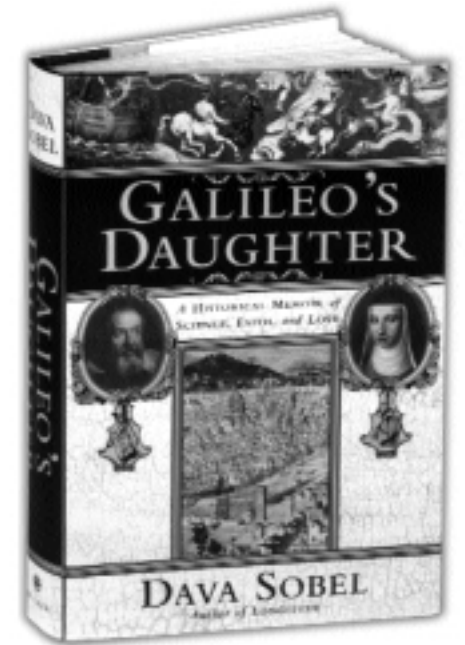
—*Elle*

GALILEO'S DAUGHTER is available from your favorite bookseller. Reading Group Guides are free and available from your local bookstore or from the publisher by calling toll-free 1-800-289-2553.

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Reading Group Guide



THE INTERNATIONAL BEST SELLER

BY THE AUTHOR OF

Longitude

GALILEO'S DAUGHTER
*A Historical Memoir of Science,
Faith, and Love*
by Dava Sobel

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