

EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



Lisa Hopkins and Tom Rutter, eds, *A Companion to the Cavendishes* (Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2020). 416pp. ISBN 978 1 6418 9177 6.

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A reader first approaching *A Companion to the Cavendishes* would be forgiven for expecting to find a collection of essays dedicated solely to the lives and writings of William (1593-1676) and Margaret Cavendish (née Lucas) (1623-1673), the Duke and Duchess of Newcastle. It therefore comes as a pleasant surprise to discover that Lisa Hopkins and Tom Rutter have expanded the field of Cavendish Studies in this 22-chapter volume to include two ancestors of William and two of his descendants (in addition to a few other relations) who made significant cultural contributions to British life and letters. Even when the main subject of a given chapter is the Duke or Duchess, the contributors situate their lives and works in a wide array of cultural (literary, theatrical, musical, architectural, equestrian), political, or philosophical contexts. Therefore, this meticulously edited collection contains a treasure-chest of new research on, and original interpretations of, not only the Cavendishes but also of the circles in which they moved and the social and political institutions they navigated in Britain and on the Continent. Since most of the contributors begin their chapters by succinctly summing up past research conducted on their subject matter, they also situate their innovative readings of the Cavendishes in ongoing conversations in the field. It is notable that the scholarship is of a very high quality throughout the entire collection.

Lisa Hopkins's comprehensive introductory first chapter includes a Cavendish family tree, highlighting the six family figures who will be foregrounded in the volume. This lends support to the editors' contention that the Cavendish family is akin to 'the Herberts, the Howards, and the Sidneys' in terms of their major roles as patrons and cultural producers (p. xiii). In the second chapter, Gavin Schwartz-Leeper ably addresses the work of

George Cavendish (1494-bef. 1562), son of Thomas Cavendish and Alice Smith. George was the great uncle of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle. Schwartz-Leeper explores the two works produced by George, associating both with the *de casibus tradition*: the historical/biographical *Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, and the volume of poetry, *Metrical Visions*. He reaffirms the belief that the former ‘is one of the earliest secular biographies in English’ and adds that the latter comprises one of the ‘earliest examples of first-person *de casibus poems in English*,’ reading the work alongside *The Mirror for Magistrates* (p. 21). He thereby clarifies George’s place in the development of historiography and historiopoetic practices in Tudor England.

We are next introduced to the musical compositions of Michael Cavendish (1565-1628), George’s grandson and sometime ‘servant in the bedchamber to Prince Charles’ (Thomas Birch, qtd. on p. 46). In this intriguing chapter, Keith Green attends to Michael’s connection to his cousins Arbella Stuart and fellow composer Sir George Cavendish. Green focuses on Michael’s *14 Ayres in Tabletorie to the Lute... and 8. Madrigalles* (1598), dedicated to Arbella, and his contributions to contemporary musical anthologies, locating them in Tudor musical culture and highlighting their connection to religio-political machinations.

The following five chapters are dedicated, for the most part, to William Cavendish, with an emphasis on his plays and public persona. Crosby Stevens first explores the mythological objectives of William and his father, the crypto-Catholic Charles Cavendish, in the creation of Bolsover Castle, a uniquely hybrid Italianate-Gothic structure. Drawing on the discourses of architecture, painting, biography, and drama, Stevens effectively challenges past views of the building as evidence of Charles’s snobbery and regional pride or of William’s licentiousness, concluding that it should be read as an aesthetic affirmation of ‘William and his family’ and proof of their ‘dynastic and court ambitions’ (p. 69). Turning from matters of the court to those of the stage, Matthew Steggle convincingly contends that William would have had a central role in Stuart professional theatre, both as a patron and a playwright, had the Civil War not intervened, based on his connections with professional playwrights and the success of his sole- or co-authored comedies. Richard Wood picks up where Steggle leaves off, skillfully drilling down into the details of William’s play *The Variety* (first perf. 1641; first pub. 1649) and highlighting its nostalgic nature through the fictional representation of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, in this dramatic depiction of the courtly fashions and values of the Elizabethan age and his own. Tom Rutter perceptively considers the evolving and mutually beneficial relationship of William and

Ben Jonson, and the advantage of reading each's work in terms of their affiliation. He offers a particularly interesting discussion of Jonsonian elements in William's three comedies, *The Wit's Triumvirate* (ms dated 1635), *The Country Captain* (first perf. 1641; first pub. 1649), and *The Variety*, before briefly reviewing Jonson's influence on other Cavendish writers. While Rutter finds that Jonson's influence on Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley's works is minimal, he characterizes Margaret's complex attitude to Jonson in her writings as one of 'ambivalent respect' (p. 123).

The last two chapters dedicated to William alone examine his desire to recuperate his reputation after his military failure and self-exile during the Civil War. Drawing on Castiglione's *Courtier*, Machiavelli's *Prince*, and Hobbes's *Elements of Law* and *Leviathan*, Rachel Willie reflects on William's attempt to figure himself as an honourable, virtuous, noble courtier, skilled in the art of governance, in the tradition of the Elizabethan court. She convincingly concludes, however, that William was viewed by contemporaries as far from *à la mode* after the Restoration. Though Willie touches on equestrian matters in her chapter, it is Elaine Walker who narrows her focus to the role of 'horses and horsemanship' in William's life and writings (p. 145), convincing us that his two equestrian training manuals are not only practical guide books, but philosophical and political meditations of a sort suitable to an honourable and virtuous nobleman of the day.

The next eleven chapters in the collection chiefly focus on the works of Cavendish women. Three analyse the works of Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley (in one case, comparing them to those of William and Margaret), and eight address Margaret Cavendish's life, works, and influences. Sara Mueller expertly scrutinizes the differences between the Beinecke and Bodleian manuscripts of the two works by Jane and Elizabeth, theorizing the significance of these differences, especially in connection to authorial collaboration and attribution. In his ingenious chapter, Daniel Cadman contends that the theme of the closet in Jane and Elizabeth's closet drama *Concealed Fancies* reimagines women's relation to 'privacy, intimacy, and devotion,' thereby refiguring the closet as a more porous space through which the domestic and public spheres interact and challenging patriarchal perspectives on the female sex (p. 240).

Hero Chalmers produces a most innovative reading of the intersecting themes, tropes, and references in the poetry of Jane, Elizabeth, William, and Margaret, leading her to surmise that they had, at the very least, a 'shared web of influences' and may have read and replied to each other's poetic works (p. 219). In all their poetry, she finds a desire both to

reconstruct the ‘Royalist networks’ that were riven during the civil wars and Commonwealth and to register the experience of alienation from family members, property, and homes during that period, figured in, for example, their poetic fixation on inventories and food (p. 220).

The chapters dedicated to Margaret’s writing expand our knowledge in a wide array of fascinating, if tenuously related, areas. While the range of topics feels rather random, as a whole they broaden our understanding of the Duchess’s many experiences, ideas, interests, and writing practices, taking us from her exile in Antwerp to her final years in Welbeck Abbey. James Fitzmaurice adeptly argues that Margaret’s time in Antwerp, a cosmopolitan and culturally sophisticated city, was more socially, intellectually, and aesthetically gratifying than her time in Northern England after the Restoration. He also draws a striking parallel between the active, if detached, observer of art and culture featured in several of her works (e.g., ‘The Observer’) with her own experience as an observer on her arrival in Paris and Antwerp.

The influence of Epicurean thought on the Newcastle circle and on Margaret’s philosophical and imaginative works in particular is adroitly assessed in two chapters. The first, by Lisa Walters, reads Cavendish’s play *The Convent of Pleasure* through the lens of gender and ‘pleasure, justice, and marriage’ as articulated by Epicurus and mediated by Pierre Gassendi, Walter Charleton, and Lucy Hutchinson, among others (p. 195). Walters maintains that Cavendish’s adaptation of Epicurean ideas in the play reveals gender as a social construct performed in flexible ways. Line Cottagnies is more interested in Epicureanism’s influence on Cavendish’s literary forms, notably her integration of historically masculine scientific discourse into female imaginative genres in a strategic but subtle fashion. Focusing on *Poems, and Fancies* and *The Convent of Pleasure*, Cottagnies concludes that Epicureanism allowed Margaret to generate ‘a woman-friendly’ materialism that defied the androcentric poetics and natural philosophy of her age (p. 344).

In her chapter on war in *Natures Pictures*, Catie Gill first clarifies that the Duchess’s interest lay in ‘the ethics of war’ not in ‘[m]ilitary history’ (p. 255). Though Gill recognizes that allusions to war, and the ‘masculine[e] excess’ that causes it (p. 263), are presented in both a positive and negative light in *Natures Pictures*, she forcefully argues that it is the latter mood that ultimately dominates since Cavendish depicts in such works as ‘Assaulted and Pursued Chastity’ the ways in which the volatility and cruelty of war render women vulnerable to multiple forms of abuse. Moving from the decimation of war to the

connection of nature, power, and creativity, Andrew Duxfield's engrossing chapter sketches two versions of nature (material and political) in Cavendish's *Unnatural Tragedy* and *Blazing World*, demonstrating, paradoxically, the artifice of the natural in these works. The complex politics of patronage is the subject of Lisa T. Sarasohn's chapter. In it she productively and persuasively details at least eight ways in which Cavendish negotiates 'patronage dynamics,' from presenting herself as her husband's 'scholar,' associating herself with virtuous women, and gifting her volumes to academic institutions to presenting herself as a 'client' of the gods and 'becom[ing] her own patron' (p. 295, p. 300).

Domenico Lovascio systematically examines references to Julius Caesar in Margaret's oeuvre. While stressing Cavendish's 'adamantine admiration' for Julius Caesar (p. 311), Lovascio cogently demonstrates that the nature and significance of her references to him vary according to the literary context in question, serving as a means to share her thoughts on a surprising array of subjects, from valour and honour to wedlock and cuckoldry, or to glorify her husband at Caesar's expense. In the final chapter solely dedicated to Margaret's works, Brandie R. Siegfried produces a critically important analysis of the Duchess's place in the history of the novel. She first establishes that Margaret embraces the probabilities that attend 'Aristotelian verisimilitude' (Michael McKeon, qtd. in Siegfried, p. 352) as opposed to the certainty of historical truth, which is evidenced in her experimental prose fiction. Siegfried then asserts that Cavendish develops a neo-verisimilitude that foregrounds human psychology rather than truth-claims, thereby generating genres 'suited to pleasure and propositional reasoning' (p. 368). In discussing this and other aspects of Cavendish's fictional works, Siegfried finds connections with a wide array of earlier and later writers, from Cervantes to Jane Austen (p. 368).

The final two chapters in the collection invite readers into the lives of lesser-known relations (cousins) of William Cavendish and to the memorial practices of the clan. Sue Wiseman undertakes a most enlightening discussion of the significance of the Devonshire Cavendishes, who 'shaped the landscape of local and national politics through aesthetics, connections, and place' and considers their relation to the Newcastle Cavendishes (p. 384), reflecting in particular on the place of Thomas Hobbes in both households. The final chapter on the funeral monuments of the Cavendishes, by Eva Lauenstein, provides a fitting conclusion to the volume. It includes three of the collection's sixteen illustrations — the tomb of Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, the tomb of Charles Cavendish and Katharine, Baroness Ogle, and an engraving of the tomb, which no longer exists, of William Cavendish, second Earl of Devonshire and Christian Bruce Cavendish. In

analyzing the location and construction of, and images and texts on, the funeral monuments of the 'Cavendish dynasty,' Lauenstein persuasively points to the recurring emphasis on familial narratives of continuity, constancy, concord, and 'Christian hope in salvation,' as well as their communication of the crucial part played by Cavendish women in generating these narratives of familial and, by extension, national harmony (p. 388, p. 394).

A Companion to the Cavendishes makes a landmark contribution to Cavendish Studies. No other monograph or edited collection has opened up so many new avenues of study in the field. The collection accomplishes this end not only by introducing the works of more Cavendishes, but by also embracing the interdisciplinary interests of the Cavendishes, thereby bringing historical, philosophical, political, and cultural concepts and artefacts into conversation with each other. Hopkins and Rutter are to be congratulated for their curation of such a fine repository of cutting-edge scholarship on the Cavendishes which will, no doubt, have a major impact on the direction of the field.