

## Chapter I

# INTRODUCTION: THE CAVENDISH FAMILY

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THE WEALTH AND position of the Cavendish family date back to the marriage of Bess of Hardwick to Sir William Cavendish in 1547. It was a second marriage for both of them. Bess, who was probably aged 19 (just under half the age of the bridegroom),<sup>1</sup> had already been briefly married to Robert Barlow, a Derbyshire neighbour; the marriage had produced no children and had probably not been consummated. It was while married to William Cavendish that Bess produced all eight of her children, of whom six survived to adulthood. From those six children four ducal families sprang—Kingston, Newcastle, Devonshire, and Portland—and an area of Nottinghamshire became known as the Dukeries in consequence.

Bess's descendants owed their prosperity and advancement not to William Cavendish himself, who was detected in embezzlement and died in dire financial straits, but to her two subsequent marriages, first to Sir William St. Loe and finally to George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury. As Horace Walpole supposedly had it,

Four times the nuptial bed she warm'd,  
And ev'ry time so well perform'd,  
That when death spoiled each husband's billing,  
He left the widow every shilling.<sup>2</sup>

This is not strictly true—Sir William Cavendish had little but debts to leave—but the wealth settled on her by St. Loe and Shrewsbury was immense, and the Cavendish children benefited greatly from it.

Bess's surviving children were three sons and three daughters. Of the daughters, two, Frances and Mary, made good marriages, to Sir Henry Pierrepont and to Shrewsbury's second son Gilbert, who after the death of his elder brother became the heir to the earldom. The third made a marriage which on paper was more splendid than either of these, but it did not last long and was unhappy in its consequences: Elizabeth, the middle girl, married Charles Stuart, Earl of Lennox, who, through his mother Lady Margaret Douglas, had inherited a possible claim to both the English and Scottish thrones. (Lady Margaret was the mother-in-law of Mary, Queen of Scots, who was a prisoner in the Shrewsbury household for sixteen years.) Both Elizabeth and Charles died young and

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<sup>1</sup> For discussion of Bess's date of birth, see Alan Bryson, "Bess of Hardwick: A Life," in *Bess of Hardwick: New Perspectives*, ed. Lisa Hopkins (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 18–35.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in I. Shenker and L. Yerkes, "Bess of Hardwick Was a Woman to Be Reckoned With," *Smithsonian* 22 (1992): 69.

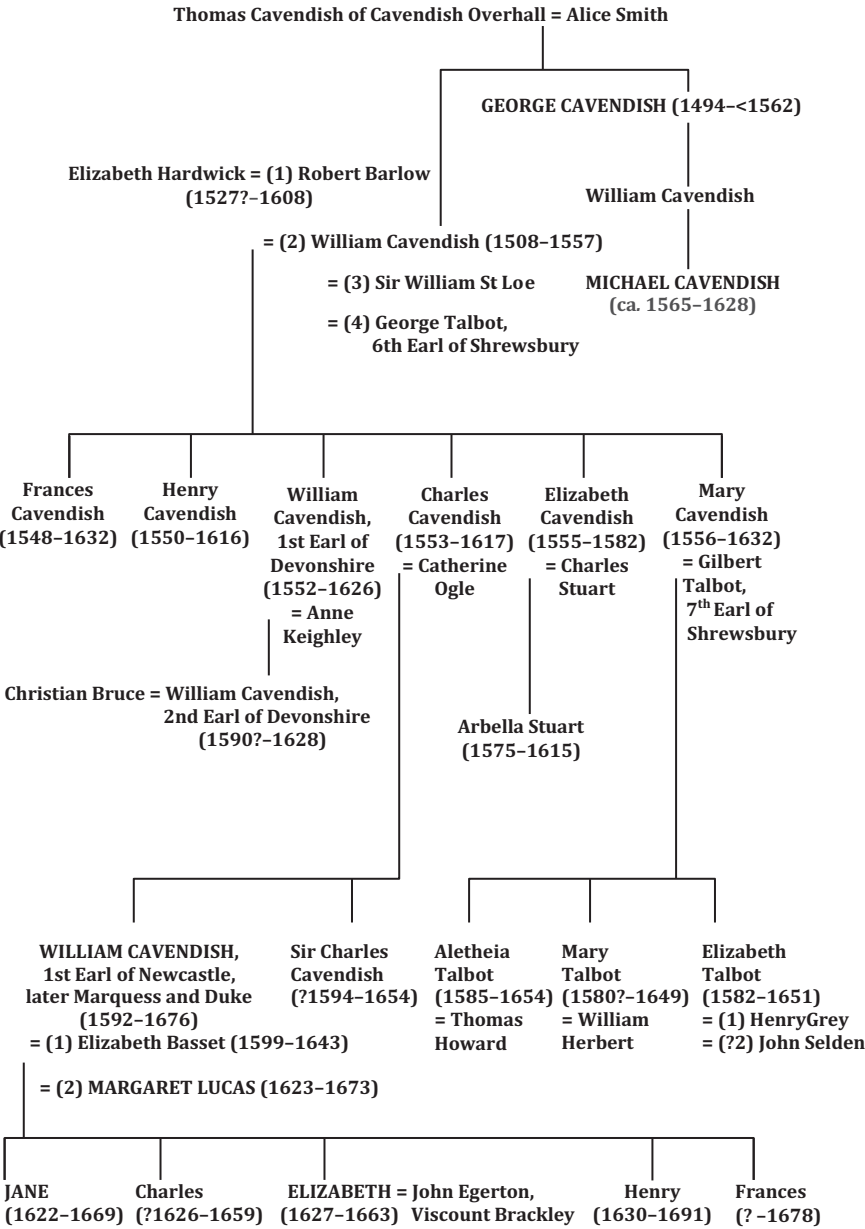


Figure 1.1. Simplified family tree of the Cavendish family; names in capitals are those of writers discussed in this book.

their only child was a daughter, Lady Arbella Stuart, who might have been named Queen Elizabeth's heir but in fact ended her life in the Tower, childless and insane. Arbella was, though, instrumental in the elevation of the Cavendish family because it was she who procured a barony for Bess's favourite son.

Bess had three sons: Henry, William, and Charles. Although Henry was the eldest, he displeased his mother by paying no attention to the wife she had arranged for him, Shrewsbury's daughter Grace, and devoting himself to womanizing on a scale which earned him the soubriquet of "the common bull of Derbyshire," though his mother termed him more simply "My bad son Henry." (He had some interesting travels, though, visiting Constantinople and also having his presence recorded in Iasi, in Romania.<sup>3</sup>) Charles, the youngest, enjoyed his mother's favour for some time, but he eventually offended her by his closeness to his brother-in-law Gilbert Talbot, with whom she fell out bitterly in her final years. William, though, she adored, and it was for him that Arbella obtained the patent of nobility that elevated him and his descendants to the ranks of the aristocracy and would eventually see them ensconced as Dukes of Devonshire in Bess's beloved Chatsworth. Writing in the mid-seventeenth century, Bess's great-granddaughter Jane Cavendish accused her of backing the wrong horse by preferring William to his younger brother Charles. In a poem entitled "On my honourable Grandmother Elizabeth Countess of Shrewsbury," Jane apostrophizes Bess:

Madam  
 You were the very Magazine of rich  
 With spirit such & wisdom wh<sup>ch</sup> did reach  
 All that opprest you, for your wealth did teach  
 Our Englands law, soe Lawyers durst not preach  
 Soe was your golden actions, this is true  
 As euer will you liue in perfect veiwe  
 Your beauty great & yo<sup>r</sup> the very life  
 And onely Pattern of a wise, good, wife  
 But this your wisdom, was too short to see  
 Of your three sonns to tell who great should bee  
 Your eldest sonn your riches had for life  
 'Caus Henry wench'es lou'd more then his wife  
 Your second children had, soe you did thinke  
 On him your great ambition fast to linke  
 Soe William you did make before your Charles to goe  
 Yet Charles his actions haue bene soe  
 Before your Williams sonn doth goe before  
 Thus your great howse, is now become the lower  
 And I doe hope the world shall euer see  
 The howse of Charles before your Willi<sup>a</sup>ms bee  
 For Charles his Willi<sup>a</sup>m hath it thus soe chang'd  
 As William Conquerer hee may well bee named

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**3** Noel Malcolm, *Agents of Empire: Knights, Corsairs, Jesuits and Spies in the Sixteenth-Century Mediterranean World* [2015] (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2016), 338.

And it is true, his sword hath made him great  
Thus his wise acts will ever him full speak<sup>4</sup>

For Jane, her grandfather Charles Cavendish is the hero of a classic younger son narrative, rising from nothing to outstrip his more favoured brother, and Charles's son William is more splendid still, a figure to rank with the Conqueror. (As it happened, the first person to build a castle at Bolsover had been William Peveril, who was sometimes said to have been a bastard son of William the Conqueror.)

Jane's poem displays some fundamental characteristics of the literary culture of the Cavendish family.<sup>5</sup> In the first place, it would strike modern readers as not very well written in a number of respects. The first line's "Magazine of rich" would make better sense if it were "Magazine of riches," and the two final rhymes of "chang'd" with "named" and of "great" with "speak" do not really work. This is because Jane and her sisters were never formally taught in the way that their brothers were or sent to Cambridge as their father had been. The same was true too of their stepmother Margaret, who, despite being the most famous writer of the family, believed that it was against nature for a woman to be able to spell (though male writers of the period might also have unusual notions of orthography). Moreover, her publishers' attempts to provide the punctuation Margaret herself omitted are often unhelpful, to the point that Katie Whitaker suggests that "Sometimes the best way to follow a section of her text is to read it as if it had no punctuation, ignoring all the marks put in by printers."<sup>6</sup> This too is an aspect of Cavendish literary culture that can be traced back to Bess of Hardwick: Alison Wiggins notes that Bess "was exposed to many different personal spelling systems through her extensive reading of a wide range of letters from correspondents across the social and educational scale";<sup>7</sup> ultimately she spelled, as she did most things, as she pleased. However, eccentricities of orthography and grammar do not obscure the liveliness and vigour of these women's writing.

The second feature of Jane's poem that is typical of Cavendish family writing is that it is not only *by* a member of the family but also *about* the family, and that it sees Jane's father, William Cavendish, as being the most important member of that family. William Cavendish was born in 1593, in his uncle Gilbert Talbot's manor of Handsworth, making him old enough to remember the late Elizabethan period and to have known

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<sup>4</sup> Jane Cavendish, *The Collected Works of Jane Cavendish*, ed. Alexandra G. Bennett (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 73.

<sup>5</sup> For the claim that there was a distinctive familial discourse at work within the Cavendish family, see Marion Wynne-Davies, *Women Writers and Familial Discourse in the English Renaissance: Relative Values* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), chap. 7, "Desire, Chastity and Rape in the Cavendish Familial Discourse", 140–69.

<sup>6</sup> Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, Royalist, Writer and Romantic* (London: Vintage, 2004), 177; see also 251 on the kinds of errors to be found in her printed texts.

<sup>7</sup> Alison Wiggins, *Bess of Hardwick's Letters: Language, Materiality and Early Modern Epistolary Culture* (London: Routledge, 2017), 113.

his formidable grandmother well. (She died in 1608.) He was sent to Cambridge, as his Cavendish uncles had been, and also trained in the Royal Mews, becoming close to Prince Henry, at whose investiture he was created a Knight of the Bath. His first experience of travel overseas came as a member of the train of Sir Henry Wotton, who was sent to Savoy in 1612 to discuss a possible marriage for Prince Henry. The prince's death in 1612 was a blow for William; he was less close to the future Charles I, who was both younger and temperamentally very different. Nevertheless, he became MP for East Retford in 1614, Viscount Mansfield in October 1620, and Earl of Newcastle upon Tyne in March 1628, and he entertained the king and queen at Bolsover in 1633 and Welbeck in 1634, with Ben Jonson writing entertainments for both events. He was also made Governor of Charles II, whom he taught to ride, although he never achieved his ambition of becoming Master of the Horse despite his acknowledged excellence in the saddle and the several books he wrote on the art of riding, as Elaine Walker's chapter discusses.

Despite Jane's reproaches to her great-grandmother, William's father Charles had not been left with quite nothing: although Bess cut him out of her will at the same time as Arbella, he bought Bolsover Castle and Welbeck Abbey from his brother-in-law and friend Gilbert Talbot and set about transforming Bolsover into a chivalric fantasy castle. When he died in 1617, work on the castle was continued by William, who grew into an increasingly important local magnate. He was particularly proud of holding the lord lieutenancies of both Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, and he took his duties very seriously, raising 120 knights and gentlemen in 1638 in case they were required to fight against the Scots. This launched him into a military role that saw him created Marquess of Newcastle in 1643 and eventually culminated in his appointment as Commander-in-Chief of Charles I's Northern Army, with "powers equivalent to those of a viceroy,"<sup>8</sup> though this came to an ignominious end at the Battle of Marston Moor in 1644. He might have returned to action in 1650, when Charles II made him a Knight of the Garter and intended him to command the men whom Charles hoped would rise in his favour in the north of England, but the Scots who were the king's principal backers would have nothing to do with Newcastle, who was thereby spared the fiasco of the Battle of Worcester. Instead he remained on the Continent until the Restoration, when he hoped that his loyalty would be richly rewarded. Instead, Charles II turned to other advisers, leaving William feeling frozen out and increasingly happier at Welbeck than at court. Not until 1665, after an unflatteringly long delay, was his service to the crown recognized by his creation as Duke of Newcastle.

As Richard Wood's and Matthew Steggle's chapters explore, William also wrote both plays (some of which were performed in London theatres) and poems. Probably no one nowadays thinks William's writings the most interesting of those produced by the family, not least because it was less extraordinary for an aristocratic man to write than for an aristocratic woman to do so. William was, though, hugely important both as a pioneer

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**8** Elspeth Graham, "'An After-Game of Reputation': Systems of Representation, William Cavendish and the Battle of Marston Moor," in *Authority, Authorship and Aristocratic Identity in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Peter Edwards and Elspeth Graham (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 83–110, 84.

of Cavendish literary culture and as facilitator and defender of his womenfolk's right to write. Victoria E. Burke and Marie-Louise Coolahan, noting "the type of literary milieu created at Newcastle's country seats, a milieu which fostered the writing of his daughters, and later his second wife, as well as himself," suggest that "It is perhaps Newcastle himself who should be praised for being unique in his unstinting support of the literary endeavours of the women in his family."<sup>9</sup> While he gave permission and support to his wife and daughters, no one else was in a position to attack them. It is also worth noting that while many seventeenth-century siblings were at odds over questions such as property, William and his younger brother Sir Charles Cavendish loved each other, and throughout their lives they did everything possible to help each other. Sir Charles was a small man (he may have suffered from some form of disability or deformity)<sup>10</sup> with a large intellect: he knew and corresponded with some of the foremost scientific minds of Europe, including Descartes, Hobbes, Gassendi, Fermat, and Mersenne.<sup>11</sup> He was interested in mathematics, in optics, in atomism, in attempts to develop a copying machine, and in myriad other topics, and he also displayed the family taste for acquiring houses by using a legacy from his mother to buy Slingsby Castle in North Yorkshire. In all of these interests, he was joined and helped by William, who may have been scorned as a general and marginalized at court but gave his wives, daughters, and brother nothing to complain of.

William married twice. His first wife was Elizabeth Basset, widow of the Earl of Suffolk's son Thomas, by whom he had two sons, Henry and Charles, and three daughters, Jane, Elizabeth, and Frances. Neither of the sons features much in this volume; in a family of writers, thinkers, builders, and fighters, neither did anything to distinguish himself, and it seems prophetic that as a child the elder of the two should have sent his father a letter which says simply, "My Lord. I can not tel what to wright. Charles Mansfeild."<sup>12</sup> The two elder daughters, though, collaborated on a play and a pastoral, as discussed in Daniel Cadman's and Sara Mueller's chapters, and Jane also wrote poetry, while the younger, Elizabeth, married Thomas Brackley, Viscount Egerton, who had played the Elder Brother in Milton's *Comus*; she was thus doubly connected to literature. The daughters were originally intended to have dowries of £10,000 each, but the Civil War put paid to that,<sup>13</sup> and Jane did not marry until 1654, over a decade after her younger sister Elizabeth had already done so; her husband was Charles Cheyne, merely a gentleman but a Royalist one, and their house in Chelsea gave its name to Cheyne Walk, later

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<sup>9</sup> Victoria E. Burke and Marie-Louise Coolahan, "The Literary Contexts of William Cavendish and His Family," in *Society, Religion, and Culture in Seventeenth-Century Nottinghamshire*, ed. Martyn Bennett (Lampeter: Mellen, 2005), 115–41, 118, 141.

<sup>10</sup> Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 84.

<sup>11</sup> Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 95–97. See also Jean Jacquot, "Sir Charles Cavendish and His Learned Friends," *Annals of Science* 8 (March 1952): 13–27 and (June 1952): 175–91.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Lucy Worsley, *Cavalier: The Story of a Seventeenth-Century Playboy* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 78.

<sup>13</sup> Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 80n.

to be famous as the address of Bram Stoker, J. M. W. Turner, and many other fashionable and public figures. Having married later than Elizabeth, Jane produced only three children to her sister's nine, but three of Elizabeth's brood died young and she herself died in childbirth in 1663, aged only 37.

The member of the family who is most famous today is, though, undoubtedly William's second wife, Margaret Cavendish née Lucas. Born probably in 1623 in Colchester, the youngest of eight children of a wealthy gentry family, Margaret was by her own account a shy, gawky teenager whose family was afraid she would disgrace herself when she became a maid of honour to Queen Henrietta Maria, first in the displaced royal court at Oxford in 1643 and then from 1644 in Paris. In so doing, she was firmly in line with her family's committed loyalism; in 1642 the family's home, St. John's Abbey, was raided by Parliamentarians and members of the family intimidated and briefly imprisoned,<sup>14</sup> her brother Sir Charles Lucas was executed in 1648 after the siege of Colchester, and the corpses of her mother and sister were allegedly disinterred by Parliamentary troops.<sup>15</sup> Despite her gaucheness, she attracted the attention of the much older and suaver Newcastle, widowed in 1643, and married him in Paris in December 1645, to the apparent consternation of his children, who had not met her but seem not to have liked what they had heard (matters were probably not helped by the fact that the eldest child, Jane, was two years older than Margaret). In her own time, Margaret was famous as an oddly dressed and oddly behaved woman who both fascinated and scandalized contemporaries (although Katie Whitaker has shown that the sobriquet "Mad Madge" was almost certainly invented in the nineteenth century);<sup>16</sup> in ours, she is remembered as a prolific author who experimented in a wide variety of genres and also interested herself in natural philosophy and historiography. It is for this reason that a third of the chapters in this book, including those by Andrew Duxfield, Hero Chalmers, Lisa Walters, Lisa Sarasohn, Line Cottegnies, Catie Gill, and Brandie Siegfried, are dedicated to Margaret and her work, but it would also be true to say that she would almost certainly not have achieved so much had she not married into a family with an existing literary culture and a tradition of independently minded women.

In 1648 Newcastle and Margaret moved to Antwerp, where they lived in the Rubenshuis, as explored in James Fitzmaurice's chapter. In 1651 Margaret returned to England with her brother-in-law Sir Charles Cavendish to "compound" for Newcastle's estates; she was unsuccessful on the grounds that she had known Newcastle was a "malignant" when she married him, but Charles, whose physical frailty had precluded him from fighting, bought back Bolsover and Welbeck. It was in 1653 that Margaret began to publish her writing, an unusual and provocative act for a seventeenth-century woman. Katie Whitaker thinks that "Margaret knew she was heading for trouble" and

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<sup>14</sup> Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 40–42.

<sup>15</sup> Though see Frances E. Dolan, "Scattered Remains and Paper Bodies: Margaret Cavendish and the Siege of Colchester," *Postmedieval* 4 (Winter 2013): 452–64 for discussion of the apparent anomaly that Margaret herself never mentions this incident.

<sup>16</sup> Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 362.



notes that a scornful epitaph produced after her death in 1673 terms her “Welbeck’s illustrious whore,” a title for which there was no evidence but which the author would presumably have felt to have been sufficiently earned by her temerity in refusing to conform to traditional modes of behaviour.<sup>17</sup> Although Jane and Elizabeth also wrote, they did not write in the same way as Margaret did, because they did not publish their work. Elizabeth’s daughter, also named Elizabeth, wrote in a poem addressed to her mother, “Mongst ladies, let Newcastle wear the bays, / I only sue for pardon, not for praise,”<sup>18</sup> and Thomas Lawrence’s epitaph for Jane (who died in 1669, aged 48) declared of her poetry that “Her modesty alone could it excel / Which, by concealing, doubles her esteem.”<sup>19</sup>

Margaret was also singular in other ways. In 1667 she visited the Royal Society, though this fell a bit flat because, tongue-tied, she was reduced to repeated assurances that she was “all admiration,”<sup>20</sup> and on the same trip to London she also appalled London society by appearing at the theatre with bare breasts (Charles II, told by a visitor that he had met a woman who was very oddly dressed, nodded wisely and said that it was probably Lady Newcastle).<sup>21</sup> Perhaps most fundamentally, Margaret did not fulfill what many contemporaries saw as the central purpose of a woman. Although she was aware that Newcastle had married her partly because he desired more sons, she never bore a child, which made her the subject of intrusive and ineffective medical enquiry. It is notable that in the household book of William’s cousin Lady Arundel, daughter of his aunt Mary Cavendish, many of the remedies are focused on what might be generically termed women’s troubles: “Water of Centory” is said to be good for “Wormes in the womb” and “Water of Fumetory” for “the Maries”; “A precious Water for the Eyes, by my Lady Heyden” requires “womans milk of divers mens children,” implying a large household containing several nursing mothers and suggesting a fertile atmosphere for such folk beliefs to flourish in.<sup>22</sup> Lady Arundel’s book helps us see how aberrant Margaret’s childless state must have appeared, but actually the cause may well have been that Newcastle was impotent (his friend Sir Kenelm Digby’s proposed cure, which involved eating powdered vipers, may not have helped matters).<sup>23</sup>

Margaret was also on bad terms with her stepchildren, who never trusted her. William’s eldest son Charles died in June 1659, aged only 32, apparently of a stroke, leaving his younger brother Henry as the heir. William persuaded Henry to break the entail, but Henry and his wife (and cousin) Frances were deeply suspicious of the

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<sup>17</sup> Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 1, 355.

<sup>18</sup> H1 Ellesmere MS 8367.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 342.

<sup>20</sup> Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 304.

<sup>21</sup> Walter Scott, ed., *Memoirs of the Court of Charles the Second by Count Grammont* (London: Bohn, 1859), 135.

<sup>22</sup> [Aletheia Talbot, Countess of Arundel], *Natura Exenterata: Or Nature Unbowelled by the Most Exquisite Anatomizers of Her* (London: Twiford, Bedell, and Ekins, 1655), 55, 29, 47.

<sup>23</sup> Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 104. Digby specified that Newcastle must order some “in time for the viper season,” though it is hard to see how vipers could be seasonal.



intentions of Margaret in particular, viewing with alarm her attempts to increase her jointure by appropriating whatever lands and monies she could find that had been omitted from the agreement William and Henry had come to. Some of the Newcastle's servants were also perturbed by Margaret's increasingly careful scrutiny of their financial transactions, which removed the opportunity for speculation; they spread rumours that she was seeking to enrich herself for a second husband, as Bess of Hardwick had done, except more so because Margaret had allegedly said that "she was a Duchess, and consequently a greater person than a Countess, and would out-do [Bess] in that kind."<sup>24</sup> Some of the duke's servants went so far as to send William an anonymous letter accusing Margaret of scandalous behaviour (probably an alleged affair with Francis Topp, husband of her favourite lady-in-waiting Elizabeth), though the plot backfired when he refused to believe it. Henry was particularly appalled by her plans for large-scale tree-felling on Cavendish lands and also in Sherwood Forest, which she was determined to pursue even though it was not clear that it was legal to do so. By the time William was in his late seventies, both Henry and some of the Cavendish household were seriously alarmed about what would happen when he died, but in fact it was Margaret who died suddenly, aged only 50, perhaps of a stroke or a heart attack (though it is not entirely inconceivable that she was poisoned by someone who feared what she might do when she was widowed). Newcastle himself died three years later, on Christmas Day 1676, at the age of 84. A Cavendish to the core, his last thoughts were bent on exhorting his heir, Henry, to complete the restoration of Nottingham Castle. He had also devoted considerable effort to creating a suitable tomb for himself and Margaret in Westminster Abbey, following a tradition of Cavendish funerary monuments which is discussed in Eva-Maria Lauenstein's chapter.

As well as these four major figures, other members of the family are also of interest. The branch that settled at Chatsworth (descendants of Bess's second son William) made a major contribution to country house culture and included some very notable collectors. They deserve gratitude both for remodelling Chatsworth and for *not* remodelling Hardwick, and Susan Wiseman's essay here deservedly attends to them. George Cavendish, brother of Bess of Hardwick's second husband, wrote a life of his employer Cardinal Wolsey; he is discussed in Gavin Schwartz-Leeper's chapter. George's grandson, the composer Michael Cavendish, the subject of Keith Green's chapter, dedicated some of his work to his cousin Lady Arbella Stuart, Bess's granddaughter and William Cavendish's first cousin. There was also Arbella herself, whom William was old enough to have known and remembered. Arbella was not a Cavendish, but she was very close to her cousins on her Cavendish mother's side, particularly the three daughters of her favourite aunt, Mary Talbot, in whose household Newcastle was partly reared, and she was an important influence on the literary culture of the Cavendish family. Sara Jayne Steen notes of Arbella that "At court, she was acknowledged to be a fine writer, one whose words were read aloud in the king's Privy Council and commended"; she may have written poetry—Aemilia Lanyer seems to have thought so, and Steen notes

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24 Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 335.

that “Bathsua Makin in 1673 commended Stuart’s ‘great faculty in Poetry’ and several later writers echoed this point,” though no verse by her has ever been identified—but in any case her “political importance meant that in some cases even the drafts of her letters were filed as state papers.”<sup>25</sup> Steen suggests that in Arbella, “Extending to women Stephen Greenblatt’s thesis about male power to fashion a self, we can watch an intelligent and well-educated Renaissance woman fashion a self in prose.”<sup>26</sup> Arbella was also fashioned by others, sometimes in ways that bore directly on the literary cultures of the Cavendish family. Both during and after her life, her situation was understood in theatrical terms. In 1610 the Venetian ambassador reported that Arbella “complains that in a certain comedy the playwright introduced an allusion to her person and the part played by the prince of Moldavia,” since in 1610 there was talk of a marriage between Arbella and the Moldavian pretender Stephen Bogdan (Stephen Janiculo);<sup>27</sup> the unnamed play is usually supposed to have been Ben Jonson’s *Epicoene*, though it could conceivably have been *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.<sup>28</sup> There are also possible references to her in *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Second Maiden’s Tragedy*, *The Noble Gentleman*, and *Cymbeline*,<sup>29</sup> and I have argued that her story also finds a reflection in two plays by the Caroline playwright John Ford, *The Broken Heart* and *Perkin Warbeck*, the second of which Ford dedicated to Newcastle.<sup>30</sup> (Ford’s connections to the Cavendish circle are also discussed in the chapters by Richard Wood and Andrew Duxfield.) These allusions to Arbella contribute to the tradition of writing the identities of Cavendish women and also of connecting members of that family to the biggest political questions of the day.

This is one of a number of things that characterize Cavendish literary culture. Another was a strong element of coterie writing. Though the name was often (perhaps always) pronounced Candish, the family motto made use of those silenced letters: it was “Cavendo tutus”—be safe by being careful—and the family device of the nowed snake underlined the implication of cunning and wisdom. That device was seen often, for it was a regular feature of the houses which so many members of the family determinedly built, embellished, or restored, as recorded in a contemporary poem which begins,

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<sup>25</sup> Sara Jayne Steen, ed., *The Letters of Lady Arbella Stuart* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 8–9, 56–57.

<sup>26</sup> Steen, *Letters*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Gristwood, *Arbella: England’s Lost Queen* (London: Bantam, 2003), 325. See also T. S. Graves, “Jonson’s ‘Epicoene’ and Lady Arabella Stuart,” *Modern Philology* 14 (January 1917): 525–30.

<sup>28</sup> Gristwood, *Arbella*, 327.

<sup>29</sup> Steen, *Letters*, 68, 94–96. On the possibility that Beaumont and Fletcher’s *A Noble Gentleman* may comment on Arbella’s situation, see also Gristwood, *Arbella*, 310; for possible allusions in *The Second Maiden’s Tragedy*, see Gristwood, *Arbella*, 385–86.

<sup>30</sup> Lisa Hopkins, “On the Edge of the S(h)elf: Arbella Stuart,” in *Women on the Edge*, ed. Lisa Hopkins and Aidan Norrie (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 159–78.

Hardwicke for hugenes, Worsope for height,  
Welbeck for vse, and Bolser for sight.<sup>31</sup>

Erecting, restoring, and furnishing houses was a tradition that went back to Bess of Hardwick, of whom it was prophesied that she would never die while she was still building; it came true in 1608, when the mortar froze and work could no longer proceed on her final project. The Cavendishes not only built houses, though; they also wrote about them. Houses and domestic furniture figure prominently both in William's writings and in those of his wife and daughters, and both these descriptions and the Cavendish houses themselves, like the motif of the nowed snake, are often rich in symbolism and suggestion.<sup>32</sup> As Crosby Stevens's chapter discusses, a typical Cavendish building had a mythological program, and William has sometimes been mocked for the raciness of some of these images, but there is perhaps an instructive contrast with what was happening in Colchester, home of William's second wife Margaret, where the Puritan fanatic Matthew Hopkins was using the castle to interrogate witches. William, by contrast, was relaxed, eclectic, and ecumenical about what was included in his homes. His father, Sir Charles Cavendish, was a secret Catholic;<sup>33</sup> he had Catholic friends to whose religion he turned a blind eye (Burke and Coolahan note that "Kenelm Digby's Catholicism goes unmentioned in Newcastle's two poems to him"),<sup>34</sup> and many of the recipes in the cookery book of his cousin Lady Arundel are openly Catholic. At Bolsover there was a Heaven closet and an Elysium closet, images of saints, a Venus fountain, and a figure of Hercules over the main entrance to the Little Castle. Hercules is holding up the globe, temporarily relieving Atlas, and this both suggests acting—he is standing in for Atlas—and potentially alludes to the Globe Theatre itself, confirming the Little Castle's status as a residence strongly associated with entertainments.

The Little Castle's use of mythology built on Bess of Hardwick's use of figures such as Penelope, Lucretia, and particularly Cleopatra. Although it is now lost, there was once a tapestry depicting Cleopatra at Hardwick;<sup>35</sup> Alison Wiggins, noting that Bess had a *Works*

**31** "Dr Andrewes on Houses of Cavendish," in James Loxley, Anna Groundwater, and Julie Sanders, *Ben Jonson's Walk to Scotland: An Annotated Edition of the "Foot Voyage"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 138.

**32** See for instance Lisa Hopkins, "Play Houses: Drama at Bolsover and Welbeck," *Early Theatre* 2 (1999): 25–44; "Margaret Cavendish and the Cavendish Houses," *In-Between* 9 (2001): 63–76; and "Point, Counterpoint, Needlepoint: The Tapestry in Margaret Cavendish's 'The Unnatural Tragedy,'" *Women's Writing* 20 (2013): 555–66; Alison Findlay, "She Gave You the Civility of the House': Household Performance in 'The Concealed Fancies,'" in *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama: Criticism, History, and Performance 1594–1988*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1988), 259–71, 260; and "'I Hate Such an Old-Fashioned House': Margaret Cavendish and the Search for Home," *Early Modern Literary Studies* special issue 14 (May 2004); online: <http://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/si-14/findhate.html>.

**33** Worsley, *Cavalier*, 11.

**34** Burke and Coolahan, "The Literary Contexts of William Cavendish and His Family," 136.

**35** For a description of the Cleopatra panel and its iconography, see Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania

of Chaucer, suggests that “We can observe that the five ‘Noble Women of the Ancient World’ selected for the full-length wall hangings at Hardwick New Hall all appear in Chaucer: Lucretia (which is also the name given to Bess’s daughter who died in infancy) and Cleopatra have their own stories in *The Legend of Good Women*, Artemisia is mentioned in the *Franklin’s Tale*, Zenobia in the *Monk’s Tale* and Penelope ... is regularly cited as an example of virtuosity.”<sup>36</sup> The Egyptian queen was of considerable interest to a number of seventeenth-century aristocratic women: Lady Anne Clifford was painted as her,<sup>37</sup> and Margaret defended Cleopatra (though she attacked Penelope)<sup>38</sup> and asked of Shakespeare “who could describe Cleopatra better than he hath done?”<sup>39</sup> In Jane and Elizabeth’s play *The Concealed Fancies*,<sup>40</sup> when the three sisters are under siege, Cicilly says to Sh,<sup>41</sup> “You mean how did you look in the posture of a delinquent? Faith, as though you thought the scene would change again, and you would be happy though you suffered misery for a time” (3.4.6–10), and Sh replies that she was able to do this because “I practised Cleopatra when she was in her captivity, and could they have thought me worthy to have adorned their triumphs[,] I would have performed his gallant tragedy and so have made myself glorious for time to come” (3.4.13–16). One reason for the sisters’ interest might have been that Cleopatra, like the Cavendish family, was symbolized by a snake;

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Press, 2010), 61. For a suggestion about its possible fate, see Lisa Hopkins and Barbara MacMahon, “‘Come, What, a Siege?’: Metarepresentation in Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley’s ‘The Concealed Fancies,’” *Early Modern Literary Studies* 16 (2013): online: <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/journal/index.php/emls/article/view/83>.

**36** Wiggins, *Bess of Hardwick’s Letters*, 103.

**37** Yasmin Arshad, *Imagining Cleopatra: Performing Gender and Power in Early Modern England* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 3, though *pace* Jessica Malay, “Viewing the Jacobean Cleopatra Portrait: Literary and Visual Intersections in Female Devisership,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 18 (Winter 2018): 29–65.

**38** Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 127.

**39** For discussion of this, see Katherine Romack, “‘I Wonder She Should Be So Infamous for a Whore?’: Cleopatra Restored,” in *Cavendish and Shakespeare, Interconnections*, ed. Katherine Romack and James Fitzmaurice (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 193–211, 194.

**40** Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley, *The Concealed Fancies*, in *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1996). Burke and Coolahan note that “The repeated use of the word ‘fancies’ in its various guises in the writings of William Cavendish, his daughters and his second wife has been interpreted as an indication of the extent of the former’s influence over the women writers of his family” (“The Literary Contexts of William Cavendish and His Family,” 130; they cite specifically Betty Travitsky, *Subordination and Authorship in Early Modern England: The Case of Elizabeth Cavendish Egerton and Her Loose Papers* (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1999), 60).

**41** The speech prefix “Sh” is the only name we have for this particular character. I have suggested elsewhere that it may stand for Susannah (“‘The Concealed Fancies’ and Cavendish Identity,” in *Authority, Authorship and Aristocratic Identity in Seventeenth-Century England: William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Newcastle, and his Political, Social and Cultural Connections*, ed. Peter Edwards and Elspeth Graham (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 111–28).

another was perhaps that in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* we find the lines "O'er-picturing Venus where we see / The fancy outwork nature" (2.2.207–8) and

Nature wants stuff  
To vie strange forms with fancy; yet t' imagine  
An Antony were nature's piece 'gainst fancy.<sup>42</sup>

Both "nature" and "fancy" are key words in Cavendish writings.

Jane and Elizabeth wrote their play at a time when Welbeck was under siege by the Parliamentarians, a powerful reminder that life in Cavendish households was not always happy. Both William and Margaret were either frequently ill or believed themselves to be so, and Sir Theodore Mayerne gave strict advice about their diets.<sup>43</sup> Margaret's second book, *The World's Olio*, took its name from a foodstuff,<sup>44</sup> and in her play *Bell in Campo*, one of Lady Victoria's proclamations is that women "shall eat when they will, and of what they will, and as much as they will, and as often as they will."<sup>45</sup> This is in marked contrast not only to twenty-first-century attitudes to female appetite but also to the lived experience of actual Cavendish-Talbot women in the seventeenth century: Bess of Hardwick reported to Sir Robert Cecil that Arbella "is so wilfully bent that she hath made a vow not to eat or drink in this house at Hardwick, or where I am, till she may hear from her Majesty,"<sup>46</sup> and Arbella does indeed seem ultimately to have starved herself to death. In this context, there are two final members of the extended Cavendish family that I want to mention, two of the three daughters of Mary Cavendish, Bess's eldest daughter, and her husband Gilbert Talbot, 7th Earl of Shrewsbury: Aletheia Howard, Countess of Arundel, and Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent, both of whom wrote recipe books that can help to give us a sense of what daily life was like in Cavendish households. (I have already touched on details from them.) Their books are Aletheia's *Natura Exenterata* (1655) and Elizabeth's *A Choice Manual of Rare and Select Secrets* (1653). For *Natura Exenterata* no author is named, but Aletheia's portrait appears opposite the title page, and one of the recipes observes of "a Water called Maids-milk" that "This Water is good to make the skin neshe" (89). We are looking, then, for a female aristocratic author equally at home transcribing Latin and using the dialect term "nesh";<sup>47</sup> Bess of Hardwick's granddaughter,

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<sup>42</sup> William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Wilders (London: Routledge, 1993), 5.2.97–99.

<sup>43</sup> Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 103.

<sup>44</sup> Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 167.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Sophie Tomlinson, "'My Brain the Stage': Margaret Cavendish and the Fantasy of Female Performance," in *Women, Texts and Histories 1575–1760*, ed. Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (London: Routledge, 1992), 134–63, 149.

<sup>46</sup> Gristwood, *Arbella*, 212.

<sup>47</sup> John Ray, *A collection of English words not generally used* (London: Bruges for Barrell, 1674), 34, observes of "nesh": "Skinne makes it proper to Worcestershire, and to be the same in sence and original with Nice. But I am sure it is used in many other Counties, I believe all over the North-West part of *England*, and also in the midland, as in *Warwick-shire*." It is certainly still in use in Sheffield.

who grew up in Sheffield and whose cousin Lady Arbella Stuart knew five languages, is the perfect if not the only possible fit.

These two books were among the earliest household manuals published, though they had been written even earlier than that, around three decades before, and they can tell us a lot about the lifestyle of the Cavendish-Talbot women. In writing their books, the sisters were tacitly acknowledging their own positions as part of a family which valued domestic entertainment. The dedication of Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* assures William Cavendish that "The custome of your Lo[rds]ships entertainments (even to Strangers) is, rather an Example, than a Fashion," and in both Margaret's play *The Unnatural Tragedy* and William's play *The Variety*, domestic ceremony is important.<sup>48</sup> Elizabeth and Aletheia had grown up in this tradition, and both of them continued it after their marriages. The younger sister, Elizabeth, married Reginald Grey, Earl of Kent, and probably after his death John Selden<sup>49</sup> (whose tract on *Mare Clausum* is parodied by William in *The Variety*). She produced two books, one of recipes and one of remedies: *A choice manual of rare and select secrets in physick and chyrurgery* and *A True Gentlewomans DELIGHT. Wherein is contained all manner of COOKERY: Together with Preserving, Conserving, Drying and Candyng, Very necessary for all Ladies and Gentlewomen*. The *choice manual of rare and select secrets in physick and chyrurgery* is described in the preface as "this small Manuall; which was once esteemed as a rich Cabinet of knowledge," and the reader is assured that "it may be justly deemed as a rich magazene of experience."<sup>50</sup> "Magazene" has a different tonality in the seventeenth century: we have already seen Jane Cavendish calling Bess of Hardwick "the very magazine of rich," and Hero Chalmers notes of Margaret Cavendish that "Her own martial metaphor of her brain as 'a Magazine' storing up her husband's 'wise discourse' implicitly links the printing of her texts with a resistance to the muzzling of her husband precipitated by military events."<sup>51</sup> However, the two books do indeed have something of the feel of a modern lifestyle magazine offering its readers privileged glimpses into Lady Kent's lovely kitchen and enviable life, not least the exoticism of some of the ingredients: "An approved Medicine for the Plague, called the Philosophers Egge" starts innocuously enough with "Take a new laid Egg" but then demands "five or six simples of Unicorns horn," though it does concede that hartshorn will do as a substitute (132 and 134). In this surely lay the appeal of the book at the time of its

<sup>48</sup> John Ford, *The Chronicle Historie of Perkin Warbeck* (London, 1634), sig. A2v.

<sup>49</sup> Lynette Hunter, "Women and Domestic Medicine: Lady Experimenters, 1570–1620," in *Women, Science and Medicine 1500–1700*, ed. Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), 89–107, 91.

<sup>50</sup> Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent, *A choice manual of rare and select secrets in physick and chyrurgery collected and practised by the Right Honorable, the Countesse of Kent, late deceased; as also most exquisite ways of preserving, conserving, candyng, &c.; published by W.I., Gent* (London: G. D. for Shears, 1653), sig. A2r.

<sup>51</sup> Hero Chalmers, "Dismantling the Myth of 'Mad Madge': The Cultural Context of Margaret Cavendish's Authorial Self-Presentation," *Women's Writing* 4 (1997): 323–40 at 326.



publication. Even if you had been able to obtain a substance that you called unicorn horn before the Civil War broke out, you would not have been able to do so once it had started—the Royalist garrison at Pendennis Castle in Cornwall was reported to be eating horseflesh—or, if you were Royalist, after it had finished, since so many of the king’s supporters were living in poverty and exile. Lady Kent’s book peddles a fantasy, offering poignant reminders of a time when people had leisure and energy to trouble themselves about trivia. In the same way, Jane and Elizabeth too write themselves a better world than that offered by the harsh reality of war, and Arbella dreams herself up a lover, while Margaret’s fertile pen imagines not just different societies but different worlds. In one of the most disturbed periods in English history, the literary culture of the Cavendishes offers us an extraordinary window into the world of a private family intimately connected to public events—a world in which living itself is a form of performance—and allows us to see the breaking down of gender distinctions and the emergence of whole new genres.

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