Chapter 5

WILLIAM CAVENDISH: AMATEUR PROFESSIONAL PLAYWRIGHT

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As is the case with many other members of the Cavendish clan, the cultural output associated with William Cavendish is astonishing both in its quantity and its variety. This chapter focuses on just one subset of those cultural outputs: dramatic writing, a field in which Cavendish participated both as patron and as author. Cavendish is perhaps best known as a patron of Restoration commercial drama, and secondarily for the family drama associated with his circle, performed outside London, generally by amateurs, and with the involvement of family members, including Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley. And yet before the Civil War, Cavendish had already built for himself an extraordinary position within English commercial drama. During the period up to 1642, he acted as patron, one way or another, to almost all the leading Caroline professional playwrights, as well as himself being involved in the writing of at least three comedies, two of which clearly achieved a measure of commercial success.[1] This chapter asks: what was Cavendish attempting to do in this continuing early engagement with professional drama? And how did it connect with his wider political and cultural aspirations?

Discussion of Cavendish's early plays has always had to engage with author-centred problems to do with their collaborative or collective authorship and the extent to which they are imitative, or indeed derivative, of previous drama.[2] However, these problems can partially be sidestepped by adopting a perspective centred more upon the audience. This chapter considers Cavendish's amateur imitation of professional drama within the

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1 A recent wide-ranging survey of Cavendish says little about his drama: See Peter Edwards and Elspeth Graham, ed. *Authority, Authorship and Aristocratic Identity in Seventeenth-Century England: William Cavendish, 1st Duke of Newcastle, and his Political, Social, and Cultural Connections* (Leiden: Brill, 2017); for overviews of the drama of Cavendish and his circle, see Timothy Raylor, ed., *The Seventeenth Century*, *Special Issue: The Cavendish Circle* 9 (1994); Irene Burgess, "Recent Studies in Margaret Cavendish, William Cavendish, Elizabeth Cavendish, and Jane Cavendish-Cheyne," *English Literary Renaissance* 32 (2002): 452–73. Contextualizations of Cavendish's work within Caroline drama include Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis 1632–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 197 and Dale B. J. Randall, *Winter Fruit: English Drama, 1642–1660* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1995), 316–20.

2 On the problems of imitation and collective authorship, respectively, see James Fitzmaurice, "William Cavendish and Two Entertainments by Ben Jonson," *Ben Jonson Journal* 5 (1998): 63–80; Timothy Raylor, "Newcastle's Ghosts: Robert Payne, Ben Jonson, and the 'Cavendish Circle,'" in Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth, ed., *Literary Circles and Cultural Communities in Renaissance England* (Columbia: Missouri University Press, 2000), 92–114.

frame of audience expectations and argues that if one were able to take a snapshot of the state of English theatre before it was devastated by the closure of 1642, Cavendish would appear as a patron/playwright likely to be pivotal in the future of the commercial stage.

The picture of that stage as a whole has changed significantly over the last forty years. No longer regarded as a decadent, politically escapist institution, gifted with foreknowledge of the impending Civil War, Caroline drama is now seen as a highly political and potentially oppositional form, not just during the Personal Rule (when, as Martin Butler argues, it constituted almost the only public forum for discussion of political matters) but during all of Charles's reign. One older piece of terminology that recent criticism has continued to find useful is the distinction between "professional playwrights"—authors who made a living out of the stage, a group whose most prominent Caroline members are Jonson, Massinger, Ford, Shirley, and Brome—and amateur courtier dramatists, such as Suckling or Carlell, who were not dependent upon theatre for their income. This financial distinction maps reasonably well, although not perfectly, onto a set of characteristic attitudes. Courtier dramatists tend to make use of elaborate costumes and scenery and to be relatively dismissive of audience reaction: professional dramatists tend to insist on the audience's right to be entertained and to present a cynical view of courtly institutions in general. Considered within this terminology, it will be argued, Cavendish is an interesting figure: an amateur dramatist looking to adopt the attitudes, reference points, and generic markers of a professional playwright.[3]

To establish this argument, it is necessary first to consider the extent of Cavendish's patronage and to list those Caroline dramatists to whom he is known to have had patronage links. These include four of the five major "professional playwrights" of the Caroline era. The first and most famous of these is Ben Jonson, whose close association with the Cavendish family had begun before 1619, when he wrote an elegy on Charles Cavendish. Jonson's *Christening Entertainment*, written between 1618 and 1625 for one of the Cavendish families, may well also mark his association with William Cavendish. Jonson addressed Cavendish in two poems, *Underwoods* 53 and 59, on horsemanship and fencing respectively. In the 1630s Cavendish was, in the words of Anne Barton, Jonson's "last patron, and his most loyal," commissioning two masques from Jonson to be performed at the Cavendish family houses in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire: *The King's Entertainment at Welbeck* (1633) and *Love's Welcome at Bolsover* (1634). Jonson's *The Sad Shepherd*, an unfinished pastoral about Nottinghamshire's local hero Robin Hood, has been convincingly identified as another Cavendish-inflected text. For his part, Cavendish continued to celebrate Jonson in allusions, imitations, and even in an elegy on his death in 1637, whose complicated textual genesis has been discussed by Timothy Raylor.[4]

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3 See Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*; Ira Clark, *Professional Playwrights: Massinger, Ford, Shirley, and Brome* (Lexington: Kentucky University Press, 1992); Julie Sanders, *Caroline Drama: The Plays of Massinger, Ford, Shirley and Brome* (London: Northcote House, 1999).

4 Anne Barton, "Harking Back to Elizabeth: Ben Jonson and Caroline Nostalgia," *English Literary History* 48 (1981): 706–31 at 706; see also Nick Rowe, "'My Best Patron': William Cavendish

James Shirley was another to benefit from Cavendish's patronage. In 1635 Shirley dedicated to him the publication of his tragedy *The Traytor*. In the later 1630s he appears to have collaborated with Cavendish in the preparation both of *The Country Captain* and *The Variety*, since a song from *The Country Captain*, "Come let us cast the dice," was printed as Shirley's in Shirley's *Poems* (1646), while the licensing record of *The Variety* (discussed in this chapter) names Shirley in connection with that play. During the Civil War, indeed, Shirley was employed by Cavendish, as Sandra Burner records.[5] A third playwright whose connection with Cavendish is well attested is Jonson's protégé and former manservant Richard Brome. Brome dedicated the 1640 publication of his place-realism comedy *The Sparagus Garden* to Cavendish, stating that he was emboldened to do so by "Your favourable *Construction* of my poore *Labours*." Brome also wrote commendatory verses on Cavendish's *The Variety*, performed in 1641, "[Cavendish] having commanded [Brome] to give him my true opinion of it." And a third suggestive document in this respect is Nottingham University Library: Pw. V. 167, a manuscript copy of Richard Brome's verse satire *Upon Aglaura in Folio*, a lampoon on the 1638 courtier drama of Cavendish's political colleague and rival Sir John Suckling. While the collection in which it survives incorporates manuscripts from multiple sources, so the provenance of individual items cannot be established with certainty, this clearly seventeenth-century manuscript may well be from William Cavendish's own library. It is a particularly interesting text to find there in that it mocks Suckling's *Aglaura* both for the lavish costumes used in its performance and for the equally lavish printing of the text, at odds with its success on the stage: "She that in *Persian* habits, made great brags, / Degenerates in this excesse of rags." Brome's insistence that audience reception, not elaborate production, is the true measure of dramatic merit is a classic statement of the professional dramatist's credo and, as will be seen, is close to the attitude to drama expressed in Cavendish's own plays.[6]

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and Jonson's Caroline Drama," *The Seventeenth Century, Special Issue: The Cavendish Circle* 9 (1994): 197–212; W. David Kay, *Ben Jonson: A Literary Life* (London: Macmillan, 1995), 180–81; Julie Sanders, *Ben Jonson's Theatrical Republics* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 186; Ian Donaldson, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), esp. 407–10; and the articles cited earlier in this chapter.

5 Sandra A. Burner, *James Shirley: A Study of Literary Coteries and Patronage in Seventeenth Century England* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1988); William Cavendish, *The Country Captain*, ed. Anthony Jonson (Oxford: Malone Society, 1999); Lynn Hulse, "Apollo's Whirligig: William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle and His Music Collection," *The Seventeenth Century, Special Issue: The Cavendish Circle* 9 (1994): 213–46; Julia Wood, "William Lawes' Music for Plays," in *William Lawes (1602–45): Essays on his Life, Times, and Work*, ed., Andrew Ashbee (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), 11–67.

6 Nottingham University Library: Pw. V. 167; for study of the poem's manuscript history, see Joshua McEvilla, "William Cavendish's copy of Richard Brome's 'Upon AGLAURA printed in Folio,' " *Ben Jonson Journal* 22 (2015): 142–55; Sir John Suckling, *The Works of Sir John Suckling: The Non-dramatic Works*, ed. Thomas Clayton (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 201–2, lines 33–34; Richard Brome, *The Dramatic Works of Richard Brome*, ed. John Pearson (1873; New York: AMS, 1966), 3.111,

In addition to these extensive connections with Jonson, Brome, and Shirley, Cavendish also had a patronage connection with John Ford. The extent and nature of the link is not clear, but it is demonstrated by the fact that Ford dedicated the 1634 printing of *Perkin Warbeck* to Cavendish. Lisa Hopkins has argued that, given Ford's patronage links to allies of Newcastle, including Arundel and Pembroke, the connection may well have been "fairly close."[7] Similarly, Cavendish had some sort of patronage connection with Robert Davenport, a fringe member of the literary circle associated with Brome, Thomas Nabbes, and Robert Chamberlain. In the 1620s and 1630s, Davenport wrote at least three extant plays and nine lost plays. While little is known about Davenport's career, his connection with Cavendish at some point between 1629 and 1643 is evidenced through what is now Nottingham University Library: Pw. V. 16, a presentation manuscript of verse.[8]

Thus Cavendish enjoyed links in the 1630s and 1640s with at least five obviously professional dramatists. In addition, there is evidence to link Cavendish to two other pre–Civil War playwrights. William Sampson was a playwright and poet who celebrated several north Midlands patrons in his eulogistic verse, including the Stanhope and Hastings familes: William Cavendish was both one of the dedicatees of his 1636 collection of poetry *Virtus post Funera Vivit* and the recipient of one of its eulogies. Evidence that the connection was long-lasting is to be found in a much later Sampson manuscript, *Love's Metamorphosis*, a poem dedicated to Margaret Cavendish. But Sampson was also a dramatist who wrote for the London stage, whose works include two extant plays and at least one lost one. The Oxford-educated clergyman Jasper Mayne knew Cavendish in the 1630s and was later employed by him as a personal chaplain, but he also wrote two plays that were performed at the Blackfriars, *The Amorous War* and the city comedy *The City Match*.[9] This list does not, of course, include the Restoration dramatists such as Settle, Flecknoe, Shadwell, and Dryden whom Cavendish patronized and with some of whom he collaborated; nor, indeed, does it include William Davenant, active in professional theatre both before and after the Civil War and a close friend of Cavendish.[10] On the other hand, in Jonson, Brome, Shirley, and Ford it already contains a figure widely recognized as the country's leading professional dramatist in his day, together with three out of the

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2 [A4r]. Brome's plays are cited throughout from this edition. See also Matthew Steggle, *Richard Brome: Place and Politics on the Caroline Stage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

7 Lisa Hopkins, *John Ford's Political Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 25–26.

8 G. E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 7 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1941–68), 3:226–38; N. W. Bawcutt, *The Control and Censorship of Caroline Drama: The Records of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels 1623–73* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 204, recovers the title of a ninth lost play; poems from Pw. V. 16 are transcribed in G. Thorn-Drury, *A Little Ark Containing Sundry Pieces of Seventeenth-Century Verse* (London: Dobell, 1921), 9–15.

9 Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 4:843–50; 5:1042–47; Rowe, "'My Best Patron,'" 198; David Kathman, "Sampson, William (*b*. 1599/1600, *d*. in or after 1655)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

10 See Lynn Hulse, "Matthew Locke: Three Newly Discovered Songs for the Restoration Stage," *Music and Letters* 75 (1994): 200–13.

four authors whom Ira Clark groups together as the leading "professional playwrights" of the Personal Rule. Cavendish was not merely an exceptionally active and wide-ranging literary patron: he elected particularly to patronize writers who can be categorized, in the terminology of G. E. Bentley, as "attached professional" dramatists involved with the London stage.[11]

The second claim that requires to be substantiated is that Cavendish himself was known as a successful writer on the pre-1642 stage, and to this end it will be useful to review what survives of his pre-1642 dramatic writing. Before moving on to complete plays, one could start with Cavendish's own collection of dramatic fragments, some of which (numbers 1–11 in Lynn Hulse's collection) predate his flight into exile in July 1644 and some of which date from the 1630s. These fragments, dialogues, prologues, and songs are clearly from a variety of contexts, including household performances.[12] In Cavendish's collection of these fragments one sees ingredients which could be stirred together into another "variety" of the sort exhibited in Cavendish's completed pre–Civil War plays.

There are at least three such plays, all comedies. The earliest is *Wit's Triumvirate, or the Philosopher*, which survives in a manuscript dated 1635 and which was first identified as Cavendish's work in 1993. This very long play is a loosely connected series of dialogues within a plot clearly derived from Jonson's *The Alchemist*, spiced with quotations from Shakespearean plays including *1 Henry IV*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. The prologues to the play, addressed to a public theatre audience and to the king and queen, suggest that performance of it was at least expected, but there are no records to confirm its production either on the public stage or at court.[13] Cavendish's next known play is *The Country Captain*, a comedy revolving around the visit of a group of London-dwellers to Sir Richard Huntlove's house in the country. The play contains a reference to the "late expedition" and the "leaguer at Barwick," which must postdate the signing of the treaty on June 18, 1639. On the other hand, the play was certainly in the Blackfriars repertory by August 7, 1641, when it was listed among those plays over which the Blackfriars company asserted their ownership. It can therefore be dated to within those limits.[14] As for its contemporary impact, there are two facts indicating that it was, indeed, a stageworthy and successful play: the King's Men thought it worthwhile

11 G. E. Bentley, *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time, 1590–1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971).

12 Lynn Hulse, "Introduction," in William Cavendish, *Dramatic Works by William Cavendish*, ed. Lynn Hulse (Oxford: Malone Society, 1996).

13 See Cathryn A. Nelson, ed., *A Critical Edition of Wit's Triumvirate, or the Philosopher*, 2 vols. (Salzburg: Universität Salzburg, 1975); the attribution is made by Hilton Kelliher, "Donne, Jonson, Richard Andrews and the Newcastle Manuscript," *English Manuscript Studies* 4 (1993): 134–73; in addition, it has been speculated that he was part-author of the anonymous Caroline comedy *Lady Alimony*: John Freehafer, "Perspective Scenery and the Caroline Playhouses," *Theater Notebook* 27 (1973): 98–113.

14 Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 3:150; Cavendish, *The Country Captain*. Johnson, "Introduction," xx–xxii argues, convincingly, that the play can probably be dated to early summer

to assert their rights over it in 1641, and it was revived successfully at the Restoration, with performances recorded in 1661, 1667, 1668, and ca.1680.[15]

For *The Variety*, a city comedy revolving around a marriage-plot, firm evidence of its date has emerged. A rediscovered record derived from the office-book of Henry Herbert reads: "Variety Com: with several reformations made by Shirley 1641. My Lo[d] Newcastle, as is said hath some hand in it. 1641 allowed upon review without exception." On the one hand, this helps with the dating question, since it indicates that the play was first produced in 1641, and in the process it makes doubly significant the fact that it is not listed in the Blackfriars repertory of August 7, 1641. *The Variety*'s first production seems to have taken place, then, in the second half of 1641. On the other hand, it provides interesting evidence of collaborative authorship, with Shirley clearly entrusted with almost all of the business of arranging the performance. Shirley's late "reformations" seem unrecoverable: it is unclear whether they were improvements to the dramaturgy or removal of potentially offensive material, although the fact that Herbert took an interest in them might suggest the latter. *The Variety*, too, clearly had some contemporary impact, since it formed the basis for a Civil War era droll, *The Humours of M. Galliard*, based on Cavendish's French dancing master of the same name. This in turn was sufficiently successful for the illustrator of *The Wits*, a Restoration collection of drolls, to depict Galliard among the comic "star turns" in the engraving that formed the title page to the collection. *The Variety* itself was also, probably, revived at the Restoration, further evidence that it was a commercially viable comedy.[16]

An obvious problem here relates to the question of authorship, since Cavendish in general made extensive use of literary collaboration, particularly in processes of redrafting and revision of his poems. Similarly, with his plays, there is evidence of collaboration and rewriting. For instance, *Sir Martin Mar-all* (perf. 1667) was written in collaboration with Dryden, who later claimed the play as his own, and another of Cavendish's post-Restoration plays, *The Triumphant Widow* (perf. 1674), was stitched together by Thomas Shadwell from a series of dramatic fragments written by Cavendish, as Lynn Hulse has shown.[17] Similarly with the pre–Civil War plays, Herbert's record makes it clear that Shirley was involved in writing *The Variety*, while *The Country Captain*, in addition to containing a song attributed elsewhere to Shirley, resembles his work so much that the manuscript version of the play was wrongly assigned to Shirley when it was rediscovered. It would be naive to assume that Cavendish "wrote" the entirety of his surviving plays in the sense that one might expect a modern poet to have written every word of a long poem of theirs. Indeed, as Cavendish's wife wrote, apropos of her own

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1641 and may even contain an allusion to the wedding that summer of Elizabeth Cavendish to John Egerton, Viscount Brackley.

15 Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 3:146.

16 Bawcutt, *Control and Censorship*, 209; Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 3:150.

17 See Raylor, "Newcastle's Ghosts"; Hulse, "Introduction," xiv–xv; Lynn Hulse, "'The King's Entertainment' by the Duke of Newcastle," *Viator* 26 (1995): 355–405.

playwriting endeavours, "I have heard that such poets as write playes, seldome or never join or sow the several scenes together; they are two several professions."[18]

On the other hand, there is plenty of evidence that Cavendish was identified at the time with the plays that were later printed under his name. Only this can explain, for instance, the frequent allusions in the Civil War era newsbooks in which he is identified as "*Newcastle*: one that in time of peace tired the stage at *Black-Fryers* with his *Comedies*" or as "A member of Blackfryers Colledge, a Stage-player, one that hath left off his *Comicall* Sockes to act Tragedies of Crueltie in the North."[19] To this extent, it is clear that playwriting (and in particular comedy-writing) formed an important part of Cavendish's public image and that the plays can be seen as functioning as a form of self-fashioning. A hypothetical well-informed playgoer, then, asked in 1642 to comment on Cavendish's role in professional theatre, would identify him as a sponsor of many of the leading professional dramatists of the day and as the author of two recent plays able to compete with professional drama in terms of their quality. They might well predict that he would play a central role in the future development of London professional theatre.

With this perspective established, one can return to Cavendish's Caroline plays, especially *The Variety* and *The Country Captain*, which the 1649 printing presents as a pair of companion pieces.[20] In light of the argument that Cavendish was not just a dilettante but a patron/playwright staking out a prominent territory at the heart of professional theatre, it is striking that these two plays look very much *unlike* courtier drama of the time and much more like Caroline professional drama.

First of all, Cavendish's plays are city comedies rather than the tragedies and tragicomedies favoured by most courtly authors. Cavendish's choice of genres is not quite unique among courtier authors—one could cite, for instance, Thomas Killigrew's *The Parson's Wedding*—but it is certainly unusual. In particular, they are clearly comedies heavily inflected by Jonsonian models, so much so that *The Variety* has been described as a "scrapbook" of humours characters compiled from across the Jonson canon.[21] Within the genre of city comedy, Cavendish's plays have obvious affinities with the "place-realism" comedy being practised by Richard Brome and others in the 1630s, full of references to particular London streets, locations, and taverns. For instance, Act 2, scene 1 of *The Country Captain* is set in the Devil Tavern off Fleet Street, in a way similar to, for instance, Brome's *The English Moor* of 1637–1638, which also sets a scene in that specific tavern. While relatively little use is made of the place-realism setting in the context

18 Quoted in Randall, *Winter Fruit*, 316. See also Anthony à Wood's comment that Shirley "did much assist" in Cavendish's playwriting: Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 3:150.

19 Bentley, *Jacobean and Caroline Stage*, 3:144; Cavendish, *Country Captain*, "Introduction," xxiv.

20 [William Cavendish], *The Country Captain and The Variety, Two Comedies, written by a person of Honor* (London: Moseley, 1649). On the textual complexities of the edition, see Hulse, "Introduction," in Cavendish, *Dramatic Works*, vii. The texts are separately paginated, and reference to both plays here is by page number to the 1649 edition.

21 Alfred Harbage, *Cavalier Drama: An Historical and Critical Supplement to the Elizabethan and Restoration Stage* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1936), 72.

of the play—it soon shifts to a rather less precisely located English countryside—the exactness of the scene's placing in a known and knowable London tavern emphasizes the realistic tone that *The Country Captain* seeks to pursue and implicitly makes a claim that the great nobleman Cavendish is familiar with the same London streets and taverns as the Blackfriars audience.

Second, Cavendish's plays are like professional drama in their attacks on monopolies of all descriptions. The best way to illustrate these similarities is by considering a number of specific parallels between the anti-monopoly satire in Cavendish's earlier drama and the anti-monopoly satire of Richard Brome's 1640 comedy *The Court Begger*. A number of the same, very specific, targets come up. Both include among the patents they satirize a "proiecte for Cornes": both also satirize a project for gaining a monopoly on periwigs. Both imagine projectors advancing schemes in which they get to have sexual intercourse with large numbers of women for the good of the commonwealth. Perhaps most strikingly, Brome's satire on monopolies includes the absurd idea of "a Patent, for a Cutpurse-hall", and in a dramatic fragment Cavendish satirically supposes that cutpurses are organized like a guild, based in "Cutt purse Hall."[22] Of course, there is no monopoly on anti-monopoly satire, which, as A. H. Tricomi points out, had been a comic staple since Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*: nonetheless, these verbal parallels are striking, and although they certainly do not demonstrate that Brome and Cavendish were collaborators, they demonstrate that Cavendish, the amateur courtier dramatist, is applying the same satirical techniques and vocabulary as his professional dramatist client.[23]

A third distinctly "professional," uncourtly flavour is provided by the way that, in Cavendish's comedies, courtier drama is repeatedly held up for ridicule. This is given a programmatic prominence in *The Country Captain*, where the Prologue announces:

> Gallants, I'le tell you what we doe not meane
> To shew you here, a glorious painted Scene,
> With various doores, to stand in stead of wit,
> Or richer cloathes with lace, for lines well writ.
> (Cavendish, *Country Captain*, 1)

Courtier dramatists' reliance on painted scenery and elaborate costumes is of course a common theme in anti-courtly dramatic writing of the 1630s. But such antipathy to courtier drama also extends to the world created by the plays as well. A brief exchange in *The Country Captain* lists some of the delights to be found in London:

> dev. [T]here will bee a new play shortly, a prity play, some say, that never heard it; a Comedy written by a professed scholler, he scornes to take monie for his witt, as the Poets doe.

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22 Hulse, "Introduction," xi; *Country Captain*, 37–38; Cavendish, *Dramatic Works*, 3, 7; Brome, *Dramatic Works*, 1:192, 194, 215, 217.

23 A. H. Tricomi, *Anticourt Drama in England 1603–1642* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989), esp. 181–84.

l ad. Hee is charitable to the Actors.
sIst. It may bee repentance in them enough to play.

(Cavendish, *Country Captain*, 14)

Taken out of context, one would expect this attack, or the similar passage in *Wit's Triumvirate*, to have been written by a professional like Brome, who elsewhere attacks amateur playwrights who "write / Lesse for your pleasure than their own delight." One would not expect it to have been written by an author who might himself be vulnerable to such charges, and one might also for the same reason be surprised by this play's later attacks on courtiers employing ghost-writers to help with their poetry.[24]

Furthermore, as well as attacks on amateur writers of stage drama, these plays also contain satire on the whole idea of the courtly masque. In *The Variety* the witless Galliard takes part in masques at court, while Manly dislikes them for their expense (36, 40); Martin Butler traces the development of this idea in Act 4, where a room in a tavern has been converted to an elaborate stage set within which an usher and a whore are elevated on a throne in a drunken parody of a masque. Butler comments: "It is an unidealized, disillusioned version of the Whitehall masques: for Newcastle, masquing carries the same ironic meanings it does in the masque of whores dressed as queens in [Nathaniel Richards's] *Messalina*, or in the masque of beggars in Brome's *A Jovial Crew*."[25]

Much the same analysis can be extended to the treatment of masque in *The Country Captain*. No masque is enacted there, but there is an extended description of an imagined masque, dreamed by the courtly adulterer Sir Francis, who falls asleep and thus misses the chance to cuckold the country gentleman Sir Richard Huntlove. In a soliloquy, Francis describes his dreams:

> [M]y dream was full of rapture such as I with all my wakinge sence would fly to meete; me thought I saw a thousand cupids slyde from heaven and landinge heere made this there scene of Reuells clappinge their goulden feathers, which kept time while their owne feete struck musick to their dance as they had trod and touched so ma[n]y Lutes: This done with in a cloude form'd like A throne, she to whome love had consecrate this night my Mistresse, did descend …
>
> (Cavendish, *Country Captain*, 74)

Of course, these masque-like dreams are untrue: indeed, while he has been sleeping, we have seen Lady Huntlove rejecting the idea of committing adultery with him. Here, the conventions of the masque are not directly satirized, but in the world of the play they are part of a lascivious and deceiving imagination of adultery. In literary terms, *The Variety* and *The Country Captain* clearly resemble professional rather than courtly drama in a number of ways: in particular, they align themselves against the current practice of courtly writers, especially courtier drama and the masque.

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24 Cavendish, ed. Nelson, *Country Captain*, 41–42; *Wit's Triumvirate*, 4.4.192–218; Brome, *Dramatic Works*, 1:184.

25 Butler, *Theatre and Crisis*, 197.

Interestingly, these references to courtly drama sit inside a much wider and more pervasive awareness of the history of drama. For instance, *The Variety*'s relationship to Jonson is not just a matter of secret imitation. At the start of the play, the audience are told that Madam Beaufield is "the only Magnetick widdow i'th Town" (2), a phrase which invites the audience to view the entire succeeding play through the prism of Jonson's Caroline comedy *The Magnetic Lady*. One obvious comparison for this technique is Richard Brome, in whose comedies characters frequently name Jonsonian precedents for their own behaviour: Cavendish's allusion here certainly distances the audience from the dramatic illusion in the same way. But it is only the first of a sequence of references in the opening scenes of *The Variety* to what Anthony Johnson calls "all the other paraphernalia of later Jonsonian comedy"—Madam Beaufield is accompanied by a "Regiment of Jeerers" (2) similar to those in *The Staple of News*; she has an "Academy" of Ladies accompanying her (12) who resemble the Ladies Collegiate of *Epicoene*; the hero's name, Manly, certainly invites comparisons to his namesake in *The Devil is an Ass*. Later in the play, Manly and Simpleton's duet, "Have you felt the wooll of Beaver?" (57) takes lines from a song featured in *The Devil is an Ass* and parodies them by having Simpleton sing the correct words and Manly make fun of Simpleton in a descant.[26] *The Variety*, and its opening sections in particular, invite us to read the play within a Jonsonian frame.

The Country Captain too makes frequent intertextual reference to Jonson, as when Sackbury warns Courtwell that too much study of the law will fill up his head with "*P*[*r*]*oclamations Rejoyndere* & hard words beyond the *Alkemist*" (22). And the scene in which he does so is the one set in the Devil Tavern, recalling as it does so not merely the contemporary work of Brome but at the same time the work of Jonson himself, whose favourite tavern it was, who wrote the *leges conviviales* for its upstairs room, and who put the tavern on stage himself in *The Staple of News*. Cavendish's use of the Devil Tavern as setting is at once self-consciously contemporary reportage and also an assertion of current literary affinities (for example, to the works of Brome), and yet also a claim to an earlier literary pedigree—to the works of Jonson and to the biographical mythology associated with the Devil Tavern and with Jonson's coterie there. The use of the Devil Tavern as a setting constitutes an intertextual claim to be a Son of Ben.[27]

Jonsonian reference in *The Country Captain* ranges widely around the Jonson canon. Engine in that play is almost a reprise of Engine in *The Devil is an Ass*. Courtwell intends to "sigh out my part, / And drop division with my brinish teares" (34), a line that

26 Jonson, *The Devil is an Ass*, 2.6.94–113, although Jonson also printed the lyric as a poem within *Underwoods*, 2.4, "A Celebration of Charis": Jonson is cited from David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson, ed., *The Cambridge Works of Ben Jonson*, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

27 See Percy Simpson, "Ben Jonson and the Devil Tavern," *Modern Language Review* 34 (1939): 367–73; Katherine A. Esdale, "Ben Jonson and the Devil Tavern," *Essays and Studies* 29 (1944): 93–100; for the symbolic importance of drinking and taverns within the mythology of literary coteries, see Timothy Raylor, *Cavaliers, Clubs, and Literary Culture: Sir John Mennes, James Smith, and the Order of the Fancy* (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1994).

refers back to Echo's song in *Cynthia's Revels*, 1.2, "Woe weeps out her division when she sings." Even Jonson's prose works are knowingly referenced, it seems: when Dorothy complains that impersonating her mistress is making her resemble her mistress, adding, "I have knowen some men taught the Stammers so" (73), it certainly invites reference back to Jonson's famous dictum that "we so insist in imitating others, as we cannot (when it is necessary) return to ourselves; like children, that imitate the vices of stammerers so long, till at last they become such."[28] Indeed, all three of Cavendish's pre-war comedies are saturated in reference to "our best poet" Jonson (*Wit's Triumvirate*, 4.4.166–68): it is not merely that they imitate Jonson extensively (perhaps as extensively as a child imitates a stammerer) but that they are an appropriation of Jonsonian comedy looking to trade on the audience's awareness of their Jonsonian predecessors and—for those sections of the audience more in the know—the author's prominent personal links to Jonson.

But if *The Variety*, especially, locates itself relative to Jonson, then it is important to note that *The Country Captain* wears another literary influence on its sleeve. In the first scene of *The Country Captain*, there is a strange comment by Captain Underwit: "I must thinke, now, to provide me of warlike accoutrements, to accommodate, which coms of accommodo Shakespeare the first & the first" (5). A second conspicuous naming of Shakespeare follows, since Thomas goes off to purchase those military accoutrements but ends up spending £23 on books. Among the pile he brings back on to stage is, extraordinarily, a copy of Shakespeare's folio works: a moment worth attention as perhaps the first moment in theatrical history where Shakespeare's plays are paraded on the stage in book form. Underwit seems unimpressed:

> und. *Shakspeares* workes. Why *Shakspeares* workes?
> t ho. I had nothing for the Pike men before.
> und. They are playes.
> t ho. Are not all your musteringes in the Country soe, Sir? pray read on.
>
> (Cavendish, *Country Captain*, 25)

This is a stage on which the presence of Shakespeare's plays is literally tangible.

What, then, are we to make of the play's relationship to Shakespeare? The second of the two direct allusions, punning on his name, is perhaps less helpful here, but the allusion at the start of the play provides more food for thought. Its reference to "Shakespeare the first & the first" makes little sense literally, since it shows Underwit treating Shakespeare almost like a law-book: in fact, the allusion can be tracked down to a relatively obscure passage in *2 Henry IV*, where Shallow and Bardolph discuss the phrase. "Better accommodated!—it is good: yea, indeed, is it. Good phrases are surely,

28 Jonson, *Discoveries*, lines 784–88. As Barton ("Harking Back," 707) points out, Brome's poem on *The Variety* makes explicit the comparison to Jonson, adapting the last line of *Cynthia's Revels* as it does so.

and ever were, very commendable. Accommodated! it comes of 'accommodo' very good; a good phrase."[29]

Like the Shallow scenes in *2 Henry IV*, this section of Cavendish's play shows a London military captain, of a sort, travelling into the country, so there is more than a verbal reminiscence here. In particular, *The Country Captain*'s countryside is certainly conceived, to put it crudely, in Shakespearean rather than Fletcherian terms: it is a detailed and sympathetically presented English landscape, full of mutton and beef and muddy boots and hunting with hounds in the forests, whose rustic simplicity is in marked contrast to the wicked sophistication of the city. The good-humoured handling of the *miles gloriosus* figure of Underwit certainly recalls, in general terms, the Bardolphs and the Falstaffs of Shakespeare. The version of Shakespeare which Cavendish appears to be invoking by the double allusion to him early on is the Shakespeare of Milton's "native wood-notes," a poet of the English countryside to set against Jonson, the bard of the city.

At first glance, this reading of Cavendish's early plays in terms of allusions to Shakespeare and Jonson, prefiguring the discussion of their relative merits in Cavendish's post-Restoration comedy *The Triumphant Widow*, would seem to suggest that Cavendish was already establishing a narrow canon of literary excellence. But, surprisingly, the allusions in the earlier plays are in the context of a much wider interest in professional drama of all sorts. Sackbury imagines a procession of "Cavaliers with tyltinge feathers gaudy as *Agamemnons* in the playe," although it is not clear which dramatic representation of Agamemnon is under discussion. "A white Devill is but a Poeticall fiction, for the devill bless us child is black," complains a character at one point. While the phrase is a proverbial one, an audience might well be reminded of Webster's *The White Devil*, acted in 1612. James comments that Simpleton's stratagem was "no tricke to catch the old one," another proverbial phrase which is also the title of a well-known Renaissance play, this time Middleton's comedy of 1608. Unequivocally explicit is James's remark that the coachman "drives like a Tamberlaine," to which Simpleton answers, "Holla ye pamperd Jades."[30] This is a reference, complete with quotation, to Marlowe's play, by now around fifty years old. In the world of *The Variety* and *The Country Captain*, professional drama is so familiar that its titles and catchphrases are in places almost indistinguishable from proverbs. In these allusions and others like them, mainstays of early modern professional theatre are carefully given places in the plays' intellectual frame.

Such an interest in a past theatrical heritage links directly to Cavendish's conscious archaism, his political "Elizabethanism." This idea, discussed in a seminal essay by Anne Barton and developed by Martin Butler, has generally been considered mainly with reference to Manly in *The Variety*, whose humour of dressing up as the long-dead Earl of Leicester is treated in the play as both ludicrous and yet admirable insofar as it indicates his belief in a sense of old-fashioned English virtue. Manly praises the Elizabethan era

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29 William Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part Two*, ed. René Weis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.2.67–70.

30 Cavendish, *Country Captain*, 22, 61; *Variety*, 59, 72; see also *Wit's Triumvirate*, 4.4.596–600, which alludes to *Hamlet*, *Tamburlaine*, and *The Spanish Tragedy*.

as "those honest dayes, when Knights were Gentlemen, and proper men took the walls of dwarfes … these things were worne when men of honor flourish'd, that tam'd the wealth of Spaine, set up the States, help'd the French King, and brought Rebellion to reason Gentlemen" (39). This is in opposition both to the remembrances of the morally dubious Jacobean era presented within *The Variety* by the reminiscences of James the Steward and to the un-English, hyper-courtly behaviour of the people of the present day. Curtis Perry suggests that the reason for Cavendish's choice of Leicester as a positive role model is a pointed contrast between Leicester and more recent favourites, such as Buckingham, who had indeed facilitated Cavendish's own rise to political prominence in the 1620s. Perry links the portrait of Leicester in *The Variety* to a revival of interest in Leicester also manifested, for instance, in the printing in 1641 of Thomas Rogers's poem *Leicester's Ghost*.[31] Another, slightly earlier, example of this effect is Brome's *The Antipodes* (performed 1638), where Letoy refers admiringly to Leicester as "That English Earle, / That lov'd a Play and Player so well" (Brome, *Dramatic Works*, vol. 3, 246). Cavendish's interest in recreating the Elizabethan is part of a wider revival of interest in the Elizabethan that was developing in Jonson's later plays and that is continued by other professional dramatists such as Brome.

While these plays, especially *The Variety*, are full of references to Elizabeth and Elizabeth's time, in *The Variety* much of the mirth directed by the other characters at Manly actually serves to emphasize that contemporary London is full of images of the Elizabethan era. The jeerers recognize that Manly is disguised as Leicester because "Thus I have seen him painted" (31), and the London they describe is full of images on conduits and churches and in paintings that remind them of the Elizabethan (32, 42). In another pointed allusion to the days of Elizabeth, it is "a statute *quinquagesimo* of the Queene" (82) that achieves the humiliation of the arrogant Galliard and of the decadent values he represents. Manly, perhaps, remains a somewhat ambivalent and ludicrous figure, but *The Variety* certainly asserts the continuity between Elizabethan London and Caroline London. Hence the welter of references in these plays to earlier drama, going back to Elizabethan texts such as *Cynthia's Revels*, *Tamburlaine*, and *2 Henry IV*, may be partly explicable not merely in terms of politicized nostalgia but as appropriations of a literary tradition. A useful touchstone here is Suckling, the quintessential courtier dramatist, who ridiculed Jonson as a representative of commercial and vulgar drama and yet sought to appropriate the legacy of Shakespeare, posing for a portrait reading *Hamlet*. In contrast, in these plays Cavendish is seeking to regain and reclaim possession of all of Jacobean and (especially) Elizabethan drama, putting his own work at the centre of a continuing tradition.[32]

Therefore, one should hesitate to categorize Cavendish's drama as political in the simple sense, since these are not tracts designed to change the way the audience would

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31 Curtis Perry, *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 22–54. See also Barton, "Harking Back," 728–29.

32 See Mary Edmond, *Rare Sir William Davenant* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 75; Suckling's attacks on Jonson include his poem "The Wits" and personal satire of Jonson

vote, had they had a vote, or to make them leave the theatre with a revised political agenda. However, while they are not propaganda, they can still constitute a public advertisement of Cavendish's literary and cultural affinities with public theatre. Cavendish's dramatic activities in the 1630s and 1640s position him at the heart of English professional drama: as patron, as writer, as claimant to the literary tradition of Jonson and Shakespeare. The intervention of the Civil War meant that Cavendish was perhaps not as central to that future as he would have wished. Although he resumed this project at the Restoration, making him one of a handful of pivotal figures who were influential on both sides of the great divide of seventeenth-century drama, he never quite regained the extensive network of patronage and, perhaps, sense of cultural authority which he, *The Country Captain*, and *The Variety* were starting to establish in the early 1640s.

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