

Chapter 6

WILLIAM CAVENDISH AND ELIZABETHAN NOSTALGIA

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IN HER BOOK *John Ford's Political Theatre*, Lisa Hopkins suggests that if there is "one political lesson which is indisputably to be learned from *Perkin Warbeck*" (John Ford's unfashionable history play of the early 1630s), it is that "the fortunes of the King and the fortunes of his nobles are indissolubly interconnected, and both sides will benefit if the relationship between them is as close and as cordial as possible."¹ Chronicle history plays, like Ford's play, though highly fashionable in late-Elizabethan theatre, had long since lost their cachet when Ford came to write *Perkin Warbeck*. Nevertheless, the lesson that Ford's play tries to teach its audience was very much in vogue during the reign of Charles I, not least during his Personal Rule, which began in 1629. Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* dramatizes the history of the young man from Flanders who claimed to be Richard, Duke of York, one of the Princes in the Tower alleged to have been murdered by Richard III. Perkin presents himself as the rightful heir returned to claim the throne from Henry VII. It is, however, not Henry but the King of Scotland, James IV, who has to learn the aforementioned political lesson of the play. The significance of this point is made more manifest when it is noted that both Henry VII and James IV were the kings through which James I and VI, Charles's father, claimed the thrones of England and Scotland respectively. And it has been observed that "implicit in the play is the plea that King Charles follow the path of his Tudor rather than his Stuart forebear": Charles, like Henry VII, should place greater importance on a close and cordial relationship between himself and the ancient nobility of his kingdoms than he appears to do at the present time.²

Significantly, the concerns of Ford's politically interested history play resonate with those of a lesser-known play, *The Variety*, a city comedy by William Cavendish, Earl of Newcastle.³ That there are resonances between Ford's history play and Cavendish's comedy should not come as a surprise, because Ford dedicated the 1634 printing of

1 Lisa Hopkins, *John Ford's Political Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 44–45.

2 Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (London: Methuen, 1965; repr. Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), 302; also see Robert G. Lawrence, ed., *Jacobean and Caroline Tragedies* (London: Dent, 1975), 92.

3 Of the earl's dramatic works, the plays *The Country Captain* and *The Variety* are the most significant; the date, the printing, and the authorship of *The Variety* are discussed by Steggle in Chapter 5; as Steggle notes, *The Variety* appears to have been produced in the second half of 1641. References to *The Variety* are to the play as it appears in *The Country Capitaine, and The Varietie, Two Comedies, Written by a Person of Honor* (London, 1649). I have modernized spelling and punctuation.

Perkin Warbeck to the earl; the significance of this forms the basis of a chapter in Lisa Hopkins's book on Ford's associations with "an aristocratic coterie," including Cavendish, that was "marked by Catholic sympathies and opposition politics."⁴ Prominent among the points of comparison with Ford's play is *The Variety*'s explicit and politically charged nostalgia for Tudor culture and politics, a trait of Caroline theatre that Anne Barton has usefully summarized in the phrase "harking back to Elizabeth."⁵

Alfred Harbage's description of *The Variety* accurately, if also rather disparagingly, catalogues its parts:

The first of Newcastle's plays is eloquent of his devotion to Jonson: *The Variety*, c. 1639, is little more than a scrapbook, wherein the story of several courtships laden with the usual bustling intrigue forms merely a frame for the "humours" portraits of a news-monger, a worshipper of the past, a country simpleton and his mother, a French dancing master, a band of professional "jeerers," and the members of a female academy of fashion—all, or nearly all, of whom had appeared in the Jonsonian gallery itself.⁶

The "worshipper of the past" in Harbage's list of characters is Master Manly. Manly is the hero of *The Variety*, and his sensibilities—an old-fashioned masculinity, represented in both his dress and comportment—are shown to triumph over the man of mode, represented by Galliard, a French dance master, who privileges Frenchified elegance over traditional English statesmanship. Manly, who dresses as the Elizabethan Earl of Leicester, signifies an older culture of "Ceremony and degrees of honour" and symbolizes the politically charged nostalgia for the Tudor age that Cavendish wishes to promote.⁷ It is Manly, or rather the "manly" man with whom he identifies, the Elizabethan Earl of Leicester, that is the focus of Cavendish's interest. In particular, I wish to suggest that the figure of Leicester, besides his value as a totem for the political Elizabethanism discussed by Matthew Steggle in [Chapter 5](#), had a particular significance for Cavendish and his opponents in the latter half of 1641 when *The Variety* was first performed. And, as well as having a potent political meaning for Cavendish, the figure of Leicester also had a personal, familial significance for him, especially as the figure of Leicester related to that of Cavendish's uncle, Gilbert Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, whom Cavendish lauded as an exemplar of Elizabethan country nobility.

Cavendish passed part of his youth in the household of his uncle and aunt, the Earl and Countess of Shrewsbury, whose daughters, Aletheia Howard, Countess of Arundel, and Mary Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, were also part of the aristocratic

⁴ Hopkins, *John Ford's Political Theatre*, front matter.

⁵ Anne Barton, "Harking Back to Elizabeth: Ben Jonson and Caroline Nostalgia," *English Literary History* 48 (Winter 1981): 706–31; also see Anne Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 300–20.

⁶ Alfred Harbage, *Cavalier Drama: An Historical and Critical Supplement to the Elizabethan and Restoration Stage* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1936), 75.

⁷ Martin Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632–1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 195.

coterie marked by Catholic sympathies associated with John Ford. This heritage, “as a scion of a great Tudor family,” perhaps explains what Martin Butler considers to be Cavendish’s Elizabethan temperament.⁸ On the death of his father in 1617, William inherited the Cavendish estates of Welbeck and Bolsover. He was raised to the peerage, becoming Viscount Mansfield in 1620, and he was created Earl of Newcastle in 1628. At the beginning of the 1630s, he was in search of a court position, something he pursued to the detriment of his finances until 1638 and his eventual appointments as “sole gentleman of the bedchamber” and governor to the Prince of Wales.⁹ His efforts to impress the king included the hiring of an old associate, Ben Jonson, to write two masques: *The King’s Entertainment at Welbeck*, for Charles’s journey north for his Scottish coronation in 1633, and *Love’s Welcome at Bolsover*, which was performed in July 1634. Cavendish’s enduring relationship with Jonson is, as we have seen, reflected in *The Variety*.

Returning to *The Variety*, and to the Jonsonian gallery to which Alfred Harbage referred in particular, the news-monger is a character called Formal, a gentleman usher to the rich widow Lady Beaufield, and he offers a clue to the political atmosphere in which *The Variety* was first performed. In an exchange between Formal and Master Newman, a suitor to Lady Beaufield’s daughter, the characters appear to be aware of the significance of the distinction between domestic and foreign news, there having been a Star Chamber ban on domestic reporting until its lifting in the year of *The Variety*’s appearance. This culture of censorship provided fertile ground for a predominantly sensationalist journalism, and what passed for serious news tended to be accounts of the Thirty Years’ War culled from Dutch news-sheets. These extracts form part of the exchange between Formal and Newman:

(Enter f or Mal with a tablebook.)

f or Mal. The same day a dolphin taken in a net at Woolwich and ten live pilchards in a salmon’s belly—strange things! The 13 of July, the cat-a-mountain kitted in the Tower; an eel ship sprung a leak shooting the bridge—here are prodigious things.

[...]

f or Mal. Oh, sir! I know to whom I speak and will tell you more, for I dare trust you with my soul. They say the northern progress holds this year and that the elk is dead in the new great park.

newMan. I hope not.

(Cavendish, *The Variety*, 6–8)

Formal and Newman reflect on several events from which the more sensationalist hacks of the time would deduce omens of great significance: the portentous death of the elk in

⁸ Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632–1642*, 195.

⁹ Lynn Hulse, “Cavendish, William, First Duke of Newcastle upon Tyne (bap. 1593, d. 1676), Writer, Patron, and Royalist Army Officer,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Windsor Great Park, the “dolphin taken in a net at Woolwich,” and the “ten live pilchards in a salmon’s belly.” The reference to the “cat-a-mountain kittened in the Tower” on July 13 would seem to be an allusion to a more specific contemporary event. The latter of these two passages also alludes to the king’s northern progress, which could refer to one of the occasions when Cavendish entertained Charles, either at Bolsover or Welbeck, or to Charles’s neglect of progresses in favour of the palace at Whitehall, or there could be a more oblique allusion here, with more contemporary political significance, in which “northern progress” connotes the Bishops’ Wars between England and Scotland, in the first of which Cavendish played a significant part. The allusion to the northern progress could hold the key to the significance of July 13.

The prelude to the Civil Wars proper included two conflicts between King Charles and Scots opposed to his episcopal system of church government. The later stages of the second of these Bishops’ Wars, which was concluded at the Treaty of London, signed on August 10, 1641, were played out against the background of civil unrest in London and the impeachment by Parliament of the king’s adviser, Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Strafford. Strafford, known as Black Tom Tyrant in popular pamphlets, was held responsible for the king’s calamitous policies after the First Bishops’ War. Strafford was executed on May 12, 1641, and it is the public burning of George Digby’s speech against Strafford’s attainder that was the significant event of July 13, 1641. Cavendish had had to resign his position as governor to the Prince of Wales after being implicated in what became known as the First Army Plot to rescue Strafford from the Tower.¹⁰ The reference to the “cat-a-mountain kittened in the Tower” could, therefore, refer to Strafford. In contemporary literature, including works by Shirley and Jonson, “cat-a-mountain” is usually used derogatively to refer to a “spirited wanton or whore.”¹¹ The habitual association of the whore of Babylon with the Church of Rome in contemporary Protestant polemics may suggest that the target is another inmate of the Tower at this time: William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury, whose policies were often characterized by his critics as papistical. Given the apparent association with Strafford, a close confidant of the king, “cat-a-mountain” may even allude to a catamite, a young male favourite and sexual partner of the king, who, in contemporary representations, exercises undue influence on the monarch in matters of state.¹² This would not, however, align with what is known of Charles and Strafford’s relationship. Such a scurrilous claim would, nonetheless, have been in the spirit of many of the pamphlets printed after the lifting of the Star Chamber ban.¹³

10 Ronald G. Asch, “Wentworth, Thomas, First Earl of Strafford (1593–1641), Lord Lieutenant of Ireland,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; Hulse, “Cavendish, William.”

11 Gordon Williams, *Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature* (London: Athlone, 1994), 217–18.

12 Williams, *Dictionary of Sexual Language*, 216–17.

13 Steggle notes that Cavendish could have chosen Leicester as a role model in contrast to favourites such as George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham; Curtis Perry, “Leicester’s Ghosts and the Discourse of Favouritism,” paper delivered at the Renaissance Society of America, May 2003.

The political turmoil surrounding Strafford's imprisonment and execution is also a significant context for understanding Manly's appearance dressed as the Earl of Leicester in Cavendish's play of the latter half of 1641. George Digby, Member of Parliament for Dorset in the Short and the Long Parliaments of 1640, was initially a manager of the impeachment of the Earl of Strafford, but he spoke out against Strafford's condemnation, as Ronald Hutton notes, "to prevent the complete estrangement of the king from the reform party."¹⁴ This is arguably not unlike Cavendish's own position, which was one of maintaining fierce loyalty to the crown while, at the same time, wishing to steer Charles towards a stronger, more mutually beneficial relationship between king and nobles. Digby's scheme backfired and he had to be rescued from attainder himself, being elevated to the Lords as Baron Digby of Sherborne on June 9. Significantly, on July 5, a few days before the public burning of Digby's speech against Strafford's attainder, Parliament abolished the courts of High Commission and Star Chamber. This led to a tremendous proliferation of printed material, controversial, polemical, and satirical in nature.¹⁵

Among the scurrilous publications of 1641 is an edition of a curious work by a little-known Elizabethan and Jacobean poet, Thomas Rogers: it is known by its shortened title *Leicester's Ghost*. It is in fact a rhyme royal tragedy in the style of *A Mirror for Magistrates* that reworks the infamous Catholic libel against Robert Dudley, the Elizabethan Earl of Leicester, known as *Leicester's Commonwealth*. In the Elizabethan original of 1584, Leicester is accused of (among an endless catalogue of crimes): the murder of his wife Amy Robsart; the murders of a number of the husbands of his lovers; preventing the queen from marrying; and, having failed to gain the crown by marrying Elizabeth himself, plotting to dethrone her and, ultimately, achieve the crown for himself alone. Besides the denigration of Leicester, the text puts forward a case for the succession of Mary, Queen of Scots or her son, James, to the throne of England. Rogers's poetic paraphrase, in which the earl's ghost narrates his own dastardly deeds, appeared in two anonymous editions in 1641: a quarto version followed by an emended octavo version. Thanks to the work of Franklin B. Williams, who discovered an authorial manuscript of the poem in the 1930s, Rogers has been identified as the author.¹⁶ The poem appears to have been begun under Elizabeth (in 1601/2) and completed not later than 1605. The

¹⁴ Ronald Hutton, "Digby, George, Second Earl of Bristol (1612–1677), Politician," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁵ For the freeing of the presses, see Margot Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre: Thomas Middleton and Opposition Drama under the Early Stuarts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 237–57; and Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632–1642*, 236–50, 289–91.

¹⁶ D. C. Peck, ed., *Leicester's Commonwealth: The Copy of a Letter Written by a Master of Art of Cambridge (1584) and Related Documents* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1985); Thomas Rogers, *Leicester's Ghost*, vol. 4 of the Publications of the Renaissance English Text Society, ed. Franklin B. Williams, Jr. (Chicago: Newberry Library for University of Chicago Press, 1972); Franklin B. Williams, Jr., "Thomas Rogers of Bryanston," *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 16 (1934): 253–67; "Leicester's Ghost," *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 18 (1935): 271–85; "Thomas Rogers as Ben Jonson's Dapper," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 2 (1972): 73–77.

original manuscript of *Leicester's Ghost* was dedicated to James I. This dedication and the stanzas on the succession were removed from the abridged form that was circulated in manuscript. The printed Caroline editions are based on an abridged manuscript and consequently do not contain these passages either. In the Huntington Library copy of the 1641 octavo, the theme switches abruptly from Leicester's plot to have his son marry Arbella Stuart to the earl's exploits in the Low Countries.¹⁷ The poem asserts that, by marrying his son, Robert, Lord Denbigh, to Arbella, Leicester wished to form a "new triumvirate" of Bess of Hardwick, Gilbert Talbot, and himself. This is where stanzas 155 to 183 of the authorial manuscript have been removed. Though the quarto and octavo editions of *Leicester's Ghost* are occasionally found alone, they are normally appended (even integral) to matching 1641 printed editions of *Leicester's Commonwealth*, which do contain the material omitted from Rogers's poem.

Thomas Rogers was the son of Sir Richard Rogers and his second wife Mary West. Therefore, Thomas was the half-brother of Honora Rogers, who married Edward Seymour, Lord Beauchamp, son of Catherine Grey and Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford; Thomas's half-brother Andrew Rogers married Mary Seymour, sister of Edward Seymour, Earl of Hertford. It is Thomas's connection to the Seymours that appears to have motivated his composition of *Leicester's Ghost* in the early seventeenth century, Hertford's second marriage having been to Frances Howard, sister of Douglas Howard, Baroness Sheffield, whose secret marriage to the Earl of Leicester had been repudiated by the earl. Frances Howard died in 1598 (the earl would in 1601 marry another Frances, who lived on until 1639), but Douglas Sheffield was still alive when Rogers's poem circulated in manuscript; the family enmity towards Leicester (who had died in 1588) clearly remained. Thomas Rogers's *Celestiall Elegies* of 1598 lament the death of Frances, Countess of Hertford. The years 1604–1605 also saw the "Great Cause of Sir Robert Dudley," the legal battle in the Star Chamber in which Leicester and Sheffield's son sought to prove his status as his father's heir.

This is all highly suggestive when we turn again to look at William Cavendish's play *The Variety*, in which the hero is a character who dresses like the Earl of Leicester. Beyond the obvious coincidence of their appearance in the same short period of time, there are other grounds for believing that *The Variety* was, in part, a pointed reaction to *Leicester's Ghost*. The figure of Lady Beaufield, who eventually grants Manly—dressed as the Earl of Leicester—"possession of [her] heart and fortunes" (86), is suggestive in this respect. The name Beaufield clearly recalls another name, one that we have met already: Beauchamp, or *beau champ*. And, as we have seen, Thomas Rogers's half-sister Honora married Edward Seymour, Lord Beauchamp, and so became a Beauchamp herself. This association could support a reading of *The Variety* as an attempt at some kind of rapprochement between former enemies, the Dudleys and the Howards. More significantly, it appears to be quite possible that Cavendish's favourable portrait of Leicester was, in part, a theatrical refutation of Thomas Rogers's belatedly published

17 "Leicester's Ghost," in *Leicester's common-wealth ... whereunto is added Leicesters-ghost* (London, 1641), sig. B7v.

tragedy; we might suggest that *The Variety* was intended to rescue the earl's reputation from the mire of the Elizabethan libels so recently reprinted. Moreover, it appears that these texts were part of the political discourse centred on the monarch and his troubled rule, and that the legitimacy of the figure of Leicester as a symbol of an earlier model for the relationship between a king or queen and his or her nobility was a key aspect of this discourse. In this context, it is worth noting that Rogers's original manuscript, dedicated to James I, might have been intended as a mirror for Rogers's own prince. Of course, in 1641, when courtiers such as George Digby were divided between their loyalty to the king and their own view of the best policy for the maintenance of the king's safety, whoever it was that published *Leicester's Ghost*—a scurrilous attack on Leicester—could well have broadly agreed with Cavendish on the struggle between Charles and Parliament but profoundly disagreed about the meaning of the Elizabethan earl.

As a means of understanding the Elizabethan earl's significance at this point in political history, I wish to draw out some of the peculiarly Elizabethan characteristics of Cavendish's use of the figure of Leicester. But before looking at Cavendish's play more closely, the parallels between the playwright and the Elizabethan earl should be noted. Cavendish, like Leicester, was known for his horsemanship: Leicester was Elizabeth's Master of the Horse; Cavendish, as governor to the Prince of Wales, was in charge of the future Charles II's equestrian training, and he went on to write the influential treatises on horsemanship *La méthode nouvelle et invention extraordinaire de dresser les chevaux*, published in Antwerp in 1658, and *A New Method, and Extraordinary Invention, to Dress Horses*, published in 1667 (see Elaine Walker's chapter). Cavendish's campaign for high office included the hiring of Ben Jonson to write two masques. Both *The King's Entertainment at Welbeck* and *The King and Queen's Entertainment at Bolsover* drew heavily on the entertainments organized by Leicester for Elizabeth at Kenilworth in 1575.¹⁸

It is clear that Leicester was an important cornerstone in Cavendish's self-image, and the nature of that image can be discerned in his play of 1641. When *The Variety* begins it is not at all clear that Manly will win the day. He is tricked into attending Lady Beaufield's party dressed as Leicester by Sir William, a suitor to the hostess; he would normally only dress up in private. When he arrives to a fanfare, he quickly realizes his folly, but he decides to make the best of the situation by presenting a suit (in more than one sense of the word) to Lady Beaufield; you might say he lets his clothes do the talking:

MANLY I am bold to present a suit to you. I confess it was not made by a French tailor. I can make a leg and kiss my hand too after the fashion of my clothes. This served in those honest days, when knights were gentlemen [...] Here's a belly piece that looks like armour. With what comeliness may a man unbutton his doublet when he seems to take the wall to make urine? Your sleeve so near your nose, with a handkerchief, which I take

¹⁸ See Ben Jonson, *The King's Entertainment at Welbeck* and *The King and Queen's Entertainment at Bolsover*, ed. James Knowles, in David Bevington, Martin Butler, and Ian Donaldson, ed., *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, vol. 6 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 659–80, 681–96.

out thus with a grace; after emunction, I put up again, with the corianders hanging out. Geometrical breeches in several slices, in which a man is not ashamed of his thighs, nor hides his bow legs, which at the bottom, surrounded with points, make him look like a rough-footed pigeon. These things were worn when men of honour flourished, that tamed the wealth of Spain, set up the States, helped the French king and brought rebellion to reason, gentlemen.

(Cavendish, *The Variety*, 39)

Manly's private nostalgia now made public does not stop at dressing like the knights of the past. He sings a song about John Talbot, 1st Earl of Shrewsbury, the "Terror of the French" who was celebrated in Shakespeare's *1 Henry VI*; he enters a singing contest with Simpleton in which they trade lines from "Little Musgrave" and "The Ballad of Chevy Chase" (57–58), the latter being a particular favourite of Jonson and the quintessential Elizabethan, Sir Philip Sidney. Manly also regales his audience with tales from the days when Garter Knights would process to Windsor with large retinues:

Then you should have the best knight of the country, with the ragged staff on [the retinue's] sleeves. ... Every knight had his hundreds, and these would take up all the taverns in the town, be drunk to the honour of their lords, and rather than not pay their reckoning, pawn their chains, though they pawned something for them the night before.

(Cavendish, *The Variety*, 41)

The ragged staff with a white bear was the badge of the Earl of Leicester, of course.

Cavendish's particular interest in co-opting Leicester for *The Variety* can be discerned from his own writings, in both personal letters and in his advice to Charles II, the latter written during or shortly before the Restoration. As early as 1632, decrying his own marginalization and the progressive decline of the position of the old English nobility at court, he declared himself a lord of misrule, taking that title "for an honor in these dayes rather then the other more common title."¹⁹ In his advice to Charles II, he presents Charles I as a negative example of the art of kingship and declares Elizabeth's government the "best Presedente for Englandes Govermente absolutlye."²⁰ He invokes his uncle Gilbert Talbot—"In my time Gilberte thatt Greate Earle off Shrewsburye whoe was a wise man & had a Gentle Sole & a Loyall" (212)—before bemoaning the "meane People thatt weare aboute the kinge & the Queen." In a sustained attack on the Frenchified atmosphere at the Caroline court, Cavendish derides those who

woulde Jeer the greateste Noble man in Englande iff hee did nott make the laste monthes Reverence A La Mode thatt Came with the laste Danser frome Paris packte upp In his fidle Case, & no maner off Regarde off the Nobilitye att All butt some fewe to monopolise the kinge & Queen Totalye to them selves, this did Infinitlye Discontente the Nobilitye & Gentrye.

(213)

¹⁹ HMC 55 (various MSS), vii, 402, cited in Butler, *Theatre and Crisis, 1632–1642*, 195.

²⁰ *A Catalogue of Letters and Other Historical Documents Exhibited in the Library at Welbeck*, compiled by S. Arthur Strong (London: Murray, 1903), 210; page references for subsequent quotations are given in the text.

Cavendish's derision for "the laste monthes Reverence A La Mode thatt Came with the laste Danser frome Paris packte upp In his fidle Case" is almost exactly reflected in the figure of the French dancing master, Galliard, in *The Variety*. In this world of Cavendish's lost childhood, when the name of Talbot carried some weight about the court, the ending of the play, with its marriages and a return to ceremony order, is like a dream of wish-fulfillment. Lady Beaufield's acceptance of Manly, however out of fashion with his times, is much more than Cavendish could have ever hoped for himself.

The references to the Talbot earls of Shrewsbury in both the play and the "Advice" could signal Cavendish's sensitivity to the accusation in Rogers's poem that Leicester wished to form a "new triumvirate" with Gilbert Talbot and Bess of Hardwick to back Lord Denbigh and Arbella Stuart in a push for Elizabeth's throne. But in both texts the Talbots function mainly as exemplars of the ancient nobility who, Cavendish believes, have been dishonoured under Charles, and, in this respect, *The Variety* is very like Philip Sidney's "Defence of the Earl of Leicester." As Roger Kuin has noted in an article for *The Sidney Journal*, Sidney's "Defence" is a "neglected text"; it is neglected by critics, in Kuin's terms, because of "the irrelevance of its concentration on Leicester's lineage" and Sidney's "apparent conviction that *Leicester's Commonwealth* ... is concerned to erase his uncle's name"; critics argue that the original libel aims far greater accusations at the earl.²¹ In fact, Sidney's defence of Leicester's name is, as Kuin observes, a defence of the "basic Elizabethan category of honor," and, therefore, Sidney could hardly be playing for higher stakes: to defend Leicester's name—the name of Dudley—is to defend his status as "an anciently descended nobleman."²²

This is the very concern that pervades Cavendish's play and his "Advice"; he invokes the name of Talbot to defend England's ancient nobility, whose names, whose honour, he senses, are being erased. It is surely not without significance in this context that the name Beaufield also recalls the Beauchamp earls of Warwick, from whom the Dudleys claimed descent and from whom the device of the bear and ragged staff was adopted; indeed, Leicester is said to have "attached a particular sentimental value" to these aspects of his identity.²³ The marriage of Beaufield and Manly in *The Variety* confirms Leicester's lineage.

In defending the honour of the ancient nobility, Cavendish does not advance his own name but invokes the name of his uncle Talbot. This is a Sidneian aspect

21 Roger Kuin, "This Böö Writing: A Defence of Sidney's Other Defence," *The Sidney Journal* 32 (January 2014): 111–21 at 111, 114; Kuin cites the following examples of critics who have neglected the "Defence": "Albert Feuillerat printed the Penshurst copy in vol. III of his *The Complete Works of Sir Philip Sidney* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912) but without comments other than textual; H. R. Fox Bourne, *Sir Philip Sidney: A Type of English Chivalry in the Elizabethan Age* (New York: Putnam, 1914), 275 assumed that Philip soon repented of having written it; Alan Stewart, *Philip Sidney: A Double Life* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), 261 sees it as a political move to get closer to Leicester after the death of the latter's son" (112n1).

22 Kuin, "This Böö Writing" 115–16.

23 Simon Adams, "Dudley, Robert, Earl of Leicester (1532/3–1588), Courtier and Magnate," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

of Cavendish's defence, but, as in Sidney's case, Cavendish has a good deal of self-interest in defending Talbot. In his defence of Leicester's name, Sidney famously declared, "I am a Dudley in blood, that Duke's daughter's son, and do acknowledge ... that my chiefest honour is to be a Dudley, and truly am glad to have cause to set forth the nobility of that blood whereof I am descended."²⁴ However, Sidney is not a Dudley (except by maternal descent), just as Cavendish is not a Talbot. Both defences rest on the value of the earls' family names—what and, in some respects, who they are—and the fact that neither Sidney nor Cavendish can unambiguously claim these names weakens their personal petitions. Nonetheless, as can be seen from the parallels between the lives of Leicester and Cavendish and the latter's long campaign for a position of service at court, the Caroline earl values what he *does* at least as much as what he *is*. Indeed, as Roger Kuin also notes, the two are inseparable, especially to Sidney, for whom the "category of virtuous action" was central to that other defence, *The Defence of Poesy*.²⁵

To speak of "virtuous action" and Sidney is to invoke the end of his life and the realization of his political and religious ambition to actively defend the cause of international Protestantism against the power of Catholic Spain in the Low Countries. It is noteworthy that Sir Charles Cavendish, William's father, served with Sidney in the Low Countries and was present at Sidney's death following the Battle of Zutphen in 1586.²⁶ In considerably changed circumstances, Cavendish favoured the same cause. In his advice to Charles II, he advocates an aggressive foreign policy, directed first at France and then at Spain, recommending that in engaging the Spanish "warr Shoulde bee by Seae butt no Invation, to hinder his Trade to hinder his Silver flote [fleet],—& thatt woulde begger him In a litle time as Queen Elizabeth did" (236). With regard to the Low Countries, he encourages Charles "to demande off the States the same priveleges Queen Elizabeth had, which Is to have Flushing & the Brill In your Ma^{ties} handes, & a Garison off your owne In them" (234).

Again, this passage is clearly echoed by Manly in *The Variety*, who recalls the time "when men of honour flourished, that tamed the wealth of Spain" and "set up the States." The beginning of the English intervention in the Low Countries in 1585 and, more specifically, Leicester's appointment to the governor-generalship of the United Provinces by the States General in 1586 are alluded to here; what followed was a divisive and ultimately unsuccessful period in the emergence of the Dutch Republic, marred for Leicester by Sidney's death. For Cavendish, it appears to have been something of a Golden Age, in stark contrast to the broadly Hispanophile foreign policy of Charles I.²⁷ Prioritizing the fate of the Palatinate of Frederick V, husband of Elizabeth Stuart, Charles's older sister,

²⁴ Sir Philip Sidney, "Defence of the Earl of Leicester," in *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 129–41, 134.

²⁵ Kuin, "This Booe Writing," 117–18.

²⁶ Hopkins, *John Ford's Political Theatre*, 25.

²⁷ Simon Adams, "Spain or the Netherlands? The Dilemmas of Early Stuart Foreign Policy," in *Before the English Civil War*, ed. Howard Tomlinson (London: Palgrave, 1983), 79–101.

Caroline policy favoured a deal with Spain over the alliance with the Dutch preferred by the forward Protestant party among the nobility, which included the descendants of the Leicester and Essex factions of Elizabeth's reign.

Unlike Sir Philip Sidney, Cavendish was not a man of any theological or philosophical depth. Though professing to be a good Protestant himself, he advised the young Charles (future Charles II) to avoid too much divinity and moral philosophy, as well as warning that those who were Bible mad might incite civil war.²⁸ Cavendish saw his own lavish entertainments as a guard against "Puritan melancholy."²⁹ Power, order, and pragmatism seem to have figured more than piety in Cavendish's advocacy of the forward Protestant position, and this is reflected in one of the scenes from his play. This is part of the exchange between Formal and Newman from Act 1, scene 2:

for Mal . Do not you remember a tempest four nights ago? Then 'twas. Blust'ring times, Master Newman.

newMan. That makes Van Trump so troubled with the wind colic. But now the Hollanders, as they report, have many engineers and mathematicians set awork how to keep and vent it at their pleasure, and so to serve in navigation for their ships, that there may be *ventus liber* as well as *ventus clausus*, answerable to the two seas.

(8)

Newman's joke about "Van Trump" suggests a familiarity with Dutch news-sheets, and Maarten Tromp in particular, who was the supreme commander of the Dutch fleet that defeated the Spanish navy in the Battle of the Downs in 1639; he also went on to be a significant figure in the First Anglo-Dutch War of 1652–1653. Newman, punning on the commander's name, ridicules him as troubled by wind (a fitting ailment for a sailor); Newman simultaneously alludes tangentially to John Selden's treatise *Mare Clausum*, published in 1635, in which the English Selden argued for a dominion of the seas in opposition to the arguments of the Dutch scholar Hugo Grotius, whose *Mare Liberum*, published in 1609, argued for openly navigable seas.³⁰ Selden served as a member of the Long Parliament and spoke (and voted) against the attainder of the Earl of Strafford. He lived with, and possibly secretly married, Cavendish's cousin Elizabeth Grey (daughter

28 For Cavendish's profession of religious conformity, see Douglas Grant, *Margaret the First* (London: Hart-Davis, 1957), 107; for his letter of instruction to Prince Charles, see London, British Library, MS Harleian 6988, art. 62, reproduced in *Original Letters, Illustrative of English History: Including Numerous Royal Letters; from Autographs in the British Museum, and One or Two Other Collections, with Notes and Illustrations*, 2nd ed., ed. Henry Ellis (London: Harding, Triphook, and Lepard, 1825), 288–91.

29 David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics in the English Renaissance*, revised ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 235n36.

30 Monica Brito Vieira, "Mare Liberum vs. Mare Clausum: Grotius, Freitas, and Selden's Debate on Dominion over the Seas," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64 (July 2003): 361–77.

of Gilbert Talbot) after the death of her husband Henry Grey, the Earl of Kent, in 1639.³¹ Formal and Newman's exchange indicates that, though he was an advocate for active opposition to Spain, Cavendish was also aware of the recent shifts in relative power between the Dutch and their enemies; the defeat of the Spanish navy was a watershed in this struggle. This comic interlude in *The Variety* betrays Cavendish's anxiety about the rising power of the Dutch navy. Ironically, Tromp went on to protect the Royalist ships in the English Civil Wars.³²

Cavendish, of course, fled to the continent after the Battle of Marston Moor, eventually setting up home in Antwerp. In the pre-war world of 1641, the policies and conduct of the Caroline court did not reflect the Elizabethan values to which he subscribed, and the contested meaning of the ghostly figure of the Earl of Leicester and the legacy of his Elizabethan forebears were things for which he was prepared to fight.

My reading of *The Variety* highlights the parallels between the values exemplified by Master Manly and those advanced by Cavendish in his advice to Charles II. Cavendish invokes the name of Talbot in both the play and the advice, and it would be interesting to consider what lessons he could have learned from the career of "Gilbert that Great Earl of Shrewsbury." As well as attracting interest from scholars who wish to understand Caroline theatre, Cavendish's advice to Charles has been a useful resource for historians of the Tudor and Stuart aristocracies, especially those scholars plotting the changes in the fortunes—fates and finances—of the English nobility and their relationship with the monarch in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, often with an eye to the causes of the Civil War. The work of one such scholar, Lawrence Stone, particularly his book *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641*, has remained a touchstone for historians of this period since the book's first publication in 1965.³³ Though Stone's methods and conclusions have been challenged on numerous occasions, a good deal of work—much of it in direct response to Stone's analysis—has been undertaken in this area, and it sheds light on the relationship between Cavendish and his Elizabethan relations, including Gilbert Talbot.

Michael Hicks, the author of the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry on Gilbert, paints a picture of the 7th Earl as a man often serving the interests of other members of his extended family rather than his own. His marriage to his stepsister Mary Cavendish, according to Hicks, served the interests of his parents, George Talbot (the 6th Earl) and Bess of Hardwick, rather than his own, "since it denied Gilbert the heiress who might have given him an independent future."³⁴ As George Talbot was charged with the care of Mary, Queen of

31 Paul Christianson, "Selden, John (1584–1654), Lawyer and Historical and Linguistic Scholar," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*; John Considine, "Grey, Elizabeth [née Lady Elizabeth Talbot], Countess of Kent (1582–1651), Literary Patron and Supposed Author," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

32 J. R. Jones, *The Anglo-Dutch Wars of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Longman, 1996) 113.

33 Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965).

34 Michael Hicks, "Talbot, Gilbert, 7th Earl of Shrewsbury (1552–1616), Landowner," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

Scots, he was rarely at court himself, so, after 1573, Gilbert attended court largely as a surrogate for his father. While at court, Gilbert lived beyond the means of his £200 allowance, accruing debts of £5,000 and damaging relations between father and son.

George Talbot, the 6th Earl of Shrewsbury, was concerned about the pressure on his own finances, which, apart from Gilbert's extravagance, bore the duty of keeping the Scottish queen and meeting what Hicks decorously terms "the financial demands of his wife, Bess," who was "engaged in expensive building works at Chatsworth and Oldcotes."³⁵ George's early career saw him appointed joint lieutenant-general of the army of the north and made a Knight of the Garter, but his later life did not fulfill this early promise and became dominated by the limitations placed on him as Mary's gaoler, his anxiety about money, and the bitter quarrel with Bess, his second wife.

George also came into conflict with the queen and the Privy Council over his attempts to procure funds through the raising of rents on his land and properties. A notorious episode involving Shrewsbury's tenants in Glossopdale is thoroughly examined by Stephen E. Kershaw. Despite Gilbert's efforts on his father's behalf to "head them off at Barnet," on April 18, 1579 four of Shrewsbury's tenants, led by "Black" Harry Botham (a "notorious trouble-maker"), petitioned a Privy Council meeting of Burghley, Leicester, Lincoln, Bedford, Hunsdon, Walsingham, Hatton, the treasurer and the comptroller.³⁶ The significance of this episode is in the response that the dispute elicited from the Council and Elizabeth. George Talbot was forced to climb down. As Kershaw notes, drawing on Lawrence Stone and others, the "Tudors whittled down the powers and privileges of the nobility," and by this point in Elizabeth's reign there was

a very real divergence of opinion over concern for the social fabric and the structure of Elizabethan authority between those peers who operated chiefly at court and those like Shrewsbury who, through choice or necessity, sought instead to maintain a role as great landowners and administrators at the head of local society.³⁷

On these terms, the main role for nobles like Shrewsbury was to keep the peace, and stirring up trouble over unjustified rent demands (as the queen saw them) was contrary to this enterprise. Of course, in Shrewsbury's particular case there was the complication of his position as the Scottish queen's gaoler: not only did this role put a higher premium on good order on Talbot's estates, but the earl's persistent complaints at the size of his allowance for what was termed the "Scotch Queen's diet" damaged his credibility with Elizabeth on the subject of finance.³⁸

35 Elizabeth Goldring, "Talbot, George, 6th Earl of Shrewsbury (c. 1522–1590), Nobleman," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Online* (2004).

36 Stephen E. Kershaw, "Power and Duty in the Elizabethan Aristocracy: George, Earl of Shrewsbury, the Glossopdale Dispute and the Council," in *The Tudor Nobility*, ed. G. W. Bernard (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 266–95, 271, 274.

37 Kershaw, "Power and Duty," 282.

38 Kershaw, "Power and Duty," 268.

The distinction that Kershaw and Stone highlight, between “those peers who operated chiefly at court and those like Shrewsbury who, through choice or necessity, sought ... to maintain a role ... at the head of local society,” seems to have been a significant factor in George Talbot’s dispute with the Glossopdale tenants but also appears to have been part of a general division between “court” and “country” aristocracy that grew in significance in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Indeed, Gilbert Talbot, once he had succeeded his father as Earl of Shrewsbury (in 1590), also seems to have fallen foul of this divide. Described by his biographer as asserting himself in his local society “in the old bastard feudal manner,” Gilbert had his own trouble with the neighbours.³⁹ His violent clashes with Sir Thomas Stanhope were infamous: Gilbert sent 400 men to destroy the Stanhope fisheries near Nottingham in 1593, first fomenting agitation among his own tenants and then unleashing them on Stanhope’s weir at Shelford. It is unsurprising that a government focused on peace and good order was not impressed. Just as George had had to climb down over the Glossopdale rents, the Star Chamber found against the men who, acting at Gilbert’s behest, had ransacked Stanhope’s fisheries. The Shrewsburies were serial offenders against Elizabeth’s government’s national policy, and this is nowhere more succinctly articulated than in Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst’s warning to Gilbert in 1592:

Your lordship must remember that in the policy of this Common Wealth, we are not over ready to add encrease of power & countenance to such great personages as you are. And when in the country you dwell in you will needes enter in a Warr with the inferiors therein, we thinke it both justice, equity and wisdom to take care that the weaker part be not put down by the mightier.⁴⁰

Of course, one paradoxical aspect of the widening divide between the peers of the Privy Council and the likes of Shrewsbury is that the government’s broader concern was, in fact, “to diminish the perceived gulf between rulers and ruled.” Another paradoxical feature of this situation, which could, arguably, be used in defence of Gilbert and George’s position, is that “the smaller fry,” as Kershaw terms them (“the new parish and middling gentry”), were up to the very same tricks as the Shrewsburies but were “better able to keep their exactions out of the public eye,” and, in the longer term, the methods of George and Gilbert became the widespread and accepted means for the aristocracy to survive economic crises.⁴¹

Given William Cavendish’s admiration for his uncle, it is interesting that Gilbert Talbot, like Cavendish, sought to improve his financial circumstances by seeking high office—a more than satisfactory means of earning a living, particularly for the court gentry, notable among whom were the privy councillors Christopher Hatton, Francis Walsingham, and Lord Burghley. Gilbert became a privy councillor himself in 1601, a position confirmed by James I on his accession. And, as lord lieutenant of Derbyshire,

³⁹ Hicks, “Talbot, Gilbert, 7th Earl of Shrewsbury (1552–1616), Landowner.”

⁴⁰ Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641*, 237.

⁴¹ Kershaw, “Power and Duty,” 283, 290.

constable and steward of Newark, and forester of Sherwood, Gilbert's power in Derbyshire, Yorkshire, and Nottinghamshire reached its peak in the early Jacobean period. Nonetheless, one diplomatic mission aside—to deliver the Garter to Henri IV at Rouen in 1596—Gilbert's court career did not touch the heights of courtiers such as the Earl of Leicester, the man of honour lauded in Cavendish's play for his actions on the international stage, whose governor-generalship of the Netherlands might have—I stress, might have—"tamed the wealth of Spain." Notwithstanding his own reputation as an asset-stripping landlord, promulgated in *Leicester's Commonwealth*, and his ties to the 6th Earl and Bess of Hardwick, Robert Dudley was essentially a court figure and, consequently, represented the opposing side in the divide between the earls of Shrewsbury and the Council, between country and court.

From this perspective it could be argued, therefore, that, despite the yoking of the figures of Dudley and Talbot together in literary and historical analyses of Cavendish's nostalgia for the Elizabethan age, the figure of Leicester—central to *The Variety*—meant something quite different from the figure of "Gilbert that Great Earl of Shrewsbury" in Cavendish's advice to Charles II. Manly-dressed-as-Leicester might be seen as a projection of the court side of Cavendish's character, his desire for office and the concomitant recognition he thought he was due; Gilbert, on the other hand, could be considered an example of the indispensable country nobility, with whom Cavendish also identified and on whose strength and loyalty he believed a nation must be built. *The Variety's* tribute to John Talbot, the 1st Earl of Shrewsbury, commemorated by Shakespeare in the first part of *Henry VI*, is in keeping with the play's celebration of the old chivalric breed; though it could be argued that Gilbert's extravagance finds its echo in "every knight [with] his hundreds," who "would take up all the taverns in the town, be drunk to the honour of their lords, and rather than not pay their reckoning, pawn their chains, though they pawned something for them the night before," he was not cast from this mould.

That Cavendish's military career ended so ignominiously at the Battle of Marston Moor would suggest that, despite his superior horsemanship, he was one of those aristocrats who, in the terms of Lawrence Stone's thesis, "no longer knew how to fight."⁴² Whatever the truth about his military credentials, Cavendish does appear to have sought to combine the roles of courtier and country landlord, inspired by the precedents set by his noble forebears. As I have suggested, the 7th Earl of Shrewsbury might not have been the best example to follow, but, continually invoking his Uncle Gilbert, Cavendish was forthright in his advice to the future king on how to build a strong nation:

In my time Gilberte thatt Greate Earle off Shrewsburie whoe was a wise man & had a Gentle Sole & a Loyall, att a S^r Georges feaste, I have known S^r George Booth a Chesheer knight & off sixe or seaven thousande pounce a yeare weare my Lorde off Shrewsburies blewe Cote on a S^r Georges Daye,—as also S^r Vinsente Corbett whose Brother had 20.000^l

⁴² Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641*, 266; it has been suggested that Robert Dudley and Philip Sidney were also "much more experienced in symbolic conflicts in the tiltyard than in real warfare" (see Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics*, 96).

a yeare & affter the death off his Brother hee had 4^l: or 5000^e a yeare & hee wore my Lo^s blewe Cote off a S^t Georges daye also,—butt the nexte daye theye satt both att my Lordes Table nexte him & nothinge butt Good Coosen Corbett, & good Coosen Booth & theye weare verye wise In Itt, for thus theye did oblige my Lorde to bee their Servante all the yeare after, with his power to serve them both In Courte & Westminster Hall, to bee their Solisiter, ... for whatt soever busines his Ma^{tie} had In anye Countie In Englande, or In all Englande, Itt was butt speakinge to Shrewsburye or Darbye & such Greate men & Itt was don with Ease and fasiletye.

(*Original Letters, Illustrative of English History*, 212)

This vision of the earl at the centre of a harmonious regional community, in which the gentry were glad to wear Shrewsbury's livery in recognition of his "power to serve them both in court and Westminster Hall," does not quite square with the evidence I have presented here; nor does the suggestion that the monarch could trust "such great men," "whatsoever business his majesty had," to serve the crown "with ease and facility." Nonetheless, it was a remarkable manifesto for future conduct in English politics to have been written at the advent of the Restoration period; one that appears to have been built on lessons learned, however indirectly, from the crises large and small endured by the earls of Shrewsbury, Gilbert and George, in the Elizabethan era.

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