

English Reformation, as well as its implementation at one locality. One learns much about the reaction of provincial dwellers, as well as the processes by which they filtered and adjusted the changes to suit the needs of their community. Perhaps more important, the analysis addresses a critical issue in Reformation studies and raises several questions. To return to McClendon's thesis, how do we understand the extraordinary skill demonstrated by Norwich's elites in mediating these tortuous religious and cultural shifts? Is this case unique? Why was their constructive sense of civic identity, independence, and responsibility replicated so infrequently within England and throughout western Europe? Were other magistrates in other towns inept, incapable, uninterested in managing events? To pose an obvious counter-factual query, could confessional strife have been avoided? At the very least, McClendon challenges historians to review the evidence and rethink their interpretations.

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Margaret Cavendish. *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays*. Ed. Anne Shaver. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999. Pp. xii, 280.

Margaret Cavendish, the first Duchess of Newcastle, claimed to write, not for her contemporaries, but for more appreciative future readers. And although her contemporaries often responded favorably to her works, Cavendish seems to have found especially appreciative readers in the late 1990s, when her poems appeared for the first time in anthologies of British literature and when longer works were published in several editions. In the context of this re-evaluation of Cavendish's work, Anne Shaver's collection of Cavendish's plays may seem almost inevitable, but this collection has been thoughtfully prepared to perpetuate that re-evaluation. Before the publication of Shaver's collection, Cavendish's nineteen plays were available only in her seventeenth-century volumes, *Playes* (1662) and *Plays, Never Before Printed* (1668). *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays* provides students with a good introduction to Cavendish and her plays, and it may inspire some scholars to explore Cavendish's volumes in greater detail.

Within its beautifully designed covers, *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays* contains an Introduction, six plays by Cavendish (*The Bridals*, *The Convent of Pleasure*, and two two-part plays, *Loves Adventures* and *Bell in Campo*), and a series of appendices that reproduce the front matter of Cavendish's two volumes of plays and provide excellent lists of primary and secondary sources for "Further Reading." As the phrase "Further Reading" may suggest, the volume's editorial apparatus seems aimed primarily at undergraduates. The sparse annotations, for instance, gloss "Alexander the Great," "bawd," and words that do not appear in the *OED*, such as "deaticall," which is glossed as "like a goddess" (p. 143). These

annotations can be inconsistent — why gloss the common word “bawd” but not the less common word “trull”? — but generally they should make Cavendish’s provocative plays accessible to most undergraduates.

The collection is most successful when it manages to accommodate the needs and interests of scholars and students simultaneously. For example, Shaver’s introduction, “Margaret Cavendish’s Life as a Writer,” offers a clear and lively biography; it balances the need to individuate Cavendish against the danger of characterizing her as simply “eccentric.” The inclusion of the copious prefatory material from Cavendish’s volumes is also important, both for students and for scholars. But why put front matter at the back of the book? Cavendish’s multiple addresses to readers (nine epistles “To the Readers” in the 1662 *Playes* alone) reconfigure the category of “plays”: these are not works that the author expects to see staged (by printing them, Cavendish believed that she forfeited the possibility of theatrical production); neither are these plays simply examples of closet drama, since Cavendish clearly would have liked to have seen them on stage. She is content, though, to claim her “brain the Stage” and to encourage readers likewise to stage her plays in their brains: “for they [readers] must not read a Scene as they would a Chapter; for scenes must be read as if they were spoke or Acted” (p. 262). Cavendish’s attempts to (re)define the genre of her works and to prescribe reading seem more than afterthoughts to be tucked into appendices. But since such important paratexts are sometimes omitted altogether, scholars and students alike will be grateful that this collection reproduces them at all.

If the glosses on mythological figures such as Mars (“the Roman god of war”) suggest that the collection is not intended primarily for an audience of scholars, the collection’s editorial practices also distinguish this collection from most scholarly editions. The brief “Note on Editorial Method” indicates that the collection retains some idiosyncrasies, such as question marks for exclamation points, because such idiosyncrasies may indicate Cavendish’s preference, yet it eliminates others, such as non-standard use of dashes, even though such non-standard use may also reflect Cavendish’s preference. Besides the inconsistent stance toward the seventeenth-century printed versions of Cavendish’s plays, this collection repeatedly refers to those seventeenth-century books as “the original,” a vexed word for textual critics generally, but particularly vexed for Cavendish, who was at once tremendously proud of her books and acutely aware of their inability to represent her originating thoughts and fancies. For scholars who, despite these questions, might nevertheless want to cite this collection, it provides no line numbers. A scholarly edition of Cavendish’s plays will have to wait for a still later future.

The *Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays* may help to usher in such a future, for it offers to a wide readership some of Cavendish’s most accomplished writings. In the front matter to the 1662 *Playes*, Cavendish admits that “most of my Plays would seem tedious upon the Stage” (p. 255), and indeed, even on the stage of the

brain, the long passages of exposition between “1st Gent.” and “2nd Gent.” in *Bell in Campo* are clumsy and “tedious.” Elsewhere, however, Cavendish skillfully manipulates the conventions of mid-seventeenth-century dramatic structure. As Shaver points out, *Bell in Campo* puts a woman, Lady Victoria, and her army at the center of a heroic romance. This army of women is so successful that “the Masculine Army” must ask in a fulsome letter for the honor of fighting alongside them. The ending of this letter and the women’s response to it are extraordinary:

we [the “Masculine Army”] are not so ambitious as to desire to be Commanders, but to join our forces to yours, and to be your assistants, and as your Common Souldiers; but leaving all these affairs of War to your direction, offering ourselves to your service,

We kiss your hands; and take our leaves for this time.

*All the women fall into a great laughter, ha, ha, ha, ha. (151)*

As a number of scholars have pointed out, Cavendish’s writing cannot be simply categorized as “feminist,” but where else in seventeenth-century English literature might one find armed women (Lady Victoria’s army even sleeps with its swords) laughing — that most deflating of responses — at the obsequiously polite requests of men? By bringing dramatic moments like this one to a broad readership, *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays* promises to stimulate even greater interest in Cavendish’s complex life, writings, and politics.

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