

Eastern Illinois University

From the Selected Works of Julie Campbell

2002

A Review of "Elizabeth Cary, Lady Falkland: Life and Letters" by Heather Wolfe

Julie Campbell, *Eastern Illinois University*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/julie_campbell/7/

agency “inscribed in contradictions” (86). Therefore, it is not Oroonoko’s conventional heroism that interests Behm, but rather the “paralyzed, grieved and oppressed” aspects of his heroism in slavery (102). Similarly, Mary Astell’s case for women’s heroism in *Some Reflections upon Marriage* is founded upon their condition of enslavement brought about through seduction. Finding evidence of extreme anger and despair in all three texts, Rose draws the initial conclusion that only revolution can change existing systems of power and gender. However, because revolutions fail, it is the “compromised” situation which finally constitutes heroism (111).

In closing, Rose cautions that the study would miss its aim if seeming to celebrate the “replacement of the male-defined heroism of action by a heroism of endurance that can be understood best as female.” On the contrary, her dual purpose is to critique “idealized domination and idealized suffering,” two alternatives which comprise the “option of survival,” equally applicable to an Elizabeth or an Odysseus (116). That survival option lends her argument authenticity, the relevance of which extends beyond the work’s historical compass. Occasionally strained, perhaps owing to its length, still, this penetrating analysis of heroic identity is especially poignant today.

Heather Wolfe, ed. *Elizabeth Cary, Lady Falkland: Life and Letters*. Renaissance Texts from Manuscript, Number 4; Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, Volume 230. Cambridge: RTM; Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001. xxxiv + 544 pp. + 5 illustrations. \$35.00 paper. Review by JULIE D. CAMPBELL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY.

Elizabeth Cary, Lady Falkland: Life and Letters is a welcome addition to Cary studies. It shifts attention away from Cary’s play, *The Tragedy of Mariam*, which has previously dominated Cary scholarship, and focuses squarely on Cary’s life by presenting the biography, *Lady Falkland: Her Life*, with correspondence by Cary, her family, and others. Wolfe begins by discussing the defining

moment in Cary's adult life: her conversion to Roman Catholicism. Wolfe proceeds to document meticulously the events leading up to the conversion, arguing that Cary's decision to convert "was not mere political opportunism; rather, it was well-informed, based on readings of Scripture, Patristic writers, and polemical religious works in Latin, French, Spanish, Hebrew, and English, along with conversations and disputations with Protestants and Roman Catholics" (3). The attention to detail and the wealth of well-documented sources are hallmarks of this book. Wolfe brings to light numerous contemporary references to Cary's circumstances, providing a rich historical context against which to consider Cary's life, letters, and the biography.

As a backdrop for exploring Cary's choices, Wolfe examines Protestant, Puritan, Arminian, and Catholic religious practices in England. She discusses at length, for example, the use of casuistry as she addresses issues of conscience among recusants. Wolfe also provides glimpses of how Cary was perceived outside England, noting that in 1629 or 1630, she "is referred to by the anagram 'Falconia' in an English Catholic allegorical play entitled 'Hierarchomachia, or the Anti-Bishop'" which "enjoyed scribal circulation and is mentioned in correspondence from England, Rome, and Paris" (9). To contextualize the *Life* and the letters, Wolfe examines the writing practices of the nuns at Cambrai and general life-writing approaches during this period, as well as letter writing practices. She writes, "fact and fiction overlapped in surprising ways in the 'non-fictional' genres of the early modern period. The letters edited here, as well as *Lady Falkland: Her Life*, were written to persuade readers to action, both spiritual and physical. They were rhetorical texts to be admired for their inventiveness within a well-known set of formulaic rules" (44-45). Thus, Wolfe lays the groundwork for teaching us how to read these documents within their early modern contexts.

Regarding the *Life*, Wolfe investigates Cary's daughters' experiences at the English Benedictine monastery of Our Lady of Consolation, Cambrai, pointing out that they were all professed in 1640, and that "[k]nown writings by this 'class of 1640' indicate

that as a group, they were more prolific than any other group of nuns educated and professed together" there (45). Upon considering handwriting identifications, textual clues, and the nuns' practice of writing "loose papers," Wolfe posits that Lucy Cary, who became Dame Magdalena, is the main author of the *Life*, but notes that it was a collaborative project, with marginal annotations and deletions added by her sister Mary, her brother Patrick, and another unidentified hand.

Wolfe refers to internal and external evidence to disclose the veracity and lack thereof of many aspects of the *Life*. She comments, for example, on the partially deleted references to Cary's episodes of depression and madness, indicating where the references would have been considered harmful to the message of the book vs. where they support the message of God's divine providence for the Cary family. She also examines Lucy's manipulation of the evidence regarding the establishment of "a Catholic continuity" in her family by describing the Protestant family members as closet or deathbed Catholics (81). Wolfe points out that *Lady Falkland: Her Life* was written during the same decade as Father Peter Salvin's *Life of Father Augustine Baker* and Father Leander Prichard's *Life of Baker*, both of which demonstrate that life writing "could provide comfort and serve as a form of penitence for both writer and reader" (51), as she believes the *Life* is meant to do. Additionally, Wolfe addresses the hagiographical nature of the biography, explaining that the "*Life's* combination of 'visions' and 'truth,' and providence and testimony, as well as its emphasis on Lady Falkland's loyalty to what 'she conceived of as the call of God,' is more in keeping with Marian martyrologies and Protestant hagiography than it is with medieval saints' lives" (66). Wolfe's insights into the practices and purposes of life writing at this time help to clarify many aspects of the *Life* that have intrigued its modern readers.

Wolfe suggests that the impulse to juxtapose the *Life* with *The Tragedy of Mariam* only serves to perpetuate the biography's function as a "decoding device," which can be limiting and misleading. Rather, she argues that the method of this present edition, putting

the *Life* in context with Cary's letters, "can afford the reader some sense of perspective on what is clearly a biased text" (96). In her edition, Wolfe identifies the authors of the glosses, reproduces deletion marks, indicates where cropping has occurred and, in general, attempts to give the reader an authentic sense of the state of the manuscript and its authorship. At the same time, she expands abbreviations and provides interlinear insertions and copious footnotes to facilitate reading. She uses similar practices with the *Letters*.

In the *Letters*, Wolfe includes 137 documents consisting of letters, obituaries, Privy Council orders, petitions, and decrees, spanning the years 1625-1671, which cover the expanse of time between Cary's return to England from Ireland until the death of her daughter Anne. Wolfe notes that this edition "includes all known letters by Lady Falkland, and selected additional letters and records which contribute to an understanding of her post-conversion life and *Lady Falkland: Her Life*" (225). She identifies the letters as holograph, autograph, or copy when that information is known. Photographic reproductions of three letters are included.

In the introduction, Wolfe explores the rhetoric of Lord and Lady Falkland's letters, demonstrating how they reflect traditional training in letter writing. About the Carys' extreme claims in their correspondence, Wolfe asks, "Were Lord and Lady Falkland truly without bread, clothing, or meat?" She suggests that they were perhaps using "exaggerated hyperbole" which they might have learned from a source such as Erasmus's *De conscribendis epistolis*, in which he recommends the persuasive power of demonstrating neediness. She also suggests that they were making use of what Frank Whigham calls "a conventional vocabulary of begging" used by Elizabethan suitors (43). Regarding Elizabeth Cary's dogged rhetorical strategies in her letters, Wolfe points out that "[a]lthough her person was forbidden from court, her words were not" (36). Therefore, her "earnest pressing" was marked by appeals "both logical and passionate, sensitive and persuasive" (36) meant to keep herself, her family, and their problems at the forefront of the minds of those who could aid them. Wolfe writes, "Only by presenting

her case eloquently and persuasively could Lady Falkland hope to counteract her husband's smear campaign, lift his financial embargo, and regain control over the future of herself and her children" (32). The letters provide a fascinating in-depth look at her attempts to accomplish these goals.

The inclusion of correspondence in response to Cary's is especially helpful as it gives readers a broad sense of her situation, how others viewed it, and the effects that her rhetoric produced. Wolfe includes, for example, letters between Cary and Lord Conway from August to September of 1627, in which Cary writes of being threatened with the "uttermost of misery" in one, and, dissatisfied with the lack of results, in spite of Conway's desire to give her "all satisfaction" when he could get the King to consider her case. She writes again, sharply opening with, "My Lord, my necessitys presse mee, more then I can doe your lordship; I haue yet gotten nothing, and I protest, it is not possible for mee . . . to subsist any longer" (297-300). We then see that Lord Conway corresponds with Sir Richard Weston on her behalf, under the authority of the king, to charge him with taking a course that ensures "from some hand or other her present necessitie may be supplied and her future maintenance prouided for according to former directions" (301). He is rewarded with a letter in which Cary thanks him profusely for his intervention on her behalf and, at the same time, he finds himself faced with a new demand: to intercede on behalf of a "poore gentleman" who was "taken" in her house. She closes this appeal by noting that she is already his servant, but if he will do her this favor, she will become his slave (301-302). These and many other examples of her correspondence illustrate Cary's reliance upon her pen to supply her needs.

Additional features of Wolfe's volume include a detailed chronology of the Cary family's life from 1575 to 1694, a family tree, two photographic reproductions of portraits of Henry Cary and Elizabeth Cary, a glossary of names that appear in the letters, and an extensive bibliography of manuscripts, facsimile editions, early printed books, modern editions, and secondary sources. With so many useful components, *Elizabeth Cary, Lady Falkland: Life and*

Letters would be an important addition to the library of anyone interested in Cary studies.

Liam E. Semler, ed. *Eliza's Babes: or The Virgin's Offering* [1652]. Madison, Teaneck, and London: Associated University Press, 2001. 202 pp. \$37.50. Review by HUGH WILSON, SUNY AT PLATTSBURGH.

L.E. Semler is also the author of *The English Mannerist Poets and the Visual Arts* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1998), and his edition of the anonymous *Eliza's Babes* is a laudable contribution to the movement to recover the lives and works of neglected women poets. Semler's edition, his learned annotations, and his three pertinent periodical articles, make Eliza's poetry far more accessible than the plain facsimile in *Early English Books*.

Of course, Semler's introduction is not comprehensive—the reader is advised to read Semler's three periodical articles on *Eliza's Babes*. (These articles were forthcoming when the book was being published.) The introduction and the periodical articles contain valuable insights omitted from the introduction.

The introduction itself seems to ramble from topic to topic, without a compelling schema. For all the theoretical jargon (and puns) describing the editor's attempt to "locate" the work in a "complex literary-cultural ecosystem of Protestantism flourishing . . . inhabiting a discursive matrix," the sub-divisions of the introduction seem to be ad hoc rhetorical expedients with no obvious inevitability. Some of the argumentation—like that against previous (and implausible) conjectures that Eliza was a "royalist," or against the idea that she was a Quaker, a Leveler, or a Ranter—are unnecessarily labored. Intellectual history seems to be privileged over economic, social, or political history, and this reader misses the sturdy framework of a clear time-line. Still, the idea of examining the other publications issued by Eliza's printer is shrewd and illuminating.

Semler claims that *Eliza's Babes* is "scarce, fascinating, deeply and sympathetically human as well as aesthetically original and