

THE CLOSET AS FORM AND THEME IN CAVENDISH AND BRACKLEY'S *THE CONCEALED FANCIES*

Daniel Cadman

dra Mat IC wr It InG was a common mode of literary expression for a variety of members of the Cavendish family and literary coterie. Prior to the closure of the commercial theatres in 1642, William Cavendish, Marquess of Newcastle had exerted considerable influence on the London theatrical scene. In addition to acting as patron to a range of influential authors, including Ben Jonson, James Shirley, and William Davenant, Newcastle also contributed to *The Varietie* and *The Country Captaine*, two comedies produced by the King's Men. Newcastle also commissioned two of Ben Jonson's masques, *Love's Welcome at Bolsover* and *The King's Entertainment at Welbeck*, for performance at his two estates. However, the Cavendish family's innovations in dramatic writing extended beyond the commercial theatres and Newcastle's patronage network. Among the prolific outputs of Newcastle's second wife, Margaret Cavendish, is a group of dramas in a range of genres written during the Civil War and Interregnum periods. Newcastle's eldest daughters, Jane and Elizabeth, also participated in dramatic writing by including a pastoral masque and a courtship comedy among a collection of writings and occasional poems that are collected together in manuscript. Written following the closure of the commercial theatres in 1642, as well as representing relatively rare examples of women's intervention in a male-dominated literary milieu, the dramatic works of the women in the Cavendish family serve to complicate the picture of the development of drama in the early modern period. Because of their distance from popular theatrical culture, the dramatic outputs of the women of the Cavendish family can be identified as closet dramas. In scholarship on early modern literature, the term "closet drama" has come to denote a type of play intended not for the commercial theatres but rather for private performance or recitations from members of elite coteries, as well as for print.¹

Using the Cavendish sisters' play *The Concealed Fancies* as my case study, I want to highlight some of the specific strategies employed by the authors in the development of their closet drama. Margaret J. M. Ezell highlights the importance of the two dramas preserved in the manuscript as part of "a case study of the literary activities of two educated seventeenth-century Englishwomen, a case study whose findings do not agree with

¹ For comment on the development of closet drama during the early modern period, see Karen Raber, *Dramatic Difference: Gender, Class, and Genre in the Early Modern Closet Drama* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001) and Marta Straznicky, "'Profane Social Paradoxes': 'The Tragedie of Mariam' and Sidneian Closet Drama," *English Literary Renaissance* 24 (1994): 104–34.

the popular image of the intimidated female author fearing to violate 'feminine modesty' and producing 'closet' literature."² In my analysis of *The Concealed Fancies*, I aim to extend Ezell's conclusions about the dramas produced by Jane and Elizabeth. However, rather than suggesting a distance from the closet, as Ezell implies, I argue instead that the sisters mobilize the ideas related to the closet, particularly its ambiguous associations with privacy, intimacy, and devotion, as means of interrogating notions of feminine behaviour, courtship, and women's engagement with cultures of performance. Such mobilizations further complicate the impression of the Cavendish sisters' productions as "private" or "marginal" literature and can instead highlight their subversive engagement with those cultural discourses.

As well as representing a dynamic engagement with the theatrical culture in which the authors' father was a participant, *The Concealed Fancies* exhibits, simultaneously, a distinctive self-consciousness about the domestic spaces in which it was written and in which it was most probably intended for performance.³ The associations between the play and the domestic space are also reflective of the intellectual culture nurtured in the Cavendish household and stimulated by Newcastle himself. Ezell observes that "Newcastle provided an environment where literary achievement was encouraged equally for his sons and daughters" and adds that he does not seem to have regarded "certain subjects to be improper for women or the public display of their talents to be immodest."⁴ Alison Findlay also adds that each of the family estates was intended by Newcastle to represent "a privileged haven for uncensored self-expression."⁵ Indeed, in his own occasional writings to the family, Newcastle praises Jane's skills as a "rare Inditer" who had "the Pen off a moste redye writer," and he encourages Elizabeth to exercise a considerable degree of liberty and to assert control over her creative self-expression by writing "but whatt you think. / Now your'e a girl, disemble when you

2 Margaret J. M. Ezell, "To Be Your Daughter in Your Pen': The Social Functions of Literature in the Writings of Lady Elizabeth Brackley and Lady Jane Cavendish," in *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama: Criticism, History and Performance, 1594–1998*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1998), 246–58, 246.

3 The significance of these domestic spaces is considered in a variety of readings by Alison Findlay, which include: "'She Gave You the Civility of the House': Household Performance in 'The Concealed Fancies,'" in *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama*, ed. Cerasano and Wynne-Davies, 259–71; "'Upon the World's Stage': The Civil War and Interregnum" in Alison Findlay, Stephanie Hodgson-Wright, and Gweno Williams, *Women and Dramatic Production 1550–1700* (Essex: Pearson, 2000), 68–80; and *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 45–53. The significance of these domestic spaces is also considered in Lisa Hopkins, *The Female Hero in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002), 186–93; and Lisa Hopkins and Barbara MacMahon, "'Come, What, a Siege?': Metarepresentation in Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley's 'The Concealed Fancies,'" *Early Modern Literary Studies* 16 (2013): 1–20, <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/journal/index.php/emls/article/view/83/82>.

4 Ezell, "To Be Your Daughter," 256.

5 Findlay, "She Gave You the Civility of the House," 259.

Linke.”⁶ It is notable not only that Newcastle aims to delineate the family household as a creative space in which the sisters should have the ability to express themselves freely but also that they should take advantage of the liminal stage between adolescence and adulthood as a point at which they can write “but whatt you think” before they enter into marriages and practise the “dissembling” which it apparently requires. As well as encouraging intellectual development and creative self-expression, Newcastle’s advice to Elizabeth also implies the performative nature of courtship, marriage, and other forms of sociability; this is a premise that is consistently registered in one of the sisters’ collaborative works, *The Concealed Fancies*.

The Concealed Fancies is one of two dramatic works preserved in manuscript form alongside a variety of poems by Jane and Elizabeth. The play was probably written at some point between the latter half of 1644 and late 1645 at the height of the English Civil War.⁷ The play appears at a moment of acute national and personal crisis for the Cavendish family. Following the defeat of the Royalist forces at Marston Moor in July 1644, Newcastle fled England and went into exile in continental Europe, eventually joining Henrietta Maria’s exiled court in mid-1645. During Newcastle’s absence, the Cavendish family’s two estates of Bolsover Castle and Welbeck Abbey were occupied by Parliamentary forces. At this time, Jane and Elizabeth were staying at the besieged Welbeck Abbey, where *The Concealed Fancies* was probably written. The writing of the play has frequently been likened to the various instances in which the female characters in *The Concealed Fancies* take advantage of the opportunities provided by the absence of the household patriarch, resulting from the Civil War, in order to explore various potential means of self-expression that are relatively untrammelled by patriarchal influence. As Alison Findlay argues, the play sees the sisters capitalizing upon an opportunity to “replay conservative royalist traditions and simultaneously to embrace the new possibilities for female autonomy offered by the Civil War context.”⁸

As well as reflecting the situations of the two sisters, the play also responds to the domestic environment from which it emerged and where it was probably intended to be performed. In the midst of the two plots, the play also contains a number of interludes involving exchanges between various servants, maids, kitchen staff, and members of the forces defending the estates, all of whom perform a function similar to a chorus by punctuating and commenting upon the developments in the principal plots. It has been suggested that these characters may well have been modelled upon real members of the serving staff in the Cavendish household, with the possibility that the depictions of these characters would be rich with in-jokes reflecting some of the idiosyncrasies of their real-life counterparts. The play may also have been written with the spaces of the households

⁶ Quoted in Betty Travitsky, *Subordination and Authorship in Early Modern England: The Case of Elizabeth Cavendish Egerton and Her “Loose Papers”* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999), 27.

⁷ Comment on the dating of the play is offered in Findlay, “She Gave You the Civility of the House,” 262–63.

⁸ Findlay, “Upon the World’s Stage,” 80.

themselves in mind. Alison Findlay has highlighted the ways in which the sisters harness the opportunities provided by the family estates of Welbeck Abbey and, in particular, Bolsover Castle as potential performance spaces. Lisa Hopkins and Barbara MacMahon have also suggested that the sisters may have envisaged a “promenade style” of performance taking in much of the estates.⁹

The analysis that follows focuses on *The Concealed Fancies*, as it represents a fitting case study for closet drama, not only because it registers the ambiguities in the distinction between stage and “closet” drama but also because it harnesses the thematic properties contained in attempts to conflate the closet with the private sphere, with particular bearings upon attitudes towards courtship and sexuality. I argue that such ambiguities in this conflation are signalled by the sisters’ adoption of the literary discourse of the Cavendish family, particularly as it is applied by, and to, their father, William Cavendish, Marquess of Newcastle, to address certain aspects of his public persona (specifically the tensions between his martial identity and his reputation as a philanderer). Most suggestively, the play contains a number of scenes set inside the closet of the household patriarch, Monsieur Calsindow (commonly regarded as an analogue for Newcastle); rather than being a space of absolute and impenetrable privacy, the closet emerges as a decidedly permeable space which struggles to contain various open secrets about the master of the house.

In his book *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England*, Alan Stewart begins a chapter on the closet by citing a distinction made by Bishop Joseph Hall between “stage-sins” and “closet-sins.”¹⁰ Hall qualifies this distinction by cautioning that it is “a dangerous vanity to look outward at other mens sins with scorn, when we have more need to cast our eyes inward to see our own humiliation.”¹¹ Here, then, “stage-sins” are those committed in full view, whereas “closet-sins” are subtle or private transgressions. Within this formulation, the “stage” comes to represent the space in which things are made fully apparent to a penetrating public gaze, whereas the closet is a space of concealment; in Hall’s use of the metaphor it is particularly notable that “closet-sins” can represent those vices which are not immediately apparent even to the transgressor, thanks to their own self-deception. The closet here is a private, internalized, and intensely personal space in which we must “cast our eyes inward” in order to observe. Hall, then, sees the closet as a space of absolute privacy and concealment in contrast to the conspicuous openness of the stage, with the binarism between stage and closet equating to that between the public and the private sphere. It is very much in this spirit that the term has come to be applied so prominently in the generic classification of early modern drama. Such a distinction between closet and stage drama has a particularly significant bearing upon the labelling of women’s dramatic writing prior to the Restoration. As Marta Straznicky notes, women’s dramatic writing has been “variously

⁹ Hopkins and MacMahon, “Come, What, a Siege?” 1.

¹⁰ Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 161–87.

¹¹ Joseph Hall, *The Contemplations upon the History of the New Testament* (London, 1661), 89.

identified as domestic, household or closet drama, all three terms signalling a perceived distinction between plays written for a paying, public spectatorship and plays written for a private audience of family and friends.¹² However, such labelling in commentary on early modern drama and the assumptions that underpin it have been highlighted as problematic in a number of ways.

What could be identified as the “first wave” of early modern closet drama is the group of neo-classical tragedies written during the 1590s and early 1600s, with practitioners including Mary Sidney, Samuel Daniel, Samuel Brandon, Fulke Greville, Sir William Alexander, and Elizabeth Cary. Stemming largely from aristocratic coteries and the related patronage networks, this group of plays share a number of common aesthetic features, including long rhetorical speeches, a lack of direct action, sententious commentary, and the inclusion of choruses, along with a range of stylistic features including apostrophe and stichomythia. Because of their privileging of rhetoric over action and sententiae over spectacle, these plays have often been characterized by their apparent hostility towards the public stage, a view promulgated particularly by T. S. Eliot. Eliot sees the emergence of this mode of dramatic writing as the product of an endeavour “to make head against the popular melodrama of the time” by promoting the tenets of neo-classical decorum which apparently were being debased on the popular stage; such ambitions, he concludes, “were bound to fail.”¹³ In outlining his view, Eliot somewhat problematically conflates the non-theatrical nature of these works with an *anti*-theatrical agenda. For these reasons, the term “closet drama” had come to denote dramas that were actively hostile towards, rather than simply bypassing, the commercial theatres.

Such a view has faced a robust challenge in commentary over the last few decades, along with a dismantling of the assumptions driving the kind of commentary promulgated most notably by Eliot.¹⁴ Lukas Erne, for example, dismisses the perception of hostility between “closet” and theatrical dramatists, highlighting instead that the two currents of dramatic writing should be considered “complementary rather than antagonistic in the influence they exerted.”¹⁵ It is for similar reasons that Coburn Freer has objected to the term “closet drama” on the grounds that it gives a false impression of “willful obscurity and terminal stuffiness.”¹⁶ The equation between the public/private

12 Marta Straznicky, “Private Drama,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women’s Writing*, ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 247–59, 247.

13 T. S. Eliot, *Elizabethan Dramatists* (London: Faber, 1963), 43.

14 One of the earliest interventions in this area comes from Mary Ellen Lamb, who rejects Eliot’s claims about both the anti-theatrical agenda behind these works and also the notion that they were the products of a coherent and mobilized group. See “The Myth of the Countess of Pembroke: The Dramatic Circle,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 11 (1981): 194–202.

15 Lukas Erne, *Beyond “The Spanish Tragedy”: A Study of the Works of Thomas Kyd* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 212.

16 Coburn Freer, “Mary Sidney: Countess of Pembroke,” in *Women Writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Katharina M. Wilson (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 481–521, 484.

and stage/closet binarisms has also proved problematic in a way that has a specific bearing upon the dramas of the sisters, Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley. Although they were probably intended for domestic performance, it is not strictly accurate to regard these plays as “private” affairs. Straznicky challenges these kinds of public/private distinctions by highlighting that “these plays could and did engage important political debates” and “were released to the public in print or circulated beyond the author’s family in manuscript and in many instances were written for performance.”¹⁷ While the “closet” dramas of the women writers in the Cavendish family differ considerably from these neo-classical tragedies, they are still often classed nominally as closet dramas because of their non-theatrical status. However, Ezell argues that *The Concealed Fancies* represents an important case study for avoiding the conflation of “public” with “publication”; she also argues that the contents of the manuscript volume in which this play appears “confirm in tone and subject that it was envisioned as having a public or social dimension” and goes on to point out that the admittedly “self-limiting readership” of this play “in no way indicates that this readership was uncritical or unsophisticated or that the authors lacked a ‘public’ voice and subject matter.”¹⁸ Emily Smith has also presented evidence that the play was familiar to a relatively broad readership and that it enjoyed a considerable degree of local popularity.¹⁹ The Cavendish sisters’ plays therefore represent another case in which the equation of closet drama with privacy is similarly problematic and for which the term needs qualification.

The Concealed Fancies can also figure significantly in these debates because it contains a number of pivotal scenes taking place within a closet, a feature of the aristocratic household that occupied a similarly ambiguous status between the public and the private. It was also a feature of which Bolsover Castle, in particular, contained numerous notable examples. As a space in aristocratic estates, the closet has often been seen as a symbol of privacy and withdrawal. Mark Girouard, for example, points out that in these houses, the closet “was essentially a private room; since servants were likely to be in constant attendance even in a chamber, it was perhaps the only room in which its occupant could be entirely on his own” with its principal functions being as “a room for private devotions, and a room for private study and business.”²⁰ However, more recent scholars, including Patricia Fumerton and Alan Stewart, have challenged the association of the closet with the absolute privacy suggested by Girouard and in Hall’s distinction between “stage-sins” and “closet-sins.” Fumerton, in particular, has argued that absolute privacy was ultimately unattainable in the early modern household, as visitors and servants had regular access to nominally private spaces, leading to an “overall sense ... of privacy exhibited in public, as if one were visiting a museum of the history of private

17 Straznicky, “Private Drama,” 247.

18 Ezell, “To Be Your Daughter;” 257.

19 Emily Smith, “The Local Popularity of ‘The Concealed Fancies,’” *Notes and Queries* 53 (2006): 189–93.

20 Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 56.

life."²¹ Mary Thomas Crane, meanwhile, has similarly labelled the closet as a paradoxical space of "public privacy" and the site of "activities such as prayer, reading, self-examination, and account-keeping that practitioners wished others to know about, even while carrying them out in ostentatious privacy."²² The closet therefore represents a liminal space, associated nominally with retreat and withdrawal while at the same time representing a site of practices associated with domestic husbandry, religious devotion, and intellectual engagement that served specific ideological ends.

The development of the plot of *The Concealed Fancies* reflects the personal and the domestic situations of its authors. The main part of the play focuses on two sisters, Luceny and Tattiney, who, like the authors, are forced to adapt to life at the family estate while the family patriarch, Monsieur Calsindow, is absent due to the onset of the war. During this time, the sisters are being courted by their respective suitors, Courtley and Presumption, whose various suits and professions of love are mercilessly, though calculatedly, rejected or lampooned. As the war reaches their estate, the two sisters abandon it and take refuge as nuns before finally relenting to the suits proposed by Courtley and Presumption following an elaborate theatrical spectacle of divine favour. Luceny and Tattiney outline their motives in frustrating the efforts of Courtley and Presumption in a discussion following an encounter with their suitors. Although they intend to accept Courtley and Presumption's suits and eventually marry them, the marriages will not be defined by their submission to their new husbands but will instead be unions that preserve the power relations of courtship. Luceny outlines her nightmare scenario as one in which she will be "condemned to look upon my nose whenever I was; and when I sit at meat, confined by his grave wink, to look upon the salt" (2.3.47–51);²³ in other words, to keep her eyes permanently downcast in recognition of her husband's superiority. On the other hand, her "happiness, when I am in the condition of his wife, is to imagine him Courtley and I Mistress Luceny" (2.3.55–57), thus preserving the dynamic offered during courtship and avoiding having to relinquish her agency in the relationship. On similar grounds, Tattiney asks rhetorically if the "words saying in the church" (or utterance of the marriage vows) "shall make me mind him more than I do now" (2.3.110–12). Their elaborate courtship games are therefore predicated upon their ambitions to retain a degree of self-possession within their marriage without having to submit to a new patriarchal authority figure. This scene is reflective of that which Alison Findlay has highlighted as the "wider project" of the authors to rewrite "the household according to their 'fancies'" and "to forge independent personalities for themselves in

21 Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), 72.

22 Mary Thomas Crane, "Illicit Privacy and Outdoor Spaces in Early Modern England," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 9 (2009): 4–22 at 5.

23 All quotations from *The Concealed Fancies* are taken from the edition that appears in *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1996).

their writing and in their marriages, whilst remaining daughters of the house.”²⁴ This scene represents the conflation of two definitions of the word “fancy,” one of which relates to sexual preference while the other refers to performance and the exercising of creative or imaginative faculties. It is notable that these exchanges of confidences between the two sisters are brought to an abrupt end when Luceny voices her concerns about the potential eavesdropping of their suitors: “Come, let us go, for I do fear / If at the door they may us hear” (2.3.150–51). Such fancies, in both senses, must remain concealed from Courtley and Presumption, and Luceny’s fears about their plans being overheard highlight the untenable nature of domestic privacy, a premise that is emblemized most readily by the space of the closet.

This permeability and penetrability of apparently private domestic spaces is signalled in an episode from the play’s subplot, which involves three sisters, one of whom is named Cicilley while the other two are identified in the manuscript only by the speech prefixes Sh and Is, who are under virtual house arrest within Monsieur Calsindow’s besieged estate, Ballamo Castle. This situation, along with that of the main plot, is eventually resolved when the siege of Ballamo is finally broken by the forces led by Colonel Free, allowing Calsindow to return and authorize the various proposed nuptial unions.

The paradoxical nature of the closet as a space of “public privacy” is a premise that is interrogated in *The Concealed Fancies*. This is most notable in a scene from the third act that takes place at Ballamo Castle, one of the two estates in the play belonging to the absent patriarch, Monsieur Calsindow. At this point, the estate has been captured by Parliamentarian troops, leaving the three cousins under virtual house arrest in the besieged estate. Bored and in search of some recreational distraction from their lessons, the cousins turn their attentions to Calsindow’s closet and rummage through a cabinet containing various cordials belonging to their host, which, they speculate, are “for restoration of health and making one young” (3.4.34–35). Dorothy Stephens notes that this plundering of the cordial box in Calsindow’s chamber represents a means of “compensating for the frustrating passivity of a siege that puts them at the mercy of the soldiers by in turn putting their absent host at their mercy in a relatively benign skirmish between the sexes.”²⁵ Among the cordials and treats they find in the box are “quintessence of mint,” “magisterium of pearl,” “accodeshdry,” fruits, cakes, “curious balsams,” and “all manner of spirits” (3.4.37–63). One of the most striking elements of this scene is Sh’s utterance, “I wish he [Calsindow] saw us in a prospective,” or telescope (3.4.46). According to Alison Findlay, the cousins’ plundering of foods “recalls Eve’s consumption of the fruit of knowledge which transforms her from an obedient daughter into an active consuming subject,” and Sh’s desire to be seen in a prospective by Calsindow “grants him a God-like viewpoint, overseeing their transgressions” but at the same time “registers a need for masters of the house to accommodate women’s desires and pleasures.”²⁶ The

²⁴ Findlay, “She Gave You the Civility of the House,” 270.

²⁵ Dorothy Stephens, *The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 146.

²⁶ Findlay, *Playing Spaces*, 48.

desire to be seen “in a prospective” lends a voyeuristic framework to the scene, in which the audience or readership are themselves implicated, which further underlines, in turn, the permeability of the closet.

Stephens also expresses frustration about what she regards as the scene’s extraneous listing of these commodities and to the abundance of “irritating little disagreements over who should have a whole pot of medicinally sweet plums.”²⁷ She goes on to speculate that such perceived shortcomings and signs of “authorial inexperience” may indicate that the scene was possibly written by the younger sister, Frances, mainly on the basis that “One could easily imagine a teenager sick of war rations might be unwilling to condense her daydream of marvelous food.”²⁸ However, the scene should be considered as consistent with the play’s persistent rhetoric of itemization. Such rhetoric is consistent with the prominence of inventories in other productions in the Cavendish family canon, as Hero Chalmers notes in her contribution to this collection. Chalmers highlights that inventories acted as important assertions of ownership arising from the threat to property during the Civil War, with Jane in particular exhibiting an awareness that “Cavendish family control over the larger properties represented by their houses and landed estates was becoming increasingly tenuous.”²⁹ In the second scene of *The Concealed Fancies*, the audience is treated to lengthy discussions of the dressing routines undertaken by the character of Lady Tranquillity, requiring “Five hours without interruption!” (1.2.39). This drawn-out process requires the mobilization of such elements as a quiff, a pinner, and a smock-band, along with such cosmetic cordials as pomatum, scarlet, and Mr. Trantam’s distilled water, which apparently contains “rarer cordials” to “plump up the face” (1.2.43–44). According to Findlay, the scenes featuring Lady Tranquillity represent “an excess of leisured self-indulgence, the nightmare of an invading housewife-to-be whose appetites threaten to consume all.” This is in contrast to the principal female characters, through whom the authors reflect their abilities to “rewrite themselves as leisured wits rather than domestic managers.”³⁰ The trope of itemization is also apparent in Act 4, scene 4, which opens with a song performed by Courtley, one of the principal male characters, who here characterizes his unrequited love by imagining himself as a shopkeeper, literally trading on his own grief. Among the items he imaginatively presents for sale to his reproachful mistress are such symbols as “Melancholy hoods,” “pendant tears of pearl,” and “fine sweetwater sighs, for to perfume / Your closet chamber, or so any room” (4.4.2–6). Here Courtley’s public commodification of his frustrated courtship of Luceny depends upon a shared assumption about what takes place in her apparently private “closet chamber.” In this case, the closet, rather than being a site of absolute privacy, becomes a contested space—rights of access may be limited, but the actual privacy of the space becomes compromised as assumptions about the contents and associations of

27 Stephens, *Limits of Eroticism*, 146.

28 Stephens, *Limits of Eroticism*, 146.

29 Chalmers, XXX–XX.

30 Findlay, *Playing Spaces*, 49.

the closet are made public. Rather than a haven of privacy secluded from the rest of the aristocratic household, the closet is here marked once again by its permeability.

In each of these cases, the closet becomes not so much a private retreat but a conduit between the household and the public sphere. The tropes of itemization and commodification also highlight it, somewhat paradoxically, as a site of conspicuous consumption. The interplay between the public and the private is further underlined by the specific identification of a number of the items uncovered by the cousins. Among the items they plunder is a “box of my Lady Kent’s cordials” (3.4.56–57), a reference to Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent, a relative of the Cavendishes whose *Choice Manual of Rare and Select Secrets in Physick and Chyrurgery* was published in 1653 (see the introduction to this volume). Such references to medicines also serve to highlight the closet as a mediated public space and point to a tradition in which such family remedies are mobilized in a voyeuristic framework that allows a degree of public access to apparently intimate domestic details. This tradition is promulgated by the recurring image of the open closet in the titles of household manuals, of which some notable examples include *The treasure of commodius conceits and hidden secrets, and may be called, the huswives closet, of heathfull provision* (1573), *Queen Elizabeth’s closet of physical secrets* (1652), and *The Queen’s Closet opened* (1655). Stephens points out that these manuals “often claim authority by making the public privy to the medicinal secrets of a great lady.”³¹ The scene in *The Concealed Fancies* employs a similar voyeuristic framework that allows mediated public access to nominally private family details.

Such medicinal vocabulary also figures prominently in the wider literary discourse of the Cavendish family and clearly has a set of resonances and associations within that specific discourse. This is highlighted by the fact that the scene also contains a reference to a cordial known as “Gilbert’s water,” which Lisa Hopkins and Barbara MacMahon associate with Gilbert Talbot, clearly marking it as a product of the Cavendish coterie.³² In an occasional poem addressed to her sister, entitled “The Quinticens of Cordiall,” Jane also likens her sister’s positive influence upon her to “Balsum to my braine, / And Gilberts water,”³³ suggesting that it would clearly have been a remedy familiar to the family, as well as highlighting its broader and more figurative resonances within the Cavendish family discourse. By including this abundance of references to cordials and medicinal goods, Brackley and Cavendish are therefore drawing upon a clearly established frame of reference from the family’s writing. This is also suggested by a collection of poems written by Newcastle during his exile, collected under the title *Phanseys* and most probably addressed to his fiancée-to-be, Margaret Lucas. I propose that *Phanseys* is one of the play’s most notable intertexts because, in addition to the similarities in titles, the two texts also exhibit a range of common metaphors, allusions, and associations, one

31 Stephens, *Limits of Eroticism*, 150–51.

32 Hopkins and MacMahon, “Come, What, a Siege?” 6–7.

33 Quotations are taken from “Presentation Volume of Jane Cavendish’s Poetry: Yale University, Beinecke Library Osborn MS b. 233,” in *Early Modern Women’s Manuscript Poetry*, ed. Jill Seal Millman and Gillian Wright (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 87–96.

of which is evidenced by the abundance of references to medicines and cordials in the *Phanseys*. In one poem, Newcastle describes his addressee as “love’s quintessence” and likens their love to a “balsum of Perue” before asserting that their “Love hath no Venum, Poyson, in’t att all, / But is all sweetnes and Balsamicall” (31.16–18).³⁴ The *Phanseys* also has Newcastle describing the effects of “a balsum kisse,” which he instructs to “Dropp, Dropp that sweeter shower, love’s softer rayne, / Into my Lips, ’twill cuer my wounded brayne.” He also imagines Margaret’s being possessed of all conceivable beautiful virtues “crusht into one forme,” thus likening it to the production of the kinds of home remedies contained in household manuals. In this sense, Cavendish’s references to cordials and medicines are eroticized; no more so than when he imagines “Our Norrishment turn’d to the quintessence / Of what makes man, and is his first Essence.” In the *Phanseys*, then, cordials become directly associated with erotic indulgence.

In his readings of the “epistemologies of the early modern closet,” Alan Stewart traces the development of a *topos* originating in Xenophon’s *Oeconomicus* that underlines domestic order predicated upon the restriction of women’s knowledge by the household patriarch, a *topos* promulgated in “a series of local twists to the notion of the closet.”³⁵ One of the principal variations of this *topos* considered in this reading is the dialogue *Della famiglia*, by Leon Battista Alberti, which contains a section in which, according to Stewart,

Alberti marks off a set of materials (his writings and papers), a set of relationships (with other men), and a room within his house (his study) as beyond the household, not falling within the possible conversation of man and wife. Any curiosity on the part of the wife about those particular materials, relationships, or that room will give rise to doubts about her chastity: a wife asking about transactions with men must be interested in men.³⁶

Stewart also argues that this tradition of excluding women from the business of the closet delineated it not “as a place of individual withdrawal, but as a secret nonpublic transactive space between two men behind a locked door.”³⁷ *The Concealed Fancies*, however, contains a distinctive twist upon this *topos* of forbidden knowledge. After having perused the contents of their host’s box of cordials, the cousins turn their attention to a locked cabinet. Speculating upon the contents, Sh anticipates opening the cabinet to find their host’s “magazine of love. I dare swear you shall see locks of all manner of coloured hairs, and favouring ribbons, in as many colours as the rainbow” (3.4.73–76). The cousins make two attempts to access the cabinet; in their initial raid on the closet, they find that the cabinet is locked, and their second attempt, for which

34 William Cavendish, Marquess of Newcastle, *The Phanseys of William Cavendish, Marquis of Newcastle, addressed to Margaret Lucas and her Letters in Reply*, ed. Douglas Grant (London: Nonesuch, 1956). All quotations from the *Phanseys* are taken from this edition and line numbers will be cited parenthetically.

35 Stewart, *Close Readers*, 163.

36 Stewart, *Close Readers*, 163–64.

37 Stewart, *Close Readers*, 171.

they call on the help of a locksmith, is interrupted by a visit from Lady Tranquillity. When Is asks what makes Sh think that these will be the contents of the cabinet, she replies, "'Tis my strong imagination, and if this fancy of mine should prove true, we shall have rarer recreation to look on them" (3.4.78–80). The actual contents of the cabinet are therefore never revealed, and the access granted to the audience is the "fancy" articulated by Sh. However, the speculations about the contents are consistent with the impressions of the authors' father, William Cavendish, in the occasional poems that accompany *The Concealed Fancies* in the manuscript volume. Ezell observes that in these poems, written primarily by Jane, Cavendish's status as a soldier, as well as his "prowess as a ladies' man," is underlined.³⁸ The cabinet's contents, at least as Sh fancies them, are particularly striking and have considerable bearing upon the construction of Monsieur Calsindow, particularly as an avatar for Cavendish himself. These two facets are yoked by Cavendish himself in the *Phanseys*, particularly in one poem where he portrays himself

Like an old Soldier in Queene Venus' warres,
My wounds of love turn'd all to mangl'd Scarrs,
Love's broaken speere and bowed sworde doe meet
As offerings att your Sacred Alter's feete.

(7.1–4)

In the same poem, he goes on to declare that his impending marriage is prompting him to abandon his earlier philandering:

And all Love's Magazine, that's thought divine,
I Sacrifise here att love's flaminge Shrine:
As all sweet powders, Essence, sweet balls, Oyles,
Rich Cloaths, Fethers, Ribbans, and all Love's Spoyles
I here give Up; all Poetry renounce,
Gainst phansi'd Ryme or Verse I here pronounce.

(7.7–12)

Cavendish here lists various elements associated with his previous romantic pursuits that are strikingly similar to what Sh imagines will be the contents of the cabinet, particularly the ribbons, which serve as material suggestions of his former dalliances in the same way as the locks of hair. The "magazine of love," or "Love's Magazine," plays on the associations with Cavendish as both lover and soldier and suggests, in Sh's mind, the potentially explosive contents of the cabinet. Rather than a site of homosocial relations, the closet here is imagined as the locus for the apparently prolific sexual conquests of the absent Monsieur Calsindow. In this sense, the scene further reveals the closet's liminal position in the relationship between the household and the private life of the host. Just as the household manuals purport to give a voyeuristic insight into the workings of an aristocratic household, so the closet is here imagined as a site that can offer confirmation of the impressions of Calsindow.

38 Ezell, "To Be Your Daughter," 255.

While in these scenes the closet is viewed as a repository of illicit private details and open secrets about the head of the household, the resonances of the closet become more ambiguous through the appropriation of images associated with the closets at Bolsover. This is particularly the case with the so-called Heaven and Elysium closets that lead off from the main bedchamber on the second floor of the Little Castle. As Lucy Worsley points out, both closets are “richly decorated” and “have ceilings and friezes painted with a riotous profusion of classical and Christian figures, and elaborate marble corner fireplaces.”³⁹ Lisa Hopkins has argued that this division of these closets represents a choice between “the fleshly delights of the pagan Elysium” and “the spiritual blessings of the Christian Heaven.”⁴⁰ Figures reminiscent of the décor of these closets are mobilized at pivotal moments in the play. At one point during the play’s main plot, the sisters Luceny and Tattiney respond in despair to the capture of their household by enemy troops. So intense is this despair that Luceny even contemplates suicide when she considers a course of action that would “shortly put unquiet life quite out” (3.2.8). Immediately after the sisters have delivered their expressions of grief, an angel appears encouraging them to remain steadfast in the face of their calamities:

Stay, be not angry, suffer with your friends,
 In like fortune yourself to them lend,
 For I do hope the happy gain will be,
 And that ere long you joyfully shall see.
 So I’m assured you shall not make these ends
 For happy shall you be in your blessed friends.
 (3.2.15–20)

Alison Findlay characterizes the intervention of the angel as “a prelude to the equally miraculous reappearance of Lord Calsindow at the end of the play.”⁴¹ The appearance of the angel also gestures towards the decor of the Heaven closet, thereby harnessing the imagery of the closet as part of a providential scheme that advances towards the play’s comedic conclusion.

A similar harnessing of the resonances of the Bolsover closets occurs towards the conclusion of the play’s main courtship plot. Following the loss of their home, the two sisters turn instead to devotional practices as nuns. The situation is resolved only when their suitors disguise themselves as pagan gods, thereby appropriating the imagery associated with the Elysium closet. Alison Findlay reads this development as a self-consciously artificial one, suggesting that an “overambitious attempt to stage a divine spectacle within the household is perhaps just what Jane and Elizabeth were dramatising: parodically destabilising patriarchal authority whilst seeming to celebrate it.”⁴² Rather than a successful reappropriation

³⁹ Lucy Worsley, *Cavalier: The Story of a Seventeenth-Century Playboy* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 114.

⁴⁰ Hopkins, *Female Hero*, 186.

⁴¹ Alison Findlay, “She Gave You the Civility of the House,” 262.

⁴² Alison Findlay, “She Gave You the Civility of the House,” 265.

of the imagery of the closet by the suitors in order to serve the maintenance of patriarchal order; the associations of the closet are once again reconfigured as a means of undermining the apparent reinstatement of patriarchal values at the end of the play.

The play's conclusion is predicated upon the return of Monsieur Calsindow in order to authorize the prospective marriages that will provide comedic closure. However, it is at this point in the play that Calsindow's sexual exploits are brought unequivocally to light. In spite of Lady Tranquillity's apparent status as a caricatured version of Margaret Lucas, she fails in her attempts to court Calsindow, who, it is gradually revealed, has in fact been dallying with her chambermaid, the aptly named Toy. This characterization is in line with a number of hints contained within Cavendish's *Phansyes*; at one point, for example, the speaker condemns "wild Phansy" for provoking young lovers to lay their "great fury with a Kitchinge wenshe" (36.16). Upon hearing that Lady Tranquillity has married the Falstaffian soldier Corpolant, Calsindow declares to her that "I will take / Your woman for my Mistress mate" (5.6.53–54). Before he can act on these words, however, the angel that had earlier dissuaded Luceny from contemplating suicide reappears to caution Calsindow that he should "take a wife / That's truly virtuous and fair, / Handsome and innocent as the chaste air" (5.6.56–58). This leads Calsindow, prompted by the angel's words, to send Toy away while insisting that "My conscience bids me not to look of you" (5.4.66). In a play in which the prospective brides are engaging various strategies to correct the lapses and presumptions of their male suitors, it is significant that the aristocratic patriarch, usually the agent of comedic closure, is himself in need of similar guidance and correction. In this way, the play adds a clear element of ambiguity to the integrity of the patriarchal authority figure. The fact that such guidance is provided by the same angel that cautioned Luceny and Tattiney against excessive despair shows how the idea of the closet has been reconfigured in the service of the play's progress towards heteronormative stability.

The closet is much more prominent as a thematic than a generic device in *The Concealed Fancies*. While the conclusion seems to require the abandonment of practices associated with the closet—whether they are the sexual exploits of Monsieur Calsindow or the devotional withdrawal of Luceny and Tattiney—the play also engages in a subversive reconfiguration of the resonances of the closet. By emphasizing such points, I underline the problematic nature of the closet as a frame for formal and generic categorization. In *The Concealed Fancies*, the associations of the closet, both broadly and locally, are reappropriated by the Cavendish sisters and redeployed as a means of undermining the patriarchal authority that appears to have been reinstated. The means by which these female dramatists appear to pay lip service to conventional and accepted modes of feminine self-expression can therefore be redeployed as vehicles for critical and even parodic comment on such conventions. Such a conclusion highlights the clear scope to extend such analyses beyond this play and to further consider the idea of "closetedness," with its apparently self-conscious modesty and marginality, as belying its more provocative properties.

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Daniel Cadman is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at Sheffield Hallam University. His first monograph was *Sovereigns and Subjects in Early Modern Neo-Senecan Drama: Republicanism, Stoicism and Authority* (2015), and he has also published work on William Shakespeare, Fulke Greville, and Samuel Daniel. He is the editor of *Early Modern Literary Studies*, for which he has also coedited special issues focusing on Christopher Marlowe and on the influence of ancient Rome upon early modern literature, and he has also contributed to the *Lost Plays Database* and to *The Year's Work in English Studies*.
