



**Cavendish, Margaret. Poems and Fancies *with* The Animal Parliament. Ed. Brandie R. Siegfried**

Jonathan Locke Hart

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Volume 42, Number 1, Winter 2019

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1064539ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1064539ar>

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Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

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Cite this review

Hart, J. L. (2019). Review of [Cavendish, Margaret. Poems and Fancies *with* The Animal Parliament. Ed. Brandie R. Siegfried]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 42(1), 374–376. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1064539ar>

a welcome addition to the bookshelves equally of social historians and literary and religious scholars.

JACQUELINE MURRAY

University of Guelph

**Cavendish, Margaret.**

***Poems and Fancies with The Animal Parliament*. Ed. Brandie R. Siegfried.**

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 64 / Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 536. Toronto: Iter Press / Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2018. Pp. xx, 462 + 4 ill. ISBN 978-0-86698-593-2 (paperback) US\$59.95.

Brandie R. Siegfried's edition makes an important contribution to seventeenth-century literature, culture, and science in English, as these are realms in which Margaret Cavendish played a central role. Cavendish has been part of the conversation of English and western European culture from her lifetime onward. In this review, I will focus on how Siegfried introduces and edits her work.

Cavendish was a keen student of natural philosophy as well as a writer of many genres, including essays, poems, orations, plays, romance, epistolary philosophy, political parody, science fiction, memoir, and biography. This versatile figure, as Siegfried argues, is of interest in the history of science, philosophy, and literature. Constantijn Huygens praised *Poems and Fancies*, Cavendish's first poetic exploration of natural philosophy. Gerard Langbaine lauded her poetry and learning. William Cavendish, her husband, was an admirer of her work, which included an Epicurean poem of atomism, a model that Cavendish adapts to her own view of matter. Siegfried also stresses that Cavendish was aware of her role as a female author and of the perils of writing and speaking up as a woman, while she advocated for female education and for better legal and political status. Cavendish asserted her own voice in print rather than leave her work in manuscript.

Siegfried presents a brief life of Cavendish, in which she claims that Margaret Lucas's marriage to William Cavendish had a great effect on her career as a writer. It introduced her to mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers; she also learned from William and his brother Charles, who were well versed in

these subjects. William supported her writing on topics beyond religion, unusual for a woman at the time, by supplying commendatory verses for her volumes. She dedicated her first books, *Poems and Fancies* and *Philosophical Fancies*, to Charles. After his death, she mentioned—in her memoir, *A True Relation*, which also declared her philosophical independence—how important he was. For Siegfried, Margaret Cavendish had to balance—throughout her life—social circumspection with a desire for enduring fame. Cavendish wrote philosophy and managed property. Her *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* included the philosophical romance, *The Blazing World*, with its use of parody.

Cavendish published, as Siegfried notes, twelve books and reissued six. Siegfried asks whether Cavendish's revisions in 1664 and 1668 of *Poems and Fancies* (1653) improved the poems. According to Siegfried, the final edition in 1668 has many small changes and creates a more "seasoned" authorial tone. She sees George Sandys's translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1632) as a model for this book, which is also in heroic couplets. *Poems and Fancies* is important in the history of the Englishing, and the reception in England, of Lucretius's *De rerum*. Cavendish's book follows the thematic and topical structure of this work by Lucretius, something Cavendish would, as Siegfried argues, expect the reader to know. Cavendish's final parable of the fictional parliament—*The Animal Parliament*—concludes with an oration by the king that draws on Elizabeth I's Golden Speech and echoes another of her speeches. Cavendish and her husband were buried in Westminster Abbey.

The afterlife or reception of Cavendish's work begins with William's memorial volume published in 1676. Langbaine's *Account of the English Dramatick Poets* (1691) says that her plays were genuine and original, a view that others took up subsequently. In Siegfried's view, *Poems and Fancies* was Cavendish's best known work for three hundred years after her death. General anthologies of literature and others in women's writing featured this text. Whereas in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries Cavendish was considered original, in the late eighteenth century her status declined. As Siegfried points out, tastes were changing and women writers were expected to be edifying, melancholic, and domestic rather than full of irony, wit, and sexual innuendo, as Cavendish sometimes was. Her melancholic and fanciful poetry was prized at the expense of her philosophical and scientific verse; Egerton Brydges's *Select Poems of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle* (1813) neglects the science or natural philosophy, which was the bulk of her first book.

Siegfried argues that Romantics such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Leigh Hunt, and Charles Lamb found a source of images and motifs in Cavendish, who was also thought to have influenced John Milton. In the twentieth century, Virginia Woolf caricatured Cavendish; by the late twentieth century, feminist scholars were helping to revive Cavendish and other women from the early modern period. In the twenty-first century, when fantasy and science fiction are valued, it seems that *The Blazing World* is Cavendish's most popular work.

Siegfried takes care in editing Cavendish's work; in "Note on the Text," she lays out for the reader a clear sense of what she has done. This edition of Cavendish is valuable for the specialist, the student, and the general reader. It should help extend Cavendish's afterlife and introduce her to yet another generation of readers.

JONATHAN LOCKE HART

Shanghai Jiao Tong University

**Cecchi, Alessandro.**

***In difesa della «dolce libertà». L'assedio di Firenze (1529–1530).***

Biblioteca Storica Toscana, Series 1, vol. 77. Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2018. Pp. x, 302 + 50 colour ill. ISBN 978-88-222-6559-3 (paperback) €29.

The siege of Florence which took place in 1529–1530 is a pivotal event in Florentine history: the final showdown between one of the most emblematic of Italian republics and a foreign army seeking to take it over and impose a ruling dynasty. It is not surprising, therefore, that the historiography on the topic has long been skewed by ideological interpretations that saw the siege as a struggle between good and evil, between liberty and oppression. After a period in which historians were largely indifferent, more recent scholarship has finally begun to approach this event in a different way, revising traditional interpretations and shedding old Manichaean stereotypes. In the wake of Alessandro Monti's *L'assedio di Firenze (1529–1530)* which appeared in 2015, the publication of Alessandro Cecchi's monograph shows that interest in the event continues to be high.

*In difesa della «dolce libertà»* is an extraordinarily detailed account of the events that transpired between the summer of 1529, when the international