

The Literary Career and Legacy of Elizabeth Cary, 1613–1680

Edited by
Heather Wolfe

To The Reader ❖



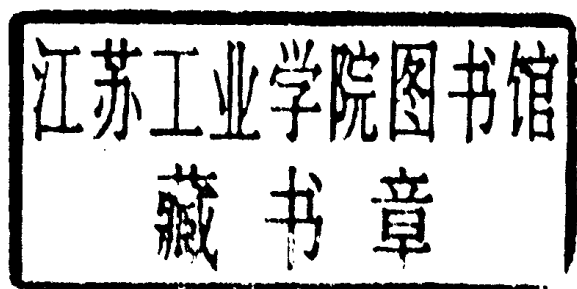
To owterronne, those weavie howers, of a
sadder, and deeper passion: My melancholly, pen
fell accidentally, upon this historiall relation.
which speaks, a kinde, one of our owne, though
one of the moste unfortunate, and shewes, y
fall, of his Inglorious Minions, whose high-
and pride, occasioned, many strangt agitations
in y^e Kingdome, and finally, wrought their own
destruction, and their Indulgent masters hume
what some daies wrought, yo^e may peruse in
one, which may informe yo^e, and excuse my errors.
Such works require, a quiet mynde, and leisure
both w^{ch} to me, I doe confess, are strangers. Some
passages remarkable, may take. If yo^e vertute
them, the rest may seeme, to make, the story fuller
lett Crittikes morallise, or Indgt, their fampc,
I am right, to please the truchte, not humor others,
And in that sense, yo^e may partake, my labors.



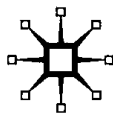
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palgrave
macmillan



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THE LITERARY CAREER AND LEGACY OF
ELIZABETH CARY, 1613–1680

in memoriam
Jeremy Frank Maule
(1952–1998)

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INTRODUCTION

Heather Wolfe

Once relegated to the status of a nearly forgotten playwright and eccentric Roman Catholic convert, Elizabeth Cary (1585?–1639) is now increasingly appreciated as a Renaissance woman historian, playwright, translator, and poet. The recent proliferation of editions and facsimiles of Cary's writings has given students and scholars the ability to place the writer in broader and comparative contexts with implications that take her far beyond the domestic sphere.¹ Essays, articles, and chapters devoted to the topical nature of her writings, and a recognition of the ease with which she moved between literary genres, has repositioned her in the milieu of many of her more illustrious male contemporaries. While her small surviving oeuvre prevents her from being considered a major Renaissance writer, she is an intriguing and remarkable writer whose richly complex work actively questions the meaning of political tyranny. As a female author she can be credited with a number of firsts: she is the first English woman to have an original play printed, the first woman to author an English history, and the first woman to publish a translation of a religious polemical work. Cary's resurrection is part of a much larger and rapidly evolving recovery process of women writers in general, spurred on by crosscurrents in literary theory, gender studies, new historicism, textual bibliography, and manuscript studies.

Now that Cary figures so prominently in the inclusive literary landscape of male *and* female writers in early modern England, where do we go from here? Cary criticism, plentiful and robust, has focused almost exclusively on *The Tragedie of Mariam, Faire Queene of Jewry* (London, 1613) and *The History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II* (London, 1680). Building on the Cary scholarship that precedes it, this collection of essays includes new voices, new perspectives, and new discoveries, broadening our understanding of Cary as a writer by incorporating critical and historical analyses of her forays into other genres. Always mindful of the literary, political, and religious backdrop of early Stuart England, the chapters explore the

extent of her engagement in both the print *and* manuscript worlds of early modern England. The chapters address crucial questions about authorship, form, and reception and avoid generalizations about gender that would smooth over her consistently ambiguous portrayals of male and female figures and her complicated appropriations of typically “male” genres.

Cognizant of a much wider and more complex culture of literary transmission—often collaborative and anonymous—that operated outside the realm of the printed book, scholars are no longer simply interested in the fact that women wrote, but are now guided by the exciting and frustrating reality that the full extent and nature of women’s writing will perhaps never be known. Women writers tended to use the medium of manuscript, rather than print, to construct their public identities, and, as recent studies have shown, manuscripts could be as influential, and often more subversive, than printed texts. But manuscripts have a much lower survival rate than printed books, and women’s writing does not always fit neatly into traditional canonical categories. The true scope of women’s writing from this period is difficult to estimate.

Cary’s autograph remains are limited to fifteen letters, her signature on two depositions, and a youthful translation of Ortelius, which she dedicated to her uncle, Sir Henry Lee.² But allusions to her works by others suggest that she was deeply immersed in a variety of networks that transmitted literary and controversial manuscript texts and that her printed corpus represents only the tip of the iceberg. The manuscript of *Mariam* was “stolen out of that sister inlaws (her frinds) chamber, and printed, but by her owne procurement was called in,” according to *Lady Falkland: Her Life* (written ca. 1645; hereafter referred to as *Life*; 110). Sir John Davies’s dedication to her in 1612 makes mention of “Scenes of Syracuse and Palestine” written by her, which he apparently saw in manuscript.³ According to Sir James Hayes’s preface to the 1680 octavo of Cary’s *History of the Most Unfortunate Prince, King Edward II*, he found the source manuscript among the papers of her husband, Henry Cary, Viscount Falkland. While this manuscript no longer appears to be extant, two other contemporary fair copies of Cary’s *Edward II* (dated January 7, 1626/27 and February 2, 1627/28), both in the same scribal hand but of differing lengths, do survive. Cary alludes to her use of a copyist to prepare a manuscript of *The Reply of the most illustrious Cardinall of Perron, to the Answere of the King of Great Britaine* (Douay, 1630) in her “letter to the reader” (sig. [a2^v]):

If it gaine noe applause, hee that writt it faire, hath lost more labour then I haue done, for I dare auouch, it hath bene fower times as long in transcribing, as it was in translating.

Cary's epitaph "On the Duke of Buckingham" and its companion elegy were transcribed into dozens of poetical miscellanies and manuscript separates. Oft-repeated statistics culled from *Life* point to many other manuscripts, including an original polemical religious treatise, thought to be "the best thing she ever writ," a letter of advice to her oldest children, and "innumerable slight things in verse."⁴ Of her verse, "that which was sayd to be the best" was "the life of Tamberlaine in verse"; she also penned verse lives of many saints, including St. Mary Magdalene, St. Agnes Martyr, St. Elizabeth of Portugal, and "many verses of our Blessed Lady."⁵ In addition to her translation of Cardinal du Perron's *Replique* (only the first tome of which was ever published), *Life* cites her translations of Seneca's epistles (found by her son Lucius in her father's study), and the writings of Louis de Blois, a sixteenth-century Benedictine monk.⁶ While only a handful of the manuscripts described in this paragraph are known to be extant, the fact that her Catholic children were aware of many of them in the decade after her death suggests that they had seen and read them when they lived with her in England, and that they perhaps took the Catholic writings with them to Cambrai.

The Lady Falkland: Her Life is a valuable tool for understanding Cary's lived life and the extent of her literary output. While it is a useful exercise to read it both as a hagiographically motivated conversion narrative of a mother and six of her children produced at a monastery in the Spanish Netherlands, and as a literary work that adheres to the prescribed format for early modern life-writing, in many cases biographical events can be distilled from providential explanations to corroborate and enhance details about Cary's life and conversion.⁷ The utility of this multilayered approach is evident in several chapters included here: Richard Serjeantson begins his chapter with an examination of *Life's* account of the triangular relationship between Cary, her son Lucius, and his friend William Chillingworth; Deana Rankin reads *Life's* account of Cary's time in Ireland against the grain to highlight her emergence in the Irish public sphere; and Marion Wynne-Davies uses *Life* as a springboard for understanding Cary's influence on the surviving written remains of four of her children (Lucy, Anne, Patrick, and Lucius). As Alison Shell elegantly argues in her chapter, it is entirely plausible that Cary followed the Renaissance practice of interrogating her own life through an active rewriting of relevant historical exemplars. Thus, it has been, and will continue to be, a useful exercise to use what we know about her life—her extensive learning, the ways in which she defended her conversion, her financial and familial hardships, her active participation in a range of influential literary and religious circles—through *Life*, her letters, and other contemporary print and manuscript sources, to better understand the relationship between form and content in her writings.⁸

Part I of the collection is devoted to *The Tragedy of Mariam*. Printed in 1613 by Richard Hawkins, this Senecan closet drama was written roughly ten years earlier, when the newly married Cary was living with her mother-in-law while her husband honed his soldier-skills in the wars in the Spanish Netherlands.⁹ Ilona Bell examines the ways in which the play's meaning is shaped by Cary's deployment of Renaissance lyric—nearly forty sonnets and countless sestets are embedded throughout the play. The use of Petrarchan sonnets and dialogic love poetry allows the female characters to respond to and transform a typically male genre, and in turn, allows the playwright herself to critique the contradictory rhetoric of the Petrarchan sonneteers of the Elizabethan period. The constant undermining and overturning of declaration and judgment by each character is central to the play's meaning and purpose, and Bell suggests that Cary unsettled her audience by providing both an ironic commentary on Renaissance literary conventions and on attitudes toward love, marriage, and women.

Previous scholars have identified Mariam as a proto-Christian martyr. Erin Kelly problematizes this tag by comparing Cary's Mariam to other Mariams and to other descriptions of post-Reformation Protestant and Catholic martyrs by Cary's contemporaries. Cary wrote her play at a critical period in the history of martyrological discourse in England, when stories about Protestant martyrs were deployed by writers *not* to encourage spiritual zealotry and religious dissent, but rather, to encourage conformity. Thus, female martyrs were often depicted as meek and innocent victims, stripped of the rebellious facets of their personalities. Cary, instead, highlights the defiant actions of her Mariam, challenging contemporary readers to accept the heroine-martyr as a chaste, but not silent or obedient, female. The judgments that the chorus pass on Mariam therefore serve as Cary's implicit interrogation of her contemporaries' tendency to strip female martyrs of their rebelliousness, since to condemn this quality is to condemn the very quality that made them martyrs.

While critics have previously compared *Mariam* to Cary's source, Thomas Lodge's translation of Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews* (1st ed., London, 1602), Alison Shell focuses on the influence of Lodge's approach to history as spelled out in his preface, rather than on the source material itself. Historical exemplars were widely used in early modern England as a means for self-interrogation of the past and as a model for future behavior, and it could be argued that *Mariam* was in part a moral exercise in internalizing an exemplar that bore some relation to Cary's own condition. Autodidactic texts such as Cary's play and Lodge's translation did not require a point-by-point correspondence between writer/reader and character, but instead required the reader to be able to infer the moral utility from only one

character trait or incident. Cary's voracious devouring of history and moral treatises, as recounted in *Life*, strongly suggests her belief in the power of a historical text or play to provide matter for the correcting of one's faults. Moving beyond both the readings of *Mariam* as an exploration of female subjectivity and as a confessional work, and the subsequent downplaying of biographical criticism by later scholars, Shell argues that the play be read in light of what we know about Cary's own conscience, and that we fully appreciate the clash of exemplarities that she presents.



Part II turns to Cary's *History of Edward II*, extant in four different versions of varying lengths—two print publications of 1680 and two scribal copies made in the late 1620s. While the story of Edward II, his wife, Isabel, and his favorites Gaveston and Spenser, was taken up by many of Cary's contemporaries, including Marlowe, Hubert, and Drayton, what were Cary's motives in reviving and retelling the story of a king who had died 400 years earlier? Curtis Perry's chapter on the folio version of *The History of the Life, Death, and Reign of Edward II* focuses on the ways in which Cary's concern with domestic tyranny is intertwined with larger questions about the meaning of political tyranny and subjection. In the 1620s, comparisons of Edward II's favorite, Spencer, to James I's and Charles I's favorite, the Duke of Buckingham, were rife, interpreted as a warning against the dangers of favorites and, simultaneously, as a warning about the dangers of unchecked popularity and speech. Cary's adaptation of this deeply contested political fable evinces an interest in its moral ambiguity: the fact that, once the political balance has tipped, nobody in the story is completely innocent, and all actions and motives are suspect. Suggesting that the politics of passion and the lack of self-restraint are Cary's central concerns, Perry invites readers to subordinate character to theme as early modern readers were prone to do; that is, to think of the fundamental narrative structure of the *History* not in terms of the experiences of individual characters but in terms of an outward movement of intemperate passion beginning with Edward himself and then moving in sequence to his court and to the realm as a whole.

Mihoko Suzuki argues that *The History of Edward II* represents a significant intervention in the history of English and continental political thought and historiography. She examines Cary's use of and divergence from Machiavelli's *The Prince* and *Discourses*, and compares Cary's gendered critique of the hierarchical metaphor of the body politic to that in Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the Body Politic*. Suzuki then situates Cary in the tradition of English political thought that advances limited monarchy—whose

chief exemplars are John of Salisbury and John Fortescue—and examines her relation to late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Catholic proponents of monarchical resistance. Not only does Cary use these political thinkers to shape her historical narrative, her analysis of the fall of Edward II serves as an exemplary narrative through which she tests political theories concerning monarchical prerogative and the claims of the subject, thus challenging the theory of absolute monarchy as put forth by James I. *Edward II* thereby participates in the contemporary dialogue concerning absolutism and parliamentary prerogative between king and parliament, while its posthumous publication during the Exclusion Crisis indicates its relevance for the similar debate between Charles II and his parliaments concerning his prerogative to name James II as his successor. Cary diverges from the traditional Protestant national historiography of Britain to advance a theory of nationhood based on an eclectic synthesis of political theory—both English and continental—that prioritizes the importance of the common good.

Criticism on Cary's *Edward II* has traditionally privileged the longer of the two printed versions of 1680, the folio *History of the Life, Death, and Reign of Edward II*. Discussion of the much shorter octavo version, *The History of the Most Unfortunate Prince*, has always been speculative and dismissive: it is treated either as a redaction of the longer version made by a later publisher or as a spurious early version. The importance of the octavo, and its relationship to the folio, are taken up by Jesse Swan and Margaret Reeves, respectively. Jesse Swan provides a detailed postpublication history of the 1680 octavo. His discussion accentuates its importance as a witness to the literary work of Cary, as an independent production with an independent aim, rather than as a redaction of the longer 1680 folio text, and illustrates the perils of trusting later editions, beginning with the version of *The History of the Most Unfortunate Prince* included in *The Harleian Miscellany* (London, 1744–1746). As Swan argues, the textual apparatus and other editorial interventions in these later editions introduce many misleading readings, solidify the erroneous attribution to Henry Cary, perpetuate the belief that the octavo was a redaction of the folio, and further, obscure the fact that the preface to the octavo was written by Sir James Hayes in 1680 and *not* by William Oldys in 1744. Swan demonstrates that commercial and bibliographical forces have led to the misrepresentation of the 1680 octavo since 1744, and describes the effect that this has had on twentieth-century scholarship on *Edward II*.

In the mid-1990s, the late Jeremy Maule discovered two manuscript versions of Cary's history of Edward II, which both enhance and complicate our understanding of the history's function and readership. The earlier, shorter manuscript (Northamptonshire Record Office, Finch-Hatton MS 1) bears some similarity to the octavo version, although it is significantly longer, while