

# WITCHCRAFT, MAGIC AND THE ESOTERIC IN THE WORKS OF THE CAVENDISH FAMILY

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The Cavendishes of Bolsver and Welbeck were an aristocratic English family who in the seventeenth century produced several writers including William Cavendish, earl, later marquess, and finally duke of Newcastle, who wrote and collaborated on plays; his second wife Margaret, a prolific and now much-studied author in a variety of genres; and his two daughters by his first marriage, Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley, who wrote poems and collaborated on a play and a pastoral. Both Margaret Cavendish and William's younger brother Sir Charles Cavendish were also interested in philosophy and science, and this aspect of the family's intellectual interests (which included correspondence with Descartes, Mersenne and Gassendi and a personal friendship with Thomas Hobbes, who tutored William Cavendish's cousin and namesake the earl of Devonshire) has been well explored. What has been less noted, however, is how often witchcraft, magic, and the esoteric crop up in the lives and writings of the Cavendishes. This essay traces elements of that presence.

After the Restoration Margaret Cavendish famously attended a meeting of the Royal Academy; she was particularly interested in atomism, and in her play *The Convent of Pleasure* the Prince compliments the heroine Lady Happy on her knowledge of astronomy:

My shepherdess, your wit flies high,  
Up to the sky,  
And views the gates of heaven  
Which are the planets seven.<sup>1</sup>

In her own eyes, Margaret was a scientist and philosopher, and despite the scorn of some of her contemporaries, modern critics are prepared to take her claims to that status seriously;<sup>2</sup> however she had friends who believed in witches,<sup>3</sup> and her childhood home of

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Cavendish, "The Convent of Pleasure," in Hero Chalmers, Julie Sanders, and Sophie Tomlinson, eds., *Three Seventeenth-century Plays on Women and Performance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 4.1.47–50.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance Lisa Walters, "Epicurus and Gender in the British Newcastle Circle: Charleton, Hobbes and Margaret Cavendish," in Lisa Hopkins and Tom Rutter, eds., *A Companion to the Cavendishes*

Colchester was the base of the witchfinder Matthew Hopkins. During the Civil War William's fellow royalist commander Prince Rupert had a dog which was believed to be magical;<sup>4</sup> its death at Marston Moor was blamed by some for the disastrous Royalist defeat there which drove William into exile, and a contemporary cartoon showed Rupert mourning over its corpse in the habit of a Catholic priest and sporting donkey ears, as if he had been the victim of a Bottom-like transformation.<sup>5</sup> Above all, the Cavendishes' homes in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire were situated in an area marked by underground landscapes with supernatural associations. The idea of the Seven Wonders of the Peak District, first referred to in the fourteenth century by the monk Ranulph Higden, was revisited first by William Camden and then by Thomas Hobbes in *De Mirabilibus Pecci: Concerning the Wonders of the Peak in Darby-shire* (1636). Hobbes's list included his pupil the earl of Devonshire's home Chatsworth House, two "miraculous" fountains, St Anne's Well in Buxton and the Ebbing and Flowing Well at Tideswell, and three subterranean spaces, Poole's Cavern near Buxton, Peak Cavern in Castleton, and the chasm at Eldon Hole.<sup>6</sup>

I have argued elsewhere that ideas about mines and caves in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries fall roughly into three broad categories: they are seen as places for illicit meetings, as doors to the underworld, and as sources of wealth.<sup>7</sup> The cave known as the Devil's Arse, at Castleton in Derbyshire, was not only one of the Wonders of the Peak and a celebrated tourist attraction, visited by both Ben Jonson and Mary, Queen of Scots, but also famous as a gathering place for gypsies.<sup>8</sup> In the 1638 play *The Seven Champions of*

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(Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2020), 181–98, accessed August 9, 2022, <https://library.oapen.org/handle/20.500.12657/43071>.

<sup>3</sup> See James Fitzmaurice, "Margaret Cavendish and the Cultural Milieu of Antwerp," in Hopkins and Rutter, *Companion to the Cavendishes*, 176. The Cavendishes lived in the Rubens House at Antwerp, where they may have encountered esoteric ideas: Brandie R. Siegfried, "'Soulified': Cavendish, Rubens, and the Cabbalistic Tree of Life," in Brandie R. Siegfried and Lisa T. Sarasohn, eds., *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014), 185–208.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Morrah, *Prince Rupert of the Rhine* (London: Constable, 1976), 105.

<sup>5</sup> The image is reproduced by Lucy Worsley in *Cavalier: The Story of a 17<sup>th</sup>-century Playboy* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 166.

<sup>6</sup> Roly Smith, *Wonders of the Peak Then and Now* (Sheffield: Byway Publications, 2018), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Lisa Hopkins, "What Lies Beneath," in R. S. White, Christa Jansohn, and Richard Fotheringham, eds., *Shakespeare's World: World Shakespeares. Proceedings of the VIII World Shakespeare Congress 2006* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008), 87–97.

<sup>8</sup> See David Mayall, "Egyptians, Land-Pirates, Moon-Men and Vagabonds: The Gypsy in Early Modern England," chap. 3 in *Gypsy identities 1500–2000: From Egipcians and Moon-men to the Ethnic Romany* (Routledge, London, 2001).

*Christendom*, published under the name of a 'J. K.' who has been tentatively identified as John Kirke, the Clown speaks of "my magnanimous Master [St George], whom I lost in the devils arse of Peake".<sup>9</sup> John Freehafer, who dates the play to 1613–14 and ascribes it to Wentworth Smith rather than John Kirke, suggests that the reference to the Devil's Arse "may be connected with the disclosure in 1610 that the cavern in Derbyshire was a meeting place for 'the Rogues of the North part'".<sup>10</sup> Such a use is also noted in the Jackman's song from Ben Jonson's masque *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*:

From the famous *Peake of Darby*  
And the *Deuills arse* there hard by,  
Where we yearelie keepe our musters,  
Thus th'*AEgyptians* throng in clusters.<sup>11</sup>

Some years earlier, Samuel Rid in his *Martin Mark-all* had explained why the Devil's Arse had acquired this reputation, calling it a cave:

Where at this day the Rogues of the North part, once euerie three yeares assemble in the night because they will not be seene and espied, being a place to those that know it verie fit for that purpose, it being hollow, and made spacious vnder ground, at first by estimation halfe a mile in compasse, but it hath such turnings and roundings in it, that a man may easily be lost, if hee enter not with a guide.<sup>12</sup>

It is, therefore, not only its size but also its distinctive topography that fits it for the meetings which Jonson describes.

Jonson, however, also offered other associations for the Devil's Arse. Later in *The Gypsies Metamorphosed*, he relates how the cavern got its name because the famous rogue "*Cock-Lorell* would needes haue the *Diuell* his guest, / And bad him into the Peake to dinner."<sup>13</sup> Drayton echoes this idea, having his personified Peak declare that the Devil's Arse is so dark and cold "That *Acheron* it selfe, a man would thinke he were / Immediately

<sup>9</sup> John Kirke, *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (London: J. Okes for James Becket, 1638), sig. fol. 3r.

<sup>10</sup> John Freehafer, "Shakespeare's *Tempest* and *The Seven Champions*," *Studies in Philology* 66 no. 1 (1969): 87–103.

<sup>11</sup> Ben Jonson, "The Gypsies Metamorphosed," in *Ben Jonson*, eds. C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson, and Evelyn Simpson, vol. 7 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1950), 569.

<sup>12</sup> Herford, Simpson, and Simpson, *Ben Jonson*, 10:617.

<sup>13</sup> Herford, Simpson, and Simpson, *Ben Jonson*, 7:601.

to passe, and stay'd for *Charon* there",<sup>14</sup> something underlined by the fact that in popular folklore, mine spirits tended to be black.<sup>15</sup> This takes us to another recurrent idea associated in this period with caves, that they were entrances to the underworld. This is why Drayton has the Peak apostrophise the famous cavern of Elden in the following terms:

For *Elden* thou my third, a Wonder I preferre  
 Before the other two, which perpendicular  
 Dive'st down into the ground, as if an entrance were  
 Through earth to lead to hell, ye well might judge it here.<sup>16</sup>

Finally caverns, whether natural or manmade, were sources of wealth. Bolsover's 'twin', Peveril Castle, was located in the Derbyshire village of Castleton, where one of the many caverns was the only known source of the precious mineral known as Blue John, and both the Peak and the Pennines were celebrated for lead mines, as Drayton pointed out in *Poly-Olbion*:

...the *Peake*, whose dreadfull Caverns found,  
 And Lead-mines, that in her, doe naturally abound,  
 Her superficialities makes more terrible to show:<sup>17</sup>

The lead mines also get a mention in Jonson's *The King's Entertainment at Welbeck*, where Accidence recounts the Wonders of the Peak in ways that pretty much sum up the three ideas which are central to early modern conceptions of caves:

Saint Anne of Buxstons boyling Well,  
 Or *Elden* bottomlesse, like Hell:  
*Pooles-hole*, or *Satans* sumptuous Arse,  
 (Surreverence) with the Mine-mens Farce.  
 Such a light, and metall'd Dance  
 Saw you never yet in *France*.  
 And by Lead-men, for the nonce,  
 That turne round like grindlestons:

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (London: 1612), 26: 419–20. <https://poly-olbion.exeter.ac.uk/the-text/full-text/song-26/>, accessed August 16, 2022.

<sup>15</sup> See Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), 212.

<sup>16</sup> Drayton, *Poly-Olbion*, 26: 439–43.

<sup>17</sup> Drayton, *Poly-Olbion*, 23:175–77.

Which they dig out fro' the Delves,  
For their Bairnes-bread, Wives, and sell's.

Jonson here gestures briefly towards the idea of the infernal in "*Elden* bottomlesse, like Hell", and also imagines the caves as a place where the "minemen" can meet socially as well as for work, but it is clear that the wealth to be extracted from the mines is at the forefront of his thoughts.

In the case of the Cavendishes, the source of the family money was William's grandmother Bess of Hardwick (who has incidentally been portrayed as a witch in a short story by Susanna Clarke,<sup>18</sup> and whose third husband Sir William St Loe was believed to have been poisoned by a brother who dabbled in alchemy),<sup>19</sup> and she had extensive interest in lead mines; there were also rumours of a "golden hill" in the area, though not surprisingly this eluded identification.<sup>20</sup> Bess and her fourth husband George Talbot, 6<sup>th</sup> earl of Shrewsbury, had been the gaolers of Mary, Queen of Scots, and while in their care Mary had paid many visits to the spa at Buxton, whose waters might variously be understood as either blessed by St Anne, mother of the Virgin, or naturally therapeutic. A strong local tradition holds that while at Buxton Mary also visited Poole's Cavern, another of the Peak District's underground landscapes, though David Templeman notes that such an excursion "is not mentioned in any letters appertaining to the Buxton visits" and "would have been highly dangerous, as the entrance in Tudor times was on a narrow path at the side of a hill."<sup>21</sup> Mary too was drawn into rumours of esoteric connections since her third husband Bothwell was accused of practising magic.

Both Bolsover Castle and the prehistoric cave dwellings at nearby Creswell Crags feature witch-marks used by seventeenth century builders.<sup>22</sup> Those at Creswell Crags, which

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<sup>18</sup> Susanna Clarke, "Antickes and Frets," in *The Ladies of Grace Adieu* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Mary S. Lovell, *Bess of Hardwick: First Lady of Chatsworth* (London: Little, Brown, 2005), 154–55.

<sup>20</sup> Talbot Papers, Ms 3201, fol. 5.

<sup>21</sup> David Templeman, *Mary, Queen of Scots: The Captive Queen in England 1568–87* (Exeter: Short Run Press, 2016), 106.

<sup>22</sup> John Charlesworth, "Decoding the witch marks deep inside the caves at Creswell Crags," *Museum Crush*, 2019, October 10, <https://museumcrush.org/decoding-the-witches-marks-deep-inside-the-caves-at-creswell-crags/>; the earliest visible date is 1505, see David Clarke, "Marks of the Witch: Britains Ritual Protection Symbols," *Fortean Times* no. 392 (2020): 36–43, [https://shura.shu.ac.uk/26362/1/036\\_FT392.pdf](https://shura.shu.ac.uk/26362/1/036_FT392.pdf); Alison Fearn and Linda Wilson suggest that "palaeographically and stylistically these [marks] appear 17-th century" (Alison Fearn and Linda Wilson, "Which Marks? Recent Press Coverage of a Cave Filled with 'witch marks' Misses the Point," *History Today* 69, no. 8 [2019]: <https://www.historytoday.com/history-matters/which-marks>). For more information and a 3D reconstruction see <https://unltdbusiness.com/>

are considered to date from “the 16th century onwards”, include PM, which may stand for Pace Maria, and WV, thought to indicate Virgin of Virgins. There is a particularly high concentration in Robin Hood Cave and one may signal an entrance to hell, an idea also associated with the Devil’s Arse cave in nearby Castleton. At Bolsover Castle, they seem to have been designed to protect not only humans but horses, animals to which William Cavendish was devoted (he was famed for his horsemanship and prided himself on introducing the art of *manège*, or dressage as we might now term it, to England) and which were considered to be in danger of being hag-ridden.<sup>23</sup> The Bolsover witch-marks include circles and hexagons and cluster round doors and windows; the very high windows in the Riding School must have been difficult to reach, but Cavendish would certainly have considered the accommodation of his prized horses as being of primary importance, so the effort would have been worth it. I have argued elsewhere that “women of the Cavendish-Talbot family interacted with the edge of Christendom through the creation of hangings and other wall decorations”,<sup>24</sup> including the portal figures which William’s grandmother Bess of Hardwick created for Hardwick New Hall; since the marks in the Riding School and elsewhere appear to have been part of the original design for the building, William may have been working on a similar principle. Witches’ marks are also to be found in the Star Chamber,<sup>25</sup> which takes its name from a starred ceiling whose design hints at the interests of alchemists and astrologers, and one also wonders whether it is purely coincidence that the two principal elements of Cavendish iconography were the nowed snake and the stag, given that “Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury and bishop of Sherbourne (639–709), can be found commenting on how houses of prayer and residences for students now occupied the locations where the pagan had once worshipped

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hidden-witch-marks-revealed-thanks-to-hallam-lecturer/ and Jason Daley, “You Can Now Explore a 3-D Model of Cave Covered in Creepy ‘Witches’ Marks’: Visitors Spotted Hundreds of Etchings Designed to Ward Off Evil While Exploring a Cave in England’s Creswell Crags”, *Smithsonian Magazine*, November 6, 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/you-can-now-see-cave-full-creepy-witches-marks-3d-1-180973484/>, accessed August 16, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> “Don’t Scare the Horses: Unpicking 17th-century Protective Graffiti at Bolsover Castle’s Riding School,” *The Past*, October 27, 2018, <https://the-past.com/feature/dont-scare-the-horses-unpicking-17th-century-protective-graffiti-at-bolsover-castles-riding-school/>.

<sup>24</sup> Lisa Hopkins, *The Edge of Christendom on the Early Modern English Stage* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 205.

<sup>25</sup> “Spotlight On Bolsover Castle,” *English Heritage*, accessed August 9, 2022, <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/inspire-me/spotlight-on/spotlight-on-bolsover/#:~:text=This%20curious%20set%20of%20concentric,mark%2C%20or%20witches%27%20mark.&text=The%20marks%20are%20difficult%20to,to%20highlight%20them%20more%20clearly.>

the snake and the stag".<sup>26</sup> Such emblems were certainly well suited to a family whose residence bore signs of protection against witchcraft.

Bolsover also incorporated design elements from both Inigo Jones's sets for *The Masque of Oberon*<sup>27</sup> and the symbolically charged buildings of *The Faerie Queene*, and Crosby Stevens argues for the presence of alchemical imagery in some of the iconography and suggests a cross-reference to Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*.<sup>28</sup> She notes too that "Mathematics, astrology and alchemy were recurring themes in plays and masques associated with [William] Cavendish",<sup>29</sup> in particular, *The preparation for a feast* mentions "Mr. Keplers Humor / For Alcumye. and his other Phanseyes"<sup>30</sup> (fancies is a key Cavendish word,<sup>31</sup> and 'Mr. Keplor' refers to Johannes Kepler) while Matthew Steggle observes that the plot of William's play *Wit's Triumvirate* is clearly borrowed from *The Alchemist*.<sup>32</sup> Witches feature in the antimasque of the household entertainment *A Pastoral*, written by William's two elder daughters Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley, being used to figure the wickedness of Parliamentary opposition to Charles I,<sup>33</sup> and there is also a song about witches in their play *The Concealed Fancies*.<sup>34</sup> The younger of the sisters, Elizabeth, was already married (although still living at home) and her husband had played the younger brother in Milton's *Comus*, a story of enchantment and magical transformation; *The Concealed Fancies* may lack the sophistication of *Comus*, but it

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<sup>26</sup> Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 29.

<sup>27</sup> Crosby Stevens, "Oh, to make boards speak! There is a task: Understanding the Iconography of the Applied Paintings at Bolsover Castle," *Early Modern Literary Studies* 19, no. 2 (2017): 12, <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/journal/index.php/emls/article/view/339/287>; The extensive illustrations in this article offer an unrivalled opportunity of understanding both the interior and exterior of the castle.

<sup>28</sup> Stevens, "Oh, to make boards speak!," 60 and 71.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>30</sup> Lynn Hulse, ed., *William Cavendish: Dramatic Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 30.

<sup>31</sup> See for instance James Fitzmaurice, "Paganism, Christianity, and the Faculty of Fancy in the Writing of Margaret Cavendish," in Siegfried and Sarasohn, *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014), 77–92.

<sup>32</sup> Matthew Steggle, "William Cavendish: Amateur Professional Playwright," in Hopkins and Rutter, *Companion to the Cavendishes*, 77; see too Tom Rutter, "The Cavendishes and Ben Jonson," in Hopkins and Rutter, *Companion to the Cavendishes*, 107–25.

<sup>33</sup> Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley, "A Pastoral," in *The Collected Works of Jane Cavendish*, ed., Alexandra G. Bennett (London: Routledge, 2018), 79–81.

<sup>34</sup> Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley, *The Concealed Fancies*, ed., introd. Daniel Cadman (Sheffield Hallam University, 2015), 2.3.63–71, <https://extra.shu.ac.uk/emls/iemls/renplays/ConcealedFancies.pdf>.

makes similar use of place. There is a particularly strong correspondence between the language of the play and the Little Castle's twin closets, the Heaven Closet and the Elysium Closet, which show the Christian and pagan versions of heaven respectively – although the presence of pagan deities in the Elysium Closet led the nineteenth-century vicar of Bolsover to refer to it as the Hell Closet, and even the Heaven Closet contains some surprisingly secular details, such as an angel carrying the score of a song about Robin Hood. When the character known only by the abbreviated speech prefix Sh. says to her lover, the Elder Stellow, "Oh, friend, I have been in hell!" (5.1.10), she could be emerging from the Elysium Closet, and like the Elysium Closet the play has a number of references to pagan deities and eschatologies. One of the two suitors, Presumption, says of Tattiney "I would have her possessed with a little Cupid if I could" (1.1.8). The other suitor, Courtly, suggests that this must mean that Presumption's intentions are not honourable, but Presumption denies this and declares, "I hope Cupid will be the gentleman-usher to Hymen" (1.1.10). There is a markedly ecumenical feel to the play; Presumption may swear "By the Gods" (2.2.17), but if he proposes to marry he can only do so by Christian rite. Nevertheless there is some notably pagan imagery: Courtly assures Luceny "But still I'm offering at your shrine" (4.1.29) and she says to him

I wonder what's the cause about you go  
Thus to profane my sacred priesthead so  
(4.1.39-40)

When Courtley says that Presumption must be the first to divulge the name of his mistress, Presumption exclaims "What! Must I be St George?" (1.1.37), equating himself with the hero whose story opens Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (Spenser's poem in a sense was family history for the Cavendishes because the character of Duessa is an obvious portrait of Mary, Queen of Scots, long-term captive of William's grandmother Bess of Hardwick and her fourth husband the earl of Shrewsbury.<sup>35</sup> An interest in romance in general and in Spenser in particular is signalled early in *The Concealed Fancies*. A particular parallel is with the house of Alma, who, like the sisters, is associated with courtship, being

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<sup>35</sup> See for instance John Staines, *The Tragic Histories of Mary Queen of Scots, 1560–1690* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), chap. 4.

wooded of many a gentle knight,  
 And many a Lord of noble parentage,  
 That sought with her to linck in marriage.<sup>36</sup>

Like the sisters, too, Alma lives in a castle distinguished by its symbolic architecture:

The frame thereof seemed partly circulare,  
 And part triangulare, O worke diuine;  
 Those two the first and last proportions are,  
 The one imperfect, mortall, foeminine;  
 Th'other immortal, perfect, masculine,  
 And twixt them both a quadrate was the base,  
 Proportioned equally by seuen and nine;  
 Nine was the circle set in heauens place,  
 All which compacted made a goodly diapase.  
 (2.9.22)

A striking feature of Bolsover was (and is) the intersection of regularly patterned oblong and square rooms with the round pillars and semicircular vaults of the square Pillar Chamber in particular (the Terrace Range is also punctuated by hemispherical protrusions whose purpose appears to be purely decorative). It may also be suggestive that Alma is the head of the House of Temperance, and the decorative scheme of the first room entered by a visitor at Bolsover was predicated on an equation of William Cavendish himself with the qualities associated with temperance: the three other humours are visually depicted, but to make the scheme complete, he himself was required to be present to identify the fourth and most congenial of them. (Temperance was also the name of one of Bess of Hardwick's daughters, who died as a child.)

There are also clear signs of what we would now call magical thinking in a rather different text written by a member of the family: *Natura Exenterata*, a book of recipes and remedies compiled by William's first cousin Alethea Talbot, countess of Arundel. An ointment for a green salve "must be made between *May* and *Bartholomew Tide*", while "An Ointment for an Ach, Rheum or swelling in the joints, made with swallows. By Mrs. Kempe" stipulates: "(*Memorandum* the Swallows may not touch the ground)."<sup>37</sup> These

<sup>36</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (London: Pearson, 2001), 2.9.18. All further quotations from the text will be taken from this edition and reference will be given in the text.

<sup>37</sup> [Alethea Talbot, Countess of Arundel and Surrey], *Natura Exenterata: Or Nature Unbowelled by the Most Exquisite Anatomizers of Her* (London: H. Twiford, G. Bedell and N. Ekins, 1655), 83 and 34.

hover between alchemy and proto-science, while others are more openly esoteric: we are told of "A good Salve for Bruises and Wounds, called, *Gratia Dei*" that "This Salve (as it is reported) was revealed unto King *Alexander* by an Angel" (3), and a remedy "For the falling Evill" promises that "the skull of a dead man, whereon Moss groweth, being taken and washed very clean, and dried in an Oven, and then beaten to powder, will cure this infirmity be the disease never so antient, but the skul must be of one that hath been slaine, or died suddenly, or of one that was hanged" (267). "Another for the bleeding of a wound" reads simply "Write these four letters, *A O G L* with the blood of the wound, about the wound" (67); A and O perhaps stand for Alpha and Omega, and the whole is likely to have either a religious or a quasi-magical significance, or perhaps both.

For all their interest in science and experiment, then, the Cavendishes also rubbed shoulders with the magical and the esoteric. Their doors and windows were guarded by witch-marks; their recipes and remedies had strange origins and might be accompanied by things that sound almost like spells; their household entertainments spoke of alchemy and magic; and the very ground on which they walked lay over abodes of devils and entrances to the underworld. In these progressive and enlightened seventeenth-century aristocrats we see the residual force of older and darker interests.