

*Cavalier: A Tale of Chivalry, Passion and Great Houses*, Lucy Worsley, Faber and Faber, 2007, pp xix + 332, hbk £20.00.

This book is unusual in that it creates a series of vignettes rather than a straightforward narrative or analysis of the life of William Cavendish, the first Duke of Newcastle. It has to be said at the outset that Lucy Worsley paints the most wonderful pictures with her text, the reality conveyed by her grasp of detail and her ability to translate from one form of evidence, whether it be painting, fabric or architecture, to another form is captivating. It could be argued that this presents a problem for readers: we all know the pitfalls of reconstruction, which in essence the beautiful descriptions of William Cavendish's daily life are: and this needs to be confronted.

This is not a biography, and arguably Newcastle needs a new one: Geoffrey Trease wrote one many years back; Peter Young and Peter Newman created brief sketches of him when looking at the civil war in the north. More recently interest has passed to the second wife the wonderful and inimitable Margaret Lucas, for good reasons, and she of course wrote a fascinating biography of her then maligned husband.

Newcastle's life falls into distinct parts and is almost circular in shape, quiet estate-building in the Midlands: royal tutor: general: exile and then back to estate building and reconstruction. He was cultivated: a wit and writer of some ability and a man who surrounded himself with artists, writers and philosophers including numerous female members of his own family. As is still current in this nation, such an erudite life exposed him to ridicule, never more so (and never more so undeserved) than when at war.

Worsley's book does include all the phases of Newcastle's life and the images she creates more than many biographies could in giving a real sense of what this life in the great houses of Welbeck, Bolsover, Richmond, in the King's Manor, York and in Ruben's house was like. William comes across as a sometimes louche but hard working, a shrewd observer of life in a rich man's household, the nooks and crannies of a great house are well exposed, by him and by Worsley seemingly working in tandem. These are touches of the Playboy Mansion about Bolsover Castle with its sexually charged garden ornamentation and sexually obliging female servants. There is a sense of how the households of Newcastle worked, from the servants' duties to William's clothes. I found the description of servants' daily routines particularly interesting: Worsley recreates this through the architecture of the building; the means by which a servant had to move through the building to conduct his or her work is a particularly strong element of the work. I found myself revolted by the descriptions of dirty underwear and the means of disguising the smell without actually washing them. This vivid imagery the work of both Worsley and Newcastle is a memorable part of the book. Newcastle's work patterns and his social working are reconstructed in the same way using the vast range of primary written and unwritten sources.

There are two major potential weaknesses of the book. The first is the section on the battle of Marston Moor and the war itself: this is the least effective part of the book and needs to be read in conjunction with other, sounder, accounts of Newcastle at war. The other problem could be arguably the strength of Worsley's style and ability, for the reconstruction could be seen as taking a step too far in the interpretation of sources. On balance if taken as a precise biographical approach it would be, and the biographer and historian in me resists this approach: but as I said at the outset this is

not strictly a biography, it is a series of vignettes of aristocratic life and the various lives that surround an aristocrat using a broad range of sources to paint pictures and this is how it should be viewed. It is a very informed and informative book that has the value of adding colour to our image of life in these great houses. As for Newcastle, we still need a biography, but in the meantime Worsley provides us with a lively image of the man in his clothes, buildings and his world. The wonderful descriptions and images from this book will remain with me a very long time, (although I will desperately try to forget the underpants).

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