

“WITH SUCH A WIFE ’TIS HEAVEN ON EARTH TO DWELL”: MEMORIALISING EARLY MODERN ENGLISHWOMEN

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1. Introduction¹

Ghosts are not the only ones drawn irresistibly to graveyards; they are joined by serious scholars who study sixteenth and seventeenth century monuments and epitaphs in order to uncover the ways in which Early Modern society memorialised its dead. This article explores the construction of two tombs: the first for Elizabeth Countess of Bridgewater in the Church of St Peter and St Paul in Little Gaddesden and the second for Lady Jane Cheyne in All Saints Church in Chelsea. The two women were sisters and more commonly identified by the names Elizabeth Brackley and Jane Cavendish since this is how they are described on the manuscript versions of their plays, poetry and prose works. Today, their reputation as two of the earliest Englishwomen dramatists has supplanted the memorials of status and virtue that characterised the epitaphs and elegies composed when they died in 1663 and 1669. But by re-examining these contemporary texts, along with letters and monumental forms, it becomes possible to trace patterns of a more complex subjectivity that lie within and beneath the conventional phrases and representations, allowing us to unearth the sisters’ distinctiveness. And this is precisely why the reference to ghosts is apposite, since the memorials do not allow either Elizabeth Brackley or Jane Cavendish to slumber in the quiet earth.

Critics analysing discourses of death have found the Early Modern period particularly rewarding because of the significant shifts in cultural, spiritual and artistic practices that impacted upon the process of commemorating the deceased. The increased emphasis upon individual identity, the impact of the Reformation and the way in which artists began to supplant artisans produced radical revisions in the shape of, and inscriptions on, tombs. A brief account of scholarly evaluations of Early Modern memorials demonstrates the ways in which these key discourses have been analysed. For example, the use of large, elaborate and ostentatious grave monuments, which became increasingly popular during the post-Reformation

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period, is discussed by Nigel Llewellyn in his comprehensive *Funeral Monuments in post-Reformation England*, where he points out that tombs came to be seen as 'expensive objects of display and culture' - the last word, as it were, in Renaissance self-fashioning (2000: 225). Llewellyn also describes the commissioning process in which 'patrons exercised close controls on the designer and on the sculptors, masons and painters who realized their plans,' although the reliance upon local craftsmen diminished in the Restoration as 'sculptors' replaced 'masons' (1991: 102). The changes endemic upon the establishment of Protestantism are discussed by Peter Marshall in *Beliefs and the dead in Reformation England*, where he explains how the words on pre-Reformation graves 'had an overtly intercessory purpose... [they] invoke prayers for the soul [since]...it was already' separated from the body and in purgatory, whereas those of the post-Reformation were 'designed solely to commemorate the past achievements of the dead' (2002: 271, 275) - although Marshall goes on to argue for a more complex post-Restoration interpretation in which retrospection was integrated with a lingering concern for the future state of both body and soul. However, with the Catholic belief in purgatory increasingly abandoned, memorials no longer had to encourage the reader of the grave inscription to pray for the soul's release. Yet Protestants themselves could not be certain that their beloved had been judged saved, and so deaths were increasingly inspected for some evidence as to the fate of the soul. Ralph Houlbrooke in *Death, religion, and the family in England, 1480-1750* includes a chapter on 'good' and 'bad' deaths in which he points out that 'The deathbed was seen as the supreme trial of faith. A successful outcome [...] was widely interpreted as an indication of the individual's eternal fate [and] left a good example to survivors' (1998: 183). By analysing last actions and words to determine whether or not the dying person could be seen to accept their end with patience, faith and a renunciation of worldly affairs, onlookers were able to judge between a good death/salvation or a bad death/damnation. Early Modern accounts of deathbed scenes, epitaphs, and elegies commonly memorialise the deceased as having experienced a good death with descriptions of stoic humility, piety and good works. These expositions were then transformed into monumental inscriptions that presented the dead body as suitably decayed and the immortal soul celebrated in heaven. But, not always.

The critical debate about Early Modern graves originally focussed upon the monuments in order to contextualise them within art history, most famously in Erwin Panofsky's *Tomb sculpture: four lectures on its changing aspects from ancient to Bernini* (1964). By the 1980s the impact of New Historicism ensured that such grandiose memorials were firmly entrenched within theories of self-fashioning; for example, in the work of Nigel Llewellyn. However, Houlbrooke's identification of the spiritual context of the deathbed scene has recently been transferred to grave monuments by Peter Sherlock in *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England*, where he argues convincingly that tombs 'were more

concerned with the sacred than most scholars have hitherto acknowledged' (2008: 3). While Sherlock traces versions of 'good' deaths within the context of the sacred, by following Houlbrooke's evocation of 'bad' deaths it becomes possible to search, in addition, for those inscriptions which posit a more complex end - for words and images that imply the soul might not have been transported so readily to heaven. It is here that theories of the revenant become apposite. In her book, *Over Her Dead Body* (1992), Elizabeth Bronfen describes the way in which women are morally evaluated through the inscriptions on their tombs not only in terms of their life, but also through a projected identity after death. If the tomb's inscription claims, in word or image, that the woman's body is successfully transmuted into dust and that her soul has risen to heaven then she is a 'good' corpse as well as a good woman. If, on the other hand, the tomb does not offer a satisfactory conclusion, in that the body may be imagined as intact or only partially decayed with the spirit remaining on earth, then the woman remains in limbo as a 'bad' corpse. This uncanny presence may be represented through disturbing words and images in which the woman's body is imagined as still present in the grave, neither of the living nor eclipsed by death. Bronfen proceeds to argue that the 'written documents and gravestone [that] ornament [the] pictorial or textual representation[s]' are, of necessity, 'based on difference and semantic indeterminacy' that 'transforms [the dead body] into a disturbing double' (1992: 296). The parallel between Houlbrooke's 'good death' and 'bad death' and Bronfen's 'good corpse' and 'bad corpse,' combined with Sherlock's recent identification of the intrinsic spiritual discourse of Early Modern tombs, predicates a re-evaluation of the ways in which women were memorialised. Moreover, Bronfen's analyses of 'difference' and 'indeterminacy' provide the theoretical means for exposing representations of the revenant.

Following a ghost's path about any Early Modern graveyard or church will confirm that by far the majority of women memorialised experienced good deaths and, being thus assured of a place in heaven, become good corpses, with the tombs recounting their piety, chastity and humility. In this sense the monuments of Elizabeth Brackley and Jane Cavendish at first appear to conform to the expected stereotypes: Brackley is described as 'meeke and humble' while Cavendish is represented as 'Pietissimæ et sanctissimæ', pious and religious (all quotations from the tomb inscriptions are taken from the monuments of Elizabeth Brackley and Jane Cheyne). Yet their final resting places belie the complex, detailed and persistent manner in which their deaths were recorded. The next two sections serve to recount these labyrinthine narratives while considering how the sisters were allowed to evade conventional female roles in death, as they did in life.

2. Elizabeth Brackley (d.1663 aged 37)

Brackley's oeuvre, while not as sophisticated as her sister's, is nevertheless extensive; she co-authored two plays (*The Concealed Fancies* and *A Pastoral*) with

Cavendish while they were imprisoned by Parliamentarian troops in their home, Welbeck Abbey, during the English Civil War and, when released to join her husband, John Egerton, second Earl of Bridgewater, she wrote several spiritual treatises, *Loose Papers* and *Meditations*. The shift from sparkling pastoral comedy to devout piety has been interpreted by Betty Travitsky in her comprehensive account of Elizabeth's marriage and authorial work, *Subordination and Authorship in Early Modern England: The Case of Elizabeth Cavendish Egerton and Her "Loose Papers,"* as evidence of her 'subordinate' role and her husband's 'autocratic ways' (1999: 91, 121), although this interpretation should not be accepted without question. However, it is certainly true that John had - as Travitsky also notes - a 'deep affection' for his wife; indeed their mutual love is shown by the way in which their writings often merge into one another's, using the same phrases, sources and events. Elizabeth's death, therefore, was profoundly shocking to her husband.

In 1663 Elizabeth was pregnant with their tenth child when John was detained in his London house at the Barbican on the order of the King when a challenge made by the Earl of Middlesex was not resolved. Elizabeth immediately joined her husband but, as her death certificate notes, she 'was there surprised by the coming of her Travaile sooner then she expected, which ended in her being delivered of a sonne, who came dead into the world, & she her selfe dyed within one quarter of an houre after her delivery' (Hunt. MS EL8348). Subsequently, as was fitting for the daughter of a Marquess (William Cavendish, Marquess of Newcastle) and the wife of an Earl, Elizabeth's body

was honourably conveyed... being attended by Nine Mourning Coaches with Six Horses apiece; filled with the Children, & other neere Relations, & accompanied by an Extraordinary great number of the Nobility, & many of the Gentry about London, in their coaches, & waited on by her Servants & other Mourners on horseback, her coronet being carried before her by one of the officers.

(Hunt. MS EL 8348)

Status and wealth were thus appropriately recognised in the form of a large and prestigious funeral procession, one that perfectly aligns with the critical perception of memorial discourses as essentially about the position of the deceased family. The certificate concludes with a formal affirmation by John - 'the truth thereof attested by the Right Honourable John Earle of Bridgewater' - but his own indexing comment on the outside of the folded paper suggests a more personal note, 'certificate entred into ye Heralds booke upon ye death of my intirely beloved wife, whose departure hath made her disconsolate Husband irrecoverably Miserable.' A parallel paper transcribes the coffin inscription which tells of a 'Beloved Wife', together with an assertion that Elizabeth has gone to 'Heaven',

thereby according with the requirements for a good death and suitable for public display. Yet again, the heading of this note offers a glimpse of private grief, 'The Coppy of ye Inscription on ye Brasse plate on ye Brest of ye Coffin of my Deare & neuer to be forgotten Wife' (Hunt. MSS EL 8348 & 8349). Further, in his letters about the tomb construction he writes of 'my incomparable Wife' and of how he has 'underualued all other Charges [costs/expenditures] in ye world; for all other Charges do not breake ye purse, but this hath broke my heart' (HRO MSS AH 1074 & 1075). Social status and spiritual probity might well be secured by the conventional memorials of death certificate and coffin plate, but John's personal comments prefigure a prolonged and intensive grief in which his wife can 'neuer...be forgotten' and in which his happiness is 'irrecoverabl[e]'. In themselves, such emotional addenda might appear formulaic, but John's anguish suggests an excessive form of memorialisation that was to become increasingly (in Bronfen's term) 'disturbing'.

One of the key elements in Early Modern memorial discourse is the production of elegies, and Elizabeth's status, together with the literary associations of her family, engendered a number of tributes. These include formal ones, such as that undertaken by Samuel Holland, a minor Restoration dramatist, whose remembrances of the great and good were designed more as a source of pecuniary favours than as any accurate representation of grief. Unsurprisingly, Holland utilises conventional terminology, referring to Elizabeth as 'most Vertuous and most Religious' and assuring her family that 'She ... Is hence to Heav'n ascended' (Hunt. MS EL 8350). In addition, as a writer from within the family, Jane Cavendish wrote an elegy memorialising her sister's death:

O God thy Judgments unto sinfull eye
Were greate, when I did see my Sister dye,
Her last look was to heaven, from whence she came,
And thither going, she was still the same,
No Discomposure in her life or Death,
She lived to pray, prayer was her last Breath:
And when Deaths heavy hand had closed her eyes,
We thought the World gave up its Ghost in Cryes:
What ere relations choice, or nature made
Lost their best light, and being in that shade;
For none can give Example like her life,
To Friendship, Kindred, Family, or wife.
A greater Saint the Earth did never beare,
She lived to love, and her last thought was care;
Her new borne Child she asked for, which n'ere cryed,
Fearing to know its end she Bowed, and Dyed:
And her last Vale to heaven appeared to all,

How much she knew her Glory in the call.

(Hunt. MS EL 8353)

Jane's description of Elizabeth's death presents a resolutely eulogistic version. To begin, she lays claim to the role of witness, 'I did see my Sister dye,' before enumerating Elizabeth's virtues: she was devout ('Her last look was to heaven' and 'She lived to pray'); she was constant and forbearing (showing 'No Discomposure'); loved, and was loved by her family (they have 'Lost their best light' and 'She lived to love'); and her life serves as an exemplar to others. Following Houlbrooke's definition, there can be no question that Elizabeth had a good death and that her spirit has ascended into heaven, becoming, in Bronfen's terms, a good corpse. Moreover, the post-Reformation secularisation of a religious subtext claimed by Sherlock may be identified in the claim that Elizabeth was 'A greater Saint.' However, while Jane's poem entertains conventions, she undercuts any sense of the formulaic with the eye-witness account of her sister's death. The poem recalls Elizabeth's last request to see her child since she could not hear the expected cries and concludes with the surrender that the knowledge of the baby's death brings. This poignant image is linked to the absence of answering words to the mother's final question and, as such, opens up the reality of wordless grief, not only for the bereaved mother within the poem, but for those left behind. The silence of the text cannot but suggest the inadequacy of language in the face of mortality. There are no uncertainties in Jane's elegy, only a dark recognition of the finality of death.

The elegy written by John to Elizabeth at first follows a similar pattern of praise: she is pious, 'her devotion constant was and true;' virtuous, 'A chaster person never was then she;' a good mother, 'With Joy she Crown'd ... their worth;' as well as being forbearing, full of 'patience' and like a 'souldier' or a 'saint' (Hunt. MS EL 8354). At the same time, the grief expressed in this poem exceeds accepted boundaries, beginning with a direct address to the reader:

Did you not heare that gale of sighes, that tore
The upper Elements when iust before
A tyde of Teares had overflow'd the Earth,
And mad't as 'twas before it's second byrth.

(Hunt. MS EL 8354)

The words demand a complicit response from the reader in which extreme grief is presented as Biblical experience: sighing is likened to gales, tears to the Flood and Elizabeth's death to Christ's crucifixion, which will bring redemption or 'a second byrth.' The spiritual nature of this revelation continues as the poem demands that the reader acknowledge Elizabeth as a 'Bless'd Saynt' who sits 'next to [her] redeemer.' Not only is the mourning extreme, but the vocabulary evokes the image

of a Christ-like figure who is both resurrected and able to offer salvation to those mortals who remain on earth. Indeed, the poem goes on to describe these bereaved figures as they join Elizabeth's funeral procession and watch as her body is interred. The 'Hundreds' of followers are described as 'Speechlesse with grieffe,' yet are simultaneously able to 'Cry ... out, she's gone! She's gone,' and

Had you but then the lamentations heard,
One would have thought her Spirit back would come,
But that Heaven yet did never Saint that wrong.

(Hunt. MS EL 8354)

The poem demands a doubled outcome in which grief both silences and demands speech; the vocal memorials bring the spirit back to earth even while its presence in heaven is acknowledged. In a stark transformation of the funeral procession described in the official death certificate, which was located in a discourse of wealth and status, John's personal depiction of the event presents a mystical experience in which the absent silence of the grave may – perhaps – be escaped through an excess of vocal and inscribed grief which – might – make Elizabeth's 'Spirit' return to earth. Moreover, this conceit is immediately complicated by the assertion that Saints 'never' return to earth, allowing a tortured identification of the idealised Elizabeth as saint in heaven and the adored wife who must remain on earth. The poem continually recalls such liminality: Elizabeth's body is as not 'Flesh and bloud,' but 'christall' so that 'Noe Fleshly eye can then her Image see, | 'Tis the Soules eye that spyes Divinitie' (Hunt. MS EL 8354). The elegy written by John Egerton for his wife memorialises her as both mortal and immortal, as eliciting both silence and speech, and as secure in heaven and yet having power on earth. Unlike Jane's abject recognition of mortality, John represents his wife as occupying an uncanny space in which she must be simultaneously absent and present. As such, when he claims in the poem, 'With such a Wife 'tis heaven on earth to dwell,' the idealised vision bifurcates into a 'disturbing double:' the memorial of a real man living with an adored wife whom he perceives as perfect; and the present of a widower whose spouse's spirit may return from heaven in order to bring him comfort in the mortal world. Of course, excessive grief does produce texts, images and memorials that defy the boundaries of life and death, trying to bring loved ones back to life precisely because they are loved so much. But in an almost pre-Gothic formulation, John used his memorials of Elizabeth as a way of inscribing her liminality. Llewellyn discusses the 'tension between continuity and separation,' drawing our attention to 'the liminal or transitional power of "dying",' and argues that the monument was constructed at this moment of liminality (2000: 42-3). But rather than enacting a moment of closure, the memorial texts inscribed by John Egerton seek to perpetuate Elizabeth's existence into a realm that is neither mortal nor spiritual.

The construction of Elizabeth Brackley's tomb was a long and complex process. While there are several records of the transactions as well as historical and critical accounts of the tomb, one of the most revelatory documents is the account John wrote for his son, explaining why he was in debt:

I come noe to another [debt] occasion'd by the greatest of sorrowes that sorrow which is unexpressable, & under which I have groaned, ever since that sad & dolefull time, in which (by the death of my deare, & never to be forgotten Wife) it fell upon me; & shall groane as long as it pleaseth God to permit me to draw out my miserable dayes upon the Earth; I meane the Monument, which I have erected in little Gaddesden Church, to the Memory of my Father, & my Mother, & that most invaluable, & unpriseable Jewell, with which God once blessed me, my entirely beloved, & truly loving Wife; of whose excellent goodnesse, & of that great happinesse which I enjoyed by it, whilst it pleased God to continue her Life, I should have thought myselfe totally unworthy, if I should not (in some measure) have endeavoured to perpetuate the remembrance of so admirable a person, so neerely related to me, & who had beene so many yeares my whole felicity; I cannot therefore conceive that this Expençe whatsoever it was (& that it was considerable, I believe whosoever lookes upon it cannot doubt) can fall under any hard censure.

(Hunt. MS EL 8117)

This is a long and seemingly repetitive quotation, but worth transcribing because it demonstrates the almost rambling excess of John's grief and concurs with his comments about 'Charges' in the letter quoted above (HRO MS 1075). Taken in more detail, the account focuses on several expected elements: Elizabeth's superlative worth ('invaluable, & unpriseable Jewell,' 'excellent goodnesse,' 'admirable'); John's love ('my entirely beloved, & truly loving Wife,' 'great happinesse,' 'my whole felicity'); his grief ('greatest of sorrowes,' 'miserable'); and that uncanny doubleness of silence and voice ('unexpressable,' 'groane'). The sharp contrast with the brief allusion to the monument for his parents ('the Memory of my Father, & my Mother') serves to underscore the depth of his feeling for Elizabeth. What is particularly interesting about this self-defence is that personal grief is closely integrated with the necessity for public expenditure. The reason for the 'considerable' 'Expençe' of erecting a 'Monument' that has led John into 'debt' is his desire to create a memorial that will impress 'whosoever looks upon it,' which seems at first to equate with the archetypal Early Modern ostentatious memorials. However, if read in conjunction with other references to financial worth within the passage, it becomes clear that the money has not been



Fig. 1. The tomb of Elizabeth Countess of Bridgewater in the Church of St Peter and St Paul in Little Gaddesden

spent to prove his own family's wealth and status, but rather to provide a fitting tomb for a woman too precious to be categorised in economic terms ('invaluable' and 'unpriseable'). Indeed, rather than expecting praise for his lavish outlay, John defends himself against 'hard censure' precisely on the grounds that Elizabeth's

superlative worth, together with his poignant grief, necessitated a grand and expensive monument. It comes, therefore, as somewhat of a shock when visiting Little Gaddesden church to find that Elizabeth's tomb is sombre and distinctly unprepossessing.

There can be no question of the monument's importance within its setting since, at just over four metres high; it dominates the whole of the church's interior, while status is resolutely represented with three large square heraldic plaques (see Fig. 1). Although the tomb is framed with two white columns and carries figures of two grieving cherubs and a central skull, the central – and largest – part of the monument is taken up with a copious amount of text inscribed onto black marble in very small letters. The main memorials are those of John's parents, 'Sir John Egerton' and 'Lady Frances,' and his wife, 'the late transcendently virtuous Lady, now glorious Saint, the Right Honourable Elizabeth Countesse of Bridgewater.' There is a final, smaller, plain tablet dedicated to John himself. Overall, the funeral monument enacts memorial in words rather than images, and eschews ostentation for sombre simplicity. The fashion for text ran parallel with – although it was never as popular as – that for ornate sculptures, so that John's choice of plain inscription could certainly represent the austere Protestant faith that he and Elizabeth practiced during their marriage (Kemp 1980: 110-11; Jupp and Gittings 1999: 195). However, the words chosen suggest that the absence of material representation was also embedded in personal grief.

Elizabeth's virtues are, inevitably, enumerated: she is 'the glory of the present;' her beauty was 'unparalleled;' her behaviour was 'winning;' her discourse 'charming;' her soul was 'noble and generous;' her disposition 'meeke and humble;' and her devotion 'exemplary, if not inimitable.' Yet, while constructing the image of a good soul, the memorial also undercuts the certainties necessary for a good death and, consequently, a good corpse. First, although Elizabeth's beauty is praised, 'it is as much beyond the art of the most elegant pen, as it surpassed the skill of several the most exquisite pencils (that attempted it) to describe, and not to disparage it.' Second, while her own writing is extolled – 'her divine meditations upon every particular Chapter in the Bible, written with her owne hand' – the public act of 'composition' is set against the act of concealment – 'never (till since her death), seene by any eye but her owne, and her then dear but now sorrowful husband.' Finally, like the inadequacy of image, text cannot describe her: 'in a word, she was so superlatively good, that language is too narrow to expresse her deserved character.' Elizabeth is caught in a liminal state wherein words ('pen' and 'language') are materially present on the monument, describing her beauty and worth while simultaneously they are denied the ability to do so. This contradiction is emphasised by the allusion to her work, which also must be both presented and concealed. The combination of absence and presence and of inscribed text and silence constructs Elizabeth Egerton as liminal, a being who exists at the juncture of continuity and separation, called back into that 'uncanny'

site through the overpowering grief of her bereaved spouse. There can be no simple interpretation of John's profound mourning and the repeated memorials he prepared. Rather, deep grief and excessive sorrow co-exist in perpetual tension throughout the texts that memorialise Elizabeth. These disparate yet entangled emotions become recognisable when interpreted through the lens of a further discourse, that of love. Foucault in *Madness and Civilisation* describes how, 'Love disappointed in its excess, and especially love deceived by the fatality of death, has no other recourse but madness' (1961: 30). While John did not succumb to the conventional Early Modern understanding of madness, the intense quality of his memorialisations locates his grief at a point of intercession between irrationality/sanity and excessive anguish/profound mourning, forging an identity for himself that is as liminal as that of Elizabeth.

The care John Egerton took over his wife's tomb inscription was echoed in the instructions he left for his own monument, although the short and simple text differs from the extreme embellishments devoted to Elizabeth. In his will John asks 'to remaine in hopes of a Joyfull Resurrection amongst my deare Relations, and as neere to the body of my deare Wife as may be,' with the engraved words noting:

Here lyes interred John Earle of Bridgewater...who desired no other memorial of him but only this: That having (in the 19th year of his age) married the Lady Cavendysh [...] he did enjoy (almost 22 years) all the happiness that a man could receive in the sweet society of the best of wives, till it pleased God, in the 41st year of his age, to change his great felicity into as great misery, by depriving him of his truly loving and intirely beloved wife, who was all his worldly bliss. (Hunt. MS EL 8164)

John Egerton never remarried, surviving his wife as is recorded faithfully on his tomb, '23 years, four months, and twelve days'.

3. Jane Cavendish (d. 1668 aged 49)

As a writer Jane Cavendish was more prolific and experimental than Elizabeth; she composed the poems that are appended to their two plays, as well as a number of other pieces, only some of which appear to be extant. Examining her writing and the way others wrote about her suggests that she was the more intellectual and independent of the two sisters. In the manuscript versions of the plays Jane is allocated (and probably authored) sharp, witty dialogue and her *Week Book* (accounts book) proves her to be, at times, equally caustic, pointing out that although 'Mr Cheyne lent mee [a sum of money] at one time ... uppon this account there is 15 shillings due to mee' (Hunt. MS EL 11 143). Even on her deathbed Jane

was capable of sharp and direct observations: in his published version of her funeral sermon, Adam Littlejohn recounts how, when her husband prayed at the bedside for her recovery so that she might 'Live and Glorifie him [God]' Jane tartly 'stopt Him in his *Prayer*, and with a comfortable Look and strong Voice [...] said, *She would Glorifie God, whether she lived or dyed*' (1669: 53). Littlejohn's witness hardly concurs with the humble and stoical death characterised as good by Houlbroke and used by Jane to describe her sister's death. Rather than the silent and patient relinquishment of life, the sermon describes how she complained about the 'Agony' of the seizures: 'Nor after the Fits, at the return of Spirits, sufficient to give Her liberty of Speech, did She ever (except two of her four last days) complain of Pain' (1669: 50-1). The parenthesis is telling, for although Littlejohn is fully conversant with the discourse of a good death, trying to emphasise Jane's fortitude, his honesty ensures that he records the reality of Jane's voluble 'complain[t]'. In fact, Jane seems not only to have complained about dying, but about living too, as Littlejohn reports:

When there were very good hopes of her *Recovery*, She used often to say, *That though she resigned up Her self wholly to the wise disposal of a good God, yet She being in expectation of being call'd away in her first Fits, look'd upon her Recovery as a gracious kind of Disappointment* (they were Her own Words) *by God Almighty. This she did* (She said) *not out of Discontent at her Sickness, which she thankfully acknowledged tolerable Easie, but (as having conquered this World, and being now in her Passage to a Better) out of her intuition of a glorious Crown, that, She trusted, awaited her in Heaven.*

(1669: 51-2)

Again, the disturbing element in Jane's deathbed behaviour is flagged up by the parenthesis; Littlejohn cannot bring himself to suggest in any way that he is responsible for words that suggest a '*Disappointment*' in God and so insists that 'they were Her own Words.' Of course, the humour, which undercuts any sense of a conventional demise, reveals a courageous, irreverent and witty woman who deflates her husband's piety, humorously appears to reprove God (to the dismay of her minister) and who, while challenging all the behavioural requirements of a good death, simultaneously lays claim to a place in heaven where she will be adorned with '*a glorious Crown*.' It is hard not to admire Jane Cavendish; she even employs self-irony in the allusion to her spiritual elevation to a '*Better*' place, since the '*glorious Crown*' also refers to her right to wear a coronet as the daughter of a Marquess in '*this World*.' Intriguingly, the debate about Jane's right to wear a glorious crown was to become an issue in the construction of her tomb.

Before considering the complicated narrative of the monument's creation, however, it is important to contextualise Jane's memorial via other textual

documentation, in particular, elegies and the remainder of Littlejohn's sermon. Unlike the considerable number of manuscripts retained by John at Elizabeth's death, only two published poems commemorating Jane remain extant: Richard Flecknoe's '*On the death of the Lady Jean Cheynee*' and Thomas Lawrence's '*An Elegy on the Death of the Thrice Noble And Vertuous Lady The Lady Jane Cheyne*' (the latter is appended to Littlejohn's sermon). Given the tenor of Jane's own writing and recorded speech, it seems likely that Flecknoe's poem was one aimed at gaining Charles Cheyne's patronage, rather than offering a personal account. The elegy describes her as 'All *sweetness, gentleness, and dovelike*...Who scarce had any passion of her own,' and depicts her as a good corpse having 'now...gone where only Saints abide' (Flecknoe 1670: 6). Lawrence's poem is much more familiar with Jane's life and work. It begins with traditional praise, 'now a blessed *Saint*,' but quickly goes on to refer to Jane's '*Poetick Spirit*,' her '*Art*' and her 'concealing...*Fancies*,' demonstrating a clear knowledge of her play (Littlejohn 1669: no pag.; cf. Smith 2006). At the same time, Jane's character is acutely observed, referring to her 'Wit' and noting,

Where *Female* sweetness manly strength did meet,
At once (like *Samsons* riddle) *strong* and *sweet*.
(Littlejohn 1669: no pag.)

The sermon also offers the usual commendations of 'Sweetness' and 'Piety,' but it shows a closer knowledge of the individual, explaining how Jane was 'lively,' '*Valiant*,' and 'the Absolute Governess of Her Own Mind' (Littlejohn 1669: 42, 46, and 43). Interestingly, the sermon also refers to '*Pious Meditations*... that she hath fill'd some Volumes with,' suggesting that the sisters composed companionate texts, although only Elizabeth's now appears to be extant (1669: 45). Indeed, while John retained Elizabeth's writing and expended considerable time and effort on his own words memorialising her, there is no evidence that Charles did likewise, his comments on her death being confined to a brief note to Littlejohn explaining what he wants written on the monument:

Of ye Truly Right Honble Pious & Vertuous Lady ye Lady Jane Cheyne Eldest daughter to his Grace William Duke of New=Castle Wife to C.C.Esq: present Lord of this Mannor of Cheyney with whom Shee Here lived but few months above 14 yeares by whom she had Issue Elizabeth William & Katherine This last deceased few months after her mother who a little before her death gave to this church ye Rooffe erected since; As shee lived so shee depar-*ted* this life & patiently and piously ye 8th day of Octobr 1669 in ye 49th yeare of her Age & is interred wth her daughter Ka in ye Middle Vault of ye Chancell of this church under ye Altar Table

This is the substance I wish rendered as you shall thinke best att
yt...and leave to yr selfe ye whole & every part as to its plaine
appearance or dresse whereto I covet not Embroidery, but rather a
few words of such value as you think suitable.

(Hunt. MS EL 11 141)

The main passage adheres to formal requirements, describing Jane as being honourable, pious and virtuous in life and having expressed the patient and humble behaviour necessary to ensure a good death. In addition, it specifically invokes status through the reference to William Cavendish and by referring to Charles as lord of the manor, as well as depicting Jane in the appropriate female roles of mother and benefactress. Grief and any sense of personalised mourning are noticeably absent, a fact underscored by Charles' casual treatment of the memorial text as he defers authorship to Littlejohn – 'as you shall thinke best...leave it to yr selfe ... as you think suitable.' It comes as a surprise, therefore, that, when it came to the tomb sculpture, he became embroiled in prolonged negotiations and spent a considerable sum in acquiring a monument from Italy.

On entering Chelsea old church, the tomb is immediately apparent; it faces the south entrance in the form of a six-metre-high marble temple, in which the life-size statue of Jane Cheyne reclines on a black sarcophagus, raising herself upon her left arm and extending her right hand over her heart (Fig. 2). A small portion of the window is visible above the main structure and this allows light to filter down onto the figure below. The statue is dressed in contemporary fashion, with the hair styled in crisp ringlets, and is adorned with the suitable emblems of a book in her left hand (referring to her scholarship) and a coronet at her feet (denoting she was the daughter of a marquess). The impact of the monument was such that histories of, and guidebooks to, Chelsea consistently refer to it; for example, Thomas Faulkner in *An Historical and Topographical Description of Chelsea and its Environs* (1829) makes a detailed description of the tomb, including a transcription of the text, summing up, 'This monument was executed by the celebrated Bernini and cost five hundred pounds' (1829: 223). Charles Cheyne, it seems, had undertaken to memorialise his wife by commissioning a statue by one of the most famous and successful sculptors of the seventeenth century. The only problem being, that it is not by Bernini.

A comprehensive account of the negotiations concerning Jane's monument is given by Linda Levy Peck in *Consuming Splendour. Society and Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* in a chapter subtitled 'a Bernini in Chelsea', where she points out that

The importance of the funeral monument lies not in its mistaken ascription to the great Bernini but in the aspirations and

cosmopolitan taste that shaped Cheyne's decision to commission and import a Roman baroque sculpture and make it fit an Anglican parish church.

(Peck 2005: 277)



Fig. 2. Lady Jane Cheyne in All Saints Church in Chelsea

Such a commission was highly unusual and Peck pertinently questions why Charles Cheyne chose 'to import this lavish funeral monument from Rome?' Peck's suggestion that Charles wished to 'commemorate...his devotion to Lady Jane' might be overly generous, but her identification of his desire to 'demonstrate...his own piety and taste,' as well as 'to develop the fashionable suburb' in which he lived seems very likely, and her final assessment of him as a 'luxury consumer and London real estate developer' is particularly fitting (2005: 279). And, rather like

his twentieth-century counterparts, Charles Cheyne was more interested in show than quality, in cutting costs, and endeavouring to deal with an artist as he would have done an artisan or local workman. Peck's chapter is so comprehensive that only a brief account of the dealings is necessary here, but it is worth quoting portions of the letters in order to illuminate the processes involved in this act of memorialisation.

None of Charles' letters have survived, but he kept all correspondence relating to his expensive purchase (unlike his wife's writings). The process began with Charles asking his young relative, Edward Chaloner, who was going to Rome in order to work for the English ambassador, to begin negotiations. From this point on the project appears as a series of debacles. First, Chaloner did not seem particularly eager to get involved, instead asking Charles for credit so that he could travel on to Venice via Vienna and then to the Loire where he hoped to spend the whole of the summer. However, Edward Altham, an English Catholic residing in Rome, was procured as the agent and work once more progressed, although in his first letter to Charles, Altham draws attention to Chaloner's lack of interest ('hee stayed here (which was but a short time)' (Hunt. MS EL 11 124). The subsequent missives narrate a catalogue of complications in which Altham is clearly replying to Charles' complaints about cost and construction. To be fair to Altham, he had secured a contract with the finest studio at the time and, while he did not manage to obtain Bernini, the architect was most probably the master's son, Paolo Valentino, and the sculptor, his favourite assistant, Antonio Raggi (Montagu 1990: 277). Of course, costs soared despite Altham 'striue[ing] to have it done by the bestmaster and at the best price as can be possible' (Hunt. MS EL 11 124), but problems also emerged about the design. Raggi, as an artist, proved to be as much a governor of his own mind as was Jane Cheyne and he was determined 'to follow the style of this country in the habiliments of the figure' making it as 'like as may bee' (Hunt. MS EL 11 125). Accordingly, Charles was required to send a drawing of Jane's face. Simultaneously, Raggi altered the original intention of showing her 'reposing... on the Urne' to the more realistic, 'upon the bed... languishing' (Hunt. MS EL 11 125). There were also considerable problems about the size of the monument, since the architect had mistakenly designed a 20-foot structure when the intended position in the church's chancel was only 14 feet. It is difficult to discover who was to blame for the major miscalculation, although it is clear that Altham was the one expected to sort it out, appeasing the renowned members of Bernini's studio and asking Charles to send a piece of string or thread so that they could be sure of the dimensions (the tomb now covers a considerable part of the window). In addition, there was little room left on the monument for the smaller figure of Jane's daughter, who had died shortly after her mother; this requisite was abandoned altogether, 'the smalle Figure cannot bee annexed as was proposed' (Hunt. MS EL 11 127). Then there was the crown: Charles was adamant that, being the daughter of a duke, Jane's statue should wear the coronet she was entitled to and

which was an essential part of the monument's function within his own self-fashioning. However, there was no way that Raggi or any member of the Bernini studio would place a crown on the statue's head, since

the sense here of the Artiste (that understand things of this quality) is that the custome of this Church is not to crowne any of the saints though canonized and haue lamps at their shrines, It being an honour onely about the rest due to the Regina Sanctorum Omnia as Mother of God and Queene of and Heauen, yet because the Lady was the eldest daughter of a Duke It tis uery requisite that there should bee some signe or token of that Honour and worth to accompany the monument and therefore the Artiste haue thaught fitt to place a Crowne at her feete as neglected and not esteemed in her life time; which if I mistake not is part of your designe mentioned in your letter and may proue conformeable to your conception if not altogether yet in some nature.

(Hunt. MS EL 11 126)

The status and 'quality' of the 'Artiste,' together with the 'custome of this Church' (Catholic) is given clear precedence over Charles' 'conception'; Altham explains that only the Virgin Mary is allowed to be crowned, although he has persuaded Raggi to 'place a Crowne at her [Jane's] feete' instead. Finally, the monument was shipped to England and erected, the sums were settled and Altham, still in Rome, wrote to Charles for feedback, clearly hoping to use a good recommendation to procure more work: 'my request therefore is at present that you would be so free as to tell me ingeniously not so much what likes you as what dislikes you in the monument' (Hunt. MS EL 11 134). There was, however, one final error that becomes apparent in Altham's tetchy response to Charles' final complaint that the 'figure [lies] with the feete to the west' and therefore looks away from the altar. Altogether, Charles Cheyne's plan for a grandiose monument that publicised his own faith and social standing had gone badly awry. Instead of a 14-foot-high tomb in the chancel, with a statue representing his wife leaning in dignified form upon an urn looking towards the altar, with a coronet on her head and the figure of her dead child beside her, he got a 20-foot monument in the nave, so large that it obscured the window, with the statue of his wife reclining in naturalistic fashion, looking to the back of the church, with a book rather than a child, and with a coronet, seemingly discarded, at her feet. Although Charles' use of memorialisation to promote himself in terms of both economic and social position accords perfectly with scholarly readings of Early Modern monuments, it also demonstrates how such grand plans could become derailed when colliding with alternative, but equally powerful, discourses.

At this point, it is useful to return to the most perceptive of all critics on Early Modern tombs, Erwin Panofsky. In his discussion of Bernini, Panofsky alludes to the liminal quality of the sculptor's grave designs, commenting that he 'abolished the borderline between life and death' (1964: 93). Recalling one of Bernini's most famous sculptures, *The Ecstasy of St Theresa*, this powerful evocation of transformation – from the material to the spiritual – is easy to understand. By examining Bernini's tomb figures, this liminal moment is even more apparent; for example, his *Beata Ludovica Albertoni* lies prone, her hand to her heart, her face caught in a moment of dream-like ecstasy, while his *Dr Gabriele Fonesca*, as Panofsky notes, with his hand 'placed on his heart [...] belongs to this world as well as the next.' (1964: 93). Close associates with Bernini, like Valentino and Raggi, would have been determined to offer what was undoubtedly to them the most beautiful and moving memorial. Working with, as Altham notes, 'the best master' and confident in their 'understand[ing of] things of this quality,' they too strove to present a life-like figure of Jane Cheyne captured forever on that 'borderline between life and death.' It is even possible to understand why Altham was so defensive of his choice, since in his self-portrait, he stands, hand on heart, with a look of soulful meditation (Montagu 1990: 281-2). Moreover, the description of Jane's statue Altham provided Charles in advance of delivery could as easily describe Ludovica Albertoni or Gabriele Fonesca:

The right hand and arme bent towarde the breaste in a pious posture.
The Uisage looking upwarde, from whence the devoute soule may
bee considered (by the spectators) was full of expectation and highly
concerned in the thoughts of another life.

(Hunt. MS EL 11 127)

The tomb of Jane Cheyne thus represents a clash of two Early Modern discourses: the desire for individual status and wealth as identified in those 'grandiose' tombs described by Llewellyn, and exemplified by Charles Cheyne's commission, with, on the other hand, the recognition of the power of art to transcend material limits as effected by Bernini, noted as such by Panofsky, and embodied in the tombs of Albertoni and Fonesca. Given its history, therefore, it comes as somewhat of a shock when visiting Chelsea Old Church to find that Jane's tomb is sombre and unprepossessing. While an elegant hand is placed over her heart, Jane's face is static, almost bored, as it gazes, not 'upwarde' in ecstasy, but across the nave south towards the church door. The liminal power of Bernini's grave monuments is altogether absent.

Conclusion

The memorials to Elizabeth Brackley and Jane Cheyne, in some ways, could not be more different: the church settings of country versus city, the use of text set against image, and their intended purposes, with the repository of grief a contrast to the statement of status and wealth. Moreover, while the words inscribed onto Elizabeth's monument construct her as liminal, Jane's statue remains resolutely within the material and mortal frame. If there is any distinctiveness to be identified in the memorials to Jane, it comes not from her expensive tomb, but from her own words as transcribed by Littlejohn in the funeral sermon. Jane's description of her '*Disappointment*' at not dying functions only if we acknowledge her to have '*conquered*' or left the mortal world '*and being now in her Passage to a Better*' where, of course, she will wear '*a glorious Crown*' (Littlejohn 1669: 51-2). The sense of absent presence so essential to the liminality of memorials is thus engendered, not by her bereaved husband, but through her own self-irony and, one suspects, she would have found Charles' failure to devise a tomb that fully enhanced his status equally amusing.

The memorials of two of the earliest Englishwomen dramatists cannot be confined by the conventions of Early Modern memorialisation, each evading the prescriptions devised to ensure the conventionality of having good deaths translating into good corpses. Both women are constructed as transversing the boundaries of the mortal and spiritual worlds, one because of the overwhelming grief of her husband and the other through her own deathbed speech. Yet the texts and monuments do engage with the driving discourses of the age; Jane's grave in particular demonstrates the importance of status and wealth to the deceased's family, as well as the shift from artisan to artist in the design of tomb statuary. Perhaps, however, it is Elizabeth's tomb that has the most enduring impact, for it discloses another powerful Early Modern discourse, the growing importance of mutual affection within marriage. The beginning of this essay refers to ghosts, pointing out that neither Elizabeth Brackley nor Jane Cavendish slumber in the quiet earth. This, of course, is an allusion to the final sentence of *Wuthering Heights*, where Lockwood wonders, 'how anyone could ever imagine unquiet slumbers, for the sleepers in that quiet earth' (Bronte 1975: 367). To conclude, I wish to invoke those two famous literary revenants, Cathy and Heathcliff, and suggest that graves provide scholars not only with critical insight, but with an understanding of the human and artistic practices that inspired them. Because, for all the ostentatious self-fashioning of Early Modern memorials, they are sometimes not about power, status, wealth and patriarchal privilege but, quite simply, about love.

NOTES

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