Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Pembroke, Dorset, and Montgomery: A Bibliographical Essay

Lady Anne Clifford, born 1590, died 1676, was the daughter and only surviving child of George Clifford, 3rd Earl of Cumberland, and in her life she was married first to Richard Sackville, 3rd Earl of Dorset, and later to Philip Herbert, 4th Earl of Pembroke (Spence 1). She is famous in English Early Modern history because upon the death of her father in 1605, his will left his estate to his brother Francis, though Anne was to receive a handsome annuity. But Edward II had decreed in 1311 that the entail of that estate must go to the eldest child of the Clifford line, male or female, Anne was the rightful heir (Dowd & Eckerle 66). She was vindicated after thirty-eight years of struggle, when Francis died in 1641 and his son Henry died two years later without male issue, making Anne the sole heiress to the estate (Sackville-West xlii).

Lady Anne’s most famous written works were her 1603 memoir and her diaries from 1616 to 19, from the third section of her Great Books of Records. The Great Books themselves were primarily history books devoted to her family’s genealogy and her own autobiography (Spence 176). The entries from 1616 to 1619 were “much more a monthly and daily record kept in rough” (Spence 176), rather than an official history of her family like the rest. The rest was not the private musings the term ‘diary’ would imply. She intended to have them back up her claim as heiress to her family estate, and to that end she hired three professional scribes.
to make three copies (Myers 581). There are no surviving original copies (Acheson, Memoir 37).

The rest of the Great Books of Records is devoted primarily to her family history, although there was also a record of her accounts from 1650 to 1675 (Acheson, Memoir 32). Of the three volumes, two of those volumes are now held in Hothfield MSS and the third is owned privately (Spence 160). The remainder of her published writings are correspondence, personal papers, and account books (National Archives).

There are several editions of her memoir and diaries, though not all of them make a distinction between the two. Katherine O. Acheson, in her thesis, suggests that, given that the 1603 memoir is a chronicle of the year written later on, while the 1616-1619 diary is a daybook, they are not “two parts of a fragmented whole [but rather] different orders of discourse” (12). Not every critic and editor agreed on this front. Mary Ellen Lamb refers to Lady Anne as “writing from 1603 to 1619” (1). The 1923 edition, arguably the most famous one, The Diary of Lady Anne Clifford, includes the 1603 memoir without comment as an early but not distinct part of the diaries, presenting it as a single dairy with a thirteen-year gap between entries. This edition’s editor was Vita Sackville-West, noted author and living descendant of Lady Anne through her first marriage to Richard Sackville (Hallett 506). The 2007 edition by Katherine O. Acheson, The Memoir of 1603 and the Diary of 1616-1619, distinctly splits the two into two separate texts, which is the more popular assessment. Because the original manuscript has not survived, editors have many posthumous manuscripts to choose from, such as the Portland manuscript likely written by
Harley Bentick, Duchess of Portland, in the eighteenth century (Acheson, *Memoir* 37-38). Another famous manuscript is the Knole manuscript, currently residing in the Kent Country Records Office, which is “likely” to have been copied from the original by Lady Anne’s daughters Elizabeth and Mary, based on other samples of their handwriting (Acheson, *Memoir* 38). The Seward manuscript, published in 1804, omits the 1603 memoir and certain small details and references, but is more accurate in terms of Early Modern spelling, this non-modernisation suggesting that it is more accurate than the Portland (Acheson, *Memoir* 38-39). Modern editions do not tend to use the period spelling, opting to modernise for the reader’s benefit. Lady Anne’s spelling, along with her capitalisation, are said to be “ambiguous and bewildering” (Williamson 145).

Clifford’s writings have received a good deal of critical attention since the time of her death, although much of that attention is focused more on the historical value of her records than on the literary merit (Acheson, *Memoir* 32). Much like Samuel Pepys’ diaries, the recordings of daily life are invaluable to historians. Therefore, much of the scholarly work on Lady Anne approach her from a historian’s perspective. Notestein’s *Four Worthies*, Spence’s *Lady Anne Clifford Countess of Pembroke, Dorset and Montgomery* (1590-1676), and Williamson’s *Lady Anne Clifford* all focus on her life and only mention her writings as records of that life, rather than analysing them directly.

Virginia Woolf was the first critic to tackle the literary aspect (Acheson, *Memoir* 32). Given that she was infamously a lover of Vita Sackville-West, her interest is unsurprising. In “Donne After Three Centuries,” she holds up Lady Anne
as one who “read good English books as naturally as she ate good beef and mutton” (Ch. 2), establishing her as the embodiment of the Early Modern educated female reader. She is also speculated to have based the eponymous main character of *Orlando* on her. Hallett analyses the similarity between the two characters – and between Lady Anne’s legal troubles and those of Vita Sackville-West – in “Anne Clifford as Orlando: Virginia Woolf’s Feminist Historiology and Women’s Biography.”

Most criticism tends to focus on the format of her writing. Megan Matschinske discussed how her writings “offer constant and repetitive pronouncements that operate directionally, spatially, and metaphorically” (Dowd & Eckerle 69), to reinforce her every claim and connection she could make. Myers talks about how the diaries were not structured to be serial, chronological, and causal. Instead of grouping events around a strict chronology or even a cause and effect rationalisation, she based everything around the places where she went, such as visits to castles (584), unsurprising given that she centered her adult life around claiming a few castles and manors she was owed.

Despite her life spent fighting men for power, and Woolf’s writings about her, there is little interest in her in feminist criticism circles. She did not put her struggles in terms of gender battle, nor did she seem interested in rights and privileges for women other than herself. It is possible to find her writings grouped in for analysis with other female writers of the period, as in Dowd and Eckerle’s *Genre and Women’s Life Writing in Early Modern England* and Burke and Gibson’s *Early Modern Women’s Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent*
Colloquium, but she is rarely studied as a feminist icon in her own right. Those that do pursue the subject are likelier to use a journal article format, such as Barbara Lewalski’s “Re-Writing Patriarchy and Personage: Margaret Clifford, Anne Clifford, and Aemilia Lanyer” and the aforementioned Orlando comparison, rather than extensive, book-length studies.

The rest of the writings we have of Lady Anne have attracted less scholarly attention, although still some. The most popular for discussion are her record of accounts from 1600 to 1602 and the diary kept in the last years of her life and especially the daily entries from the last few months. Her accounts were written when she was only ten to twelve years old, but reveal much about Lady Anne’s character. They are, to Edith Snook, “a form of life writing” (147). Vita Sackville-West takes a good deal of pleasure in picturing the young, serious Lady Anne who gave gifts to her servants but then “duly entered against their names in her account book” and then comparing that to the “autocratic old woman” (xxvii) who had never forgotten a debt or squandered a penny in her life.

George C. Williamson takes especial interest in her private letters, carefully preserved at Appleby Castle. Through them we gain an insight into her relationship with her just-as-formidable mother, Margaret Russell (145). One packet of these letters ranges from June 1614 to April 1616. Most of the letters are about visits and home lives, but one dating from November 10, 1615 refers to her desire to settle the inheritance business with her uncle that would not be settled for another thirty-eight years (Williamson 151). A second bundle of letters to her steward Christopher Marsh, ranging from 1649 to 1653, detail her financial troubles – she had sunk most
of her money into repairing her estates, which her uncle and cousin did not upkeep and her lawsuits with various tenants (Williamson 210). The first packet of letters illuminates her relationship with her mother, her only reliable ally in her inheritance battle, while the second gives a good idea of what a stern matriarch she was, refusing to cede her claims to even a shilling from tenants if it was owed to her, despite the expense of dragging the ordeal through the courts.

Lady Anne Clifford is an exciting source for both historical and literary criticism. Her writings give a unique insight into Early Modern daily life on par with that of Samuel Pepys’, along with a dynasty’s history. They also illustrate an iron lady who influenced serial narrative conventions and took a firm place in the Early Modern women’s canon. She remains a rich area of study about life under King James, the Civil War, and the legal rights of wealthy women.
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