
Article

Scattered remains and paper bodies: Margaret Cavendish and the Siege of Colchester

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Abstract Many histories of the civil war and biographies of Margaret Lucas Cavendish recount the story that, in 1648, parliamentary soldiers desecrated the Lucas family tomb, scattered the remains of Cavendish's mother and sister, and tore out the corpses' hair to wear in their hats. Tracking down the sources of this widely repeated story, this essay examines the role of textual accounts in producing the effect that bodies precede them. Events and stories, flesh, facts, and fiction, prove to be very difficult to untangle.

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Many histories of the civil war and biographies of Margaret Lucas Cavendish recount the story that the Lucas family tomb was desecrated by parliamentary troops in 1648. This is a story so gruesome as to be irresistible. In histories of the civil war the attack on the Lucas family house, St. John's, is usually included as part of a narrative of the siege of nearby Colchester, which Barbara Donagan describes as 'a central event of the second civil war and a focus of national attention in private letters and public print' (Donagan, 2008, 313). The attack on the house sets the stage for the arrest of Margaret's brother, Sir Charles Lucas, a Royalist commander, and his summary court martial and execution. The connection to Cavendish, already married and in exile with her husband, is not always clear. For instance, Diane Purkiss reports that 'When the Parliamentaries



captured the house of Sir Charles Lucas, just south of Colchester, they broke open the family vault and tore apart the bodies of Lucas's mother and sister, cutting off their hair to wear in their hats as scalps' (Purkiss, 2006, 535; cf. Carlton, 1994, 321). Some readers might not remember that Cavendish was born a Lucas; Purkiss does not remind them at this point in her account. As is standard practice in a popular history, Purkiss also does not specify her source for the sacking of the family vault, presenting it as an event rather than an assertion, and interpreting its meaning for the perpetrators as 'a kind of tribal magic' (Purkiss, 2006, 535).

While Purkiss does not remind the reader that Lucas was Margaret Cavendish's brother, biographies of Cavendish, predictably, make Margaret's status as a member of the Lucas family explicit. Here, too, the desecration is presented as fact. As one example, Katie Whitaker recounts how 'Entering the Lucases' burial vault, they [parliamentary forces] broke open the tombs and "scattered the bones about with profane jests." Margaret's mother and sister Mary were so recently buried that their hair remained undecayed and this the soldiers "cut off ... and wore it in their hats"' (Whitaker, 2002, 105).¹ Whitaker's quotation marks advise the reader that she has this information from a contemporary source, but she does not comment on the source or its provenance. While historians and biographers cannot resist including this story – and who can blame them? – Cavendish herself excludes it from her 'true relation' of her life. There might be many reasons why she might shrink from recounting an incident so horrifying and unsettlingly carnivalesque. One possibility is that it never happened, although historians and biographers do not consider this.

The surviving evidence of this atrocity consists of texts that, like Cavendish's autobiography, trumpet their status as true relations or accounts. A 'relator' often conveys the information to the reader. While the relator's credibility resides in access to inside information, he or she recounts reports from eye and ear witnesses at least as often as purporting to be such a witness. These texts often refer the reader to corroborating persons or documents outside the text, but these exist for us now, as they must have for many contemporary readers, only as they are referred to in the text. Examining various relations of the ransacking of the Lucas family vault raises questions about what constitutes a 'true relation,' what its status was as evidence for contemporaries, and what its value might be for us now as we attempt to gain knowledge about premodern flesh. The fragments of the Lucas women's bodies and the tufts of their hair leap off the page as the animate body parts of macabre fantasy, the gruesomely, viscerally undead. These fragments may be figments. Yet they have had a vibrant textual afterlife nonetheless. In this essay, I will explore the possibility that the accounts through which we have access to what happened to the remains of Elizabeth Leighton Lucas and Mary Lucas Killigrew may not simply preserve the traces of their premodern flesh but, effectively, create their flesh. That is, I will be suggesting that the process of textual transmission of premodern flesh might not begin with a body and then lead toward its representation in a text but, rather, begin with textual accounts that produce the effect of bodies preceding them.

1 For similar accounts of this vandalism as fact, see Grant (1957, 101) and Jones (1988, 68). I cannot determine where Jones found the detail that 'small items of jewellery on the corpses were stolen.' Jones and Grant both cite HMC, 12 Rep., Pt. ix, 1891, 27–28, discussed below.

2 Cavendish uses this phrase in her *Sociable Letter* 143, published in 1664. See Bowerbank and Mendelson's introduction to their collection *Paper Bodies* (Bowerbank and Mendelson, 2000, 11) where the letter itself also appears (81).

Cavendish's description of her manuscripts as 'paper bodies' suggests the materiality of the text and an author's investment in these textual offspring as extensions of herself (Cavendish, 2004, 203).² Similarly, when Milton defends books against censorship and destruction in 1644 by insisting that 'books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are' he too positions books as the extensions or children of their authors (Milton, 2011, 341). But if the author's soul suffuses a book with life, books can also suffuse the bodies they depict with the appearance of life. I want to borrow Cavendish's phrase to emphasize the elusiveness of the early modern body, even at its most grotesquely evocative. Her mother's and sister's bodies are, for us, paper bodies. This is not to say that they are not consequential, but rather that they are made to matter for us, as they were for contemporaries, through textual accounts. It is likely that there were rumors about the desecration of the Lucas family tombs at the time, whether it happened or not. Perhaps curious locals and soldiers rushed to see the broken stones and lingering tufts of hair, and were or were not satisfied. If the bodies really were disturbed, surely the family made efforts to collect the scattered remains and rebury them. But for anyone who did not see those scattered remains, those bodies, then or now, exist only as written accounts describe them.

The role of texts in generating the illusion of flesh is not simply a function of the passage of time, rendering us more textually dependent than contemporaries were. Rather, we share with contemporaries a reliance on verbal accounts, accounts that produce the impression of real bodies. While contemporaries depended on hearsay and print for information about what happened during the war, including atrocities, they also developed skills as interpreters of these relations, alternately skeptical and partisan. The truth related through textual relations was widely understood to be inevitably partisan and purposeful – and therefore available to contestation (Knights, 2005; Dolan, 2013). Scholars now interested in premodern flesh might cultivate contemporaries' skeptical readings of the accounts through which bodies matter.

3 My source for this quotation is Bruno Ryves, a royalist clergyman and a member of Charles I's Council of War. The title of his newsbook, which first appeared some nine months after the events it reports, contrasts

Reports of the 1648 desecration of the Lucas tombs elaborate upon the claim that the Lucas family vault had already been ransacked and the coffins 'transfixed' with 'Pistols, Swords, and Halberts' in 1642 (Ryves, 1646, B2v).³ The two separate desecrations create confusion and conflation in some chronologies of the Lucas family. In 1642, the house was in the possession of the eldest (legitimate) Lucas brother, John. (Thomas, having been born six years before his parents married, could not inherit when their father died in 1625.) In his 1999 account of the actions of the so-called 'Colchester Plunderers,' John Walter argues that the 'prominence' of the 1642 attack on Sir John Lucas and St. John's in 'contemporary print culture ensured its writing into the later historiography of the English Revolution' (Walter, 1999, 1). 'Exposing the genealogy of the narratives' of the first attack, Walter offers a model for reading such narratives skeptically and resisting the temptation to elide stories with events (Walter, 1999, 9).



Yet Walter's interrogation of the narrative evidence and afterlife of the first plundering has not informed discussions of the second. Historians and literary critics have taken those stories as fact although the relationship between the two assaults itself should raise doubts. The 1642 plundering of the Lucas family tombs, or at least the true relations of that plunder, might have suggested the idea of plundering them again six years later. Or the way the story had already gained prominence might have dictated the shape of a Royalist account of Parliamentary atrocity, especially one directed at the Lucas family. Stories of 1642 might have inspired an action in 1648; an act in 1642 might have inspired the story of an even more grotesque atrocity in 1648. It is hard from this distance to distinguish textual prominence from actual occurrence, influence from precedent.

Accounts of the desecration of the Lucas tombs during the 1648 siege of Colchester rely upon two sources, which are, like those Walter uses to discuss the 1642 plunder, 'seductively rich' (Walter, 1999, 22). The first is a print account, *A Most True and exact Relation of That as Honourable as unfortunate Expedition of Kent, Essex, and Colchester* (1650) by M. C., since identified as Matthew Carter, and described on the title page as 'a Loyal Actor in that Engagement' (C.M. [Carter, Matthew], 1650). M. C. describes how, after an extended siege, the parliamentary troops seized St. John's.

And having thus possess themselves of this House, (as it is their custome in all other places, the first thing thought on is plunder) they fell to searching the House, and those things that were in it moveable though little of worth, or conveniency they tooke away; which could be little more then bedsteeds, and stooles, and the like. That house having beene divers times before, and indeed the first in the Kingdom, as is believed plundred: But finding themselves no better rewarded for their service, that they might be more notorious in their villany, broke up the vault wherein the ancesters of that Family were usually Interred, under the pretence of searching for money, and finding them not yet quit dissolved, the corps of the Lady *Lucas*, and the Lady *Killigrew*, (as I received it from eye witnesses) wrapt in Lead; they tore open that coffine, beyond what ever was known or read of before, or amongst the most unhumane barbarous thoughts, dismembred their trunks, throwing a legge in one corner of the vault, and arme in another, and were so Impudent in this so and worse then brutish act, as to beare away the haire of their heads in their Hats as a triumphant bravadoe in honour to their villanie. In which posture the vault continued, till the corps of Sir *C. Lucas*, that Loyall Martyr, was brought to possesse it. Is not that Commonwealth happy that must receive a reformation from such Saints? Who have these ten yeares been practising acts, absolutely monstrous to even nature it selfe: Beyond parallel, president, or politicall complotment of the most subtill Machavillian, or bloody Tyrants in the world. (C.M. [Carter, Matthew], 1650, sigs. L7v–L8r)

outrageous rebels to 'faithfull Subjects.' According to Walter, 'As the title makes abundantly clear one of the most important and frequently cited accounts of the attacks was a piece of royalist polemic. But this is seldom acknowledged by those who use it, and there has been little critical discussion of such a seductively rich source' (Walter, 1999, 22).

As is clear from this passage, M. C. is an interested witness, focused on demonstrating that Sir Charles Lucas and Sir George Lisle were martyrs to the Royalist cause and that the parliamentary forces were vicious transgressors of the rules of war. This account stresses that this is the second plundering of St. John's and the family vault. For M. C., St. John's has a special status as the 'first' house in the Kingdom to be so violated. His vivid description of the corpses dismembered and the body parts flung about sets the stage for the 'corps of Sir C. Lucas, that Loyall Martyr' being interred shortly afterwards amidst the ghoulish wreckage. Fragments of the Lucas women's bodies, their trunks, leg, arm, and 'the haire of their heads' seize the reader's attention. Yet they are both grotesquely present, and so too horribly available to plunder, and not there at all. Even for M. C., they exist only at removes – what reliable witnesses said they saw. Dependent on witnesses, M.C. can know this outrage only to the extent that it can be turned into a verbal relation, one that he can hear and that he can render as a 'true and exact relation' for his reader. Yet he marks its egregiousness by announcing it as exceeding what has been 'known or read of before.'

While M. C.'s *Most True and exact Relation* has been called 'the most famous account of the siege,' it is not the true relation most often cited and quoted in histories of the civil war and biographies of Cavendish (Donagan, 2008, 313). That distinction goes to an anonymous account that has the twin if paradoxical advantages of surviving in manuscript, consistently privileged as prior and superior to print as 'archival evidence,' and of being readily available in a Historical Manuscripts Commission published report. The Manuscripts of the Duke of Beaufort contain an incomplete and unattributed account of the Siege of Colchester. Some unknown hand has written 1648 on the manuscript in brackets. Arthur, Lord Capel, who was present at the siege, was the Duchess of Beaufort's father. This manuscript may be in the Beaufort collection because she got it from her father or his experience of the siege guided her choices in acquiring and preserving various manuscripts. Like M. C.'s *Most True and exact Relation*, this one emphasizes the outrage that the Lucas house was being sacked for a second time. This narrative, too, insists on the exact location of these decaying bodies in time: they are recently buried and so as yet 'unconsumed.' They are not, then, anonymous skeletons – which could be anyone – but recognizable as recently living women and as Lucas women – aristocrats and royalists – at that.

Here is the story as presented (and as punctuated) in the HMC twelfth report, from which most biographers and historians quote:

The enimie being possess of the house, exercised their brutall rage upon the bare walls, for there was nothing else that remained, this being one of the first houses in England which suffred by that fatall libertie of the subject, which the prophane vulgar in the beginning of these disorders soe passionately petitioned the Parliament to graunt them; who intending to serve themselves of their blind furie, not only suffred but applauded their



violence to their neighbours; but like unskilfull counjurors they often raised those spirits which they could [not] lay; for under cover of zeal to the cause, the poore levelled the rich of both parties and ... [ellipses in original]

There joined to the house a chappell, under which was a vaulte, the buriall place of this honorable family. Heere their officers and souldiers entered, and broake open the tombs of their ancestors, amongst whom the Lady Lucas and Lady Killigrew, the mother and sister of the present Lord Lucas, were so lately buried, that their sinues and haire were unconsumed.

Then they scattered the bones about with profane jests, and cut off the hair and wore it in their hats. (Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1891, Twelfth Report, Appendix, Part IX. 27–28)⁴

The relator here speaks both in the first person plural of ‘we’ royalists and with the authority of an eyewitness, an authority unlikely since a royalist probably would not have been in the crypt and lived to tell the tale. This relator does not include M. C.’s parenthetical reference to having ‘received’ intelligence from eyewitnesses. Instead, he describes the events as if he witnesses them, yet without claiming to have been present. The source of information might even be M. C.’s *Relation*. Just as M. C. used the incident to disparage the religious pretensions of Parliamentary forces as ‘saints’ by exposing them as monsters who despoil graves, defile women, and create martyrs, this manuscript account makes the parallel move of presenting this episode as evidence of the ‘fatal libertie of the subject,’ the insubordination that, once stirred up, is unappeasable.

For both these royalist writers, the desecration of the Lucas tomb was an extremely useful story. Even the detail that these saints and subjects wear hanks of hair in their hats marks them as macabre versions of the Levellers, who identified themselves by the rosemary sprigs they wore in their hats; these pillagers may also anticipate the mutinous soldiers who wore copies of *An Agreement of the Free-People of England*, printed in 1649, pinned to their hats.⁵ Since M. C.’s pamphlet was first printed in 1650, and the date of the manuscript account is uncertain, the story of soldiers decorating their hats with dead women’s hair may even remember and caricature such gestures of defiant panache.

The two royalist accounts of the siege of Colchester were contested even at the time by accounts more sympathetic to the parliamentary cause. Equally if differently partisan, these accounts also presented themselves as true. All of the surviving accounts concur that Colchester was devastated by the siege, which lasted from 13 June to 28 August 1648. But those texts more sympathetic to parliamentary forces do not describe the desecration of the Lucas family tombs. Instead, they describe Royalist atrocities. For example, *A True and Exact Relation of the taking of Colchester ... and an Account of the Cause of giving no Quarter to Sir Charles Lucas, and Sir George Lyle* (1648) emphasizes that Lucas himself was ‘the cause of the ruine of this place, his interest in the Town

4 I include the quotation marks here because they are in the Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC) version and, as unreliable as quotation marks are in early modern texts for identifying reported speech, they open up the possibility that this whole description is a quotation from some unnamed source. In addition to occasional quotation marks within this account, the HMC *Twelfth Report* encloses the whole text in quotation marks (Historical Manuscripts Commission, 1891, 19–30).

5 See Mendle (2001, 14–15, 33, 155). According to Mendle, this defiant gesture so enraged Cromwell that he tried to

pull the pamphlets
off of hats.

drawing the Army thither' (Anon., 1648b, sig. A2v). In such texts, Sir Charles Lucas emerges as villain rather than martyr. For instance, *Colchester's Tears Affecting and Afflicting City & Country* (1648) accuses Royalist forces and Lucas himself of sexual assaults. I do not mean to equate assaults on corpses with assaults on living women, or to suggest that atrocities did not happen in the English civil war. My point is that it is hard for us to be certain which atrocities happened based on the partisan accounts surviving to us and that the living or dead flesh of those victimized is equally inaccessible to us. What parliamentary and royalist propaganda has in common is its mobilization of gendered paper bodies to make the case against the opposition.

Staking out a position as 'a Moderate Relation and Debate' and as an attempt 'to see the Truth in the mist of various relations obscuring the same,' in part by testing relations against the evidence of the authors' 'own eyes,' *Colchester's Tears* offers its own 'briefe Narrative to satisfy all unprepossessed, civil, and moderate men' (Anon., 1884, titlepage). The authors, 'Severall Persons of Quality,' propose to present first 'the narration of things seen, and then of that which credible reports from eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses coming out of the towne doe testifie, wherein we must humbly crave leave, in the detestation of such horrid things as our English nation abhorrs to heare, and in hope it may make them blush that had hands therein, and others to beware of beleeving any thing but what they have from those that are moderate in opinions' (Anon., 1884, 488). Even those committed to finding truth through the mist or in the midst of obscuring relations must still depend on relations from eye and ear witnesses, since no one person can be everywhere. But it is not enough for the witnesses to have been present. The 'credible report,' however abhorrent its content, comes from a relator who is 'moderate in opinions.' Thus the relator's political views authorize rather than undermine claims to credibility. For these writers, as for many in the seventeenth century, truth emerges in relation to the political position of both relator and reader. Royalist, parliamentary, and 'moderate' relators have their own versions of the truth.

Yet however openly partisan and contested these accounts of the siege of Colchester were, the desecration of the Lucas family tomb appears in histories of the civil wars and biographies of Cavendish as an event rather than a polemical story. In her 2008 history of *War in England, 1642–1649*, Barbara Donagan engages in a widely used maneuver of acknowledging the dubious status of a source and then proceeding to rely on it. Historians and literary critics alike signal this move with words such as 'nevertheless' or 'nonetheless.'⁶ Here is Donagan's discussion of the attack on the Lucas family vault.

The overheated narration of many of these stories leads us, perhaps unjustly, to suspend belief, but they are *nonetheless* evidence of the bitter hold the siege of Colchester took on imagination. Others, equally traditional in their evocation of horror at overturned norms of conduct, have

6 I discuss this 'acknowledge then forget' maneuver throughout *True Relations* (Dolan, 2013, especially



stronger evidence to support them. One famous incident flouted the respect due to the bodies and resting places of the dead. Lord Lucas's house in the suburbs had already been gutted by the 'Colchester Plunderers' in August 1642; when it was taken in 1648 Fairfax's soldiers, disappointed in their hopes of richer pickings, ravaged the family vault beneath the chapel. They broke open the family tombs, including those of the mother and sister of Lord Lucas and Sir Charles, who 'were so lately buried, that their sinues and haire were unconsumed', scattered the bones, cut off their hair and wore it as trophies in their hats. Deeply felt taboos were transgressed, but the incident reminds us of earlier iconoclastic orgies and the widespread belief that Lord Lucas was a papist, and of the ferocity and the bloodiness of the preceding fight for the gatehouse. The royalists made much of this atrocity while parliamentarians largely ignored it, but the accounts are persuasive. (Donagan, 2008, 344, emphasis mine)

25–26 and 113–116).

In this passage, Donagan moves from skepticism, to dependence on stories as evidence nonetheless, at least of the imaginative aftershocks of the siege, to narrating what Fairfax's soldiers actually did. What precisely is the 'stronger evidence' suggesting that this incredible incident really happened? Since the story 'reminds us' of other polemic and was, above all, useful to royalists (the only ones who told it), why is it 'persuasive'? Donagan is scrupulous in her use of evidence and an invaluable guide to the civil war. Yet this story overleaps her skepticism to assert its status as fact. Fairfax's soldiers did this.

Cavendish's biographers also cite the second attack on the Lucas family vault as fact. As but one example, several of the Broadview editions of Cavendish's works include it in their chronologies under 1648 (but not 1642): 'Family tombs violated by Parliamentary troops' (Fitzmaurice, 2004, 30); 'Lucas family tomb broken open' (Bennett, 2002, 19). This 'event' thus shares the same status as births, deaths, marriages, and publications. For her biographers, those moments in Cavendish's writings when she associates war with iconoclasm and casts doubt on earthly tombs and monuments constitute indirect references to the grave desecration, to which she never refers explicitly, thus confirming that it really happened and demonstrating its consequences for her. In 'A Description of Civil Wars,' printed in *Nature's Pictures* (1656), Cavendish appears to revisit the traumas of her own experience of war, associating the Commons with iconoclasm ('All Monuments pull'd down, that stood long time' (Cavendish, 1656, sig. M4v)) and describing the cold-blooded murder of 'a Lady's' brother, and the refusal to restore the estate of another Lady's banished husband. In one of her *Sociable Letters* (1664), Cavendish takes a philosophical approach to her own corpse, saying that when she dies she will leave her 'body to Earth, there to be Dissolved and Transformed as Nature Pleases, for to her it belongs. I do not much Care, nor Trouble my Thoughts to think where I shall be Buried, when Dead, or into what part of the Earth I shall be Thrown.' She says she'd like to have her dust

‘mix’d with the Dust of those I love Best, although I think they would not Remain Long together, for I did observe, that in this last War the Urns of the Dead were Digg’d up, their Dust Dispersed and their Bones Thrown about.’ Since she assumes that all Civil Wars lead to such acts, she asserts that ‘it is but a Folly to be Troubled and Concerned, where they shall be Buried, or for their Graves, or to Bestow much Cost on their Tombes, since not only Time, but Wars will Ruin them’ (Cavendish, 2004, 173–174). Cavendish writes with characteristic ambivalence here. On the one hand, since one cannot control one’s body, there’s no reason to worry about it. Nature will reclaim and dissolve it; soldiers will disperse its dust. Soldiers are both abominations here and predictable participants in nature’s plan. The body is no longer the self – Cavendish distinguishes soul and fame from body in letter 119 – and yet she’d prefer to mingle her ashes with those of her loved ones, at least for a time.⁷

7 Critics have also pointed out that Cavendish’s proclaimed disregard for tombs did not stop her husband William from commissioning an elaborate one for them both in Westminster Abbey (Grant, 1957, 237; Whitaker, 2002, 345). The epitaph, which William probably wrote, identifies Margaret not just as William Cavendish’s wife, the Duchess of Newcastle, and an author, but in terms of her relation to her brother, the royalist martyr, and to Colchester: ‘her name was Margaret Lucas, youngest sister to the Lord Lucas of Colchester; a noble familie, for

These passages are often assembled and adduced as evidence that the second plundering of the Lucas family tombs shaped Margaret’s attitudes. But what is the status of these passages as evidence that the plundering of the Lucas family tombs actually happened? These moments in her text could refer to the purported attacks of 1642 or of 1648. They are not specific to the details attached to the story of the second assault. They could simply refer to the widespread accounts of desecration during the war. They could be anti-war propaganda more than personal memoir. Who knows?

Even when she refers to ‘Bones Thrown about,’ Cavendish does not recount the story that her mother’s and sister’s bones were thrown about and their hair pulled out and worn as ornaments. What are we to make of this omission? According to the two surviving accounts, the bodies of Margaret Lucas Cavendish’s mother and sister were useful to parliamentary forces. As the story goes, parliamentary forces, failing to secure booty, settled for bodies, venting spleen and showing contempt not only by scattering remains but by ‘triumphing’ over them. By means of these two accounts, or as paper bodies, the Lucas women’s remains were even more useful to royalist propaganda, whether or not they’d ever decorated a hat. Yet, in the aftermath of the war, Margaret Cavendish does not tell the story, even when she tackles the subject of grave desecration as a war atrocity. Does she turn away from recounting a traumatic occurrence that is too terrible to recall? Does she pass over a story that, while once current and politically useful, she knows to have been untrue or exaggerated? Does she refrain from compounding the violation of her mother and sister by redescribing it in unseemly detail? Does she resist the way that other narratives make use of her beloved dead? Is it possible that she doesn’t know the story at all? It is notoriously difficult to explain omissions. While it is productive to speculate about the meaning of Cavendish’s discussion of grave desecration, I think we need to read what she does and doesn’t say about that as skeptically as we read the accounts of the siege of Colchester. Whatever her motives, Cavendish does not tell the tale in which her mother and



sister's remains were scattered, a tale that, it seems possible, existed only in the telling.

To conclude my ruminations on the elusiveness of premodern flesh, I would like to juxtapose John Walter's bracing skepticism about wartime propaganda to several influential feminist discussions of the body. Walter points out that the most widely disseminated narrative of the first attacks on Colchester, the one by Bruno Ryves, 'highlights violence against exactly those groups that the codes of conduct in civil war decreed should be protected: women, ministers, the old and the dead' (Walter, 1999, 25). As Walter says of accounts of attacks on women such as Lady Lucas and the Countess Rivers, 'The threat to the female body was being used to symbolise the threat to the social and moral order' (Walter, 1999, 25). Precisely because the female body so often exists at the level of imagination and representation in order to be threatened and violated, I am arguing here that we might want to question the presumption that threat and violation precede true relations of them. While Walter's analysis might itself threaten to obscure real harm to real bodies, his emphasis is not actual threats to the female body, living and dead, but stories about such threats. In my use of John Walter's work, I have tried to show that scrutinizing the status of narratives as evidence and raising questions about how we gain access to those much-sought 'real people' is not simply the business of much-maligned post-modern critics but rather part of the process of creating historical knowledge.

Regarding the second attack on St. John's, the Lucas family home, perhaps we can shift our attention from injury to the process, purposes, and effects of narrating injury because, even at the level of the surviving narratives, the Lucas women are already dead. They do not fear or suffer depredations; their bodies are not in pain. If we acknowledge that we aren't talking about these real bodies, even if dead, but rather textual accounts of them, then we are freer to question whether they ever existed and to refuse the assumption that real bodies and real harms precede the textual ones. When Janet Halley describes the 'facts' of a divorce case as the 'narrative bites' available in Supreme Court justices' opinions on the case, she also 'disavow[s] any suggestion that the resulting formulations describe the real human beings' involved in the case (Halley, 2006, 348). Real bodies had real experiences. But what survive on the record or in the archive are 'narrative bites,' and those narrative bites are available to multiple readings, even if 'the reading itself is no empirical warrant' (Halley, 2006, 359). Arguing against the habit of 'representing women as end points of pain,' Halley also urges her readers to resist the impulse to assume that a (female) body in pain is what might be called an origin, which precedes and grounds all accounts of it (Halley, 2006, 346). She challenges, then, the position of the suffering female body as alpha and omega, origin and endpoint. While her political stakes and 'narrative bites' are rather different from the ones that concern me here, I seize upon the license she offers to question the real body as prior to and accessible through 'narrative bites.' If we surrender the assumption that real bodies precede paper ones, then we can

all the Brothers
were Valiant and
all the Sisters
virtuous' (Grant,
1957, 239). The
tomb was
designed and built
in 1672 (while
Cavendish and her
husband were
both still alive).
She died in 1673
at age 50;
William, 30 years
older, survived
her.

scrutinize the ‘true relations’ or ‘narrative bites’ through which we appear to have access to them without seeming to dismiss or negate the suffering and pain of once living historical subjects.

Equally inspired by John Walters and Janet Halley, an unlikely pair, I confess, I am arguing for the value of reversing a trajectory that we still sometimes assume uncritically when we think about premodern flesh. For example, Nancy Vickers, whose discussion of scattering in the Petrarchan blazon informs my title, maps out the trajectory by which women are ‘lost’ in the fragmenting poetic process in this way: ‘body → introjected image of the body → textual body’ (Vickers, 1982, 105). The appalling desecration of Lady Lucas and Lady Killigrew’s bodies might appear to shockingly literalize and politicize the process Vickers theorizes, by which the male writer compensates for his own loss of power and integrity by reducing his beloved to fragments. But I have also argued here that we might run this trajectory the other way, imagining that the textual or paper bodies in M.C.’s *A Most True and exact Relation* or the Beaufort manuscripts produce the effect that there are real bodies preceding them. In a widely cited formulation, Elizabeth Grosz argues that ‘Bodies are not inert; they function interactively and productively. They act and react’ (Grosz, 1994, xi). By scrutinizing the textual evidence that the Lucas family vault was vandalized in 1648, I have argued that paper bodies also function interactively and productively, perhaps even generating the impression that premodern flesh precedes them.

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About the Author

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