

The Art of Partisan Biography: George Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey*

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Like the other best known biographies of the Tudor period, Thomas More's *Richard III* and William Roper's *Life of More*, Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey* is profoundly partisan. George Cavendish served Cardinal Wolsey during most or perhaps all of the decade of the 1520's, his duties being those of a gentleman-usher—to oversee the proper running of the household and, a sign of Wolsey's trust in and appreciation of his competence, to serve as a special messenger. Cavendish was thus with Wolsey not only during the period of his great diplomatic triumphs but also in the period of disgrace and mortification, "the term of all his troubles" (p. 8), which followed swiftly upon the Cardinal's inability to deliver the divorce decree Henry VIII desired.¹ In introducing himself to the reader, Cavendish adopts an attitude of partisanship tempered by recognition of Wolsey's flaws. He is moved finally to write, during the period 1554-58, not by a desire to white-wash Wolsey but rather to see justice done to the memory and reputation of his former master, a reputation the preceding Protestant quarter-century had seen distorted and degraded. Cavendish affirms his own first-hand familiarity with the Cardinal's affairs, "His demeanor and usage," and declares that

... since his death I have heard divers sundry surmises and imagined tales made of his proceedings and doings, which I myself have perfectly known to be most untrue. . . Therefore, I commit the truth to Him that knoweth all truth; for whatsoever any man hath conceived in him when he lived or since his death, thus much I be bold to say without displeasure to any person or of affection: that in my judgment I never saw this realm in better order, quietness, and obedience than it was in the time of his authority and rule; ne justice better ministered with indifferency, as I could evidently prove if I should not be accused of too much affection or else that I set forth more than truth. (p.4)

Cavendish's assertion that he is writing only to set the record straight should not be allowed to cloud the fundamentally partisan relationship of biographer to subject. The partisanship is so obvious a feature of the *Life*, however, that rather than unintentionally missing it, the most popular critical reflex has been to duly acknowledge and then effectively ignore

the partisan bias. The stated purpose of Cavendish's biography, however, is basic to both the structure and the interpretation of the work. Although, as critics have long recognized, the *de casibus* paradigm is basic to the *Life*, it is the partisan purpose of the author which dictates the twin climaxes of the work and modifies in important ways the received *de casibus* tradition. The ramification of this authorial partisanship in the artistry and design of the *Life* is the subject of this paper.

According to his own account, Cavendish is writing a biographical narrative, not a history of events, for he does not intend, he tells us, to emulate the "historiographers of chronicles of princes" (p. 11). His stated purpose is rather to counter the slanders and distortions concerning the Cardinal's career with an accurate account of disputed matters. What were these crucial matters so subject to misinterpretation and malicious misrepresentation? Two stand out in the chronicles and histories of the day—the charge that Wolsey was the original source of the divorce idea and the description of the Cardinal's death, terrified and unrepentant, probably damned as a suicide. This is the account found in both Edward Hall's famous *Chronicle*, which Cavendish certainly knew, and the revised 1555 edition of Polydore Vergil's *Anglica Historia*, the first volume to contain an account of the rise and fall of the Cardinal.² Not surprisingly, then, it is these two events which are central in the design of Cavendish's biography. The first half of the *Life* focusses on the marvellous "policy" by which Wolsey rose from obscurity to become Henry VIII's chief minister, surpassing all others in the skill with which he satisfied the will of the king. The failure of Wolsey's effort, marked by Suffolk's ominous pronouncement ("It was never," quod he, "merry in England whilst we had Cardinals among us" [p. 93]), signals the reversal of direction of his fortunes.

The second half of the narrative, Wolsey's fall, concludes with several increasingly intimate scenes which span the period from the onset of the fatal dysentery to the Cardinal's death. As it was Cavendish's task to prove Wolsey was not the originator of the divorce scheme in the first part, here it is his more difficult task to prove Wolsey died penitent, shriven, transformed and redeemed, the antithesis of the proud and vainglorious prelate who stalks through the earlier portion of the *Life*. The two halves of the biography thus move in similar fashion to parallel ends: the first half is designed to exculpate Wolsey from the charge that he was the author of the divorce scheme; the second half details the moral growth or awakening prompted by adversity, culminating in a presentation of the Cardinal's death as a penitent Christian. Both these climaxes, political and moral, then, are dictated by extra-literary considerations quite independent of the *de casibus* tradition from which the structure of the *Life* is customarily derived. The complementarity of the two schemes of organization, the partisan and the *de casibus*, is often fortuitous and effective, but it is not essential, as witnesses Cavendish's attempt to rehabilitate his old

master in the final movement of the biography, an endeavour which is no part of the *de casibus* tradition. In particular, the skill with which Cavendish undertakes to convince skeptical readers of the Cardinal's metamorphosis and ultimate redemption in the second part of the narrative has never been adequately analyzed or appreciated, although it is the pinnacle and proof of his success as a partisan biographer.

The gravity and panoply of the divorce trial, with its speeches reconstructed formally and in the classical manner, climaxes the first, public part of the *Life*. The Cardinal's death, in a small room of a country abbey, attended by a few friends and an arresting officer, concludes the book. Both episodes move to grand rhetorical climaxes—Queen Catherine's emotional speeches in defence of her marriage in the first part, Wolsey's deathbed insight into the character of Henry VIII and his prophecy of the future trouble to spring from the monarch's wilfulness and the growing breach with Rome in the latter. The first climax, which marks the decisive downturn in Wolsey's fortunes, presents a portrait of the Cardinal at the peak of his public power, wealth, pride, and ostentation, while most clearly revealing how treacherous is the quicksand upon which he has erected his personal edifice of Magnificence, the will of the Monarch. In Cavendish's portrait, Wolsey is a man who has reaped the gifts of Fortune by perverting those of Nature—his wit, his intellectual endowments, and even his moral conscience. The end result of these misplaced values is a wilful moral blindness overlaid by a mountain of pomp.

The climax of the biography's second movement reverses this portrait. Here Wolsey, stripped of Fortune's specious gifts, haltingly finds his way to ultimate spiritual illumination and redemption. As Henry VIII relentlessly requires of the Cardinal his honours, his goods, and finally his life, in this time of suffering Cavendish shows us Wolsey progressing slowly, tortuously toward an intellectual clarity and a spiritual purification by which the biographer means to enlist the reader's sympathy while rebutting detractors.

However defensive the origin of Cavendish's narrative, the design he imposed upon his materials is brilliant. Cavendish's concern to rebut the twin charges led him to impose the ponderous *de casibus* frame on his materials, complete with the standard image of Fortune and her wheel and the set moralising passages. To satisfy the first point, Cavendish argues the Cardinal's opposition to the divorce in his private conferences with the king, cites Henry's own declaration that he was the author of the plan, and points to the obvious fact that the divorce was the rock on which the Cardinal's fortunes foundered. In addition to and complementary with the account of Wolsey's rise and fall in the public sphere, a matter of Wolsey acquiring honours, wealth, etc., in the first part only to forfeit each in the second (the addition or subtraction of externals), Cavendish imposed another ideological construct upon his material, one which would speak to

the second point and requite the slanderous tales of Wolsey's death. This secondary framework is that of the morality play, the familiar sin to salvation progression.

Although it is largely submerged in the fastpaced narrative of Wolsey's rise, his progress from school-master to Archbishop, Cardinal, and Lord Chancellor, Cavendish traces in the Cardinal's life a moral progress analogous to *Everyman's*. Both are tempted by the lords and goods of this world and both succumb. Of a piece with the symmetry which is one of the distinguishing features of the biography, what R.S. Sylvester aptly calls the work's "correspondent structure,"³ Cavendish views the nadir of Wolsey's moral truancy as coinciding with the pinnacle of his worldly success. For the divorce trial finds Wolsey in the fulness of his power as Lord Chancellor, Cardinal, and Papal Legate de Latere. Morally, however, this point is his nadir, where Wolsey publicly argues for and supports a course of action which he privately knows to be wrong from moral, legal, and even political standpoints. Here Cavendish meticulously records the Cardinal's abject submission to the will of Henry VIII, the price of his fragile magnificence. And to drive home the enormity of Wolsey's infidelity to both God and self, Cavendish strategically positions in obvious contrast sharply etched portraits of those such as the Queen herself, or Ridley, or Fisher, who put principle above the will of man.

The divorce trial, then, climaxes the action of the first half of the biography, exonerating Wolsey if not from complicity in the divorce strategy at least from its invention, and marking both the zenith of the *de casibus* arc and the nadir of the morality play downward movement into sin and neglect of God. What remains for Cavendish is to trace the upward arc of the morality construct, the suffering, penance, confession, and redemption that occur even as Wolsey's public ruin is assured. The possibility of such a spiritual movement, ignored or denied by all Protestant chroniclers and most Catholic ones, tested Cavendish's artistry to the limit, and a consideration of Cavendish's handling of this most difficult problem will occupy the remainder of this paper.⁴

One element that Cavendish takes over from the *de casibus* tradition is the shadowy figure of the goddess of the spinning wheel, Fortuna. However, Cavendish's break with the *de casibus* tradition in his manipulation of Fortune so as to illumine Wolsey's spiritual and moral growth has not been noticed. As Howard Patch and Willard Farnham long ago taught us, the concept of Fortune as it comes down in the literary *de casibus* tradition and the larger culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance is often confused and complex.⁵ Patch enumerates three basic variants in the belief in Fortune during the period, all of which are illustrated in the *Life of Wolsey*. The first is the view of Fortune as simply the name given to blind chance, caprice, an amoral power with vast influence over the lives of men. She is an independent power whose only constant is muta-

bility and her operations follow no discernable plan or pattern. Fortune so appears several times early in the biography, as in Cavendish's lament:

Here may all men note the chances of Fortune, that followeth some whom she listeth to promote, and even so to some her favor is contrary, though they should travail never so much with urgent diligence and painful study, that they could devise or imagine; whereof, for my part, I have tasted of the experience. (p. 11)

This concept of Fortune bears a strong resemblance to that amoral power Machiavelli urges his aspiring Prince to harness.

Another popular conception of Fortune is to see her as a false idol, as the spirit of evil in the world, luring men to trust her, offering them her gifts that she may enslave and destroy them. Still an independent, though now a decidedly immoral power, she is the enemy of the wayfaring Christian and is so attacked from the early Church Fathers to the pulpits of the Renaissance. So Cavendish moralizes:

. . . let all men to whom Fortune extendeth her grace not to trust too much to her fickle favor and pleasant promises, under color whereof she carrieth venomous gall. For when she seeth her servant in most highest authority and that he assureth himself most assuredly in her favor, then turneth she her visage and pleasant countenance unto a frowning cheer and utterly forsaketh him, such assurance is in her inconstant favor and sugared promise. (pp. 13-14)

This fortune resembles the deity to which Sir Thomas Wyatt alternately offered poetic supplications and excoriations.

Both these closely related concepts of Fortune are in evidence all through the narrative of the Cardinal's hasty climb up Fortune's wheel in the first half of the biography. Whether as amoral deity or seductress, Fortune is represented as a force which shares power over man's mortal lot with the Christian God. Cavendish employs this concept as a moralising gloss on Wolsey's rise and a commentary on his values and faith at this stage in his life. In this respect it is congruent with and complementary to Wolsey's well-known reliance on sooth-sayers and fortune tellers.

The specifically Christian conception of Fortune as an instrument in God's plan for the disposition of man and an agent in this world of His will does not appear at all in the references to Fortune which occur prior to Wolsey's fall. For this proper perspective on Fortune, emphasizing her transformation by Christianity into an agency of the divine will, a concept which comes down in literature through Boethius and Dante, must be learned by Wolsey, who in his prosperity relied upon his own quick wit, good luck, and ability to curry favour with the King. As Cavendish represents it in the second part of the biography, the learning experience is both slow and painful for Wolsey, but it is crucial to the process of mortification and purification by which he earns a Christian's death. Cavendish portrays Wolsey's path to true knowledge and repentance in

large part as the result of Fortune's gifts, just as his rise had been. But Fortune's gifts to the man out of her favour resemble not at all her earlier favours, and hardly seem gifts at all from the mortal perspective.

However, Fortune, which has appeared to favour him while actually ensnaring him in the first half of the biography, in the second portion begins to work for Wolsey, although not in the simplistic and erroneous sense he wishes (i.e., the return of his manors, goods, honours, etc.). Instead Fortune offers Wolsey her great true gift: Poverty, a poverty which brings with it freedom from the mental and spiritual bondage to the material. Wolsey resists this gift, to be sure, but therein lies the psychological verisimilitude of his Passion. One further benefit of poverty, as in Chaucer's "balade" on Fortune, is that in such a state one discovers his true friends.⁶ Obviously Wolsey must discover what Sir Thomas More, his successor as Chancellor, had known from the beginning of his service with Henry VIII: the King regarded even his greatest ministers as tools, not friends, mere agents of his will to be discarded or destroyed when no longer useful. While Wolsey is attempting to avoid this painful recognition in the period of his adversity, he soon comes to learn the corollary proposition: the value of true friendship, of which Cavendish himself is the most prominent example. Thus shortly after Wolsey's fall, Cavendish represents him telling Thomas Cromwell that, despite his reverses, "I have cause to rejoice considering the fidelity that I perceive in the number of my servants who will not depart from me in my miserable estate, but be as diligent, obedient, and serviceable about me as they were in my great triumphant glory. . ." (p. 109), even though the Cardinal can no longer pay their wages. Wolsey's growing appreciation of the value of loyalty and unfeigned friendship becomes a prominent motif in the second part of the biography, an early manifestation of his maturing perspective, a motif that includes his tearful address to his retainers and climaxes with the tableau of the small band at his deathbed.

The harder lessons poverty teaches Wolsey is far less ready to learn. In the second part he gives repeated evidence of apparent character growth, of seeing clearly where before the World had clouded his vision, only to have each instance of apparent growth called into question by its context. After having been stripped of his Chancellorship and having his goods confiscated, for example, Wolsey promises his faithful retainers, "I will never hereafter esteem the goods and riches of this uncertain world but as a vain thing. . ." (p. 112), but the sentiment is rendered suspect by its occasion and context. Wolsey after all is offering his servants a promise in place of a paycheque. And a few pages later, when the King, apparently solicitous at the Cardinal's illness, sends Wolsey several cartloads of plate and hangings, the Cardinal snaps them up, "trusting," Cavendish writes, "after this to have much more" (p. 126). Another instance of this apparent moral growth is Wolsey's speech on the supremacy of conscience to Master

Shelley, where he stresses the good advisor's moral duty not to simply feed the monarch's appetite but to press the higher claims of conscience when the king's will conflicts with moral law. Although during the period of his glory Wolsey had never acted on the advice he gives in his adversity, it still seems an impressive statement of abstract principle until the context is considered. The occasion of the speech is that Henry VIII has sent Shelley to require that the Cardinal legally transfer his palace at York, the last of Wolsey's great houses, to the King, and Wolsey is trying to convince Shelley to prevail upon the King to change his mind. However noble it may sound, then, Wolsey's speech on conscience and moral imperatives is anything but detached or disinterested.

One final example of this pattern of moral ambiguity comes from the plans for Wolsey's formal installation as Archbishop at York just prior to his arrest for treason. Here the Cardinal, symbol of pomp and magnificence in the first part of the biography, is presented with a legitimate occasion to indulge these tastes even in adversity. However, Wolsey takes the occasion to renounce pomp and declare his desire for an austere and simple ceremony, his wish "not to go thither [the St. James Chapel at York, site of the installation ceremony] for any triumph or vainglory, but only to fulfill the observances and rules of the church. . ." (p. 152).⁷ However, a short time before, in answering Cavendish's query as to why he had pleaded guilty to the charge of praemunire instead of challenging the King's case against him at trial, Wolsey candidly replied that by so doing he hoped to arouse "a certain prick of conscience" in Henry, hoping that "he would rather pity me than malign me" (p.181). Wolsey's strategy, as he explains it to his gentleman-usher, then, is to appear submissive and pathetic in adversity in hopes of recapturing the King's favour through his pity. At least the bare bones installation service would certainly seem calculated to forward this strategy.

This pattern of Wolsey's apparent desire for the amendment of his life and purification of his spirit, colliding repeatedly with his still glimmering hopes of restitution and his old habits of policy, lifts the narrative of the Cardinal's troubles far above simple sentimentality and pathos. Cavendish gives us a shrewd psychological portrait of a clever and wily man trying to win *both* heaven and earth. It is a portrait calculated to hold the reader's interest by emphasizing Wolsey's very human internal conflict, a struggle which has the further advantage of preparing the reader to accept as earned the authentic insight and genuine epiphany which Cavendish reserves for Wolsey's last sickbed.

This final insight, what R.S. Sylvester calls the tragic *nodus* of the biography, is prompted by the last of Fortune's paradoxical gifts to Wolsey in his decline: the lingering, painful illness which struck him at York and took his life at Leicester Abbey.⁸ While the onset of such a

mortal illness likely strikes the modern sensibility as even less a gift than poverty, to the Renaissance mind such a death properly considered was desirable, as attested by the flourishing *Ars moriendi* tradition. The contemporary *Crafte of Dyinge*, for example, explains that in the illness which precedes death God permits suffering as punishment for sins. As Nancy L. Beaty sums up the contemporary Christian attitude in her study of the *Ars moriendi* tradition, "Just as the contrite sinner offers himself to pain as satisfaction for his sins, so should the sick man; for illness endured rightly (that is, patiently, gladly and 'willfully') is purgatory suffered before death. Since the greater the sin, the greater or longer the illness. . . say, with St. Augustine, 'Here cutt, here brenn, so that thou spare me everlastynglye.'"⁹

That the physical suffering Wolsey endures in his illness is no less cleansingly purgatorial than his mental struggles will emerge from a study of the transformation the once proud and arrogant Cardinal undergoes in his illness. This transformation, designed to exonerate the Cardinal from the chroniclers' charges that he spent his last days in fear and trembling, dying sunk in sin, probably by his own hand, is skillfully orchestrated by Cavendish. Its cornerstone is Wolsey's new insight into the role and nature of Fortune in the affairs of men. Whereas, earlier, Fortune had appeared as an independent or evil force, in his illness Wolsey finally perceives Fortune in the framework of Christian philosophy. On learning that the messenger Henry VIII has sent to convey him to the King's presence is Master Kingston, the Constable of the Tower, Cavendish writes that Wolsey turned to the Earl of Shrewsbury, his host, saying, "Well, sir. . . as God will, so be it. I am subject to Fortune, and to Fortune I commit myself, being a true man, ready to accept such ordinance as God hath provided for me" (p. 176). The comprehension here of Fortune as both subject and agent of God in the working out of the divine plan is thus in stark contrast to the conception of Fortune which attended Wolsey's rise. Wolsey's speech may mark a recognition of the spiritual utility of Fortune's bitter gifts to the fallen prelate; certainly it marks an important step in the Cardinal's belated spiritual and intellectual maturation.¹⁰

As Wolsey's perception of a divine plan in the course of his life replaces the blind goddess of the spinning wheel, so his understanding of his own state and of his fellow man is clarified. Following the Cardinal's speech on Fortune as an instrument of God's ordinance, Master Kingston enters and assures Wolsey that all is for the best, that the King does not believe the charges against the Cardinal, and summons him to London only to aid him in acquitting himself against the accusations of his enemies. But the Cardinal, who has been accustomed to snatching at any shred of evidence which might be interpreted as forecasting a restoration of the King's favour, now exhibits an unexpected attitude reflective of insight painfully won. "Master

Kingston," Wolsey replies, "I thank you for your good news. . . . But, Master Kingston, all these comfortable words which ye have spoken be but for a purpose to bring me in a fool's paradise. I know what is provided for me" (p. 177). That Wolsey has indeed finally attained to a clear-sighted assessment of the situation is evident in the famous "God and King" speech which follows. But between the first evidence of his loss of illusion and the "God and King" speech which follows from it, Cavendish slows the forward movement of the narrative to describe, in embarrassing detail, the nature of Wolsey's illness.

In his consideration of the Cardinal's dysentery, Cavendish seems to display some of his old master's fascination with medicine and amateur diagnosis.¹¹ But the diagnosis Cavendish offers is not just another example of the gentleman-usher's fascination with detail for its own sake; rather it is an integral part of the pattern of purification which Cavendish works out in the final movement of the narrative. Cavendish interprets Wolsey's illness as the result of *cholera adustum*, an excess of the choleric bile which the Cardinal's body is voiding in a series of severe attacks of diarrhea, much enfeebling him physically. According to the Galenic medical theory of the day, an excess of the physical humour within the body was responsible for the appearance of certain personality traits in the individual. From this perspective of the intermixed temperaments, Cavendish's stress on the unpleasant aspects of Wolsey's disease becomes not only comprehensible but an essential part of a larger pattern. For Wolsey had ever been an individual of the choleric type, manifesting those traits of the choleric man enumerated, for example, in the enormously popular *Secreta Secretorum*: light to wrath and pains, of a sharp wit, cunning, of a good memory, a great entrepreneur, and hasty to vengeance—in sum, a cunning and crafty man.¹²

Throughout the biography Cavendish has repeatedly shown Wolsey manifesting, often in a negative manner, all of these traits. A compact illustration would be the anecdote at the opening of the narrative concerning Sir Amias Paulet, who, upon an occasion of some forgotten displeasure against the young schoolmaster, had Wolsey set in the stocks. The incident was "afterward neither forgotten ne forgiven," notes Cavendish (p. 5), who proceeds to detail how, years afterward, when Wolsey had attained to the Lord Chancellorship, he had sought out Paulet and found ways to persecute the country knight, finally restricting him to the Middle Temple where he was constrained to remain for five or six years. The reason, then, for Cavendish's stress on the Cardinal's great "flux," which extends even to an examination of the feces, is to interpret this physical purgation as an extension and symbol of his character transformation from proud and wrathful prelate to meek and humble penitent. The physical purgation is thus a complement to the moral purification wherein the Cardinal finally perceived correctly the true relationship between the operations of Fortune

and God in this world and to the intellectual clarification in which Wolsey at last recognised his state as a fool's paradise and abandoned his illusions about the character of Henry VIII.

To counter the rumours of suicide and the nearly universal belief that Wolsey died confirmed in sin, Cavendish constructed a triple-tiered pattern of purification in the closing movement of his biography. Having illustrated this progressive pattern in the heart, mind, and body of the Cardinal, Cavendish is ready for the final movement in the art of dying well—the purification of the soul. Thus there follows Wolsey's final confession, his refusal, though on his deathbed, to break a fasting day, and the quiet acceptance of his assurance to Master Kingston that "I tarry but the will and pleasure of God, to render unto Him my simple soul into His divine hands" (p. 182); all these prepare the Cardinal to meet a Christian death. First, however, as seal and token of the new man, like Shakespeare's Richard II seeing clearly only at the end, Wolsey delivers his well-known "God and King" speech, recognizing that "if I had served God as diligently as I have done the King, he would not have given me over in my grey hairs" (p. 183) and prophesying future troubles to befall the realm. Here, as R.S. Sylvester notes, "for the first and only time in the *Life* we get a direct and unambiguous description of Henry VIII's true character."¹³ Following this final oration, there remains only for Cavendish to note the administration of the last rites before Wolsey dies, as he had prophesied, as the clock struck eight in the morning.

By keeping his partisan purpose before us, we can recognize that the wave-like movement of the narrative to paired climaxes at the centre and conclusion of the biography is the product of Cavendish's partisan desire to exonerate Wolsey as much as the result of a rigid adherence to a *de casibus* paradigm designed to demonstrate in the Cardinal's career only the end of Pride. An examination of the biography from this perspective reveals that there are two ideological frameworks supporting this structure: the *de casibus* movement in which Wolsey first acquires and then forfeits the false gifts of Fortune, and the moral progression of the morality construct as Wolsey moves from sin to salvation and from ignorance to enlightenment. The two counterpoint each other. Impressive as this careful development of his subject's career is, however, the ultimate test for Cavendish as partisan biographer lay in his ability to convince a skeptical readership of the proud Cardinal's transformation into a contrite, ultimately redeemed, Christian soul. I have tried to show how skilfully Cavendish succeeds in this endeavour by creating what I have called a "purification pattern," a series of staggered and interlocked metamorphoses which change the Cardinal in heart, mind, body, and soul. In his utilisation of traditional moral and literary constructs to organise his materials into a finely articulated narrative which fulfills its stated partisan aim, the exon-

eration of Wolsey, Cavendish demonstrates an artistry and craftsmanship which make the *Life of Wolsey* a classic of Renaissance prose and a model of the partisan biographer's art.

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Notes

- 1 For ease of reading, all citations from the *Life Of Wolsey* are taken from the modernized text edited by R.S. Sylvester and Davis P. Harding, *Two Early Tudor Lives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), and are incorporated into the body of the paper. This modernized text is based on Sylvester's *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey* edited for the Early English Text Society (Oxford University Press, 1959).
- 2 Neither chronicler mentions, as Cavendish does, the public statement of Henry VIII that the Cardinal had not been the origin of his doubt concerning the legality of his marriage. Both prefer to blame Wolsey, and Vergil even represents the king steadfastly resisting the plan, finally moved to consider it only by several of Wolsey's deceptions. On the origin of the divorce plan, Vergil writes, "For it came into his [Wolsey's] head to change his queen and to find a new one, whom he wished to be like him in conduct and character; and this although Queen Catherine did not hurt or damage the fellow, but, hating his evil ways, had sometimes gently admonished him to cultivate self-control." (*The Anglica Historia of Polydore Vergil*, ed. by Denys Hays [London: Royal Historical Society, 1950], p. 325). And both chroniclers give the Queen speeches pointedly accusing Wolsey, as in Hall's *Chronicle* where Catherine declares, "But of this trouble I only maie thanke you my lorde Cardinal of Yorke, for because I have wondered at your high pride and vainglory, and abhorre your voluptuous life, and adhomisable Lechery, and litle regard your presueteous power and tyranny, therefore of malice you have kindeled this fire, and set this matter a broche. . . ." (Edward Hall, *Hall's Chronicle* [AMS reprint of London, 1809 ed.], p. 755.) Hall is also responsible for popularizing the suicide suggestion, as in his account of Wolsey's death: "When the Cardinal saw the capitaine [sic] of the garde, he was sore astonnyed and shortly became sicke, and for that cause men sayd that he willyngly toke so muche quātitie of strong purgacion that this nature was not able to beare it: but Sir William Kyngston comforted him, and by easy iornayes he brought him to the Abbay of Leicester the xxvii. day of November, wher for very feblenes of nature caused by purgacions and vomites he dyed the second night folowyng. . . ." (*Hall's Chronicle*, p. 774.) The story that Wolsey poisoned himself as a cowardly way of escaping the consequences of his crimes died hard. P.L. Wiley notes its reappearance in the 1587 revised edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles* even though the editors of the volume knew Cavendish's *Life* ("Renaissance Exploitation of Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey*," *Studies in Philology*, 43 [1946], 121-46).
- 3 "Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey: The Artistry of a Tudor Biographer*," *Studies in Philology*, 57 (1960), 51. Sylvester's article is the most extensive and perceptive study of Cavendish's achievement I am aware of. More general treatments of the *Life* may be found in Harold Nicholson's *The Development of English Biography* (1928), Donald Stauffer's *English Biography Before 1700* (1930), and Paul M. Kendall's *The Art of Biography* (1965).
- 4 The only writer of the time who is willing to see the Cardinal penitent and redeemed at the end is William Forrest, who stresses this point in his narrative poem the *History of Grisild the Second*. In his discussion of the relationship between the poem and Cavendish's *Life* in Appendix A of the EETS edition of *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, however, R.S. Sylvester sees Forrest's sympathetic account as most probably deriving from Cavendish. He suggests the possibility that Forrest and Cavendish were friends and that the similarities between the poem and the biography may be accounted for by assuming Cavendish showed Forrest the manuscript on which he was working some time before Forrest finished his poem in June 1558.

- 5 See Patch's *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature* (1927) and Farnham's *The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy* (1936).
- 6 *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature* (New York: Octagon Books, 1967), p. 74.
- 7 This is another of those instances in Cavendish's narrative where his facts are diametrically opposed to the chroniclers. Both Hall and Vergil report that Wolsey planned to be installed amidst the grandest pomp imaginable, and both interpret this grand installation as a political ploy by which Wolsey hoped to outflank the king. According to Vergil these grand plans were the last straw for Henry VIII, who had planned only to ruin, not execute the Cardinal. But when the King heard of Wolsey's plans, according to Vergil, he had the Cardinal arrested "to stop him becoming haughtier and acting like a madman." (*Anglia Historia*, p. 333).
- 8 "Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey*: The Artistry of a Tudor Biographer," p. 58.
- 9 *The Craft of Dying: A Study of the Literary Tradition of the Ars Moriendi in England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 14.
- 10 This reading of Cavendish's use of Fortune as carefully controlled to produce a particular artistic effect is thus in opposition to the position that holds Cavendish's references to Fortune are confused or haphazard. F.J. Levy, for example, in arguing for this latter position writes, "Cavendish never really solved the problems he raised. Whether it was Fortune that felled Wolsey, or God's just retribution, or a combination of the two was an unanswerable conundrum: and in Cavendish's mind the pagan goddess and the Hebrew God probably merged more and more into one another." (*Tudor Historical Thought* [San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1967], p. 28).
- 11 Wolsey had a keen interest in medicine. In one of his sicknesses Henry VIII sent several physicians to attend the Cardinal who, Cavendish writes, "took upon him to debate his disease learnedly among them, so that they might understand that he was seen in that art" (p. 125). Wolsey even diagnoses the dysentery that killed him (p. 183). In 1519 Thomas More had written Wolsey warning the Cardinal not to physic himself so much (see *The Life and Death of Cardinal Wolsey*, p. 241n).
- 12 See Walter Clyde Curry, *Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences*, rev. ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1960), pp. 72-73.
- 13 "Cavendish's *Life of Wolsey*: The Artistry of a Tudor Biographer," p. 61.