

Richmond Barbour is Associate Professor of English at Oregon State University, and also the author of *Before Orientalism: London's Theatre of the East, 1576-1626*. *The Third Voyage Journals* will appeal to those interested in the history of trade as well as those interested in maritime history and performance practice. Barbour's notes (pages 255-71) provide a compelling context for the journals, the history of the journeys, and the author's own extensive research. In addition, there is a bibliography of primary sources, an index of persons and places, and a brief index of subjects.

Michael G. Brennan, Noel J. Kinnamon, and Margaret P. Hanney, eds. *The Correspondence (c. 1626-1659) of Dorothy Percy Sidney, Countess of Leicester*. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2010. 227 pp. + 8 illustrations. \$99.95. Review by COLLEEN E. KENNEDY, THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY.

The letters of Dorothy Percy Sidney (1598-1659), Countess of Leicester, reveal a shrewd housewife, doting mother, and unrepentant gossip. This is the first time that her letters have been fully transcribed and edited, and what we learn from this collection are her personal fears and hopes, most reverberatingly, for the well-being of her children. Through the letters, readers learn the costs of establishing the London homestead, Leicester House, and the protracted marriage negotiations for their beloved daughter, Doll. The Countess of Leicester, then, is both a typical matriarch attempting to keep her estate and family in order, and also worthy of study due to the exceptional pedigree of her own and her husband's family dynasties. Her correspondence is thus a fitting addition to the recent Ashgate series, *The Early Modern Englishwoman 1500-1750: Contemporary Editions*.

The three editors have also co-edited another set of Sidney familial correspondence: *Domestic Politics and Family Absence: The Correspondence (1588-1621) of Robert Sidney, First Earl of Leicester, and Barbara Gamage Sidney, Countess of Leicester* (the parents of Dorothy Percy's husband, Robert Sidney), as well as two collections of the works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke (aunt to Robert Sidney).

They are currently working on editing yet another set of Sidney family correspondence. Separately, they have all published on the Herbert and Sidney families, those denizens of early modern English aristocracy associated with Penshurst and Pembroke. Simply put, they have the access and wherewithal to Sidney family archives and are making these materials more accessible for scholars, both by publishing these rare materials and by creating this narrowly focused, yet comprehensive edition that details the Sidney family's place in Caroline and Interregnum England.

In this particular edition, the editors have supplemented the letters with well thought out supplementary materials absolutely needed to keep these impressive families in order. They provide both a Sidney Family Table and Family Tree, a Chronology, and an index of Persons and Places. In addition, they offer helpful footnotes and translate the ciphers used by Dorothy Percy Sidney and her closest allies as they write about sensitive courtly matters in numerical code. Most crucially, however, the editors have provided a lengthy introduction to Dorothy Percy Spencer, her immediate family members, and the precarious position of the Sidneys in the tumultuous mid-seventeenth century. Because of the long list of persons involved in the forty years of correspondence and the repetition of familial names, the correspondence could become quite chaotic, but the highly organized paratext allows for clear and unencumbered readings of the correspondence without distracting or complex referential materials overwhelming the contents of the letters themselves.

The Countess of Leicester was related by marriage to some of the most important English women writers, Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, and Lady Mary Wroth, who depicts Robert and Dorothy as a loving couple in her prose romance *Urania*. Dorothy's marriage, however, was fraught with difficulty. Her husband was a stubborn and high-minded individual capable of holding long-term grudges that affected his political advancement, and he was often gone for extended periods as a foreign ambassador. Her letters reveal that she offers advice, especially on how to act cordial, to her husband, and although his letters are frustratingly not published and maybe not extant, we can tell from her tone that he often loses his temper, but she

does seem to have quite the influence over her husband. She lovingly addresses him as “My Dearest Heart” and in the Introduction, the editors provide the Earl’s mournful recollection of his wife’s last illness and death. Dorothy sleeps in Robert’s bed during his long absence, and several of her letters demonstrate her longing for his embrace.

The letters between the Countess and two of her siblings are equally interesting. Her eldest brother, Algernon Percy, Earl of Northumberland, was her greatest champion, offering advice and support during her husband’s absence and especially during the difficult years of the Civil War. Her younger sister, Lucy Percy Hay, Viscountess of Doncaster and Countess of Carlisle, was a celebrated court beauty and wit, and the sometime mistress of the Duke of Buckingham. In the exchanges between the sisters, Lucy uses her position as Lady of Queen Henrietta Maria’s bedchamber to make advances for her brother-in-law. Lucy’s letters are full of courtly gossip and sartorial news, but she also expresses a dogged loyalty for her sister. Dorothy, in her letters to her husband, expresses admiration for both siblings’ devotion, but she often chides Lucy as vain and flirtatious.

The letters also plot out the rising and falling action of the Earl of Leicester’s political career, demonstrating both the approach of the national Civil War, but also the domestic civil wars as family members claimed opposing allegiances. In the earlier letters, 1626-1643, Robert maintains a series of political, parliamentary, diplomatic, and courtly posts. Even though he sometimes loses favor, his social position is relatively secured. From 1644 until Robert’s death in 1677, he has a break from Charles I and never regains a prominent position again. Readers learn of the burgeoning political careers of the Sidney sons, and after Robert Sidney’s disastrous turn as Lord Deputy of Ireland, the difference between his wife and son Algernon’s increasingly Parliamentary leanings, and the Earl’s own withdrawal from court to Penshurst. One son, Algernon, will eventually be executed for his part in the Rye House Plot while another son, Robert, attended to King Charles II when he returned to England. Dorothy, however, died in 1659, right before the Restoration, but her letters demonstrate how influential and ambitious one aristocratic matriarch could be, even when separated from her husband and writing from her country estate, Penshurst.