

Sophia of Hanover.

***Memoirs (1630–1680)*. Ed. and trans. Sean Ward.**

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In the English-speaking world, Sophia (or Sophie) of Hanover is best known as the German princess who was almost queen of Great Britain. In June 1701, at the age of seventy, she became heiress presumptive following the passing of the Act of Settlement by parliament. For much of the remaining thirteen years of

Sophia's life, it was only Queen Anne who stood between her and the throne. Sophia's death in June 1714 occurred less than two months before Anne's, and thus the Hanoverian rule of Britain began not with Sophia but with her eldest son, George Louis, henceforth known as George I.

Sophia's *Memoirs*, however, date from a much earlier phase of her life. Written in 1681, they cover the time from her birth in 1630 up to the end of 1680, around a year after she had become Duchess of Hanover. They were written, she explains, to cheer herself up during one of the long absences of her husband, Ernest Augustus (1629–98). Despite her melancholic state, she wrote with great humour about the many supporting characters in her life, from royalty and nobility to men and women of dubious repute, and also with great candour, most notably about her husband's infidelity (127–29). Most entertaining are Sophia's avowedly fish-out-of-water accounts of her travels in Italy in 1664–65 (95–117) and her trip to France in 1679 (152–74).

Despite Sophia's place in British history, her *Memoirs* have been translated into English only once before, by H. Forrester (London, 1888). However, Forrester chose to omit around 10 percent of Sophia's text: material that he judged out of keeping with the taste and manners of the age. Not burdened with Forrester's Victorian scruples, Sean Ward's new translation contains all of the deleted text. This ranges from the poignant (such as the candid details of her husband's affairs) to the squalid, in particular a number of episodes that might best be described as evidencing Sophia's "toilet humour," such as her childhood recollections of flinging a urine-soaked handkerchief at a man she considered too crude (40) and giving the gift of a boxed turd to another man who tried to trick her (41), and in later life her suggestion that the sails of a ship were swelled by the escaping winds of a flatulent passenger (150). Ward's edition of Sophia's *Memoirs* is also to be recommended over its nineteenth-century rival on account of its superior scholarly apparatus: Sophia's text is embellished with 321 footnotes (compared to 168 in Forrester's edition), helping the reader get to grips with the dizzying cast of characters and events she discusses, and is prefaced by an excellent thirty-page introduction, which *inter alia* illuminates the matters of protocol that are to be found on nearly every page of the *Memoirs*. Curiously, however, Ward says little about the source material of his edition. It is unclear, for example, whether his translation was made from manuscript or from a published transcription (but as there is no mention of the archive in Hanover which holds the manuscript, one assumes it was the latter). Also, little

is said about the state of Sophia's written French, which is consistently awkward and ungrammatical (even by seventeenth-century standards), which led Forrester to exclaim that Sophia was such a law unto herself with spelling and grammar that she effectively devised her own version of French! Translating Sophia is thus no easy task, but Ward manages to turn her mangled French into very readable English, thanks in no small part to a conscious decision to aim for a conversational tone (28). The result is smooth and lucid, though the presence in the translation of a handful of modern terms—such as “canoodled” (58), “prenuptial agreement” (122), “interior decorator” (123) and “pet project” (174)—is a bit jarring.

As a final point, it is interesting to note that this volume is published in The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe series. At its inception in 1996, the series was devoted to books by women writers who had contributed to the growth of humanism from ca. 1300 to ca. 1800. Sophia's *Memoirs* fall a long way outside this remit; indeed, they contain scant evidence of any kind of intellectual engagement whatsoever, never mind a contribution to any discipline or movement. The *Memoirs* themselves are primarily concerned with issues of pomp and circumstance, descriptions of protocol and etiquette followed and not followed, personal and political machinations, and tales of parties, festivities, and other amusements (especially dancing and gambling), giving the reader the impression that Sophia was little more than a privileged aristocrat with a penchant for gossip and an obsession with rank and status. This impression is unfortunate, as she was a woman of great learning who had important things to say about philosophy, politics, and theology. To find such, one will need to mine her voluminous correspondence.

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Il laboratorio del Rinascimento. Studi di storia e cultura offerti a Riccardo Fubini. Biblioteca 58. Florence: Le Lettere, 2015. Pp. 294. ISBN 978-88-6087-966-0 (paperback) €28.

On the occasion of the eightieth birthday of Professor Riccardo Fubini, sixteen of his colleagues, pupils, and friends decided to put together a collection of