

John Evelyn: A Life of Domesticity. John Dixon Hunt.

Renaissance Lives. London: Reaktion Books, 2017. 328 pp. £14.95.

Only a mulberry tree survives of Evelyn's home, Sayes Court. Until recently, only the diary seemed left of Evelyn. This is no longer so, and this short biography is an accomplished and readable synthesis of modern scholarship. The subtitle proclaims the importance of domesticity, a notion stretching to include the domestication of foreign learning and the natural world. Evelyn's might equally be called a life in translation; above all, it was one informed by a sense of official rectitude that certainly carried a cost, and might have been explored.

After synoptic chapters on Evelyn's early education—mostly through travel, observation, and language learning—the biography moves briskly through the Interregnum; Evelyn's exile; his marriage to Mary, the daughter of the Royalist ambassador to France, Sir Richard Browne; and his settling into the rambling Sayes Court, hard by Deptford dockyard. Retrospectively, these early chapters seem like curtain raisers for the dramatic energies of the Restoration. Evelyn was a Baconian natural philosopher, an intensely curious virtuoso. A driving force in the Royal Society, he was a man of lists more than speculation (152). He chaired its Georgical committee, dealing with all matters agricultural and horticultural. He was active on the language committee, having prescient views on the reform and enrichment of English. These needed discussion. He was involved in vetting elections—he would decline the presidency and a knighthood. A close friend of John Aubrey, he was nevertheless instrumental in blocking Aubrey's other dear friend, Thomas Hobbes, from the society, evidence that Hobbes's problematic exclusion was more than a Presbyterian conspiracy. It is also a topic that might have been aired.

As chapter 8 demonstrates, Evelyn was an exceptionally dedicated administrator under persistently difficult circumstances. He promoted pavements and public libraries (232), was involved in dockyard finances (hence the friendship with Pepys), and was much exercised by the plight of distressed seamen, for whom he could never raise enough money. Eventually, he was treasurer for Queen Mary II's project of the Greenwich naval hospital, working with the architects Wren and Hawksmoor. In 1666, he had produced plans for the rebuilding of London. Yet he was a reluctant courtier. He found the licentiousness and corruption surrounding Charles II repugnant, but worked on regardless. Charles urged him to write a history of the Dutch wars. He started but it remained unfinished, partly, Hunt argues, because of Evelyn's sympathy for the Dutch, and his ambivalence about English policy (an unlikely bedfellow for Andrew Marvell). He then found the Catholicism of James II anathema, but still could not withdraw to tend his gardens. They were, in any case, never a private escape. Evelyn probably regarded gardens much as Justus Lipsius had (*De Constantia*), as realms of divine responsibility and preparation for active engagement with the world. Hunt rightly emphasizes Evelyn's commitments to the active life, but the political dimension of this is underdeveloped; his political writings get scant coverage.

Throughout his adult life Evelyn domesticated the linguistically alien—ancient into modern, and French texts into English—again not without tensions. Hunt suggests that the translation of Lucretius may have been abandoned because Evelyn's piety came into conflict with his Baconianism (77–78). He also wrote works designed to be translated into practice: on salads, garden construction, vineyards, soils, air pollution, and, above all, in *Sylva*, on trees and the need to balance the demands for timber with the imperatives of forestation. Narrowly domestic affairs also created difficulties—he was over-assiduous in educating his son for a gentleman's responsibilities, and tested his wife's understanding through his intense, albeit platonic, relationship with Margaret Blagge. With so many patterns of responsibility, and despite his talented wife's support (242–47), his was bound also to be a life of unfinished business. His magnum opus, *Elysium Britannicum*, valuably discussed (201–28), was conceived as a cooperative work of natural philosophy but remained a heap of manuscript pages at his death. Because, as Hunt argues, Evelyn's life is a window onto his times, it is all too easy to ask for more. But whereas bad books are a waste of trees, ones like this might well have used more timber. I found only two minor errors in naming (150, 323).

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The English Renaissance and the Far East: Cross-Cultural Encounters. Adele Lee. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018. xxxviii + 186 pp. \$90.

Any businessperson who takes a flight from either Beijing or Tokyo to New York will travel east for hours. On return, this same person will fly west for hours. From such a perspective, the term Far East might incline one to ask, "far to the east of where exactly?" Of course, when we bring up the Far East, even when it is a Chinese or Japanese scholar speaking, we mean places that are far to the east of Western Europe. The Far East is, yes, a Eurocentric geographic designation. This study eschews what a reader might expect to be a postcolonial theoretical treatment of such Eurocentric thinking (and the attendant admonishments) and instead focuses on "the degree to which East Asia fascinated, inspired, and challenged a relatively weak and peripheral Europe in the early modern period" (xv). As this study holds throughout, the Edward Said thesis, taken too far east to China and Japan, very much seems a square peg for various round holes. The lords of the Ming dynasty saw England, if they saw England at all, as marginal and insignificant. The daimyo of Japan received the English Protestant cousins of the earlier Portuguese sailors and Jesuit priests as curious barbarians. If we fast-forward to current times, which this study does in its second part, then it may well be that we are in the Pacific century—for example, the iconic Western