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Title of Essay : ‘An Irishwoman Abroad? The Truth of Kit Cavenaugh’

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An Irishwoman Abroad? The Truth of Kit Cavenaugh

“She and her four friends had been somersaulting down the lush green hill, giggling and as skittish as wild colts at play”.¹ The opening line of Anne Holland’s book reads more like a work of fiction than a historical biography. Nonetheless, the book did serve as an introduction to Kit Cavenaugh and led me in search of her reality. The book is based on *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies, commonly call'd Mother Ross; who, in several Campaigns under King William and the late Duke of Marlborough, in the quality of a Foot-Soldier and Dragoon, gave many signal Proofs of an Unparallell'd Courage and Personal Bravery. Taken from her own Mouth when a Pensioner of Chelsea-Hospital, And known to be true by Many who were engaged in those great Scenes of Action*, an 18th century piece describing the amazing and unimaginable feats of one ordinary Irishwoman during the War of the Spanish Succession and the Thirty Years War. Interest in female warriors peaked in the 17th century, leading John A. Lynn to label it a “phenomenon”.² Is *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies* a product of this phenomenon, or is there truth to be gleaned from the account? The memoir contains various unusual features which make it an interesting source to examine.

The text features a number of problematic irregularities throughout. These are not cold hard facts that can be proven to be true or false, but rather improbable events or accomplishments that the author claims to have happened. They are present from the beginning of the text and reappear regularly. As the text begins, Kit describes her home life and family; that they belong to the Church of Ireland, but that they are loyal to King James II, the Catholic monarch. This in itself is quite unusual, as the Protestant population on the

¹ Anne Holland. *The Secret of Kit Cavenaugh: A Remarkable Irishwoman and Soldier*. Cork: Collins, 2013. p.1

² John Lynn. *Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008. Print. p164

whole supported the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and looked to King William III and Queen Mary II to protect their religious rights. However, perhaps her family were one of the exceptions.

Passing over this initial anomaly, the reader goes on to learn of Kit's father's untimely death at the Battle of Aughrim in 1691.³ The State reneges on its word and seizes all of their possessions. The young Kit grieves for her father, and starts being courted by a cousin, a young student Mr. Thomas Howell. The courtship progresses and Howell becomes more insistent and passionate in his love for Kit, which results in Kit giving the young man her maidenhead. This incites feelings of guilt and shame, and results in Kit experiencing a period of depression and being sent to her aunt in Dublin. For four years she worked with her aunt and learned the business, until her aunt died and left everything to Kit. Kit then managed the business and built it up, before being courted by and marrying her servant, Richard Welsh. They spent four years in happy domesticity, and Kit was pregnant with their third child when Richard suddenly disappeared. Having given him up for dead, Kit finally received a letter from him a year later. She then organised her affairs and enlisted in the army, sailed to the Netherlands and was supposedly present at the Battle of Landen in 1693, two years after the Battle of Aughrim, where she received a wound to her ankle.⁴ Obviously this is impossible, as around eleven years have passed since the death of her father, but yet she is on the continent and wounded at the Battle of Landen only two years after his death. This is quite possibly the biggest inconsistency of the text, and one which is immediately evident to anyone who knows Irish history, as the author cleverly omits the exact date of the Battle of

³ Anonymous. *The life and adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies, commonly call'd Mother Ross; who, in several campaigns under King William and the late Duke of Marlborough, in the quality of a foot-soldier and dragoon, gave many signal proofs of Proofs of an unparallell'd courage and personal bravery. Taken from her own mouth when a pensioner of Chelsea-Hospital, And known to be true by Many who were engaged in those great Scenes of Action.* London: R. Montagu, 1740

⁴ Ibid

Aughrim from the memoir. Other inconsistencies only become obvious through a close reading of the text, or after a critical examination of the historiography of the period.

The memoir deals with not only the time Christian spent as a soldier, but also her time after her sex was discovered when she became a camp follower. The culture of the camp follower began to decline in the first half of the 17th century because, according to Lynn, pillaging, a camp follower's most essential function, fell from favour and became obsolete.⁵ State commissioned armies were larger than the previous contract armies, and because the government provided food and clothing for their soldiers, women were an unwanted expense to the army. This transition was not complete by the close of the 17th century, but on the whole it was largely finished. Thus, the livelihood Kit describes after the discovery of her sex has been largely eradicated by that time (the first decade of the 18th century), albeit pillagers and sutlers had not completely disappeared and thus proving she did not live that life is impossible. Another questionable feature of the account is that after major battles, Kit lists all of the fallen generals and captains, but fails to name any of her peers.⁶ While this would not be strange if the soldier in question had a particularly good relationship with any of their superiors, the listing of each one after a battle and the complete omission of comrades, roommates, and possibly friends appears suspicious. Her sex was discovered by surgeons after she was wounded at the Battle of Schellenberg in 1704, a bullet lodged in her hip and while treating the injury they concluded that she was, in fact, a woman. She describes this wound as grievous, and declares that "*to this Day the Wound is open, and has almost deprived me of the use of my Leg and Thigh*".⁷ Yet she never again mentions the wound, and continues to march with the army for a further ten years regardless of the open wound, and after that continued to travel between England and Ireland. Another alleged claim made by

⁵ Lynn. *Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe*.

⁶ Anonymous. *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies*

⁷ Ibid, p.61

Kit in the memoirs mentions how she fell pregnant with her third husband, Davies. At this stage in her life, Christian was approaching fifty years of age, and while it is not altogether impossible that she could become pregnant, in our modern society a woman of that age usually needs medical assistance to become pregnant. One final irregularity in the account is as the memoir draws to a close. The author, “Kit”, has devoted over two hundred pages to describing her life and accomplishments in detail, she summarises her last years in a handful of lines; *“I lived three Years in Chester, and then returned to Chelfea, where I have remained ever since”*.⁸ This is an unusual end to a work which up to that point had been so detailed and descriptive. Kit’s function as a vessel through which to describe King William’s and the Duke of Marlborough’s wars has expired.

While none of these abnormalities or irregularities can be proved to be true or false for certain, nor do they seem overly suspicious on their own, together they create a series of mistakes and incredulous claims that would make any reader question the credibility of the narrator. A historian viewing the piece critically could not observe all these facts and, without any other evidence to discredit the work, take this as a genuine first-hand account.

Extraordinary detail is given by the author in the account of Kit’s life; there are full names, places, dates, and incidents which, it is assumed, only someone who was actually present at the time would know. For example, Christian tells us that her mother’s father was a Reverend Bembrick from Durham in England who had immigrated to Dublin. Details such as these enhance the authenticity of the account, as who would fabricate these unnecessary facts? The account becomes even more detailed as Kit leaves Irish shores for the wars on the Continent, and there are numerous dates, battles, generals, and events listed. The author’s knowledge of European affairs is certainly superior to their knowledge of Ireland. The narrator gives us a lot of specific information regarding the people she met on her adventures,

⁸ *ibid*, p.204

such as Musefa the Elector of Hanover she met after enlisting (if she was present at Landen, it would presumably have been circa 1692). Considering the detail in which the author describes Kit's life in the army in Europe, this is a considerable slip up, as Ernest Augustus had been appointed Elector of Hanover in 1692, and ruled until his death in 1698.⁹ He was not, as Kit describes the Elector, a Turk. This careless fabrication of a person, especially such a well-known figure of his day who is documented, doesn't bode well for the existence of the minor characters named in Kit's narrative.

While she, again quite unusually, neglects to name her peers and comrades in the army, focusing instead on her superiors, she cannot help but name ordinary people she encounters in her early life in Ireland. While Irish historical documents are, for the most part, incomplete or destroyed, there are still avenues to explore when trying to verify the facts of Kit's account. First and foremost, Kit's father was allegedly a Jacobite. Not only that, but Kit boasts that he commanded his own company of horse, which was called 'Cavenaugh'. There is no record of any Cavanagh, Cavenaugh, Kavanagh, or Cavenagh in Simm's *List of Irish Jacobites* from Kildare or Dublin.¹⁰ The only Cavenaugh (or variation) are from the Wexford/ Carlow area, an area populated by the old tribe of MacMurrough-Cavanaghs, and where the surname Kavanagh is still prevalent today. Additionally, in John D'Alton's *King James' Irish Army List*, the only Cavenaugh listed is a Lieutenant Thomas Cavenaugh in Lord Dongan, the Earl of Limerick's, Regiment of Dragoons. Furthermore, D'Alton lists no company of horse called 'Cavenaugh', and after his detailed accounts of the members of each regiment and company, he states that "*All the foregoing Regiments of Horse were engaged at Aughrim*".¹¹ Thus, it can be assumed that her father did not command a company of horse consisting of his workers and tenants. This suggests that either her father was not a supporter

⁹ "Ernest Augustus." *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Web.

¹⁰ J.G. Simms. "Irish Jacobites." *Analecta Hibernica* 22 (1960). JSTOR. Web. 12 Mar. 2014.

¹¹ John D'Alton. *Illustrations, Historical and Genealogical, of King James's Irish Army List (1689)*. Dublin: Author, 1860. p.254

of King James, did not own a farm in Kildare with tenants, or that he did not exist. Either way, this is further proof that the author has lied in the narrative, which further devaluates the work as a primary source.

Additionally, there is a lack of evidence for any of the facts Kit states during her life in Ireland. In the Depositions of 1641, there is no record of any Cavanaugh family in Kildare.¹² While it may be taken that the family were not from the locality and they may have moved there shortly before or after Kit's birth (given as 1667), there is no evidence of any Cavanaugh, or variation, in the Abstracts of Wills from the *Registry of Deeds, Dublin*.¹³ Again, 'Cavanaugh' fails to make an appearance in Pender's Census, as either a 'Titulado' ("referring to the principal person or persons of standing in any particular area") or in the Irish family surname list for Leixlip or Dublin.¹⁴ Furthermore, there is no mention of their alleged neighbour, the farmer Mr. Ascham. The last source examined in the search for the Cavanaugh family, and Kit herself, was the *Statute Staple Books* of 1596-1687. Her father, as well as owning a farm in Leixlip, was also claimed to have been a brewer and a maltster in Dublin. In the entire Staple Books, there is no listing for any debtor or creditor in the city of Dublin with the surname of Cavanaugh, or any variation.¹⁵ Similarly to the indiscretions and anomalies in the text, any of these absences from documents would not, on their own, be sufficient to draw conclusions, but grouped together they heavily imply that there was no family of Cavaughns in Dublin or Leixlip, who supported King James II, in this period. In the interest of a balanced argument, it must be documented that in the *Registry of Deeds*, a Daniel Forrest mentions his late brother, Charles, in his will, and states that he was an

¹² 1641 Depositions. Trinity College, Dublin, Web. 6 Aug. 2014. <<http://www.1641.tcd.ie>>.

¹³ P. Beryl Eustace. *Registry of Deeds Dublin: Abstracts of Wills ... 1708-1745 ..* Dublin: Stationery Office, 1956. Print.

¹⁴ Séamus Pender. *A Census of Ireland, circa 1659, with Supplementary Material from the Poll Money Ordinances (1660-1661)*. Dublin: Stationary Office, 1939. Print

¹⁵ Jane H. Ohlmeyer and Éamonn Ó Ciardha. *The Irish Statute Staple Books, 1596-1687*. Dublin: Dublin, 1998. Print

Alderman in the city of Dublin.¹⁶ This may be Kit's Alderman, or it may be a complete coincidence, the inability to confirm any other facts she gave about her life would suggest the latter.

While Irish records can be quite unreliable when endeavouring to locate an ordinary man, English Church records, which were kept by law from the mid-16th century by the command of King Henry VIII, are much more available. Upon inspection there is no account of Bryan Bembrick, supposedly her mother's father, (or any Bembrick at all) in all of the county of Durham in the whole of the 17th century.¹⁷ As well as this, the only record of any variation of 'Howell' in Shropshire from 1700 to 1739 is the marriage of a Thomas Howells in 1717, however this cannot be Kit's Thomas Howell as she claims she met him circa 1716-18 in Ireland, when he was already married with eleven children and subsequently committed suicide a few months later.^{18,19} As both men mentioned were allegedly Reverends in the counties of Durham and Shropshire, and subsequently the men who kept the parish records, the notion that neither of these men recorded any baptisms, burials, or marriages in their families throughout their lives is ludicrous. Moreover, a very reliable source is the archives at Trinity College, Dublin. Their archives are in excellent condition and they begin in 1592 when the University was created. Kit mentions that her suitor and cousin, Thomas Howell, was a student at the University when he was courting her. Trinity College's records show that there was no Thomas Howell studying there in the early 1690s, but that in 1695 a young man by that name of sixteen years old was admitted.²⁰ Is this Kit's Thomas Howell? If so, why don't the dates match up? As such, because of the lack of evidence to back up any of the details Kit provides about her life and acquaintances in Ireland and England, modern

¹⁶ Eustace. *Registry of Deeds Dublin*. p. 104, entry 245

¹⁷ "England Births and Christenings 1538-1975, England Marriages 1538-1973." *Dusty Docs*. Web.

¹⁸ "Full Text of "Shropshire Parish Registers"" *Archive.org*. Web.

¹⁹ Anonymous, *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies*, pp 196-8

²⁰ Trinity College, Dublin Archive. Accessed 04.01.2014 via correspondence with the Provost's Office.

historians cannot hope to use these sections of the memoir as primary evidence, and it calls the credibility of the document as a whole into question.

Taking into consideration the falsification of facts dealing with Kit's life and family in Ireland, some of her alleged feats and actions on the Continent can be called into question. There are many instances when the historian would call Kit's honesty into question, such as the time she came face to face with her first cousin repeatedly while in the guise of a soldier, and yet he did not recognise her at all, when she claims to have taken a match from a hesitating soldier and lit the canon (after the discovery of her sex) thus initiating fire on a town they were besieging, or the time when she happened upon a tent of Officers in England and they got her drunk on expensive wine before paying her a shilling each for the gift of a kiss (keeping in mind Kit was around fifty years old and, by her own admission, was missing many teeth and had gotten fat).²¹ Such allegations are curious and, while they cannot be proven to be false, they hint that the narrator is exaggerating her adventures for ulterior motives. Some claims, such as the Prince of Orange himself becoming concerned for Kit in her intense grief for Richard, can obviously be attributed to propaganda, while others, such as Kit's mother who "*tho' upwards of a hundred Years of Age, travelled ten Miles on Foot*" to meet her may just be to serve plot purposes.²² The idea that the Prince of Orange's tent was so close to Kit, the pillager's, tent is unthinkable. Amid the noise and bustle of camp life, the prince's tent would have had to have been almost beside Kit's to hear her cries, and with the rigorous class system in Early Modern armies, this is highly unlikely.

Kit's exaggerations and questionable claims always emphasise that she was braver and stronger and bolder than any man, a woman who went to war and excelled in it. It doesn't state exactly what year the author is purported to have recorded Kit's memoirs, but from the

²¹ Anonymous, *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies*, pp.32, 134, 190

²² *Ibid*, pp. 146,184

language she uses towards the end of the piece it was between 1727 and 1739, which makes Kit between sixty and seventy-two years of age. Although elderly, Kit supposedly still remembers every battle, general, commander, conference, date, and place. Her descriptions and facts given about battles and monarchs or other leaders can all be verified, so how does a woman of her age remember every detail of events that happened up to half a century before? Again, this is something which on its own would seem extraordinary, but when viewed in the light of all the allegations discussed previously, seems utterly outlandish. Her claims of meeting the famous leaders of the day and interacting with them, of finding glory on the battlefield, and of enforcing the ideal that in the face of war one may be reunited with their true love all serve to encourage young men to enlist in their search for adventure. Nowhere in Kit's memoirs does one read about the starvation and fatigue experienced by many in the army. In one instance, she mentions two soldiers who froze because of harsh weather conditions, but they are barely given a line in the story. Yet again, while none of these can be disproved, together with the false details given earlier and viewed as a whole, these allegations seem too far-fetched to be true.

While *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies*, is claimed to have been taken "from her own mouth", the authorship of the piece has never been proven.²³ A century after the memoir was published it was included in a compilation of works accredited to Daniel Defoe.²⁴ The assumption of his authorship was not questioned until recently, when academics began to critically examine *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies* against some of Defoe's other works, such as *Memoirs of a Cavalier; or A Military Journal of the Wars in Germany, and the Wars in England. From the Years 1632 to 1648. Written threescore years ago, by an English gentleman, who served first in the army of Gustavus*

²³ Anonymous. *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies*, p.1

²⁴ Daniel Defoe. *The Novels and Miscellaneous Works of Daniel De Foe*. Comp. George Chalmers. Oxford: Printed by D.A. Talboys, for Y. Tegg, London, 1840. Print.

Adolphus, the Glorious King of Sweden, till his death, and after that in the Royal Army of King Charles the First, from the beginning of the Rebellion to the end of the War. Defoe, who was devoted to the Williamite cause, was a known intelligence gatherer, writer, and master of propaganda to the King.²⁵ The account of Christian Davies' life is peppered with praise for the King of Orange, from relaying words of praise from the mouths of his enemies to personal acts of kindness he bestowed on Kit.²⁶ Defoe wrote opinionated pieces on party policies, economic plans, and foreign policy, but Dr. David Macaree argues that "Defoe's most enduring propaganda assignment... was to discredit Jacobitism".²⁷ In *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies*, it is mentioned that the Prince of Conti writes in one of his letters that William deserves the Crown of England because of his bravery on the battlefield, Kit, as an ordinary foot soldier, could not have known the contents of the private letters of the monarchy, and so this is blatantly an embellishment- and one which serves the purposes of propaganda.²⁸

However, just because Defoe fulfils most of the criteria for the author of this piece, this does not mean that it was automatically so. Lynn and Scarlet Bowen both dismiss the idea that Defoe was the author of the memoir.²⁹ Anti- Jacobite feeling was rife among the majority of the people of England who sought to protect their religious beliefs through the Protestant sovereigns William and Mary. Defoe was known to have had a very traditionally myopic view of Ireland.³⁰ In Defoe's view, it was a colony whose only purpose was to support England economically. He once said Ireland was to Britain as the workhouses were

²⁵ John Robert Moore. "Daniel Defoe: King William's Pamphleteer and Intelligence Agent." *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 34.3 (1971)

²⁶ Anonymous, *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies*

²⁷ Margaret Steele. "Daniel Defoe and the Jacobite Movement by David Macaree." *The Scottish Historical Review* 63.176 (1984), p. 204

²⁸ Anonymous, *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies*, p. 24

²⁹ Lynn. *Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe*, p. 173

³⁰ David Macaree. "Daniel Defoe, "The True-Born Englishman," and Irish Affairs." *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 8.1 (1982), p.17

to the towns of England.³¹ Defoe is even recorded as having wandered away from his hero, King William's, party as they left London for Ireland, as he was distracted by the countryside along the way.³² For a man with little or no interest in the country or its people, a good portion of the story gives details of people and places, though these details have been found not to be accurate. Why bother make Christian Davies an Irishwoman at all, if her nationality need not be specified? One argument is that some authors disassociate their characters from their society to allow them to go to certain places and act in ways that members of their society could not. Rudyard Kipling uses this device in his novel *Kim*, where the eponymous hero is not of English descent, but Irish. This makes it acceptable for him to mingle with Indian natives and act barbarically. Another reason could be because Christian Davies, or Kit Cavanaugh, was in fact Irish. An entry in Sir Sidney Lee's *Dictionary of National Biography* references Abel Boyer's *Political State of Great Britain* which records a "Mrs. Christiana Davies" who fought with The Inniskilling Dragoons at the battle of Aughrim.³³ Perhaps Defoe recreated the Ireland of Kit Cavanaugh using a model of rural England, or perhaps another aspiring writer used Defoe as his model to write fictional memoirs in praise of King William. Either way, it is obvious from the anomalies present in the text that the author was definitely not Christian Davies, or Kit Cavanaugh, or Mother Ross, but rather a third party using her story as a medium to praise King William and discourage Jacobite sentiments.

When examining the validity of any document, one cannot just take the anomalies, inaccuracies, or exaggerated claims as the only evidence. The style of the piece and the way in which the narration is written have a huge part to play in determining the legitimacy of the work. *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies* has very distinct styles of narration. There are two easily identified types; the personal narrator and the reporter. The account

³¹ Macaree. "Daniel Defoe, "The True-Born Englishman," and Irish Affairs."

³² Ibid, p.19

³³ George Smith and Sidney Lee. "Christian Davies." *The Dictionary of National Biography*. London: Oxford UP, 1953, pp.138-9

begins in the style of the personal narrator, and it continues in that vein describing Christian's life up to when she joins the army. As soon as battle commences, the narrative style immediately switches to a more journalistic style. It soon becomes clear to the reader that rather than give an honest account of Kit's life, this memoir serves to give an honest and extremely detailed account of William of Orange and the Duke of Marlborough's wars. After she leaves Ireland, the account becomes increasingly factual and detailed in aspects of war. Interestingly, Part II of the memoir contains more personal than journalistic style narration, especially after the discovery of her sex. At one point, Kit actually makes an outright reference to her audience as she makes the transition from one narrative style to the next; "*I believe I shall not displease my Readers, by taking a step into Italy, and giving a short Account of the Situation of Affairs in Savoy*".³⁴ Unusually, when describing the Battle of Wenedal, Kit begins with the usual, detached narrative style, but then suddenly changes to personal narration when describing what booty she acquired after the battle, and what it was sold for. The variation in narrative style shows that this is certainly not a first-hand account of the war, and also illustrates that the author was not a very experienced writer as the transitions are obvious and clumsy.

As well as the contrasting narrative styles, there are various literary devices in the memoir that suggest that it is not a first-hand account. The piece begins by describing Kit and her friends at their play. She constantly mentions grey horses in her childhood (a nod to her later position in the Regiment of the Scot's Greys) and that she injured one of the horses, and so had to bring a cup of ale to a local labourer who had seen the incident every night for "*a considerable Time*", this echoes her later duties as a camp follower when she brings ale to Richard and his comrades.³⁵ Additionally, when Richard disappears and writes her twelve letters, one a month for a year, and he then resolves to cease writing after the twelfth letter, it

³⁴ Anonymous, *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies*, p.96

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 6

adds to the dramatic effect that she should finally receive the last letter thus beginning her adventures. One final dramatic embellishment found in the account is the echo of an incident from her childhood when Kit is on the front line. When she takes a match and lights the cannon, and then falls over and is rewarded twice what she was promised, it is an exact replica of an incident at the beginning of the story when she and her friends are dared to show their underclothes to a gentleman. Yet again, she reinforces the notion that he (or she) who is the boldest and the bravest will receive rewards and glory, encouraging men to sign up and emanate these virtues. However, Lynn reminds us that “*their [women soldiers’] stories were usually a long way from the pursuit of love and glory presented in the songs of the day*”.³⁶ Yet the young men of the period did not have any knowledge of the realities of camp life.

Literature began to become cheaper and more widely available, thus as a result of popular culture and the political climate of the period “*the ‘true’ story of a woman soldier’s life became a seventeenth and eighteenth century literary genre*”.³⁷ Interest in the woman soldier peaked in the 17th century, with Jacques Du Bosc’s ‘*La Femme héroïque*’ published in 1645, and Pierre Le Moyne’s much more successful ‘*La Galerie des femmes fortes*’ in 1647.³⁸ However, commenting on Kit’s memoir, Lynn argues that it “*lacks much of the romantic nonsense of the French volumes and speaks with some authority about camp life*”, this is not to say that it should be taken at face value, as perhaps a French novelist and an English novelist would differ in style according to what was accepted by their society, but Lynn does go on to add that the work “*is padded with historical reports on the War of the Spanish Succession across Europe, facts Davies probably would not have known*”, and as such, again, Kit’s memoir is found to have little credibility.³⁹ Examining the evidence here

³⁶ Lynn, *Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe*, p.165

³⁷ *Ibid*, p.169

³⁸ *Ibid*, p.167

³⁹ *Ibid*, p 173

with literary devices and literary trends, it is not outlandish to label *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies* as literature, rather than as a historical document.

The overwhelming evidence that points towards the memoirs of Kit Cavanaugh belonging to literature rather than history leads to us the question, did Kit really exist? Was there a Christian Davies who served in the army? One undisputable fact remains, that there is no evidence of any grave for any Christian Davies in the cemetery of the Royal Hospital in Chelsea, even though the memoir states that she was buried there with full military honours in 1739. Seeing as the memoir was first published in 1741, it seems ludicrous to assert something as specific as that in the hope that readers would not deem it worth their while to check. However, “*recent scholarship establishes that she was quite real and lived to receive a pension*”, and contemporary sources reinforce this statement.^{40,41} With records of her becoming a Chelsea pensioner in 1717 Christian Davies certainly existed, but did Kit Cavanaugh?

None of the facts given by the author relating to Ireland or Kit’s time here have given the historian any reason to believe their authenticity. Her own surname, Cavanaugh, and her father’s support of King James both imply that she descended from the Old Irish, and yet she insists her family belongs to the Church of Ireland and she enlists to fight for King William III. Her surname insinuates one version of herself, while she projects another. Perhaps, when writing, the author had no knowledge of Irish politics or the divide in the country between the Irish and Old English, and New English. Another curiosity is when she mentions her nationality, which she does a handful of times throughout the memoir. It is brought up multiple times close together, as if the author forgot to put it in earlier in the narrative, and then it is hardly mentioned again except when she travels to Dublin. Initially she seems proud

⁴⁰ Lynn, *Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe*. p. 173

⁴¹ Letter from the Secretary of War to the Commissioners of Chelsea Hospital, 19th July 1717, PRO WO 4/20, fol. 182 in Easton “Gender’s Two Bodies: Women Warriors, Female Husbands and Plebian Life”, p. 144

to be Irish, asserting that “*had not the Courage of my Countrymen, so much despised in England...*” been present, Prince Eugene’s possession of Cremona, Italy, might have failed.⁴² Later in the piece she mentions that she spoke to someone “*in the Brogue*”, implying that she doesn’t have an Irish accent all the time.⁴³ Why would the author make Kit an Irishwoman? Perhaps, as discussed earlier, it is a form of disassociation. They want to incite men to join up, as even women are winning glory and having adventures on the Continent, while at the same time not condoning this sort of behaviour for Englishwomen. Irishwomen were viewed as ‘other’ and could participate in cross-dressing and battle without causing too much of a shock to polite English society. Evidently, from the lack of research put into Kit’s background and Irish affairs, Irish people were not the intended audience for this piece of literary propaganda. The author clearly does not expect any Irish man or woman in 1741 to read this, as they would undoubtedly know the year of the Battles of the Boyne and Aughrim, they would be able to ascertain whether there was a family of Cavenaugh in Leixlip or Dublin, and they would see through the absurdity of a Jacobite Protestant with the surname of Cavenaugh living in Co. Kildare.

However, the entry found in Boyer’s *The Political State of Great Britain* does record that Christian Davies was an Irishwoman, albeit one who fought for William at Aughrim.⁴⁴ Another twist is that Davies would not have received a pension for fighting at Aughrim, and so the true identity of Kit Cavenaugh eludes us once more. Whether she was an Irishwoman through her author’s choice or by birth, or whether she was not, does not distract from her tale. Indisputably a work of literature rather than a valid historical document, the work still has much to tell historians about different aspects of camp life. The author may have been writing from first-hand experience, or he may have interviewed the veterans who returned,

⁴² Anonymous, *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies*, p.54

⁴³ Ibid, p.111

⁴⁴ Smith, George, and Sidney Lee. "Christian Davies." *The Dictionary of National Biography*. London: Oxford UP, 1953, pp.138-9

but either way Kit's anecdotes of a soldier committing bestiality and his sentence, the details of the dangers and realities of pillaging, and the intricate description of the ritual of a camp marriage and the codes they lived by can be of great value to any historian wishing to explore camp life, and particularly a woman's role in the camp. It is certainly not a valid stand-alone source, but examined in conjunction with other contemporary sources and academic research on the topic, it can be used as one of many keys to unlock the past.

Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. But there is too much evidence against the validity of Kit Cavanagh's account to take it as factual. As stated, it does give us insight into ordinary camp life, but the absence of any proof for her statements, and the multiple inconsistencies and fanciful tales discredit the work, and thus it is evident that it can only be used as a companion or in comparison with other sources, and that it carries no weight as a first-hand account of Kit's life. While most academics already regard the work as literature rather than fact, publications such as Holland's *The Secret of Kit Cavanaugh* prove that an examination of the source is vital to define the status of the work once and for all. How could a modern historian take this work as accurate, given all of the evidence? Lynn suggests that "*the authority of the printed page gave these accounts more weight, which could be misleading to the naïve*", and it certainly served to give *The Life and Adventures of Mrs. Christian Davies* more weight than it deserved.⁴⁵ Hence, the holes in the piece must be acknowledged and the memoir stripped of having any semblance of authority. Seeing as the only facts we can accept as truth from the memoir are the ones reinforced by other documents, how can anyone argue that this is a valid historical document?

⁴⁵ Lynn. *Women, Armies, and Warfare in Early Modern Europe*, p. 169

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