MARGARET CAVENDISH

Gender, Science and Politics

LISA WALTERS

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It is often thought that the numerous contradictory perspectives in Margaret Cavendish's writings demonstrate her inability to reconcile her feminism with her conservative, royalist politics. In this book Lisa Walters challenges this view and demonstrates that Cavendish's ideas more closely resemble republican thought, and that her methodology is the foundation for subversive political, scientific and gender theories. With an interdisciplinary focus Walters closely examines Cavendish's work and its context, providing the reader with an enriched understanding of women's contribution to early modern scientific theory, political philosophy, culture and folklore. Considering also Cavendish's ideas in relation to Hobbes and Paracelsus, this volume is of great interest to scholars and students of literature, philosophy, history of ideas, political theory, gender studies and history of science.

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Abbreviations

Works by Margaret Cavendish

APC	'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' [1656]. *Margaret Cavendish: The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley. London: Penguin Books, 1994, 45–118.
NP	*Natures Pictures Drawn by Fancies Pencil to the Life*. London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1656.
OUEP	*Observations upon Experimental Philosophy, To which is added, The Description of a new Blazing World*. London: A. Maxwell, 1666.
PF	*Poems and Fancies*. London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1653.
PL	*Philosophical Letters: or, Modest Reflections Upon Some Opinions in Natural Philosophy, Maintained by Several Famous and Learned Authors of This Age, Expressed by Way of Letters*. London, 1664.
PPO	*Philosophical and Physical Opinions*. London, 1663.
TBW	'The Blazing World' [1666]. *Margaret Cavendish: The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley. London: Penguin Books, 1994, 119–225.
TC	'The Contract' [1656]. *Margaret Cavendish: The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley. London: Penguin Books, 1994, 1–44.
TPPO	*The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*. London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655.
TWO	*The Worlds Olio*. London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655.

Introduction

> But this Age hath produced many effeminate Writers, as well as Preachers, and many effeminate Rulers, as well as Actors. And if it be an Age when the effeminate spirits rule, as most visible they doe in every Kingdome, let us take the advantage, and make the best of our time, for feare their reigne should not last long; whether it be in the Amazonian Government, or in the Politick Common-wealth, or in flourishing Monarchy, or in Schooles of Divinity, or in Lectures of Philosophy, or in witty Poetry, or any thing that may bring honour to our Sex.
>
> Margaret Cavendish, *Poems and Fancies*, 1653, Aa1v[1]

In *Poems and Fancies*, Margaret Cavendish's first publication, she claims that she was living in an era where 'effeminate spirits rule'; that she was experiencing an age where women actively engaged in politics, philosophy and theology. Cavendish has been described by scholars as an absolutist and a royalist,[2] yet she lists female 'Preachers', the radical puritans of the English civil war, as honorary and exemplary women who also

[1] This quotation can be found in the signature pages after page 160 in *Poems and Fancies*.

[2] For examples of the common assertion that Cavendish was a royalist or absolutist, see Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green, 'Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle', in *A History of Women's Political Thought in Europe, 1400–1700* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 215; Deborah Boyle, 'Fame, Virtue, and Government: Margaret Cavendish on Ethics and Politics', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67.2 (2006): 282; Gary Schneider, 'Royalist Approaches to the Civil War and Commonwealth in Familiar Letter Collections', *Renaissance Studies* 24.4 (2009): 561–2; and Sujata Iyengar, 'Royalist, Romancist, Racialist: Rank, Gender, and Race in the Science and Fiction of Margaret Cavendish', *English Literary History* 69.3 (2002): 649–72. Cavendish's writings have also been compared with *Eikon Basilike*, a text claimed to be authored by Charles I, which defended the King's actions and the royalist cause. See Anne Elizabeth Carson, 'The Hunted Stag and the Beheaded King', *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900* 45.3 (2005): 544, and Holly Faith Nelson and Sharon Alker 'Memory, Monuments, and Melancholic Genius in Margaret Cavendish's *Bell in Campo*', *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 21.1 (2008): 35. Critics now refer less often to Cavendish as an absolutist. However, in the 1980s and 1990s important, groundbreaking criticism did define Cavendish as a proponent of absolutism. See Catherine Gallagher, 'Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England', *Genders* 1 (1988): 24–39, and Kate Lilley, 'Introduction', in *Margaret Cavendish: 'The Blazing World' and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (London: Penguin Books, 1994), xiv.

'bring honour to our Sex'.[3] What does it mean that the 'royalist' Margaret Cavendish considers puritans to be honorary and exemplary women? This study aims to reconsider claims of scholars who consider Cavendish a royalist or a hierarchical thinker, by exploring the interconnections among her ideas about gender, science and politics which emerge in her prose fiction, poetry and scientific treatises. Cavendish suggests that women can excel in 'the Politick Common-wealth' and 'Lectures in Philosophy'; these were topics that Renaissance people would have known as science. Hence, Cavendish argues here that the masculine world of science and politics can provide honourable pursuits for women whether they are 'effeminate rulers' or puritan 'Preachers'.

The 'royalist' Cavendish's praise of radical puritan women is paralleled by admiration expressed for Cavendish from across the political spectrum by Sarah Jinner, who referred to the Restoration of the English monarchy as an 'Evill'.[4] In her 'Almanack', Jinner provides medical recipes, astrology and advice to a popular audience, and assuages what she believes will be her readers' anxiety on seeing 'one of our Sex in print especially in the Celestial Sciences' by invoking prominent women, including her contemporary Margaret Cavendish, to justify her own entrance into print culture and her own intellectual authority. She argues: 'What rare Poets of our sex were of old? and now of late the Countess of Newcastle.'[5] We are thus presented with the question: why would the middle-class Jinner, who believed the Restoration 'Evill', choose to identify with the supposedly royalist and aristocratic Cavendish? Cavendish herself contends in *Sociable Letters* that women are not 'bound to State or Crown': since women are 'not Citizens in the Commonwealth', they should not be deemed 'Subjects to the Commonwealth'.[6] Thus, Cavendish argues, remarkably, that women need not bear loyalty to their monarch, to their kingdom or to a political party, although later she does concede that women are, at times, subject to their husbands.[7] Mihoko Suzuki reminds us that early modern women were

[3] Cavendish does not always portray puritan women as exemplary, complaining elsewhere in *Poems and Fancies* that they 'Preach *false Doctrine* in a Tub'. *PF* A4r2.

[4] Jinner 'heartily wish[es]' in 1660, the year of the Restoration, 'that the Evill that is threatned may be turned from us by Prayer' and claims that 'Much of our evill that will befall us, is like to be occasioned by the evill minds of some in Power.' The evil minds of those in power are presumably those associated with the newly restored King, Charles II. Sarah Jinner, *An Almanack or Prognostication for the year of our Lord 1660* (London, 1660), A2r8.

[5] Sarah Jinner, 'An Almanack or Prognostication for the year of our Lord 1658', in Alan S. Weber (ed.), *Almanacs* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 17.

[6] Margaret Cavendish, *CCXI Sociable Letters* (London, 1664), 27.

[7] *Ibid*., 27.

expected to share the political affiliations of their husbands and fathers.[8] Cavendish turns this notion on its head, to suggest that if women are not full political subjects, then they are not obliged to maintain loyalty to the state and sovereign. This claim of Cavendish's, that women are not morally or politically obligated to have allegiance to their monarch, certainly challenges common assumptions about Cavendish's alleged royalism and the depth of her commitment to monarchy.

In the Renaissance, the feminine ideals of silence, obedience and chastity were perceived as intrinsically linked, and in theory women were meant to subscribe to them. Except in the case of female monarchs, that is, queens, women were not expected to have complete political subjectivity. The everyday lives of women, however, were much more complex than this strictly proscriptive rubric. Sarah Mendelson and Patricia Crawford have demonstrated that in reality, middle- and lower-class women performed a range of paid and unpaid work from manual labour, crafts, service, teaching and running businesses, to prostitution and theft.[9] Early modern women, however, were understood to be much more sexual, carnal, unruly and inconstant than men. Hence, women were believed to be in need of male governance and authority. But gender was only one facet of a complex nexus of hierarchical relations during the Renaissance, and men also were expected to demonstrate obedience to their superiors. Ann Hughes has argued that during the early modern period, 'all hierarchical relationships were seen as inextricably connected': fathers, kings and God were comparable in their authority, 'and each type of rule was a model for, and helped to justify, the others'.[10] Further chapters in this book will describe ways in which Cavendish's science challenges such suppositions.

Cavendish was one of the most fascinating and extraordinary intellectual figures in the seventeenth century. She is most remarkable for being a woman who published an extensive oeuvre on natural science, yet she was also the first woman to attend a meeting of the Royal Society, and she corresponded with and sometimes influenced contemporary intellectuals and philosophers.[11] While aristocratic women in the seventeenth century were

[8] Mihoko Suzuki, *Subordinate Subjects: Gender, the Political Nation, and Literary Form in England, 1588–1688* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003). Suzuki further argues that both apprentices and wives 'were excluded from being political "subjects" because they were supposedly represented by their masters and husbands'. *Ibid*., 145.

[9] Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England, 1550–1720* (Oxford University Press, 2003, 256–344). Even aristocratic women managed large estates, supervising and organizing servants and children.

[10] Ann Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 65.

[11] For example, Cavendish participated in epistolary debates with Constantijn Huygens. The elevation of other female intellectuals, such as Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–78) and Princess

indeed expected to read and write, this expectation did not quite extend to the act of publication, which presumably would have violated the feminine ideal regarding silence. Hence Sarah Jinner's expression of concern over women's writing appearing in print manifests the anxiety surrounding female publication itself, and its 'immodesty'. An aristocratic culture also generally preferred manuscript circulation over print as a means to circulate ideas and thoughts. Nevertheless, Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle, was one of the more prolific authors in early modern print. Over nearly twenty years, she published twenty-three volumes, writing in almost every available genre of her time: scientific treatises, poetry, prose fiction, plays, orations, romance, fictional letters and science fiction. It is important to put this effort into its cultural context: although during the civil war women increasingly appeared more in print, before the civil war of 1640, only half of one per cent of all published books were by women.[12]

Cavendish's work also demonstrates a profound engagement with, and radical critique of, her intellectual and cultural milieu. Scholars have often presented Cavendish as a conservative royalist figure, in the sense of a person who supported monarchy and social hierarchy, and who was engaged with royalist politics and culture. However, Hilda L. Smith has noticed that even though Cavendish sometimes espoused statements entirely in line with her husband's royalist politics and the royalist circle connected to their household, there is still a greater divide between their views than has been traditionally understood in criticism.[13] Consequently, qualifications are necessary before one categorizes her as a conventional royalist. Smith contends that Cavendish is 'clearly a royalist', and yet she 'seems unfairly characterized by that label alone', and that 'she does not display the immediate loyalty to the Crown that her husband does or identify with policies that would protect the king's authority'.[14] Likewise, Smith notes that

Elisabeth of Bohemia (1618–80), 'is primarily established by their epistolary debates with other male philosophers'. Moreover, Katie Whitaker notes that some of 'Glanvill's books were replies to Margaret's views'. See Nadine Akkerman and Marguérite Corporaal, 'Mad Science beyond Flattery: The Correspondence of Margaret Cavendish and Constantijn Huygens', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 14 (2004): 3, and Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: The Extraordinary Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, the First Woman to Live by Her Pen* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 319.

[12] Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 1.

[13] Hilda L. Smith, '"A General War amongst the Men … But None amongst the Women": Political Differences between Margaret and William Cavendish', in Howard Nenner (ed.), *Politics and the Political Imagination in Later Stuart Britain: Essays Presented to Lois Green Schwoerer* (University of Rochester Press, 1997), 143–60.

[14] *Ibid*., 156, 151.

some of Cavendish's statements critique the abuse of animals, and defend peasantry and women. In Smith's view, it is these intriguing moments, in which Cavendish contradicts and breaks away from royalist viewpoints, that merit more attention.[15] For example, in *Orations*, Cavendish provides opposing perspectives on numerous political issues including the merits of monarchy, democracy and war. Some of the arguments are classically royalist, such as when one voice in the text claims 'Monarchy is the Best and Safest Government', and she also echoes the conservative tenets of patriarchalism – the belief that kingly authority is fatherly in origin – with another voice arguing that 'a King is the Common Father of his People'.[16] But occasionally the arguments are startlingly radical. One voice reads more like a declaration from a Leveller pamphlet; it claims that:

> Nature, who made all things in Common, She made not some men to be Rich, and other men Poor, some to Surfeit with overmuch Plenty, and others to be Starved for Want: for when she made the World and the Creatures in it, She did not divide the Earth, nor the rest of the Elements, but gave the use generally amongst them all.[17]

This passage not only argues against hierarchy and inequality, it goes so far as to suggest that an unequal distribution of wealth or power is completely unnatural.

What are we to make of these surprisingly contradictory political views in Cavendish's writings, and why would she be interested in exploring opposing viewpoints? Although Smith suggests that we may never be able to know Cavendish's 'real' politics, in so far as she characteristically portrays multiple perspectives upon the same topic, the present study proposes that we *can* answer this question of Cavendish's political views. As previously mentioned, the aim of this study is to reconsider assumptions that Cavendish was a royalist. One way this can be done is through an examination of what plurality in opinion meant for her culture, and how this concept can be applied to her scientific and political ideologies, particularly since diversity and contradiction are recurring motifs in her oeuvre. In doing so, this study will demonstrate how Cavendish's interrelated

[15] *Ibid*., 155.

[16] Margaret Cavendish, *Orations* (London, 1662), 279, 130.

[17] *Ibid*., 86. Nature is also the great equalizer that justifies all people to having equal property and freedom in Richard Overton's Leveller pamphlet: 'every Individuall in nature, is given an individuall property by nature, not to be invaded or usurped by any … For by naturall birth, all men are equally and alike borne to like propriety, liberty and freedome', where everyone is 'to live, every one equally and alike to enjoy his Birthright and priviledge.' Richard Overton, *An Arrow against all Tyrants and Tyranny* (1646), 3.

deconstruction of gender and political hierarchies generates a view of the natural world that is more sympathetic to republican than to royalist ideology.

Some scholars have suggested that Cavendish's portrayals of gender, science and politics are unconnected modes of inquiry which contradict one another.[18] However, John Rogers, Emma Rees and Jonathan Sawday have shown that Cavendish's science is political in nature, although they interpret her scientific endeavours as expressions of her royalist ideology.[19] Later chapters of this book will show the correspondence between Cavendish's natural science and her interest in plurality: these reveal a set of important and overlapping concerns that cohere into an epistemology which questions hierarchical modes of thinking. Plurality in this study means the recognition of numerous perspectives in natural philosophy and politics which, to some extent, can be deemed valid or true. Though Cavendish sometimes repeats the ideas of the royalist circle on which she was dependent and in which she was immersed, she simultaneously undermines these very ideas and advances political theories that support neither a monarchist government nor royalist conceptions of the natural world.

The term royalism was first coined in the 1640s by William Prynne, supporter of the parliamentarian cause,[20] who asserted that 'his Majesty and all Royalists must necessarily yeeld'.[21] However, the word came to encompass a wide variety of attitudes and ideals during the seventeenth century. DeGroot defines 'royalism' as a 'loose affiliation of those who supported the King and who condemned his enemies. They were first and foremost monarchists, before any ambiguity of internal debate regarding the rela-

[18] Londa Schiebinger argues that the democratic implications of Cavendish's physiology were never extrapolated to her political philosophy, while Eve Keller posits that at times Cavendish's 'gender critique vanishes before a non-critical engagement with the privileges and pleasures of her class'. Likewise, Rachel Trubowitz argues that Cavendish is 'driven by the competing demands of the Duchess's radical feminism and social conservatism'. Londa Schiebinger, 'Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle', in Mary Ellen Waithe (ed.), *A History of Women Philosophers*, vol. III, *1600–1900* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), 15; Eve Keller, 'Producing Petty Gods: Margaret Cavendish's Critique of Experimental Science', *English Literary History* 64.2 (1997): 466; and Rachel Trubowitz 'The Reenchantment of Utopia and the Female Monarchical Self: Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 11.2 (1992): 229.

[19] John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton*, 2nd edn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Emma L. E. Rees, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile* (Manchester University Press, 2003); and Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995).

[20] Jerome DeGroot, *Royalist Identities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 1. However, the word was rarely used during the civil war except occasionally as a term of abuse. *Ibid*., 1.

[21] William Prynne, *The Soveraigne Power of Parliaments and Kingdomes. Or Second Part* (London, 1643), 12.

tionship with the parliament.'[22] Although royalists were not a monolithic group, he posits that they nevertheless shared some similar assumptions:

> 'Royalism' was concerned with the construction of a set of binary roles and behavioural models designed to perpetrate a certain paradigm of social stability. It attempted to impose a structure of social identity that rejected the transgressions of Parliament and was premised upon obedience and a hierarchy of 'normality'. It was perceived that violation of these codes led to instability, social inversion, anarchy and dissolution. The conflict challenged and questioned the structure of society and politics. 'Royalism' desired a social order dependent on preordained and fixed roles of the obedient subject.[23]

DeGroot posits that royalism, reacting to the turbulence of the civil-war period and to the social and political transgressions it provoked, was seeking to re-establish social order and hence 'was desperately trying to confirm the centrality of a divine or royal presence'.[24]

Other scholars have interpreted the word 'royalist' somewhat differently. Unlike DeGroot's definition, which did not situate the monarch's relationship with parliament as the foremost issue of royalism, Robert Wilcher explains that royalists were 'those who wanted to preserve the ancient prerogatives of the crown' rather than making the monarch 'answerable to a parliament which had executive as well as merely legislative authority'.[25] He claims the civil war disrupted the medieval political doctrine of the king's two bodies: the notion that the individual monarch and the mystical office of kingship were two bodies in one. The revolutionary period upset the balance between these two bodies since '[r]oyalist rhetoric tended to move to one extreme', referring mostly to the divine qualities of kingship.[26] In contrast, Jason McElligott emphasizes the heterogeneous nature and diversity of the category, arguing that 'royalists could (and did) hold a wide variety of political or theological opinions but they were united by a concern to see the Stuarts return to power on their own terms or, failing that, the best possible terms available'.[27] He further argues 'that not every expression of antipathy to Parliament or sympathy for the plight of the king is evidence of royalism', particularly since there was much more overlap between royalist and parliamentarian ideals than is usually recognized.[28] John Miller

[22] DeGroot, *Royalist Identities*, 2. [23] *Ibid.*, xv. [24] *Ibid.*, 6.
[25] Robert Wilcher, *The Writing of Royalism, 1628–1660* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5.
[26] *Ibid.*, 4.
[27] Jason McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship in Revolutionary England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 6.
[28] *Ibid.*, 6.

also provides a more moderate picture of royalism, as he explains that even though modern readers often find absolutism and moderation contradictory, these attitudes were often perfectly compatible for many seventeenth-century royalists:

> [The] emphasis on divine right was quite compatible with belief in the ancient constitution, itself a part of God's creation. Most Royalists and Tories believed firmly in the common law and expected the king to respect it. They differed from Parliamentarians and Whigs in seeing the main threat to the constitution and the law as coming from revolution from below, rather than from the crown. The 'constitutionalist revolution' was born of the perception that, within the ancient constitution, the crown was becoming too strong; the Royalists and Tories believed that it had become too weak.[29]

According to Miller, most royalists believed the civil war and its resulting social turmoil had been brought about because parliament exerted too much power, in a way that weakened the monarch's power to maintain order, as well as his or her ability to preserve the established legal structure.

Indeed royalists were much more moderate than has hereto been assumed. McElligott and Smith contend that 'almost every royalist was a constitutional royalist', at least to some extent.[30] David L. Smith defines constitutional royalists as moderates who believed

> the monarch's powers were sovereign yet legally limited; that episcopacy should be retained as an integral part of the existing Church 'by law established'; and that constitutional monarchy protected the property and freedom of the subjects and the privileges of Parliament … The common law was perceived as an expression of natural and divine law, and armed resistance to the monarch was deemed contrary to both. Monarchy, Church and the law were thus taken to be interdependent structures. This web of interlocking beliefs coloured the idiom in which each was expressed, and it is therefore impossible to separate them, or to assign a prior importance to any one, without doing violence to their intrinsic nature.[31]

Although constitutional royalists believed in a limited monarchy which respected laws and the parliament, Smith contends that for most of these, 'mixed monarchy did not imply shared sovereignty; and second,

[29] John Miller, *After the Civil Wars: English Politics and Government in the Reign of Charles II* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 115.

[30] Jason McElligott and David L. Smith, 'Introduction', in Jason McElligott and David L. Smith (eds.), *Royalists and Royalism during the English Civil Wars* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12.

[31] David L. Smith, *Constitutional Royalism and the Search for Settlement, c. 1640–1649* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 243.

that the concept of legally limited monarchy involved a regulation rather than a restriction of the monarch's powers'.[32] Nor did constitutional royalism assume that there should be limitations on the monarch's power to choose military commanders or advisers.[33] Hence, on one extreme end of the category of royalism, there were theorists of divine right and absolute monarchy that advanced a notion of royal authority that placed little or no restraint upon sovereignty. On the other end of the spectrum was the belief that the monarch's sovereignty could be regulated to work harmoniously with established laws and the constitution. Yet, McElligott claims that only 'a relatively small number of royalists could ever have experienced the Civil Wars without borrowing bits and pieces of ideological baggage from the theoretical extremes of "absolutism" and "moderation" at different times, or perhaps even at the same time'.[34] Thus, this study will make note of how Cavendish's political thought is complementary neither to absolutism, nor to more moderate forms of royalism.

Proponents of absolutism, such as Thomas Hobbes, Robert Filmer and John Maxwell, demonstrate the variety of approaches among theories of royal authority that existed on this end of the royalist spectrum. Whereas Filmer contended that kings were originally fathers, and hence had patriarchal infallibility over their subjects, Maxwell proposed a theory of divine right wherein the monarch's power was derived directly from God, who 'investeth the Soveraigne with entire Soveraignty, so hath he set the bounds of it, [and] defined it'.[35] Thomas Hobbes, in contrast, used an essentially secular contract theory to contend that the sovereign's power should be undivided and absolute, even though (or *because*) sovereignty is derived from the consent of the governed in the body politic. Chapters 3 and 4 will demonstrate how Cavendish's political theory does not coincide with these models of politics. Though her ideas are more conducive to moderate constitutional royalism, the doctrines that shaped the policies of the Restoration,[36] the present study will show how those principles cannot adequately characterize her political leanings.

For the purposes of this study, I define royalism as a set of beliefs that advance the view that monarchy is the ideal form of government, that obedience to social hierarchy is necessary to avoid disorder, as well as that a monarch's sovereignty is undivided even if limited, that subjects

[32] *Ibid*., 228. [33] *Ibid*., 7.
[34] McElligott and Smith, 'Introduction', 11.
[35] John Maxwell, *Sacro-sancta Regum Magestas* (Oxford, 1644), 125.
[36] David L. Smith contends that the 'official position of the Restoration regime was based on Constitutional Royalist principles'. Smith, *Constitutional Royalism*, 297.

do not have the right to rebel against their monarch and that power does not derive from the common people. This definition is purposely broad enough to account for the various types of seventeenth-century royalism, from absolutists to constitutional royalists. It should, however, exclude those 'republicans' who may not have wished to abolish monarchy entirely, but nevertheless believed that subjects had the right to resist tyrannical monarchs or that a monarch's political power derived from the populace. In order to account for the nuances and complexities of royalist thought, this study will make note of the specific forms of royalist ideology that Cavendish engages with and challenges.

It must be admitted that republicanism itself was not a coherent or consistent body of thought, and its definition remains contested today.[37] Some scholars, such as Blair Worden, maintain that the theory of English republicanism can be defined as ideas drawn from ancient republics as well as from a preoccupation with liberty and a 'politics of virtue'.[38] Quentin Skinner, meanwhile, argues that republicanism should be understood more broadly, as a theory that defines *liberty* as the absence of arbitrary power.[39] However, he reasons that a republican in the strict sense is one who is an opponent of monarchy.[40] This study will define republicanism in accordance with Skinner's understanding of republican political theory.

While Chapters 1–3 of the present study are more concerned to indicate how Cavendish's political theory does *not* conform to royalist assumptions about monarchy and social order, Chapter 4 will, more specifically, explore how the politics of Cavendish's romances may closely resemble attitudes common among parliamentarian critics of the Crown following the execution of Charles I. It should be noted, however, that in her

[37] For example, the ideological differences between republicans and royalists are not always distinct, considering that many republican theorists were prepared to accept a compromise with people who endorsed the monarchy in 1660 and 1688, providing firm barriers were erected to prevent royal absolutism. For more details see David Wooton, 'Introduction', in David Wooton (ed.), *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649–1776* (Stanford University Press, 1994), 8.

[38] Blair Worden, 'Marchamont Nedham and the Beginnings of English Republicanism, 1649–1656', in Wooton, *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society*, 46.

[39] Skinner explains that it was the view of English republicans that, if you are 'subject to arbitrary power, then you are a slave; but if you are a slave, then *ex hypothesi* you are no longer in possession of your liberty'. Even if a slave has a master who permits them to pursue whatever their will desires, the slave still lacks liberty, since their actions and desires are still contingent on another's arbitrary will. Skinner explains that 'Slaves are never free, because they are never free of their master's will.' Quentin Skinner, 'Freedom as the Absence of Arbitrary Power', in Cécile Laborde and John Maynor (eds.), *Republicanism and Political Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 88, 96.

[40] *Ibid*., 83–101.

corpus Cavendish does *not* espouse the parliamentarian belief that *parliament* should instead be the highest authority, or the belief that the king was merely a branch of sovereignty alongside the parliament.[41] Neither does she lay out a specific plan or outline of how a republic ought to function, nor hark back to ancient examples of republics or their constitutions. Nevertheless, Thomas N. Corns has noted the somewhat impromptu and ad hoc history of the notion of republicanism during the civil war, whereby 'senior army officers and their civilian supporters blundered into the foundation of the republic, without a constitutional theory, without a sustained critique of other models … without a vision or an image of the state they were founding, and even without an appropriate political vocabulary'.[42] Indeed, Worden claims that most of the regicides were 'concerned to remove a particular king, not kingship. They cut off King Charles' head and wondered what to do next. In that quandary they saw no practicable alternative to the abolition of monarchy.'[43] Before the civil war, virtually nobody was a republican in the sense of articulating and theorizing a model of republican government without monarchy. Indeed, it was not until 1659/60 that Milton unambiguously renounced monarchy.[44] Cavendish's formulations of her political ideas should therefore be read with this point in mind.

Though Cavendish is frequently identified with royalist politics, to examine Cavendish's science and pluralistic methodology is to see a political thinker who is more closely aligned with republican ideology, and at times is even sympathetic to the most revolutionary ideas emerging in print during the civil war. For the purposes of this study, 'revolutionary' refers to sympathy or support for radical change or upheaval to the established political and social order during the civil-war period. It is thus significant that Cavendish expresses *both* revolutionary and royalist perspectives in her works. For example, in her autobiography in *Natures Pictures*, Cavendish

[41] Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–3.

[42] Thomas N. Corns, 'Milton and the Characteristics of a Free Commonwealth', in David Armitage, Armand Himy and Quentin Skinner (eds.), *Milton and Republicanism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 26.

[43] Blair Worden, 'Milton's Republicanism and the Tyranny of Heaven', in Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli (eds.), *Machiavelli and Republicanism* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 226.

[44] Blair Worden, 'Milton and Marchamont Nedham', in Armitage, Himy and Skinner, *Milton and Republicanism*, 166. Corns reminds that it is only in Milton's last major republican pamphlet in 1660, *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*, that he puts forward a constitutional model of a government that functioned without a king ('Milton and the Characteristics', 41). For more detail on how Milton relates to classical republicanism, see Martin Dzelzainis, 'Milton's Classical Republicanism', in Armitage, Himy and Skinner, *Milton and Republicanism*, 3–24.

evokes divine-right imagery in a seemingly royalist way, as she declares that the parliamentarians 'would have pulled God out of Heaven, had they had power, as they did Royaltie out of his Throne'.[45] Yet, elsewhere in *Natures Pictures* she claims that 'the Monarchical Government of the Bees is as wise and as happy as the Republick Commonwealth of the Ants'.[46] It is significant here that Cavendish uses the term 'Republick', indicating a government without a monarchy, where, in theory, more power is extended to the populace or its representatives. Hence, Cavendish in this passage indicates that there are examples within Nature demonstrating that republics are *natural*, and can be as effective as monarchies. Bees and ants illustrate how different, contradictory systems can both operate as valid or useful structures within the natural world. However, at the same time both forms of government are also imperfect systems, in so far as both demonstrate that 'there is no secure Safety, nor perfect Felicity, nor constant Continuance in the Works of Nature'.[47] The analogy of the bees and ants portrays how change, contradiction and plurality are the fundamental principles of Cavendish's philosophical and political thought. Three years earlier, in *Poems and Fancies*, Cavendish described ants as having a form of government that would be recognized as communist in contemporary society:

> All is in Common, nothing is forbid.
> No Private Feast, but altogether meet.
> …
> There is no Superiority, or Clowne.
> No Stately Palaces for Pride to dwell,
> Their House is Common, called the Hill.
> All help to build, and keep it in repaire,
> No 'speciall work-men, all Labourers they are. (*PF* 104)

Here, the ants do not have private property, rank, titles or hierarchy. This example counters Sujata Iyengar's contention that Cavendish was an 'ardent Royalist', such that her 'fictional worlds were a Royalist riposte to the Interregnum, a rejoinder that affirmed the supremacy of distinctions of rank above all other categories'.[48] It is further noteworthy that in *Natures Pictures* she argues that the 'Republick' of the ants is as 'wise' as monarchical government. This is one of numerous examples of her writings portraying various political viewpoints that are not always consistent with royalist culture.

[45] Margaret Cavendish, 'A true Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life' (*NP* 377).
[46] Margaret Cavendish, 'A Moral Tale of the Ant and the Bee' (*NP* 165).
[47] Margaret Cavendish, 'The third Moral Tale of the Ant and the Bee' (*NP* 166).
[48] Iyengar, 'Royalist, Romancist, Racialist', 650–1.

Cavendish's break from royalist ideology has significance for the consideration of early modern society at large, as it provides an example of how subordinate subjects, such as wives, may have held political and religious views very different from their family's beliefs. Suzuki reminds us that since many women may have held political opinions that did not correlate with their family's official view, it is important to discern different layers of meaning and possible political readings within women's texts.[49] While authors such as Elizabeth Cary and Katherine Philips demonstrate that some wives indeed openly expressed religious and political sentiments that did not align with their husbands',[50] Cavendish provides an example of a wife who chose a more subtle way to question the values of her family and community.

Cavendish's divergence from royalist politics is most evident in her science. The substance or subject matter of what was called philosophy and science during the early modern period does not align neatly with our own definition and conception of this category today; it included subjects such as alchemy and astrology. Even 'natural philosophy' or 'natural science', which focused on the material world and attempted to provide systematic explanations for natural phenomena, often engaged with what our culture would consider metaphysical topics such as the relationship of God to creation – topics held to be beyond the scope of 'scientific reason' in our time. For Cavendish, science is a political endeavour, as attested by *Philosophical Letters*, where she insists that 'man thinks he governs, when as it is Nature that doth it … Thus it is not the artificial form that governs men in a Politick Government, but a natural power' (*PL* 48). Here she suggests that political interactions between people are more influenced by Nature, or the workings of natural phenomena, than by governing institutions or individuals.

Thus it is important to understand how Cavendish perceives Nature, as well as how she believes this 'natural power' affects and governs the political world. She maintains a comparable position in *Philosophical and*

[49] For example, Suzuki argues that embroidered pictures and caskets created by young royalist women portray images that are not in alignment with a royalist worldview. See *Subordinate Subjects*, ch. 5, '"Royalist" Women and the English Revolution', 165–202.

[50] Unlike her Anglican husband, Elizabeth Cary was Catholic, while Katherine Philips's royalist politics differed from her parliamentarian husband's. See Anon. [one of the daughters of Lady Falkland], 'The Lady Falkland: Her Life', in Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson (eds.), *The Tragedy of Mariam, The Fair Queen of Jewry* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 183–276; and Penelope Anderson, '"Friendship Multiplyed": Royalist and Republican Friendship in Katherine Philips's Coterie', in Daniel T. Lochman, Maritere López and Lorna Hutson (eds.), *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 131–2.

Physical Opinions, implying that natural philosophy has political and/or ethical effects, stating

> that without Natural Philosophy Men could not tell how to Live … indeed All Arts and Sciences are produced in [one] kind or other from Natural Philosophy, insomuch as it may be said, Man Lives merely by Natural Philosophy, so that Natural Philosophy is the Light that God is pleased to give Man, to Direct him in the Course of his Life. (*PPO* sig. b3r)

Because 'Arts' in the seventeenth century would include the art of politics, Cavendish suggests that by studying Nature through the medium of natural philosophy, individuals can enrich their understanding of political and moral issues to guide them through their lives.[51] And while she indicates that an understanding of political realities can be facilitated by a study of natural philosophy, she also repeatedly asserts that a physical or material body is analogous to political bodies. For example, in her Restoration-era treatise *Philosophical Letters* (1664), she compares the death of animal bodies to the dissolution of a commonwealth, and a similar metaphor can also be found in *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655) published earlier during the civil war, where she equates the complex workings of the body to a 'Common-Weale' in which there are 'several sorts of Trades' which 'agree to the making of every figure' such as 'Magistrates, and rulers; others as Train-bands, as soudiers, some make forts, and dig trenches; some as Mechants that traffick; some as Sea-men, and Shipmasters; some that labour and and [*sic*] work, as some cut and carve; Others paint, and ingrave' (*PL* 459 and *TTPO* 32). This analogy is significant inasmuch as all members of this body, regardless of their role or trade, 'agree' to work together to create a corporeal form, rather than simply being demanded or directed to work by a superior force. According to Karen Detlefsen, Cavendish's specific form of materialism suggests 'that there is no difference in kind between human beings and every other kind of being', while her natural philosophy in general 'allows Cavendish to draw very strong parallels between events in human, social interactions and events in non-human, natural interactions, even to the point of allowing her to extend conclusions reached regarding the former realm to the latter'.[52] Along with this parallelism it is thus significant that in her first two treatises, written in the 1650s, before the Restoration, Cavendish posits that there can be

[51] Early modern understandings of art included 'Human workmanship or agency; human skill as an agent. Opposed to *nature*'; 'art', n.2, *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, www.oed.com.ezp1.villanova.edu/view/Entry/11125?rskey=tb90K2&result=1, accessed 27 December 2013.

[52] Karen Detlefsen, 'Reason and Freedom: Margaret Cavendish on the Order and Disorder of Nature', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 89 (2007): 177, 178.

'no absolute power' in the body of Nature.[53] She repeats this claim again later in the Restoration in her fourth treatise, *Philosophical Letters* (1664), maintaining that 'it is not conceived, that a part can have an absolute power' (*PL* 96). This opinion is yet again echoed later in *Observations* (1666), when she posits that 'Man is but a small part, and his powers are but particular actions of Nature, and therefore he cannot have a supreme and absolute power' (*OUEP* 1 6).

Such a portrayal of corporeality and its relations offers a worldview that contradicts assertions that Cavendish was a proponent of absolutism. An example of such an assertion is found in Deborah Boyle's statement that '[a]s commentators have pointed out, Cavendish was unwaveringly devoted to absolute sovereignty'.[54] While it is true that not all royalists were proponents of absolutism, Cavendish's often repeated assertion that humans cannot obtain absolute power in Nature – a claim which presumably entails the political world – clearly casts into serious doubt the claims of critics that Cavendish was an absolutist. Chapter 1 will demonstrate how such portrayals of matter by Cavendish are *not merely descriptive*: they do not merely give an account of how matter typically behaves, as opposed to indicating how matter *ought* to function. Furthermore, as this book will demonstrate, Cavendish's recurring analogies, which link natural and political bodies and indicate corresponding relationships between them, are not in accord either with absolutism or with royalist understandings of the cosmos. This fact is particularly compelling since these analogies are drawn by a woman who was immersed within royalist kinship groups and political circles. While one might argue that Cavendish's science constitutes a mode of inquiry that is separate from and independent of her politics, Cavendish herself did not believe this, to which conviction her numerous assertions linking natural and political bodies attest.

Cavendish's complex and unique political worldviews were perhaps influenced by her unusual and fascinating life history. She was born Margaret Lucas in 1623, the eighth and youngest child of a wealthy, royalist Essex family.[55] Her father died two years later, and she was raised by her strong and independent mother, who according to Cavendish's autobiography managed 'all their affairs … so well, as she lived not in a much

[53] See *Philosophical Fancies*, 5, and *TPPO* 2. Cavendish expands and clarifies this in detail in a marginal note in *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, claiming 'Life is in every thing' and 'absolute power, that is, onely matter would rule it self, but being infinite it neither absolutely knows it self, nor can absolutely rule or govern it self'. See *TPPO* 41.

[54] Boyle, 'Fame, Virtue, and Government', 282.

[55] For Cavendish's life see Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, and Douglas Grant, *Margaret the First: A Biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, 1623–1673* (University of Toronto Press, 1957).

lower condition than when my father lived'.[56] The Lucas family, however, was hated by the local populace, partly because of the family's support for Charles I and partly because of resentment over the family's dubious financial practices, such as enclosing common land and cutting off the town's water supply. James Fitzmaurice has suggested that her brother, John Lucas, with his antagonism towards the lower classes, may have also provoked profound hostility towards the family.[57] As a result of these issues, at the beginning of the civil war, the Lucas family's fortune turned. Though reports vary, some contemporaries claimed her family home was attacked by a mob of men, women and children, anywhere from 2,000 to 5,000 people.[58] Everything in the family estate was plundered, windows broken, gardens destroyed, family graves were desecrated and some walls were demolished as rioters attempted to bring down the house.[59] The Lucas family was imprisoned in the common jail for three days, though it is unclear whether Cavendish herself was imprisoned.[60]

Afterwards in 1643, at the age of twenty, Cavendish claimed she 'had a great desire to be one of [Queen Henrietta Maria's] Maids of Honour', and against family advice obtained the prestigious position of lady-in-waiting to the French queen consort of Charles I.[61] The Queen was a military figure in her own right, leading an army of 5,000 infantry against parliamentarians in full armour to help her husband and the English royalists. The Queen was not only an active politician and military strategist, but was also interested in theatre and Neoplatonism. Like Cavendish's mother, Henrietta Maria was another strong woman in Cavendish's life, who most likely influenced her views on gender. Cavendish's close encounters with political violence continued when the Queen, with a few companions including Cavendish, was pursued by the parliamentarian army in 1644. The party embarked on a ship while being pursued by enemy warships, firing at them and damaging the boat's rigging.[62] Once the group landed and settled safely in France, Cavendish became part of the English émigré culture in Paris. With the exception of one visit to England to request reimbursement for lost funds in 1653, Cavendish did not reside in her native country again for seventeen years.

[56] Cavendish, 'A true Relation' (*NP* 370).
[57] James Fitzmaurice, 'Cavendish, Margaret, duchess of Newcastle upon Tyne (1623?–1673)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Online edition, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford University Press), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4940, accessed 21 March 2013.
[58] Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 39–40.
[59] *Ibid.*, 40. [60] *Ibid.*, 42–3.
[61] Cavendish, 'A true Relation' (*NP* 373). [62] Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 55–6.

At court, Cavendish was an awkward and shy figure. She claimed she 'was thought a Natural Fool' because she was unusually 'fearfull, and bashfull'.[63] Regardless of her bashfulness, in Paris she met and fell in love with her future husband William, the Marquis of Newcastle, thirty years her senior, who had led an army for Charles I. Cavendish claims in her autobiography that William 'was the onely Person I ever was in love with' and they wrote passionate love letters to each other and married for love without the Queen's blessing.[64] Her marriage immersed her in a rich intellectual culture. Not only did William and his scholarly brother Charles mentor and encourage her interest in philosophy, but William was also a great patron for many writers and intellectuals. Consequently, during Cavendish's time in Paris, she was hostess to famous intellectuals such as Descartes, Hobbes, Gassendi and Mersenne. It was, however, after leaving Paris in 1648 and moving to a quieter life in Antwerp that Cavendish began her literary and philosophical career.[65]

Political exile proved difficult, and William and Margaret Cavendish survived by feigning and emulating wealth. In her biography of William she explained that by parliamentarians he 'was counted a Traitor for his Honest and Loyal service to his King and Country'.[66] Consequently, 'After My Lord was married, having no Estate or Means left him to maintain himself and his Family, he was necessitated to seek for Credit, and live upon the Courtesie of those that were pleased to Trust him.'[67] William obtained multiple loans which he paid through continuously procuring more loans and inducing a perpetual cycle of debt. The situation became so extreme that in William's biography she claimed that he asked if she would 'of necessity pawn my Cloaths, to make so much Money as would procure a Dinner'.[68] Fortunately, William was able to soon receive another loan, but for years Cavendish lived in fear that they would descend into abject poverty or worse, that William would be imprisoned for outstanding debts: 'And though I was not afraid of starving or begging, yet my chief fear was, that my Lord for his debts would suffer Imprisonment.'[69] Though the Restoration allowed the couple to return to Britain, they still faced some financial problems. The King, who owed the Cavendish family money for the wars, did not pay them back, but instead promoted them

[63] Cavendish, 'A true Relation' (*NP* 374). [64] *Ibid*., 80.
[65] Before settling in Antwerp, William and Margaret Cavendish stayed in Rotterdam for six months. Fitzmaurice, 'Cavendish, Margaret, duchess of Newcastle upon Tyne'.
[66] Margaret Cavendish, *The Life of the Thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince William Cavendishe* (London: A. Maxwell, 1667), 57.
[67] *Ibid*., 55, 56. [68] *Ibid*., 56. [69] *Ibid*., 82.

in 1664 to the rank of duke and duchess, giving the couple, who had for years feared poverty, one of the highest aristocratic titles in the kingdom.

It was in the early 1650s, during the difficult times of the civil war and political exile, when Cavendish began to publish her works. Even after the Restoration, when she was able to return to England and experience some economic and political security, Cavendish continued to publish prolifically. Although the Restoration saw Cavendish's life change dramatically, she chose to revisit and explore many of the same topics she wrote about during her exile. In the prefaces of Cavendish's Restoration scientific treatises, for example, she describes her scientific writings as a continuous revision process of the same natural philosophy.[70] An outline here of the development of her publications, particularly of those relating to her science, will clarify my focus on her treatises published between 1663 and 1666, and also how an understanding of her science can provide a richer insight into her poetry and prose fiction.

Cavendish began formulating her natural philosophy in her first two publications, *Poems and Fancies* and *Philosophical Fancies*, both published in 1653, when she was in England attempting to petition for reimbursement for her lost lands and fortune.[71] In *Philosophical Fancies*, Cavendish lays the foundation of her natural philosophy, articulating a materialist version of vitalism in which matter is self-moving, self-conscious and in a constant state of motion: she continues to develop these ideas throughout her later scientific writings.[72] It is important to note that Cavendish first published her treatise in the midst of the English Renaissance vitalist revival. Vitalist philosophy believed that matter was infused with spirit and self-movement: this could carry political implications. John Rogers argues, for example, that 'the philosophy of monistic vitalism could become enwrapped in the strands of revolutionary political sentiment', since it provided models of the body which did not conform to royalist assumptions concerning corporeality and the structure of the cosmos.[73] Later chapters of this study will explore Cavendish's complex engagement with vitalist philosophy's socio-political implications.

[70] See *PL* sig. c1r and *OUEP* sig. e1v and sig. e2r.

[71] Cavendish wrote in *Poems and Fancies* that the time spent writing both pieces 'hath not been very long, but since I came into England, being eight Yeares out, and nine Months in' (*PF* sig. A4 4r).

[72] Cavendish argues there is a type of 'thin, subtle Matter' which she refers to as 'the spirits of life' which 'do not onely move dull and in moving matter, but makes that matter to move'. Matter and motion are also inseparable, according to Cavendish, since 'Whatsoever hath an innate motion, hath Knowledge … for Knowledge lives in motion, as motion lives in matter' (*Philosophical Fancies* 44, 19 and 52).

[73] Rogers, *Matter of Revolution*, 27.

The vitalism of *Philosophical Fancies* carries over into *Poems and Fancies*, which explores a range of topics not only in poetry, but also, contrary to expectations in the title, prose fiction as well. Yet it contains numerous poems devoted to the topic of atoms, and Cavendish portrays these atoms as having vitalist qualities. In one poem, '*A World made By Atomes*', Cavendish describes atoms building worlds like 'severall work-men' who construct homes (*PF* 5). In other poems, atoms have agency and movement as they dance, go to war and combine together (*PF* 16–17). The similarities between Cavendish's scientific treatise and *Poems and Fancies* were deliberate, as she intended that her first two publications would be companion pieces for each other, writing that *Philosophical Fancies* was meant to be 'joyned to [her] Booke of Poems' (sig. B6r). She admits that *Philosophical Fancies* was hastily written so that she could attach it with her poems, 'For I writ it in lesse then three weekes; and yet for all my hast, it came a weeke too short of the Presse' (*Philosophical Fancies* sig. B6r). Her haste to publish her poetry, prose fiction and science together, along with the fact that both texts explore matter in a vitalist context, underscores how she believed her poetry and fiction were an intrinsic part of her scientific project. Cavendish's effort to publish *Philosophical Fancies* together with *Poems and Fancies* also suggests that both works, covering different genres, were complimentary to each other and that such generic mixing could inform and elucidate meaning for her readers. She contends that though she expressed her ideas in different genres in these texts, she has 'writ different wayes of one and the same subject, yet not to obstruct, crosse, or contradict; but … have used the freedom, or taken the liberty to draw several works upon one ground, or like as to build several rooms upon one foundation' (*TPPO* sig. a2v). As this passage suggests, Cavendish regards her scientific treatises, poetry and prose fiction as part of the same house, based upon the same foundational principles.

Though she later disclaims her atoms from *Poems and Fancies*, the central premise of her natural philosophy remains the same: that corporeality is both entirely material and self-moving. Indeed, *Philosophical Fancies* can be seen as a rough preliminary sketch of her natural philosophy, since two years later she revised it, naming the new edition *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655). Although *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* has different epistles and prefaces, it is an expansion of *Philosophical Fancies*, the first book in the treatise being a nearly identical copy of the earlier text.[74] Despite this similarity, L. E. Semler argues that *Philosophical*

[74] The treatise contains five parts. Part 1 is essentially *Philosophical Fancies*, but with several parts omitted and a few minor spelling and grammatical changes.

and Physical Opinions illustrates a shift in her philosophical thinking as it 'takes us through the chaotic dynamics of war and strife … and begins to establish the harmonious oneness of eternal nature variously presaged in the early works. This oneness becomes a core theme of her philosophy from 1655 onward.'[75] Nevertheless, in her later writings Cavendish clarifies that her numerous treaties can be understood as revisions of *Philosophical Fancies*, explaining that 'the Principles, Heads and Grounds of my Opinions are my own … and the first time I divulged them, was in the year 1653. since which time I have reviewed, reformed and reprinted them twice' (*PL* c1r). Hence, Cavendish perceives her scientific treatises as the same work through a continuum of revisions.[76]

Prior to her first publication, Cavendish wrote *The Worlds Olio*, but published it two years after *Poems and Fancies*.[77] *The Worlds Olio* is much less focused on her natural philosophy, though it demonstrates her interest in mixing genres, since the term 'Olio' itself refers to a generic mixture of essays, brief statements and allegories about a wide range of topics. This interest in combining genres intensifies in her next publication, called *Natures Pictures* and published in 1656. The title-page states that *Natures Pictures* contains 'several feigned Stories of Natural Descriptions, as Comical, Tragical, and Tragi-Comical, Poetical, Romancical, Philosophical, and Historical, both in Prose and Verse, some all Verse, some all Prose, some mixt, partly Prose, and partly Verse. Also, there are some Morals, and some Dialogues.' Not only is *Natures Pictures* generically mixed, but it also provides the most politically mixed commentary: it includes her autobiography, a text that conveys a complaint that the parliamentarians dethroned the King, Charles I, as well as romances such as 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' and 'The Contract', which (as Chapter 4 of this book will argue), articulate and engage with radical political theory from the civil war.

[75] L. E. Semler, 'Margaret Cavendish's Early Engagement with Descartes and Hobbes: Philosophical Revisitation and Poetic Selection', *Intellectual History Review* 22.3 (2012): 348.

[76] In Cavendish's 1655 treatise, she explores several topics which she did not have the opportunity to discuss in *Philosophical Fancies* though she listed them as points of interest at the end of the text. *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* explores many of the issues she mentioned, such as the causes of disease, colour, thunder, lightning and bodily senses (*TPPO* 127–71, 81–3, 92–3 and 115–26). The last four parts of the treatise also expand Cavendish's ideas on matter and motion and continues a few ideas discussed in *Poems and Fancies* such as multiple worlds, the cause of the 'ebbing and flowing of the sea', 'motions of the Sun' and the relation between infinites and centres.

[77] Cavendish explains in *The Worlds Olio* that 'THIS Book, most of it was written five years since, and was lockt up in a Trunk as if it had been buried in a Grave, but, when I came out of England, I gave it a Resurruction' (*TWO* sig. A3v).

After *Natures Pictures*, Cavendish did not publish any material for six years. However, after the Restoration of Charles II, Cavendish returned to England, where she published a collection of numerous plays, many of which contain strong, articulate female heroines, and *Orations*, a text which provides mock debates and conflicting perspectives on various social, legal and political issues, demonstrating her characteristic interest in exploring contradictory and opposing opinions. She also revised *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* again in 1663, by defining terms in her preface and clarifying her theories:

> Wherefore, in this Work of mine you will find, not only my former Philosophical Opinions Enlarged, but much Reformed and Corrected; for though I keep to the first Ground or Principle … yet I have indeavoured here to Build upon that Ground, not only a Larger, but a more Exact and Perfect Fabrick, wherein every Several Chapter, like Several Rooms, have as Much and as Clear Lights as I can give them. (*PPO* sig. b1r-v)[78]

An example of Cavendish's revised thinking can be seen in her approach to materialism. In her former treatises, she described corporeality as material, yet she often referred to one category of matter as 'spirit' in order to designate it as the 'life' of matter.[79] The usage of the term spirit is confusing in this materialist context, and she later revised her terminology, referring to this category as 'sensitive matter'.[80] Lisa Sarasohn has pointed out that the 1663 revision offers a more nuanced materialism, while in addition Cavendish's three categories of matter, which she describes as rational, sensitive and inanimate, are 'now so entirely integrated that her matter theory can be described as holistic'.[81] While Sarasohn describes such categories as hierarchical, it is notable that Cavendish emphasizes that all bodies, regardless of their size or composition, contain a mixture of these elements. Perhaps this was an attempt by Cavendish to revisit the possibility of hierarchical implications of her categorical distinctions in matter.

[78] As a matter of bibliographical record: Cavendish revised and republished *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* in 1663. This revision has commonly been overlooked even in the best chronologies of Cavendish's works currently in print. This revision, however, should not be considered as of minor importance. It is in fact an important text bridging her 'early' work with her 'Restoration-era' texts.

[79] For example, she describes 'the spirits of life' as 'not onely mov[ing] dull and immoving matter, but makes that matter to move and work upon others' (*TPPO* 8).

[80] Cavendish defines sensitive matter in the preface, explaining that '*the Animate matter is of two Degrees, Sensitive and Rational, I call the Sensitive the Life, and the Rational the Soul, this the Designer, and that the Worker, which Sensitive and Rational matter Is*' (*PPO* sig. e1r).

[81] Lisa T. Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy during the Scientific Revolution* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 101.

After the Restoration, Cavendish also became determined to improve her education, and began an active reading and studying of philosophical and scientific works, including those of Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes, Galileo Galilei and William Harvey.[82] Although Semler provides evidence that Cavendish's earliest publications demonstrate more exposure to learning than she admits in her prefaces,[83] in the biography of her husband she nevertheless reveals her frustration with formulating a natural philosophy without a formal education:

> I confess that for want of Scholarship, I could not express my self so well as otherwise I might have done, in those Philosophical Writings I publish'd first; but after I was returned with your Lordship into my Native Country, and led a retired Country life, I applied my self to the reading of Philosophical Authors, of purpose to learn those names and words of Art that are used in Schools.[84]

These studies of other philosophers had a great influence on Cavendish, who, after studying the philosophy of her contemporaries, changed her philosophical methodology. Though she retains the fundamental materialist, vitalist principles of her theory, she actively engages in a dialogue with other philosophers in her subsequent treatises, called *Philosophical Letters* and *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*. She explains the progression of her scientific works in *Observations*:

> I Do ingeniously confess, that both for want of learning and reading Philosophical Authors, I have not expressed my self in my Philosophical Works, especially in my Philosophical and Physical Opinions, so clearly and plainly as I might have done, had I had the assistance of Art, and the practice of reading other Authors: But though my Conceptions seem not so perspicuous in the mentioned Book of Philosophical Opinions; yet my Philosophical Letters, and these present Observations, will, I hope, render it more intelligible. (*OUEP* sig. d2r)

As a result of her engagement with other philosophies, Cavendish's methods and terminology in her later scientific treatises became increasingly more clear and defined. *Philosophical Letters*, in particular, situates her ideas in the context of 'Works of four Famous and Learned Authors',

[82] She claims that she used English translations for works which were not originally published in English with the exception of Descartes, whom she 'had some few places translated to me out of his works' (*PL* b1v).

[83] Semler argues that *The Worlds Olio*, *Poems and Fancies* and *Philosophical Fancies* directly engage with and respond to newly appearing publications by Descartes and Hobbes. He notes, however, that Cavendish's earlier works are far less confident, coherent and combative in their engagement with these thinkers. Semler, 'Cavendish's Early Engagement with Descartes and Hobbes', 336.

[84] Cavendish, *The Life*, sig. a2r.

Descartes, Hobbes, Henry More and Jean-Baptise van Helmont, while also engaging with the philosophies of Galilei, Harvey and Aristotle (*PL* 1). In *Philosophical Letters*, which is written in the form of a fictional letter correspondence between two women, Cavendish argued that her own philosophy was rendered 'more perspicuous and intelligible by the opposition of other Opinions' and aimed to demonstrate 'how far, and wherein [she does] dissent from these Famous Authors, their Opinions in Natural Philosophy' (*PL* 2, 1). Consequently, the natural philosophy which is 'described in [her] afore-mentioned Book of Philosophical Opinions' is 'more clearly repeated and explained in this present' (*PL* sig. b2v).

In *Philosophical Letters*, Cavendish requests her readers to refer to *Poems and Fancies* to better understand elements of her natural philosophy (*PL* 482, 455, 456). She most likely hoped that this would encourage readers to examine the new revised edition published that same year in 1664, which was similar, though several pieces were deleted, added or placed in a different order. That same year, Cavendish continued to demonstrate her new interest in epistolary forms of writing as she also published a collection of fictional correspondences titled *Sociable Letters*, which comment on a wide variety of cultural issues. Two years later, 1666, is the date when she published *Observations*, which included her science-fiction text *The Blazing World*, as well as a separate edition of *The Blazing World*. In this text she pursued the topics of optics and perception, and continued her dialogue with other philosophers by 'examin[ing] the Opinions of … Modern Microscopical or Dioptrical Writers' including a section discussing ancient philosophy (*OUEP* sig. b1r). Cavendish specifically requested her readers to join their study of *Observations* with *Philosophical Letters* and *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* to better comprehend her natural philosophy.[85] Cavendish believed that these works, along with her fictional text, *The Blazing World*, should be read in conjunction.

Cavendish continued to write and publish throughout the Restoration. In 1667 she published the biography of her husband, and in 1668 she published another collection of plays as well as a revised version of *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, titled *Grounds of Natural Philosophy*.

[85] Cavendish tells her readers that 'especially do I recommend to you my Philosophical Opinions, which contain the Grounds and Principles of my Philosophy, but since they were published before I was versed in the reading of other Authors, I desire you to join my Philosophical Leters, and these observations to them, which will serve as Commentaries to explain what may seem obscure in the mentioned Opinions' (*OUEP* sig. e1vf.). *Philosophical Letters* provides a similar statement: 'I must desire you, worthy Readers, to read first my Book called *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, before you censure this, for this Book is but an explanation of the former, wherein is contained the Ground of my Opinions' (*PL* sig. b2r).

That same year she published another version of *Observations*, a further separate edition of *The Blazing World* and another edition of *Orations.* Also, she oversaw a Latin translation of her biography and published a revised version of *Poems and Fancies* which she titled *Poems, or Several fancies Including Animal Parliament*.[86] Her final publications appear in 1671, when she republished *The Worlds Olio* and *Natures Pictures*.

Throughout her oeuvre, Cavendish continued to express an interest in mixing science and more imaginative mediums of literature. Similar to her first treatise in 1653, in which she intended to publish a scientific treatise along with poems and prose fiction, Cavendish published her *Observations* with a science-fiction story called *The Blazing World*. She asserts the connection between her fictional and non-fictional prose in the separate 1668 edition of *The Blazing World*, claiming to her female readers that 'This present Description of a New World; was made as an Appendix to my Observations upon Experimental Philosophy; and, having some Sympathy and Coherence with each other, were joyned together as Two Several Worlds, at their Two Poles.'[87] Thus, Cavendish indicates that the fictional *The Blazing World* is complementary to the non-fictional *Observations*. This demonstrates her belief that her science benefited from being articulated in a fictional format. Not only did she intend to publish three editions of her scientific treatises next to prose fiction or poetry; she requests in her later treatises that her readers go back and read *Poems and Fancies* to better understand her ideas.[88]

To facilitate a comprehensive understanding of her philosophy, I will primarily draw from the three treatises which Cavendish claimed should be read together: *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, *Philosophical Letters* and *Observations*, including the appendix to *Observations*, *The Blazing World*. Because *Philosophical Letters* and *Observations* portray her ideas in dialogue with other philosophers, this study will treat those two works as a foundation for understanding not only Cavendish's science, but also Cavendish's relationship to her intellectual milieu. Since *Observations* emphasizes optics and perception, while *Philosophical Letters* discusses a broader range of topics, I more frequently draw from *Philosophical Letters*. In addition, this book will examine Cavendish's use of different genres

[86] Rees suggests the term 'oversaw' is most appropriate for the Latin edition of her biography since it was translated by Walter Charleton. Rees, *Gender, Genre, Exile*, 17n.3.

[87] Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World* (London, 1668), 2r. Whereas three publications of *The Blazing World* dedicated the preface to 'The Reader', who is not given a sex, the 1668 edition is the only version which is written for 'all Noble and Worthy LADIES'. *Ibid*., 2r.

[88] See *PL* 482, 455, 456 and 501, and *OUEP* II 31.

such as poetry, prose fiction and scientific treatises in order to examine how the intermixture of science and fiction may provide insight into her political and philosophical thought, and to better understand why Cavendish insisted that an imaginative literary medium could facilitate and enhance her scientific project. Diana Barnes notes that 'often Cavendish's oeuvre has been treated as two halves: the literary and the philosophical; neither approach alone is entirely satisfying'.[89] For Barnes, Cavendish's blurring of disciplinary boundaries should make us 'open to the possibility that her approach to the discipline of philosophy may have involved some willful manipulation of certain proprieties such as the distinction between natural philosophy and politics'.[90] Cavendish herself mixes science, politics and fiction within many of her texts, indicating that interpretation of her works should not be limited to disciplinary boundaries.

Cavendish's poetry and prose fiction are primarily located in *Poems and Fancies*, *Natures Pictures* and *The Blazing World*. Consequently, this work concentrates on these texts, and investigates specifically poetic and fictional texts in which she explores her principles of natural philosophy. In *Philosophical Letters*, Cavendish asks her readers to refer back to sections in *Poems and Fancies* that discuss atoms and fairy lore, to facilitate a more nuanced comprehension of her materialism (*PL* 227, 455, 456, 501). Hence, I will examine poems and prose dealing with these topics, particularly those presented within the framework of her natural philosophy. I will also examine 'The Travelling Spirit' in *Natures Pictures*, since Cavendish's philosophical and secular explanation of fairy lore in her poetry thematically overlaps with the story's portrayal of alchemy, witchcraft and materialism. Unlike other texts examined in this book, the romances from *Natures Pictures* do not overtly describe her scientific principles. Cavendish claims, however, that *Natures Pictures* 'are naturall Descriptions & not Fancies' (sig. c6r). It is notable that Cavendish asserts that her prose fiction and poetry are not 'Fancies', or to be understood as fantasy, but instead are 'natural Descriptions'. The phrase 'natural Descriptions' suggests that her fiction is meant as a portrayal of the real or natural world, and can be considered within the investigative scope of natural philosophy. Hence, despite their literary genre, they can be construed as an investigation or description of aspects of Nature. Such a definition of her fiction becomes

[89] Diana Barnes, 'Familiar Epistolary Philosophy: Margaret Cavendish's *Philosophical Letters* (1664)', *Parergon* 26.2 (2009): 45. Barnes uses Jacqueline Broad as an example of another critic who shares this sentiment. See Jacqueline Broad, 'Cavendish Redefined', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 12.4 (2004): 731–41.

[90] Barnes, 'Familiar Epistolary Philosophy', 59.

more intelligible when read within Cavendish's insistence that her understanding of science corresponds to the workings of human society and politics. Sarasohn has argued that *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* 'should be read in conjunction with *Natures Pictures* (1656), a collection of tales and romances that projects Cavendish's thought to a more popular audience and includes accounts of imaginary journeys that clearly anticipate the imaginative universe of *Blazing World*'.[91] Therefore, the purpose of my using stories from *Natures Pictures*, such as 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' and 'The Contract', in this study is to ascertain their correspondence with the political implications of her natural philosophy, particularly since both texts articulate revolutionary political theory current during the civil war.

This study will make use of the original edition of *Natures Pictures* published in 1656, since the revised version was published in 1671, which was a number of years after the political events relevant to this book: the civil war and the Restoration of Charles II.[92] Similarly, this book will use the original 1653 edition of *Poems and Fancies* since it was written during the civil war and shows how Cavendish's political and scientific ideologies were articulated even in her earliest publication.

Cavendish was not only interested in generically mixing fiction with science, she also held a recurring interest in plurality, which is evident in her earliest publication, *Poems and Fancies*, in which poems are expressed through the perspective of birds, hares, trees and the earth. This text also contains dialectical poems which bring together oppositions between anthropomorphic concepts: for example poems containing dialogues between love/hate, melancholy/mirth, learning/ignorance and rich/poor. *Poems and Fancies* initiates Cavendish's deep interest in conflicting, multifarious perspectives and opinions. Also, its longest text (at thirteen pages), 'The Animall Parliament', demonstrates another key image of Cavendish's writings: that the body is analogous to a political structure. It does so by portraying the body as a monarchy ruled by a king, who enacts laws with the consent and votes of a strong parliament (*PF* 199–211). In this fable, the Soul King 'called a Parliament in his Animal Kingdom', in order, among other things, to remedy the growing disorder in his kingdom (*PF* 199). *Poems and Fancies* is Cavendish's only text which depicts, in detail, a royal, monarchical and patriarchal

[91] Sarasohn, *Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*, 18.

[92] Though both versions are very similar, the most notable difference is the omission of her autobiography in the later edition.

kingdom as analogous to a body. In 'The Animall Parliament', the eponymous parliament consists of a hierarchical order where 'The Soul is the King, the Nobility are the Spirits, the Commonalty are the Humours and Appetites' (*PF* 199). Sarasohn argues that the text portrays 'a state ruled by a powerful sovereign, who nevertheless consults with his people before making law'.[93] Yet Sarasohn notes that there are some aspects of Cavendish's monarchical model which are unusual for a royalist position, for it 'may seem odd to find a Parliament in a work written by a royalist woman at a time she was seeking funds from a Parliament that had just beheaded its king. But 'The Animall Parliament' is a fable of how the state should work, not how it was working.'[94] It is indeed remarkable that a royalist woman, who lost her childhood estate to anti-royalist mobs and was banished for many years into political exile, describes a strong parliament where all members vigorously debate and vote on issues in order to improve the ailing body, while the king himself speaks little. Although the body is headed by a king, he gathers a parliament 'to make and enact strict Lawes to a good Life, in which I make no question, but every one which are in my Parliament will be willing to consent' (*PF* 200). Importantly, the king *refuses* to enact laws without the vote and consent of every member of the parliament. Thus, the poem provides a depiction of a model of government in which monarchical and parliamentarian forces are equally necessary for the running of society.

Nine years after the Putney debates saw disputes within the army concerning the best way to organize the political body and fix its social problems, Cavendish also describes a political debate concerning how a body should be organized and repaired, albeit hers is conducted in the presence of a king. Though Charles I had dissolved parliament, Cavendish's king gives the Animal Parliament such power and agency that he refuses to enact any laws without full consent of every single member. More importantly, he ensures that petitions by all parts of the body are listened to by the parliament. This representation of the political body bears some resemblance to popular sovereignty, the notion that a larger segment of the populace should have political representation. The idea of popular sovereignty was increasingly current during the period when *Poems and Fancies* was published. Nevertheless, Emma Rees has argued that even though parts of the body have agency, the model of the body put forward in 'The Animall Parliament' is still royalist, since it uses principles

[93] Sarasohn, *Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*, 107. [94] *Ibid.*

of mechanical philosophy which held that bodies functioned like a machine:

> The sensory faculties of Cavendish's construct, that is, reason, taste, sight and others, may appear vitalist in as much as they have a degree of self-determination, but decisions made in one House must be actively conveyed to the other: they cannot move themselves. The model then is predominantly mechanical. It is the monarch where the parliamentary processes begin and end, and is the monarch that has directional power over the rest of the body.[95]

Rees suggests that the politics of the body is based upon a mechanist model, as the body is like a passive machine, governed and guided by a Soul King.[96] Rees does note, however, that the poem contains elements of vitalism. However, it is significant that the rest of the body influences and alters the workings of the government: when the Animal Parliament enacts a law that prohibits alcohol, or 'great Draughts' except 'upon Festivall dayes … all the young women and men in the Kingdome made such a mutiny, as the Parliament had much adoe to pacifie them; nor could not, untill they had alter'd that clause of Sweet-meats, and Healths' (*PF* 208, 209). Through a humorous analogy, this scene indicates that some rebellion and revolt is part of a healthy, functioning body politic. This would not be congruent with even moderate, constitutional royalism, which assumed 'that politics was an harmonious process in which different sources of authority complemented and reinforced each other'.[97] Such royalists also believed that resistance to the monarch broke up this political harmony in its violation of common law, which was seen to be an expression of natural and divine law.[98]

The parliament also proposes banning practices such as the piercing of ears and the plucking of eyebrows, 'But for the abolishing of these customs few agreed to, fearing such another Mutiny as the former, amongst the effeminate sex' (*PF* 209). Hence, this kingdom's laws are dictated to an extent by popular opinion of its female subjects. Despite Rees's argument that the body is mechanist and ultimately directed by the king, the fears of female 'Mutiny' and the popular revolt by the youth that occurs over 'Draughts' change enacted laws, thus demonstrating that all members of the body can be active in the decision-making and organization of the

[95] Rees, *Gender, Genre, Exile*, 149.
[96] For a more detailed account of how 'The Animall Parliament' and poems in *Poems and Fancies* address Descartes's mechanist physiology, see Semler, 'Cavendish's Early Engagement with Descartes and Hobbes', 336–7 and 352–3.
[97] Smith, *Constitutional Royalism*, 6. [98] *Ibid.*, 243

bodily structure: this provides a view of corporeality that is vitalistic, not mechanist. This depiction of the body is comparable to Cavendish's atoms, also depicted in *Poems and Fancies*, who are like workers who build homes as they form together to create a body. In these depictions of corporality, matter is self-determining and active rather than passively governed by a centralized force such as a monarch. It is significant that the king's subjects, not just the sovereign, make decisions for the body politic and enact laws, as he declares 'MY good and loving Subjects, I give you thankes for your care and industry, in rectifying the Errours of this Kingdome' (*PF* 211). It is particularly noteworthy that a royalist woman puts forward here a model of the body that portrays a strong parliament, popular revolt and elements of popular sovereignty.

The most politically charged aspect of the text occurs during the discussion of the 'Parliament of Errors' which had previously held power. After listing the erroneous opinions of this former regime, a Rationall Lord declares that 'These ought to be repealed, and new ones enacted in their roome' (*PF* 202, 204). He then lists new opinions unrelated to the former list. It is unclear whether these are the opinions to be replaced or whether they are a continuation of the previous list. Both interpretations are fraught with politically charged issues, and perhaps such confusion is deliberate, considering the sensitive political matters discussed. The Rationall Lord declares in the second list 'That all those that have got the power, though unjustly, ought to be obeyed, without reluctancy' (*PF* 204). If this is meant to be a newly enacted law, then Cavendish here is suggesting that the population of England should obey the new parliamentarian regime which executed Charles I, in so far as parliament was the regime which held power when Cavendish wrote and published the text. Many of the statements in the second list contradict Cavendish's own assertions found elsewhere in *Poems and Fancies*, which supports the possibility that the second list is a continuation of the first.[99]

The second interpretation, however, is equally fraught with problems. If the second list is meant as a continuation of the first list of erroneous 'Opinions', then the Soul King's throne is challenged. The Soul King

[99] For example, one opinion states 'That the bloud goeth in a Circulation' (*PF* 204), a belief that corresponds with her poem, 'The Motion of the Blood', which describes the process of circulation (*PF* 42). This list also includes assertions that older philosophy was foolish, while contemporary philosophers 'have committed no Errours' (*PF* 204). This contradicts her claims elsewhere in the text that no era can obtain truth: 'Some Ages in Opinion all agree, / The next doth strive to make them false to be … Reasons old are thought to be Non-sense / But all Opinions are by Fancy fed, / And Truth under Opinions lieth dead' (*PF* 39).

presides 'in a kernel of the Braine, like to a Chaire of State by himselfe alone' (*PF* 199). One of these erroneous 'Opinions' would be the belief that 'the Soul is a Kernel in the Braine' (*PF* 204). On one level this statement would serve as a critique of Descartes's belief that the soul is located in a small gland in the brain known as the pineal gland. Yet, by critiquing Descartes's theory of the pineal gland, the Animal Parliament would simultaneously be asserting that the location of the Soul King does not exist: in this interpretation the parliament is effectively *dethroning* its king, albeit in a convoluted manner. Descartes argued that 'the machine of the body is so composed that, merely because this gland is moved diversely by the soul or any other cause there may be, it drives the spirits that surround it toward the brain's pores, which guide [the spirits] through the nerves into the muscles, by means of which it makes them move the members'.[100] Demonstrating a mechanical account of the interaction between soul and body, while maintaining the mind/body distinction, Descartes suggests that the soul is the causation of movement in the body; that the soul drives spirits into the 'brain's pores' which then cause movement in the nerves and then the muscles. Although Rees argues that 'The Animall Parliament' demonstrates a mechanist account of movement through causation, where the king is the directional power over the various houses of parliament, Cavendish in fact critiques this possibility, by dethroning a king who is analogous to Descartes's pineal gland, which he believed was the origin of corporeal movement. Jacqueline Broad claims that Cavendish continues to critique Descartes's theory of the pineal gland in her latter writings such as *Philosophical Letters* and *Observations*, arguing that 'Cavendish denies that the soul is a distinct entity that can be separated from the body and subsist without it.'[101] Cavendish explains her contention that there is no 'seat' of rational thought: she does 'not absolutely confine the sensitive perception to the Organs, nor the rational to the Brain, but as they are both in the whole body, so they may work in the whole body according to their own motions' (*PL* 19). 'The Animall Parliament' underscores the importance of the endeavour to understand Cavendish's fictional genres through the lens of her natural philosophy. It also demonstrates the political nature of her scientific thinking, at least in so far as the text, in both interpretations of the listings of erroneous 'Opinions', challenges the very monarchical model it is meant to portray, by adverting in one reading to a

[100] René Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, ed. and trans. Stephen Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989), 38.

[101] Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 46. And see *PL* 111–12.

theory of de facto political power, in the other to a mechanistic theory of the action of the soul.

Although Cavendish presents politically controversial topics that do not correspond with royalist politics, her biography of her husband, written seven years after the Restoration, provides a very different political ideology. This demonstrates how any attempt to situate Cavendish precisely on the political spectrum of civil war and Restoration England is a difficult task. While her biography does not describe her natural philosophy, in the opening dedication to 'His most Sacred MAJESTY', she positions herself as a dedicated royalist figure, the '*most Obedient, Loyal, humble Subject and Servant*' to the King.[102] Moreover, throughout the text she praises her husband's 'Loyal, Heroick and Prudent Actions', frequently emphasizing 'his Sufferings, Losses, and ill-Fortunes'.[103] William Cavendish is depicted as uniquely loyal among a treacherous aristocracy, since 'he well knew how to have secured himself, as too many others did, either by Neutrality, or adhering to the Rebellious Party; but his Honour and Loyalty was too great to be stained with such foul adherencies'.[104] Cavendish emphasizes his suffering and losses, while positioning him as steadfastly loyal: 'I dare boldly and justly say, That there never was, nor is a more Loyal and Faithful Subject then My Lord.'[105] Cavendish's biography is clearly a royalist text inasmuch as she portrays her husband as a hero for the King and the royalist cause. However, for a text dedicated to the King, and which celebrates her husband's heroic royalism, she complains a considerable amount, particularly as she records in incredible detail their financial losses during the civil war, including 'a Computation of My Lord's Losses, which he hath suffered by those unfortunate Warres'.[106] Furthermore, she calculates the cost of numerous entertainments in honour of the royal family.[107] Cavendish also lists in detail the money and lands lost during the war which were never recovered, including funds provided by her husband to raise armies for Charles I. This is an interesting example of how Cavendish was immersed within royalist culture, and was willing to publicly state in print her allegiance to the King, yet this allegiance does not fit within royalist polemics in an unproblematic way. Cavendish's emphasis upon her husband's loyalty and sacrifice for the royalist cause, combined with the detailed discussion of his financial losses, can be viewed as a way of petitioning the King for restoration of more of their lost properties and funds which he owed them, since her husband 'hath lost and suffered

[102] Cavendish, *The Life*, 2rv. [103] *Ibid*., sig. c2r. [104] *Ibid*., 12.
[105] *Ibid*., 120. [106] *Ibid*., sig. d2r. [107] *Ibid*., 139–1.

most of any subject' and still had not been fully compensated.[108] Perhaps Cavendish's portrayal of their financial losses is comparable to her petitioning of the parliamentarian Committee for Compounding for lost funds during the civil war,[109] suggesting that although Charles II promoted them to duke and duchess, he was not adequately repaying them for the suffering they endured for him. Considering that her science and prose fiction often overlap with political theory, it is notable that her biography also does not explore political theory, even though it expresses the most overtly royalist statements.

The steadfast loyalty combined with immense financial loss of her husband is not only highlighted in her biography, but also in her autobiography, where she claims that 'though my Lord hath lost his Estate, and banish'd out of his Country for his Loyalty to his King and Country, yet neither despised Poverty, nor pinching Necessity could make him break the Bonds of Friendship, or weaken his Loyal Duty to his King or Country' (*NP* 375). Indeed, when Cavendish explicitly discusses the royalist party in her writings, she primarily complains about her own family's financial losses. In *Philosophical Letters*, for example, she complains that 'I wish with all my heart, the poor Royalists had had some quantity of that powder; and I assure you, that if it were so, I my self would turn a Chymist to gain so much as to repair my Noble Husbands losses, that his noble family might flourish the better' (*PL* 285). A similar complaint is made in *The Blazing World* when she personifies Fortune, who 'cast [her husband] into a banishment, where she kept him in great misery, ruined his estate, and took away from him most of his friends' (*TBW* 197). Note in these examples that the point of emphasis is her financial losses, rather than an articulation of the merits of a particular political ideology. Her complaints about the sequestration of royalist estates in her biography and autobiography exemplify how she perhaps did not perceive an incongruity between publicly praising the King and her husband's service to him, while also putting forward in her science a political vision that challenged the royalist culture within which she was immersed.

Perhaps the dramatic aspects of Cavendish's life in relation to poverty, nobility and exile enabled Cavendish to look at the world in unconventional ways. Throughout her life Cavendish was an outsider: as an émigrée

[108] *Ibid.*, 122.

[109] See Rees, *Gender, Genre, Exile*, 4. Cavendish reminds the reader that she was unable to successfully petition this parliamentarian committee to reclaim some of their funds, a privilege granted to other female relatives of royalists, because 'my Lord and Husband had been the greatest Traitor of England (that is to say, the honestest man, because he had been most against [the Parliament]', Cavendish, *The Life*, 71.

in Paris and Antwerp, as a political exile, as a woman participating in a masculine intellectual world, as an aristocrat without wealth and also as a painfully shy and bashful young woman in a court culture filled with gossip and intrigue. Perhaps these experiences as an outsider encouraged her to challenge conventional ideas, to have sympathy for outsiders such as women, peasants and animals and to take a deep interest in examining different, contradictory perspectives in her writings, since her own perspective was often from the margin.[110] Plurality may have appealed to her as an outsider, since she may not have always shared the perspectives or attitudes of those around her.

Cavendish's texts are incredibly creative, so much so that it has been argued that they are products of mental illness; the term 'Mad Madge' has appeared in articles and books to either defend or question her sanity. In recent years scholars have moved away from this position, primarily because there is scant evidence to prove any type of mental disorder.[111] There is, on the other hand, much evidence that Cavendish was a very independent thinker. David Cunning argues that Cavendish is an important figure in philosophy partly because 'she anticipates arguments and views that are found in some of the more famous philosophers that follow her – for example, Locke, Leibniz, and Hume. Another [reason] is that she is an important precursor to contemporary philosophers of mind.'[112] Furthermore, her 'view [of the physicality of matter] is an important chapter in the history of materialism, and it may even be correct'.[113] Likewise, her views about gender also anticipate later thinkers. In *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, for example, she articulates a passionate defence for women's education like none of her contemporaries, claiming that men

[110] For an example of her defence of animals, see 'The Hunting of the Hare' and 'The hunting of the Stag'. Margaret Cavendish, *Poems and Fancies* (London, 1653), 110–16. Cavendish's sympathy for animals is particularly notable in the context of the torturous experiments inflicted upon dogs by the Royal Society as recorded in the diaries of Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn. For more details of the particulars of these experiments, see Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. G. Gregory Smith (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905), 260, 311, 439–40, 666, and John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. Esmond Samuel De Beer, vol. III (Oxford University Press, 1959), 424–5, 473, 507.

[111] Virginia Woolf was influential in suggesting that Cavendish, whom she referred to as the 'crazy Duchess', was mentally ill. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin Books, 1945). For an example of scholarship which challenges this assumption see Hero Chalmers, 'Dismantling the Myth of "Mad Madge": The Cultural Context of Margaret Cavendish's Authorial Self-Presentation', *Women's Writing* 4.3 (2004): 323–40.

[112] David Cunning, 'Cavendish on the Intelligibility of the Prospect of Thinking Matter', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 23.2 (2006): 118.

[113] *Ibid*., 127.

> thinking it impossible we should have either learning or understanding, wit or judgement, as if we had not rational souls as well as men, and we out of a custom of dejectednesse think so too, which makes us quit all all [*sic*] industry towards profitable knowledge being imployed onely in [low], and pettie imployments, which takes away not onely our abilities towards arts, but higher capacities in speculations, so as we are become like worms that onely live in the dull earth of ignorance, winding our selves sometimes out, by the help of some refreshing rain of good educations which seldom is given us; for we are kept like birds in cages to hop up and down in our houses.[114]

Cavendish argues here that through a cycle of ignorance and lack of sufficient education, women internalize inferiority and do not realize their intellectual and artistic capacities. According to Cavendish, gender difference is caused by 'a custom of dejectednesse' rather than a natural and inescapable gender hierarchy. Bathsua Makin, in 1673, points out that Cavendish was able to transcend her own lack of formal education, asserting that 'the present Dutchess of New-Castle, by her own Genius, rather than any timely Instruction, over-tops many grave Gown-Men'.[115]

In order to understand Cavendish's understanding of gender, Chapter 1 of this book will focus on Cavendish's treatises, particularly *Philosophical Letters*, which articulates a natural philosophy that appropriates, critiques and revises influential early modern medical theories of the body and prominent scientific traditions. Her epistemology counters early modern beliefs that women should be silent, obedient and chaste, and were unfit for positions of power or intellectual rigour. In particular, Cavendish's theory of Nature disrupts cultural signifiers which shaped early modern understandings of body and corporeality, and their corresponding gender ideologies which directly or implicitly situated women and femininity as passive, incomplete, irrational and impure.

Cavendish's theory of Nature also engages with magic, witchcraft, alchemy, religion and fairy lore. Though Cavendish was unusually secular for the early modern period, Chapter 2 will explore the significance of the supernatural for Cavendish by applying her natural philosophy to 'The Travelling Spirit' from *Natures Pictures*, and to various poems from *Poems and Fancies*. Though Cavendish was a dedicated materialist, she appropriates theories of magic from early modern science and folklore into her materialist epistemology. As Cavendish draws upon a fusion of early

[114] Margaret Cavendish, 'To the Two Universities' (*TPPO* sig. B2v).
[115] Bathsua Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (London, 1673), 10.

modern conceptions of magic, she creates a radical theory of matter that not only challenges patriarchy and binary oppositions, but also emphasizes the plurality, mystery and diversity that can exist within an infinitely complex material world.

Building upon the theory of Nature discussed in Chapter 2, the third chapter will situate Cavendish's *The Blazing World* in the context of the philosophy of Hobbes and Paracelsus. Though the text portrays an absolute Empress who models her regime on Hobbesian principles, when examining references in the text to alchemical philosophy and theological debates concerning free will, a complicated political landscape emerges, which does not fit well within the conceptual framework of royalism or absolutism. This chapter will demonstrate that although Cavendish is generally assumed to be a loyal supporter of royalist politics, the political world of the Empress is not an uncritical view of monarchy. In particular, in so far as Cavendish engages with Paracelsian views of the imagination, the text provides a more revolutionary understanding of an individual's relation to power, corporeality and the cosmos.

Thus, the first three chapters investigate the relationship between her science and her politics, and hence focus primarily on her philosophical treatises, prose fiction and poetry, which overtly articulate her scientific ideas. A better understanding of Cavendish's thought will be gained by exploring how her scientific theories inform and shape her literature, as they deeply challenge both monarchy and patriarchal ideology.

But Cavendish wrote in a wide range of genres, and the final chapter will focus on her political theory exclusively as expressed in her romances 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' and 'The Contract', published in *Natures Pictures*. Both texts serve as case studies of her political theory, providing some of the most in-depth examples of her overt engagement with, and articulation of, civil-war politics. Both these romances by Cavendish provide a unique perspective, adding a feminist slant to republican polemics regarding tyrannicide, self-defence, popular sovereignty and slavery. Cavendish, situating female subjectivity within the language of revolutionary politics, investigates the political implications of republicanism when applied to women.

As previously stated, this study will demonstrate that contradictory and multifarious approaches are the foundation for Cavendish's political, scientific and proto-feminist theories. Using plurality as a basis for her theoretical thought, Cavendish creates an unorthodox science that challenges both patriarchy and the royalist ideology that she has been assumed to advocate. By examining the interconnections between Cavendish's science,

literature and politics, this study will aim to impart a richer understanding of women's contribution to early modern scientific and political theory. It also aims to highlight the integral importance of science and philosophy for an understanding of the early modern cultural and political landscape, while increasing awareness of the nuances and complexities of early modern political sympathies.

CHAPTER 1

Redefining gender in Cavendish's theory of matter

Margaret Cavendish's plays, poetry and fiction have in recent years increasingly found their way into university curricula. Yet she also wrote an extensive oeuvre concerning natural science. Her science is noteworthy for its exploration of contentious early modern debates concerning atoms, materialism and vitalism. But what is particularly significant about her natural philosophy is that it presents a complex disruption of the cultural signifiers that founded early modern understandings of bodies and matter. Theories of corporeality affected the organization of society deeply, particularly in so far as they reinforced gendered hierarchies and naturalized early modern notions of sex difference. These were ideas which either directly or implicitly situated women and femininity as passive, incomplete, irrational and impure. Such assumptions reinforced beliefs that women should be silent, obedient and chaste, and were unfit for positions of power or intellectual rigour. The gender assumptions in science remain a central concern today for many feminist scholars who argue that science can be used to naturalize gender stereotypes and inequities.[1] Cavendish's epistemology provides a very important example of a proto-feminist critique of science at the point when it emerged into modernity. In particular, her scientific treatise, *Philosophical Letters*, debates many philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, Jean Baptiste van Helmont, Henry More, Descartes and Aristotle. Directly engaging with a wide array of philosophers, Cavendish unravels and questions patriarchal ideas that underlie various philosophical methods and traditions. More importantly, in *Philosophical Letters* she does not simply reverse the gendered signifying domain. Rather, she redefines the terrain to create a theory of Nature that implicitly challenges many aspects of early modern culture that justified social hierarchies.

[1] See for example, Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

This chapter will focus on Cavendish's theory of Nature as it relates to prominent medical theories of the body and various scientific traditions influential in early modernity, such as mechanical philosophy, occult science and Aristotelian philosophy. As Cavendish appropriates and reworks ideas of the early modern scientific milieu, she creates a heterodox epistemology that counters the conceptual foundations that encouraged the establishment of gender and other hierarchies in early modern literature and culture. Consequently, a look into Cavendish's method also highlights just how deeply scientific thinking and philosophy affected the organization and values of early modern society at large.

I The early modern body

A comprehension of the different ways in which bodies were understood during the Renaissance will demonstrate how early modern physiology played a central role in conceptions of gender, and will further facilitate an understanding of how Cavendish's scientific thinking challenges early modern assumptions concerning corporeality and gender. Jonathan Sawday, discussing Renaissance anatomical perceptions of the body, argues that the body seems to 'possess its own specific forms of history which are ordered by a network of social and religious codes'.[2] Similarly, in contemporary literary and critical theory, Judith Butler argues that biological sex is neither a simple fact nor a static condition of a body, but an effect of power. Since sex 'is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls', this power creates the norms by which a body can be understood within the 'domain of cultural intelligibility'.[3] Within this context, body has its own history. As this chapter will show, early modern understandings of the body produced a sense of self that would be impossible for contemporary people to experience. Since our bodies may feel 'natural' to us, it may be difficult to understand them as normative, historical constructs bearing demarcations of power. Yet, theorists have explored the gendered constructs implicit within contemporary, 'factual' scientific discourse: constructs which inevitably affect how an individual understands, interprets and experiences their body and the world around

[2] Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), 7.

[3] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1–2.

them.[4] When exploring a different era's conception of body (going outside the parameters of our own cultural intelligibility), the relation between power and sex becomes strikingly apparent.

Conflation between power, gender and body can be seen particularly in early modern understandings of sex difference, influenced by the ancient physiology of Aristotle and Galen, who understood women as being imperfect men. Aristotle, for example, argued that 'the female is as it were a deformed male'.[5] The male body was the perfect form, and the female body was a defect from this generic type, and was thus defined as a kind of monster in Nature.[6] Like Aristotle, Galen also argued that 'the female has been made less perfect than the male'.[7] Galen posits that women's 'whole nature is weaker and less fully developed'.[8] Consequently, women were perceived as unable to become physically mature and develop to a fully masculine state. Within this logic, there was in a sense no female body, since females were essentially males that went wrong.

Models of the body based upon Galen's theory of humours dominated medical discourse and were widely used in universities and popular culture alike.[9] 'The medical discoveries of the seventeenth century did not immediately filter through into popular print, or alter prevailing ideas'

[4] For example, something as seemingly straightforward or factual as scientific descriptions of egg and sperm have been intrinsically bound with gender stereotypes that reflect ideology more than observed behaviour. See Emily Martin, 'The Egg and the Sperm: How Science has Constructed a Romance Based on Stereotypical Male–Female Roles', in Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen E. Longino (eds.), *Feminism and Science* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 103–17.

[5] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, trans. A. L. Peck (London: William Heinemann, 1943), 175.

[6] 'Nature has in a way strayed from the generic type. The first beginning of this deviation is when a female is formed instead of a male, though … this indeed is a necessity required by Nature' (*Ibid*., 401).

[7] Galen, *Galen On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body: Peri Chreias Moriōn [romanized form] De Usu Partium*, ed. Margaret Tallmadge May (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968), 632. Galen, *De Semine*, ed. Phillip de Lacy (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992), 195.

[8] Galen, *De Semine*, 195.

[9] Hannah Woolley, for example, in her advice to female servants and maids, offered medical advice and a recipe based upon humoral theories of the body. On the other side of the social spectrum, John Evelyn reported in his diary the treatment of Charles II on his deathbed, where physicians 'let bleed in both jugulars, and both vomit and purges'. Though this in all likelihood hastened his death, it was based upon the idea that disease was a symptom of an imbalance of the body's four humours: bleeding and vomiting could balance the humours and rid the body of corrupt fluids. These ideas can be seen in other medical tracts as well. Hieronymus Brunschwig, whose ideas were published several times in English, for example, offers four distinct medical recipes for headaches based upon whether an individual's dominating humour was black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood. See Hannah Woolley, *The Compleat Servant-maid* (London, 1677), 36–7; John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. William Bray, vol. II (New York: M Walter Dunne Publisher, 1901), 205; and Hieronymus Brunschwig, *A Most Excellent and Perfecte Homish Apothecarye*, trans. Ihon Hollybush (London, 1561), 2.

of gender and body.[10] Unlike nineteenth-century conceptions of sexual difference that relied upon the notion of the incommensurability of the sexes, male and female bodies were more likely to be understood as fundamentally similar.[11] Thomas Laqueur famously argues that both genders were believed to correspond to 'one-sex', where reproductive organs were conceived as being inverted versions of each other.[12] This was particularly evident in the science of Galen, who claimed that in regard to reproductive organs, the sexes 'differ in one thing only: the parts are in one case internal, the other external'.[13] Galen explains that the penis becomes an inverted cervix and the scrotum, the womb:

> If one should think of the female uterus … reversing itself that all of it that is outside comes now to be inside, and what is inside appears now on the outside, he would in this way produce the testicles in the scrotum, the cavity of the uterus, having become the scrotum and the peritoneum, the sheath-like tunic, and the testicles themselves not being outside the uterus, as they are now, but inside.[14]

Within this model of thinking, male and female bodies were similar and structurally equivalent. Gowing argues that sex 'was a matter of degrees, not absolutes, dependent on the balance of humours'.[15] From this perspective, Laqueur contends that 'there is no female and no sharp boundary between the sexes'.[16] Unlike current notions of opposite sex, in early modernity difference in gender is more of a sliding, fluid continuum than a sharp binary.[17]

The one-sex model articulated by Laqueur facilitates an understanding of the early modern notions of sex and gender, yet there has been much critical debate about the accuracy of his claims, and recent scholars argue that the teleology of the one-sex model was not so monolithic or literal as Laqueur contends.[18] For example, although humoral theory was a

[10] Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 17. Though Galen provided conceptions of the body that were highly influential throughout early modern society, Gowing has demonstrated that in popular medical books and discourse there were alternative and contradictory models. See *ibid.*, 19.

[11] *Ibid.*, 18, 19.

[12] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 25–35.

[13] Galen, *De Semine*, 189. [14] *Ibid.*, 191.

[15] Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 18. [16] Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 35.

[17] Although the one-sex model and beliefs in sex metamorphosis were increasingly challenged by medical writers throughout the seventeenth century, Valerie Traub suggests that sex transformation that occurred within stories of witchcraft and marvel was a logical extension of this idea. Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 45.

[18] For example, see Patricia Parker, 'Gender Ideology, Gender Change: The Case of Marie Germain', *Critical Inquiry* 19.2 (1993): 337–64, and Janet Adelman, 'Making Defect Perfection: Shakespeare

prevalent discourse throughout Renaissance culture, a new chemical outlook, inspired by Paracelsus, created a fundamental break from established Galenic tenets. Doctors 'trained in classical medicine' were sometimes in conflict with more experimental and clinical treatments.[19] For example, Samuel Pepys recorded in his diary that he witnessed a heated and passionate argument between four doctors arguing about the merits of chemistry versus Galenism, demonstrating a lack of consensus in the early modern world regarding the ways in which bodies were understood.[20] Paracelsus challenged medical authorities in ways that, according to Elizabeth Lane Furdell, are often in contemporary criticism 'described as analogous to Martin Luther's defiance of the Roman Catholic Church'.[21] Paracelsus characteristically questioned authority, and rather than a one-sex model of corporeality, he instead emphasized separateness between men and women:

> Man is the Little World, but woman … is the Littlest World, and hence she is different from man. She has a different anatomy, a different theory, different effects and causes, different divisions and cares … Thus the cosmos is the greatest world, the world of man the next greatest, and that of woman the smallest and least. And each world – the cosmos, man, and woman – has its own philosophy and 'art'.[22]

The sharp distinction between sexes, where men and women exist in entirely different worlds, is an essential component of Paracelsus' medical epistemology; women existed in what he termed 'the Littlest World'. Hildegard Elisabeth Keller argues that Paracelsus was 'a radical theorist of gendered medicine' who treats 'all illnesses as gender-specific' since

and the One-Sex Model', in Viviana Comensoli and Anne Russell (eds.), *Enacting Gender on the English Renaissance Stage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 23–52. After examining medical literature that discussed the differences between male and female genitalia, Winfried Schleiner accepts that such findings speak 'against the notion that a one-sex model was pervasively accepted', however he argues that 'it does not challenge the notion of general correspondence'. Similarity between the sexes was the conceptual framework for understanding reproduction. For example, though the midwife Jane Sharp references the one-sex model in her midwifery book, Elaine Hobby argues that this is merely an analogy for Sharp. Similarly, Gowing argues that the one-sex model 'was part of a heterogeneous corpus of ideas and arguments', yet it was not the only story. See Winfried Schleiner, 'Early Modern Controversies about the One-Sex Model', *Renaissance Quarterly* 53.1 (2000): 183; Elaine Hobby, 'Introduction', in *The Midwives Book Or The Whole Art of Midwifry Discovered*, ed. Elaine Hobby (Oxford University Press, 1999), xxviii, n.38; and Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 19.

[19] Elizabeth Lane Furdell, *Publishing and Medicine in Early Modern England* (University of Rochester Press, 2002), 1.

[20] Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Gregory Smith (London: Macmillan, 1905), 224.

[21] Furdell, *Publishing and Medicine*, 6.

[22] Paracelsus, 'Man and the Created World', in *Paracelsus: Selected Writings*, ed. Jolande Jacobi, trans. Norbert Guterman (Princeton University Press, 1995), 36.

'women have women's brains, women's hearts, and women's hair and, if they are hungry, hunger in a woman's way'.[23] It is rather ironic that forensic evidence suggests that Paracelsus may have had ambiguous gender himself or herself,[24] while he argued that men and women have inhabited different worlds from the beginning of the cosmos. Paracelsus asserts that 'man is a child of the cosmos', while in contrast woman is 'like the earth and all the elements'.[25] Consequently, Paracelsus offers a subordinate role to woman as a more earthly creature.[26] Femaleness encompasses the lowest ontology of 'Worlds', with the cosmos structured according to a male-over-female hierarchy. Although Paracelsus argues women are important and made in God's image, his cosmology none the less contains Aristotelian undertones with respect to gender, where femaleness is less whole or encompassing than maleness or the male world. Hence, influential models of early modern medicine understood femaleness as somewhat imperfect or less whole in relation to masculinity.

Cavendish, in contrast, 'attribute[s] an Infinite Wisdom, Strength, Power, Knowledge, &c. to Nature', which she defines as female (*PL* 8).[27] Cavendish specifically describes Nature as a 'Matron' and 'Mistress' (*PL* 302). The description of Nature as a female is not metaphoric – Nature's femaleness is an integral part of Cavendish's cosmology. Cavendish contends that 'Nature is altogether Material' and is described as subordinate to God. Yet, she argues that 'God has ordained Nature to work in herself by his Leave, Will, and Free Gift' (*PL* 11–12). Hence, a material female body is given a Godlike role over the natural world. Although Paracelsus believed women inhabited a lower world because they are 'like the earth and all the elements', Cavendish in contrast defines corporeal, feminine matter as infinitely powerful and wise rather than as an inferior substance. Though Nature's power and status does not necessarily correspond to

[23] Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, 'Seeing "Microcosma": Paracelsus's Gendered Epistemology', in Gerhild Scholz Williams and Charles D. Gunnoe Jr (ed.), *Paracelsian Moments: Science, Medicine, and Astrology in Early Modern Europe* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2002), 111 and 94.

[24] William R. Newman explains the findings of forensic specialists, claiming that 'we are left with the remarkable possibility that the gender of Paracelsus may have been capable of description as either female or male'. William R. Newman, *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), 197.

[25] Paracelsus, 'Man and the Created World', 25.

[26] 'Woman', in Glossary, *Paracelsus: Selected Writings*, 265–6. However, Jacobi contends that men and women are equal in Paracelsean cosmology since both sexes are made in God's image. *Ibid*., 266.

[27] Cavendish stresses that her definition of 'infinite' is not theological: 'God is a Spirit, and not a bodily substance, again that Nature is a Body, and not a Spirit, and therefore none of these Infinites can obstruct or hinder each other, as being different in their kinds … therefore when I call Nature Infinite, I mean an Infinite extension of Body, containing an Infinite number of Parts' (*PL* 8).

perfection, it nevertheless raises the ontological status of female corporeality and equates it with wisdom and power.

Cavendish also has a less hierarchical outlook on the nature of matter, arguing in *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* that 'there is infinite Life, so infinite Knowledge, all which makes an infinite Equality in infinite Matter' (*PPO* 10).[28] Since her thought shifts away from a principle of hierarchy towards a principle of equality, a brief discussion of her use of this concept is in order. Cavendish uses the term equality several times in *Philosophical Letters*, while also devoting a short chapter to it in *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, 'Chapter XI: Of the Equality of several Degrees and Changes of Infinite Matter and Motion' (*PPO* 9–10).[29] In both of these texts, Cavendish avoids establishing a definition whereby equality within matter is a condition of being equal in quantity or amount:

> the sensitive and rational parts in Nature, which are divided, being infinite, into every Figure or Creature; I cannot say equally divided, no more, then I can say, all creatures are of equal shapes, sizes, properties, strengths, quantities, qualities, constitutions, semblances, appetites, passions, capacities, forms, natures, and the like. (*PL* 416)

For Cavendish, equality does not mean that all matter contains the same calculable sizes, colours or shapes, but rather that there is life, soul and knowledge in all matter. While equality does not indicate an exact correspondence of attributes between different aspects of matter, none the less 'those Infinite effects in Nature are equalized by her different motions', since 'there are equalities or a union in Infinite' (*PL* 480). In *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, she explains that there is equality in different degrees of matter: 'there is an Union and Equality in the Infinite of each Degree of matter, and Change of motion' and this makes 'an Equality' (*PPO* 9). It is motion relative to the infinite that renders an equality of effects. Though Nature is diverse, Nature is also a state of equilibrium where all parts of Nature are part of an equal, unified whole: everything in the natural world contributes to, and is part of, the life, soul and knowledge of the body of Nature.

It is suggestive that Cavendish here employs the charged and volatile political language of equality used during the civil-war period, and that she uses such a concept to deconstruct hierarchy within matter and

[28] Cavendish defines 'Infinite matter' as being 'Infinite in Quantity, Bulk, Space, Place, Continuance, as also Parts and Whole, but Individable from each other, also all Positives, Negatives, and Potentials, inherent in the Only Substance' (*PPO* d2v).

[29] Cavendish defines motion as a permanent condition of matter by conflating 'Motion and Infinite [which] is Inseparable, for whatsoever is Infinite, is either Moving or Moved, or both' (*PPO* e1r).

corporeality. While radical polemics did not often go so far as to advocate full equality of the entire populace, let alone the natural world, Gerrard Winstanley, a leading figure within the Diggers, argued that equality extends to 'wives, children, servants, subjects [who] are their fellow creatures, and hath an equall priviledge to share with them in the blessing of liberty'.[30] For Winstanley, equality of privilege and liberty is (or should be) predicated on the equality of creatures in Nature. While Cavendish is not arguing for a redistribution of wealth or status, it is nevertheless interesting that she chose to use the political rhetoric of equality to describe all aspects of the material world. Furthermore, although a diverse corpus of ideas equated corporeality with gender hierarchy, Cavendish, in contrast, imagines a cosmos where bodies and corporeality are defined as being infinitely equal.

The conflation between power, gender and body is particularly evident in early modern understandings of reproduction. Discussing generation in *Observations*, Cavendish complains that Aristotle is 'the Idol of the Schools, for his doctrine is generally embraced with such reverence, as if Truth it self had declared it' (*OUEP* III 32). Although Aristotle's doctrines were increasingly challenged during the early modern period, his conception of physiology none the less remained a pervasive system of thought. In context of the history of the body, Aristotelian physiology powerfully demonstrates how deeply sexual politics shaped perceptions of reproduction. Aristotle argues that the male 'is something *better* and more divine in that it is the principle of movement for generated things, while the female serves as their matter'.[31] According to this logic, the woman does not actively participate in reproduction, since the womb was merely the place where matter is worked on by form and it had no actual active role in generation:

> The female always provides the material, the male provides that which fashions the material into shape; this, in our view, is the specific characteristic of each of the sexes: that is what it means to be male or to be female.[32]

Perhaps this strain of thinking justified inheritance laws which privileged eldest sons, since men, according to Aristotle, are the ones that transmit what we would refer to in current thought as genes. Since women were

[30] Gerrard Winstanley, *The New Law of Righteousnes* (London, 1649), 5. For more information about civil war political ideas, see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 1984 [1972]); J. P. Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots: Politics and Ideology in England, 1603–1640*, 2nd edn (London: Pearson Education, 1999); and Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994).

[31] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 133. [32] *Ibid*., 185.

understood to be passive receptacles for active male generative force, these reproductive roles defined their entire nature. According to Aristotle, men were active and women passive and within this framework these concepts could be replaced by 'moving' and 'moved': 'we may generalize this still further by substituting "moving" and "moved" for "active" and "passive"'.[33] 'Now of course the female, *qua* female, is passive, and the male, *qua* male, is active — it is that whence the principle of movement comes.'[34] It is thus significant that Cavendish theorizes female matter that constitutes the *active* principle of movement, for in her view 'nature hath a … power of self-moving' (*PL* 225). She argues, in contradiction of Aristotelian understandings of bodies, that it is motion and body which cause reproduction because 'in generation every producer doth transfer both Matter and Motion, that is, Corporeal Motion into the produced; and if there be more producers then one, they all do contribute to the produced' (*PL* 420, 421). Both parents (or producers) contribute matter and motion. Cavendish's thesis hence disrupts Aristotelian hierarchies based upon matter and reproduction.[35]

Cavendish was not the only thinker to challenge Aristotle on his claim that women are passive receptacles that merely provide matter in generation: Galenic texts, which were 'adored by the medical establishment',[36] and Paracelsus, whose theories of corporeality and medicine were gaining momentum throughout the medical establishment, suggested that both sexes contribute seed during reproduction.[37] Jane Sharp, a midwife who presumably had much direct experience in these matters, complains in exasperation about how 'idle Coxcombs … undertake to shew how Children may be had without use of the woman'.[38] Though Galen counters some of Aristotle's misogyny, he none the less claimed that male semen 'is of the purest quality' compared to women's.[39] Paracelsus' views of generation, however, illustrates a sense of symmetry between men and women

[33] *Ibid*., 113. [34] *Ibid*., 25.

[35] For a discussion of how Cavendish further disrupts Aristotelian constructions of gender in her dramatic work, see Andrew Hiscock, '"Here's no design, no plot, nor any ground": The Drama of Margaret Cavendish and the Disorderly Woman', *Women's Writing* 4.3 (1997): 401–20.

[36] Allen G. Debus, *Chemistry and Medical Debate: van Helmont to Boerhaave* (Canton: Science History Publications, 2001), 14. Andrew Wear estimates that there were approximately 590 different editions published of works of Galen between 1500 and 1600. Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550–1680* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 35.

[37] Paracelsus argues that 'nature combines the seed of the man and the seed of the woman'. Paracelsus, 'Man and the Created World', 27. For a more detailed discussion of the differences between Galenic and chemical medicine, see Debus, *Chemistry and Medical Debate*, 1–29.

[38] Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book* (London: S. Miller, 1671), 41.

[39] Galen, *De Semine*, 135.

when he explains that man 'is not an entire and perfect work, since he lacks harmony, but is only fragmentary until the woman is created like him; then the work is entire'.[40] For Paracelsus, both men and women are equally important in creating one complete or whole entity. However, unlike Cavendish, who argues both the parents contribute fundamental matter and motion, Paracelsus argues that only one parent contributes to the form and brain of the child, although this is not gender-specific.[41] While Paracelsus provides a more egalitarian view of women compared to Aristotle, this admittedly is not very difficult. Echoing Aristotelian notions that de-emphasize women's contribution to reproduction, he argues that men who commit bestiality can reproduce without women:

> [If an] animal, like a woman, receives the seed of the man with appetite and lust into its womb … through the continuous heat of the body, a man, and not an animal, is born from it.[42]

A man merely needs matter or any type of womb, human or animal, to produce offspring. This resembles the Aristotelian idea that women provide matter while men provide seed. In one of his more peculiar moments, Paracelsus even argues that a man can artificially create a miniature human called a homunculus, without a female, by heating and putrefying his own seed in an alchemical still.[43] Newman argues that many of the authors who discussed homunculi, 'accept[ed] a generative theory that viewed the female as supplying the matter of the embryo and the male the form' and 'saw such male parthenogenesis as a plausible means of escaping the bonds of the material world'.[44] Paracelsus' views on homunculi are steeped in gendered ideology: homunculi, who are not born of women, have mysterious and superior powers and knowledge since they 'are the instruments of great things, who get great victories over their enemies, and know all secret and hidden matters'.[45] Thus, an entity derived only from a male,

[40] Paracelsus, 'The Manual Concerning the Philosopher's Stone', in *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Aureolus Philippus Theophrastus Bombast, of Hohenheim, called Paracelsus the Great*, ed. and trans. Arthur Edward Waite, vol. II (Berkeley, CA: Shambhala, 1976), 100.

[41] Paracelsus argues that of 'the two seeds the better and stronger will form the other according to its nature' and a child's brain is 'formed according to the [parent] which is the stronger of the two, and it becomes like this seed'. Hence, strength, rather than gender determines which parent provides the intelligence of the offspring. Paracelsus, 'Man and the Created World', 27.

[42] Paracelsus, 'Concerning the Nature of Things', in *Hermetic and Alchemical Writings*, of Aureolus Philippus Theophrastus Bombast, of Hohenheim, called Paracelsus the Great, ed. and trans. Arthur Edward Waite, vol. I (London, J. Elliott & co., 1894), 121.

[43] *Ibid.*, 124.

[44] Newman, *Promethean Ambitions*, 236.

[45] Paracelsus, 'Concerning the Nature of Things', 125.

an offspring with superior capacities, is closer to spirit and further from matter.

Perhaps the deprivileging of women's participation and status in reproduction is connected to early modern beliefs that often understood the womb to be unclean, unstable, suspect and foul, and a source of disease.[46] For example, Nicholaas Fonteyn in *The Woman's Doctour* likens the womb to a public sewer as he reports that 'the Matrix is as the common shoore of the body, where most of the excrements are exonerated'.[47] Using similar language, James McMath in *The Expert Midwife*, discusses the 'filthy … Fact' that the womb is like 'the Vilest Room' or a 'Sink', for those 'Obscoene parts, which (for being so Foulsome, are turned down into the Vilest Room, in a manner the Sink of the Body)'.[48] Some writers of midwifery manuals were less extreme and used more neutral terms to describe the womb, such as Peter Chamberlen, who reported that the womb resembled a 'leather bag or bottle' and Jane Sharp, who more defensively asserted in her description of the womb that 'we women have no more cause to be angry, or be ashamed of what Nature hath given us than men have'.[49] However, the womb is particularly a source of disease for Edward Jorden, who argues that the womb is 'subject unto [more] infirmities then other parts are', while Fonteyn claims it 'is the cause of all those diseases which happen to women' since it 'hath a Sympathie with all the parts of the body'.[50] Likewise, even Sharp argues that 'There is a great agreement between the womb and the brain … and there is the like between the womb and the Heart by Nerves and Arteries.'[51] The disease-ridden womb has a special sympathy or a special connection with all parts of the woman's body, linking women's bodies with disease, contagion and impurity. These ideas demonstrate Sawday's contention that the 'female body *was* held to be monstrous' and that it was 'a region of erotic desire governed by the quasi-autonomous uterus'.[52] Though not all people believed the womb was autonomous, one great influence on early modern thought was Plato, who describes the 'discontented and angry' irrational womb as

[46] Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 174, 184.
[47] Nicolaas Fonteyn, *The Womans Doctour* (London, 1652), 147.
[48] James McMath, *The Expert Mid-wife* (Edinburgh, 1694), 21–22.
[49] Peter Chamberlen, *Dr. Chamberlain's Midwifes Practice* (London, 1665), 32, and Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 33.
[50] Edward Jorden, *A Briefe Discourse of a Disease Called the Suffocation of the Mother* (London, 1603), sig. B1r, and Fonteyn, *The Womans Doctour*, 2.
[51] Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 126.
[52] Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned*, 221. Jane Sharp claims, for example, that 'Monsters of all sorts [can] be formed in the womb' such as 'Worms, Toades, Mice, Serpents'. Sharp, *Midwives Book*, 111.

'wandering in every direction through the body'.[53] This influence can be seen at least partly in Nicholas Culpeper's directory for midwives published in 1662, where the womb is also linked with irrationality as he discusses a condition called the 'Frenzie of the Womb', which he describes as a '[s]ordid disease' which causes an 'immoderate desire of Venery … and tends to madness' and is so severe that it can be the death of 'modest women'.[54]

With her vitalistic view of matter and corporeality, Cavendish challenges these understandings of the womb and reproduction. Because all of matter in its entirety, regardless of sex, is vitalistic and self-moving, it has the power to create: it does not happen only in one place, such as a womb.[55] Indeed Cavendish surmises that 'the whole World [can] be likened unto an Egg' (*PL* 427).[56] In *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, the creation of thoughts is comparable to procreation because 'the Mind procreates like as the Body' (*PPO* 71).[57] In contrast to Plato's belief that wombs were angry and irrational, Cavendish argues that wombs are associated with rationality, since 'some parts have more Rational matter than other parts, as the Head, Heart, Liver, Womb, and the like' (*PPO* 56). Rather than describing the womb as a site of disease and disorder, Cavendish portrays a distance between the womb and corruption in *Natures Pictures*:

> Nature creates more Creatures from Death than from Life, from the Grave than from the Womb, for those Creatures she creates from the Womb, she creates for the most part by single ones, or couples, as witness Mankinde, and most sorts of Beasts: but those that she creates from Death and the Grave, as from dead Carcasses, and rotten Corruption, she produceth by numbers, as witness Maggots, Worms, and … are the cause of creating Millions of living Creatures. (*NP* 169–70)

[53] However, Galen believed this opinion to be 'totally preposterous'. See Galen, *On the Natural Faculties*, trans. Arthur John Brock (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), 44, and Plato, 'Timaeus', in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, trans. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton University Press, 1973), 1210.

[54] Though it can cause the demise of modest women, it will cause unchaste women to 'follow men … shamelessly'. Nicholas Culpeper, *Culpeper's Directory for Midwives*: or, A guide for women. The second part (London, 1662), 116, 115.

[55] Cavendish emphasizes the generative quality of matter, claiming that 'the perceptive corporeal motions are the ground-motions in Nature, which make, rule, and govern all the parts of Nature, as to move to Production, or Generation' (*PL* 513). Self-moving matter, according to Cavendish, is the most important aspect of generation or reproduction.

[56] This concept may have been inspired by Paracelsus, who held that the earth was a matrix. See Paracelsus, 'On the Matrix', in *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541): Essential Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. Andrew Weeks, vol. V (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008), 631.

[57] In *Poems and Fancies* Cavendish also compares brains and wombs when she claims that 'The Braine, as Earth, from whence all Plants do spring, / And from the Womb it doth all Creatures bring' (*PF* 148).

Unlike Fonteyn and McMath, who portrayed the womb as a site of filth, Cavendish does not suggest that the womb is filled with corruption and disease. She emphasizes instead that, more accurately, the location outside a womb would be the place where life is created out of decay and corruption, in so far as dead carcasses generate much more life, in the form of worms and maggots, than wombs. In her science-fiction story *The Blazing World*, the process of obtaining eternal youth involves a nine-month ordeal resembling pregnancy, since most of the nine months is spent in a cocoon-like condition. This state of artificial pregnancy, which can transform an elderly man to 'appear of the age of twenty, both in shape, and strength', is described as a process of purification of bodily waste and fluids. This artificial pregnancy is not a state of impurity, but instead is a process which purges impurities through vomit, stool, urine, sweat and blood, which ultimately 'cleared both the stomach and several other parts of the body [and] then … works upon the brain' (*TBW* 156).

Thus Cavendish challenges early modern assumptions concerning the womb, redefining Renaissance ideologies of female bodies. Butler states that her own theory of the body aims to create 'a radical resignification of the symbolic domain, deviating the citational chain toward a more possible future to expand the very meaning of what counts as a valued and valuable body in the world'.[58] Although Cavendish theorized in the seventeenth century, her science leads towards a similar target. It places bodies or body parts that were often defined as inferior in early modern physiology within a different signifying chain, while radically questioning and altering what is a valued or non-valued body.

II The politics of heat

It was not only on account of the womb that the female body was considered inferior, but also because of fundamental biological perceptions that defined female bodies. Temperature was a principal component in models of sex difference within many early modern frameworks for imagining the body. An adequate positioning of the political and cultural implications of Cavendish's representations of temperature in relation to gender, requires a situation of her ideas in the context of prevailing early modern theories of temperature in relation to sexual difference. Gail Kern Paster argues that temperature was a prevalent and important component for understanding early modern gender. Temperature was 'a form of difference

[58] Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 22.

thoroughly saturating female flesh and the subject within it. And it is precisely woman's literal saturation by the cold clamminess of the female complexion that philosophically undergirds the most virulent, most conservative forms of Renaissance misogyny.'[59] The language of humoralism established internal hierarchies of fluids within the body, which correlated with external gender politics. The ancient and influential Galen claimed that 'it is clear that after they are born the male is at all times of life hotter and drier than the female'.[60] In the early modern era, Jane Sharp explains to her female readers, in her midwifery manual about women's bodies, that 'woman is not so perfect as a Man, because her heat is weaker'.[61] Similarly, Juan Huarte in *The Examination of Men's Wits* also exemplifies the underlying gendered assumptions about temperature. He explains that Eve 'was by God created cold and moist: which temperature, is necessarie to make a woman fruitfulll, and apt for childbirth, but enemy to knowledge: and if he had made her temperat like Adam, she should have been very wise, but nothing fruitful'.[62] Like the womb that is irrational, woman also naturally lacks the capacity for reason as a result of her temperature. Ian Maclean points out that woman was 'considered to be inferior to man in that the psychological effects of her cold and moist humours throw doubt on her control of her emotions and her rationality'.[63] For example, temperature was crucial in formulating sex differentiation for Aristotle, who claimed a female was created simply when a man lacked enough vital heat to produce another male. Consequently, a woman was reckoned to be an 'infertile male' because she lacked heat and therefore *dynamis* or soul to generate a new life.[64] As the female body is corrupt and characterized by deficiency relative to the male body, so also female menstrual blood is a corrupt form of perfect male bodily fluids. Semen was the principle of new life since it contained vital heat and soul necessary for reproduction; menstrual blood was a form of male semen 'though in an impure condition'.[65] Thus, the premise of Aristotle's biological understanding of gender is based upon temperature: women are inferior or are not able to become men because they lack vital heat: 'That which by nature has a smaller share of heat is weaker; and … the female answers to this description.'[66]

[59] Gail Kern Paster, 'The Unbearable Coldness of Female Being: Women's Imperfection and the Humoral Economy', *English Literary Renaissance*, 28.3 (2008): 430.
[60] Galen, *De Semine*, 185.
[61] Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 41.
[62] Juan Huarte, *Examen de ingenious: The Examination of Men's Wits*, (London, 1594), 274
[63] Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge University Press, 1980), 46.
[64] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 103.
[65] *Ibid*., 175. [66] *Ibid*., 93–5.

While Galen's theory was less misogynistic than Aristotelian thought, Galen did theorize that 'the female is less perfect than the male by as much as she is colder than he'.[67] In this way, humoral theory fundamentally relied upon a view of the innate goodness of heat and correlated the male body and masculinity with hot and dry temperatures.[68] Though Galenists occasionally argued that women's bodies were just as perfect as men's, generally humoral theory maintained and supported a hierarchical view of the sexes. As Paster persuasively argues, not only was the belief in women's coldness persistent, but heat and cold, in general, were gendered phenomena which could explain processes of mind as well as of body:

> [S]tates of consciousness and cognitive awareness were ranked in terms of cold/hot, moist/dry. Waking consciousness was thought to be a hotter and drier state than sleep; rationality was less cold and clammy than irrationality … It followed logically that most men were thought to have better perceptual and cognitive apparatuses – better hardware, software, and wetware – than most women and were thus able to report more rationally and reliably about the world.[69]

In accord with the Galenist norm, Burton, for example, argues in 1621 that a 'hot and dry brain neuer sleeps well'.[70] However, his understanding of temperature is implicitly gendered. According to Burton, while 'a cold and moist Braine is an vnseparable companion of folly',[71] 'a dry light makes a wise mind, temperate heat and drynesse are the chiefe causes of a good wit'.[72] Consequently, intelligence and rationality were included in humoralism's gender differentiation of heat and was situated against coldness, moisture and femininity.

Besides physical form and degrees of reason, the amount of cold and moisture in a body defined an individual's character, signifying their moral and social aptitudes. For example, Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* argues that if people are 'too hot they are furious and mad, if too cold, dull, stupid, timorous and sad'.[73] In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Desdemona initially believes that Othello is incapable of jealousy since 'the Sun where he was borne / Drew all such humors from him'.[74] However, Iago tells

[67] Galen, *Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, 57. [68] *Ibid*., 71.
[69] Paster, 'Unbearable Coldness', 419.
[70] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1621), 357.
[71] *Ibid*., 225. [72] *Ibid*., 264.
[73] Burton further links temperature and personality with humoral theory, where 'Phlegmaticke are dull: Sanguine louely, pleasant, acceptable and merry, but not witty: Cholericke are too swift in motion and furious, impatient of contemplation, deceitfull wits; Melancholy men haue the most excellent wits, but not all, this humour may be hot or cold, thicke or thinne.' *Ibid*.
[74] William Shakespeare, *Othello* (London, 1622), 56. Cavendish was a great admirer of Shakespeare. See Margaret Cavendish, CCXI *Sociable Letters* (London, 1664), 338 and 244–8.

Desdemona later that Othello's anger and jealous behaviour were indicative of 'his humour'.[75] Both Shakespeare and Burton exemplify how vital early modern notions of temperature and humours were for comprehension not only of physiology, but also of personality and the self. Humoral theory posited that bodies were composed of the four humours or fluids, blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile, and these humours were not only gendered, but they determined temperament and personality. Although potentially a wide spectrum of characteristics could be in both sexes, men were believed to be by nature more inclined to heat and dryness and this indicated a range of characteristics such as courage, intelligence, hotheadedness and aggression. In contrast, women were consequently understood to be colder and more liquid than men. According to the gender dynamics of physiology, this indicated that women were less intelligent, courageous and constant. Though these attitudes were prevalent, some individuals turned such logic upside-down. In 1660 the French physician Samuel Sorbière, for example, argued in a letter to Princess Elizabeth of Bohemia that 'the softness of [women's] constitution … is much more suitable to actions of the mind than the dryness and hardness of ours'.[76] The more prevalent gendered understandings of the self and body, however, had very real consequences for cultural politics since women's physiology often rendered them unreliable and unsuited for duties and responsibilities performed by men.[77]

Sexual difference was believed to be induced by temperature, entailing the principle that the female's lack of heat is what causes her to be passive, incomplete and ultimately inferior. And while the theories of Paracelsus stood in contradiction to many of the Aristotelian and Galenic understandings of disease and healing practices, he too understood gender

[75] Shakespeare, *Othello*, 73.

[76] Samuel Sorbière, *Lettres et discours de M. de Sorbière sur diverses matières curieuses* (Paris, 1660), 71, quoted in Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 167.

[77] Though gender and temperature were intrinsically linked in early modern scientific thought, the early modern humoral body cannot be neatly placed within a binary framework, since the balance of humours in each individual body was affected by a diversity of influences such as climate, age, diet, exercise, etc. For example, Burton reports that prostitution is more widespread in warmer countries because of temperature: 'In Naples, the fruits of the soyle and pleasant aire eneruates their bodies, and alters constitutions. In Italie and Spaine, they haue their stewes in euery great Cittie, as in Rome, Venice, Florence: which as some say hath 90000. inhabitants, of which 10000. are whores.' Furthermore, he explains that 'old men … are cold and drie'. Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 545–6, 671–2. For more on humoral theory in relation to ethnicity and race, see Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). For a more detailed account of age, gender and humours, see Anthony Ellis, *Old Age, Masculinity, and Early Modern Drama: Comic Elders on the Italian and Shakespearean Stage* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009).

through the medium of temperature, as he argues that a 'man has in himself what is warm and dry; a woman that which is cold and moist'.[78]

Women's alleged coldness, wetness and passivity were dominant underlying assumptions governing various early modern physiologies of sex difference. These beliefs, along with women's ability to menstruate, lactate and the early modern stereotype of women's incontinent nature, contributed to the notion that women's bodies were incomplete, imperfect, leaky vessels.[79] Ben Jonson's *Epicoene* provides an example of this attitude when Morose explains that his overly talkative wife 'is like a conduit-pipe, that will gush out with more force, when shee opens againe'.[80] Drawing from Bakhtin's description of the grotesque body which 'is not a closed, completed unit',[81] Paster interprets this model as one where 'woman is naturally grotesque – which is to say, open, permeable, effluent, leaky. Man is naturally whole, closed, opaque, self-contained.'[82]

The way in which Cavendish engages with the politics of heat is noteworthy in this context where temperature was a powerful signifier of gender hierarchy in early modern medicine. Her approach to temperature can be contradictory. In her first written text, *The Worlds Olio*, written in 1650 then published in 1655,[83] she employs the language of humorism in support of the patriarchal belief that thanks to their cold constitutions women's intelligence was not as sharp as men's. For example, she claims that it 'cannot be expected I should write so wisely or wittily as Men, being of

[78] Paracelsus, 'Concerning the Alchemical Degrees and Compositions of Recipes and of Natural Things', in *Hermetic and Alchemical Writings*, vol. II, 173. B. J. Gibbons argues that Paracelsus' gendering of the four elements also had 'its moral implications; it is the hot and dry (fire and air) which help the soul rise to the One, and the cold and moist (earth and water) which drag it down into the phenomenal world. Paracelsus regarded air as hermaphroditic, but he continued to see fire as masculine and earth and water as feminine.' B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and its Development in England* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 83.

[79] For example, John Fletcher, while classifying urine, articulates early modern assumptions about women's incontinence and leakiness when he explains that during cold weather, women (along with drunkards, idle people and children) produce more urine: he explains that the 'Lacke of sufficient heate to attenuate and concoct the grosser parts so in winter' causes 'drunkards, sleepers, idle persons, women and children' to have more 'contents'. John Fletcher, *The Differences, Causes, and Judgements of Urine* (London, 1623), 57.

[80] Ben Jonson, *Epicoene*, in *The Workes of Beniamin Ionson* (London, 1616), 574.

[81] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 26.

[82] Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 92. However, Patricia Parker challenges the idea of a doctrine of male perfection in the Renaissance by demonstrating the early modern preoccupation with imperfect male bodies in the context of impotence, and by examining thinkers who argued for the perfection of both sexes. Parker, 'Gender Ideology, Gender Change'. None the less the notion of women's imperfection was an established, dominant discourse in the cultural landscape.

[83] Cavendish explains in *The Worlds Olio* that 'THIS Book, most of it was written five years since, and was lockt up in a Trunk as if it had been buried in a Grave' (*TWO* sig. A3v).

the Effeminate Sex, whose Brains Nature hath mix'd with the coldest and softest Elements' (*TWO* sig. A4r). Although Cavendish never reasserted this position in her succeeding treatises, Broad posits that this gendered understanding of humorism is but one example among several paradoxes encountered by modern readers of Cavendish's natural philosophy. Broad explains that:

> Cavendish rejects the view [articulated by Jean Baptiste van Helmont] that women's physiology makes them susceptible to madness and irrationality; and she dismisses the theory that the strong imaginations of pregnant women are responsible for birthmarks and birth defects in their young. Yet, at the same time, she supports the Galenic theory of the humors – a theory that also promotes the physical and intellectual inferiority of women compared to men.[84]

Broad contends that Cavendish's reliance upon Galenic models of the body poses a challenge to an interpretation of her as a feminist thinker: 'before we applaud the presence of "modern feminist sentiment" in Cavendish's work, we should bear in mind that Cavendish supports the Galenic theory of the humors'.[85] Although it is true that Cavendish does believe in humours, her theories of temperature, both in her later science and her literary works, often blatantly resist patriarchal constructions of the female body that depend upon the gendering of temperature in humoral theory. For example, Geraldine Wagner explains, regarding the Empress in *The Blazing World*, that 'there is a certain amount of agentic power intimated by the "light of her beauty" and "heat of her youth", both of which help her to survive the extremity of cold'.[86] Even though Aristotle argued that women were passive and that 'Nature does not assign defensive weapons to any female creature', the Empress remarkably survives and defends herself against freezing arctic temperature as a result of her own heat and light.[87] The males that have kidnapped the Empress fail to produce the same amounts of heat as a woman and 'were all frozen to death' (*TBW* 126). Thus Cavendish's story blatantly challenges Aristotelian and Galenic models of bodies, gender and heat.

[84] Jacqueline Broad, 'Cavendish, van Helmont, and the Mad Raging Womb', in Judy A. Hayden (ed.), *The New Science and Women's Literary Discourse: Prefiguring Frankenstein* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 60.

[85] *Ibid.*, 59.

[86] Geraldine Wagner, 'Romancing Multiplicity: Female Subjectivity and the Body Divisible in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 9.1 (2003): 9.16.

[87] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 335.

Cavendish not only reverses the heat/male and cold/female dichotomies; she reconceptualises the meaning and function of temperature:

> [N]either is death more cold then hot, nor life more hot then cold; for we see that Frost is as active and strong as burning heat; and Water, Air, and Earth, are as full of life, as Fire; and Vegetables, Minerals, and Elements, have life as well as Animals: But we, feeling a Man's flesh cold when he is dissolving from an Animal, think death is cold; and seeing he was hot before the same alteration, say Life is hot. (*PL* 386, 387)

Here Cavendish dismantles the gender hierarchy implicit within the meanings of hot and cold in the science of her time, as she perceives cold as being a force as active, burning and strong as heat. Though Aristotelian thought tends to equate heat with life, activity and soul, for Cavendish life does not correspond with temperature. If everything has life, then death is not hot, nor is it cold: according to Cavendish, the concept of vital heat is merely an imperfection of our limited corporeal perceptions.

In contrast to the axioms of humoral theory that argued that women's colder bodies made them more prone to cowardice and less inclined towards intelligence, Cavendish argues that temperature, fluids and moods are not intrinsically connected since 'it is not divers distempers … that cause different Dreams, or Cold, or Heat' (*PL* 29). Interestingly, this stands in contrast to the medical knowledge of her own physician, Théodore Turquet de Mayerne, who did link humours with moods.[88] However, for Cavendish, not only is the distinction between cold and heat challenged, but there are 'Infinite degrees of softness, hardness, thickness, thinness, heat and cold' and also 'Infinite degrees of Strength, Knowledg, Power' (*PL* 6). Hot and cold are not simple categories, but are infinites. They both can be infinite in their severity, strength or weakness. For example, she argues that during the summer, the sun, whom she describes as male, has a burning heat, where he appears 'an absolute Conqueror of all Exterior Cold motions'. The cold, however, is an equally powerful principle in the autumn: 'Cold elements become more Strong by Degrees, and in the Winter season they are in full Power' (*PPO* 245). As summer and winter shift and replace each other, hot and cold 'motions' are presented as equally significant, powerful and prevailing forces. The description of both heat and cold as 'infinite' indicates that both heat and cold are, in a sense, non-definable concepts.

[88] Mayerne, for example, argued that 'Panick fears will vanish' for people with a melancholic disposition if they subscribe to his medical advice and gave an example of a melancholic aristocratic woman, who once cured, became 'Merry, and enjoying a firm health'. Théodore Turquet de Mayerne, *Medicinal Councels* (London, 1677), 27–8.

Not that an individual cannot perceive the temperature of an object, but that the broader categories of hot and cold exceed our perceptions, categories and measurement, 'for natural effects go beyond all number, as being infinite' (*OUEP* III 38). Although both cold and heat are complex aspects of matter that transcend measurement, Cavendish none the less argues that 'the motions of cold are as strong and quick as the motions of heat' (*OUEP* I 104). Since women were associated with cold and men with heat, Cavendish's discussion of temperature implies a type of equality between the sexes. Her theory of temperature is yet another complex disruption of a system of signification which consequently challenges assumptions equating men with strength, reason, power and activity and women with passivity and matter.

At the same time as Cavendish alters the gendered signifying domain that constituted the early modern conceptions of bodies, she challenges other aspects of early modern culture. Perceptions of the body deeply affected the organization of society. Women's corporeal incompleteness and leakiness resembles Bakhtin's notion of the grotesque body which is 'unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits'.[89] Women's leakiness transgresses many boundaries, as it was associated with excessive female verbal fluency. Early modern women were expected to be silent, obedient and chaste. Though this was not necessarily always the reality, it was none the less the ideology delineating women's role in society.[90] The 'whore was the leakiest of all female vessels in part because of her tendency to linguistic overflow'.[91] Burton, for example, articulates the link – the inverse correlation – between speaking and chastity by asserting that 'when women scold haue I cried whore first'.[92] The leaky vessel was a threat in so far as it could transgress the doctrine of female silence (and consequently, female obedience in general) with its natural inclination towards verbal leakiness. The naturally grotesque female body was a site that was beyond the control of women themselves, reflecting the common early modern belief in women's inherent disorderly and unruly nature; a force which patriarchal governance needed to restrain and control. For example, although Burton claims both sexes can be treacherous, he cites

[89] Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 26.

[90] For a more detailed understanding of women's status and the actual reality of their lives, in relation to education, religion, law, work and writing, see the first part of Anita Pacheco (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 1–91.

[91] Paster, *The Body Embarrassed*, 151. For more information regarding the connection between verbal excess and bodily excess, see *ibid.*, ch. 1, 'Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy', 23–63.

[92] Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 10.

Platina claiming that 'No penne could write, no tongue atttaine to tell … Of womens treacheries the hundreth part',[93] suggesting that women are fundamentally unreliable, incomplete and unruly.

The scientific content of *Philosophical Letters* not only questions early modern understandings of gender and female 'leakiness', but its format, too, performs this interrogation. The framing of a text as an exchange of letters between Cavendish and a fictional female friend disrupts the association between the incomplete, leaky female body and women's speaking. Anxiety about women's speech was prevalent in the seventeenth century, particularly since women were taught that female virtues were silence, chastity and obedience, and that these were one and the same. Thirty-five years before the publication of *Philosophical Letters*, in 1631, Richard Brathwaite demonstrated the anxiety surrounding women's discourse with his claim that for women nothing 'detract[s] they more from their honour, than by giuing too free scope to that glibbery member'.[94] A woman's tongue is merely a slippery, nonsensical organ or a 'glibbery member' that does not communicate reason and instead detracts from a woman's 'honour' or chastity; so he signals that a loquacious woman was one whose chastity was suspect. Pens (not tongues) were the tools of reason and were made analogous to men's weapons, and the pun on 'pen' and 'penis' was a common metaphor. This shows the degree to which writing and public discourse were conceived as fundamentally masculine domains.[95] Lisa Sarasohn argues that women just 'did not write natural philosophy in the seventeenth century. To do so was not only revolutionary but even unnatural, a complete blurring of the gendered characteristic considered inherent in the male and female.'[96] Indeed, Cavendish's choice to articulate her natural philosophy within a fictional correspondence between females raises a question for Deborah Boyle's belief that there is no 'evidence that she had feminist aims in mind when commenting on her own career as a woman participating in the traditionally masculine activities of writing and thinking about natural philosophy'.[97] Furthermore, this claim is also difficult to uphold in view of the many female scholars depicted *within* Cavendish's corpus, such as the Empress who leads scientific communities

[93] *Ibid*., 680.

[94] Richard Brathwaite, *The English gentlewoman* (London, 1631), 88.

[95] Margaret W. Ferguson, 'Renaissance Concepts of the "Woman Writer"', in Helen Wilcox (ed.), *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500–1700* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 152.

[96] Lisa T. Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy during the Scientific Revolution* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 15.

[97] Deborah Boyle, 'Margaret Cavendish's Nonfeminist Natural Philosophy', *Configurations* 12.2 (2004): 227.

and debates philosophy in *The Blazing World* and the Female *Anchoret* in *Natures Pictures*, who is likened to one of the most famous Greek philosophers: because she 'grew as famous, as Diogenes in his tub, all sorts of people resorted to her, to hear her speak, and … to get knowledge, and to learn wisedom' (*NP* 289). It is also remarkable here that 'The first that came to her were Naturall Philosophers' (*NP* 289). It is also worth noting that Cavendish also portrays women in traditionally masculine leadership positions throughout her fiction. For example, a victorious female army in *Bell in Campo* asserts that women should be 'Copartners in [Men's] Governments', in order 'to help to rule the World, where now we are kept as Slaves'.[98] As David Cunning points out, it 'seems unlikely that Cavendish thinks that women are inferior by nature if she depicts women as capable of the highest levels of achievement in alternative possible worlds'.[99] This interest in reimagining gender roles in her fictional worlds complements her natural philosophy, which challenges gendered metaphors in her own world.

A further reason it is noteworthy that Cavendish chose the form of an exchange of correspondence between women to articulate her natural philosophy has to do with the historical context of her discourses. As Diana Barnes explains, while '[h]istorically women were excluded from philosophy through their ignorance of the genres by which its community is constituted', it is also the case that the 'published letters of humanists and philosophers opened the dialogical practice underpinning intellectual community to seventeenth-century women'. [100] The genre of the letter provided women with access to intellectual culture, although women's philosophical letters usually did not surface in print.[101] Therefore we must recognize that Cavendish chose to have an epistolary debate about science not just in the public medium of print, but also within correspondence between two women. Cavendish further legitimizes women's philosophical discourse in asking her fictional friend to support and validate her theories, as she formally declares that her 'opinions in Natural Philosophy, desire the assistance of [her] favour, or else they will die' (*PL* 451). In this

[98] Margaret Cavendish, *Bell in Campo*, in *Playes* (London, 1662), 588–9.

[99] David Cunning, 'Margaret Lucas Cavendish', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: The Metaphysics Research Lab., 2012), 45–6.

[100] Diana Barnes, 'Familiar Epistolary Philosophy: Margaret Cavendish's *Philosophical Letters* (1664)', *Parergon* 26.2 (2009): 49.

[101] *Ibid*., 49, 50. Barnes contends that Cavendish's representation of her correspondence echoes classical epistolary friendship modelled from Cicero and Atticus, and then popularized by Renaissance humanists. *Ibid*., 43, 44.

way Cavendish's 'masculine' reason is confirmed and sustained by another woman, rather than by male approval.

Cavendish's *Philosophical Letters* begins with an interesting presentation of her own philosophical voice. The text commences with a prefatory letter from her husband along with Cavendish's response. William's letter, however, emphasizes his own intellectual silence in contrast to Cavendish's 'eternal Spring, and running Stream', thus distancing his self and his authority from her text (*PL* iv). In recognizing that his own muses 'have broken all their Fidle-strings' and that 'then despair did bid me write no more', William's letter serves as a means to publicly endorse and approve of his wife's writing in print, but he simultaneously claims no agency or voice over the fictional female correspondence that ensues (*PL* irv). While appearing in print was considered immodest for women, and philosophy was mostly written and published by men, her husband portrays his support and admiration for Cavendish's unconventional publication of a philosophical dialogue solely between women. Hence, Cavendish publicly receives endorsement from her husband while placing her ideas within the form of a correspondence between two women that confirm and create a feminine model of reason and intellectual authority, even within a male-dominated intellectual tradition.

The creation of a discursive format for philosophical inquiry through the voices of women is only one facet of Cavendish which challenges assumptions about women and their relation to reason and power. The inverse of the 'irrational womb' effect was that rational knowledge was often depicted as male and in direct opposition to an irrational, female Nature.[102] Within these gendered dichotomies, ideas associated with maleness were often superior to their opposite. This perceived link between women, Nature and body, opposed to reason or spirit, provided the justification for the conviction that women needed to be controlled and subordinated. For example, in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve are 'Not equal, as their sex not equal seemed; / For contemplation he and valour formed, For softness she and sweet attractive grace, / He for God only, she for God in him: His fair large front and eye sublime declared / Absolute rule.'[103] In Milton's view, Adam is created for thought, heroism and God, qualifying him for 'Absolute rule', whereas Eve is further removed from reason and rulership;

[102] For more detail about the gendering of knowledge in the thought of Bacon and his ancient predecessors, see Genevieve Lloyd, 'Reason, Science and the Domination of Matter', in Evelyn Fox Keller and Helen E. Longino (eds.), *Feminism and Science* (Oxford University Press, 1996), 41–53.

[103] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2008), Book iv, lines 296–301.

her relationship to God is mediated through Adam. God instructs Adam directly, but Eve is instructed via Adam.

The widespread belief in early modern culture that women were naturally more carnal than men and less fit for authority can be seen in the *Parliament of Women* pamphlets, published throughout both the civil war and the Restoration, which portrayed a parliament run by women as wanton, unruly and driven primarily by women's sexuality; where laws were enacted solely for women 'To live in more Ease, Pomp, Pride, and Wantonness: But especially that they might have Superiority, and domineer over their Husbands'.[104] James Turner argues that the *Parliament of Women* pamphlets were designed to discredit the English parliament by 'gendering it female'.[105] Hence, the pamphlets provide a coding of parliamentary debate on legislation as a feminine manner of government, which diverges from the divinely ordained, monarchical and patriarchal form of kingship, which also has the apparent virtue of being more rational and less carnal. According to Maclean, the 'trio of vices – ambition, avarice and lechery' are 'all linked with woman, who as the worldly creature *par excellence* is thought to be more deeply imbued with them than is man'.[106] Although in the imagery of Catholic Europe, female saints and the Virgin Mary do not fit within these stereotypes, for the most part women 'remain[ed] associated with weaker reason, stronger passions and greater inherent vice'. Consequently, the pamphlets signify through satire that women cannot assume positions of authority in an institution such as a parliament, because they have a diminished capacity for reason and augmented 'appetites', traits which disqualify them from governance.

Since Nature was historically linked with women, focusing on Nature is particularly important for understanding Cavendish's understanding of gender. Also, Nature can be understood as a delineating concept for distinguishing between different Renaissance scientific schools of thought. Hugh Kearney claims that early modern science can be loosely organized into three main scientific traditions, which he describes as the scholastic, magic and mechanic sciences, each of which can be discerned by its approach to Nature. Mechanical philosophy, which eventually evolved into modern science, used the metaphor of a machine to describe the natural world; the magic or occult tradition often understood Nature as a piece of artwork or harmonious music to be mastered by the magician;

[104] Anon., *The Parliament of Women* (London, 1656), frontispiece.
[105] James Grantham Turner, *Libertines and Radicals in Early Modern London: Sexuality, Politics, and Literary Culture, 1630–1685* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 96.
[106] Maclean, *Renaissance Notion of Woman*, 22.

and scholastic science, which was taught in universities, used analogies with organisms to depict natural phenomena.[107] Each of the three sciences had a different worldview and these often contradicted one another. Like the early modern medical theories of the body, they all maintained a gendered view of matter and corporeality. Because Cavendish's thought has been described as mechanist and vitalist,[108] the next section will explore her ideas in relation to these traditions, so to understand her method more clearly.

III Mechanical science

In early modern natural philosophy, Nature also embodies many of the attributes derived from early modern medical theories that situated the female body as irrational, incomplete and passive. Like other intellectuals of her milieu, Cavendish explicitly defines Nature as female. Yet she challenges the patriarchal values embedded within this metaphor, questioning the basic tenets of mechanism in particular. Mechanical philosophy regarded Nature as being a motionless machine that God set in motion. For example, Robert Boyle conceived the natural world as functioning like a mechanical clock: ''tis like a rare Clock, such as may be that at Strasbourg, where all things are so skilfully contriv'd, that the Engine being once set a Moving, all things proceed according to the Artificers first design.[109] Similarly, for Descartes, natural bodies operated according to the same laws as machines:

> [T]he body of a man – insofar as it is a kind of mechanism composed of and outfitted with bones, nerves, muscles, veins, blood and skin – even if no mind existed in it, the man's body would still have all the same motions that are in it now except for those motions that proceed either from a command of the will or, consequently, from the mind.[110]

This emphasis upon the passivity of Nature resembles Aristotle's contention that women's bodies were naturally passive in contrast to men's, which were active. Cavendish, however, argues that unlike the underlying mechanist principle of mindless, inert matter, Nature is one active, self-moving body sustaining itself without the aid of any external power. For example,

[107] Hugh Kearney, *Science and Change 1500–1700* (London: World University Press, 1971) 17–48.
[108] See Jay Stevenson, 'The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900*, 36.3 (1996): 527–43.
[109] Robert Boyle, *A Free Enquiry* (London, 1686), 11.
[110] René Descartes, *Meditations*, in *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), 'Sixth Meditation', 96–7.

she claims that there is *no* rest in Nature, and that this constant movement is not induced by an external force because 'nature hath a natural Free-will and power of self-moving' (*PL* 225). Nature is not merely a passive, empty, lifeless body, but is capable of movement within itself. Nature is an active, moving, powerful being, for 'matter is not meerly Passive, but always Active' (*PL* 145). This contrasts with what Robert Boyle outlines in a letter as the 'two grand [principles] of Mechanical Philosophy, Matter and Motion. For, Matter alone, unless it be moved, is altogether unactive.'[111] As Cavendish reverses the active/passive dichotomy, she questions the associations between body, Nature and woman with passivity.

As Cavendish rejects the traditionally passive conception of Nature, she argues that external forces cannot govern Nature since 'Nature moveth not by force, but freely' (*PL* 23). This theory applies to all natural phenomena, 'for if matter moveth it self, as certainly it doth, then the least part of Matter, were it so small as to seem Individable, will move it self' (*PL* 21). Within this framework, even the smallest, seemingly insignificant bodies are capable of self-movement, a theory that contradicts the fundamental principle of mechanist thought, the metaphor of the machine. According to the mechanist analogy, if the universe is a lifeless machine, then it requires an external force for motion to occur.[112] Cavendish instead argues that if all motion is caused by self-movement, then the force envisioned by mechanists would disorder the natural world, rather than framing it into a functioning instrument:

> For these violent motions would rather have disturbed and disordered Nature; and though Nature uses variety in her motions or actions, yet these are not extravagant, nor by force or violence, but orderly, temperate, free, and easie. (*PL* 107)[113]

A lifeless machine or body, which moves only through external forces, depicts a vision of the universe that contains violent connotations, particularly in the context of its gender associations. In mechanism, Nature is a passive, lifeless entity that is forcefully and even violently moved.

Violent metaphors were used by Francis Bacon, whose mechanist ideas founded the Royal Society. Bacon used imagery of rape and domination

[111] Robert Boyle, 'Of the Excellency and Grounds of the Corpuscular or Mechanical Philosophy', in *The Excellency of Theology Compar'd with Natural Philosophy* (London, 1674), 8.

[112] For example, Cavendish explicitly argues against the Hobbesian belief that 'when a thing lies still, unless somewhat else stir it, it will lie still for ever' (*PL* 21).

[113] Although Cavendish agrees that force can create local motions, it does not create all movement; 'for Nature and her creatures know of no rest, but are in a perpetual motion, though not always exterior and local, yet they have their proper and certain motions, which are not so easily perceived by our grosser senses' (*PL* 447–8).

to describe the male scientist's pursuit of knowledge. He argues that earlier science, the 'true sons of knowledge', has been trying to 'find a way at length into [nature's] inner chambers',[114] yet has failed to discover her secrets, 'though it grasps and snatches at nature, yet can never take hold of her. Certainly what is said of opportunity or fortune is most true of nature; she has a lock in front, but is bald behind.'[115] Though Bacon suggests that scientists have not been able to dominate Nature, she is none the less imagined as a female body to penetrate and violate by male reason for the pursuit of knowledge. The male/female binary is utilized to portray a relation between knowledge and sexual power. Power can be obtained over Nature as man has power over woman. However, it was not just Bacon who evoked such sinister analogies. Eve Keller argues that in mechanism, the 'metaphors of violence against women [were] employed routinely to describe the relationship between the powerful force of the male scientist's mind and the resistant but ultimately submissive body of nature'.[116] Consequently, the mutually reaffirming metaphors linking women, body and Nature potently demonstrate Bacon's claim that 'Human knowledge and human power meet in one'.[117]

Cavendish disrupts associations between power, masculinity and reason as she argues that Nature is incomprehensible, thereby diminishing the impression of male science mastering a feminine, natural world. Not only are Nature and 'femininity' active, but they are also imbued with reason and knowledge:

> But Nature is wiser then any of her Creatures can conceive; for she knows how to make, and how to dissolve, form, and transform, with facility and ease, without any difficulty; for her actions are all easie and free, yet so subtil, curious and various, as not any part or creature of Nature can exactly or throughly trace her ways, or know her wisdom. (*PL* 476, 477)

Nature, and its associations with woman, is not a passive vehicle to master, for it is not only wise, but also an entity beyond human understanding. Cavendish's theories disrupt the association of women and Nature with irrationality. In contrast to early modern thinkers such as the authors of the *Parliament of Women* satires, Cavendish naturalizes female authority, as she places Nature in a governing position over natural phenomena.

[114] Francis Bacon, *The Novum Organum*, in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, (eds.) James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, Douglas Denon Heath, vol. IV (London: Longman, 1858), 42.

[115] *Ibid*., 106.

[116] Eve Keller, 'Producing Petty Gods: Margaret Cavendish's Critique of Experimental Science', *English Literary History* 64. 2 (1997): 447.

[117] Bacon, *Novum Organum*, 47.

An infinitely complex, powerful and cognitive Nature would not fit neatly within the common early modern rhetorical figure of the Book of Nature. This concept was used by many mechanical philosophers to distinguish their methods from previous sciences.[118] Although the metaphor of the Book of Nature was employed in various ways throughout Renaissance culture, the analogy that 'Nature is a book' often indicates that scientists should rely not upon the traditionally valued books of antiquity, but only what they observe in the material world.[119] Hence the Book of Nature could function as an anti-scholastic metaphor. It was believed that there were only two books written by God, the Bible and the Book of Nature.[120] As Protestants stressed that individuals should not rely upon the interpretations of priests and bishops, a parallel outlook encouraged scientists to rely on the Book of Nature rather than traditional, scientific interpretations and authority.[121] Nature's Book, if correctly read, would carry the highest authority. For example, Robert Boyle claimed he barely read any authoritative works of natural philosophy so 'that [he] might not be prepossess'd with any Theory or Principles' and was 'content to be thought to have scarce look'd upon any other Book than that of Nature'.[122] Turning the emphasis away from books, many mechanists began emphasizing the importance of visual observation in scientific endeavours. For example, William Harvey distinguished his method from earlier scholastic traditions in claiming 'how base a thing it is to receive instructions from others' comments without examination of the objects themselves … as the book of Nature lies so open and is so easy of consultation'.[123] The concept of the Book of Nature redefined scientific methodologies, placing an emphasis upon direct sensory experience, an idea that became the root of modern empiricism.[124] Descartes explained this methodology in a letter where he claimed he uses 'no reasoning which is not mathematical and evident, and all … conclusions are confirmed by true observational data'.[125] If accurate knowledge is not to be had from intellectual traditions

[118] Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 68, 69.
[119] *Ibid.*, 69.
[120] For example, Boyle reports that he 'may safely compare several things in the Books we call the Scripture, to several others in that of Nature'. Boyle, 'The Excellency of Theology', in *The Excellency of Theology Compar'd with Natural Philosophy* (London, 1674), 49.
[121] Shapin, *Scientific Revolution*, 78.
[122] Robert Boyle, *Certain Physiological Essays* (London, 1669), 7, 39.
[123] William Harvey, 'Anatomical Exercises or The Generation of Animals', in *The Works of William Harvey: Physician to the King, Professor of Anatomy and Surgery to the College of Physicians*, trans. Robert Willis (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2006), 152.
[124] Shapin, *Scientific Revolution*, 69.
[125] René Descartes, 'To Plempius for Fromondus', in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. III, *The Correspondence*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 64.

and authority, knowledge should be derived from individual perception and reason. Though this did challenge hierarchical constructions of scientific knowledge, in so far as access to science was not reliant upon ideas from authority and tradition, Carolyn Merchant argues none the less that 'sexual politics helped to structure the nature of the empirical method that would produce a new form of knowledge and a new ideology of objectivity seemingly devoid of cultural and political assumptions'.[126] Even if the mechanists were creating more secular, empirical and seemingly objective scientific methodology, their Book of Nature was not a book devoid of values. As Bacon's sexually violent metaphors demonstrate, ideology, and particularly perceptions of gender, was intrinsic to the development of the new empirical science.

Although Deborah Boyle asserts that gender does not motivate Cavendish's critique of mechanist claims to objectivity,[127] Boyle does not fully account for Cavendish's challenge to the mechanist notion of Nature as lifeless, unintelligent and female, which is what makes Cavendish's critique of mechanist objectivity most meaningful. While it is true that, from a contemporary perspective, Cavendish's ideas may not immediately appear feminist, as this chapter has demonstrated, it is nevertheless anachronistic not to account for the ways she does engage with early modern constructions of gender. For example, Cavendish dismantles gender dichotomies by envisioning Nature as an infinitely complicated, powerful female body: 'For Nature having Infinite parts of Infinite degrees, must also have an Infinite natural wisdom to order her natural Infinite parts and actions, and consequently an Infinite natural power to put her wisdom' (*PL* 8). Sawday explains, however, that '"Royal Science" developed a stridently aggressive language of appropriation and domination from which science, particularly biological science, has never recovered.'[128] The *History of the Royal-Society*, written by Thomas Sprat only ten years after the society was established, reflects the intrinsic gender politics within the development of the new science that later evolved into the modern scientific method. The language of sex difference is the initial point of departure for Sprat's text: the preface, written by Abraham Cowley, begins by reversing traditional gendered analogies. 'Philosophia' is quite resolutely given a metaphorical sex-change:[129]

[126] Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980) 172.
[127] Deborah Boyle, 'Cavendish's Nonfeminist Natural Philosophy'.
[128] Sawday, *The Body Emlazoned*, 245.
[129] *Ibid*., 237.

> Philosophy, I say, and call it, He,
> For whatsoe're the Painters Fancy be,
> It a Male Virtue seems to me.[130]

Sprat continues this theme, arguing that the Royal Society needs to stop the use of feminine poetic tropes since poetic language hinders scientific progress towards discovering an objective truth or 'perfection in true knowledge'.[131] Therewith femaleness is opposed to masculine, scientific reason; it hinders all that will lead to an objective epistemology.

Rather than such perfection in knowledge, scientific objectivity for Cavendish, as Keller argues, consists of 'social constructions that are endorsed as much because they advance the needs of their adherents as because they are deemed to be scientifically effective or true'.[132] Cavendish does often satirize scientific claims of value-neutrality; this is particularly evident in *The Blazing World*. For example, the preface of *The Blazing World* parodies the concept of an aggressive, masculine science mastering truth in opposition to female fancy. The first section of the book is described surprisingly as 'romancical' (*TBW* 124); surprising since this is the part that depicts a scientific community much like the Royal Society.[133] Describing its work as a romance or fictional fantasy, Cavendish counters claims that the Royal Society represents objective, masculine reason mastering the world. However, the inability to discern absolute truth is not exclusive to the Royal Society or to any particular science. Cavendish remains consistent to her project of dismantling claims to absolute knowledge as she playfully satirizes even herself. Sarah Hutton demonstrates that 'it is by no means always that a "Cavendish opinion" wins the debate' during philosophical disputes in the text.[134] Though her preface sets up a truth/fiction dichotomy, claiming that *The Blazing World* is entirely separate from the realm of truth and science, she nevertheless publishes it as an appendix to her philosophical work, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*. Ironically, both texts explore the same scientific theories, but

[130] Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal-Society* (London, 1667), sig. B1r.
[131] *Ibid.*, 15.
[132] See Eve Keller, 'Producing Petty Gods', 451.
[133] For a more in-depth discussion of how the scientific communities resemble the Royal Society, see Sarah Hutton, 'Science and Satire: The Lucianic Voice of Margaret Cavendish's *Description of a New World Called the Blazing World*', in Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (eds.), *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 161–78.
[134] *Ibid.*, 170. For example, 'the fish-men's explanation of tides and currents in the sea is not the one propounded in *Observations*' (*ibid.*, 170).

from within seemingly contradicting mediums, demonstrating that fancy and science are not absolute dichotomies.

In contrast to the 'romancical' part, the second section of *The Blazing World* is referred to as 'philosophical' even though no science is actually discussed, only conquest and war, demonstrating Cavendish's contention that science is more concerned with power and ambition than objectivity (*TBW* 124). Even the 'spirits', resembling the hermetic practice of conversing with angels or spirits, are part of the Empress's larger project of maintaining absolute power; they serve as spies and 'gave her intelligence of all such things as she desired to know' (*TBW* 203).[135] Indeed their intelligence instigates war and colonization; it is reminiscent of John Dee, the famous Elizabethan alchemist, who published a four-volume work in which he elaborated his imperial case. The 'philosophical' part of *The Blazing World* seems even more appropriate as a label in juxtaposition with Dee, whose frontispiece to the volume on *The Art of Navigation* (1577) carried an image of the 'Imperiall Ship' of Christendom, carrying Queen Elizabeth on a mission to restore her empire through sea power, which bears an uncanny resemblance to the Empress's naval war in *The Blazing World*.[136] Instead of scientific knowledge being objective truth, *The Blazing World* shows science as having a definite political agenda, one that serves as a conduit for absolute monarchy, conquest, manipulation and imperialism. Feminist historians of early modern science have also commented on the gendered language of the new emerging scientific methodologies; Keller argues Cavendish was interrogating similar issues at its inception:

> Cavendish was … uniquely aware of the gendered construction of the new science *as it was being created*: its binary categories – of observer and observed, subject and object, truth and fiction, philosophy and fancy – were to Cavendish's mind necessary finally not for discovering that 'one truth of nature', but rather for producing men as 'petty gods'.[137]

Cavendish's scientific methodology demonstrates a recurring concern with the relation between gender, power and science. As Cavendish intermixes distinctions between science/romance, philosophy/power and truth/fancy, she demonstrates the multifaceted ways in which knowledge and power

[135] For a more in-depth discussion of how Cavendish satires occult philosophy in *The Blazing World*, see Sarah Hutton, 'Margaret Cavendish and Henry More', in Stephen Clucas (ed.), *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 185–98.

[136] John Dee, *General and Rare Memorials pertayning to the Perfect Arte of Nauigation* (London, 1577).

[137] Eve Keller, 'Producing Petty Gods', 467.

combine within early modern scientific discourses, creating male scientists striving to be 'petty gods'.

Cavendish attacks her contemporaries and their assumption that Nature is a body void of reason:

> some of our modern Philosophers think they do God good service, when they endeavour to prove Nature, as Gods good Servant, to be stupid, ignorant, foolish and mad, or any thing rather then wise, and yet they believe themselves wise, as if they were no part of Nature; but I cannot imagine any reason why they should rail on her, except Nature had not given them as great a share or portion, as she hath given to others; for children in this case do often rail at their Parents, for leaving their Brothers and Sisters more then themselves. (*PL* 162–3)

Metaphorically placing the relationship between science and Nature into a system of inheritance, Cavendish indicates that scientists seek power and wealth from their pursuit of knowledge. This passage also suggests that in railing at Nature and calling her 'stupid' or 'mad', they utter abusive language to their mother, an action that in early modern society would be both disobedient and disorderly to family and state. Families were crucial for early modern conceptions of governmental order and the well-being of the commonwealth depended on with the good management of families.[138] From this perspective, as scientists rail at their mother, they are analogous to rebellious children; they disrupt the family. Not women bearing cool, incomplete, impure bodies, but rather scientists are the unruly force attempting to disrupt Nature. This passage also suggests that humanity is not God's favourite, but their vanity makes them akin to little children who whine and shout abuse for want of more attention and power. The scientist's desire for power stemming from 'reason' is ironically rooted in jealousy and ambition. Cavendish locates humanity in a humble position where only Nature as a whole body united has knowledge of the entire material world. If humanity is only one small part within Nature's infinite body, then 'there can never be in one particular creature a perfect knowledg of all things in Nature' (*PL* 407). Thus, Cavendish conceives human knowledge as fragmented and limited while she also theorizes that all aspects of the material world are fractured and incomplete. This subversively indicates that the only form in matter that is a whole, entire, harmonious union is the *female* body of Nature. Cavendish's view of Nature's

[138] See Keith V. Thomas, 'Women and the Civil War Sects', *Past & Present* 13 (1958): 42. Though Thomas addresses radical sects in the civil war, his article explores meanings of family in the early modern period.

body stands in contrast to many medical understandings of sex difference; the male body is as incomplete and imperfect as any other part of matter.

Since humanity is merely a small fraction of the body of Nature, its knowledge and perspective cannot transcend its limited position within the natural world. Male reason and knowledge are not distinct from body, matter and femaleness, but are limited creatures within Nature. This strikingly contrasts not only with many scientific discourses, but also with the poetic language of the period. Sawday explains that the image of a 'triumph of a strident masculinity over a submissive and cowed feminine Nature within the discourses of science was entirely in accord with the poetical-political language of the moment'.[139] Sawday explains that poets such as John Donne employed the language of ownership, colonization and discovery of the natural world to describe a female lover:[140]

> O my America! my new-found-land,
> My kingdome, safeliest when with one man man'd,
> My Myne of precious stones: My Emperie,
> How blest am I in this discovering thee![141]

Evoking a sinister combination of colonization and sensuality, the woman is the empire to be controlled, depicting an association between woman, body and Nature as entities to be owned and dominated.[142]

However, in the Cavendish universe, Nature and matter cannot be governed or possessed, since matter 'is wise, and knows how to move and form every creature without instruction' (*PL* 108). It is also the force that creates humanity itself: 'if Nature hath power from God to produce all kinds of Vegetables, Minerals, Elements, Animals, and other sorts of Creatures, Why not also Man' (*PL* 192)? Hence, matter is the principle of life and 'the cause of every particular material Creature is the onely and Infinite Matter' (*PL* 10, 11). Matter itself is one united mass or body that is continuously moving in infinite ways to create a diverse and boundless universe:

> [F]or though Matter is one and the same in its Nature, and never changes, yet the motions are various, which motions are the several actions of one and the same Natural Matter; and this is the cause of so many several Creatures; for self-moving matter by its self-moving power can act several

[139] Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned,* 237.
[140] For a discussion regarding the relation between the representations of the female body in both Donne and anatomy, see *ibid*., 26–8.
[141] John Donne, 'Elegie XIX. To his Mistress Going to Bed', in *The Complete English Poems of John Donne*, ed. C. A. Patrides (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1985), 184.
[142] See Sawday, *The Body Emlazoned*, 28.

> ways, modes or manners; and had not natural matter a self-acting power, there could not be any variety in Nature. (*PL* 163, 164)

Thus, it is Nature's activeness and plurality that cause and produce the universe. Unlike Renaissance notions of the irrational, impure and 'filthy' womb, female generative force intrinsic in all matter is necessary for the functioning of the natural world. In terms of gender, this signifies that femaleness and body are Godlike since they are the active powers that create the world.

IV Magic science

Cavendish's view of self-moving matter resembles vitalism, which also perceived matter as self-moving. Yet for vitalists, matter had an active spirit that permeated or suffused passive, inert matter.[143] While mechanism emphasized a more secular worldview where God played a more distant role, both held parallel views upon the state of matter. Although matter was understood as alive and infused with spirit, the alchemist and mystic Thomas Vaughan thought matter was 'meerely Passive, and furnished with no motive Faculty at all',[144] while Merchant argues that Paracelsus believed that 'material objects were merely … gross manifestations of the subtle soul'.[145] He describes spiritual bodies as being like a 'civet in a pure and uncontaminated casket'.[146] Like the way women's bodies, in medical thought, were sometimes understood as impure and corrupt, he suggests that the body and hence Nature and matter are akin to contamination and waste. In contrast, Cavendish assigns much more status and importance to corporeality. In *The Blazing World*, for example, spirits are unable to perceive the material world without body.[147] This tests Deborah Boyle's contention that Cavendish's vitalism does not have feminist implications. Boyle argues against John Roger's belief that Cavendish's degrees of vitalist matter can be seen as gendered categories,

[143] For example, Henry More claims that spirit of nature pervades 'the whole Matter of the Universe' and '[directs] the parts of the Matter and their Motion'. An individual could thus manipulate the natural world by controlling the active spirit within physical bodies. Henry More, *The Immortality of the Soul* (London: J. Flesher, 1659), 450.

[144] Thomas Vaughan, *Anima Magica Abscondita*, (London, 1650), 9–10.

[145] Merchant, 'Death of Nature', 118.

[146] Paracelsus, 'The Archidoxies of Theophrastus Paracelsus', in *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Aureolus Philippus Theophrastus Bombast, of Hohenheim, called Paracelsus the Great*, ed. and trans. Arthur Edward Waite, vol. II (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1976), 6. Even Jane Sharp argues that 'the Female sex are subject to more diseases by odds than the Male kind are'. Sharp, *The Midwives Book*, 250.

[147] The 'Empress asked them, whether they could speak without a body, or bodily organs? No, said they; nor could we have any bodily sense' (*TBW* 168).

wherein sensitive matter is masculine and rational matter is feminine and superior. Although Boyle may be correct in her disagreement with Roger's analysis, since as Boyle points out 'Cavendish herself did not link her natural philosophy with such claims about gender', this still does not mean her thought lacks a proto-feminist account of vitalism.[148] Cavendish, for example, challenges Renaissance occult assumptions regarding the passivity of matter, arguing that spirits cannot control Nature, since 'natural Matter stands in no need to have some Immaterial or Incorporeal substance to move, rule, guide and govern her, but she is able enough to do it all her self' (*PL* 194). The idea of a self-moving, active and material Nature redefines body and Nature in such a way that she has become a force that cannot be controlled or governed, whether it is by God, science or immaterial substances.

Though magical sciences regarded corporeality as passive and inferior to spirit, this type of knowledge none the less emphasized harmony and union in Nature. Keller claims that as a result, alchemy, in particular, offered more egalitarian gender metaphors, for whereas 'Bacon sought domination, the alchemists asserted the necessity of allegorical, if not actual, cooperation between male and female'.[149] Vaughan used masculine and feminine metaphors to describe two equal peers in harmonic union:

> The Magicians Sun and Moon are two universall Peeres: Male and Female, a King and Queen Regents, alwayes young, and never old. These two are Adaequate to the whole world, and coextended thorough the universe. The one is not without the other.[150]

Vaughan provides a hermaphroditic view of matter in which male and female forces co-extend through the whole universe. While occult thinkers such as Vaughan utilized more equal metaphors, emphasizing union, balance and harmony between the sexes, the magic tradition nevertheless contrasts with Cavendish's materialism.

Cavendish argues that immaterial entities are *not* the primal cause of natural phenomena, and attempts to explain and understand Nature in material terms. The occult emphasis upon mysticism was problematic for Cavendish, since she believed science should focus upon the material, natural world.[151] Some occult philosophers, on the other hand, were influenced by the Jewish cabbala, which claimed to reveal the magic secrets of the Old Testament through numbers. Henry More, who was one of

[148] Deborah Boyle, 'Cavendish's Nonfeminist Natural Philosophy', 218.
[149] Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, 48.
[150] Vaughan, *Anima Magica Abscondita*, 29.
[151] Cavendish argues against scientists who attempt 'to demonstrate things supernatural … which go beyond mans reach and capacity' (*PL* 195).

the most important Cambridge Platonists, provided a detailed study of the cabbala in *Conjectura Cabbalistica* (1653), and Anne Conway, who was both educated by More and associated with the Cambridge Platonists, made numerous references to the cabbalist text, *Kabbalah Denudata*.[152] Consequently, for many early modern occult thinkers mathematics was not a dispassionate, rational 'hard science', but was a transcendental and spiritual pursuit. Kearney argues that mathematics 'offered the key to a world of unchanging realities, close to, if not identical with, the Divine Mind'.[153] For Kepler, geometry existed 'before the origin of things' and 'was coeternal with the divine mind and is God himself'.[154] As a result, the 'pursuit of mathematics was not a secular activity', but 'was akin to religious contemplation'.[155]

Numbers were not only considered the key to the mind of God; mathematics was understood as an apparatus that could unlock the secrets of Nature. The resulting knowledge could induce vast magic powers that would raise the mathematician to an almost Godlike state. For example, Allen G. Debus argues that John Dee felt that his geometrical method repeated the first steps of creation, and 'the reader was promised the understanding of great mysteries'.[157] Shakespeare evokes the image of a Godlike mage in *The Tempest*: Prospero, who was 'rapt in secret studies', performs 'high charms' which control weather, spirits and people.[158]

How does this relate to the relation between Nature and gender? Cavendish challenges many of the fundamental tenets of Renaissance magical thinking, and implicitly provides a gendered critique of occult theories of corporeality as well. Cavendish argues that mathematics cannot discover divinity or God's mind, since it is not possible 'that Divinity can be proved by mathematical Demonstrations; for if Nature be not able to do it, much less is Art' (*PL* 211). If the universe is entirely material, then not only are spirits unable to control passive matter, but the scientist cannot obtain absolute power through their arts. The concept of mystical mathematics is critiqued in Cavendish's science-fiction story *The Blazing World*, when the spirits argue that 'infinite cannot be reckoned,

[152] See Henry More, *Conjectura Cabbalistica* (London, 1653) and Anne Conway, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (London, 1692).
[153] Kearney, *Science and Change*, 40.
[154] Johannes Kepler, *The Harmony of the World*, trans. E. J. Aiton, A. M. Duncan and J. V. Field (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1997), 304.
[155] Kearney, *Science and Change*, 40.
[157] Allen G. Debus, *Man and Nature in the Renaissance* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), 19.
[158] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. David Lindley (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1.2: 77; 3.3: 88.

nor numbered' (*TBW* 172) and there is no 'other mystery in numbers, but what man's fancy makes' (*TBW* 171). If numbers cannot adequately calculate infinity, then mathematics cannot comprehend God's mind. Since it could also be an occult practice to converse with spirits or angels,[159] Cavendish satirizes this tradition, as spirits ironically argue against the basic tenets of their own science. It may appear surprising for Cavendish to contradict her materialism, as she continuously refers to the spirits as 'immaterial': yet 'those spirits were always clothed in some sort or other of material garments' (*TBW* 165) and 'cannot leave or quit them' (*TBW* 169). It is significant that these spirits do not move or govern matter: 'natural material bodies give spirits motion; for we spirits, being incorporeal, have no motion but from our corporeal vehicles, so that we move by the help of our bodies, and not the bodies by the help of us' (*TBW* 168). Early modern culture predominantly perceived bodies as passive and inferior to spirit, but in *The Blazing World*, understandings of bodies are turned upside-down, since there corporeality is the fundamental force or principle of life that provides spirits with motion, life and knowledge. Spirits are entirely passive, without bodies; they can neither speak nor perceive any bodily sense without matter (*TBW* 168, 169). Cavendish ironically defines 'immaterial' spirits as entirely material and reliant upon corporeality for cognitive and mobile powers. Significantly, matter and corporeality, and its connection to women, is more active and powerful than spirit: it is the force that provides knowledge and insight to the spirits who reside in the Blazing World.

As Cavendish turns the relation between body and spirit upside-down, the spirits of the Blazing World also critique the belief that occult science could find the mysteries of God: 'spirits are as ignorant as mortals in many cases; for no created spirits have a general or absolute knowledge, nor can they know the thoughts of men, much less the mysteries of the great creator' (*TBW* 182). Neither the spirits, nor any mortal, including a magician, can have a universal knowledge or a true comprehension of a God. Similarly, in the non-fictional *Philosophical Letters*, Cavendish argues that scientific attempts to discover God's secrets represent human arrogance rather than constructive scientific pursuits:

> I am amazed, when I see men so conceited with their own perfections and abilities, (I may rather say, with their imperfections and weaknesses) as to make themselves God's privy Councellors, and his Companions, and

[159] John Dee, for example, documented his alleged angelic conversations. See John Dee, *A True and Faithful Relation*, ed. Meric Casaubon (London, 1659).

> partakers of all the sacred Mysteries, Designs, and hidden secrets of the Incomprehensible and Infinite God. O the vain Presumption, Pride, and Ambition of wretched Men! (*PL* 314)

Humanity is vastly ignorant and arrogant in its belief that it can discover the secrets of the divine. Scientists striving for the secrets of God's mind are comparable to the devil and his fall from heaven. Their pride and ambition parallels Satan's aspiration to be like God; 'some men will be as presumptuous as the Devil, to enquire into Gods secret actions, although they be sure that they cannot be known by any Creature' (*PL* 349). By associating Satan with scientists who aspire to gain tremendous Godlike powers, Cavendish questions the ethics and objectives of any science that attempts to control Nature. In terms of gender, Cavendish imagines a natural world where Nature is feminized, but incredibly powerful, active and infinitely wiser than humans.

Since Cavendish routinely emphasizes the infinite, complex qualities of Nature, opposed to the limitations of human knowledge and ability, she critiques the alchemical belief that chemistry could remedy the vast number of diseases. Followers of Paracelsus believed it was possible to understand the whole universe through chemistry, and thereby all could be cured.[160] But Cavendish argues from the variety of the natural world that chemistry could not cure all disease:

> And what would the skill of Physicians be, if one remedy should cure all diseases? Why should they take so much pains in studying the various causes, motions, and tempers of diseases, if one medicine had a general power over all? Nay, for what use should God have created such a number of different simples, Vegetables, and Minerals, if one could do all the business? (*PL* 390)

Cavendish argues that the natural world is so diverse and remarkable as to limit the reach of synthetic medicine: 'Chymists torture Nature worst of all; for they extract and distil her beyond substance, nay, into no substance, if they could' (*PL* 491).[161] In attempting to find the philosopher's stone and turning base metal into gold, alchemists transmute natural substances and minerals, thereby enacting a Godlike position. Consequently,

[160] Paulo A. Porto, '"Summus atque felicissimus salium": The Medical Relevance of the *Liquor alkahest*', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 76.1 (2002): 5.

[161] Although Cavendish disagreed with aspects of chemical medicine, she enthusiastically agreed with medical practices that used natural rather than synthetic remedies, which she understood as working with nature, rather than trying to usurp or possess her powers (*PL* 378). Paracelsian reformers, however, often advocated the prescription of local herbs for local diseases. See Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 147.

the alchemists' 'tortur[ous]' attempts to transform and alter Nature can be seen as an external force violently controlling the body of Nature.

V Scholastic science

Though Cavendish's science has been described as mechanist and vitalist, she also appropriates ideas from scholasticism into her natural philosophy. Aristotle came under challenge from a number of early modern thinkers who were intent on replacing his ideas with a new theoretical system. As previously mentioned, he was none the less still taught in universities, and the Peripatetic epistemology remained pervasive in society. Consequently, the scholastic mode of thought was well known in Renaissance culture, although its status was in decline. Cavendish and scholasticism both based their science upon analogies of the body. Yet Cavendish's conception of body vastly differs from and challenges scholastic definitions of corporality, motion and in turn the social hierarchy and gender order that scholasticism sustains.

Cavendish disputes the Aristotelian conception of matter in relation to corruption. The scholastic tradition conceived matter on earth as corruptible and subject to change, whereas the matter that composed the heavens or planets was eternal and incorruptible. Aristotle claimed that 'planets – which are eternal (for a body which moves in a circle is eternal and unresting)' will 'suffer no change'.[162] In contrast, elements on earth were changeable, and mimetic of the eternal: 'Imperishable things are imitated by those that are involved in change, e.g. earth and fire.'[163]

Aristotle's hierarchical chain of matter applied to human society; he argues that army leaders and freemen are analogous to the heavens because their movements are more ordered, less changeable and irregular compared to those of slaves:

> We must consider also in which of two ways the nature of the universe contains the good, and the highest good, whether as something separate and by itself, or as the order of the parts. Probably in both ways, as an army does; for its good is found both in its order and in its leader, and more in the latter; for he does not depend on the order but it depends on him. And all things are ordered together somehow, but not all alike, – both fishes and fowls and plants; and the world is not such that one thing has nothing to do with another, but they are connected. For all are ordered together to one end, but it is as in a house, where the freemen are least at liberty to act at

[162] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954) Book XII, Part 8 and Book XI, Part 6.
[163] *Ibid.*, Book IX, Part 8.

> random, but all things or most things are already ordained for them, while the slaves and the animals do little for the common good, and for the most part live at random; for this is the sort of principle that constitutes the nature of each.[164]

Aristotle argues that everything is connected, but some things, such as an army leader or a freeman participate more in the 'highest good'. Aristotle's vision of a hierarchical cosmos influenced the concept of the Great Chain of Being, an orthodox view inherited from the medieval interpretation of Aristotle.[165] This chain was composed of links ranging in hierarchical order from rocks and plants through every possible grade up. Consequently, differences in social rank were perceived as part of a divinely ordered hierarchy where each individual was allotted a particular space in the natural order.

Aristotle's view delineates a natural and static hierarchy, but Cavendish's theory of corporeality does not facilitate notions of a hierarchical cosmos, nor gendered views of matter. Like women's bodies, which were more corrupt, and inferior, Aristotle's cosmology situates matter and Nature as corrupt and inferior to the perfect heavens. Women were associated with matter and Nature, and men were perceived as having a closer likeness to God. Thus, women would correlate with the corruptible side of Aristotle's heaven/earth, incorruptible/corruptible binary. In contrast, Cavendish rejects the notion that *anything* can be corrupt in Nature, since all 'Matter is Eternal and Incorruptible'. She denies a teleological hierarchy based on corporeality: she argues that there is no such thing as more perfect, or less perfect in matter (*PL* 460, 439). As Cavendish challenges the dualisms between body and spirit and between the heavens and earth, she simultaneously questions political, religious and scientific understandings of gender hierarchy that are related to this dichotomy.

Both Aristotle and Cavendish argue that everything on earth is in constant flux, but in *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* Cavendish specifically applies this concept to all matter, including the planets:

> [B]ut the chief actions of Nature are Composition and Division, and changes of Parts: Wherefore, although to our humane perception, the Stars and Planets do not change from their general nature, as from being such or such composed figures, but appear the same to us, without any general or

[164] *Ibid*., Book XII, Part 10.

[165] Arthur O. Lovejoy claims that Aristotle provided 'the idea of arranging (at least) all animals in a single graded *scala naturae* according to their degree of "perfection"'. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 58.

> remarkable change of their exterior figures; yet we cannot certainly affirm, that the parts thereof be either moveless or unalterable, they being too remote from our perception. (*OUEP* I 147)

Her principle that all matter is constantly in change and motion challenges the scholastic tenet that the heavens never change and have perfect motion, in contrast to the earth, which has imperfect motion. Broad has contended that although Cavendish advocates antidogmatism in science, she paradoxically 'defend[s] the old Scholastic way of thinking' and 'is strongly opposed to the questioning of ancient authority'.[166] But while Cavendish may appropriate aspects of scholasticism, she also redefines matter as vitalistic and equal, a description that has the effect of disrupting the multiple, reaffirming cultural metaphors that signified and reinforced sex hierarchy within scholastic thought.

Cavendish uses categories and dualisms that would be familiar to and embedded within early modern science, yet she questions and subverts such conceptions by placing them in a different context. For example, in her description of matter Cavendish uses active/inactive and rational/irrational dichotomies. But she creates these distinctions in order to question the values they support. She argues that there is one aspect in animate matter that is reason and another which is sense and life:

> [B]y corporeal self-motion, which I name sensitive and rational matter, which is life and knowledg, sense and reason [and are] the knowing, understanding and prudent parts, the designing, architectonical and working parts, nay, the Life and Soul of Nature, and that there is not any Creature or part of nature without this Life and Soul; and that not onely Animals, but also Vegetables, Minerals and Elements. (*PL* 99)

This initially in some respects seems to replicate understandings of matter in early modern science where rational substances or entities govern corporeality. For Cavendish, however, inanimate and animate matter are completely intermixed with each other, 'so closely joyned and commixed as in one body, the inanimate as well as the animate, although not in the same manner; for the animate moves of it self, and the inanimate moves by the help of the animate' (*PL* 99). While Cavendish retains these distinctions, she breaks with other scientific traditions: God, spirits or other immaterial entities are not part of and do not govern these intermixed

[166] Broad, 'Cavendish, van Helmont, and the Mad Raging Womb', 60, 49.

categories. Also, significantly, everything in existence, including minerals and vegetables, none the less has reason, body, motion and life.

In Cavendish's theory, life, power and knowledge are brought into concepts that were typically situated within the feminine side of the male/female metaphors. The concept of reason distinct from matter is instead placed by Cavendish in a vitalist universe where all of matter is living with cognitive and rational abilities without the aid of spirit:

> [T]here is life and knowledg in all parts of nature, by reason in all parts of nature there is a commixture of animate and inanimate matter: and this Life and Knowledg is sense and reason, or sensitive and rational corporeal motions, which are all one thing with animate matter without any distinction or abstraction, and can no more quit matter, then matter can quit motion. (*PL 99*, 100)

Reason is not distinct from nor superior to matter and femininity cannot be defined as irrational or further from God, as both are thoroughly intermixed as one living, knowing entity. Body and corporeality are reconceptualised as all matter is composed from the powerful, feminine force of matter, imbued with life and reason.

Cavendish's universe is a vitalist conglomeration of reason, body and knowledge. Confusing mind/body categories, the mind is an entity that functions like a physical body: 'the minde feeds as greatly on thoughts, as a hungry stomacke doth upon meat' (*TPPO* 110). If reason and matter are conceived as equivalent, then signifiers of masculinity and femininity are confused, challenging the ideology which associated men with reason, God and spirit and women with corporeality, irrationality and corruption.

There has been a long-standing debate concerning the relationship between Descartes and gender, but it is not surprising that Cavendish, who was essentially an anti-dualist, provided an implicit gendered critique of the Cartesian mind/body binary.[167] She claims that both the mind and body are material and, thus, inseparable. Furthermore, humans cannot have immaterial knowledge, since 'the Natural Mind is not less material then the body' (*PL* 149). Nature as a whole body united has knowledge of the entire material world. Since her creatures are only pieces that together compose her body,

[167] For more details and perspectives concerning different views regarding Descartes and feminism see Susan Bordo (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of René Descartes* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1999). Sarah Hutton further argues that Cartesianism helped seventeenth-century women philosophers enter the realm of philosophy. Sarah Hutton, 'Women Philosophers and the Early Reception of Descartes: Anne Conway and Princess Elisabeth', in Tad. M. Schmaltz (ed.), *Receptions of Descartes: Cartesianism and Anti-Cartesianism in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3–24.

they can obtain only fragments and pieces of this wisdom. Consequently, all creatures in Nature are simultaneously wise and ignorant, 'for if there were not ignorance through the division of Parts, every man and other creatures would know alike; and there is no better proof, that matter, or any particular creature in Nature is not governed by a created Immaterial Spirit, then that knowledg is in parts' (*PL* 178). No aspect of Nature can either comprehend, or be entirely ignorant of, the whole infinite body of which they are a small part. Since all perspectives and knowledge are valid and true to some degree, none can claim perfection: 'no particular Creature in Nature can have any exact or perfect knowledg of Natural things, and therefore opinions cannot be infallible truths' (*PL* 246). Perhaps this is why Cavendish characteristically depicts various and contradictory opinions and perspectives upon one subject. Since knowledge is distributed or divided between body and matter, no single entity has a privileged perspective, for 'there is no part of Nature that hath not life and knowledg' (*PL* 98, 99). Cavendish describes a vitalist and pluralistic universe where not only humanity, but every aspect of the material world is wisdom. Human reason is only one aspect within a vast, infinite body.

Within this wider view of the universe, human knowledge appears insignificant. Nature is goddess-like in her power and knowledge of the natural world, yet corporeal, but too vast and infinite to be an anthropomorphic character. Her knowledge and power is divided and distributed throughout the material world:

> [F]or what man knows, whether Fish do not Know more of the nature of Water, and ebbing and flowing, and the saltness of the Sea? or whether Birds do not know more of the nature and degrees of Air, or the cause of Tempests? … For, though they have not the speech of Man, yet thence doth not follow, that they have no Intelligence at all. But the Ignorance of Men concerning other Creatures is the cause of despising other Creatures, imagining themselves as petty Gods in Nature. (*PL* 40–1)

Many forms of knowledge within Nature may be incomprehensible or imperceptible to humanity, since knowledge is limited by material, sensory perceptions. Possibly other forms of knowledge may exist beyond human cognitive and sensory abilities, 'for other Creatures may know and perceive as much as Animals, although they have not the same Sensitive Organs, nor the same [manner] or way of Perception' (*PL* 59). It is significant that Cavendish critiques the belief that animals do not have speech, and therefore have no intelligence. Intellectuals such as Descartes and Hobbes understood speech as a defining feature of human supremacy and a central

factor differentiating humanity from other creatures.[168] This attitude was not confined to the sciences and can also be perceived in seventeenth-century literature. For example, in Ben Jonson's *Timber, or Discoveries*, Jonson argues '*Speech* is the only benefit man hath to expresse his excellencie of mind above other creatures. It is the Instrument of *Society*.' Consequently, 'Language most shewes a man.'[169] Erica Fudge argues that the 'making of the boundary which separates the human from the beast is important', particularly since 'it is an issue in many areas of culture which are central to our understanding of the early modern period'.[170] For example, Calvin often uses a simile to animals, or 'brute beasts', as a means for delineating what he perceives as ungodly attitudes and behaviour.[171] Fudge argues that animals often represent human power and dominion.[172] There was also an association between beast and woman in early modern misogynistic rhetoric. In *King Lear*, which was published several times throughout the seventeenth century, Lear expresses his most virulent misogyny towards his daughters through animal imagery: 'Down from the waist / They're centaurs, though women all above. / But to the girdle do the gods inherit; / Beneath is all the fiend's. There's hell.'[173] As Cavendish challenges

[168] See René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, in *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Cress, 'Fifth Part', 30, and Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 24.

[169] Similarly, Miranda in *The Tempest* also indicates the importance of linguistic capacity as a defining feature of humanity, as Caliban, who is described as a thing that is 'A strange fish' and a 'puppy-headed monster', is associated with an initial inability to speak: 'When thou didst not, savage, / Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like / A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes / With words that made them known.' Ben Jonson, 'Timber, or Discoveries', in *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson*, vol. II (London, 1640), 118, 120; Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, 1.2: 355–8.

[170] Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 1.

[171] Calvin complains that people 'make themselues wilfully drunken, that they myght haue a senslesse conscience, and they bereue themselues of all vnderstanding, as though they were brute beastes'. Also, he notes 'that our wicked lustes, and the affect [of] that are termed the sensual appetytes, wherin wee resemble the brute beastes'. Such statements are particularly significant since Calvin argues that when people behave in beastly ways, 'Gods image is defaced in them, and they become lyke doggs and Swyne, and Asses'. Jean Calvin, *The Sermons of M. Iohn Caluin, vpon the Epistle of S. Paule too the Ephesians*, trans. Arthur Golding (London, 1577), 99r, 70v, 269r.

[172] Fudge, *Perceiving Animals*, 4. Bacon also combines human mastery over animals with human linguistic capacity; 'for whensoever he shall be able to call the creatures by their true names he shall again command them'. Francis Bacon, 'Valerius Terminus', in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. III, 222. Fudge further explains how human mastery over submissive animals is celebrated in country-house poems such as Ben Jonson's 'To Penshurst', where a pheasant is 'willing to be kill'd', and in Thomas Carew's 'To Saxham', where a 'willing ox, of himself came / Home to the slaughter'. Ben Jonson, 'To Penshurst', in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson and Evelyn Simpson, vol. VIII (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), 94, and Thomas Carew, 'To Saxham', in R. G. Howarth (ed.), *Minor Poets of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Dent, 1953), 86.

[173] William Shakespeare, *The History of King Lear*, ed. Stanley Wells, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2008), sc. 20: 119–22. Moreover, Joseph Swetnam repeatedly associates women with animals in

the human/beast binary, sexual politics are also questioned. Holly Faith Nelson argues that Cavendish in her natural philosophy, shifts meanings of animals to challenge gender:

> As woman and beast intersect as negative terms in the dominant patriarchal discourse, Cavendish invests positive value in both the female and the non-human to subvert the binary that divests women and animals of symbolic power. Cavendish makes a clear attempt to reject the negative value assigned to female and beast when she inverts the definition of 'man' and 'beast' to the benefit of the category 'woman'.[174]

A redefinition of the category of woman would have required the symbolic domain to be reconceptualized so that all signifiers of 'others' were shifted and hence could not be used as negative measures to define the feminine. It is consequently significant that in *The Blazing World*, the hybrid creatures who are humans mixed with animals or insects not only can reason, but they can also speak. Yet it is not just understandings of animals and insects that are challenged within the Cavendish paradigm. Catherine Gallagher argues that because Cavendish in *The Blazing World* 'assumes that each unit of matter englobes a self-sufficient and radically distinct consciousness, she is able to imagine that there is no privileged perspective of universal knowledge, such as that which might earlier have been attributed to the topmost position on the great chain of being, the position occupied by the male human being'.[175] Notions of human supremacy or natural gender hierarchy in matter do not fit comfortably within this pluralistic view of the universe since all creatures have their own valid knowledge and perspective. Consequently, the male scientist cannot dominate or master a female Nature if human knowledge is a fraction within an infinitely complex body.

If Nature is such an infinite and continuously active force for Cavendish, then the teleological scholastic explanation for motion – that objects are attempting to fulfil their final cause or purpose – is made problematic. Although the theory of final purpose may perhaps appear to relate to Cavendish's notion that matter has a vitalistic self-motion,

his popular yet scathing pamphlet, republished numerous times throughout the seventeenth century. He claims that women cannot be persuaded with reason and 'will barke more at me, then Cerberus the two-headed dog did at Hercules, when he came into Hell'. Joseph Swetnam, *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* (London, 1615), A4r.

[174] Holly Faith Nelson, '"Worms in the Dull Earth of Ignorance": Zoosemiotics and Sexual Politics in the Works of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle', *English Language Notes* 39.4 (2002): 19.

[175] Catherine Gallagher, 'Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England', *Genders* 1 (1988): 32.

the movement towards a final cause did not mean that all matter had life and knowledge. Aristotle maintained that matter sought its end-purpose because it was seeking its natural place in the universe.[176] He further argued that '"motion" in its most general and primary sense is change of place' and that 'the place of a thing is neither a part nor a state of it, but is separable from it'.[177] Cavendish on the other hand believed that matter was motion itself; for 'Matter, Motion and Figure, are but one thing, individable' (*PL* 10, 11). Matter therefore was not searching for its natural place since 'all bodies carry their places along with them, for body and place go together and are inseparable' (*PL* 67). If matter and place are the same principle, an external force cannot move passive bodies from one place to another:

> Say a man travels a hundred miles, and so a hundred thousand paces; but yet this man has not been in a hundred thousand places, for he never had any other place but his own, he hath joined and separated himselfe from a hundred thousand, nay millions of parts, but he has left no places behind him. (*PL* 102)

A body will not move *through* various places for that would suggest that the body is not connected or interacting with the particles of matter that it is immersed within. On an atomic level, matter is infinitely interactive, and humanity is constantly mixing, becoming part of or physically interacting with the material environment. Cavendish's labyrinth of vitalist matter is complicated and expanded in this definition of place.

Cavendish disrupts Aristotelian understandings of hierarchy by claiming that place and objects are the same, and consequently cannot have an ordered place in a cosmic hierarchy. This challenges the concept of place, along with categories determining distinctions between men, women and animals. Furthermore, since all bodies have knowledge, reason, intelligence and soul which cannot be always perceived by human sense, humans could not be able to locate them in a hierarchy based upon mind and spirit. The conception of space and matter proposed by Cavendish does not correspond with a divinely ordained, hierarchical body politic. Her understanding of matter questions and blurs distinctions between humanity, body, man, woman and Nature, as it disrupts and complicates scholastic cosmology, science and politics.

[176] Shapin, *Scientific Revolution*, 28, 29.
[177] Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

VI The teleology of Nature

Cavendish's depiction of matter challenges early modern conceptions of gender, but Nature's agency can nevertheless appear limited in so far as Nature executes the 'Will and Command' of God, her 'Eternal Master' (*OUEP* II 25 and sig. g1r) Accordingly, one might regard the subservient relationship of Nature to God as a complication for the gender critique in Cavendish's natural philosophy: 'by [God's] All-powerfull Decree and Command he produces all things; and Nature, which is his Eternal servant, obeys his Commands: Wherefore the actions of Nature cannot be a disturbance to his Incomprehensible felicity' (*OUEP* III 30). Although God is unmoving, his will is exerted through his 'All-powerfull Decree and Command'. One reading of this passage could suggest that Nature's actions are merely an expression of God and that she has no distinct or separate agency, particularly since her actions and creations do not disturb his 'felicity'. Karen Detlefsen contends that Cavendish's natural philosophy indicates that there is a teleological 'order determined by God' and that Cavendish 'relies upon an external agent – God himself – creating order within nature in accordance with his purposes *vis-à-vis* the natural world'.[178] Detlefsen rightly points out, however, that Nature also is endowed with freedom,[179] since 'nature hath a natural Free-will' (*PL* 225). Because God has endowed Nature with free will, she presumably has the freedom to choose to disobey God, just as Adam and Eve rebelled again God in Milton's account of Genesis.

Nature has agency, and in Cavendish's epistemology matter may behave in a nonhierarchical fashion. Detlefsen reminds us, however, that it does not necessarily stand that this is meant to describe matter conforming to a teleological order. Detlefsen defines a teleological account of Nature as one which

> must make reference to an entity, part or process that is *prescriptively* normative, and not merely *descriptively* (or statistically) normative. An account that is merely descriptively normative makes reference to something which normally occurs but which does not occur *so as to* fulfill those norms as is the case with the prescriptively normative. As a result, in the case of a merely descriptively normative account, deviations from what normally occurs represent statistical anomalies rather than a failure to achieve an end

[178] Karen Detlefsen, 'Margaret Cavendish on the Relation between God and World', *Philosophy Compass* 4.3 (2009): 431, 432.

[179] Karen Detlefsen, 'Reason and Freedom: Margaret Cavendish on the Order and Disorder of Nature', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 89 (2007): 157–191.

> or a goal, and events which are in line with what normally occurs cannot be characterized as successes which are good.[180]

Is it possible that matter indeed appears subversive in Cavendish's natural philosophy while its behaviour is only 'descriptively (or statistically) normative', but does not conform to its 'prescriptive' goals? In other words, does the normal behaviour of Nature fail to accomplish or fulfill what it is *meant* to do? Hobbes, for example, would believe that it was natural for humans to exist in a state of war without government, but that does not indicate that humans *should* do this: the natural state of war is not a norm, nor is it an end.

If Nature has freedom to deviate from God's order, then according to Detlefsen, one must allow that Nature makes mistakes and creates monsters:

> Cavendish thinks that in our world there are normal kinds or species of individuals, which have natures proper to them … These are not just statistical norms, but they are prescriptive norms. That is, in virtue of being of a specific kind, an individual ought to behave in certain ways, and failure to do so results in privation, indeed, privation within its own nature … Were a human to fly, this would be a perversion of its nature … Thus, individual bodily structures are as they are, according to Cavendish, because they serve the normal behavioural ends of the natural kind to which they belong. Deviations from these ends are not just statistical anomalies but monstrous.[181]

God has created standard 'norms' to which different categories of creatures should conform. Hence, the standards in Nature are not induced by what typically occurs, but are 'prescriptive' in that there are certain behaviours that species *ought* to fulfill. Even so, these creatures have the freedom to disobey and deviate from their prescribed norms. Detlefsen posits that Cavendish's natural philosophy suggests that monsters, civil wars, democracies and diseases are symptoms of Nature's freedom to disobey or disregard God's norms, and are constituted by 'deviant actions that disrupt the orderly activity within the body as a whole'.[182] This reading of Cavendish's natural philosophy indicates that individual parts of Nature can freely choose to defy a harmonious, prescriptive order set by God.

Although a Nature which possessed free will as described by Detlefsen could be read as Nature having the potential to act like a disorderly female, as it were, who rebels against the good order and standard set by

[180] Detlefsen, 'Margaret Cavendish on the Relation between God and World', 422.
[181] *Ibid.*, 427–8. [182] *Ibid.*, 428.

God, my reading of the relationship between God and Nature differs significantly. It is telling that in *Philosophical Letters*, Cavendish repetitively asserts that God *approves* of *all* Nature's actions and creations: 'as God has given Nature a power to act freely, so he doth approve of her actions, being wise and methodical in *all* her several Productions, Generations, Transformations and Designs' (*PL* 165). Cavendish does not state that God generates Nature's actions, but instead uses the word 'approve'. This indicates that Nature has external actions of which God can either approve or disapprove. Significantly, Cavendish postulates that God approves of *every* action performed by Nature, suggesting that she does not actually defy a prescribed teleological order. Moreover, there are further instances where Cavendish continues to indicate that Nature and her actions do not deviate from an order prescribed by God. For example, Cavendish argues that phenomena that we term disorders, monsters and other imperfections are entirely *natural*: 'all natural effects are produced, either perfect, or imperfect; timely births, or untimely and monstrous births; death, health, and diseases, good and ill dispositions, natural and extravagant Appetites and Passions … Sympathy and Antipathy, Peace and War, Rational and Phantastical opinions. Nevertheless, all these motions, whether regular or irregular, are natural' (*PL* 359). Even though Nature creates monsters, diseases and war, 'Nature is what God was pleased she should be' (*PL* 10). Thus, God approves of Nature's freedom to create and act. Nature may cause death, war, disease and even sin, but Cavendish explains that these events are caused by Nature's irregular motions: 'such actions which are different, cross and opposite, not moving always after their usual and accustomed way I name Irregular, for want of a better expression; but properly there is no such thing as Irregularity in Nature' (*PL* 538–9). While it is true that Nature may cause war or disease, her 'cross and opposite actions make no confusion', because her body as a whole entity is peaceful and orderly (*PL* 538). This suggests that Cavendish does not intend to portray Nature as disrupting God's order, but rather Nature herself creates the standards and set species or types that create a peaceful whole. More importantly, oppositions which occur in Nature are necessary for the creation of a variety of figures and actions in the natural world: '[Nature's] variety cannot be produced without variety of actions, no not without opposition; which opposition is the cause, that there can be no extreams in particulars; for it ballances each action, so that it cannot run into infinite, which otherwise would breed a horrid confusion in Nature' (*OUEP* II 66). It is significant here that irregular motions are *not* described as preternatural mistakes or errors that defy God's will. They are rather *necessary*

aspects of how matter is balanced into a peaceful order. Indeed, actions or ideas that we term delusions and mistakes are better understood as a symptom of our own incomplete perception of Nature's incomprehensible and infinite body: 'as for delusion, it is part of Natures delight, causing the more variety; but there be some actions in Nature which are neither perfect mistakes, nor delusions, but onely want of a clear and thorow perception' (*PL* 510). While Nature herself cannot make mistakes as she is a whole, infinite body, the individual parts within her make local errors of perception because they lack the capacity to comprehend Nature in its entirety.

Cavendish's belief that Nature does not defy God's order is exemplified in her assertion that new *forms* or *types* of creatures cannot be newly created:

> It is not probable that God should have made any thing imperfect, especially in the production of Nature; for if there be things created anew which never were before in Nature, it argues that Nature was not perfect at first … And thus it would inferr, as if God had not power either to have made Nature perfect at first. (*OUEP* II 30)[183]

Because Nature is perfect, she cannot defy God's good order by deviating from his ordained forms and figures. Hence, there are no imperfect figures or productions in the natural world. Because all figures already exist in Nature, who is timeless, she does not 'create any part that was not in her from Eternity' (*PL* 529). Hence, 'nothing in nature is lost or annihilated, what is past, and what is to come, hath as well a being, as what is present; and, if that which is now, had its being before, why may it not also have its being hereafter?' (*PL* 34). Everything that has been or will exist in Nature already exists, since the whole body of Nature does not recognize a beginning or end to its 'natural infinite power' (*OUEP* II 9). Hence, Nature cannot deviate or rebel against God since 'God's Will is obey'd by Natures self-motion', which has already occurred though we may not perceive it from our finite perspective (*OUEP* II 25). Although Cavendish occasionally asserts Nature is not as perfect as God and that individual parts of her move irregularly,[184] at other moments such as in the quotation given above, Nature and her creations are described as

[183] See also *PL* 11.

[184] 'Nature is not so perfect but she has some faults and infirmities, otherwise she would be a God, which she is not', since there are 'an irregularity and imperfection in some parts of Nature' (*OUEP* II 36).

perfect. Somehow Nature has free will, but her will always gets approved of by God.

Nature's free will, agency and order, on the one hand, and God's omnipotence, on the other, can rightly be seen as a problematic tension and difficulty within Cavendish's natural philosophy. Perhaps a determination of the distinction between Nature's agency and God's will can be found in Cavendish's suggestion that 'Nature's Principal motions and actions are dividing, composing, and disposing or ordering, according to her Natural wisdom, by the Omnipotent God's leave and permission' (*PL* 159). Here Cavendish depicts Nature's powers and wisdom as something separate from God. To be sure, she says they are permitted and approved by him. Indeed, she often refers to Nature's powers or movement as a 'gift' from God (just as one might consider leave or permission to do something). This would denote that Nature retains her power and agency, although it was granted to her as a divine gift in principle.

Cavendish in fact tends to highlight the agency and order of Nature, rather than the details of how Nature should follow God's standards:

> For why should it not be as probable, that God did give Matter a self-moving power to her self, as to have made another Creature to govern her? For Nature is not a Babe, or Child, to need such a Spiritual Nurse, to teach her to go, or to move; neither is she so young a Lady as to have need of a Governess, for surely she can govern her self; she needs not a Guardian. (*PL* 149)

Nature does not need a figure such as a nurse or governess to instruct her how to order and 'govern her self'; nor does she need a 'Guardian'. Elsewhere Cavendish suggests that Nature is comparable to a 'Proxy or Vice-gerent' of God. The term 'vicegerent' means something slightly different from 'viceregent', but the distinction is quite significant for determining the relationship between God and Nature in Cavendish's natural philosophy. While a viceregent exercises delegated power on behalf of a sovereign, a vicegerent instead is a more metaphysical office, as it indicates an individual who is an earthly representative of God: in the Catholic Church, for example, the pope would be a vicegerent. Hence, as a vicegerent of God, Nature is endowed with many metaphysical powers generally associated with God, including the capacity to 'produce Infinite Creatures' since she is the 'onely Framer and Maker, as also the Dissolver and Transformer of all Creatures' (*PL* 288).

VII Atoms

The implications of Cavendish's scientific thought with respect to social hierarchy and political theory may be better understood when situated in the context of her atomic theories, particularly since she often links the nature of atoms to that of humanity. Anna Battigelli argues that the 'physical universe, the political world, the mind – each of these could be envisioned as an atomist system'.[185] Cavendish portrays the self also as analogous to an atom: 'I remaine an unsettled *Atome*, or a confus'd heape' (*PF* sig. A6r). Although within Cavendish's science the universe is described as infinite and ultimately incomprehensible, all creatures therein are derived from one substance, matter, which has certain qualities that all creatures share, whether atom or human. If atoms are analogies for Cavendish's politics, an understanding of Cavendish's atomic theories will facilitate a clearer idea of her political sentiments.

Cavendish devoted numerous poems to atoms in her first publication, *Poems and Fancies* (1653), yet she dismissed her previous ideas concerning atoms in her later scientific treatises. Deborah Boyle contends that while her ideas about atoms may demonstrate Cavendish's interest in science, they are not part of her natural philosophy and do not comprise 'a true scientific theory'.[186] Nevertheless, Cavendish herself clearly asserts that her atomic poems *are* part of her science. For example, her scientific treatise, *Philosophical Letters*, not only recommends that if her readers 'desire to know more [about her views of atoms they] may read [her] mentioned Book of Poems', she further includes one of her atomic poems in the text because it 'contain[s] the ground of [her] opinion of Atomes' (*PL* 455–6). Both *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* and *Philosophical Letters* refer the readers to her previous books and even to particular pages in order to better understand her atomic theory. In *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, she enigmatically asks her audience to read her previous works about atoms and again includes an atomic poem within her treatise, while simultaneously rejecting the same ideas: 'And as for Atoms, after I had Reasoned with my Self, I conceived that it was not probable, that the Universe and all the Creatures therein could be Created and Disposed by the Dancing and Wandering and Dusty motion of Atoms' (*PPO* sig. c2r). There are several reasons, ontological and political, why Cavendish would choose

[185] Anna Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 39.
[186] Deborah Boyle, 'Cavendish's Nonfeminist Natural Philosophy', 197 and 215.

to distance herself from atomism. Though Cavendish, like atomists such as Charleton, argued that atoms are in continual motion,[187] her later writings stray from two important precepts of Renaissance atomism, a school of thought that maintained the distinguishing arguments that all bodies are composed of undividable particles and that there exists empty space or a vacuum through which atoms move.[188] But Cavendish's later writings argue instead that matter, including atomic particles, is infinitely dividable, or that matter can always fragment into smaller particles. Moreover, her belief that matter is *rational* does not allow for Epicurean atoms, which are 'Small, Senseless Fibres, Moving and Composing all Creatures by Chance' (*PPO* c2). More importantly, atoms cannot replace self-moving and knowing matter as a principle of natural phenomena, for 'if there were any such particles in composed bodies, yet they are but parts or effects of Matter, and not principles of Nature' (*OUEP* II 63). Cavendish here concedes that tiny particles may exist in the vast body of Nature that are not perceptible to the naked eye, yet they are not the fundamental building blocks of all natural phenomena. Furthermore, as previously argued, she maintains that place is inseparable from both matter and motion – this not only challenges notions of a hierarchical cosmos, it also questions the existence of a vacuum that was so important to atomism. Consequently, she rightly claims that her understanding of 'Conceptions of [Atoms … are New, and my Own' in so far as her ideas on the matter differ significantly from those of her contemporaries (*PPO* c2). Indeed, in *Philosophical Letters*, she reports that 'when I name Atomes, I mean small parts of Matter' (*PL* 528). For Cavendish, the concept of small particles, which are not visible to the naked eye, is indeed useful for explaining how self-moving matter works on what contemporary society would understand as a subatomic level. Nevertheless, it is difficult to regard her definition of atoms as a true form of atomism in her natural philosophy, in so far as for Cavendish atoms are not a *first principle* of matter. Eileen O'Neill has suggested that Cavendish 'attack[s] all particulate matter theories' because for Cavendish, 'complete blending confers a unity on animate and inanimate matter, making of them a single, continuous self-subsistent organism. The parts of this continuous organism are not themselves self-subsistence, but depend for their

[187] Walter Charleton exemplifies this view in his claim that there is a 'natural and inamissible propensity of Atoms to Motion'. Walter Charleton, *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana* (London, 1654), 432.

[188] For example, Charleton explains that 'Atoms admit of no division below themselves' and that if there is 'no Vacuum, [then] no Motion; since the Body to be moved must want a Place'. *Ibid.*, 86, 19.

existence and properties on their relation to each other and to the whole of nature.'[189] While O'Neill is correct that Cavendish's later philosophy suggests that matter is one body and not divisible into self-sufficient particles. Nevertheless, in her treatises Cavendish still admits the possibility of atoms (so understood) being merely 'small parts of Matter' which behave like all other phenomena within Nature's bodies. In other words, she believes in atoms, while not believing them to be a first or primary principle of natural phenomena (*PL* 528). Hence, on the one hand, I agree with O'Neill's contention that Cavendish 'does not commit her[self] to the atomic account of matter. That is, it does not commit her to the view that there are self-subsistent atoms, the sum of whose aggregates is corporeal nature.'[190] Yet, on the other hand, Cavendish's references to atoms are too numerous to dismiss entirely; the concept of atoms forms a significant part of her epistemology even if her view is that atoms are not individually self-sufficient or a first principle comprising the whole of corporeal Nature.

Cavendish herself does not seem to have entirely made up her mind about atoms. Whereas in *Observations*, she claims that she has 'waved [atomism] in my Philosophical Works: for if there can be no single parts, there cannot be Atomes', *in Philosophical Letters* she provides quite a different view (*OUEP* I 141): 'my opinion of Atoms, their figures and motions, (if any such things there be) I will refer you to my Book of Poems, out of which give me leave to repeat these following lines, containing the ground of my opinion of Atomes:

> All Creatures, howsoe're they may be nam'd,
> Are of long, square, flat, or sharp Atomes fram'd. (*PL* 455)

Despite her uncertainty of their existence and her questioning 'if any such things there be', she continues to assert that the 'ground' of her opinions of atoms is that 'All Creatures' are 'fram'd' or composed of atoms. Jay Stevenson suspects that Cavendish's paradoxical position on atoms comes about partly because of the subversive nature of her atomism and also because disagreement and contradiction is precisely the state of Cavendish's atoms.[191] It is Stevenson's claim that this later shift in her science should not be taken at face value, and that her supposed revised science, which excludes atoms, is virtually the same philosophy but with

[189] Eileen O'Neill, 'Introduction', in Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. Eileen O'Neill (Cambridge University Press, 2001), xxvi–xxvii.
[190] *Ibid.*, xxvii.
[191] Stevenson, 'The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish', 536–7.

different terminology.[192] While it is true that her atoms share characteristics similar to those of self-moving matter, the shift in her later science towards describing Nature as holistic demonstrates some change in her thinking about atoms inasmuch as she disagreed with theories that saw atoms as undividable, senseless, separated from one another by a vacuum, or which moved by chance. Yet, Cavendish is not prepared to dismiss atoms entirely. They would appear to be useful for her in explaining how vitalist properties function in matter. For example, Detlefsen contends that for Cavendish, 'other parts of nature … are *essentially just like us* because comprised of sensing, reasoning matter. We can say *that* all beings causally interact through rational suggestion and response, each being exercising its own specific sort of rationality.'[193] Cavendish's claim that we are not self-sufficient or detached from Nature would likewise apply to these rational atoms. Thus, for Cavendish, atoms are simply small particles in Nature, which are not visible to the naked eye, which may or may not exist in all bodies, but in case they do, they abide by Cavendish's fundamental principle that matter is one self-moving, united body.

If atoms are just like us, then they can be helpful for ascertaining her beliefs regarding the macrocosm. In *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, for example, Cavendish argues that atoms could not exist,

> for if Every and Each Atome were of a Living Substance, and had Equal Power, Life and Knowledge, and Consequently, a Free-will and Liberty, and so Each and Every one were as Absolute as an other, they would hardly Agree in one Government, and as unlikely as Several Kings would Agree in one Kingdom, or rather as Men, if every one should have an Equal Power, would make a Good Government; and if it should Rest upon Consent and Agreement, like Human Governments, there would be as many Alterations and Confusions of Worlds, as in Human States and Governments. (*PPO* sigs. c2r, c2v)

Keeping in mind the political contention surrounding atomist systems, Cavendish's reasons for disclaiming her atoms ironically resemble her theories that claim all matter has free will, life and knowledge. For example, in *Philosophical Letters* she claims 'Nature hath a natural Free-will' and that 'there is life and knowledg in all parts of nature' (*PL* 225, 99). Cavendish describes the atoms as contentious and disagreeing, reminding one of the observation by the Empress of *The Blazing World* that there

[192] *Ibid*.

[193] Karen Detlefsen, 'Reason and Freedom: Margaret Cavendish on the Order and Disorder of Nature', 89 (2007): 178.

are 'more religions than gods, and more opinions in those religions than truth' (*TBW* 201). Despite the disagreements that occur within both human society and atomic particles, Cavendish still perceives a relational principle among them since states and governments do ultimately form together, at least for some time, since the unique rational capabilities of each unit of matter do *create* a variety of modes of governments and not complete anarchy. In *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* she argues that in the centre of all units of matter there is a material 'Deity' which 'is no ways Finite, neither to it Self nor Matter, its Knowledge being as Infinite as its Power, and its Wisdome as infinite as its Knowledge' (*PPO* 453). Hence, each atom contains a material deity; an assertion not entirely dissimilar to her argument that atoms, if they exist, would be comparable to 'Several Kings'.

Since humanity can never find consensus and agree upon one opinion, this indicates that disparity in human opinion will always be infinite. Yet, according to her science, such conflicts are natural and necessary, since this description of humanity is also a reflection of the state of Nature and matter. These disagreements, along with consensus, are the glue that cements atoms and reality together. Antipathy and sympathy between atomic particles are what form the world. The variety and plurality in the body of Nature create an infinite variety of reactions among its entities in regard to one another, creating infinite worlds and creatures. Some parts of matter have various degrees of negative, positive or neutral reactions towards one another, and this is the glue or cement that holds forms within matter together.[194] Thus there can be no true, perfect or unchanging government, since human opinions and governments are as variable as the changes and variety in atoms and the natural world. It is significant that Cavendish portrays the same political dynamics of autonomous and vitalistic atoms in *Philosophical Letters*. While discussing the passions, she draws upon political metaphors of politics and warfare, arguing that the formation and dissolution of both natural and political bodies requires disagreement and consent, in a manner replicating the behaviour of atoms she described in *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*:

> [T]here is no doubt, but that many Passions, as Fear, Jealousie, &c. arise against our will and appetite; for so may forreign Nations invade any Kingdom without the will or desire of the Inhabitants, and yet they are

[194] The motions within matter can make 'an agreeable union and conjunction in the several parts of Metal or Stone', creating a kind of 'glue or cement [that] holds the parts of hard matter' together (*PL* 167).

> corporeal men: The same may be said of Passions; and several parts of matter may invade each other, whereof one may be afraid of the other, yet all this is but according as corporeal matter moves, either Generally, or Particularly: Generally, that is, when many parts of Matter unite or joyn together, having the like appetites, wills, designs; as we may observe, that there are general agreements amongst several parts, in Plagues, as well as War. (*PL* 212)

Natural and political bodies are analogous structures according to Cavendish. The principles of warfare and passions within the body are described as comparable to political realities of war and invasion that Cavendish attributes to vitalism or the disagreement or consent of different parts of matter. Cavendish herself compares the behaviour of atoms with passions at the end of *Philosophical Letters* arguing that 'every Passion, which doth rise, / Is as each several atome lies. / Thus sickness, health, and peace, and war, Are as the several atomes are' (*PL* 456). In this statement Cavendish reiterates her belief in atoms, but she also affirms that, for her, the autonomous, vitalistic aspects of matter are both medical and political.

Cavendish's emphasis upon consent also suggests that there is no natural hierarchy since all creatures, even ones as small as atoms, have free will and knowledge and need to disagree to make matter into forms. Although theories of the plurality of solar systems and of inhabited planets were not uncommon topics of discussion by the seventeenth century, Cavendish's emphasis upon heterogeneity, disorder and instability contradicts the aims of royalist science. Jonathan Sawday argues that 'Stability, order, rationality, systematization, solidity, the privileging … of homogeneity over heterogeneity, these were the hallmarks of "Royal Science".'[195] Sprat exemplifies this attitude in his *History of the Royal-Society* when he optimistically explains that experimental science and exercising reason is the most 'effectual remedy' to cure 'Civil differences, and Religious distractions' and 'that men of disagreeing parties, and ways of life, have forgotten to hate, and have met in the unanimous advancement of the same Works'.[196] Not only does Sprat

[195] Sawday, *The Body Emlazoned*, 242. John Evelyn, in his diary, documents how Charles II symbolically linked the society to his power as he 'gave us the arms of England to be borne in a canton in our arms, and sent us a mace of silver gilt, of the same fashion and size as those carried before his Majesty, to be borne before our president on meeting days'. John Evelyn, *The Diary of John Evelyn*, ed. William Bray, vol. 1 (New York: M Walter Dunne Publisher, 1901), 362.

[196] Sprat, *History of the Royal-Society*, 426, 427. Bacon also claims that natural philosophy can create a unified, homogeneous and orderly society as it 'makes [people] subiect to lawes, obedient to gouerment, and forgetfull of their vnbridled affections, whilst they giue eare to precepts, and submit themselues to discipline … insomuch that it would not be amisse to say, that euen thereby

emphasize unification and civic and religious stability, which may have been particularly appealing after the violence of the civil war, Sprat further claims that their science will encourage unity and 'Obedience to the Civil Government'.[197] Likewise, Dryden, a royalist and member of the Royal Society (until he stopped paying fees),[198] imagines new technology not just uniting one country into a stable whole, but he envisions science reaching the 'remotest Regions' to '[make] one City of the Universe'.[199]

Unlike Royal Science, Cavendish argues that the body of Nature is in constant conflict and chaos. Furthermore there is no supernatural order placed upon the material world. Cavendish provides a representation of matter that is decentralized, equal and autonomous without hierarchy, and this may be troublesome for views that presume Cavendish's royalism. If every aspect of Nature possesses free will, is equal and has 'an equal power [which] would make a Good Government', then no one entity would have a divine right to a hierarchical position, such as a monarch. Even moderate, constitutional royalists, who believed in a limited monarchy, would not hold that *all* members of society are equal and able to create a 'Good Government'. Furthermore, Cavendish invests the poor with great agency and power within a commonwealth in her characteristic comparison of governmental politics with natural bodies. She posits that 'the meanest in a Commonwealth, may chance to make a Publick disturbance, so likewise in the Common-wealth of the body, one single action in a particular part may cause a disturbance of the whole Body, nay, a total ruine and dissolution of the composed; which dissolution is called Death' (*PL* 365, 366). The 'meanest' member of society can cause a revolution in the same way that 'one single action' of a body part can cause the death of the entire body.

Much as Cavendish's portrayal of a complex nexus of infinite, self-moving atoms supports the possibility of a successful revolution and challenges a monarchical cosmology, her theories of how the soul relates to matter also complicate the belief that she advocates hierarchy. All of Nature, including atoms, are not only active, powerful and imbued with reason, but also contain equal soul:

stones, and woods were called together, and setled in order'. Francis Bacon, *The Wisedome of the Ancients*, trans. Arthur Gorges Knight (London, 1619), 58–9.

[197] Sprat, *History of the Royal-Society*, 427.

[198] Helen M. Burke, '*Annus Mirabilis* and the Ideology of the New Science', *English Literary History* 57.2 (1990): 307.

[199] John Dryden, *Annus Mirabilis*, in *The Poems of John Dryden*, ed. James Kinsley, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 81. Helen M. Burke provides a detailed reading of these lines in relation to the ideologies of Royal Science. See Burke, '*Annus Mirabilis*', 313–14.

> [T]here is not any Creature or part of nature without this Life and Soul; and that not onely Animals, but also Vegetables, Minerals and Elements, and what more is in Nature, are endued with this Life and Soul, Sense and Reason: and because this Life and Soul is a corporeal Substance, it is both dividable and composable. (*PL* sig. B2v)

Cavendish defines the soul as corporeal, a presence within all matter, that is not supernatural or exclusive to humanity; 'though there is but one Soul in infinite Nature, yet that soul being dividable into parts, every part is a soul in every single creature, were the parts no bigger in quantity then an atome' (*PL* 433). This corporeal soul stands in contrast to the divine soul in humans, which Cavendish believes is a topic better pursued by the Church rather than herself (*PL* 209–10). Applying to atomism her understanding of corporeal soul, Cavendish indicates that there is no true self, but infinite, dizzying amounts of living, knowing souls within one organism. There is no death within this paradigm, only changes within matter (*PL* 411),

> like as a Commonwealth, or united body in society, if it should be dissolved and dispersed, the particulars which did constitute this Commonwealth or society, may joyn to the making of another society; and thus the natural motions of a body do not perish when the figure of the body dissolves, but joyn with other motions to the forming and producing of some other figures. (*PL* 459)

Although a government or society may fall apart or collapse, for Cavendish this is as natural a phenomenon as death. She argues that a person or creature may die, yet the matter of which they were composed will continue to be imbued with life, soul and motion. In a similar manner, matter is never created, but only moves, since 'one Creature is produced by another, by the dividing and uniting, joyning and disjoyning of the several parts of Matter, and not by substanceless Motion out of new Matter' (*PL* 431). Matter exists as a plurality of states as the various forms compose, dissolve and continuously change. Commonwealths are also pluralistic in this way; their components, organizations and relations are never static, but always changing into other types of societies.

As Cavendish's understanding of vitalist, conscious, living matter expands and complicates ideas concerning both political and natural bodies, she complains that science often 'takes a part for the whole, to wit, this visible World for all Nature, when as this World is onely a part of Nature, or Natural Matter, and there may be more and Infinite worlds besides' (*PL* 460). If there are multiple worlds within the mass of Nature, how can

a tiny fragment of an infinite, complex mass understand, control or dominate the whole? If the body of Nature is immeasurable then there could be more worlds than an individual could comprehend. Cavendish's theory of multiple worlds can be better understood in the context of atoms: she conceives even particles as small as atoms as having their own life and knowledge. If every aspect of Nature, whether it is as small as an atom, has life and reason, then there could be infinite worlds that are imperceptible to our senses. For example, there could be 'A World in an Eare-Ring' as described in her atomic poetry (*PF* 45). Although Cavendish advanced a unique form of atomism, theories of atoms were problematic during this period. Reid Barbour argues that more 'than any other physical theory available in Bacon's day, atomism involves its early modern students in ethical, epistemological, and theological affiliations that subvert any straightforward or confident accreditation of what is true about, useful within, or true and therefore useful regarding the subtle phenomena of nature'.[200] Cavendish's theory of matter likewise expands beyond human experience and comprehension with its viewpoint that there are worlds within worlds that are too small, large or enigmatic for human comprehension, and our senses are too limited to be able to perceive or understand the 'Infinite variety of Worlds' (*PPO* 107).

Cavendish envisions an infinitely complex cosmos, as she emphasizes multiplicity over unity; she also conceives body and soul as the same principle, rather than polarized opposites. Aristotle in contrast not only believed that 'Soul is better than body', but that 'the physical part, the body, comes from the female, and the Soul from the male'.[201] This gendering of soul and body further translates to external power structures since Aristotle posits that the 'rule of soul over body is like a master's rule'.[202] Similarly, Bacon, citing Aristotle, posits that 'the mind has over the body that commandment which the lord has over a bondman'.[203] The Aristotelian and Baconian doctrines influenced much early modern scientific thinking. Consequently, early modern science often reinforced and justified early modern gender politics, translating other hierarchies associated with mind, soul and body thereto. Commonplace political and

[200] Reid Barbour, 'Bacon, Atomism, and Imposture: The True and the Useful in History, Myth, and Theory', in Julie Robin Solomon and Catherine Gimelli Martin (eds.), *Francis Bacon and the Refiguring of Early Modern Thought: Essays to Commemorate 'The Advancement of Learning' (1605–2005)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 18.

[201] Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 131, 185.

[202] Aristotle, *Politics*, in *A New Aristotle Reader* (Princeton University Press, 1988), 513.

[203] Francis Bacon, 'Of the Dignity and Advancement of Learning,' in *The Works of Francis Bacon*, vol. IV, Book IV, 406.

domestic metaphors also claimed man was the head, woman was the body, implying the necessity of his control over her. This assumption was related to the association of women with passion and men with reason.

Close examination of the ways Cavendish deconstructs the complex network of gendered metaphors in early modern scientific traditions presents a challenge to Deborah Boyle's contention that Cavendish's natural philosophy should not be viewed as proto-feminist.[204] Boyle's scepticism is based partly on her interrogation of other scholars, who believe that Cavendish provides an alternative, female way of knowing. Boyle may be correct in her reluctance to believe that Cavendish's philosophy offers us a feminine mode of knowledge: Cavendish seems much more interested in complicating and challenging deeply embedded gendered metaphors within knowledge-construction, rather than in suggesting that women have a unique way of conceiving the world. For example, by redefining concepts, such as rationality and governance, that were associated with masculinity and blending them into the cultural definitions of femininity and its links with Nature, matter and body, Cavendish demonstrates that an intricate system of cultural associations and analogies maintains a gender ideology. Keller argues that even in contemporary times we 'see our world divided by a multiplicity of conceptual and social dichotomies – mutually sanctioning, mutually supportive, and mutually defining: public *or* private, masculine *or* feminine, objective *or* subjective, power *or* love'.[205] Cavendish does not simply subvert the specific binary of masculine and feminine; her science deconstructs dichotomies which mutually define each other and define conceptual reality. If the associations between women, passivity, irrationality and matter are disrupted, then multiple justifications and rationales for their subjection are challenged. Butler suggests that power functions from within such gender polarities rather than from the actual social relations that it influences:

> Power seemed to be more than an exchange between subjects or a relation of constant inversion between [a] subject and an Other; indeed, power appeared to operate in the production of that very binary frame for thinking about gender. I asked, what configuration of power constructs the subject and the Other, that binary relation between 'men' and 'women', and the internal stability of those terms?[206]

[204] Deborah Boyle, 'Cavendish's Nonfeminist Natural Philosophy', 195–227.
[205] Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science*, 8.
[206] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd edition (New York: Routledge, 1999), xxviii.

Value systems and social hierarchy are maintained and reaffirmed through various categories and institutions, to give the appearance of a stable, unchanging truth. Cavendish not dissimilarly tends to deconstruct the gender and power dichotomies of her own time – categorizations that were assumed or posited to be naturally 'true'. Her efforts not only challenge social and political arrangements governing the relative status of men and women; they also give rise thereby to a more complex natural philosophy. Investigations into early modern understandings of gender demonstrate how binaries function and support each other on various, complex levels. The conceptual dichotomies of man/woman and their associations with active/passive, reason/irrationality, perfect/imperfect, pure/impure in early modern science and cosmology affected everyday lives and politics; they rationalized the need for women's lower status in the early modern cultural, economic and political landscape.

Although she writes in a contemporary context, Judith Butler postulates that it is crucial that feminist theory critiques epistemology. She argues that contemporary critics often theorize from within a patriarchal model, not questioning the rationale and epistemology that supports and justifies inequity: 'Categories of true sex, discrete gender, and specific sexuality have constituted the stable point of reference for a great deal of feminist theory and politics. These constructs of identity serve as the points of epistemic departure from which theory emerges and politics itself is shaped.'[207] While the formulation of Butler's argument is focused upon identity, her analysis is quite relevant for approaching an early modern thinker such as Cavendish. From different contexts both Butler and Cavendish suggest that gendered constructions of knowledge can appear 'natural' inasmuch as they correspond with and reflect the sexual politics of a particular culture. Power does not merely function in social interactions, but is supported and justified by complementary epistemological systems. If politics and theory are founded upon essentialist or binary notions of gender, then the effective theoretical paradigm will continue to be patriarchal. Although she was writing in the seventeenth century, Cavendish's science challenges what Butler terms 'categories of true sex' in complex, multifaceted ways. Understandings of gender and sexuality in Renaissance science often intersected with and reinforced political, economic and cultural hierarchies. Cavendish's scientific theories investigate the relation between various gendered dichotomies and categories in early modern society. To study these theories is to demonstrate how value

[207] *Ibid.*, 163, 164.

systems and social hierarchy are maintained and reaffirmed through various systems of knowledge and institutions of power to give the appearance of a stable gendered truth.

As Cavendish systematically deconstructs metaphors, analogies and cultural associations that define and maintain authority, she reveals the multifaceted dimensions of power, particularly how the belief in natural gender differences and the patriarchy they entailed was entrenched within the early modern perception and experience of the world. Cavendish directly and implicitly revises scientific metaphors and ideas that maintain sex hierarchy as she critiques and absorbs aspects from various sciences. Thus, in multiple, diverse ways, Cavendish strategically attacks a multiplicity of metaphors defining gender within her society. Cavendish's natural philosophy, theory of Nature and her method for deconstructing hierarchical thinking also shed light upon the relations between science, gender, politics and society in Renaissance thinking. The next chapter will continue investigating the links between these issues by exploring how Cavendish's Nature, as represented in her prose and poetry, is deeply influenced by both alchemical philosophy and popular folklore.

CHAPTER 2

Margaret Cavendish's fusion of Renaissance science, magic and fairy lore

Cavendish's engagement with Renaissance scientific discourse redefines and challenges the patriarchal assumptions within early modern scientific traditions, and provides a gendered critique of emerging sciences as they were developing. Her theory of matter also demonstrates an unorthodox cosmology which would have broader implications for early modern culture at large. As Lisa Sarasohn notes, Cavendish often 'shows how the radical implications of one area of thought can reinforce and strengthen the subversive tendencies of another, quite different attack on authority'.[1] This chapter will examine Cavendish's complex use of Renaissance theories of magic and fairy lore in *Natures Pictures* and *Poems and Fancies*, and also in her scientific treatise, *Philosophical Letters*. Cavendish draws upon a fusion of early modern conceptions of magic, and she questions patriarchal assumptions within early modern science, religion and popular culture. In doing so she also creates a fascinating and unique scientific and political outlook that embraces ideas from both elite and popular culture.

From a philosophical standpoint, Cavendish's interest in magic is particularly evident in 'The Travelling Spirit', a short story from *Natures Pictures*. There, Cavendish uses the figures of a witch and an alchemist to espouse her own materialist science as well as to further investigate contentious early modern debates concerning the nature of magic, witchcraft and alchemy. Her later scientific treatise *Philosophical Letters* explores comparable issues as it articulates a revised and more sophisticated version of her natural philosophy. Notably, in this text, she refers her readers back to her first publication, *Poems and Fancies*, asking readers to examine her earlier poetry about fairy lore. Consequently, Cavendish encourages her readers to view her natural philosophy as connected to popular folklore.

[1] Lisa T. Sarasohn, 'A Science Turned Upside Down: Feminism and the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish', *Huntington Library Quarterly: A Journal for the History and Interpretation of English and American Civilization* 47.4 (1984): 290.

Cavendish's methodology can be perplexing. She makes use of many genres, and often applies seemingly unrelated, contradictory ideas or genres to one another. This is particularly apparent in her approach to supernatural and folkloric matters – which is arguably the most enigmatic aspect of her thought. Cavendish was unusually secular for a female writer of the mid seventeenth century. While she was a dedicated materialist,[2] her writings demonstrate a recurring interest in magic and the supernatural; she discusses alchemy, witchcraft and fairy lore throughout her science and fiction, yet the significance of these to her scientific thought has received little critical attention.[3] This chapter will explore the somewhat uneasy relationship between Cavendish and the supernatural, particularly examining how her idiosyncratic use of Renaissance theories of magic and science in 'The Travelling Spirit' relates to her poetry and science.

I Witchcraft, magic and gender

A witch is a central figure of Cavendish's 'The Travelling Spirit', and witchcraft is discussed in *Philosophical Letters* as well, yet criticism has paid little attention to the significance of the witch or of witchcraft to her fictional or philosophical oeuvre.[4] During the Renaissance, belief in witchcraft, magic and fairies underwent a remarkable revival, not only in popular culture but also among intellectuals. Linda Woodbridge argues that belief in magic was a prevalent influence on structuring unconscious mental processes throughout the early modern period.[5] Frances A. Yates maintains that

[2] See Jay Stevenson, 'Imagining the Mind: Cavendish's Hobbesian Allegories', in Stephen Clucas (ed.), *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 144. David Cunnings suggests that at times 'Cavendish comes close to saying … that material things are the only things that exist or are real'. Erna Kelly further argues that though Cavendish may have had an affinity with Roman Catholicism, 'her texts often appear to dismiss belief in God', while Sarah Hutton also notes that 'absent from Cavendish's critique of Hobbes are the standard charges of atheism founded on his materialism'. See David Cunning, 'Margaret Lucas Cavendish', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: The Metaphysics Research Lab, 2012), 13; Erna Kelly, 'Playing with Religion: Convents, Cloisters, Martyrdom, and Vows', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 14 (2004): 1; and Sarah Hutton, 'In Dialogue with Thomas Hobbes: Margaret Cavendish's Natural Philosophy', *Women's Writing* 4.3 (1997): 424.

[3] One notable exception is Tien-yi Chao, '"Between Nature and Art" – The Alchemical Underpinnings of Margaret Cavendish's *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* and *The Blazing World*', *EurAmerica* 42.1 (2012): 45–82.

[4] Jacqueline Broad, who examines Cavendish's correspondence with Joseph Glanvill in 1667/8, is a clear exception to such neglect. Throughout these letters, Cavendish denies the existence of witches, and in doing so, demonstrates to Glanvill that his arguments in favour of the existence of witches betray his own scientific principles. See Jacqueline Broad, 'Margaret Cavendish and Joseph Glanvill: Science, Religion, and Witchcraft', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 38 (2007): 493–505.

[5] Linda Woodbridge, *The Scythe of Saturn: Shakespeare and Magical Thinking* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 11–13.

the hermetic influence upon Renaissance magic is particularly important to acknowledge, since it exemplifies changed attitudes regarding the cosmos in relation to humanity, and this change was necessary for the rise of modern science.[6] For many early modern people, magic was a significant part of everyday belief systems and for making sense of the world around them. In order to understand Cavendish's interest in magic and how it relates to her philosophical ideas and methodology, it is necessary to comprehend what magic meant for both popular culture and the intellectual milieu.

Cavendish's representations of witches interestingly engage with controversial early modern cultural and scientific debates concerning the nature of magic and witchcraft. 'The Travelling Spirit' begins with a man seeking a witch in order to obtain knowledge. Though the witch states she has a 'great Master the Devil' (*NP* 145), she is not represented as in Continental folklore, where typical witches danced obscenely, ate newborn babies and indulged in sexual orgies.[7] Nor does she resemble common English understandings of witchcraft, which focused on demonic familiars, possession and contracts with the devil.[8] Rather than incantations, charms or spells, the witch's power in 'The Travelling Spirit' is induced by opium – a substance derived from a natural plant. The witch claims that they will leave their bodies behind for the duration of their journey; yet she accomplishes this by giving the man 'a Dish of Opium, and prayed him to eat well thereof' (*NP* 145). Her magic is thus explained as coming from a natural drug, existing within a *material* framework. Furthermore, throughout their travels the characters feel physical sensations such as heat, cold and pain, in a way which suggests that ideas which they believe are 'all Spirit' actually have a physical component (*NP* 144, 145).

Cavendish's explanation for the witch's power mirrors the belief of Giambattista della Porta regarding a substance known as 'witch's salve'. Della Porta was known as the foremost authority on the subject of 'natural magic'; he dedicated his life to proving that it was a legitimate, empirical science distinct from demonic witchcraft.[9] Though 'the witch's salve' was believed to transport witches into flight, della Porta, like Cavendish,

[6] Frances A. Yates, 'The Hermetic Tradition in Renaissance Science', in Charles S. Singleton (ed.), *Art, Science, and History in the Renaissance* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), 255.
[7] James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2001), 59.
[8] *Ibid*., 61–4.
[9] William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton University Press, 1994), 196. Giambattista della Porta, *Natural Magick* (London, 1658).

argued that it was merely a drug which induced hallucinations, causing people to believe that they had partaken in nocturnal flights.[10]

In so far as Cavendish portrays a witch whose power is derived simply from natural substances, she participates in the early modern theories of magical discourse. William Eamon argues that the 'basic assumption of natural magic was that nature teemed with hidden forces and powers that could be imitated, improved upon, and exploited for human gain'.[11] For example, in his influential *Natural Magic*, della Porta explains that 'There are two sorts of Magick: the one is infamous, and unhappie, because it hath to do with foul spirits, and consists of Inchantments and wicked Curiosity; and this is called Sorcery.'[12] In contrast, he maintains that the other type of 'Magick is nothing else but the survey of the whole course of Nature'.[13] Natural magic is not witchcraft, nor does it involve evil spirits or ritual. Rather than violating the laws of Nature and working with demonic forces, natural magic is observing and working with the hidden properties within the cosmos.

Although della Porta legitimizes some aspects of natural magic, the concept was still debated in early modern thought, and not all religious authorities were tolerant of the idea. In particular, many puritan leaders were hostile to magic as practised by folk healers, magicians, astrologers and charmers; they were none the less unsuccessful in changing the more positive views of beneficial magic residing in popular culture.[14] Shakespeare evokes a more sinister view of natural magic in *Hamlet*, when the king in the play within the play is murdered by poisoning. Lou Agnes Reynolds and Paul Sawyer argue that as poison is poured into the king's ear, the murderer 'repeats a rhyme imitative of the folk charms and spells chanted over herbal potions as they were mixed or administered'.[15]

[10] Eamon explains that in the treatise on witchcraft entitled *De prestigiis daemonum* (1564), the German physician Johann Wier cited della Porta's experiment with the 'witch's salve' to argue against the persecution of witches. Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 202. According to Philip C. Almond, part of this experiment is translated into English by Reginald Scot, who refers to della Porta as Johannes Baptista Neapolitanus. See Reginald Scot, *The discouerie of witchcraft* (London: Henry Denham, 1584), 184–5. Philip C. Almond, *England's First Demonologist: Reginald Scot and 'The Discoverie of Witchcraft'* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 95–6.

[11] Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, 194.

[12] Della Porta, *Natural Magick*, 1.

[13] *Ibid.*, 2.

[14] Leland L. Estes, 'Good Witches, Wise Men, Astrologers, and Scientists: William Perkins and the Limits of the European Witch-Hunts', in Ingrid Merkel and Allen G. Debus (eds.), *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1988), 159–61.

[15] Lou Agnes Reynolds and Paul Sawyer, 'Folk Medicine and the Four Fairies of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 10.4 (1959): 515.

> Thou mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected,
> With Hecate's ban thrice blasted, thrice infected,
> Thy natural magic and dire property,
> On wholesome life usurp immediately.[16]

Shakespeare provides a representation of natural magic which includes Hecate, who was regarded as presiding over witchcraft and magical rites. Hence, the scene weaves together an acknowledgement of natural magic – the properties of potions – that is also conditioned by a supernatural invocation.

In her treatise *Philosophical Letters*, Cavendish also engages with these early modern debates concerning the role and possibilities of magic. She argues there that there is a 'Natural Witchcraft', but it is only the enigmatic workings of Nature (*PL* 298). Since events are 'sometimes unusual and strange to us, we not knowing their causes, (For what Creature knows all motions in Nature, and their ways.) do stand amazed at their working power; and by reason we cannot assign any Natural cause for them, are apt to ascribe their effects to the Devil' (*PL* 298). Cavendish situates all forms of magic and witchcraft within a materialist paradigm as she argues that magic or 'Natural Witchcraft' is real, but merely a phenomenon that appears immaterial as a result of humanity's inability to comprehend the mysterious and infinitely complex aspects of matter.

Using similar terminology to della Porta, who argued that 'the Aegyptians [erroneously] termed Nature her self a Magician',[17] Cavendish also argues that Nature can be mistaken for a Magician:

> I believe natural Magick to be natural corporeal motions in natural bodies: Not that I say, Nature in her self is a Magicianess, but it may be called natural Magick or Witchcraft, meerly in respect to our Ignorance; for though Nature is old, yet she is not a Witch, but a grave, wise, methodical Matron, ordering her Infinite family. (*PL* 302)

Nature is not a witch or 'Magicianess', but paradoxically performs 'natural' witchcraft. Though Cavendish in utilizing the word 'natural' appropriates the concept of natural magic, it is significant that she uses the powerfully charged term 'witchcraft'. Cavendish hybridizes and brings together witchcraft with the tradition of natural magic, suggesting that both are the same principle: they are both indicative of the complexities of matter and corporeality rather than any type of supernatural or spiritual force.

[16] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, ed. Robert Hapgood (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 3.2: 233–6.
[17] Della Porta, *Natural Magick*, 2.

While the witch in 'The Travelling Spirit' does not appear to have supernatural powers, she does possess knowledge about Nature, and as she and the man travel to the centre of the earth, she teaches him about various aspects of natural phenomena. They pass by seas of blood; the man initially assumes that the seas are composed of human blood, asking, 'where was the Blood of other Creatures, as Beasts, Birds, Fish, and the like'? The witch corrects him by explaining that it is mixed 'amongst the Blood of Men' for 'the Earth knows no difference' (*NP* 146). As in *The Blazing World*, which features hybrids of animals and insects with humans, the blood of animals is with that of humans indiscriminately mixed. Not only blood, but their bodies are also intermixed without distinction, for there are 'monstrous great and high Mountains of the Bones of Men and Beasts, which lay alltogether with one another' (*NP* 145).[18] Thus Cavendish suggests that the earth does not distinguish between beasts, humans, birds and fish. Accordingly, the witch espouses Cavendish's natural philosophy, which argues that all creatures are composed and generated from the same basic substance, from 'which all other Creatures are made or produced, which Principle is but one, viz. Matter, which makes all effects or Creatures of Nature to be material' (*OUEP* II 19). Not only are all aspects of Nature generated from the same basic principle, matter, but also creatures rarely return to their previous figure or species: 'there is not any action, or motion, or figure, in Nature, but may be repeated, that is, may return to its former Figure, when it is altered and dissolved; But by reason Nature delights in variety, repetitions are not so frequently made' (*PL* 34). After death, an individual's body would transform into another form. As mentioned in Chapter 1, according to Cavendish's scientific thought all of matter is vitalistic and alive, with knowledge and reason. Consequently, this would indicate that a man could be dissolved into animals, vegetables or even a woman, blurring the boundaries and distinctions between categories that define what it meant to be human.

Cavendish's representation of magic in 'The Travelling Spirit' not only complicates the binaries between human/animal, good/bad magic and immaterial/material phenomena, it places Cavendish herself in a controversial position. It is fascinating that Cavendish espouses some of the premises of her scientific theories through a witch, an alarming and heretical figure in early modern culture. Witchcraft was a very serious allegation, since in

[18] The witch, however, does provide a distinction, not through species, but through the manner of death. The seas contain the blood of either violent deaths or 'those that dyed in peace' (*NP* 146).

1563 it became a felony punishable by death.[19] Significantly, most people put on trial for witchcraft in England were women.[20] This is because in both folklore and philosophical enquiry women were considered naturally more susceptible to witchcraft. Women were often regarded as unruly, wayward and sexually insatiable, which rendered them more prone to sinful and deviant behaviour. While discussing humoral theory, Robert Burton asserts 'Of womens unnaturall, unsatiable lust, what countrey, what village doth not complaine' and later denounces what he believes to be women's innate treacherous nature.[21] Earlier, on the Continent, inquisitors Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger exemplify the attitude that women were more carnal in the notorious *Malleus Maleficarum*, where they explain that regarding 'intellect, or the understanding of spiritual things, [women] seem to be of a different nature from men' and the reason for this is because 'she is more carnal than man'.[22] Though not all early modern people held such extreme and misogynistic views of women, these examples demonstrate the common assumption that women were naturally more misguided or susceptible to heresy.

So, why would a woman such as Cavendish identify her ideas with a witch and why might she be interested in altering common perspectives on witches? Perhaps she simply wanted to question the justice of early modern judicial systems that were prosecuting women for witchcraft: she argues in *Philosophical Letters* that 'many a good, old honest woman hath been condemned innocently, and suffered death wrongfully, by the sentence of some foolish and cruel Judges' (*PL* 298). Often popular opinion or pressure by mobs influenced court cases, and convicted witches were subject to popularly licensed violence and humiliation.[23] In her youth, Cavendish experienced mob violence herself when mobs attacked and plundered her family estate during the civil war. Or perhaps her sympathy for the plight of accused witches is yet another instance of Cavendish's recurring interest in marginalized voices and perspectives, whether animal or human, man or woman, as discussed in Chapter 1. This may explain

[19] Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, 3.

[20] Christina Larner, 'Was Witch-Hunting Woman-Hunting?', in Darren Oldridge (ed.), *The Witchcraft Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), 274.

[21] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, 1621), 541, 680.

[22] Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, trans. Montague Summers (New York: Dover Publications, 1971), 44.

[23] Jim Sharpe explains that though the 'phenomenon of crowd action or popular attitudes towards criminals or at executions was not limited to witchcraft cases; but the frequency of references to hostile mobs is striking, especially since they were on the fringes of the legal process'. Jim Sharpe, 'Women, Witchcraft and the Legal Process', in Oldridge, *The Witchcraft Reader*, 299.

why she draws attention to the gender and class dynamics of witch persecutions, highlighting the problem of elderly, poor women being targeted.

By suggesting that witchcraft involves merely the mysteries of Nature, Cavendish further questions and redefines Renaissance understandings of gender and sex difference, particularly since witchcraft was in multifaceted ways perceived as a feminine crime. Although women were indeed more likely to be accused of witchcraft, there was a predominance of women witnesses against accused witches. Furthermore, testimonies by women demonstrate that witches were figures who both related to and contrasted with their own identities as housewives and mothers.[24] Since witches were also believed to be rebellious and sexually promiscuous, the figure of the witch embodied the opposite of the virtuous female behaviour defined as silence, obedience and chastity. Louise Jackson argues that witchcraft was antithetical to early modern feminine roles: 'details of the cases refer directly to traditionally defined feminine space – the home, the kitchen, the sickroom, the nursery: to culturally defined female tasks or occupations and their direct opposites – feeding (poisoning), child-raising (infanticide), healing (harming), birth (death)'.[25] The witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* demonstrate these attitudes. Their cauldron certainly contains no dearth of extremely unpleasant items, but especially noteworthy here are ingredients such as 'poison'd entrails', 'Swelter'd venom' and 'Finger of birth-strangled babe'; hence this passage associates witches with poison, harm and infanticide rather than nurture, feeding and childbirth.[26] Diane Purkiss argues that witchcraft threatens housewives' competence and authority since it 'characteristically produces a shaming effect of utter disorder, dirt, and pollution: milk behaves like white of egg, ale turns sour and smells vile, cows produce blood where they should produce milk, and pease becomes rotten, stinking and uneatable'.[27] Though witchcraft questioned the authority and identity of the housewife and was perceived as the antithesis of feminine virtue, Cavendish describes Nature not only as performing witchcraft, but as a 'Matron', a respected motherly figure who competently manages

[24] Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 94. Purkiss, for example, discusses the testimony of Bennet Lane against Agnes Heard, a woman indicted for witchcraft. Lane accused Heard of bewitching her so that 'she could no longer spin nor make a thread to hold', and that 'she would have fleet [skimmed] her milk bowl, but it would not abide the fleeting'. W. W., *A true and just record, of the information, examination and confession of all the witches taken at St Oses in the Countie of Essex* (1582), quoted in Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 94–5.

[25] Louise Jackson, 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', in Oldridge, *The Witchcraft Reader*, 356–7.

[26] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. John Wilders (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4.1: 5, 8, 30.

[27] Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 97.

domestic affairs (*PL* 302). Her magic is not chaotic, polluting or evil, but the embodiment of order and wisdom. This complicates the relation of witchcraft with disrupted housewifery, while further challenging early modern beliefs that women were disorderly. Although women were often understood to be more carnal than men, and Nature is the manifestation of corporeality and body, here woman is none the less a matriarch representing female authority as a good, orderly and natural force. To further complicate gendered understandings of witchcraft, Cavendish argues that Nature's corporeality and witchcraft is *necessary* for order and the everyday functioning of Nature, however mysterious it may appear.

The witch in 'The Travelling Spirit' is not a housewife. Yet, she is an individual who seems to understand the workings of Nature. It is interesting that she is someone who understands philosophy as she teaches her male companion about the mysteries of matter, rather than appearing as an emblem of female disorder.

Though in both her science and fiction Cavendish discusses witches, little attention has been paid to her understanding of witchcraft and how this concept affects her literature. Although scepticism concerning witchcraft did not necessarily indicate a proto-feminist position, it had the potential to be used to challenge women's inferior status in both popular culture and early modern theology. As previously argued, women were associated with the body, corruption and sexuality, and were consequently often understood as further from God. The early modern association of woman and body meant that she was not only more alienated from the divine, but naturally subordinate to man. John Milton, for example, demonstrates this distance between woman and God in *Paradise Lost*, as God and the Angels frequently converse with Adam, but do not have direct conversations with Eve.[28] Consequently, Eve must obey Adam, her more reasonable superior, who is closer to the divine.

King James explains the rationale for why women were further from God and more inclined to witchcraft in his treatise *Daemonologie*:

> The reason is easie, for as that sexe is frailer than man is, so is it easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Divell, as was over well prooved to be true, by the Serpents deceiving of *Eva* at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sex.[29]

[28] See John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1998).
[29] James I, *Daemonologie* (London: Arnold Hatfield, 1603), 43, 44.

This was not an unusual argument, nor one that was confined to theorists of demonology. Throughout the seventeenth century, the biblical story of Eve provided one of the greatest justifications for the subordination of women. It was assumed that women inherited the unruly and untrustworthy characteristics of Eve, the ancestor of all women. Consequently, there was a prevailing belief that women were more susceptible than men to heretical ideas. Patriarchy was justified by the Fall since women were presumed to be naturally or originally misguided and in need of male authority.

Although Eve does not make an appearance herself in 'The Travelling Spirit', a man who claims to be Adam's brother does emerge in the text. In Cavendish's tale, Adam has a brother, an elderly man who lives in the centre of the earth. He has a conversation with the witch and her companion. The elderly man initially appears to voice the common interpretation of Eve as an explanation for women's potentially sinful nature. He claims that he 'had been there ever since the World was made; for he having never had a Woman to tempt him to sin, never dyed' (*NP* 146). He states that his brother '*Adam* transplanted Men from Earth by his sin, as some to Heaven, some to Hell, so I will transplant the World from Earth to Glass, for that is the last act of Chymistry' (*NP* 147). With this claim that it was Adam that altered the world, Cavendish establishes Adam as the primary transgressor, thereby reversing the rationale that understands gender roles in terms of Adam and Eve. Yet the creation story gets even more disrupted as we learn that although Adam's brother never had a woman to tempt him, like his brother, he will effectively transform the world anyway by transforming it into glass. Radical change will occur regardless of the influence of women. By emphasizing Adam's role in the Fall, and by speculating that a similar change could happen again, Cavendish's text questions the patriarchal assumptions embedded in prevailing interpretations of the Genesis story of the Garden.

In the seventeenth century the importance of the role of Eve in defining womanhood is particularly evident in the *querelle des femmes*, the pamphlet debate that occurred in early modern England regarding the relationship between the sexes. For example, Joseph Swetnam's notoriously misogynist pamphlet, which was republished during the civil war and Restoration, relied upon the creation story to prove women's inferiority:

> [Woman] was no sooner made, but straightway her mind was set upon mischiefe, for by her aspiring minde and wanton will, [Eve] quickly procured

> mans fall, and therfore ever since they are and have beene a woe unto man, and follow the line of their first leader.[30]

Eve was often evoked to justify misogyny; but she could also be utilized to challenge powerfully charged gender politics relating to the Fall. Rachel Speght in 1617, for example, reinterprets Genesis by arguing that though Eve was the first transgressor, the Fall was fundamentally on account of Adam: 'the punishment of [Eve's] transgression being particular to her owne sex, and to none but the female kinde: but for the sinne of man the whole earth was cursed'.[31] Women were given their own specific punishment – pains in childbirth – but it was Adam who caused the greater fall, a view like Cavendish's in 'The Travelling Sprit'. Rachel Speght draws the conclusion that 'no more is woman simply to bee condemned for mans transgression'.[32]

II Alchemical and occult philosophy

The story of Adam and Eve was also important for occult thinkers such as van Helmont and Agrippa. The term 'occult' meant something different from what it means today insomuch as it encompassed subjects such as theosophy, alchemy, astrology and magic and was held to be of a secret or mysterious nature. So it is significant that in 'The Travelling Spirit' the brother of Adam is described as an alchemist. For some alchemists, the principle of symmetry or harmony between male and female, which was discussed in Chapter 1, extended so far that Eve was interpreted as having superiority over Adam. For example, van Helmont argues that humanity was cursed because *Adam* was more carnal and attacked Eve, who was 'deflowred by Adam by force'.[33] Like Cavendish and Speght, who place more blame on Adam, van Helmont argues that 'the crafty Serpent assaulted not the Woman as being the weaker; but because the Admonition was given unto Adam from the Mouth of God'.[34] Eve was not weaker; she was chosen rather because she was not directly given the command from God. In fact, van Helmont turns the world upside-down,

[30] Joseph Swetnam, *The Araignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* (London, 1615), B. Likewise, Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger explain that 'it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives.' Kramer and Sprenger, *Malleus Maleficarum*, 44.

[31] Rachel Speght, *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (London, 1617), 5.

[32] *Ibid*., 5.

[33] Jean Baptiste van Helmont, *Van Helmont's Works*, trans. J. C. (London, 1664), 666.

[34] *Ibid*., 654.

claiming that, before the Fall, God had 'appointed the Woman to be the head, top, and ultimate Creature above the Man'.[35] Likewise, although the earlier Cornelius Agrippa, whose works were published and translated numerous times throughout the seventeenth century, initially argues that men and women are equal in *A Treatise of the Nobilitie and Excellencye of Woman Kynde*,[36] he none the less claims 'woman is made so muche more excellent than man' and that 'we haue synned (and must dye) in Adam, not in [Eve]'.[37]

The representation of Genesis was also important for alchemical philosophy because there was a belief that the magus had the potential to tap into prelapsarian powers, which were dormant in humanity after the Fall. For example, van Helmont argues that 'the knowledge and power Magical … sleeps since the knowledge of the Apple was eaten'.[38] He suggests that the effects of the Fall, however, could be overcome through cabbala, which could awaken divine, magical faculties within the individual and would enable them to affect distant objects.[39] Similarly, the alchemist in Cavendish's 'The Travelling Spirit' – an explicitly prelapsarian person – seems to have vast powers, as he claims that through his chemistry[40] he has been responsible for creating all of the gold in the world and has the 'power to call all things on the Earth unto him by degrees, and to dispose of them as he would' (*NP* 146).[41] This power resembles features of the Neoplatonic concept of the World Soul.[42] Henry More, who influenced

[35] *Ibid*.

[36] Agrippa argues that 'The woman hathe that same mynd that a man hath, that same reason and speche … And thus betwene man and woman by substance of the soule, one hath no higher preemynence of nobylytye aboue the other, but both of them naturally haue equall libertie of dignitie and worthynesse.' Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *A Treatise of the Nobilitie and Excellencye of Woman Kynde*, trans. Dauid Clapam (1542), 2r.

[37] *Ibid*., 2r and 28r.

[38] Van Helmont, *Works*, 781.

[39] He argues that 'the art of the Cabal … may restore that Natural and Magical power' and 'the same magical Faculty being somewhat awakened, is able to act also out of her Prison, on another distant Object'. *Ibid*., 781, 784. According to van Helmont, this power is Godlike and divine since it is 'by virtue of the Image of God'. *Ibid*., 780. Van Helmont's use of the term 'cabbala' refers to the mystical interpretation of the Old Testament developed in the beginning of the thirteenth century, erroneously believed to be derived from an older tradition. The word 'cabbala' originally referred to the oral transmission of divine teaching from Moses to the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud. 'Cabbala | Kabbalah, n.', *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, www.oed.com/view/Entry/25725?redirectedFrom=Cabbala#eid, accessed 10 April 2014.

[40] In early modern use the term 'chemistry' is often indistinguishable from alchemy.

[41] He claims that 'all the Gold that is digged out of the Mines was converted by me' (*NP* 147).

[42] Cavendish's World Soul, then, obtained powers because he 'never had a Woman to tempt him to sin'; this mirrors van Helmont's belief that the magical powers of humanity diminished and grew dormant with the 'opiate' of original sin (*NP* 146). Jean Baptiste van Helmont, *A Ternary of Paradoxes* (London, 1650), 70.

Cavendish's scientific positions, theorizes that this entity, which he refers to as the Spirit of Nature, pervades 'the whole Matter of the Universe' and '[directs] the parts of the Matter and *their* Motion'.[43] Steven Shapin explains that the World Soul is 'the notion that matter was imbued with life', and that such 'doctrines gave legitimacy to magical beliefs and practices'.[44] However, the alchemist, described as an older man, portrays his magic and alchemy in *natural* terms: 'As for my Stills, said he, they are the Pores of the Earth; and the Waters I distill' (*NP* 147). Other natural phenomena are also explained as acts of his chemistry: 'the saltness of the Sea comes from Chymistry; and the Vapour that arises from the Earth, is the Smoke that steems from my Stills' (*NP* 147). The mysteries of alchemy, like witchcraft, are portrayed as real, while being explained within a materialist paradigm, as being derived from the enigmatic powers within body and matter.

Many facets of alchemical philosophy are represented in 'The Travelling Spirit', and overlap into Cavendish's materialism in complex ways. The title is significant, since Henry More, whom Cavendish critiqued extensively in *Philosophical Letters*, believed souls can travel. He argues in *The Immortality of the Soul* that 'the Soul may be loosned and leave the Body, and yet return thither again'.[45] However, Cavendish criticizes the belief in travelling souls in *Philosophical Letters*, as she argues that 'the natural soul is not like a Traveller, going out of one body into another, neither is air her lodging' (*PL* 218). Although in her science Cavendish argues against the possibility of vehicles of the soul, she devotes an entire fictional story to this concept. However, as with representations of witchcraft, Cavendish does not exactly indicate that the effects credited to occult thought are entirely impossible,

[43] Henry More, *The Immortality of the Soul* (London: J. Flesher, 1659), 450. Jacqueline Broad argues that Cavendish's theoretical position is 'shaped in response to the Cambridge Platonists, and especially Henry More'. See Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 36. Other critics have also begun to explore the link between More and Cavendish. Sarah Hutton argues that Cavendish's Nature represents a material universe that is the direct opposite of More's philosophy, and Katie Whitaker demonstrates how Cavendish responds to More's emphasis upon immateriality. See Sarah Hutton, 'Margaret Cavendish and Henry More', in Clucas, *Princely Brave Woman*, 185–98, and Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: The Extraordinary Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, the First Woman to Live by Her Pen* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 317–19.

[44] Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 43.

[45] More, *Immortality of the Soul*, 268. Cavendish may also be referring to the Neoplatonic belief that souls descend from heaven to earth using a light, ethereal yet material body known as a vehicle of the soul. More exemplifies this belief when he describes 'the descent of the Soule out of her *aiery* Vehicle into this terrestrial Body'. *Ibid*., 261. For more details about the Renaissance belief in a vehicle of the soul see D. P. Walker, 'The Astral Body in Renaissance Medicine', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21.1/2 (1958): 119–33.

but redefines the concepts therein, situating them within a secular, material framework. For example, the witch's and the man's encounter deep in the centre of the earth with an alchemist can be perceived as highly satirical, since Plato, a strong influence on occult traditions, uses the metaphor of a dark cave to illustrate the difference between true knowledge of ideal forms and the world of appearance in which we live.[46] Cavendish's alchemist has found forms within an underground cave-like dwelling, deep in the centre of the earth, where there are 'the shapes and substances of all kinds of Fruits and Flowers, Trees, or any other Vegetables' in what the witch terms a 'Storehouse of Nature' (*NP* 146). It is quite ironic that Cavendish's quasi-Platonic forms are not outside of the cave, but exist deep within the earth, where the only light was derived from 'Glow-worms Tails' (*NP* 146). The Platonist would expect them to be found in the sky. Light and perception are provided not by the unchanging heavenly spheres or transcendental lights, but by natural creatures of the earth. Nature, not humans, provides the illumination of substance, even though it be inside the cave; even the creatures that dwell closest to the earth and to mutable, transient matter may be sources of light. An authentic perception of the structures and substances and materials of Nature may be seen by this light, in this cave. Like Cavendish's science, 'The Travelling Spirit' not only intermixes the distinctions between witchcraft and natural magic, but also it further serves as a key to understanding how the supernatural is explained in Cavendish's scientific epistemology.

As 'The Travelling Spirit' explores witches, Platonic forms and alchemy, it increasingly appears to be a journey through a hybrid world of Cavendish's philosophy intermixed with Neoplatonic and occult conceptions. Kate Lilley argues that Cavendish often demonstrates 'an abiding fascination with kinds as such, and particularly impure and unexpected hybrids'.[47] Hence, for someone who characteristically challenges categories, a materialist philosophy intermixed with a science that is based upon spirit and magic would not necessarily be an unusual method of inquiry. Stephen Clucas argues that Cavendish's science 'collapses the dichotomy between matter and spirit, mechanism and vitalism, by insisting that matter is living and sentient, but *not* spiritual'.[48] Yet, it is not just alchemy,

[46] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), Book 7.

[47] Kate Lilley, 'Introduction', in *Margaret Cavendish: 'The Blazing World' and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (London: Penguin Books, 1994), xi.

[48] Stephen Clucas, 'The Atomism of the Cavendish Circle: A Reappraisal', *Seventeenth Century* 9.2 (1994): 262.

but Neoplatonic science in general is continually turned upside-down and incorporated into her epistemology from various perspectives throughout the story. Within this densely metaphored story, even the direction of travel that the witch and the man embark upon is significant: though Plato's allegory argues that people must ascend *upward* from the cave if they are to perceive ideal forms, or even the immutable paths of the heavenly spheres, the man and the witch descend ironically *downward* far into the depths of the earth, and into knowledge of the natural world.[49] Witches are not trying to master humans; rather it is the alchemist who is attempting to turn the entire world into glass. 'The Travelling Spirit' is a complex, multi-layered exploration of occult science and witchcraft, placed within Cavendish's materialism, demonstrating how concepts that are defined against each other, such as immaterial/material, are not necessarily polarized opposites, but often are similar principles. Thus her work complicates binary oppositions and categorical structures.

Her methodology of fusion of seemingly contradictory concepts may have been influenced by Renaissance magic traditions. Many philosophers theorized about the concept of perennial philosophy (*philosophia perennis*); a belief which developed from the occult interest in producing harmony from discord and unity from multiplicity.[50] Perennial philosophy viewed certain truths as enduring in the philosophy of various historical periods.[51] Consequently, diverse philosophies throughout history contained elements of truth. This idea induced and facilitated a more syncretic, flexible and tolerant belief system. Sarah Hutton, in her study of Anne Conway, argues that perennial philosophy was a view held by the Cambridge Platonists and which 'was widely accepted in the Renaissance and the seventeenth century'. Perennial philosophy 'involved conflating ancient and modern philosophy into one timeless system of thought'.[52] For example, Henry More seems to have discovered in the notion of perennial philosophy a method of addressing the theological question as to what Athens could possibly have to do with Jerusalem; he defends his method of 'citing the Heathen Writers so frequently', arguing that their ideas initially descended from Moses and biblical prophets and consequently the classical pagan thinkers contained insights from a timeless cabbala.[53] More

[49] See Plato, *Republic*, Book 7.

[50] Charles B. Schmitt, 'Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966): 532.

[51] *Ibid*., 505.

[52] Sarah Hutton, *Anne Conway: A Woman Philosopher* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 11.

[53] He claims 'their Philosophy [was] from Moses and the Prophets, as Pythagoras and Plato, or else the Disciples or Friends of these Philosophers. And therefore I thought it very proper to use their

further explains his belief that Moses himself articulated a cabbala and not only 'Pythagoras and Plato had their Philosophy from Moses', but 'it would not so easily have suggested unto them, had they had no assistance from either Iewish or Aegyptian Prophet or Priest to expound it'.[54] More suggests that a joint multicultural, religious effort relating Jewish, Egyptian and Greek thinkers was necessary to harmonize an ancient theology and philosophy into one timeless, integral wisdom.

What Cavendish provides could be seen as a materialist form of such perennial philosophy, wherein body is the defining principle or a timeless truth. Corporeality, associated with women, was usually perceived as inferior to spirit, but Cavendish challenges body/spirit hierarchies: she situates body and materiality as the principle which provides truth and order. In considering the attributes of timeless truth, rather than placing the emphasis on cabbala or spirit, corporeality functions as a timeless concept that synthesizes, combines and reconciles a multiplicity of contending ideas and beliefs into one single philosophical system.

The more tolerant and broad qualities of perennial philosophy may have appealed to Cavendish. 'The Travelling Spirit' was written during the civil war, and perhaps she would have found perennial philosophy with its emphasis upon harmony and the unification of disparate ideas pertinent during this turbulent and divisive historical period.

Though Cavendish's science can appear inconsistent, if understood as conforming to a commitment to redefine binary oppositions, such as spirit opposed to corporeality, there is a definite method to be found underlying her seemingly idiosyncratic, diverse and contradictory approach. Since all aspects of Nature have their own specific knowledge and valid perspective, then the best way to discover knowledge is to be open to all forms of intellectual thought, regardless if they are contradictory. For example, in *The Blazing World*, Cavendish sounds like the Elizabethan magician John Dee himself as she argues 'the best informers are the immaterial spirits' (*TBW* 184).[55] Since they are the best informers, she is evidently not entirely discrediting occult sciences, but rather appropriating their ideas into her

Testimony … as having receiv'd the Cabbala from the ancient Prophets.' Henry More, *Conjectura Cabbalistica* (London, 1653), 82–3.

[54] *Ibid.*, 106.

[55] Michael Hunter, argues that for John Dee 'angelic intercourse was not only a possibility but the ultimate goal of magical activity'. Michael Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy: Intellectual Change in Late Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), 29. Dee himself claimed that he was not satisfied seeking knowledge derived from people or from reading, but only from angels. John Dee, *A True and Faithful Relation*, ed. Meric Casaubon (London, 1659), 231.

own thought.[56] An examination of all sciences, including occult thought, would consequently be the most appropriate method for understanding an infinite body of Nature.

III Early modern fairy lore

'The Travelling Spirit' explores and appropriates numerous concepts from occult traditions, while the story strangely bears a striking resemblance to the fairy kingdom described in *Poems and Fancies*. Like 'The Travelling Spirit', the kingdom of fairies is also located 'in the *circled centre* of the *Earth*' where '*Glow-worms* for candles are light up' (*PF* 148, 153). Not only do both texts share the same location and use of glow-worms, in the centre of the fairy kingdom lives an '*old man* that doth i'th Center dwell' (*PF* 150). He is, however, not depicted as an alchemist, but a '*Smith set at the forge* below' (*PF* 150). Similarly, van Helmont, in his alchemical philosophy, depicts a 'Workman' or 'Smith of generations' that 'walketh [through] all the Dens and retiring places of his Seed, and begins to transform the matter, according to the perfect act of his own Image'.[57] Paralleling van Helmont's smith, Cavendish's alchemist in 'The Travelling Spirit' also lives near the Storehouse of Nature or Platonic forms and will attempt to transform the world into his own image by transplanting 'the World from Earth to Glass' (*NP* 147). The concept of a supernatural smith was not restricted to scientific thought. Janet B. T. Christie argues that many cultures within Western Europe had folk tales about a supernatural smith:

> [T]he story may vary from one people to another, its basic elements are the same. He works unseen and in an underground smithy … He is represented as being a giant in stature; sometimes he is associated with elves or dwarfs, or is himself elvish.[58]

Drawing from a fusion of folklore and alchemical science, Cavendish's smith, who resembles Henry More's Spirit of Nature (or World Soul), is also associated with fairies as he works deep within the earth in the fairy kingdom. Both the smith and the elderly alchemist in the 'Travelling Spirit' are also described as creating mines in the earth:

> *Nature* her *mettal* makes him hammer out,
> All that she sends through *Mines* the *world* about. (*PF* 150)

[56] As argued earlier, though these spirits are referred to as 'immaterial', Cavendish fundamentally describes them as material creatures.
[57] Van Helmont, *Works*, 35.
[58] Janet B. T. Christie, 'Reflections on the Legend of Wayland the Smith', *Folklore* 80.4 (1969): 286.

The parallels between the two stories are striking and fascinating. Yet, one is about alchemy and witches, while the other is about a fairy kingdom. However, this connection is less strange when *Poems and Fancies* is placed in the context of early modern fairy lore.

In current times, fairies are regarded as small, benevolent creatures that are often consigned to children's stories. Yet James Sharp argues that this 'was not the case in early modern England, where there was a powerful folklore which saw fairies as active, large, and frequently mischievous and sometimes malevolent beings'.[59] However, they were not always seen as entirely evil, particularly since local healers known as cunning folk claimed to be in touch with the fairies.[60] Fairies were also known to help mortals by healing a range of illnesses from rheumatism to the gout.[61] While they could be benevolent, there were many overlaps between witch and fairy beliefs, and those who claimed to be in contact with fairies could be attacked by authorities who argued that such contact was consorting with Satan.[62] Indeed, King James argued that fairies were deceptions derived from the devil.[63] Literary representations of fairies illustrate their moral ambiguity. Though in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* Oberon attempts to help lovesick mortals, Milton in Book 1 of *Paradise Lost* compares the fallen angels of hell to a gathering of 'faerie elves'.[64]

The link between the 'The Travelling Spirit' and the fairy kingdom appears less incongruous in the context of early modern conceptions of fairies and their associations with witchcraft.[65] Even alchemical and hermetic scientists did not limit their exploration of the supernatural to magic and witchcraft. Katharine Briggs argues that the 'alchemists, astrologers and magicians, who enjoyed a curious immunity in this time of witchcraft persecution, relied on the general toleration of the fairies and were ready to claim acquaintance with them'.[66] For example, the celebrated

[59] Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, 58.
[60] *Ibid.*, 58.
[61] Regina Buccola, *Fairies, Fractious Women, and the Old Faith: Fairy Lore in Early Modern British Drama and Culture* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 2006), 55.
[62] Frederick Valletta, *Witchcraft, Magic and Superstition in England, 1640–70* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 79.
[63] James I, *Daemonologie*, 73–4.
[64] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 108.
[65] Emma Wilby traces the similarities between witches' familiars and fairies in popular culture, arguing that there would have been considerable confusion about clear differences between the two entities. See Emma Wilby, 'The Witch's Familiar and the Fairy in Early Modern England and Scotland', *Folklore* 111.2 (2000): 283–305.
[66] Katharine Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck: An Examination of Fairy Beliefs among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and Successors* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959), 104.

antiquarian Elias Ashmole had manuscript recipes for conjuring fairies in his library.[67]

In Cavendish's writings, fairies also are defined in similar terms to witches. Both are described as natural, material creatures which humanity interprets to be supernatural:

> [A]lthough not subject to our sense, then wee must grant, that substance must have some forme; And why not of man, as of any thing else? and why not rational soules live in a small body, as well as in a grosse, and in a thin, as in a thicke? Shall we say Dwarfes have lesse soules, because lesse, or thinner bodies? And if rational souls, why not saving souls? So there is no reason in Nature, but that there may not onely be such things as Fairies, but these be as deare to God as we. (*PF* sigs. Aa2r, Aa2v)

Although Cavendish writes about fairies in her literature and science, the function of fairies in her thought has received little critical attention. Not only do the fairies reside near the Storehouse of Nature; they are also associated with Nature, since the queen of the fairies is 'in *Natures grace*' (*PF* 150) and is given a governing position:

> There *Mab* is *Queen* of all, by *Natures* will,
> And by *her* favour she doth governe still. (*PF* 150)

Though in English folklore Mab is queen of the fairies, Cavendish claims she is also in favour with Nature and even governs the smith or the Neoplatonic World Soul.

Fairies are not just fictional characters in Cavendish; they are also a significant facet of her scientific thought. In *Philosophical Letters* she not only affirms her belief in fairies, but also refers the reader back to her previous work, *Poems and Fancies*, to better understand them. Besides their existence in the centre of the earth, the fairies in *Poems and Fancies* are also significantly part of the human body, where 'The City of the Fairies' is described as physical parts of the brain:

> The *City* is the *Braine*
> …
> It's trenched round about with a thick scull,
> And fac'd without with wondrous Art, and skill.
> The *Fore-head* is the *fort*, that's builded high,
> And for the *Sentinels* is either *Eye*. (*PF* 163)

This poem suggests that fairies are part of the human *corpus*, inasmuch as their city is the corporeal parts of the head. Fairies also influence memory,

[67] Briggs provides the spells in her appendix. See *ibid.*, 248–50.

visions and dreams, since 'Those *formes* and *figures*, we for *fancy* take. / And when we sleep, those *Visions*, *dreames* we call' and 'the place where *Memory* doth lye in, / Is the great *Magazine* of *Oberon King*' (*PF* 162, 163). Perhaps Cavendish was influenced by Shakespeare's description of Queen Mab in *Romeo and Juliet*, who gallops through people's brains instigating dreams.[68] Fairies and dreams were also associated in folklore since nightmares were sometimes considered to be fairy-like spirits that plagued sleeping humans. Drayton demonstrates the early modern link between fairies and nightmares in *Nimphidia*, where he claims that the queen of fairies was '[i]n elder Times the *Mare*', an old English demon responsible for bad dreams and whose name survives today in the term 'nightmare'.[69]

Like the idea of 'Natural Witchcraft', early modern fairy lore influenced Cavendish's scientific theories on many levels. Cavendish's fairies, which she describes as corporeal parts of the body, resemble what she terms the rational part of matter. In *Philosophical Letters*, Cavendish describes a vitalist system containing three types of matter: inanimate, sensitive and rational. Rational matter is what processes and produces knowledge and information.[70] Similar to fairies, who affect memory, imagination and dreams, rational matter also generates 'Conception, Imagination, Fancy, Memory, Remembrance, Understanding, Judgment, Knowledg, and all the Passions' (*PL* 36). In *Poems and Fancies*, she directly links cognitive processes and fairy lore in the title of her poem '*The* Fairies *in the* Braine, *may be the* causes *of many* thoughts' (*PF* 163). Since both rational matter and fairies produce thoughts, conceptions and knowledge, Cavendish's fairies can be understood as anthropomorphic representations of rational matter.

Because fairies and rational matter influence thoughts, memory, visions and dreams, the mind is profoundly affected by these entities, creating a conception of self that is not insular or stable. Humanity is not separate from such creatures, but fairies are an intrinsic part of the self. Like her atomic poems which demonstrate infinite worlds within worlds occupied

[68] Mercutio claims that Mab 'gallops night by night / Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love; / O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on curtsies straight; / O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees; / O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream'. William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. Peter Holland (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 1.4: 70–4.

[69] Michael Drayton, *The Battaile of Agincourt … Nimphidia, the Court of Fayrie* (London: Augustine Mathewes, 1631), 170, and Briggs, *Anatomy of Puck*, 21 and 191.

[70] Though 'inanimate matter has no motion, nor life and knowledg of it self' (*PL* 99), Cavendish claims that 'all and every particular Creature, as also all perception and variety in Nature, is made by corporeal self-motion, which I name sensitive and rational matter, which is life and knowledg, sense and reason', these are 'the knowing, understanding and prudent parts, the designing, architectonical and working parts, nay the Life and Soul of Nature' (*PL* sig. b3v).

with miniature people, the self is also not whole or complete, but is infinitely fragmented and filled with vitalistic creatures. Perhaps this is why Cavendish depicts a war between the fairies and the pygmies, demonstrating her conception of a fragmented self where there can be a 'war in the thoughts of the Reader' (*PL* 254).

Though Cavendish's representation of fairies may seem eccentric, she draws upon many different early modern literary and folk traditions. Throughout the seventeenth century, there was what Briggs terms a 'Fashion for the miniature', in literary representations of fairies.[71] Though fairies were sometimes portrayed as large, in some instances, they were so minute that they were associated with atoms. Like Cavendish's atomic worlds inhabited by miniature people, Herrick portrays tiny fairies that dine on 'Conserves of Atomes'.[72] Reid Barbour argues that within literature 'the atomized fairy court is famous for its mystery, vitality, and refinement as well as for its size'.[73] Even Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* describes the fairy queen, Mab, 'Drawn with a team of little atomi'.[74] Later in the century Robert Kirk described fairies as being 'as thick as Atoms in the Air'.[75] Perhaps scientific developments in microscopes and telescopes, and discoveries of new lands and cultures in the New World, influenced the vogue for imagining new, mysterious miniature worlds inhabited by indigenous fairies.

Though those sceptical about witchcraft such as Reginald Scot suggest that fairies exist only in stories, and Hobbes asserts that entities like fairies are 'Phantasms of the braine, without any reall nature of their own',[76] Cavendish argues that fairies, witchcraft and alchemy do exist, but they are '*not subject to our sense*' and simply demonstrate that the natural world cannot be fully comprehended or categorized (*PF* sig. Aa2r). Significantly, Cavendish uses the same terminology to describe multiple worlds and atoms, which are also 'not subject to our *Sense*' (*PF* 44). Perhaps, then,

[71] Briggs, *Anatomy of Puck*, 56–70.

[72] Robert Herrick, *Hesperides*, in *The Complete Poetry of Robert Herrick*, ed. J. Max Patrick (New York University Press, 1963), 164.

[73] Reid Barbour, *English Epicures and Stoics: Ancient Legacies in Early Stuart Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 45.

[74] Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1.4: 57.

[75] Robert Kirk, *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies*, ed. Andrew Lang (New York: Cosimo, 2005), 81.

[76] Matthew Woodcock argues that 'whilst Scot denies the existence of fairies and Robin good-fellow as essential beings he does not deny their existence within stories and narratives, and he is very much aware of the expedience of constructing such stories'. Matthew Woodcock, *Fairy in 'The Faerie Queene': Renaissance Elf-Fashioning and Elizabethan Myth-Making* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 24. See also, Reginald Scot, *The Discouerie of witchcraft* (London: Henry Denham, 1584) and Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 418.

it is not surprising that fairies are linked within Cavendish's conception of rational matter since early modern fairies were also difficult to categorize. Diane Purkiss argues that fairies tended to exist in areas that are 'distinguished by being nameless, unmapped, uncharted, and above all unowned'.[77] Emphasizing fairies' liminal status, Purkiss further argues that they 'are encountered on boundaries, either in space – between town and wilderness – or in time – at midday, at midnight, at the change of the year, on the eve of a feast, on Halloween or May Eve'.[78]

Another similarity between Cavendish's theoretical thought and early modern fairy lore is that both are deeply connected to Nature. Fairies were often associated with a natural landscape. Briggs presents the argument that fairies are not easily defined as good or evil, like Cavendish's understanding of 'Natural Witchcraft':

> They may be evil, dealing death or sickness to every man and creature they pass on their way, like the *Sluagh* of the Highlands; they may steal unchurched wives from child-bed, or snatch away unchristened babies leaving animated stocks or sickly children of their own in their place, or they may be harmless and even beneficial – fertility spirits watching over the growth of flowers or bringing good luck to herds or children.[79]

Meeting a fairy can be risky, dangerous or helpful, just as Nature can be beautiful, powerful and dangerous.

Like early modern understandings of fairies and witchcraft that were concerned with women and women's activities, Cavendish's representation of Nature is also associated with femininity. Cavendish, as we have seen, defines Nature as a female matriarch: fairyland was also a matriarchal domain since the queen was generally portrayed as the centre of power.[80] Regina Buccola maintains that the 'majority of theatrical and popular representations of fairyland in early modern England depicted a queen who had either sole sovereign authority or dominance over her partner'.[81] There was also an assumption that stories about

[77] See Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome Things: A History of Fairies and Fairy Stories* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 151.

[78] Dianne Purkiss, 'Sounds of Silence: Fairies and Incest in Scottish Witchcraft Stories', in Stuart Clark (ed.), *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2001), 83.

[79] Katharine M. Briggs, *The Vanishing People: A Study of Traditional Fairy Beliefs* (London: Batsford, 1978), 39.

[80] Buccola, *Fairies, Fractious Women*, 71.

[81] *Ibid*. In her analysis of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Buccola argues that an early modern audience would have been familiar with 'the unquestioned centrality' of the fairy queen's authority and would have been particularly amused by the drugging of Titania, largely on account of the anticipation of her sobriety and return to control. *Ibid*., 71, 74.

fairies were often transmitted by serving-women.[82] Fairy legends often focus upon traditional women's concerns such as birth and childcare.[83] Stories of human women becoming midwives to the fairies were widespread in England, and house fairies occupied traditional female work spaces performing domestic chores.[84] Wendy Wall notes for example, in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, that after 'waxing lyrical about screeching predators and demonic spirits, Puck describes his nocturnal mission as an odd hallowing'.[85] He claims that he is 'sent with broom before / To sweep the dust behind the door'.[86] Fairies were also particularly offended if domestic duties were not adequately completed. In *Hesperides*, for example, Robert Herrick portrays fairies pinching women who do not clean their homes properly:

> Wash your Pailes, and clense your Dairies;
> Sluts are loathsome to the Fairies:
> Sweep your house: Who doth not so,
> *Mab* will pinch her by the toe.[87]

Not only were fairies deeply concerned with domestic labour, fairies also inhabited feminine spaces in the sense that their status mirrored that of women. They were outsiders, yet also familiar; they were considered neighbours, yet alien and sometimes even appeared as deceased relatives.[88] Women were also outsiders – they were part of families, yet since they became part of their husband's family, they were not fully part of their own; they were not full subjects, yet were subject to the laws of the land. Like fairies, women were closer to Nature and further from God.

Fairies could also be encountered during moments of physical or social transition such as birth, adolescence, loss of virginity, marriage, death and

[82] Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 102. For example, Reginald Scot demonstrates the view that fairy beliefs were passed on through women when he lists fairies along with witches, elves, Robin Goodfellow and other supernatural entities as terrifying 'bugs' commonly passed down in childhood by 'our mothers maids'. Like Scot, Hobbes also discredits fairy lore by suggesting that they are stories told by women or rising from the traditions of 'old Wives'. See Scot, *Discouerie of witchcraft*, 152, 153, and Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 418.

[83] Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 106.

[84] Briggs, *Vanishing People*, 93–103 and Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 53 and 93.

[85] Wall, *Staging Domesticity*, 94.

[86] William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Trevor R. Griffiths (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5.1: 367–8.

[87] Herrick, *Hesperides*, 267.

[88] For more information regarding fairy lore in relation to the dead see ch. 3, 'Birth and Death: Fairies in Scottish Witch-Trials', in Diane Purkiss, *Troublesome Things*, 85–115.

burial.[89] Sometimes they were understood as dead relatives, demonstrating that they were both foreign and familiar, dead, yet alive, unable to be placed in one fixed category. Appropriately, given fairies' unstable ontological nature, the early modern populace did not 'believe' in fairies, yet they also did not disbelieve. Purkiss argues that fairies 'both are and are not', they are 'liminal, boundary walkers'.[90]

In *Poems and Fancies*, Cavendish claims that characters in the fairy kingdom are often mistaken for goddesses:

> She *Proserpine*, that's thought the *Queen* of hell.
> Yet *Venus* is a *Tinkers wife*, we see,
> Not a *goddesse*, as she was thought to be. (*PF* 150)

Venus and Persephone are the same entity. Though they are not goddesses, they are either fairies or at least are intrinsically connected to the fairy kingdom. Perhaps that is why in another story in *Natures Pictures*, 'The She-Anchoret', the philosophical protagonist denies that 'sensitive and rationall spirits' are actual little creatures 'for they are not creatures but Creators'.[91] Cavendish's choice of deities is significant since she does not choose gods of the sea, forest or war, but instead chooses Persephone, who is thought to be the '*goddess*' of Hell, and Venus, who is goddess of Love, reminding the reader of hell/heaven, love/hate, God/Satan; associating not only mythical entities, but religious figures with rational matter.[92] Furthermore, though it was not uncommon for fairyland to be furnished

[89] Purkiss, 'Sounds of Silence', 83. [90] *Ibid*.

[91] Although 'The She-Anchoret' is comparable to 'The Travelling Spirit', in so far as it represents sensitive and rational matter as creators, 'The She-Anchoret' often departs from representations of Nature as a wise and orderly force, a view which is typical in Cavendish's others texts. The protagonist of 'The She-Anchoret', in contrast, claims 'all evill lives in nature as all good in *Jove*, for in nature said she, is discord, in *Jove* concord' for 'nature … struggles and strives like an untoward jade, that would break lose to run wildly about'. It is worth noting, however, that this story seems to provide many examples of Cavendish's more conservative voices. For example, the main character, who grew 'famous' for her wisdom, declared monarchy was the best form of government, since 'a good King is the Center of a Commonwealth, as God is the Center of Nature, which orders and disposes all to the best, and unites and composes all differences which otherwise would run into a confusion; and Unity'. Margaret Cavendish, 'The She-Anchoret', in *Natures Pictures* (London, 1656), 318, 319 and 326.

[92] Cavendish was not the only author to associate Persephone with fairies. In Chaucer's 'The Merchant's Tale', Pluto is referred to as the 'king of faierye' and 'his wif, the queene Proserpina'. Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Jill Mann (London: Penguin Books, 2005), 374. Interestingly, mythical gods and goddesses also play a parallel role in relation to Nature and power in the play within a play in *The Convent of Pleasure*. Neptune boasts that he is 'sole Monarch of the Sea' with singular power and property rights over his kingdom, while the unnamed Sea Goddess, in contrast, does not speak the same language of political power, command and ownership. However, Neptune, who emphasizes his domination, none the less admits that he is guided or directed by Nature: 'Nature directs and doth provide / Me all Provisions which I need'. Margaret Cavendish, *The Convent of Pleasure*, in *Plays, never before printed* (London, 1668), 44 and 42.

with glow-worms, according to the *OED*, worms were associated with serpents.[93] Considering the references to Persephone and hell, it is notable that glow-worms shed light on Cavendish's understanding of the origin of knowledge. In both *Poems and Fancies* and 'The Travelling Spirit' glow-worms illuminate knowledge of ideal forms, paralleling Satan, the serpent, who was also a figure associated with the discovery of knowledge, albeit forbidden.

Fairies' moral ambiguity correlates with a vision of rational matter that embodies both divine and sinful knowledges, unlike hermetic philosophy, which often associated the mind and reason with God. For example, the alleged Trismegistus states 'the Minde' is described as 'being Divine' and the part of the soul 'which is Reasonable is immortall'.[94] Likewise, 'Heaven is reasonable or rational.'[95] In fact, Trismegistus claims that a pious soul 'after it is departed from the Body … becomes either Minde or God'.[96] Henry More similarly associates God with Reason as he argues that 'Reason seems to me to be so far from being any contemptible Principle in man, that it must be acknowledged in some sort to be in God himself.'[97] Interestingly, Cavendish uses fairies, which were associated with Nature and were morally ambiguous, as a means to symbolize rational matter. For Cavendish, God, mind and reason is not defined against Nature or corporeality. Like Trismegistus, who describes 'the minde' as both 'God' and a 'Workman of all [who] useth the fire as his Instrument in his workmanship', Cavendish also describes a workman or smith who is associated with both rational matter and fairies.[98] Nature and fairies, too, represent life. An egg is a common ingredient in fairy magic as it symbolizes birth and hidden life.[99] Like fairy magic, there is hidden life in Cavendish's

[93] 'Worm, n.', *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, www.oed.com/view/Entry/230283?rskey=Ff7XSR&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid, accessed 10 April 2014. For example, Milton refers to Satan in Book 9 of *Paradise Lost* as a worm as he states that 'in evil hour thou didst give ear / To that false worm'. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 532. See Drayton for an example of glow-worms in literary depictions of fairyland (Drayton, 176).

[94] Hermes Trismegistus, *Hermes Mercurius Trismegistus his Divine Pymander in Seventeen Books: Together with his Second Book Called Asclepius*, trans. Dr Everard (London, 1657), 61 and 6. During the Renaissance, Hermes Trismegistus was believed to be a great Egyptian sage who was a contemporary of Moses. Ficino translated his texts from Greek in the fifteenth century, since it was believed that they had influenced Pythagoras and Plato. However, later scholars dated the texts to roughly the third or fourth century AD rather than ancient times. See Margaret Healy, *Renaissance Transformations: The Making of English Writing (1500–1650)* (Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 164–5.

[95] Trismegistus, *His Divine Pymander*, 11.

[96] *Ibid.*, 64.

[97] More, Preface, *Conjectura Cabbalistica*, Sig. A7v.

[98] Trismegistus, *His Divine Pymander*, 20 and 63–4.

[99] Purkiss also argues that many fairy legends are vivid metaphors for the birth process. 'Sounds of Silence', 85–8.

understanding of matter which is always creating and giving birth. Like natural witchcraft, magic is a means for articulating the complexities of matter and corporeality.

If women were more closely associated with the evil side of the good/evil binary, collapsing the dualism redefines man and woman in relation to God, challenging religious understandings of woman that placed her in an ideologically inferior position. The chasm between woman and God is closed, as God is an intrinsic part of every creature. Women are not further from God and mind, since all aspects of the natural world are imbued with rational matter. Purkiss argues that the ontological instability of fairies made them a suitable medium for explaining taboo subjects, such as the trauma of incest.[100] Fairies are thus appropriate creatures to voice or represent a heretical scientific worldview. Cavendish also espoused a materialist and vitalist understanding of Nature that was heterodox. Hence, both fairies and Cavendish's scientific epistemology exceed the terms of what was acceptable or orthodox in society. Perhaps this is also why Cavendish allowed a witch to espouse some of her philosophies; a figure related to fairy lore, who as a character is most remarkable for not actually being overtly diabolical.

IV Renaissance unorthodoxies

Cavendish's representation of fairy lore, magic and materialism highlights her unconventional worldview. Some scholars argue that her philosophy implies atheism. For example, Jay Stevenson argues that 'much of Cavendish's work smacks of atheism in that it suggests the mind has no direct spiritual connection to God, but is wholly physical and left to its own devices'.[101] However, it is not just the mind, but the entire material world is corporeal: this point indicates an even more unorthodox strain to her thought. Although 'The Travelling Spirit' espouses ideas heterodox for early modern culture, in *Philosophical Letters* Cavendish reassures the reader that she does not deny central tenets of the Bible and religious doctrine:

> Neither am I against those Spirits, which the holy Scripture mentions, as Angels and Devils, and the divine Soul of Man; but I say onely, that no Immaterial Spirit belongs to Nature, so as to be a part thereof; for Nature is Material, or Corporeal; and whatsoever is not composed of matter or body,

[100] For a more in-depth discussion of this, see *ibid.*, 81–98.
[101] Stevenson, 'Imagining the Mind', 144.

> belongs not to Nature; nevertheless, Immaterial Spirits may be in Nature, although not parts of Nature. But there can neither be an Immaterial Nature, nor a Natural Immaterial. (*PL* 187)

Asserting her position that Nature is entirely material and corporeal, Cavendish still negotiates theological issues, placing angels, devils and the immortal Soul in a locale separate and distinct from Nature, where they exist but do not interfere within the working of the natural world. Nature still holds free rein in her system of thought. Consequently, by creating two distinct realities that do not interact, Cavendish can focus upon natural phenomena without having to adhere to religious orthodoxy.

In contrast to Cavendish's materialist representation of witchcraft in 'The Travelling Spirit', many members of the Royal Society had no doubt that spirits and devils affected the natural world, and, in general, many scientists also remained committed to the reality of witchcraft.[102] Though Lynn Thorndike argues that Bacon, whose ideas founded the Royal Society, 'had little faith in witchcraft', the Royal Society had differences of opinion regarding the supernatural.[103] Occult philosophers, in particular, theorized about the importance of magic and witchcraft in the natural world, not only for studying natural phenomena, but for maintaining religious belief. For example, Joseph Glanvill argues that '*those that dare not bluntly say, There is NO GOD*, content themselves, (*for a fair* step, *and* Introduction) to *deny there are* SPIRITS, or WITCHES'.[104] Denying the existence of spirits and witches is, according to Glanvill, akin to atheism and heresy.

Unlike Glanvill, Cavendish argues against witchcraft by denying that the Devil can create contracts with people – a central component of English interpretations of witchcraft:

> I believe that there is a Devil, as the Word of God and the Church inform me, yet I am not of the opinion, that God should suffer him to have such a familiar conjunction, and make such contracts with Man, as to impower him to do mischief and hurt to others, or to foretell things to come. (*PL* 227)

If humans could not make contracts with devils, foretell the future and/or obtain diabolical power, then witchcraft, in the early modern sense of

[102] See Shapin, *Scientific Revolution*, 43, and Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy*, 10.
[103] Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. VII (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 82, and Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy*, 291.
[104] Joseph Glanvill, *A Blow at Modern Sadducism* (London, 1668), sig. Biv.

the term, could not exist.[105] Yet, denying satanic influences and witchcraft was a controversial claim for her era since it was equated with atheism.[106] Hunter also argues that in general, during this period, to 'deny outright the reality of witchcraft was thus a position of doubtful orthodoxy, and at the time it was widely seen as part of the phenomenon of "atheism"'.[107]

Though denying witchcraft and spirits could potentially be unorthodox, both Cavendish and Hobbes go further to deny the existence of all incorporeal spirits. Like Hobbes, who argued that the idea of 'incorporeal substance' was a contradiction, Cavendish argues that incorporeal spirits are 'No-thing' since they are 'not parts of Nature, but supernatural; for there may be many things above Nature, and so above a natural Understanding, and Knowledge' (*PL* 78, 321).[108] Scientific inquiry can neither perceive nor understand immateriality, and thus cannot transcend its limited material position to perceive incorporeal spirits. Consequently, she claims 'I meddle not with the Particular Divine Souls of Men, but only the General Soul of Nature' (*PPO* b21). The implication of her argument is that theology does not need to be applied to scientific inquiry. As 'The Travelling Spirit' and *Poem and Fancies* demonstrate, this does not mean, however, that science cannot investigate ideas deemed supernatural since, for Cavendish, magic is an entirely material phenomenon.

How were such heterodox ideas received by Cavendish's contemporaries? Contrary to earlier critical claims in Cavendish studies which perceived Cavendish as an isolated thinker, criticism in the last decade has uncovered evidence that Cavendish was perceived as an established writer.[109] However, she did not go uncriticized, and some seventeenth-century readers still accused her of atheism. For example, a vitriolic epitaph found in one of Elias Ashmole's manuscripts claims that Cavendish is 'The great atheistical philosophraster, That owns no God, no devil, lord nor

[105] Hobbes also disclaims the belief that witches could foretell future events, since prediction from witches 'is but juggling and confederate knavery' (Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 81). However, unlike Cavendish, Hobbes explicitly rejects spiritual entities (except for one omnipotent God), claiming they derived from fear, ignorance and fancy. *Ibid*., 79, 80.

[106] Valletta, *Witchraft, Magic and Superstition*, 61.

[107] Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy*, 288.

[108] Eileen O'Neill argues that Cavendish 'would be one of the few seventeenth-century thinkers to dare to side with Hobbes in espousing a materialist philosophy that denied the existence of incorporeal souls in nature'. Eileen O'Neill, 'Introduction', in Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. Eileen O'Neill (Cambridge University Press, 2001), xiii.

[109] For example, Joseph Glanvill claimed that she was a 'Heroine, whose Pen is as Glorious as [her husband's] Sword'. See William Cavendish, ed. *A Collection of Letters and Poems* (London, 1678), 104. Katie Whitaker argues that Cavendish had achieved a prominent place in English intellectual life, while Anna Battigelli argues that some writers 'seemed to consider her something of an oracle'. See Whitaker *Mad Madge*, 310–15, and Anna Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 4.

master.'[110] However, Hunter argues that the term 'atheist' was often merely 'an empty smear word used to discredit intellectual and other positions disapproved of by those who employed it'.[111] Though Stansby's attack may have merely been an empty smear, Ralph Cudworth, who was influenced by aspects of Cavendish's thought, none the less rebuffs Cavendish's materialist philosophy as too atheistic.[112] Yet, atheism did not necessarily have the same connotation in the seventeenth century as it does now. For example, Frederick Valletta discusses how one pamphlet of 1642 defined atheists as 'people who would have no church-government' and who 'live in an independent way'. There is no mention of disbelief in God: rather the pamphlet was more concerned about the failure to recognize the Church. By the mid seventeenth century atheists were viewed as people who denied the existence of God, either directly or by implication. It was self-evident to many that unbelief would be sustained by a materialistic ideology that understood a natural world which had originated without a beneficent creator and in which God's activity was limited or completely absent.[113] For example, Hobbes, who gained notoriety for his materialism, was decried as an 'arch-atheist'.[114] Many feared that to hold that God did not intervene in the affairs of humanity was to indirectly challenge the existence of a deity. Cavendish embodied many of these definitions of atheism. Although she was a professed Anglican, representations or discussion of Church hierarchy do not appear within her writings.[115] More importantly though, as discussed in Chapter 1, God's power is virtually absent within Cavendish's world, since He has given free rein to a vitalistic, Nature. Furthermore, Cavendish portrays a witch who has no apparent diabolical power, but who instead simply takes opium while discussing natural philosophy.

Although 'The Travelling Spirit', demonstrates in particular how Cavendish's philosophy embraces contradictions while systematically challenging categories and polarized opposites, there is a peculiar and notable contradiction in her own methodology. Her opposition to dualistic thought is contradicted by what initially appears as one strange, inflexible and uncharacteristic dualism, which she articulates in *Philosophical Letters*. Although Cavendish theorizes a material, yet soulified universe,

[110] Bodleian, Ashmole MS 36, f. 186v, quoted in Douglas Grant, *Margaret the First* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957), 199.
[111] Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy*, 229.
[112] Broad, *Women Philosophers*, 53.
[113] Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy*, 229.
[114] Samuel I. Mintz, 'Preface', in *The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth-Century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge University Press, 1962), vii.
[115] Whittaker (*Mad Madge*, 32) argues that Cavendish remained a professed Anglican throughout her life.

Cavendish none the less argues that the material world is entirely severed from spirit: 'Spirit and Body are things of contrary Natures' (*PL* 197). In contrast to her science and fiction that suggest all binaries are intermixed and blended, matter and a spirit world both exist, yet are incompatible: 'Neither can supernatural and natural effects be mixt together, no more then material and immaterial things or beings' (*PL* 11). It seems very uncharacteristic for Cavendish's system of thought to create an unconnected world that is placed in polar opposition to Nature, for her system typically appropriates and blends various categories, traditions and binary oppositions. Though she often plays with contradictions, this point about the material world seems completely unconnected to her overall theoretical position, which is essentially anti-dualist.[116]

Though it could be argued that Cavendish's opposition between spirit and matter simply exemplifies her characteristic and enigmatic use of contradictions, she attempts to remain consistent in her challenge to binary thought, as she argues that though this appears as an opposition, the separate and contrary natures of matter and spirit do not make them opposing principles: 'God and Nature are not opposites, except you will call opposites those which bear a certain relation to one another, as a Cause, and its Effect; a Parent, and a Child; a Master, and a Servant; and the like' (*PL* 458). Rather than conceptualizing them as dualistic, Cavendish regards God and Nature as connected and related in familial terms. Yet neither directly affects or influences the other. However, while Cavendish argues that this is a relational principle between the immaterial world and matter, they remain a dichotomy fundamentally, since immaterial spirit exists, yet is completely severed from and defined against matter.

This uncharacteristic binary begins to have a meaningful function when understood in context with what was considered acceptable in seventeenth-century print. Early modern anxieties concerning materialism, mechanism and vitalism are somewhat resolved in Cavendish's creating a parallel spiritual locale alongside the material world, which contains heterodox concepts and values, but does not mix with or affect matter; nor does it mix with her materialist epistemology. The material/immaterial binary allows Nature infinite power, but, paradoxically, this does not supersede the 'superior', spiritual power of God. Hence, apostasy is avoided. This is the space that allows witches and alchemists to espouse

[116] For a more detailed discussion of the anti-dualist aspects of Cavendish's thought in relation to Descartes, Hobbes and More, see Jacqueline Broad, 'Cavendish, van Helmont, and the Mad Raging Womb', in Judy A. Hayden (ed.), *The New Science and Women's Literary Discourse: Prefiguring Frankenstein* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 47–63.

heterodox, materialist ideas concerning Nature in 'The Travelling Spirit' and justifies fairies who both resemble gods and exist in people's brains in *Poems and Fancies*. Anticipating critics who could point out the potentially unorthodox implication of her ideas, Cavendish argues that her epistemology is not polytheistic and God remains omnipotent within her philosophy:

> But you will say perhaps, if I attribute an Infinite Wisdom, Strength, Power, Knowledge, &c. to Nature; then Nature is in all coequal with God, for God has the same Attributes: I answer, Not at all; for I desire you to understand me rightly, when I speak of Infinite Nature, and when I speak of the Infinite Deity, for there is great difference between them, for it is one thing a Deitical or Divine Infinite, and another a Natural Infinite; You know, that God is a Spirit, and not a bodily substance, again that Nature is a Body, and not a Spirit, and therefore none of these Infinites can obstruct or hinder each other. (*PL* 8)

Establishing a binary between Nature and God allows God to be omnipotent, while simultaneously permitting Nature to retain infinite material power, wisdom and strength. Sarasohn suggests that Cavendish's insistence on an unknowable, absent God indicates that 'Cavendish's theology is nature worship at best and atheism at worse'.[117] Nature is indeed described as a God in her play *The Convent of Pleasure*, where the protagonist, Lady Happy, establishes a convent where she serves 'Goddess Nature' and 'is not a Votress to the gods but to Nature'.[118] This is significant since, as argued in Chapter 1, Nature in the early modern period was understood as passive, irrational, corrupt, feminine and inferior to masculine forces of reason, mind and spirit. In contrast, Cavendish argues that Nature acts as vicegerent for God, consequently maintaining limitless power within her domain and is not moved, controlled or ultimately mastered by any external power.

Nature is also portrayed in a Godlike capacity in her earliest work, *Poems and Fancies*, where Cavendish imagines an alternative creation story in which Nature functions as the creator of the world:

> When *Nature* first this World she did create,
> She cal'd a Counsell how the same might make. (*PF* 1)

Unlike biblical understandings of creation, Nature is instead situated in a Godlike position as creator. Yet, she does not work alone and requires the

[117] Lisa T. Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy during the Scientific Revolution* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 36.
[118] Margaret Cavendish, *The Convent of Pleasure*, in *Playes* (London, 1662), 32, 11.

advice and assistance of a council, emphasizing a more unorthodox and multifarious version of creation:

> First *Matter* she brought the *Materialls* in,
> And *Motion* cut, and carv'd out everything.
> And *Figure* she did draw the *Formes* and *Plots*,
> And *Life* divided all out into Lots. (*PL* 3)

Nature does not create the world in isolation, but works collectively with Matter, Motion, Figure and Life. Cavendish replaces the monarchical God of Genesis with a more democratic, yet vitalist counsel. Not surprisingly, Cavendish seemed concerned that her ideas could be perceived as heretical, as she self-consciously argues that she is not an atheist; 'Concerning my belief of God, I submit wholly to the Church, and believe as I have bin informed out of the *Athanasian* Creed' (*PL* 141). It is significant that Cavendish felt the need to explicitly state that she was not an atheist; this might demonstrate an awareness of the unorthodoxy in her writings.

Mechanists also accorded to God a more distant role in their understanding of the cosmos. Although Robert Boyle wrote treatises about theology and religion,[119] he argued that 'an Intelligent and Wise Agent' initially created the universe like a machine and does not directly intervene with every motion the machine makes: 'in this great *Automaton* the World, (as in a Watch or Clock,) the Materials it consists of, being left to themselves, could never at the first convene into so curious an Engine'.[120] Like Boyle, who imagines God as a clockmaker, Cavendish also assigns God a more distant role in the cosmos. However, her Nature is not a lifeless clock, but a cognitive being who governs the natural world in his place. Her own society and culture featured hierarchical relationships, comprehended as inextricably linked since fathers, kings and God were believed to be analogous forms of power. Yet in Cavendish's cosmos, Nature is a female entity, who presides over the natural world like Queen Mab in her fairy poetry. Thus she complicates early modern patriarchal cosmology and its socio-political implications for gender relations in daily

[119] Jan W. Wojcik explains that Boyle was recognized in the seventeenth century as a lay theologian and that approximately half of his prolific writings discuss theological matters. Yet Wojcik argues that Boyle's empiricism is interwoven with his theology, particularly in his belief that human reason and understanding are limited in comprehending both the natural world and creation. She asserts that Boyle had a 'remarkably unified worldview, a worldview in which truths in chemistry, physics, alchemy, and theology were but different aspects of one unified body of knowledge'. Jan W. Wojcik, *Robert Boyle and the Limits of Reason* (Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1–2 and xi, ix.

[120] Robert Boyle, *The Origine of Formes and Qualities* (Oxford, 1666), 193–5.

life.[121] Through this system of analogies, fathers and kings would have less symbolic authority in Cavendish's cosmos.

Though the power Cavendish allots to Nature is highly unorthodox, it was not uncommon for Renaissance philosophers to argue that it was impossible to entirely comprehend God. Descartes argues that it 'is possible to know that God is infinite and all powerful although our soul, being finite, cannot grasp or conceive him'.[122] Like Descartes, Cavendish argues that 'Gods wayes are incomprehensible and supernatural' (*PL* 527). Although Cavendish affirms God's existence, she argues that humanity cannot 'have an Idea of the essence of God, so as to know what God is in his very nature and essence; for how can there be a finite Idea of an Infinite God?' (*PL* 139). Unlike many early modern thinkers, for Cavendish, the spiritual and the material are two worlds contained within their own dimensions, where humanity is incapable of perceiving the immaterial realm. From this perspective, all things that appear magical, like witches, alchemical magic and fairies, are simply parts of Nature herself.

Although a more distant role was also assigned to God within mechanist philosophy, it was still troubling for early modern culture since, as Hunter argues, it could 'easily be taken too far, raising the spectre of an entirely materialist view of the world'.[123] On the other hand, there were difficulties with vitalist ideas, 'which might be seen to imbue matter with a life of its own, possibly even extending to the ability to replicate itself: the idea of spontaneous generation was alarming because it implied that the universe could subsist without the need for a divine creator and sustainer'.[124] Cavendish's science did indeed take ideas of mechanism further, theorizing a materialist universe while also appropriating the most threatening aspects of vitalism: a natural, material world that generates and creates itself without being affected by God.

When examining the praise and criticism of Cavendish's contemporaries and the limits that orthodoxy may have had upon her thought, it is important to contextualize seventeenth-century commentary about her in light of her heterodox ideas. For example, Hobbes was known as the 'Monster of Malmesbury, the arch-atheist, the apostle of infidelity', 'the bug-bear of the nation' primarily because it was believed that

[121] For a more detailed appreciation of conservative Renaissance understandings of the relation between fathers and kings, see Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha*, in *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1–68.

[122] René Descartes, 'To [Mersenne], 27 May 1630', in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. III, *The Correspondence*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25.

[123] Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy*, 15. [124] *Ibid*.

he was an atheist.[125] Parliament cited his theories as a probable cause of the Great Fire of 1666 and his books were banned and publicly burnt.[126] Significantly, many critics have noted the similarities between Hobbes's and Cavendish's materialist epistemology.[127] Like Cavendish, Hobbes believes that the universe is material, an explosively controversial viewpoint for early modern culture.[128] Samuel Mintz, for example, argues that Hobbes's denial of incorporeal spirit was viewed as a threat to 'the fundamental order of things, as heresies with the most dangerous consequences for religion'.[129] On this point, Mintz explains that a common sentiment among Hobbes's critics was articulated by Bishop Bramhall, who argued that when Hobbes takes 'away all incorporeal substance, he taketh away God himself'.[130]

A key to understanding early modern unorthodox thinkers such as Cavendish is to discern how she bridged the gulf between acceptable orthodoxy and the more radical implications of their ideas. Many of the puzzling aspects of Cavendish's epistemology can be clarified through this approach. Hunter claims that it has 'been argued of a number of heterodox thinkers of the early modern period that, at a time when the threat of prosecution made the open statement of atheistic opinion dangerous, the safest alternative was to imply such views without actually saying them'.[131] Even as late as 1695, an Act was passed in Scotland that declared that those should be punished who in 'their writing or discourse, deny, impugn or quarrell, argue or reason, against the being of God, or any of the persons of the blessed Trinity, or the Authority of the Holy Scriptures of the old and new Testaments, or the providence of God in the Government of the World'.[132] Furthermore, no individual at the time openly admitted

[125] Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, vii. [126] *Ibid*.

[127] For more in-depth discussions of the relationship between Cavendish and Hobbesian thought, see Hutton, 'In Dialogue with Thomas Hobbes'; Battigelli, *Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind*; and Neil Ankers, 'Paradigms and Politics: Hobbes and Cavendish Contrasted', in Clucas, *Princely Brave Woman*, 242–4.

[128] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 269–79. [129] Mintz, *Hunting of Leviathan*, vii.

[130] John Bramhall, 'The Catching of Leviathan', in *The Works of the Most Revered Father in God, John Bramhall* (Dublin, 1676), 873.

[131] Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy*, 299.

[132] *The Acts of the Parliament of Scotland*, ed. T. Thomson and C. Innes, vol. VII (Edinburgh, 1814–75), 386–7, quoted in Hunter, *Science and the shape of Orthodoxy*, 312. Even as late as 1697, a University of Edinburgh student, who was under twenty-one years old and technically a minor, achieved notoriety as a free-thinking atheist. He was later charged with blasphemy and executed, even after confessing and performing a public repentance. Although this was deemed extreme and unusual by this period, it none the less demonstrates the potential obstacles and limitations faced by more unorthodox thinkers during the seventeenth century. See Michael Hunter, '"Aikenhead the Atheist": The Context and Consequences of Articulate Irreligion in the Late Seventeenth Century', in *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy*, 308–32.

to being an atheist.[133] Although early modern culture demonstrated considerable anxiety surrounding atheism in its various forms and definitions, Cavendish defends atheists in *The Worlds Olio*, arguing that it 'is better, to be an Atheist, then a superstitious man; for in Atheisme there is humanitie, and civility, towards man to man; but superstition regards no humanity, but begets cruelty to all things, even to themselves' (*TWO* 46). Since atheism was often understood as being synonymous with immoral behaviour and beliefs, her defence challenges and reverses early modern conceptions of atheism in relation to morality in the same way that the witch in 'The Travelling Spirit' challenges common assumptions about the morality of women.[134]

It would be anachronistic when essaying to understand more secular and heterodox thinkers such as Cavendish not to account for the limitations of what could be articulated in print, particularly when examining controversial ideas such as a materialist witch. Jay Stevenson argues that Cavendish's contradictory style corresponds to what Leo Strauss identifies as characteristics of philosophical writings attempting to elude political suppression, and which seek to conceal subversive ideas: obscurity of plan, contradictions and important links in arguments that are often not linked together.[135] Even though contradictions are part of Cavendish's methodology and pluralistic worldview, perhaps early modern censorship is yet another reason why 'The Travelling Spirit' emphasizes the merging of contradictory thoughts and ideas.

Like the earth in 'The Travelling Spirit', which indiscriminately mixes the bodies of humans and animals, Cavendish questions ontological distinctions between categories and types. Within Cavendish's philosophical thinking, all aspects of Nature are also vitalist and Godlike, since every part of the natural world creates life and is endowed with rational matter.[136] Hence, every creature is a physical form of worship: 'all parts and creatures in nature do adore and worship God' and 'all their actions they

[133] Hunter, *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy*, 232.

[134] *Ibid*. 293. For example, physicians were more often criticized for encouraging 'practical atheism', which indicated a variety of 'ungodly' practices such as drinking, swearing and sexual promiscuity, than 'speculative atheism'. See Peter Elmer, 'Medicine, Witchcraft and the Politics of Healing in Late-Seventeenth-Century England' in Ole Peter Grell and Andrew Cunningham (eds.) *Medicine and Religion in Enlightenment Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate 2007), 227.

[135] Jay Stevenson, 'The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 36.3 (1996): 527–43.

[136] Cavendish argues that 'we canot assign a certain seat or place to the rational, another to the sensitive, and another to the inanimate, but they are diffused and intermixt throughout all the body; And this is the reason, that sense and knowledg cannot be bound onely to the head or brain: But although they are mixt together, nevertheless they do not lose their interior natures by this mixture' (*PL* 112).

may worship thee' (*PL* 138, 542). Reverence is not confined to one type of religion or even to humanity, but there is infinite worship. Worship not only can occur without the aid of religious authority, but it is a physical part of existence for all creatures, which embodies infinite forms and shapes: 'I believe there is a general worship and adoration of God; for as God is an Infinite Deity, so certainly he has an Infinite Worship and Adoration' (*PL* 138). Since God is infinite, he must be venerated in infinite ways, and if all creatures have life, soul and reason, then there are innumerable methods of legitimately worshipping God. Within this theological framework, no particular religion could claim authority over others.

If every part of matter is unable to entirely understand God, then no individual is more receptive to God compared to others. Following this rationale, how could one individual, such as a monarch, claim his or her authority was ordained by God? Monarchy would need to be justified on very different terms. The royalist theorist Robert Filmer linked atheism and religious toleration with opposition to monarchy. He argued that 'the liberty that a popular estate can brag of, every man may be of any religion, or no religion, if he please. Their main devotion is exercised only in opposing and suppressing monarchy.'[137] Though there were secular arguments to be given in support of monarchy – most famously espoused by Hobbes, and which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter – it was more typical to justify monarchical politics with religion. Removing God from political structures would raise many questions, concerning political legitimacy and whence the origins of power and authority are derived. Furthermore, Cavendish's analogy between politics and natural philosophy actually suggests that political disobedience is a natural phenomenon in bodies:

> That it is easier to make disorders then to rectifie them: as for example, in a Common-wealth, the ruines of War are not so suddenly repaired, as made. But concerning Relapses and Intermissions of diseases, Intermissions are like truces or cessations from War for a time; and Relapses are like new stirs or tumults of Rebellion; for Rebels are not so apt to settle in peace as to renew the war upon slight occasions; and if the regular motions of the body be stronger, they reduce them again unto obedience. (*PL* 408–9)

[137] Robert Filmer, 'Observations upon Aristotles Politiques', in *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, 257. Although *Patriarcha* was published in 1680, the text was written years before the publication of *Natures Pictures*. See Johann P. Sommerville, 'Introduction', in *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, xxxii–xxxiv.

As discussed in Chapter 1, Cavendish recurrently offers comparisons between political and natural bodies, which she describes as dynamic and in a constant state of flux as they experience disease, death and collapse. Rebellions that disturb a commonwealth are a natural characteristic of political as well as natural bodies, rather than being an affront to a divinely sanctioned political system. The consequent lesson is that governmental structures are naturally subject to rebellion and change.

Establishing one dichotomy between spirit and matter ironically enables Cavendish to destabilize the very epistemologies that induce a variety of class hierarchies and gendered binaries. Cavendish's representation of the witch in 'The Travelling Spirit' makes more sense from this perspective. She claims to have a 'great Master the Devil' (*NP* 144), but immaterial spirits cannot affect matter in Cavendish's worldview. So neither could diabolical spirits affect a witch, no matter what she claimed or confessed. Cavendish claims that 'both fright, cure, and the disease, are made by the rational and sensitive corporeal motions within the body, and not by Supernatural Magick, as Satanical Witchcraft, entering from without into the body by spiritual rays' (*PL* 302). Since evil forces could not affect or penetrate Nature, such malevolent entities could not interfere with the functioning of the natural world. No force, whether divine or diabolical, directly governs the powerful, female body of Nature.

Bearing in mind Hunter's contention that it was necessary for early modern writers to imply unorthodox ideas rather than directly state them, Cavendish's enigmatic representations of witchcraft, magic and fairies are more comprehensible. As Cavendish draws from various scientific, religious, folk and intellectual traditions, she develops a complex epistemology which believes all perspectives, yet simultaneously disbelieves. She is a secular materialist, yet the body of Nature is mythical, alive and Godlike. Like fairies, magic and witches, Nature is enigmatic and powerful and existing beyond comprehension and categorization. The fairies' fluid, non-definable, liminal status made them appropriate representations for a philosophy that consistently destabilizes categories and boundaries. Buccola argues that fairies 'were always something other – always sliding out of easy categorization, of any definition readily referential to the known or familiar'.[138] Like fairies in early modernity, Cavendish's science

[138] Buccola, *Fairies, Fractious Women*, 35. Like fairies, witches' magic also resisted boundaries because it was perceived as formless and able to go through that which was meant to be marked off or contained, penetrating the boundaries of households and bodies. See Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 120–2.

challenges categorical and dualistic thought, as she incorporates scientific theories and ideologies from alchemy, Neoplatonism, science and folklore that seemingly contradict her own. Although fairies, with their association with witchcraft and magic, may seem mysterious and magical, in Cavendish's poetry and science they represent the plurality and diversity that can exist within an infinitely complex natural world. The next chapter will further explore how Cavendish's interest in plurality and contradiction corresponds to the revolutionary political ideologies apparent with *The Blazing World*.

CHAPTER 3

The politics of free will in The Blazing World
Hobbes, Paracelsus and absolute rule

Contemporary scholars have generally assumed that Cavendish was a loyal supporter of royalist politics.[1] Many scholars have focused upon her presumed staunchly conservative politics and dedication to social hierarchy; some have even suggested that these beliefs invalidate her other political theories, particularly in relation to feminism.[2] Indeed, the Empress of the Blazing World has 'absolute power to rule and govern all that world as she pleased' (*TBW* 132). If a reader were to assume that the Empress is an idealized ruler, *The Blazing World* can appear to advocate an absolute, Hobbesian-style monarchy. However, her method of absolute rulership is far from ideal when the text is situated in the context of early modern politics, philosophy and theology. In doing this contextualization, one notices that the politics of the text do not easily fit within the conceptual framework of absolutism, divine right or monarchical understandings of political and corporeal bodies. This chapter will investigate Cavendish's political theory in *The Blazing World* and how it is framed by her understandings of Nature and science, and her interpretation of contentious early modern debates concerning free will. Although the text initially could appear to advocate Hobbesian political philosophy, such a notion is especially countered by its later engagement with Paracelsus,

[1] For exceptions to this critical view of Cavendish see Hilda L. Smith, '"A General War amongst the Men … But None amongst the Women": Political Differences between Margaret and William Cavendish', in Howard Nenner (ed.), *Politics and the Political Imagination in Later Stuart Britain: Essays Presented to Lois Green Schwoerer* (University of Rochester Press, 1997), 143–60, and Mihoko Suzuki, *Subordinate Subjects: Gender, the Political Nation, and Literary Form in England, 1588–1688* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003). Also, Cavendish's political writings are introduced by Smith, Suzuki and Wiseman in their edition as being 'greatly enhanced by [their] fundamental radicalism (especially as [they relate] to women's standing within the state)'. Hilda L. Smith, Mihoko Suzuki and Susan Wiseman (eds.), *Women's Political Writings, 1610–1725*, vol. 1 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), 203.

[2] For examples of this reading of Cavendish see Kate Lilley, 'Introduction', in *Margaret Cavendish: 'The Blazing World' and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (London: Penguin Books, 1994), xiv, and Eve Keller, 'Producing Petty Gods: Margaret Cavendish's Critique of Experimental Science', *English Literary History* 64.2 (1997): 465.

whom Cavendish alludes to as 'a famous chemist', and whose cosmology was more sympathetic to revolutionary ideals (*TBW* 156). As *The Blazing World* explores free will alongside Paracelsian understandings of creativity and liberty, the text provides a more revolutionary and republican understanding of the individual's relationship to the cosmos.

The story begins with the kidnapping of the protagonist by a merchant. She miraculously escapes, and enters a fantasy world called the Blazing World. The once beleaguered heroine marries the Emperor, who then relinquishes all his power to her. Hence, the protagonist becomes an absolute Empress, obtaining power in every sphere of life, including science, the church, the state and foreign wars. She also explores a diverse range of ancient and contemporary philosophy with the strange native population, some of whom are human/animal or human/insect hybrids, while others are described as spirits. With the power and knowledge she obtains from this kingdom, the Empress completely alters the Blazing World to fit her religious, scientific and political views, and later embarks on imperial, military ambitions abroad. Hence, *The Blazing World* portrays a female political ruler who wields more absolute power and influence than any monarch England had encountered.

The Blazing World emphasizes the absolutist and conformist qualities of its society even before the Empress reigns absolute, a society in which there is 'but one sovereign, one religion, one law, and one language, so that all the world might be but as one' (*TBW* 201). The notion here expressed as 'one law' presumably indicates that the sovereign's will is the only law of the land, rather than a complex system of courts and legislation. The natives of the Blazing World explain that laws disrupt political unity and are a precursor to civil war, since 'many laws made many divisions, which most commonly did breed factions, and at last break out into open wars' (*TBW* 134). It is questionable, however, whether even among royalists, the early modern populace would perceive the type of monarchy represented in *The Blazing World* as an ideal governmental model, particularly since the Empress later rules arbitrarily, without obeying laws of the land, or consulting a parliament or a constitution. Historically speaking, England as a whole never fully embraced an idea of absolute monarchy without adherence to established law, even if resistance or rebellion were perceived as unacceptable.[3] Moderate constitutional royalists, who believed in a

[3] See Glenn Burgess, *Absolute Monarchy and the Stuart Constitution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996) and C. H. McIlwain, 'The English Common Law, Barrier against Absolutism', *American Historical Review* 49.1 (1943): 23–31. Many royalists during the civil war did not believe in absolutism. Stuart Sim and David Walker, for example, posit that constitutional royalists 'believed firmly

limited monarchy which respected established laws as well as parliament, would certainly find this political world unacceptable. Constitutional royalists further held that episcopacy should be retained as fundamental to the national church, a belief clearly not held by the Empress, who converts the entire world to her religion, wherein she 'preached sermons of terror' and 'sermons of comfort' in her new chapels (*TBW* 164). Even early Stuart royalists did not advocate a notion of absolute monarchy with unlimited powers without obligation to law, which would be defined as arbitrary rule.[4] Charles I tried carefully to distance himself from absolutism, while arguing that the dissolution of parliament would actually help 'maintain the ancient and just Rights and Liberties of Our Subjects' who live in a more 'free estate than any Subjects in the Christian world'.[5] After the Restoration's initial euphoria, there emerged a resistance to what were believed to be attempts to create an absolute monarchy akin to French absolutism.[6] This concern would continue after Cavendish's death, as Whigs attempted to paint Tory political thought as tending towards supporting arbitrary government and absolutism.[7] Hence, Cavendish's Empress represents an extreme type of government based on arbitrary rule; she unceremoniously alters laws and religion and also breaks apart scientific societies, without heeding any type of legislative body or parliament.

Quentin Skinner defines the basic thrust of republican theory as being one in which arbitrary power is perceived as inhibiting liberty.[8] J. G. A. Pocock argues that during the sixteenth century, the English populace was imbued with a strong sense of historical and national identity based upon their own sense of self-sovereignty: 'the claim was being made that

that the king was *not* above the law', since they 'believed that the king could not rule arbitrarily within the constitution and the common law'. Sim and Walker further explain that constitutional royalists supported Charles I 'because they considered him to be a viable constitutional monarch'. Stuart Sim and David Walker, *The Discourse of Sovereignty, Hobbes to Fielding: The State of Nature and the Nature of the State* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 7.

[4] See Glenn Burgess, '"Absolutism" and Monarchy in Early Stuart England', in *Absolute Monarchy*, 17–62.

[5] Charles I, 'His MAJESTIE's Declaration to all His loving Subjects, of the Causes which moved Him to Dissolve the Parliament', in *Basilikâ: The Works of King Charles the Martyr* (London, 1687), 230.

[6] Sim and Walker, *Discourse of Sovereignty*, 7. According to J. G. A. Pocock, even in the sixteenth century 'the House of Commons more and more saw parliament's function as the preservation of liberty, and liberty as rooted in fabric of immemorial custom with which it was possible to identify every major juridical and governmental institution, up to and including parliament itself'. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1975), 340.

[7] Burgess, *Absolute Monarchy*, 213.

[8] Quentin Skinner, 'Freedom as the Absence of Arbitrary Power', in Cécile Laborde and John Maynor (eds.), *Republicanism and Political Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 83–101.

the English possessed a historical and immemorial sovereignty over themselves; they were not, and they had never been, anything which was not of their own making'.[9] It is important to note the statement of the Empress herself: she suggests that her radical changes to government, religion and culture proceeded purely from her arbitrary whims; she explains that she 'somewhat alter[ed] the form of government' merely because it is 'the nature of women, being much delighted with change and variety' (*TBW* 201). A ruler who can arbitrarily alter the fabric of society, from state to religion, legislation and learned societies, and who later embarks upon an imperialist agenda without redress to common law, would be dissonant with England's self-perception and national identity. Far from being a utopian fantasy, *The Blazing World* highlights the potential problems with absolute monarchy.

Even Charles I claimed that he had 'permitted many of [his] high Prerogatives to be debated'.[10] So it is quite worrying that the Empress also publicly proclaims that if she 'had long speeched councillors' she 'would hang them' (*TBW* 209), and that she suggests that public counsel or counter-opinions may warrant a death penalty.

C. H. McIlwain argues that 'the English common law throughout its whole history was regarded by English common lawyers and judges as originating in the people alone and was treated as the *people's* peculiar inheritance'.[11] Although for theoretical support many monarchists in the later seventeenth century turned to Filmer, an extreme absolutist,[12] Glenn Burgess argues that often proponents of divine right were working within a different conceptual model that did not theorize about the workings of legislation:

> Divine-right theorists did not necessarily *reject* absolutism explicitly; rather, they were working on a different plane. Frequently, they scarcely engaged with what we might identify as the problem of absolutism at all. The questions they dealt with were not, generally, questions that demanded any specific account of the extent and scope of royal authority … writings of James I and his more articulate subjects did not amount to a theory of absolutism, because they entailed no commitment to any particular view

[9] Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 341.
[10] Charles I, 'Declaration', 223.
[11] McIlwain, 'English Common Law', 28.
[12] For example, Filmer makes a case that fathers have absolute right over their children's lives and the law should not necessarily interfere with this prerogative. Since fathers and kings are understood as being the same, according to Filmer's logic, then the king would also have arbitrary power over his subject's lives without recourse to established laws. Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha*, in *Filmer: Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 18, 19.

> of the king's authority to make law, or the ways in which such an authority should be exercised.[13]

While King James did not clearly discuss the legal ramifications of such a theory,[14] Cavendish represents a society where an absolute sovereign alters the fabric of society without recourse to common law or a legislative system. Therefore Cavendish is not just portraying a powerful monarch in *The Blazing World*, but is specifically exploring the political, philosophical and ethical consequences of absolute, arbitrary sovereignty.

For divine right theorists, the monarch was conceived as God's viceroy on earth, which endowed the monarch with a quasi-divine status. For example, King James highlights the sanctity of monarchs, arguing that 'Kings are justly called Gods, for that they exercise a manner or resemblance of Divine power upon earth. For if you wil consider the Attributes to God, you shall see how they agree in the person of a King.'[15] Likewise, an anonymous elegy denouncing the execution of Charles I described the former king as 'A God on Earth, more than a Saint in Heav'n'[16] – demonstrating how monarchs were imagined as having a sacred status that was analogous to the divine. Accordingly, power was understood as deriving from God alone, and descended downward through various patriarchal figures through God, kings and fathers. Since patriarchal authority had a religious status, rebellion against this chain of authority was comparable to religious blasphemy. Nigel Smith argues that 'all monarchical defence was a theology as much as it was a politics: religion mattered'.[17]

Unlike many royalists, Cavendish does not use religion as a base to begin her political theory. The Empress initially receives her power from

[13] Burgess, *Absolute Monarchy*, 99. Neil Rhodes, Jennifer Richards and Joseph Marshall argue that 'James agrees that a good king will always act in accordance with the law, to set an example', yet he none the less states that the King is above the law. See their 'Introduction', in *King James VI and I: Selected Writings*, ed. Neil Rhodes, Jennifer Richards and Joseph Marshall (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 14.

[14] However, James implies that a sovereign has the right over subject's lives, albeit he does not provide details about the workings of such a right. For example, he states that if part of a physical or political body is incurably 'affected with any infirmitie', it can be cut off 'for feare of infecting of the rest: even so is it betwixt the Prince, and his people'. James I, 'The Trew Law of Free Monarchies', in *James VI and I: Selected Writings*, 273. Contrasting James with Hobbes's well-enumerated list of sovereign's rights in ch. 18 of *Leviathan* can elucidate how James was not theorizing or engaging with the details of his legislative capacities. See Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 96, 121–9.

[15] James I, 'A Speach to the Lords and Commons of the Parliament at White-hall', in *James VI and I: Selected Writings*, 327.

[16] Anon., 'An Elegy upon the Death of Our Dread Sovereign Lord King CHARLES the MARTYR', in *Basiliká*, 212.

[17] Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 114.

the Emperor; however, royalists generally grounded the origin of power upon religious premises. Even constitutional royalists held that the monarchy and Church were interdependent. As argued in previous chapters, Cavendish's philosophy can be interpreted as a form of atheism. While royalist ideology and religion were intrinsic to each other, there were more secular methods for justifying monarchy. Thomas Hobbes used secular contract theory to prove that monarchy was more conducive to a peaceful and stable commonwealth than other forms of government.

I Approaching Cavendish through Hobbes

Many scholars have linked Cavendish with the royalist Hobbes.[18] Anna Battigelli claims that Cavendish 'absorbed his political thought, taking it to its logical extreme. In the end, she was more of a Hobbesian than Hobbes.'[19] Hobbes and Cavendish were both political thinkers, who were also unusually secular and materialist for the early modern period. Furthermore, her husband William Cavendish was a patron of Hobbes, who was a close associate of the household. In order to facilitate an understanding of her politics, it is important to compare their philosophical and political worldviews, particularly since *The Blazing World* initially seems to demonstrate a Hobbesian outlook upon power and monarchy.

Even though monarchism as a structure may seem incompatible with a doctrine of equality, Hobbes argued that people are equal. Because of the inherent equality between people, the natural state of humanity compels 'a condition of Warre of every man against every man'.[20] Hobbes argues, in a passage that reinforces this view of natural equality, that there is a 'generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death'.[21] The inclination for power, Hobbes claims, is fundamentally equally distributed among all human beings. Consequently, monarchy was the best government for establishing peace and unity. The Empress of the Blazing World manifests a likeness to the

[18] For example, see Lisa T. Sarasohn, '*Leviathan* and the Lady: Cavendish's Critique of Hobbes in the *Philosophical Letters*', in Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (eds.), *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish* (Cranbury, NJ: Rosemont Publishing and Printing Corp., 2003), 40–58; Neil Ankers, 'Paradigms and Politics: Hobbes and Cavendish Contrasted', in Stephen Clucas (ed.), *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 242–54; and Sarah Hutton, 'In Dialogue with Thomas Hobbes: Margaret Cavendish's Natural Philosophy', *Women's Writing* 4.3 (1997): 421–32.

[19] Anna Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1998), 83.

[20] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 96. [21] *Ibid*., 70.

Hobbesian principle, as she relentlessly seeks power throughout the text. For example, once the Empress secures absolute power in the Blazing World, she continues to expand her domain through imperial conquest, while simultaneously creating cabbalas. This mirrors Hobbes's argument 'that Kings, whose power is greatest, turn their endeavours to the assuring it at home by Lawes, or abroad by Wars' and then turn to express their power in a variety of forms such as 'being flattered for excellence in some art, or other ability of the mind'.[22]

At no point during her domestic and imperial rule does the Empress's desire for power cease. Her quest for domination and power in its multifaceted forms is one of the most recurring motifs of the text. She universalizes violent pursuits of power, claiming that though there are 'many several nations, governments, laws, religions, opinions, etc. … not any particular state, kingdom or commonwealth, was contented with their own shares, but endeavoured to encroach upon their neighbours' (*TBW* 190). Regardless of the locale, the Empress believes that there is a natural human inclination towards war.

The text's exploration of politics in relation to arbitrary power, conquest and war is juxtaposed against much humour and playfulness. For example, while the text examines different ideas from various philosophers, including Cavendish herself, one of the Empress's logicians none the less concludes in a syllogism that 'every beast is a philosopher' (*TBW* 161). The character Margaret Cavendish also amusingly derides her own unintelligible, horrible handwriting (*TBW* 181). None the less, the playfulness of the text does not take away from the seriousness of the political theory, particularly in relation to Hobbes. For example, even the depiction of religion in *The Blazing World* reflects Hobbes's assertion that ecclesiastical aspects of life primarily serve civil authority. Hobbes maintains that religion has a 'purpose to make those men that relyed on them, the more apt to Obedience, Lawes, Peace, Charity, and civill Society' and for many it 'is a part of humane Politiques; and teacheth part of the duty which Earthly Kings require of their Subjects'.[23] Like Hobbes, the Empress substitutes the civil for the ecclesiastical: she perceives religion as a secular means for inspiring civil obedience. *The Blazing World* explores

[22] *Ibid*. In *Philosophical Letters* Cavendish claims that she does not read or write about politics, including the political sections in *Leviathan*. This claim is highly suspect, since in the very next sentence she indeed not only discusses 'Politick Government', but puts forwards ideas which appear to directly engage with Hobbes's political theory. See also *PL* 47. Lisa T. Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy during the Scientific Revolution* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 114–18.

[23] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 79.

power and politics, but specifically depicts a world through a Hobbesian looking-glass. Hobbes suggests that the 'Feare of things invisible is the naturall Seed of … Religion', which has been seen as the best way 'to govern others, and make unto themselves the greatest use of their Powers'.[24] The Empress notably strengthens her regime through false or faked religious spectacles. For example, she appropriates scientific technology to create 'artificially contrived' chapels which appear supernatural so that she 'appeared like an angel', and thereby encourages her subjects into obedience 'in all other duties and employments' (*TBW* 164). One speculates that the Empress's trickery may be meant as an implicit critique of Queen Henrietta Maria, who had also built two chapels, one of which for its first mass was spectacularly illuminated with 400 lights and contained impressive artworks and technology, including a machine to display the host.[25] Though Henrietta Maria was Catholic and the Empress is described only as Christian, both also are female monarchs who proselytize their own religion.

Both Henrietta Maria and the Empress are enthusiastic royalist military leaders. Henrietta Maria described herself as a 'she-majesty generalissima';[26] the Empress likewise performs the role of a general as she wages aggressive wars on other kingdoms. During Cavendish's experience as a lady-in-waiting to Henrietta Maria, the Queen most likely had an influence upon her, as evidenced by military women who appear in several of Cavendish's texts. A relatively direct instance of this is her play *Bell in Campo*, which portrays a woman who successfully leads a female army.[27] But while *The Blazing World* explores the possibilities of female military agency and leadership, it also provides a critique of divine right theory. Though the Empress claims to have the benevolent intention of saving her native country from war, a part of her war strategy is to perform a spectacular visual display of power, so demonstrating that religious spectacle is a powerful instrument for the securing of authority. Appearing like an image of Christ, the Empress walks on water, radiates light and 'appeared as glorious as the sun' (*TBW* 215). The population on whom she waged war consequently 'believed her to be some celestial creature, or rather an uncreated goddess' (*TBW* 215). For these people, she is more than a sovereign, she is the image of divinity itself. But the creating of

[24] *Ibid*., 75.
[25] Su Fang Ng, *Literature and the Politics of Family in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 183.
[26] Battigelli, *Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind*, 19.
[27] Margaret Cavendish, *Bell in Campo*, in *Playes* (London, 1662), 578–633.

such a technologically powered spectacle, seeming divine and miraculous with the purpose of fooling the populace, is not well aligned with the early modern divine right perception of power. Edward Symmons, a royalist propagandist, argues that a sovereign was 'also the *Image* of Christ as God'.[28] Using similar language, the extreme divine right theorist John Doughty discusses how Charles is 'the truest and liveliest reflex or image of God upon earth'.[29] Although the Empress literally appears as a divine image to her enemies, yet this manifestation is not caused by her aura of mystical, sovereign power; rather it is but a product of self-interest and exploitation of scientific technology. On Jodi Mikalachki's reading, Cavendish invokes 'the movement of the holy spirit "upon the face of the waters" in the opening verses of Genesis', and thus equates 'the imperial majesty of her Empress with the divine power to create, as well as destroy, whole worlds'.[30] Yet religious conviction is not the motivation behind her dazzling, radiating, water-walking performance, where she seemingly performs miracles.

After playing the part of divine spectacle, the Empress dictates the terms of her imperial charge without recourse to laws and tradition; this evidences a model of monarchy based upon deception, arbitrary rule, imperialism and false miracles. And while the Empress's acting and elaborate attire might have been derived from Cavendish's own interest in plays and dressmaking or dressing-up,[31] her costume and acting are also political acts. The conquered population is so amazed by her goddess-like appearance that 'they all had a desire to worship her' and thus obey her (*TBW* 215). Cavendish's cynical representation of organized, state-sanctioned religion approaches the maxims of Niccolò Machiavelli. The Italian political thinker argued that Ferdinand of Aragon was successful because 'in order to undertake even greater campaigns', he continually '[made] use of religion, resorting to a cruel and apparently pious policy of unexampled wretchedness', such as war and invasion, which is a 'quite extraordinary' example of political strategy.[32] Unlike divine right theories that presented sovereignty as the image of God, *The Blazing World* instead illustrates

[28] Edward Symmons, *A Loyall Subjects Beliefe* (Oxford, 1643), 13.
[29] John Doughty, *The Kings Cause* (Oxford, 1644), 3.
[30] Jodi Mikalachki, *The Legacy of Boadicea: Gender and Nation in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1998), 58, 59.
[31] Cavendish had a life-long interest in fashion and designing clothing. Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: The Extraordinary Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, the First Woman to Live by Her Pen* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 22.
[32] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, eds. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 77.

Machiavellian political strategy, where maintaining sovereignty is merely a performance of power to induce civil obedience.

The dramatic irony is that unlike the conquered population, the reader understands that the spectacle the Empress provides is an elaborate and theatrical demonstration of power, rather than a truly divine or miraculous event. The Empress strategically employs earthly means for promoting a divine image of herself as she appears 'to walk upon the waters, and to destroy whatever she pleases, not only whole nations, but a whole world' (*TBW* 215). Yet the reader of *The Blazing World* is party to the construction of an elaborate, theatrical spectacle of power. This is not merely a royal masque for entertainment, however, since the Empress uses this strategy to 'convert them all to her own religion' (*TBW* 162). Though she was able to keep the populace 'in a constant belief, without inforcement or blood-shed' she expends immense amounts of time and effort strategically developing and sustaining her regime, demonstrating that 'government thereof is rather a trouble, than a pleasure; for order cannot be without industry, contrivance and direction; besides, the magnificent state, that great Princes keep or ought to keep, is troublesome' (*TBW* 190). From the Empress's perspective, rather more effort is required to inspire the obedience of her subjects. Though the Empress believes that it is 'love' rather than 'fear' that most effectively inspires her subjects' obedience, the love is not divinely inspired (*TBW* 164). Cavendish's representation of power is comparable to Michel Foucault's assertion that power is an active strategy, rather than a static position:

> [Power is a] strategy, that its effects of domination are attributed not to 'appropriation', but to dispositions, manoeuvres, tactics, techniques, functionings; that one should decipher in it a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity, rather than a privilege that one might possess … In short this power is exercised rather than possessed.[33]

Power is not simply taken or appropriated in the Blazing World; rather it is portrayed as a complicated, multifaceted strategy to be continuously employed through religious spectacle and deceit.

The Empress, who is a foreigner and a woman, not only immediately converts the entire patriarchal society to a foreign religion, but she turns the gender hierarchy upside-down. In this process there appears an engagement with a specific part of Hobbes's *Leviathan*. Although the Blazing World's original religion was patriarchal, one in which women

[33] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 26.

were forbidden even to enter churches, the Empress on taking power quickly alters the fabric of society, founding a new matriarchal religion. As the Empress assumes a priestly role, she establishes 'a congregation of women, whereof she intended to be the head herself, and to instruct them in several points of her religion' (*TBW* 162). Although Hobbes does not exclude the possibility of women embodying his ideal vision of sovereignty, Mikalachki notes that Cavendish 'responds to the one place where Hobbes's exclusion of women is explicit, in his attack on prophets and prophecy in chapter 36'.[34] The Empress converts the populace 'in the articles of faith' through her 'excellent gift of preaching' (*TBW* 163). Mikalachki argues that while 'Hobbes discredits and dismisses women prophets, Cavendish imagines a congregation of women convoked and inspired by the prophetic gifts of its female sovereign'.[35] Once a woman embodies a Hobbesian position of power, Cavendish turns patriarchy upside-down. Perhaps she is poking fun at Hobbes, the man who was a friend of the household and who enjoyed many dinners at her residence when they lived in Paris. The absolute Hobbesian sovereign ironically resembles sectarian women of the revolutionary period who preached, participated in religious activities and attempted to alter the religion and culture of early modern English society. This not only indicates that absolute monarchy can alter the structure of patriarchy, but a monarch's arbitrary decisions can cause the entire society and culture to become unrecognizable. Like Shakespeare's *King Lear*, which portrays an absolute monarch who violates the very political system that brought him to power by dividing his land and authority among his daughters, the absolute Emperor arbitrarily gives his power to his wife. The irony revealed is that absolute monarchy, a political theory that is patriarchal in origin, can be instantly altered to a matriarchal regime through the original power invested in the patriarch.

II 'No Arts, no Letters, no Society': the departure from Hobbes

In its representation of a world built from Hobbesian principles, *The Blazing World* investigates the nature of monarchical power. Lisa Sarasohn, however, suggests that Cavendish distanced herself from Hobbes, 'both because of her evolving materialism and perhaps because of the political

[34] Mikalachki, *Legacy of Boadicea*, 65. For more on Hobbes's attitudes towards prophecy, see Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 287–300.
[35] Mikalachki, *Legacy of Boadicea*, 65.

and religious climate of Restoration England'. The new government, by means of the Clarendon Code and the Act of Uniformity, attempted to control liberty of thought and belief.[36] In the aftermath of turmoil from the civil war, conformity of belief may have appeared to be the only way to maintain a peaceful and stable society. Both Cavendish and Hobbes display a similar understanding of politics where religious belief and interpretation is the prerogative of the sovereign without recourse to the individual conscience of the larger populace. The immaterial spirits of *The Blazing World* contend that there can be 'no diversity of opinions in … religion' (*TBW* 135). Hobbes also maintains that debate over good and evil is also akin to a weakened political state: 'From this false doctrine, men are disposed to debate with themselves, and dispute the commands of the Common-wealth; and afterwards to obey, or disobey them.'[37] Consequently, this type of debate causes 'the Common-wealth [to be] distracted and *Weakened*'.[38] Political stability cannot be achieved in a locale that allows diversity in religious and moral opinions. Hobbes moreover contends that 'a Common-wealth is but one Person, [so] it ought also to exhibite to God but one Worship', while the Empress likewise believes that conformity to 'one religion' is fundamental for obtaining obedience in the Blazing World.[39] Hobbes further posits that the Christian scriptures show the relation between one type of subject and the divine Sovereign: 'The Scripture was written to shew unto men the kingdome of God, and to prepare their mindes to become his obedient subjects; leaving the world, and the Philosophy thereof, to the disputation of men, for the exercising of their naturall Reason.'[40] According to Hobbes, scripture teaches the precepts of the 'kingdome of God' which Christians ought to obey. The temporal world, however, remains informed by philosophy and reason, which provide room for disputation rather than pure obedience. By linking scriptural authority to law, Hobbes contends that the scriptural interpretation is the domain of the sovereign.[41] In sharp contrast to the domain of law and the authority of the commonwealth, disputation and variety in opinions can occur safely only in some forms of philosophy. Sim and Walker contend that for the early modern populace, such arbitrary power

[36] Sarasohn, *Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*, 115.
[37] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 223 (ch. 29).
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] *Ibid*., 252 (ch. 31).
[40] *Ibid*., 58 (ch. 8).
[41] Sim and Walker, *Discourse of Sovereignty*, 20.

of the governors over religion would generally overstep boundaries of religious conscience, and that Hobbes is at odds with his times:

> [T]heology is unceremoniously subordinated to the sovereign will. Scriptural disputation is turned into a political, rather than a religious issue … underestimat[ing] the emotional investment most people of the time had in religion – an investment that went well past the narrow confines of philosophical logic.[42]

Although *The Blazing World* puts forth a utopian narrative based upon a doctrine of absolute power developed from Hobbesian principles, the text demonstrates the implications that this power would have for the population at large. Sim and Walker contend that for 'a significant section of the population of Hobbes' England, disorder is actually preferable to an order where they forfeit the right to act according to the dictates of their conscience – especially in matters of religion'.[43] Religious conscience was a powerfully charged issue in Renaissance England, as the country experienced a series of forced religious conversions from Catholicism to Protestantism; each shift in religious affiliation resulting in violence and bloodshed. A problem with the Empress's regime is that it not only lacks a legislative system akin to England's traditional common law, which was meant to prevent absolutism, but also it arbitrarily converted the populace to her own religion.

Religious conscience was an explosive issue, yet the Empress's regime not only requires suppression of individual moral conscience, but she also further believes that variant opinions of *any* kind could have political repercussions. However, Hobbes argues that disputation and variety in opinions should occur only in some forms of philosophy.[44] Consequently, it is significant that the Empress's scientific communities, populated by fantasy creatures, threaten the political and social order of the world:

> [B]ut now perceiving that the world is not so quiet as it was at first, I am much troubled at it; especially there are such contentions and divisions between the worm-, bear-, and fly-men, the ape-men, the satyrs, the spider-men, and all others of such sorts, that I fear they'll break out into an open rebellion, and cause a great disorder and the ruin of the government. (*TBW* 201)

The Empress believes that having a single religious belief, one language, one law and one monarch keeps her world peaceful, but allowing scholarly

[42] *Ibid.* [43] *Ibid.*, 24.

[44] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 223 (ch. 29). For more details regarding Hobbes's concerns about moral philosophy, Aristotle and theology see *ibid.*, 458–73 (ch. 46).

debate tends to cause disorder that 'ruin[s]' her government. Even the fly-men and worm-men, who are her natural philosophers, are part of the turmoil.[45] Hence, in so far as she believes that variant opinions in philosophical as well as scientific debate can undermine civil unity and hence sovereign authority, the Empress's character manifests a divergence from Hobbes's proscription that disputation should occur only within the realm of secular philosophy.

After the Empress conjures the character 'the Duchess of Newcastle's soul' into the Blazing World, she advises the Empress to suppress the production of knowledge and learning within her scientific communities, in order to secure political stability:

> I would advise your Majesty to dissolve all their societies; for 'tis better to be without their intelligences, than to have an unquiet and disorderly government. The truth is, said she, wheresoever is learning, there is most commonly also controversy and quarrelling … which must needs breed factions in their schools, which at last break out into open wars, and draw sometimes an utter ruin upon a state or government. (*TBW* 202)

Although the Empress herself 'erected schools, and founded several societies' in Book 1, yet like Hobbes, she believes learning none the less has a destabilizing effect upon monarchy. The schools are sources of faction. This is made particularly evident by the logicians who practise 'the art of disputing' (*TBW* 160). The Empress finds their debates so threatening that she fears they will disturb 'divinity and policy, religion and laws, and by that means draw an utter ruin and destruction both upon church and state' (*TBW* 162). Cavendish examines Hobbes's rationale to test whether any diversity of opinions would be destructive within his philosophical model. Cavendish takes Hobbes's method to its logical extreme to demonstrate the problems with Hobbes's own theories.[46] Cavendish offers an unflattering interpretation of the vision of unification in the Leviathan; one where there can be no intellectual debate permitted whatsoever. Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer argue that following Hobbesian precepts, the pursuit or dissemination of knowledge can dissolve unity and sovereign authority, since 'disorder and civil war' could 'be produced from an incorrect appreciation of how knowledge was generated and what its

[45] For example, 'the fly-, worm- and fish-men [were] her natural philosophers' (*TBW* 134).

[46] Jacqueline Broad argues that in Cavendish's philosophy, Henry More's method is taken 'to its logical extreme', which results in challenging his own materialism. See Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 36. However, it appears that this method of argument is not confined to More, as Cavendish explores Hobbesian ideas in the same way by taking his method to a logical extreme.

nature was'.[47] Although Hobbes himself maintains that a sovereign would have the legitimate power to suppress sciences such as geometry, and burn its associated books, he nevertheless argues that there is no need to do so: these sciences do not interfere with sovereign rule.[48] Cavendish for her part none the less suggests that his epistemology leads to suppression of all knowledge, including geometry, since, according to the Duchess, the 'spider-men, which were her mathematicians', are included in the schools, and this inclusion can cause 'open wars, and draw sometimes an utter ruin upon a state or government' (*TBW* 159, 202). It is indeed ironic that 'Arts' and 'Letters' are threatened as represented by Cavendish's portrayal of a Hobbesian type of state, for this challenges Hobbes's famous contention that art, culture and intellectual endeavours cannot prevail or exist in the state of nature, for in that equal and most bellicose condition 'there is no place for Industry … no Navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by Sea … no Knowledge of the face of the Earth; no account of Time; no Arts; no Letters; no Society'.[49] Although Hobbes equates the possibility of culture, progress, and knowledge-production with absolutist and monarchical regimes, *The Blazing World* suggests that a thoroughgoing Hobbesian politics could obstruct the development of culture, art and science.

Diversity of opinion and a preference for nondogmatic stances was an important component of the ethics of the Royal Society.[50] The Empress's suppression of knowledge contradicts the fundamental tenets of the Royal Society, which believed that knowledge and research should be openly

[47] Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton University Press, 1985), 100. In contrast, David van Mill argues that the production and dissemination of knowledge is not necessarily threatened in Hobbes's system, since the sovereign should only exercise censorship for preserving peace and not for other reasons such as 'morally unsavory' ideas. Mill suggests that Hobbes was not necessarily against lively intellectual debate, nor the publication of various topics, and explains that it 'has yet to be demonstrated, therefore, that because the sovereign has the power to censor that it will do so in a heavy-handed manner. It should use this power only to censor those texts that threaten the peace.' David van Mill, *Liberty, Rationality, and Agency in Hobbes's 'Leviathan'* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 189. Shapin and Shaffer maintain, however, that since Hobbes believes authentic knowledge will ultimately stop debate and lead to universal assent, opposed to belief, there remains 'no philosophical space within which dissent was safe or permissible'. Shapin and Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump*, 107.

[48] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 74 (ch. 11). [49] *Ibid*., 89 (ch. 13).

[50] Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law, and Literature* (Princeton University Press, 1985), 64–5. Equality and freedom among gentleman scientists were expected within the Royal Society: 'No conception of truth could be legitimate if pursing and maintaining it put civil conversation at risk.' Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 123.

discussed and debated for the public good. But the Empress abruptly dismantles her version of the Royal Society.[51] Cavendish also indicates that instruction in foreign languages, and the resulting dissemination of knowledge between neighbouring countries, would be forbidden – only 'one language' is allowed (*TBW* 201). This is particularly significant considering the internationalism that was emphasized in Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal-Society*: Sprat claims that the Society has freely admitted 'Men of different Religions, Countries, and Professions of Life. This they were oblig'd to do, or else they would come far short of the largeness of their own Declarations. For they openly profess, not to lay the Foundation of an English, Scotch, Irish, Popish, or Protestant Philosophy; but a Philosophy of Mankind.'[52] Hence, the Royal Society, which tended to be royalist in affiliation, would not survive within the political world of *The Blazing World*. This point suggests that the consequence of Hobbesian uniformity involves an implicit war on the production and dissemination of knowledge. Despite this, Cavendish's husband, the Duke of Newcastle, along with his brother, Charles, were great patrons of the arts and sciences, and supported Hobbes.[53] Yet Hobbes himself perhaps would not survive in the intellectual climate envisioned by a utopian world developed from his own principles.

Besides the presentation of a view of the consequences of Hobbes's *Leviathan* in the first book of *The Blazing World*, in Book 2 the knowledge that was initially discovered by scientific societies (which were later dismantled) is appropriated for creating imperialist technologies.[54] Ironically, the outcome of sharing diverse opinions within science communities – an ideal envisioned by the Royal Society – is used to strengthen the Empress's imperial regime. The Empress's power is secured through the joint efforts of her scientists as she burns down houses, terrorizes nations and forces them to pay tribute to and recognize as absolute sovereign, the King of the Empress's former homeland. Though *The Blazing World* is often described as a utopia,[55] these nations are 'enslaved' and left unable 'to peep out of

[51] Sarah Hutton explains how the scientific communities of *The Blazing World* resemble the Royal Society. See Sarah Hutton, 'Science and Satire: The Lucianic Voice of Margaret Cavendish's *Description of a New World Called the Blazing World*', in Cottegnies and Weitz, *Authorial Conquests*, 165–6.

[52] Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal-Society* (London, 1667), 63.

[53] Ankers, 'Paradigms and Politics', 243.

[54] In ch. 10, Hobbes links technology of warfare, such as engines and fortification, with power, but he is not entirely clear about the ramifications or implementation of such knowledge within his vision of government. See Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 63.

[55] See Marina Leslie, *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 124.

their own dominions without a chargeable tribute' (*TBW* 212). Cavendish's 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' had portrayed forced tribute subsequent to conquest as a type of intolerable slavery; in that story the protagonist rallies her troops against invasion and slavery by claiming, among other problems, that the conqueror will levy 'unreasonable taxes' (APC 97). Though the Empress can be playful and humorous, she none the less endorses enslavement, forced tribute, violence and the quelling of intellectual debate. Indeed, a paradox is created since the very diversity of ideas that assist the Empress's domination in Book 2 was perceived as a threat to her authority in Book 1. The societies for learning are dismantled, and the resulting knowledge is only utilized for the Empress's imperialistic ambitions. For example, the community of giants become excellent architects who learn to make such 'ships as could swim under water' to help the Empress in her naval conquest (*TBW* 206). Likewise, the bear-men, her experimental philosophers, demonstrate her militaristic appreciation of scientific innovation since they 'were as serviceable to her as the north-star' because they were able to perceive 'through their telescopes what towns and cities those were that would not submit' (*TBW* 207, 213). Since there is no indication that new societies are being cultivated, the text indicates that new technologies will be tolerated only if they directly assist and serve a violent imperialist agenda which can be used 'to destroy whatever she pleases, not only whole nations, but a whole world' (*TBW* 215). Although the Empress's scientific communities are intrinsic to her political power, the open communication of ideas and knowledge ultimately threatens the Blazing World. The more sinister aspects of the Empress are emphasized in Cavendish's choice to name the imperial city 'paradise'. Like Eve, the Empress searches for knowledge and Godlike power in a locale named paradise. However, paralleling Genesis, paradise radically changes as a result of a woman's pursuit of knowledge and power.

While it appears that knowledge in the Blazing World is restricted and used to deceive and control both the domestic and colonized populace, Amy Boesky argues that Renaissance utopias 'often strike modern readers as restrictive or totalitarian', where 'the nation functions as a machine for the production of "perfected" citizens, but it is not always clear whether the author is praising or bemoaning the nation's burgeoning power'.[56] For example, though Thomas More's *Utopia* represents a society with no poverty, political corruption, private property or aristocratic hierarchy among

[56] Amy Boesky, *Founding Fictions: Utopias in Early Modern England* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 8.

citizens, none the less 'the slaves do all the particularly dirty and heavy chores' in preparation of the Utopians' meals.[57] Likewise, anyone 'who takes upon himself to leave his district without permission, and is caught without the governor's letter, is treated with contempt, brought back as a runaway, and severely punished. If he is bold enough to try it a second time, he is made a slave.'[58] Boesky argues that Renaissance utopian writings also often demonstrate a sinister perspective on the identity of its inhabitants: 'If the utopia promotes the bourgeois, the adventurer, and the empiricist … it also censures the very idea of the self, depersonalizing citizenry and granting only the exile or malcontent a "name".'[59] For example, More emphasizes the uniformity of Utopia when he reports that if 'you know one of their cities you know them all, for they're exactly alike'.[60] Similarly, in Francis Bacon's utopian text, *New Atlantis*, he describes the population as they observe the return of their spies from abroad like an army: 'So that there was never any Army had their Men stand in better Battle-Array, than the People stood. The Windows likewise was not crouded, but every one stood in them, as if they had been placed.'[61] Both utopias provide a depersonalized representation of the populace which emphasizes uniformity rather than distinction among the citizenry.

Although the totalitarian emphasis of *The Blazing World* is not unique in utopias, a genre that was 'explosively' popular in early modern England,[62] Cavendish's text does provide a critical view of arbitrary power. As the character 'the Duchess of Newcastle' attempts to create a world structured around Hobbes's principles, it proves more like 'a company of wolves that worry sheep, or like so many dogs that hunt after hares; and when she found a reaction equal to those pressures, her mind was so squeezed together, that her thoughts could neither move forward nor backward' (*TBW* 188). Essentially, Hobbes gives Cavendish a headache. As with the attack on knowledge-production in the Blazing World, 'the Duchess's own thoughts are ironically stifled and paralyzed within a world ordered from Hobbesian logic, an indication of a view that there can be no movement, intellectual or otherwise, within his political model.

Cavendish, perhaps intentionally, does not make clear whether she is critiquing Hobbes's political theories or his science, since both rely upon the idea or concept of force. Hobbes believed not only that the political

[57] Thomas More, *Utopia*, ed. George M. Logan and Robert M. Adams (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 56.
[58] *Ibid*., 58. [59] Boesky, *Founding Fictions*, 8.
[60] More, *Utopia*, 44. [61] Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis* (London, 1658), 25.
[62] Boesky, *Founding Fictions*, 3.

force of a monarch was needed to control the state of nature, but that all motion in nature is caused by force: 'Whatsoever is at rest, will always be at rest, unless there be some other body besides it, which, by endeavoring to get into its place by motion, suffers it no longer to remain at rest.'[63] The requisite force needed for movement bore to Hobbes's representation of the brutish picture of human relations in his political philosophy an analogous relation. Spragens posits that 'Hobbes's fundamental psychological model is a human equivalent of the "law of inertia", the urge for self preservation, and self interest in general is founded on the universal tendency of continual inertial movement'.[64] Consequently, though Cavendish and Hobbes have overlapping epistemologies, their conception of nature and its relation to politics are radically different.

III Interconnections between Nature and philosophy

Within Cavendish's understanding of the cosmos, Nature is a force that cannot be controlled or mastered by 'art' or culture and this has political implications which challenge monarchist understandings of bodies and the cosmos. It also challenges one of the basic tenets of Hobbes's absolutist beliefs that the state of nature necessitates a social contract, otherwise there is 'continuall feare, and danger of violent death; And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short'.[65] Hobbes maintains that social contracts, which are a form of 'Art', can 'imitat[e] that Rationall and most excellent worke of Nature, *Man*. For by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE … which is but an Artificiall Man; though of greater stature and strength than the Naturall.'[66] Hence, the central argument of his political philosophy is that art creates commonwealths or artificial men, and such creations are stronger than those created by Nature. In direct opposition to Hobbes, Cavendish claims in *Philosophical Letters* that art, which would include 'government', can never control or be superior to nature.[67]

[63] Thomas Hobbes, 'Elements of Philosophy', in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, ed. and trans. William Molesworth, vol. I (London: Bohn, 1839), 115.

[64] Thomas A. Spragens, *The Politics of Motion: The World of Thomas Hobbes* (London: Croom Helm, 1973), 189.

[65] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 89.

[66] *Ibid.*, 9.

[67] *The Oxford English Dictionary* states that seventeenth-century definitions of 'art' included 'Human workmanship or agency; human skill as an agent. Opposed to *nature*'; 'art', n.2. *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, www.oed.com.ezp1.villanova.edu/view/Entry/11125?rskey=tb90K2&result=1, accessed 27 December 2013.

> [S]ome men are so much for Art, as they endeavour to make Art, which is onely a Drudgery-maid of Nature, the chief Mistress, and Nature her Servant, which is as much as to prefer Effects before the Cause, Nature before God. (*PL* 36)

Art and culture are merely components within the body of Nature. To situate art and culture above Nature is akin to a kind of religious blasphemy. Art is only an effect or consequence of Nature's operations. In *Observations* Cavendish provides a similar understanding, where 'Art imitates Nature' and consequently produces 'Artificial' and '*Hermaphroditical*' figures (*OUEP* 101).[68] Though art and Nature are not entirely distinct from one another', she none the less understands Art as unable to alter Nature itself since 'there is no comparison between finite and Infinite' (*OUEP* 1 13). Consequently, cultural practices ultimately cannot change or regulate the fundamental behaviour or inclination of natural phenomena:

> Nature doth not rule God, nor Man Nature, nor Politick Government Man; for the Effect cannot rule the Cause, but the Cause doth rule the Effect: Wherefore if men do not naturally agree, Art cannot make unity amongst them, or associate them into one Politick Body and so rule them … Thus it is not the artificial form that governs men in a Politick Government. (*PL* 47–8)

As Nature cannot rule God, humanity cannot govern Nature. Likewise, governments cannot control humanity. An artificial government such as the Leviathan cannot control the natural state of people. Governments are compared to a mechanical watch that cannot transcend or rule a watch-maker: 'Man rules an artificial Government, and not the Government Man, just like as a Watch-maker rules his Watch, and not the Watch the Watch-maker' (*PL* 48). Since the mechanical watch is artificial, it is a force that cannot bind Nature. Cavendish emphasizes that her natural philosophy intrinsically correlates with the political world in the same passage:

> But man thinks he governs, when as it is Nature that doth it, for as nature doth unite or divide parts regularly or irregularly, and moves the several minds of men and the several parts of mens bodies, so war is made or peace kept: Thus it is not the artificial form that governs men in a Politick Government, but a natural power. (*PL* 48)

The minds and actions of people, according to Cavendish, are determined by a 'natural power' or vitalistic force within individuals, rather than by

[68] For example, 'Artificial Glasses' present objects in a way that is 'partly Natural, and partly Artificial' (*OUEP* 1 8).

the rules and structures of a government. Consequently, governments are unable to entirely control humanity; 'although there is no Art that is not made by Nature, yet Nature is not made by Art' (*PL* 23). Consequently, any political system, including monarchy, is created and sustained by art, rather than through any fixed order within the universe.

It is important to perceive clearly Cavendish's conception of Nature in relation to government and society since it has been maintained by several critics that Cavendish held royalist political beliefs, which are grounded upon the understanding of Nature in her work. For example, Marilyn Williamson asserts that her 'thinking was constrained by [her] allegiance to nature', according to which view the emphasis upon Nature demonstrates a conservative, essentialist belief system, one where Nature 'has ordered the cosmos so that moral and spiritual values may be based on that order'.[69] Williamson concludes that Cavendish upholds social hierarchy at least to the extent that human inequalities are induced by the 'bias of nature', rather than social constructions: Nature was 'the key impediment to her advocacy for changes in women's lot'.[70] As a result, Williamson argues that 'Cavendish's thinking was entirely consonant with patriarchal theory of her time and earlier'.[71] Deborah Boyle also argues that Cavendish's political sympathies are premised on an account of Nature. Boyle posits that for Cavendish 'peace and stability are the highest goods in society', which 'parallels … her view of nature itself'.[72] Thus Boyle explicitly connects natural philosophy with the political philosophy in Cavendish. Linking down from the hierarchical order of Nature to the aims and ends of government, Boyle believes that Cavendish was 'devoted to absolute sovereignty', because 'it is the form which best promotes stability'.[73] However, as argued in Chapter 1, Cavendish depicts the natural world as inherently pluralistic. A fuller examination into how she conceptualizes Nature in the context of her philosophy shows that for Cavendish, Nature is a point of departure to more flexibly explore and critique political theory, including royalist ideology. This is because, for Cavendish, governments are not a fixed, hierarchical structure, but instead are artifices that cannot entirely control a populace. For example, in *Philosophical Letters*, she explicitly states that monarchy *cannot* occur within Nature because it is unnatural:

[69] Marilyn Williamson, *Raising Their Voices: British Women Writers, 1650–1750* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 63, 46.
[70] *Ibid*., 42, 46. [71] *Ibid*., 52.
[72] Deborah Boyle, 'Fame, Virtue, and Government: Margaret Cavendish on Ethics and Politics', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67.2 (2006): 254.
[73] *Ibid*., 282.

> [I]t is impossible, that one single part should be King of the whole Creature, since Rational and Sensitive Matter is divided into so many parts, which have equal power and force of action in their turns and severall imployments; for though Nature is a Monarchess over all her Creatures, yet in every particular Creature is a Republick, and not a Monarchy; for no part of any Creature has a sole supreme Power over the rest. (*PL* 337)

Cavendish posits that equality and diversity within all of Nature make sovereignty impossible: a monarchical body itself is unnatural. Though the Empress believes she can create absolute kings in one world and be an absolute monarch in her own, in *Observations* Cavendish similarly denies that 'any Part or Creature of Nature should have a supremacy above the rest' (*OUEP* II 18).[74] Although Hobbes used the language of contract theory to advocate absolutism, Cavendish appropriates images from both royalism and republicanism to put forward a decentralized representation of matter, where Nature is a monarch, but all bodies in the natural world, including the English political body, operate like a republic.

Employing analogies of the body was a common strategy for explicating the relation between the monarch and subject. Divine right theorists argued that the sovereign is the head while the subjects encompassed the body. For example, King James argued that 'The King towards his people is rightly compared to … a head of a body composed of divers members.'[75] A similar idea was also expressed by his successor Charles I, who claimed that those whom he was 'ready to prove … guilty of High Treason' were 'contriving fostering and fomenting Mistakes and Jealousies betwixt Body and Head'.[76] Charles further warns against the 'monstrositie' of factions which allow different perspectives, since 'the Supreme Power can bee but in one as the Head.'[77] In notable contrast, Cavendish imagines such a 'monstrositie' as a positive, natural and fundamental principle underlying the workings of natural phenomena as she envisions bodies being as a 'Republick' rather than a monarchy. As in the case of her science that embraces a multiplicity of traditions and intellectuals, Cavendish's universe is too complex and enigmatic to allow one entity, one perspective or one type of government to establish a fixed order.

Cavendish's cosmos most closely resembles the writings of physiologists during the volatile civil war period, who, according to John

[74] Cavendish is specifically arguing in this passage that 'no Creature in Nature can be called Prime or Principal' (*OUEP* II 18).

[75] James I, 'The Trew Law of Free Monarchies', in *James VI and I: Selected Writings*, 272.

[76] Charles I, 'His MAJESTY's Declaration to all His Loving Subjects, of the 12 of Aug. 1642', in *Basilikά*, 314.

[77] Charles I, *Apophthegmata Aurea* (London, 1649), 37.

Rogers, were increasingly interested in bodily metaphors which worked through decentralized models of organization.[78] For example, though van Helmont argues that bodies '[imitate] a monarchical State, wherein there is a certain Independent Prince, the moderatour of Laws and Government', he also suggests the heart is none the less 'Independent on any other part' and contains 'the Fountain of Radical Life'.[79] In this bodily paradigm, the heart is independent of princely power as it infuses life throughout the commonwealth of the body. Significantly, van Helmont equates this life and nourishment of the body with peasant workers of a kingdom:

> But because a Common-wealth cannot long subsist, unless it be nourished; therefore after Kings, Husband-men, and Fisher-men are chief, who bring forth unto us Grain, Herbs, Flocks, Fishes, Woolls, Flaxes, Wines, Woods, Honeys, Oyls, and Hides: Because also, before Kings were thought of, happy Shepherds and Husband-men, had now their Flocks.[80]

The peasant workers, the life of the kingdom, happily existed 'before Kings were thought of' or before the establishment of monarchical government. This seems to suggest that societies once functioned and existed (even happily so) without monarchy. Van Helmont not only linked the poor with the independent force of vitalism, he linked the plight of the poor with the status of women:

> [T]he World despiseth Women, and preferreth Men: But in most things, the Judgements of God are opposite unto the Judgements of the World; so that also, the World despiseth the Poor, of whom Christ calleth himself the Father, but not of the Rich.[81]

This gainsays the divine right theory in so far as it posited that kings were closer to the divine being. Unlike divine right theory, those who are disempowered in the world are associated most closely with God; Christ does not have a closer connection with the powerful. It is notable that van Helmont's writings were first translated and published in the English press in 1649, not long after the regicide.[82]

Another example of this decentralization in bodily metaphors can be found in Paracelsus, who also underwent a revival during the Interregnum, attested to by the numerous publications of his writings that appeared in

[78] John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton*, 2nd edn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 22.
[79] Jean Baptiste van Helmont, *Van Helmont's Works*, trans. J. C. (London, 1664), 747, 748.
[80] *Ibid.*, 748. [81] *Ibid.*, 675.
[82] See Jean Baptiste van Helmont, *A Ternary of Paradoxes*, trans. Walter Charleton (London, 1649).

print in English during that time.[83] Paracelsus explains that the philosopher's stone is self-moving spirit which is in all creation:

> [T]hat spirit [is] found to be and to move it self in all elementary creatures … wherein even all mysteries lie hidden … Moreover they ascribe thereunto an infinite power and divine efficacy and vertue.[84]

For Paracelsus, this divine spirit moves without the assistance or governance of a centralized force. More importantly, Paracelsus does not seem to indicate that any one person, such as a monarch, has more divine self-moving matter than another. Though he believed that the 'Wife doth not rule over the Man',[85] he wandered the countryside healing the poor and claimed that he wrote his philosophy in 'German to make it less strange and to bring science to the common people'.[86] The link between vitalism and politics is particularly made evident as Paracelsus equates the philosopher's stone with Christ.[87] He claims that Christ himself flows freely through all things in Nature 'without exceptions of rich or poor'.[88] The idea of Christ flowing through all people is similar to Quaker beliefs concerning a divine light which flows through humanity. For example, William Dewsbury, a Quaker minister, encouraged people to 'give up freely to be guided by the counsel of the Lord the light in you, believing in his power that is present with the light'.[89] Hence, the Paracelsian idea that Christ flows within is akin to the Quaker belief that '*the Kingdome of Christ is in you*'.[90] The Quaker notion of an inner light was of one which superseded any earthly authority. Drawing from Matthew's gospel, Dewsbury claims that,

> though you be hailed before *Rulers*, *Governours* and *Kings*, for a Testimony against them, take no thought what you shall say, but keep within, stand in the Counsel of God, it shall be given you in the self-same hour; my Heavenly Father will in you speak, and his Enemies confound before his

[83] Though Paracelsus was first introduced into English print several times during the Elizabethan period, the translations were mostly concerned with his recipes. In contrast, the translations of the 1650s began to concentrate on his general doctrines. This publication trend of Paracelsus' writings continues into the beginning of the Restoration.

[84] Paracelsus, *Paracelsus His Aurora* (London: J. H. Oxon, 1659), 99.

[85] *Ibid*., 113.

[86] Paracelsus, *Das Buch Paragranum. Der erste tractat, von der philosophia*, 144; quoted in Harris L. Coulter, *Divided Legacy: A History of the Schism in Medical Thought. The Patterns Emerge: Hippocrates to Paracelsus*, 2nd edn, vol. 1 (Westminster, MD: Osprey Publishing, 1994), 360.

[87] Paracelsus, *Paracelsus His Aurora*, 146–8.

[88] *Ibid*., 145.

[89] William Dewsbury, *The Discovery of Mans Return to his First Estate* (London, 1655), 35.

[90] *Ibid*., 31.

> mighty Power in you; and the Hearts of the great and mighty Men of the Earth shall fail.[91]

Earthly powers will fail and hence lose legitimacy when confronted with the God within. Though the Quaker understanding of a light or life force within is comparable to Paracelsus' vitalism, the historical relation between the two is complex. On one hand, Anne Conway joined the Quakers, yet her mentor Henry More wrote against enthusiasm and sectarianism.[92] Though van Helmont's son, Francis Mercury, was deeply interested in the Quakers, he was rejected by the Society of Friends for his cabbalistic and hermetic ideas, and instead circulated his ideas among aristocrats and intellectuals.[93] Though interest in alchemy certainly increased during the Interregnum, and vitalist ideas disrupt monarchist metaphors and understandings of bodies, it was not only radicals who were interested in vitalist ideas. J. Andrew Mendelsohn argues that the politics of alchemy includes members throughout the political spectrum. For example, when Charles II returned to England for the Restoration, he brought an alchemist with him to his court.[94] Likewise, Walter Charleton and William Harvey were both royalists who were interested in vitalism, and had been physicians to Charles I. Both Charles I and Charles II demonstrated an interest in alchemical ideas.[95] Though these examples demonstrate a political ambiguity surrounding alchemy, there was none the less a connection between vitalism and enthusiasm in the minds of people such as Richard Baxter, who complained about Quakers who 'give us their Doctrine on a new Authority within them (and so Behmenists, Paracelsians and all Enthusiasts)'.[96] Likewise, Starkey dedicated his vindication of van Helmont to the regicide Robert Tichborne,[97] while Mary Cary employed the analogy of alchemy in one of her popular prophesies.[98]

Rogers contends that there was 'woven into the argumentative fabric of many claims for self-moving matter, an organizational rhetoric so hostile to hierarchy, any hierarchy, that nearly all its adherents, at one point or another, were compelled to retreat from its broadest social and political

[91] William Dewsbury, *The Faithful Testimony of that Antient Servant of the Lord* (London, 1689), 14. See Matt. 10:17ff.
[92] See Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* (London, 1656).
[93] J. Andrew Mendelsohn, 'Alchemy and Politics in England 1649–1665', *Past & Present*, 135 (1992): 70.
[94] *Ibid.*, 30. [95] *Ibid.*, 30–78.
[96] Richard Baxter, *One Sheet against the Quakers* (London, 1657), 12.
[97] George Starkey, *Natures Explication and Helmont's Vindication* (London, 1657).
[98] Mendelsohn, 'Alchemy and Politics', 52.

implications'.[99] For example, though Charleton was the first to translate and publish van Helmont's works, he abruptly changed his mind in 1654, retracting his previous support against the ideas of the 'Hairbrain'd and Contentious Helmont' and the 'stupid admirers of that Fanatick Drunkard, *Paracelsus*'.[100] Though the politics of alchemy are not absolute or completely straightforward, the notion of decentralized power could none the less be translated to revolutionary political ideas, particularly since arguments from the Levellers argued for decentralization of political power during the revolution.[101] It is noteworthy that Cavendish's interest in decentralized understandings of corporeality is mixed with a claim that monarchy is impossible in Nature. However, Cavendish's natural philosophy appears even more outside the framework of royalist ideology when placing *The Blazing World* in dialogue with early modern theories of cognition and imagination.

IV Renaissance understandings of the mind and the imagination

The nature of mind and cognition were important topics of debate in early modern philosophy. 'What is the nature of thought? What sorts of substances think?' Peter Anstey argues that these questions 'are some of the watershed issues that were raised in the early seventeenth century and form a backdrop to a whole host of philosophical disputes'.[102] Descartes, who was at the centre of these debates, and was also patronized by Cavendish's husband, famously summarized an argument with 'I *think*, *therefore I am*', in the course of which he suggests that sensory perceptions and the imagination are not reliable indicators of truth in themselves.[103] The only facet of reality that is certain is being aware that one is a thinking

[99] Rogers, *Matter of Revolution*, 16.

[100] Walter Charleton, *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana* (London, 1654), 58, 3. Likewise, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Cavendish distanced herself from self-moving atomism, which she espoused in both her philosophical and poetic writings during the civil war.

[101] Rogers, *Matter of Revolution*, 13–14. For example, Leveller pamphleteer Richard Overton argues that both political and ecclesial power should be distributed throughout the political body, since 'Every man by nature being a King, Priest, and Prophet in his owne naturall circuite and compasse, whereof no second may partake, but by deputation, commission, and free consent from him, whose naturall right and freedome it is.' Richard Overton, *An Arrow against all Tyrants* (London, 1646), 4.

[102] Peter Anstey, 'Boyle against Thinking Matter', in Christoph Lüthy, John E. Murdoch and William R. Newman (eds.), *Late Medieval and Early Modern Corpuscular Matter Theories* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 484.

[103] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, in *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), 'Fourth Part', 17.

being with a mind or that one has cognitive awareness. This awareness also entails the certainty of the existence of the thinker – one's own existence. One's awareness of one's own existence for Descartes is primarily an awareness of one's cognitive processes, of one's self-consciousness. But the recognition of sensations relating to the physical world outside the mind is secondary and fundamentally uncertain. For Descartes, awareness of the mind with its cognitive states is prior to awareness of material bodies.

While Descartes's theory of the mind was influential, and he was a frequent visitor to the Cavendish household in Paris, Cavendish collapses the mind/body dualism of Cartesian thought as she argues instead that 'all thoughts have not onely a being, but a material being in Nature; nay, even the Thought of the existence of a Deity' (*OUEP* III 8). Consequently, thoughts are embodied and are a component within the material body of Nature. David Cunning argues that Cavendish believes 'that ideas, volitions, and other mental items are properties of bodies'.[104] According to Cunning, she anticipates Locke in her belief that 'ideas and volitions are the ideas and volitions of a mind, and because a person's mind moves along with its body, its ideas and volitions are the ideas and volitions of a material thing'.[105] Moreover, for Cavendish, all matter within the body of Nature is both material and vitalistic, which would mean that even thoughts about God become independent from the thinker who created them. For Descartes, however, the thought of the existence of a deity *does not* require material being at all. Along similar lines, and also in contrast to Cavendish, Robert Boyle argued against the possibility of thinking matter and instead argued for a crucial, metaphysical difference between matter and minds, where matter is not 'capable of any True, or at least any Intellectual, Perception, or true Love or Hatred'.[106] For Cavendish, however, the process of thinking is a central component of her *materialism*. Hence Cavendish's theories require something of a rebalancing of the rather widely accepted conviction (articulated most notably by Descartes) that *thinking* is independent of matter and can be conceived of and described without reference to matter or to material substances. Cunning explains that an 'important strand in Cavendish's argument for materialism is her defense of the view that matter thinks. If she can successfully defend this view, then the fact of the existence of thinking will not be

[104] David Cunning, 'Cavendish on the Intelligibility of the Prospect of Thinking Matter', *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 23.2 (2006): 118.

[105] *Ibid.*, 119.

[106] See Robert Boyle, *The Excellency of Theology* (London, 1674), 54. Though Boyle's text was published in 1674, the 'Publisher's Advertisement to the Reader' claims the text was actually written in 1665.

evidence against the view that everything is material.'[107] Consequently, for Cavendish thoughts should not be taken to provide demonstrative proof of the thinker's existence, but rather as indicating a remarkably complex and *material* cosmos that is continuously multiplying into new forms of life and existence; one where the identity of the thinker is infinitely divided and fragmented. Unlike Descartes, who understood non-divine minds to be 'finite' and limited,[108] for Cavendish the mind is a decentralized entity that is infinitely fracturing into different forms of vitalistic agency. Thoughts are also portrayed as diverse elements randomly contesting for pre-eminence, since there can be a 'war in the thoughts of the Reader' (*PL* 254). While Descartes argued that corporeality 'is divisible, while the mind cannot be conceived of excepting as indivisible',[109] Cavendish *views both matter and mind* as infinitely divisible, rational and self-moving. Cognitive properties are not distinct from body and, in fact, are the same principle.

Descartes famously prefaced his *Meditations on First Philosophy* with a letter to the Faculty of Theology of the University of Paris. Therein he advertised his view that the arguments he was presenting would provide firm foundations for the use of theology as well as science. The research of Ann Thomson suggests that the Cartesian approach was at least successful on the theological side, as she asserts that the argument that matter was 'impossible to conceive of … as thinking became the standard recourse of theologians'.[110] For example, both Henry More and John Wilkins, philosophers and members of the Anglican clergy, articulate a view of matter which is devoid of thought and sense.[111]

[107] David Cunning, 'Margaret Lucas Cavendish', in Edward N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford, CA: The Metaphysics Research Lab, 2012), 9.

[108] René Descartes, *Meditations*, in *Discourse on Method and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Cress, 'Third Meditation', 74.

[109] *Ibid*., 56.

[110] Ann Thomson, *Bodies of Thought: Science, Religion, and the Soul in the Early Enlightenment* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 49.

[111] More argues that 'it is manifest that this faculty we call *Free-will* is not found in *Matter*, but in some other Substance', indicating that matter itself does not have cognitive agency or sense. Though Wilkins argues that there is a magnetic 'naturall Power, intrinsicall' to the heavens and earth which causes their motion, he argues against angels, also known as 'Intelligences', directing their movements, wondering 'how are the Orbes capable of perceiving this Will in the Intelligences? Or if they were, yet what motive Facultie have they of themselves, which can inable them to obey it?' Hence, Wilkins suggests that bodies do not have will, sense or cognition which would enable them to perceive or obey immaterial substances or angels. Elsewhere, he emphasizes that contemplation and thinking are properties of the Soul: 'do but mark the nature of the *Soul*, which at the same time perhaps doth *contemplate* heaven, *direct* the body in its sundrie motions'. Henry More, *The Immortality of the Soul* (London, 1659), 135; John Wilkins, *A Discourse Concerning a New World & Another Planet*, vol. II (London, 1640), 210–15; and John Wilkins, *A Discourse concerning the Beauty of Providence* (London, 1649), 43.

When compared with Renaissance occult thinking, though, Cavendish's representation of cognitive process is not as eccentric as it may initially appear. Paracelsus held a comparable view about the cognitive powers of the mind. Arthur Versluis contends that Paracelsus believed that the cosmos was 'created through the divine imagination, and so it is only natural that humanity also participates in this power. Imagination governs the development of things.'[112] Paracelsus compares the imagination to language, arguing that it should be understood 'no differently than the way we would understand a word which departs from the body and does not itself have a body, and yet it forces the other to bring about that which was desired by the body from which the word proceeds'.[113] Although Descartes argues that the imagination is distinct from the set of cognitive processes which affirm the thinker's existence,[114] Angus Fletcher explains that for Paracelsus, the imagination 'was not simply a faculty of the conscious mind, but the animating spirit of all of nature'.[115] As *The Blazing World* portrays women creating worlds with their imagination, Paracelsus likewise contends that the entire cosmos is produced and affected by creative powers of the mind. Arthur Edward Waite explains that Paracelsus' *De Virtute Imaginativa*, which has survived only in a fragmented state, argues:

> The whole heaven, indeed, is nothing else but an imagination … Man, however, is altogether a star. Even as he imagines himself to be, such he is, and he is that also which he imagines. If he imagines fire, there results fire; if war, there war ensues; and so on in like manner. This is the whole reason why the imagination is in itself a complete sun.[116]

For Paracelsus the imagination creates reality, including the heavens. The human imagination is akin to the sun, a necessary component for

[112] Arthur Versluis, *Restoring Paradise: Western Esotericism, Literature, Art, and Consciousness* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 60.

[113] Paracelsus, 'The Third Book on the Invisible Works', in *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493–1541): Essential Theoretical Writings*, ed. and trans. Andrew Weeks, vol. V (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007), 823.

[114] Descartes maintains that there is a 'difference between imagination and pure intellection'. Descartes, *Meditations*, trans. Cress, 'Sixth Meditation', 89.

[115] Angus Fletcher, 'Living Magnets, Paracelsian Corpses, and the Psychology of Grace in Donne's Religious Verse', *English Literary History* 72.1 (2005): 5–6.

[116] Paracelsus, 'The Archidoxies of Theophrastus Paracelsus', in *The Hermetic and Alchemical Writings of Aureolus Philippus Theophrastus Bombast, of Hohenheim, called Paracelsus the Great*, ed. and trans. Arthur Edward Waite, vol. II (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1976), 7, n. In some respects, this is similar to the early modern belief that pregnant women could affect fetal development through their overactive imaginations. Jane Sharp, for example, explains this idea in her midwifery manual by explaining that there was a woman 'who brought forth a child all hairy like a Camel, because she usually said prayers kneeling before the image of *St. John Baptist* who was clothed with camels hair'. Jane Sharp, *The Midwives Book* (London, 1671), 118.

nourishment in the physical world. For Paracelsus, the imagination encompasses such power that men can create fire and war through their imaginative capacities. Perhaps Cavendish's representation of women creating worlds through their imaginative faculties is responding to the Paracelsian belief that men can obtain Godlike powers by literally creating artificial life, called a homunculus, through chemistry. William R. Newman argues that Paracelsus and his followers believed 'that human creative power was practically unlimited. The homunculus, as artificial human, was the crowning piece of man's creative power, making its artificer a sort of demiurge on the level of a lesser god.'[117] Similarly, for Cavendish, fancy and the imagination is the locale where individuals become microcosms of God's creative capacity, and can imitate the divine.

As argued in Chapter 2, there was a tradition in Renaissance occult thought that believed that individuals could tap into prelapsarian powers. Paracelsus also draws from this tradition,[118] claiming that 'wonderfull Secrets' such as the ability 'of healing again all imperfect bodies; to purifie the old, and to prolong the shortness of life' can be discovered by accessing prelapsarian powers.[119] Agrippa likewise argued that if a person sinned less, they could regain prelapsarian powers.[120] This sense of humanity's potential to become quasi-divine is also expressed by Pico della Mirandola, as he argued that Adam was told by God that he was 'confined by no bounds' and could become divine: 'thou mayest sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine.'[121] Cavendish, appropriating Renaissance beliefs regarding the quasi-divine nature of humanity, locates the imperial city of the Blazing World in paradise, where the Empress and, by extension, the author can achieve prelapsarian powers through the imagination and creativity. While Paracelsus believed that the mind frees the body from corporeality,[122] Cavendish suggests that *all* mental processes, and the con-

[117] William R. Newman *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 199.

[118] Paracelsus, *Paracelsus His Aurora*, 77–83.

[119] *Ibid*., 79.

[120] Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, trans. J. F., Book III (London, 1651), 472–3.

[121] Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis, 2nd edn (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 5.

[122] For example, Paracelsus claims that 'Nature is hindered by the bodily structure, just as if one were bound in a prison with chains and fetters. From this the mind is free'. See Paracelsus, 'The Archidoxies of Theophrastus Paracelsus', 4.

sequent power they can provide, derive from *materiality*. Fletcher suggests that for Paracelsus, the individual mind is a microcosm of universe:

> Because he sees mind as the driving force behind all natural change, he views the cosmos as a web of different psychic repositories that exert influence by tapping into each other's awareness. The collection of sensations, images, and beliefs that people experience as their imagination is thus a miniature of the animate perception that characterizes the universe as a whole, and people's experience of the way their mind drives their body is a small-scale version of the way that all physical change occurs.[123]

Fletcher's description of Paracelsus' understanding of mind is strikingly similar to the way in which imaginative faculties create physical change in the cosmos of *The Blazing World*. The representation of the possibilities of creative powers is an aspect of *The Blazing World* which brings the narrative out of a depersonalized political world modelled on arbitrary monarchy. Significantly, it is not just men or renowned philosophers whose imaginations have a quasi-divine ability to create worlds:

> [C]an any mortal be a creator? Yes, answered the spirits; for every human creature can create an immaterial world fully inhabited by immaterial creatures, and populous of immaterial subjects, such as we are, and all this within the compass of the head or scull; nay, not only so, but he may create a world of what fashion and government he will. (*TBW* 185)

Any person, regardless of rank, can arbitrarily create and rule worlds, suggesting that in a manner like that of her science, the second part of the first book of *The Blazing World* is advancing a very anti-hierarchical view of humanity. Consequently, every person is thus Godlike in the sense that they are creators of worlds and creatures. Since in Cavendish's epistemology thoughts are *material*, the mind is a powerful locale, akin to a deity, since it can create imaginary worlds that are fully embodied. This does not mean, however, that an individual can imagine a physical object and it suddenly appears. As argued in Chapter 2, thoughts relate to the category of matter that she terms 'rational matter'. Cavendish's epistemology describes three categories of matter; rational, sensitive and inanimate, which are thoroughly intermixed together throughout Nature:

> [T]he Rational parts are more agil, active, pure and subtil then the sensitive; but the Inanimate have no activity, subtilty and agility at all … and this Triumvirate of the degrees of Matter … is so necessary to ballance and poise Natures actions, that otherwise the creatures which Nature produces,

[123] Fletcher, 'Living Magnets', 6.

> would all be produced alike, and in an instant; for example, a Child in the Womb would as suddenly be framed, as it is figured in the mind; and a man would be as suddenly dissolved as a thought. (*OUEP* 18r and 17v)

Although all three categories are intermixed for matter to *be* matter, the 'Inanimate matter' is the only category which does not move, and is instead moved and shaped by the rational and sensitive matter. This immobile category is important, though, since it allows *some* measure of stability in Nature: without it rational matter could indeed create or dissolve a person instantly. As argued in Chapter 2, Cavendish demonstrates a recurring interest in exploring the traits of rational matter, which she associates with thoughts, atoms, ideas from folklore and other parts of Nature that are not obviously corporeal or 'subject to our *Sense*' (*PF* 44). Hence, rational matter can seem or appear to be like an 'immaterial world'. Nevertheless, in this epistemology, the imagination is still corporeal and affects the body of Nature, though with limitations. If the imagination is embodied, the act of imagining is an act of creation, suggesting that thought is an activity that is quasi-divine. Significantly, Cavendish provides women with a quasi-divine creative power.

Such a conception of mind and the imagination is particularly distinct from Hobbes's theory, which posits that body 'dependeth not on the imagination, but is a reall part of that we call the *Universe*'.[124] Hence, the imagination does not contain independent creative power, but is merely a form of remembrance of things perceived in the senses. Accordingly, 'Imagination and Memory, are but one thing', albeit imagination consists of fading memories that are intermixed with one another.[125] In contrast, Cavendish understands imagination to be an intrinsic part of reason and understanding.[126] Although Hobbes provides a view in which the imagination has limited power, Todd Butler argues that Hobbes's political philosophy none the less exhibits anxiety concerning the power of imaginative faculties among subjects in a commonwealth.[127] Hobbes rejects the right of subjects to act upon their own individual imaginations because, according to Butler, 'to allow such acts would concede the determination of truth and propriety to the individual conscience rather than to the state'.[128] According to Hobbes, if

[124] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 269. [125] *Ibid.*, 16.

[126] In *Observations*, for example, she argues that 'Fancy or Imagination is a voluntary action of Reason, or of the rational parts of Matter, and if reason be in all Animals, nay, in all Creatures, Fancy is there also' (*OUEP* III 39).

[127] Todd Butler, *Imagination and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 139–68.

[128] *Ibid.*, 1.

people were allowed to determine truth through their imagination, then the unity of the political body would be threatened, since 'no Law [could] be made to hold, and so all Common-wealth would be dissolved'.[129] This discussion makes it evident that early modern thinkers readily apprehended what might be called the individualism of the imagination, and in doing so possibly recognized the spectre of a dangerous junction of cognitive faculty and political action.

The political possibilities latent within imaginative thinking were not perceived only by Hobbes. The imagination was an important aspect of the early modern political landscape, since, as Butler contends, 'to understand – let alone to employ – the imagination was to gain access to a power'.[130] For example, in 1571, treason was defined as a crime involving the imagination, since a traitor was defined as an individual who attempts to 'compass, imagine, invent, devise or intend' harm to the monarch.[131] Chief Baron Bridgman, explaining the law to the jury trying the regicides, stated that 'Treason it is in the wicked imagination'.[132] Treason is also associated with the imagination in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, when Fabian attributes Malvolio's dreams of social climbing to imaginative faculties: 'Look how imagination blows him'.[133] This hints at how the use of imagination could have been seen as a force potentially disruptive of traditional social hierarchy. This made it a worthy subject for the stage. Karen Cunningham argues that since it was deemed a 'function of imagination, treason participates in the contestatory relations that characterize the stage and the political arena as sites of ideological production'.[134] Indeed, the Renaissance dramatic imagination was overseen by a system of censorship to ensure that treasonous ideas were not expressed on stage.

So the imagination was a contentious issue in early modern politics and culture, yet Cavendish draws from Paracelsian understandings of the imagination that provided a nonhierarchical conception of the natural world:

[129] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 207. [130] Butler, *Imagination and Politics*, 3.

[131] '"An Act whereby certain offences be made treasons" (Second Treasons Act of Elizabeth, 1571)', in G. R. Elton (ed.), *The Tudor Constitution: Documents and Commentary*, 2nd edn (Cambridge University Press, 1982), 73.

[132] 'The Lord Chief Baron's Speech', in T. B. Howell (ed.), *A Complete Collection of State Trials*, vol. V (London: T. C. Hansard, 1816), 988.

[133] William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, ed. Elizabeth Schafer (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.5: 37.

[134] Karen Cunningham, *Imaginary Betrayals: Subjectivity and the Discourses of Treason in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 10.

> Thoughts are free and are subject to no rule. On them rests the freedom of man, and they tower above the light of nature. For thoughts give birth to a creative force that is neither elemental nor sidereal … Thoughts create a new heaven, a new firmament, a new source of energy, from which new arts flow … When a man undertakes to create something, he establishes a new heaven … For such is the immensity of man that he is greater than heaven and earth.[135]

Thoughts are not subject to a hierarchically ordered cosmos, since they are 'free and are subject to no rule'. Unlike divine right theorists who conceived authority as deriving from God or the sovereign, authority for Paracelsus is instead established from the individual's creativity. Not only are imaginative faculties free to transcend monarchical politics and social hierarchies, an individual's creativity also forms reality. Likewise, in *Grounds of Natural Philosophy*, Cavendish applies to religion this idea of free and unruled thought, as she theorizes that the resurrection will be a state in which people exist within their own past thoughts, imaginations and conceptions in a material afterworld. Within Cavendish's thinking, thoughts are material; thus people create what she describes as their own material heaven or hell.[136]

Because humanity is not superior to other forms of matter within the Cavendish paradigm, all aspects of Nature have Paracelsian creative powers, for all parts of matter have free will, reason and soul.

> [E]very material part has a material natural soul; for nature is but one infinite self-moving, living and self-knowing body, consisting of the three degrees of inanimate, sensitive and rational matter, so intermixed together, that no part of nature, were it an atom, can be without any of these three degrees; the sensitive is the life, the rational the soul, and the inanimate part, the body of infinite nature. (*TBW* 176)

Because all matter has reason and soul, all creatures are capable of creating worlds that create worlds, an endless process of birth and creation. Consequently, 'there were more numerous worlds than the stars which appeared in these three mentioned worlds' (*TBW* 184). Nature parallels the infinity of numbers in that 'as numbers do multiply, so does the world' (*TBW* 172). As a result, the world or universe is endlessly expanding, shifting and mutating, since 'corporeal, figurative motions, which being infinitely various in infinite nature, did produce infinite several effects' (*TBW*

[135] Paracelsus, 'Man and the Created World', in *Paracelsus: Selected Writings*, ed. Jolande Jacobi, trans. Norbert Guterman, 2nd edn (Princeton University Press, 1979), 45.
[136] Margaret Cavendish, *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (London, 1668), 263.

157). There are realities that cannot be perceived with humanity's limited senses, as described in her atomic poetry, where '*Ladies* well may weare / A *World* of *Worlds*, as *Pendents* in each *Eare*' (*PF* 45). One order or political system could not apply to the entirety of Nature because there are an infinite number of physical and fantasy worlds with infinite social orders. Catherine Gallagher notes that the infinite multiplicity of Cavendish's understanding of subjectivity 'may dizzy the reader',[137] perhaps because it dissolves the possibility of a comprehensible, hierarchical truth and its resulting universal ordering of Nature. As Jay Stevenson notes, Cavendish's philosophy 'offers little reassurance to those who wish to believe in a stable and permanent cosmic order'.[138]

V The mind, theology and free will

Cavendish's representation of the imagination is not only politically charged, but it also engages with the most explosive theological debates during her lifetime. No other theological issue was more controversial than the question of whether people's actions were predetermined or if they were instigated entirely by free will.[139] Understanding Cavendish's unique perspective upon this debate will help contextualize the significance of the Empress's absolute power and how this aspect of her narrative relates to Cavendish's natural philosophy. Margaret Osler explains that in the free-will controversy, one school of thought, intellectualism, believed that there are 'some elements of necessity in [God's] creation'.[140] Although there is some scholarly debate about whether Descartes can be accurately called an intellectualist, Osler argues that Descartes personifies the intellectualist position as he argues that there are essences and mathematical truths that are 'immutable and eternal, since the will and decree of God willed and decreed that they should be so'.[141] Hence, laws of the universe are fixed and eternal and not subject to chance or God's intervention (except in the case of miracles). In contrast, voluntarists generally held that creation is absolutely contingent on God's will. For example,

[137] See Catherine Gallagher, 'Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England', *Genders* 1 (1988): 32.

[138] Jay Stevenson, 'The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish', *SEL* 36.3 (1996): 537.

[139] Sarasohn, *Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*, 88.

[140] Margaret J. Osler, *Divine Will and the Mechanical Philosophy: Gassendi and Descartes on Contingency and Necessity in the Created World* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 11.

[141] René Descartes, 'Fifth Set of Replies', in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. II, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 261; quoted in Osler, *Divine Will*, 1.

Gassendi argued that the 'thrice great God is not, as Jupiter of the poets is to the fates, bound by things created by him, but can in virtue of his absolute power destroy anything that he has established'.[142] Consequently, God 'neither is confined by anything nor imposes any laws on himself that he cannot violate if he pleases'.[143] God can override the natural order and is not bound by his creations. For example, God could entirely alter the laws of the universe to create a world where gravity pulls upwards and the sun is purple. Likewise, he could create or destroy worlds: his creative capacity is never exhausted. Thus the early moderns engaged in an intense debate regarding the parameters of divine will. Osler argues that 'these differences were related to difference in their underlying theological assumptions about God's relationship to the creation, specifically, the issue of how binding God's act of creation is on his future interactions with the world'.[144] Does the universe always conform to a set of intelligible principles, or is it contingent on a notion of God's will as being arbitrary?

Though early moderns held differing views upon necessity and contingency, many mechanists and members of the Royal Society envisioned an arbitrary, voluntarist God, who allowed little or no room for individual free will or liberty. For example, according to Boyle, God can completely alter existing laws of Nature if he so chooses, since 'the most free and powerful Author of those Laws of Nature, according to which all the *Phenomena* of Qualities are regulated, may (as he thinks fit) introduce, establish or change them in any assign'd portion of Matter'.[145] Likewise, John Wilkins, Anglican bishop and one of the founders of the Royal Society, asserts that 'There is nothing which God cannot do', since God 'can do whatsoever any other single thing, or a combination of all other things put together, can perform, and infinitely more; and that without any kind of labour or difficulty'.[146] Rogers argues that in the Royal Society, voluntarist views of God indicated that matter was

> clearly subordinated to and organized, ultimately by a single force, the Heavenly Father. This arbitrary deity could impose on nature and enforce

[142] Pierre Gassendi, *Disquisitio metaphysica*, ed. and trans. Bernard Rochot (Paris: J. Vrin, 1962), 480–1, quoted in Osler, *Divine Will*, 1.

[143] Pierre Gassendi, *Syntagma Philosophicum*, in *Opera omnia*, 1: 309; quoted in Osler, *Divine Will*, 154.

[144] Osler, *Divine Will*, 10.

[145] Robert Boyle, *Some Physico-Theological Considerations about the Possibility of the Resurrection* (London: Printed by T. N. for H. Herringman, 1675), 36.

[146] John Wilkins, *Of the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion Two Books* (London: A. Maxwell, 1675), 145 and 144. Wilkins reiterates his voluntarist position in *A Discourse Concerning the Beauty of Providence*, when he claims that 'There is no event in the world but it is ordered both according

> at will an arbitrary set of mechanical laws much as the God of Calvin held arbitrary sway over the lives of his creatures. As a corollary to their denial of autonomous individual action, puritan theologians and Anglican scientists forwarded an analogous picture of a world whose governance lay in the hands of an arbitrary and unrestricted God.[147]

Although many Calvinists staunchly opposed arbitrary or absolute monarchy in the political world, none the less Calvinism 'possessed at its ontological core a theology of arbitrary rule' and posited an arbitrary model holding an affinity with the determinism and voluntarism of royalist mechanists.[148] Though mechanists were generally royalist in affiliation, puritans and mechanists both espoused theories that did not allow for self-determination.[149] Similarly, astrology, which was extremely popular, put forward a view of predestination where stars and planets determined human affairs. Though the Catholic Church was utterly against the idea of fate,[150] many early moderns in England, whether Calvinist or mechanist, puritan or royalist, would not entirely endow an individual with free will and liberty. Leopold Damrosch, Jr argues that Hobbes's theology, in particular, embraces a type of voluntarism which did not allow for free will: 'Like Luther and Calvin … Hobbes rejects as meaningless the claim that man is free … and declares that God must be directly responsible for everything that happens.'[151] Accordingly, in 'all the universe only God is free'.[152] Hobbes's emphasis upon God's absolute, arbitrary power instigated Bishop Bramhall to exclaim 'I hate this Doctrine from my heart … It destroyes liberty, & dishonours the nature of Man.'[153]

to Gods *will*, and by his *counsel* … *Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he* … There is nothing so *great* but is under his *power*; nothing so *little* but is within his *care*. Those actions and events that seem unto us most *free*, *casuall*, *inconsiderable*, are all of them ordered by his providence.' Wilkins, *Discourse Concerning the Beauty of Providence*, 33–4.

147 Rogers, *Matter of Revolution*, 6.

148 *Ibid*.

149 *Ibid*., 6, 7. However, not all voluntarists were determinists. For example, Gassendi was dismayed by theories of predestination, arguing that if souls 'are ruled by fate; if our souls are destitute of liberty', then 'the reason for human life perishes'. Pierre Gassendi, 'Ethics', in *Syntagma Philosophicum*, *Opera*, II: 831; quoted in Lisa T. Sarasohn, *Gassendi's Ethics: Freedom in a Mechanistic Universe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 67.

150 Sarasohn, *Gassendi's Ethics*, 67.

151 Leopold Damrosch, Jr, 'Hobbes as Reformation Theologian: Implications of the Free-Will Controversy', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40.3 (1979): 343. For examples, Hobbes posits that 'By denying the Existence, or the kingdom Providence of God, men may shake off their Ease, but not their Yoke.' Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 245.

152 Damrosch, 'Hobbes as Reformation Theologian', 342.

153 John Bramhall and Thomas Hobbes, *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance. Clearly Stated and Debated between Dr. Bramhall Bishop of Derry, and Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury* (London, 1656), 84.

Ironically, Calvinism, Lutheranism, astrology and mechanism provided diverse views of God and the universe, and were from different sides of the political spectrum, yet they all suggested that free will is not an intrinsic part of the individual. Instead, these different worldviews suggest, in a variety of ways, that people are governed by arbitrary, outside forces determining their fate. While both Calvin and Hobbes reinforced *providentialism*, where the world and individual actions are determined only by intervention from God, the *vitalist* assumptions regarding self-motion emphasized the autonomy and freedom of individuals. In particular, the Cambridge Platonists, as Sarah Hutton explains, were generally anti-determinists, whose 'defense of freewill opens the way for arguing the autonomy of the individual human subject'.[154] For example, Ralph Cudworth extensively argues against a voluntarist, arbitrary God and defends the autonomy of individual choice in *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*. He claims:

> That this *God* being *Essentially Good* and *Just*, there is … Something in its own *Nature*, *Immutably* and *Eternally Just*, and *Unjust*; and not by *Arbitrary Will*, *Law*, and *Command* onely. And … That we are so far forth *Principles* or *Masters* of our own *Actions*, as to be *Accountable* to *Justice* for them, or to make us *Guilty* and *Blame-worthy* for what we doe Amiss, and to Deserve *Punishment* accordingly.[155]

Cudworth argues that free will and individual choice are crucial for the theology of redemption. Henry More likewise emphasizes the importance of free will in his assertion that 'we have this *Liberty* and freedome in our selves, and that we refuse the good, and chuse the evill'.[156]

Within the contingency and necessity debate, Cavendish provides a unique theoretical position that is fundamental for her understanding of politics. In *Observations*, the companion treatise to *The Blazing World*, she puts forward an intellectualist position, arguing that 'God is an Immoveable and Immutable Essence' and 'cannot actually move the Universe, like the chief wheel in a Watch' (*OUEP* II 24; III 35). Yet Cavendish also claims that since God made Nature, 'so he may destroy her' (*OUEP* II 9). Although God can arbitrarily destroy Nature, his power

[154] Sarah Hutton, 'The Cambridge Platonists', in Steven Nadler (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 308.

[155] Ralph Cudworth, 'Preface', in *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, 1678), 2v.

[156] More, *Immortality of the Soul*, 134. More also argues that the soul is 'endued with the power of exerting it self into the act of Willing, is the necessary cause of Voluntary actions … therefore [the soul] is not necessarily determined to will by externall impresses, but by the displaying of certain notions and perceptions she raises in her self'. *Ibid.*, 145.

is still limited. Nature has limitations as well, since she 'is neither absolutely necessitated, nor has an absolute free will' to 'work beyond herself, or beyond her own nature' (*OUEP* 1 108). In other words, Nature has a free will, but cannot alter the fundamental workings of natural phenomena such as self-movement and self-knowledge. Both God and Nature are free within certain limits.

This understanding of free will is crucial for understanding the politics and ontology of *The Blazing World*, since Cavendish situates the concept of authorship into theological debates concerning contingency and necessity. In the text, the author is placed in a quasi-divine position as creator of worlds that contain living, rational, sentient beings. Like the voluntarist position of the cosmos, an individual author can arbitrarily create worlds and realities, each governed by contradictory laws and principles. Like Gassendi's theory of contingency where God is not bound by the laws he creates, the Empress and 'the Duchess' create various corporeal worlds based upon a wide variety of philosophers, then abruptly dismantle them. Although both the characters satirize and critique many of the theories, each philosophical system was able to form or create an actual political world in a sense, since thoughts are material in Cavendish's natural philosophy.[157] Consequently, all of these systems were in a way valid or correct, just as a plurality of contradictory bodies and systems exist within Nature. The 'soul of the Duchess of Newcastle', the character in the story, explains that the imagination is arbitrary and voluntarist, since an individual 'may make a world full of veins, muscles, and nerves, and all these to move by one jolt or stroke: also he may alter that world as often as he pleases, or change it from a natural world, to an artificial; he may make a world of ideas, a world of atoms, a world of lights, or whatsoever his fancy leads him to' (*TBW* 186).[158] The authors/creators are not bound by any of the laws they create. Likewise with Nature, in Cavendish's epistemology the viceroy of god: 'Nature hath a natural Free-will' (*PL* 225) and to an extent is not bound by natural laws or order as long as she does not alter the fundamental principles of self-moving matter itself.

[157] However, Cavendish humorously claims she is not able to create a world from Aristotle, satirizing the idea that 'her mind, as most of the learned hold it, was immaterial, and that according to Aristotle's principle, out of nothing, nothing could be made' (*TBW* 187).

[158] Cavendish's contention that an author may alter 'a natural world, to an artificial' seemingly contradicts her assertion that art cannot supersede Nature. However, free will and creative powers are natural phenomena within her view of Nature. All worlds would be natural from this perspective and would not be able to successfully alter the principles of self-moving, cognitive nature. For example, Cavendish created an artificial Leviathan in the text itself, however, as previously argued, the world cannot maintain conformity or unity which contradicts the natural inclination of self-moving matter.

Although Cavendish places the author into a quasi-voluntarist position that can arbitrarily create and destroy worlds, she simultaneously claims that 'every human creature can create an immaterial world fully inhabited by immaterial creatures' (*TBW* 185). Although Calvin and Luther, along with most mechanists, believed that the actions of humans are predetermined, Cavendish's statement highlights a heterogeneous cosmos where individual creativity is a microcosm of divine creation. Though Renaissance utopias often depersonalize the citizenry, *The Blazing World* suggests that every individual is a microcosm of creation indicating that there is a multiplicity of arbitrary, voluntarist individuals. Like her atomic theory discussed in Chapter 1, which emphasized autonomous atoms vying for power and governance, a plurality of individuals arbitrarily affect natural and political bodies through their creative processes. Significantly, Cavendish suggests that plurality is positive and necessary for the functioning of natural phenomena, since 'corporeal, figurative motions, which being infinitely various in infinite nature, did produce infinite several effects' (*TBW* 157). In the same way, in *Philosophical Letters* she claims that diversity is fundamental for the workings of natural phenomena for 'Nature loves variety, and this is the cause of all strange and unusual natural effects' (*PL* 391). Unlike Charles I, who perceived multiple perspectives as 'the manie headed *Hydra* of Government … where counsel may bee in manie as the senses', Cavendish's epistemology indicates that plurality is not a monster, but a completely natural and necessary component of Nature.[159]

Cavendish's model of absolute, arbitrary power paradoxically provides a decentralized view of the world, where individuals embody a microcosm of God's macrocosm, including his creative capacities. Consequently, power originates from individuals rather than from a divinely ordained hierarchical cosmos. Highlighting the revolutionary possibilities of individual political agency, Cavendish situates contingency and necessity into a radically decentralized cosmos. Despite Oddvar Holmesland's argument that Cavendish's 'idea of natural relations can consequently be seen to subscribe to the notion of an aristocratic order instituted by God',[160] Cavendish's natural philosophy actually portrays a cosmos that is not ordered along any predictable model, since a plurality of systems of order and government exist. The continuum of creation represented by the Empress and

[159] Charles I, *Apophthegmata Aurea*, 37.
[160] Oddvar Holmesland, 'Margaret Cavendish's "The Blazing World": Natural Art and the Body Politic', *Studies in Philology* 96.4 (1999): 459.

the character 'the Duchess' evidences a chaotic, contingent world, which continually expands through imaginative faculties that are always subject to change. Osler describes Descartes's position as one where the 'only property [of matter] is extension' and that 'the universe is a plenum and that the matter filling it is infinitely divisible'.[161] Like Descartes, Cavendish also argues that the cosmos is expansive and dividable, yet she suggests that these properties allow for a diversity and plurality of political systems.

Karen Detlefsen provides a helpful reading of Cavendish's theory of freedom in the natural world. In contrast to scholars who maintain that Cavendish endorses a 'top-down approach', wherein 'infinitely wise nature had complete, determining control over all its parts',[162] Detlefsen argues that a Nature conceived 'as an extended plenum of freely-acting parts' better accounts for both order and disorder in Cavendish's natural philosophy.[163] If, as Cavendish seems to suggests, each unit of matter is 'a centre of phenomenological awareness and memory, or a centre of unified sense and reason that recognizes itself as one', then according to Detlefsen it is 'also a centre of moral contemplation and action' and can hence freely choose to act in contrast to the whole of Nature's wisdom.[164] Hence, 'nature's disorders are explained by nature's parts either knowing how they ought to proceed and refusing to comply, or simply not knowing how to proceed due their limited rationality and thus ignorance, and so proceeding erroneously by accident'.[165]

Although I agree with Detlefsen's premise that Cavendish develops a 'a theory of the ubiquitous freedom of nature' that can account for both order and disorder, my reading differs in its interpretation of disorder in Cavendish's natural philosophy, and such a difference carries significant political ramifications.[166] While Detlefsen argues that disorders should be thought to be real perversions of Nature's norms, I have argued in Chapter 1 that disorders can rather be understood as *natural and necessary* aspects of natural phenomena. Indeed, *Philosophical Letters* provides strong textual evidence for this interpretation. There Cavendish defines disorders, such as disease and wars, as naturally occurring 'irregular motions' in Nature:

> [A]ll the variety and difference of natural Creatures arises from her various actions, which are the various motions in Nature; some whereof are

[161] Osler, *Divine Will*, 9.
[162] Karen Detlefsen, 'Reason and Freedom: Margaret Cavendish on the Order and Disorder of Nature', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 89 (2007):185, 180.
[163] *Ibid.*, 185. [164] *Ibid.*
[165] *Ibid.*, 180. [166] *Ibid.*, 157.

> Regular, some Irregular: I mean Irregular, as to particular Creatures, not as to Nature her self, for Nature cannot be disturbed or discomposed, or else all would run into confusion; Wherefore Irregularities do onely concern particular Creatures, not Infinite Nature … And thus according as Regularities and Irregularities have power, they cause either Peace or War, Sickness or Health, Delight and Pleasure, or Grief and Pain, Life or Death, to particular Creatures or parts of Nature. (*PL* 238–9)[167]

Rather than describing irregular motions as contradictions of or rebellions against the wisdom, order and direction of Nature, Cavendish suggests that death, illness and war can appear irregular only from the perspective of particular creatures (*PL* 332–3). War and disease are natural motions within the body of Nature, which, regarded as a whole, is peaceful. Cavendish explains that irregular motions are even permitted and *generated by Nature herself* since 'she makes irregularities for varieties sake, but she her self orders the regular part, that is, she is more careful of her regular actions; and thus Nature taking delight in variety suffers irregularities; for otherwise, if there were onely regularities, there could not be so much variety' (*PL* 345). Nature 'makes' and 'suffers' irregularities since they allow increased *diversity*, which is a trait that pleases her. In *Observations* Cavendish even suggests that irregular motions are necessary for the very existence of order: 'all [Nature's] actions are ballanced by their opposites; as for example, there is no … no grossness without purity; no animate without inanimate; no regularity without irregularity: All which produces a peaceable, orderly, and wise Government in Natures Kingdom' (*OUEP* III 65). Irregular and regular motions are *necessary* oppositional pairs in Nature in so far as they help generate a balanced and orderly whole body. In other words, without irregular motions there could be no order.

Interpreting disorders as natural and necessary components of matter allows a different political reading of Cavendish's natural philosophy. Detlefsen contends that disorders are real consequences of the freedom of Nature's parts to choose to rebel against the wisdom of Nature as well as a sovereignty: 'Just as nature as a whole has infinite wisdom which guides, from the top down, what all its parts *ought* to do, so too, human communities ought to follow the model of a monarch guiding his subjects.'[168] Hence, Cavendish 'denounce[s] democratically-organized societies and favour[s] the hierarchy of a monarchy'.[169] However, if irregularities such as civil war and disease are instead understood as natural and necessary

[167] Irregular motions are also the cause of monsters, which Cavendish defines as completely natural, but not ordinary (*PL* 229).

[168] Detlefsen, 'Reason and Freedom', 176. [169] *Ibid*.

aspects of natural phenomena, then subjects could not *unnaturally* rebel against the rational order of a monarch. Instead, they choose freely to follow a monarch or to rebel, but such a choice does not interject a disturbance or disorder into Nature's harmonious authority or wisdom. For a royalist woman, this philosophical stance allows a surprising amount of room to justify civil dissent, particularly in so far as it can now be described as a natural event that Nature either generates or allows.

Another facet of Cavendish's understanding of order, which can better elucidate her political views, can be found in her theory of perception. As previously mentioned, unlike many of her contemporaries, Cavendish insists that motion is *not* caused by force. Similarly, she believes that perception is not caused by bodies transferring force or motion to one another. In *Observations* she argues, for example, that vision is *not* induced 'by receiving either the figures of the exterior objects into the sensitive Organs, or by sending forth some invisible rayes from the Organ to the Object; nor by pressure and reaction' (*OUEP* 111). Instead individuals 'pattern' out a copy of external objects like a painter might copy his or her surrounding environment (*OUEP* 1 222). According to Cunning, this indicates that bodies pattern-out prints to perceive each other, with the effect that 'bodies communicate with each other about how to coordinate their behavior'.[170] This is not a top-down approach to understanding how order functions in the natural world. Cunning suggests the presence here of an 'interpretive issue' related to her corresponding political philosophy:

> A sovereign cannot simply decree that certain things happen: whether or not they happen is a function of the responsiveness of the members of the commonwealth. For Cavendish, an ecosystem holds together, but not because a single member imposes its will on the others. Instead, the members work together as a group, and if human beings are a part of nature, they would function under the same constraints. If Cavendish is right, a sovereign has to be extremely powerful to secure peace and stability, but what it is for a sovereign to have power is to be wise enough to figure out which are the messages that his subjects would accommodate.[171]

This application of her theory of perception to the political realm depicts *limited* sovereignty inasmuch as it suggests that there are natural limits to the methods and extent of monarchical power in Nature. One person simply cannot force or exert their will upon others; nor is it sufficient

[170] Cunning, 'Margaret Lucas Cavendish', 25.
[171] *Ibid.*, 47–8.

for authoritative control that one part is viewed as being in the position of 'head'. Instead, a ruler must on some level negotiate with his or her subjects to convince them not to rebel or set up a new political body. For Cunning, the analogy between the natural and the political world implies that the members of the body communicate with its other parts (as opposed to simply directing them). Although I agree with Cunning's political reading of Cavendish's theory of perception, I do not share his belief that this is an interpretative problem for Cavendish's natural philosophy. If we allow that she may not have held typically royalist views, then there is no clear contradiction here in her conception of sovereignty. It is instructive to consider the Empress of the Blazing World in this context. Although she never quite completely maintains order in her realm, for she fears civil dissent among her scholars, she does obtain some degree of security in the beginning, when she 'gained an extraordinary love of all her subjects throughout that world' (*TBW* 163). Unlike moderate constitutional royalists' doctrine of a limited monarchy that respects established laws and the Church, the Empress completely disregards the political traditions, religion and laws of the Blazing World and instead maintains power through the love of her people as well as by manipulation of their religious beliefs. This emphasis upon love and manipulation is compatible with Cunning's suggestion that for Cavendish, a monarch cannot simply exert their will, but must rely upon the responsiveness of the community that he or she rules.

Cavendish's natural philosophy does not only emphasize that power depends upon the responsiveness of a particular community; it also describes plurality and contradiction as natural and positive attributes. Yet the natives of the Blazing World voiced the absolutist position that 'it was natural for one body to have but one head, so it was also natural for a politic body to have but one governor; and that a commonwealth, which had many governors was like a monster with many heads' (*TBW* 134). Still, Cavendish's analogy of the head or mind in her earlier work, *The Worlds Olio*, resembles a more democratic political model: 'The Mind is like a Commonwealth, and the Thoughts as the Citizens therein; or the Thoughts like Household servants, who are busily imployed about the Minds Affairs, who is the Master' (*TWO* 95). By describing the mind as a commonwealth with 'citizens' as opposed to subjects, Cavendish invokes images of republicanism. Turning the common early modern political metaphor of the sovereign as head upside-down, the citizens have appropriated the monarchical position. It is unclear where the locale of power is situated, or who the master would be in such an analogy. While discussing

Cavendish's poem 'The Prey of Thoughts' (*PF* 140), Stevenson argues that Cavendish indicates that psychological and social order must be imagined: there 'is no absolute king of the mind's jungle' and 'all thoughts are similarly motivated by the exigencies of survival'.[172] Cavendish thus subverts the common early modern metaphor of the physical body as representing the body politic, which needs to be governed by the monarchical mind. Battigelli argues that by 'comparing the mind to a commonwealth or the body politic, which she feared was always on the brink of dissolution, she was indicating the ease with which the mind could itself fall into anarchy. Pointing to the unstable texture of the self was in turn, a way of highlighting the fragility of a political entity composed of so many unpredictable minds.'[173] However, the political analogy of a mind that is continuously on the brink of chaos is akin to the motif of change, decentralization and plurality, ideas manifest throughout Cavendish's oeuvre.

While Cavendish draws ideas from the free-will debate, she also appropriates ideas from early modern atomists. Atomism had an anti-providential legacy,[174] yet Cavendish was concerned that Epicurean atomism, which believed that the workings of Nature were caused by chance, still took away freedom from the individual. She argues for the impossibility 'of senseless and irrational Atomes, moving by chance; for it is more probable that atomes should have life and knowledg' (*OUEP* I 141). In order to make sense of how self-moving matter functions, Cavendish's revised 1668 version of *Observations* uses the analogy of church members who 'all agree' to congregate to highlight how particles work together to create unified bodies.[175] Although this suggests that all bodies must be formed through consent, the analogy of a church does not indicate that there is one type of church or body. This is particularly so in the historical aftermath of the civil war, which saw an outburst of religious sects and religious convictions. Ironically, her metaphor of a church parallels her emphasis upon plurality, since there are 'more religions than gods, and more opinions in

[172] Jay Stevenson, 'Imagining the Mind: Cavendish's Hobbesian Allegories', in Clucas, *Princely Brave Woman*, 148.

[173] Battigelli, *Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind*, 60.

[174] Reid Barbour, 'Bacon, Atomism, and Imposture: The True and the Useful in History, Myth, and Theory', in Julie Robin Solomon and Catherine Gimelli Martin (eds.), *Francis Bacon and the Refiguring of Early Modern Thought: Essays to Commemorate 'The Advancement of Learning' (1605–2005)* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 18.

[175] For example, Cavendish explains that 'as many men assembled in a Church, make but one Congregation, and all agree to worship one God, in one and the same manner or way; so, many Parts conjoin'd in one Figure, are, as it were, so many Communicants, all agreeing, and being united in one Body'. Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (London, 1668), 196.

those religions than truths' (*TBW* 201). Sarasohn argues that Cavendish believes that freedom is 'an attribute of material being. God is not partial in giving man freedom, since all of nature possesses freedom.'[176] However, this freedom is caused by consent within the vitalist tendencies in matter. Cavendish in *Observations* emphasizes the notion of consent as a fundamental principle in both the natural and political world: 'as several workmen join in the building of one house, and several men in the framing of one Government; so do several parts in the making or forming of one composed figure' (*OUEP* II 58). As in Cavendish's metaphor of members of a congregation agreeing to join a church, several 'men' or 'parts' join together to form a government or natural body.

Republicans often grounded their beliefs from contractual theory, which argued that government derived from the consent of the commonwealth, and not immediately from God: thus both sovereign and subjects were bound by reciprocal conditions.[177] Like Cavendish's church analogy, people consent to be part of the political body. The notion of consent limited the power of the sovereign and also demonstrated that humanity is naturally born with freedom from all subjection and is at liberty to choose what form of government it pleases.

Consent is also an issue highlighted in *The Blazing World*. As Cavendish the author (as distinct from the character) interposes into the Epilogue, she claims that if the people whom she created in her world are 'willing to be my subjects, they may imagine themselves such, and they are such, I mean, in their minds, fancies or imaginations; but if they cannot endure to be subjects, they may create worlds of their own, and govern themselves as they please' (*TBW* 225). This change in perspective shifts the meaning of the text from portraying and advocating an arbitrary, oppressive government into an entirely different politics. Although Cavendish, as author, as creator of *The Blazing World*, is Godlike, this statement not only acknowledges the instability of her own fictional regime, but more radically suggests that power derives not from the author/sovereign, but from below, from the consent of the subjects. Indeed, fictional characters have incredible power over their author/sovereign, as demonstrated by the Empress, who has the power to summon Cavendish as a character into

[176] Sarasohn, *Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*, 91

[177] However, Nigel Smith explains that 'monarchical defenders in the 1650s were compelled to take on the very different discourses of republicanism and the impact of a truly popular politics', yet apologies for monarchy gained momentum again after the 1660s. See Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 114. Yet, Cavendish had a secular attitude towards religion during both Interregnum and Restoration.

her world. Likewise, the Empress was unable to control her philosophical world modelled on Thales, where she was 'so much troubled with demons, that they would not suffer her to take her own will, but forced her to obey their orders and commands' (*TBW* 187). Since thoughts are material in the Cavendish paradigm, then ideas from her own imagination have a free will of their own, which either accepts authority or rebels, destabilizing the regime of the mind. Even the self splits, merges and multiplies, making the boundaries of power and authority impossible to define. Thus, even if someone is Godlike and is creator of a world, their power is unstable, fractured and never absolute. While discussing the genre of *The Blazing World*, Geraldine Wagner argues that it 'is a testament not to the text's incoherence but to its breadth and complexity that, like its author, it cannot be reduced to singleness'.[178] Though scholars such as Carrie Hintz, Oddvar Holmesland and Deborah Boyle argue that Cavendish's royalism is predicated upon the need for balance and stability in society,[179] Cavendish, even in her fictional work, attempts to decentralize and complicate the unity of any structure on generic, political and philosophical levels, thus demonstrating in multifaceted ways that 'nature is eternal and infinite, and her particulars are subject to infinite changes and transmutations by virtue of their own corporeal, figurative self-motions' (*TBW* 152–3).

VI Monarchy and imagination in the Blazing World

As *The Blazing World* explores free will and consent, it further demystifies sovereignty by representing its limits. For example, by appropriating the mechanist preoccupation with observation-based epistemologies, the text suggests that monarchs cannot realistically perceive with their senses the land and subjects it purports to own:

> [The Empress] possesses a whole world, yet enjoys she but a part thereof; neither is she so much acquainted with it, that she knows all the places, countries and dominions she governs. The truth is, a sovereign monarch

[178] Geraldine Wagner, 'Romancing Multiplicity: Female Subjectivity and the Body Divisible in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 9.1 (2003): 8.

[179] Carrie Hintz argues that the Empress, who tries to alter the society of the Blazing World, 'serve[s] as a caution against the enjoyment of "change and variety"', while Boyle suggests that it is 'natural balance and stability, even in the face of tremendous diversity, that Cavendish thinks human societies ought to emulate'. Holmesland suggests that the nobility of the Blazing World represent an ideal balanced state and that 'the entire seat of the Empress is the epitome of an artistic form that bears on balance and moderation'. See Carrie Hintz, '"But One Opinion": Fear of Dissent in Cavendish's *New Blazing World*', *Utopian Studies* 7.1 (1996): 27; Deborah Boyle, 'Fame, Virtue, and Government', 256–7; and Holmesland, 'Cavendish's "The Blazing World"', 474.

> has the general trouble; but the subjects enjoy all the delights and pleasures in parts; for it is impossible, that a kingdom, nay, a country should be enjoyed by one person at once, except he take the pains to travel into every part, and endure the inconveniencies of going from one place to another; wherefore, since glory, delight and pleasure lives but in other men's opinions, and can neither add tranquillity to your mind, nor give ease to your body, why should you desire to be Empress of a material world, and be troubled with the cares that attend your government? (*TBW* 186)

The monarch's power is to some extent illusory since it cannot actually observe or experience every aspect of the kingdom. Also, subjects are able to enjoy aspects of the dominion that are inaccessible to the monarch and have autonomy that the monarch can never control. Although nobility were named and defined by the land they owned (the Duke and Duchess of Newcastle are a case in point), a noble or monarch cannot truly possess land since it cannot be entirely perceived or observed from their senses.

Just as monarchy is positioned as a fractured system that is not whole or unified, but rather fragmented and limited in its perspective, signifiers of ownership and status are also disrupted and redefined throughout Cavendish's text, complicating signifiers of power and privilege. Initially, the Blazing World appears like an opulent, decadent fantasy of monarchical privilege, since none 'was allowed to use or wear gold but those of the imperial race … nor durst anyone wear jewels but the Emperor, the Empress, and their eldest son' (*TBW* 133). The palace and imperial city, in addition, are made from so much gold, diamonds, rubies and other rare gems 'that it surpasses my skill to enumerate them all' (*TBW* 132). However, within this world precious jewels are the prosaic minerals, since 'they had an infinite quantity both of gold and precious stones in that world; for they had larger extends of gold, than our Arabian sands; their precious stones were rocks, and their diamonds of several colours; they used no coin, but all their traffic was by exchange of several commodities' (*TBW* 133). Hence, jewels and gold have no economic value, for they are as common and accessible as rocks. Furthermore, the economy of the Blazing World is based upon trade, rather than a monetary-based system. Gold and precious stones have no economic or cultural value, even though they are still associated with the monarchy, since the Empress is not only adorned with gems, but she is crowned with them; 'on her head she wore a cap of pearl, and a half-moon of diamonds just before it; on the top of her crown came spreading over a broad carbuncle, cut in the form of the sun' (*TBW* 133). The nobility are not attired and crowned in valuable, costly minerals; that is to say, they wear emblems that have no

economic or cultural worth. Mikalachki argues that Elizabethan iconography plays a formative role in descriptions of the Empress, particularly since the 'detail of the "star-stone" in the Empress's hair … recalls the "moon-jewel" headdresses of Elizabethan portraiture. The cult of Elizabeth as Cynthia, or the moon, also implied her sovereignty over the ocean.'[180] In contrast, the Empress wears items devoid of economic value, rather than precious materials and rich attire to symbolize her power. Providing a commentary on the foundation of economics, Cavendish suggests that what is considered valuable, whether it is gold or a monarch, is not inherently valuable in itself. Value is placed externally by the interpretative powers of the community at large. For example, what the Empress 'wondered most at, was, that they should prize or value dirt more than men's lives' (*TBW* 190). Since jewels and gold are like sand and rocks in her world, they are dirt, thus exemplifying that it is not God or the monarch that defines power, status and wealth, but the collective imagination of the community. Although Paracelsus believed the imagination, in a sense, *was* reality, Cavendish offers a similar principle from a materialist perspective. Imaginative faculties are also a locale of power that affects reality, not through magic or magnetism, but through the collective interpretation of cultural signifiers.

Imagination is portrayed as particularly powerful when the Empress manipulates the domestic population into obedience through her use of artificially contrived chapels. Similarly, the Empress's imperialist agenda is successful thanks to technology which taps into the collective imagination of the populace, convincing the people that she was a goddess rather than a mortal enemy. Though the Empress's political regime collapses communities of learning, burns homes and destroys nations, the imagination can also be used for revolution, as suggested by the demons of Thales, who 'forced [the Duchess] to obey their orders and commands' (*TBW* 187). Hence, creations from her own imagination revolt against her. Though Paracelsus argued that imaginative faculties are quasi-divine, for Cavendish, the imagination is a powerful tool for conquest and absolutism, yet it is also a powerful force that can be utilized by any person.

Cavendish's time in exile with the English court may have also influenced her view of power, since then the King was in a sense a fictitious ruler. Gallagher argues that during the years of exile, 'Charles II was himself the ruler of a kind of fantasy kingdom. In a sense, the exile literalized the monarch's metaphoric significance. The real king had become the

[180] Mikalachki, *Legacy of Boadicea*, 59.

ruler of what amounted to a microcosm, had almost been reduced to a private kingdom.'[181] Like the representation of imaginative faculties and monarchy in *The Blazing World*, the King ruled places and people he had never seen and experienced. If a ruler cannot observe or experience a kingdom, authority remains fragmented and incomplete; such a concept of authority stands out of accord with divine right and even moderate royalist beliefs that conceived power as a unified force derived from God.

In *The Worlds Olio*, Cavendish emphasizes the cognitive processes involved with power dynamics, arguing that a man who is unjust and harsh can successfully rule 'his wife and servants [who] never accustomed to any other government before, [will] willingly submit' but if the customs alter 'by making new laws, and to set other rules, although they are more commodious, easie, pleasant, and plentiful; yet being unusual, the servants begin to murmur, the children to complain, factions and side-taking grows, until there is a falling out' (*TWO* 47). To change government, one must reconfigure the entire system of knowledge and customs 'for mixt laws of old and new, will no more agree in government, then crosse humours in a private family' (*TWO* 48). Thus, there is not one system of government which is most stable; power merely is stabilized from a system of knowledge that justifies and reinforces the regime. For example, the Empress's subjects claim that their government coincides with their culture: 'a monarchy is a divine form of government, and agrees most with our religion; for as there is but one God, whom we all unanimously worship and adore with one faith, so we are resolved to have but one Emperor, to whom we all submit with one obedience' (*TBW* 134). Through depicting the multifaceted aspect of power, the text demonstrates how different institutions such as government and religion can reinforce and justify their combined influence. Similarly, Foucault theorizes about the relation between knowledge and power, arguing that power and knowledge directly imply each other; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations.[182] If power and knowledge are intrinsically connected, then this would explain why the Empress changes the entire society of the Blazing World, from the religious establishment to scientific inquiry: the entire system needed to be reconfigured to justify her authority, for she 'knew well, that belief was a thing not to be forced or pressed upon the people, but to be instilled into their minds by gentle

[181] Gallagher, 'Embracing the Absolute', 29.
[182] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 27.

persuasions' (*TBW* 164). Similarly, Cavendish claims in *The Worlds Olio* that successful rulership is reliant upon the manipulation of the collective minds of the populace: 'He is the greatest Monarch that is most beloved of the subject, because he hath not onely the power over mens bodies, but over their minds' (*TWO* 49). Cavendish suggests that power, knowledge and imagination are the same principle. Yet, she none the less represents the mind through more republican analogies. For example, she describes the brain as operating 'like an University, Senate, or Council-Chamber, wherein all [her] Conceptions, Imaginations, Observations, Wit and Judgment did meet, to Dispute, Argue, contrive, and Judge' (*PPO* sig. b3v). Mihoko Suzuki claims that although 'Cavendish may have officially been a royalist in allegiance to her husband who was one of Charles's foremost supporters', there is 'a republican strain in Cavendish's thought'.[183]

VII Plurality

Cavendish's emphasis on plurality is more aligned with revolutionary thinking. She characteristically portrays multiple opinions upon one topic so that often it is difficult to discern which voice is Cavendish's 'own' perspective, creating a decentralized narrative even in many of her own works. Whitaker argues that she was 'broad-minded enough to see both sides of an issue', and was more interested in arguing both sides of an argument than settling on one unified, fixed opinion.[184] Yet, a multifarious discourse has political connotations: debate can also cause revolution. Unlike the emphasis upon conformity within the Blazing World, the variety of opinions in printed matter was often perceived as damaging to the social order. Nigel Smith argues that the printing press particularly caused anxiety to those who advocated monarchy. Such individuals wanted an abolition of all publications that did not emanate from royal authority:

> [T]hose who saw the church and state as indissolubly linked, and the structure of authority stemming ultimately from the unitary power of the monarchy, were frightened and repulsed by the flood of publications which they saw about them, and the different, opposed claims for authority in those publications.[185]

The vast amount of information and contradictory opinions that were surfacing were threatening. A multiplicity of opinions were able to be

[183] Mihoko Suzuki, 'The Essay Form as Critique: Reading Cavendish's *The world's olio* through Montaigne and Bacon (and Adorno)', *Prose Studies* 22.3 (1999): 1–16.
[184] Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 17–18. [185] Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 25.

published that conflicted with royal prerogative and claims to power. Nigel Smith explains that the decentralized effect of the printing press created a type of 'media revolution':

> [T]here was a 'downwards dissemination' of print – a democratising of its availability. And there was still a sense – from all quarters – that the world had been destabilised by a printing surfeit. National perception had been changed for good by a media revolution.[186]

Diverse perspectives provided by the printing press had a destabilizing effect upon the monarch's power since dissenting opinions which contradicted the ruler's claim to authority could reach vast numbers of the population. Smith argues that a 'new kind of attitude was produced whereby a latitude of views was possible, although such broad thinking, at first and in absolute terms, was very rare. For the most part, attentive minds registered the situation of divided, multifarious voices, and tried to grasp their predicament as best they could'.[187] However, far from trying to create a unified voice within this information revolution, Cavendish appears to have embraced the ideologies that were emerging from it. Not only did Cavendish publish a large quantity of works, the texts themselves are filled with divided, contradictory and multifarious voices, mirroring the actions of the printing revolution itself.

Cavendish's publishing behaviour can also be understood as atypical in relation to class propriety. Although some critics have interpreted her acts of publishing as an aristocratic gesture,[188] the nobility generally distributed their writings in manuscript. Whitaker argues that published scholarly debates particularly contrasted with aristocratic behaviour, conventions and ideals.

> Virulent book wars were common amongst scholars, vying with each other to establish their own opinions and reputations, but polite society took no part in them. Gentlemen did not contradict each other, unless they wished to fight a duel, and William, like the rest of his class, despised scholarly disputations as 'a pedantical kind of quarrelling, not becoming noble persons'.[189]

[186] *Ibid.*, 24. [187] *Ibid.*, 26.

[188] Hero Chalmers argues that Cavendish's decision to publish coincided with a royalist agenda, since wifely self-display could be used to affirm her husband's aristocratic status, while Karen L. Raber claims that one 'reason Newcastle might have remained indulgent of his wife's desire to write, and even publish, is that she assiduously defended his reputation and his values as an aristocrat'. See Hero Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers 1650–1689* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 16–55, and Karen L. Raber, '"Our wits joined as in matrimony": Margaret Cavendish's Plays and the Drama of Authority', *English Literary Renaissance* 28.3 (1998): 487.

[189] Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 261.

Though perhaps not becoming to her noble status, Cavendish broke with aristocratic codes of behaviour and enthusiastically participated in published scholarly debate. Yet, Cavendish did not claim to possess the only uncontested narrative, since she was 'as willing to have [her] opinions contradicted, as [she does] contradict others', demonstrating an active attempt to participate in the non-aristocratic book wars (*PL* 4r). Hence, Cavendish's own behaviour advocated a model of intellectual activity that encouraged dispute, contradiction and plurality; a type of scholarly pursuit which the Empress of the Blazing World would have ironically suppressed.

Although Cavendish advocated scholarly dispute, diversity in opinions, according to the Empress, is what unsettles political structures. Consequently, the Empress infiltrates her power into the multiple facets of life. She receives absolute political power in the Blazing World, controls the production of knowledge and converts society to her religion. The subjects claim that 'their Blazing World had but one Emperor, one government, one religion, and one language, so there was but one passage into that world, which was so little' that it was difficult to enter (*TBW* 205). The less variety in a world, the more its structure is strengthened or fortified, not allowing new ideas. Yet, no matter how much conformity she enforces, there still is dissent that threatens civil war. The Empress concedes that human opinion is a constantly changing force which must be relentlessly manipulated:

> But at last, pondering with herself the inconstant nature of mankind, and fearing that in time they would grow weary, and desert the divine truth, following their own fancies, and living according to their own desires, she began to be troubled that her labours and pains should prove of so little effect, and therefore studied all manner of ways to prevent it. (*TBW* 163)

The Empress manipulates the populace with a Machiavellian sense of statecraft, yet power remains unstable as she relentlessly attempts to maintain political unity. The tale illustrates that the most absolutist regimes are none the less on the brink of anarchic change and dissolution. Even an author such as Cavendish cannot sustain absolute power or stability within her own text as *The Blazing World* fragments into different perspectives, voices and realities.

VIII The autonomous subject

Cavendish's interest in plurality and instability is also evident in her depiction of identity. As Cavendish consistently decentralizes opinion,

bodies, minds, politics, texts, etc., she creates a unique model of subjectivity that decentralizes monarchical conceptions of identity and order. Gallagher argues that *The Blazing World* 'de-center[s] the universe' where 'subjectivity [is] an infinite, unfathomable regression of interiority.'[190] Consequently, Cavendish shifts the ideology of the absolute monarch to define an absolute, complete self. However, rather than demonstrating a privileged perspective, the monarch serves as foundation for subjectivity: 'what at first appears to be an absolutism that would merely lead to the subjection of all individuals except the monarch was actually for Cavendish the foundation for a subjectivity that would make its own absolute claims'.[191] According to Gallagher's interpretation, the self for Cavendish is modelled upon a sovereign type. Yet, the subjectivity of the monarch itself is rendered insignificant, since the self becomes autonomous. Furthermore, Cavendish extends the seventeenth-century conception of human-as-microcosm to all creatures: if 'a fly or worm was a little world, then man was so too' (*TBW* 169, 170). Every person and unit of matter, whether it is human or fly, parallels monarchy since they are individually a self-contained, whole, distinct and true world. If every unit of matter is metaphorically an absolute sovereign, then Cavendish creates an astoundingly infinite plurality of perspectives and worlds based upon the monarchical model.[192] Though the self is modelled on the absolute form, it paradoxically expands and multiplies into other autonomous selves, just as the worlds in *The Blazing World* regress, fracture and multiply into fantasy worlds. This fragmentation does not exclude humans, as demonstrated by the souls of the Empress, 'the Duchess' and the Duke of Newcastle, who merged and expanded into a rather peculiar 'platonic seraglio' (*TBW* 194). Yet, while the self is constantly multiplying, it is also simultaneously and paradoxically whole and absolute; destroying any possibility for one privileged, universal perspective.[193]

If every creature is Godlike, the self can be understood as a microcosm of the body of Nature, with an infinite number of contradictory selves within one whole that is constantly changing, creating and moving. In *The Blazing World*, the self constantly shifts and fractures as it combines with others. Worlds and selves divide and expand into a continuum; 'dear friends' are 'like several parts of one united body' (*TBW* 183). Wagner argues that 'the author, her Empress and her Duchess comprise a multiple

[190] Gallagher, 'Embracing the Absolute', 32.
[191] *Ibid.*, 27. [192] *Ibid.*, 31–2. [193] *Ibid.*, 32.

organism ("a monstrosity") that defies this equation of singularity with the natural'.[194] This process is complicated further, as such 'merging is always subject to further transmutations'.[195] It is significant that this merging includes no centralized authority figure; it provides a much more egalitarian trope where bodies function like friends uniting through their own consent and free will. Hence, Cavendish suggests that the self is fractured, with infinite selves within one body such that, according to the spirits of the Blazing World, there 'may be numerous material souls in one composed body' (*TBW* 175–6). Other people become integral parts of the self as they divide, merge and expand into one another, rendering it difficult to define the boundaries of an individual within one body. Not only are there worlds within worlds within every corporeal body, but external forces may enter: 'spirits may enter into your body, if you please' (*TBW* 189). Wagner argues that Cavendish plays 'with the boundaries that constitute "within" and "without"', dissolving not only 'the line between reality and fantasy, but also between self and other' so that there is no self-coherence or self-difference.[196] The selfhood Cavendish envisions also is infinitely connected to all aspects of the natural world, so that as Ankers suggests, 'nature and [the] individual self become interchangeable, as well as life and motion'.[197] The self is paradoxically autonomous, yet while it constantly fractures inwardly, it also splits outwardly as well, creating a model of subjectivity that does not privilege any one particular perspective.

Although divine right theorists understood the sovereign to be the head of a political body, corporeality in *The Blazing World* does not correspond to such monarchical analogies. The body of the Empress is represented as a complicated, unstable physiological and political body as her soul travels out of her body, leaving 'one spirit to be viceroy of her body in the absence of her soul', one which 'so resemble[s her] soul, that neither the Emperor, nor any of his subjects, although the most divine' were aware of its absence (*TBW* 190). Confounding the quasi-divine status of the sovereign, Cavendish posits that a sovereign's soul can leave his or her body and can rule *incognito* by replacing it with another subject. Rather than a unified model of corporeality and politics, sovereignty in *The Blazing World* is fractured, complicated and disjointed, and it is impossible to ascertain the seat of power with any accuracy. Cavendish further indicates that the *author* becomes a part of the world she or he creates, contesting

[194] Wagner, 'Romancing Multiplicity', 19.
[195] *Ibid.*, 54. [196] *Ibid.*, 34, 35.
[197] Ankers, 'Paradigms and Politics', 248.

borders of identity, fiction, imagination and reality. To make matters more complex, as the character 'the Duchess of Newcastle', an alias of Margaret Cavendish's, creates a world or reality, her creations can make worlds, which can make worlds, creating an unending labyrinth of infinite parallel realities, because all of matter – a thing that seems to include imaginations – has a free will of its own.

Within this system hierarchy becomes problematic, for free will and imagination are what actively affect conceptual reality. Emphasis is placed upon the importance and equality of the individual, an emphasis which would appear incongruous with staunch royalist politics. Sarasohn argues that Cavendish belongs to a tradition of critics of modern science, traceable back to Ben Jonson and Thomas Shadwell, and extending on to Jonathan Swift, and also anticipating modern writers of science fiction, such as Mary Shelley and Ursula Le Guin, for whom definitions of what is human or what is man or woman become complicated and fluid, with concomitant exploration of the potential problems of unbridled science and power.[198] To understand the relationship between Cavendish's views of power, Nature and imagination in *The Blazing World* from the framework of Hobbesian and Paracelsian philosophy is to also describe a much greater, more complex and richer understanding of Cavendish's political worldview. As Cavendish creates a fictional world that explores the political implications of both of these philosophies, the text puts forward a natural philosophy, which when extrapolated to her political worldview highlights a republican and revolutionary strain to her thinking. For example, in *Observations* she correlates her natural philosophy to political theory and argues that the republican belief in consent of the governed populace constitutes a fundamental attribute of both natural and political bodies. She posits that 'in the Politick body of a Commonwealth, one Traytor is apt to cause all the Kingdom to take armes; and … every member, if regular, knows its particular duty, which causes a general agreement to assist each other; and as it is with a Common-wealth, so it is also with an animal body' (*OUEP* I 61). The formulation of bodies, political and natural, requires the cooperation of different people or parts rather than a fixed hierarchical order or government. Similarly, her systematic attempts to explore and embrace dissonant philosophies, while decentralizing power, truth and identity, provide an epistemological space which validates other narratives and perspectives from those who are disempowered and lacking status. Throughout her oeuvre Cavendish indeed spoke for and defended

[198] Sarasohn, *Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*, 196.

many marginalized perspectives, such as those of animals, the unlearned and women.[199] While Cavendish's works may seem contradictory in so far as they represent contradictory philosophies and opinions, this tendency can be understood as a genuine methodology in line with her theory of Nature, which she holds to be infinitely diverse, pluralistic and multifarious. In this framework, it is important to observe and note that the origin of power is derived from individual creativity, free will and consent, and not from a monarch's authority.

[199] *Ibid*., 13. For examples of some of Cavendish's most poignant defences of animals through their own perspective see 'The Hunting of the Hare' and 'The Hunting of the Stag' (*PF* 110–16).

CHAPTER 4

Margaret Cavendish the republican?
Revolution and gender in Cavendish's romances

While Cavendish's romances 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' and 'The Contract' are not overtly scientific, these texts are nevertheless significant, since they demonstrate that revolutionary politics was a preoccupation for Cavendish even outside of the realm of science and philosophy. Both romances, which were first published in *Natures Pictures* in 1656, provide striking examples of how her writings during the civil war articulate and defend numerous concerns of parliamentarian critics of the Crown and republican notions of liberty as they were being debated in popular pamphlets.[1] This chapter will explore how Cavendish's romance 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' articulates republican beliefs about tyrannicide, self-defence, natural rights and popular sovereignty. While doing this, Cavendish's text draws from understandings of rape within early modern legislation in order to apply republican theory to women. Consequently, Cavendish develops a unique political theory of self-defence, one which does not merely articulate an individual woman's right to self-preservation, but also engages with republican polemics that perceived self-defence as a key political concept for protecting a commonwealth from tyranny or arbitrary power. In doing so, Cavendish challenges legislation which denied women property rights, as well as early modern ideologies which suggested that silence, obedience and chastity were the primary virtues of women. Building upon this, the chapter will further discuss how 'The Contract' explores the politics of patriarchalism and contract theory to critique monarchy, as well as to draw attention to the gender dynamics of power implicit within republican discourse. In these two stories, Cavendish offers a unique perspective, adding a feminist slant to civil war political theory. By situating female subjectivity into the language of

[1] Pamphlets became accessible to a much wider audience and increasingly became an important literary form for espousing political propaganda. For more details about propaganda and pamphlet culture see Jason Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers: Propaganda during the English Civil Wars and Interregnum* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

republican politics, Cavendish explores the political implications of republicanism as applied to women's socio-economic status.

While Cavendish's ideas do not conform to royalist politics, it remains difficult to neatly classify her political ideology. This chapter will argue, however, that, like parliamentarian critics of the Crown after the execution of Charles I, Cavendish's texts defend tyrannicide and argue for limitations on monarchical power. Although Cavendish's 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' does not outline a specific model of government, it defends the rights of private individuals regardless of their socio-economic status, gender or nationality. Furthermore, the text puts forward an understanding of power derived from popular sovereignty and revocable political contracts. Cavendish also widens the political scope and significance of emerging republican ideas, demonstrating how anti-monarchy polemics can equally apply to patriarchal modes of oppression and can reconceptualize female subjectivity.

Quentin Skinner explains that Hobbes in 1651 was the first to articulate in print 'the unambiguous claim that the state is … represented by those who wield sovereign power, and that their acts of representation are rendered legitimate by the fact that they are authorised by their own subjects'.[2] During this same time, Skinner explains there also 'rose to prominence an associated view of the relationship between the power of the state and the liberty of its subjects' where to be a free member of society was simply to be unimpeded from pursuing your desired ends.[3] The function of the state, therefore, was to prevent any individual from invading the rights of other citizens by imposing the law equally upon all citizens.[4] Though some legally minded royalists immediately began taking up these theories themselves, they did so to discredit the emerging classical ideal of a free state which was concerned with a notion of freedom based upon civil rights.[5] However, Skinner contends that it was not until 1656, the year that *Natures Pictures* was published, that a full-scale republican theory of freedom emerged first in Marchamont Nedham's *The Excellency of a Free State* and a few months later in James Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceana*.[6] It is important to acknowledge that in terms of context, while writing 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' and 'The Contract' Cavendish would not have been exposed to English writings which advocated a

[2] Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4–5.
[3] *Ibid*., 5. [4] *Ibid*.
[5] Skinner refers to this tradition as 'The neo-roman theory of free states', see *Ibid*., 1–57.
[6] *Ibid*., 15

genuine republican government, even though these writings demonstrate recurring interest in republican concerns about liberty and natural rights.

The reception of Cavendish's works in recent times has not generally situated them beyond royalist political theories, particularly as espoused in the civil war pamphlet debate.[7] Scholars occasionally recognize particular ideas within Cavendish's writings not corresponding with royalism, but such ideas are often interpreted as theoretical problems or inconsistencies within her political thinking. For example, Victoria Kahn asserts that Cavendish's analysis of contractual theory in 'The Contract' is problematic because her 'defense of a more equitable marriage contract may in the end bring her closer to parliamentary critics of the king than she would have liked', particularly since she 'shows almost in spite of herself that true romance is as much as a justification of personal and political divorce as it is of marriage'.[8] Although Kahn's analysis of Cavendish's engagement with contract theory is ground-breaking, she assumes that Cavendish's royalist epistemology at times inadequately upholds her own political beliefs. Likewise, Geraldine Wagner argues that *The Blazing World* is a literary experiment in writing a utopia that fails because Cavendish does not imagine alternatives to early modern utopian discourse, and such utopian thought itself embodied conservative, even oppressive ideologies.[9] Yet Wagner notes that Cavendish depicts a political body with 'no sovereign head, but many multi-bodied, competing loci of potential agency'. Wagner suggests the irony of such a provocative image given Cavendish's monarchist politics.[10] Thus a typical portrayal becomes apparent: republican ideas and images that emerge in Cavendish's texts are often assumed to be the result of Cavendish's inability to remain consistent with her own political doctrines. But since republicanism was dramatically shaping the political world during the

[7] A notable exception, however, is Victoria Kahn, who discusses 'The Contract' and 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' in relation to contract theory. See Victoria Kahn, *Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation in England, 1640–1674* (Princeton University Press, 2004). In addition, Susan James's anthology of Cavendish's writings for Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought places *The Blazing World* next to *Orations*, inviting a comparison. Since *Orations*, as previously mentioned, contains both stern defences for absolute monarchy and strikingly radical arguments in line with Leveller ideology, the anthology implicitly shapes Cavendish as a political thinker who does not fit into conventional royalist polemics. See Margaret Cavendish, *Political Writings*, ed. Susan James (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[8] Victoria Kahn (1997), 'Margaret Cavendish and the Romance of Contract', *Renaissance Quarterly* 50.2: 526–66.

[9] Geraldine Wagner, 'Romancing Multiplicity: Female Subjectivity and the Body Divisible in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 9.1 (2003): 18.

[10] *Ibid.*, 1.

civil war, to ignore such political developments would be inconsistent with Cavendish's inclusive, pluralistic methodology.

I Romancing self-defence

In discussing Cavendish's drama and orations, Joanne Wright contends that Cavendish offers important contributions to civil war political theory in so far as these texts challenge phallocentric representations of civil war politics, even though 'they have yet to be fully incorporated into the larger conversation of early modern political thought'.[11] Smith, Suzuki, and Wiseman contend that early modern women authors such as Cavendish 'alert us to the need to think outside modern paradigms for political writing in order to recognize more fully the nature of political writings'.[12] We should not assume from the fact that Cavendish's political ideas surface in a romance, that her choice of genre signifies her indifference to or disengagement from contemporary political debates, particularly with regard to republican ideas which were at their zenith of circulation during the time the text was written and published.

In 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' Cavendish uses the genre of romance to investigate controversial political debates concerning the question of whether subjects in a commonwealth have the right to self-defence against authority. The genre of romance is difficult to define, partly because it takes many different forms, but also because neither early modern nor contemporary debates have established a consensus about what constitutes the form.[13] Helen Cooper claims that texts which draw upon tales

[11] Joanne H. Wright, 'Not Just Dutiful Wives and Besotted Ladies: Epistemic Agency in the War Writing of Brilliana Harley and Margaret Cavendish', *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 4 (2009): 4.

[12] Hilda L. Smith, Mihoko Suzuki and Susan Wiseman, 'Introduction', in Hilda L. Smith, Mihoko Suzuki and Susan Wiseman (eds.), *Women's Political Writings, 1610–1725*, vol. 1 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), xxvii.

[13] Victoria Kahn explains how in Renaissance Italy, romance was perceived as morally deviant and structurally deficient, particularly since Aristotle never discussed romance, and the form does not conform to classical rules of literature. Romance was also a vexed category in Renaissance England: Tiffany J. Werth notes that romance, as a genre, is 'conspicuously absent from the English gallery of kinds in major critical accounts of genre such as Thomas Elyot's *Boke Named the Governour* (1531), Sir Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* (publ. 1595), and Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia* (1598), which list epic, lyric, tragedy, and comedy, among other forms'. See Victoria Kahn, 'The Passions and the Interests in Early Modern Europe: The Case of Guarini's *Il Pastor fido*', in Gail Kern Paster, Katherine Rowe and Mary Floyd-Wilson (eds.), *Reading the Early Modern Passions: Essays in the Cultural History of Emotion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 220–1; Tiffany Jo Werth, *The Fabulous Dark Cloister: Romance in England after the Reformation* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 168, n.35. For an overview of the ways in which romance has been defined by recent scholarship, see Valerie Wayne and Mary Ellen Lamb, 'Introduction:

of love or chivalry, or portray high-ranking characters, adventurous heroes and heroines in magical or exotic settings that are distant in location or time, can be considered romance. Romances also are known for their happy endings and a concern with secular ideals or 'human perfectibility within a social context'.[14] However, according to James Grantham Turner, there is a profound distinction between Old Romance, which included stories of 'giants, dragons, and enchanted castles', and New Romance, which was more 'bound by historical probability', is more realistic and less remote for readers in Restoration England.[15] Though romances, in general, are also characterized by happy endings, sexual violence, whether threatened or committed against female characters, is also a central feature of such narratives. Jocelyn Catty asserts that during the early modern period, '[r]ape is a stock motif in romance'.[16] For example, in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* characters such as Una, Belphoebe, Florimell, Amoret, Samient and Serena are attacked or threatened with sexual violence. At the same time, in *The Faerie Queene*, 'Chastity' is upheld as 'The fayrest vertue, far aboue the rest'.[17] Although the genre is preoccupied with rape and female chastity, many romances none the less demonstrate cross-dressing, disguise and a fluid portrayal of gender. In Sidney's *Arcadia*, for example, Pyrocles disguises himself as an 'Amazon lady going about the world to practice feats of chivalry and to seek [himself] a worthy husband', while Britomart in *The Faerie Queene* is the virgin knight of chastity who is of 'matchlesse might'.[18]

Though disguise and rape are common topics to be found in the romance genre, a narrative's focus on sexual violence or aggression is not necessarily devoid of political import. Catty argues that during 'the early modern period, rape is often deployed as a political allegory, or defined in terms that privilege its political significance over other concerns' and

Into the Forest', in Valerie Wayne and Mary Ellen Lamb (eds.), *Staging Early Modern Romance: Prose Fiction, Dramatic Romance, and Shakespeare* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 3–4.

[14] Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time: Transforming Motifs from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the Death of Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 1–15. Cooper also asserts, though, that any of the characteristic features of romance 'that might be taken as definitive for the genre may be absent in any particular case without damaging that sense of family resemblance'. *Ibid.*, 9.

[15] James Grantham Turner, '"Romance" and the Novel in Restoration England', *Review of English Studies* 63 (2011):58–85.

[16] Jocelyn Catty, *Writing Rape, Writing Women in Early Modern England: Unbridled Speech* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999), 25.

[17] Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Qveene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, Hiroshi Yamashita and Toshiyuki Suzuki, 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2007), 287.

[18] Philip Sidney, *The Old Arcadia*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones, 4th edn (Oxford University Press, 2008), 16, and Spenser, *Faerie Qveene*, 294.

that rape 'may be an expression of political tyranny'.[19] For example, in his *Discourses on Livy*, the Italian political thinker Niccolò Machiavelli uses Roman examples to support his claim that rape can incite political uprisings. In the chapter titled 'How a State is Ruined Because of Women' he writes:

> First, it is evident that women have been the cause of many downfalls, have done great damage to those who govern a city, and have caused many divisions; as we have seen in this history of ours, the abuse committed against Lucretia took the state from the Tarquins, and the one committed against Virginia deprived the Ten of their authority. Among the principal causes Aristotle gives for the downfall of tyrants is the one of having injured others through women by raping them, violating them, or breaking up marriages.[20]

The reign of the *decemviri*, who assaulted the chastity of Virginia, was an instance of tyranny within the history of the Roman Republic as recounted by Livy. This incident and its aftermath wrecked the *decemviri*'s popular support and ruined their political legitimacy. According to Machiavelli's commentary, then, rape can be a politically charged event which can induce political revolt against tyranny.

Though Cavendish does not overtly describe her romance as political, the text signals to her readers that her story about rape or 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' has significance beyond the realm of love and sexuality. When the protagonist, Miseria, is offered reading material, she declines romances, claiming 'they extoll vertue so much as begets an envy', are 'ridiculous to reason' and 'beget wanton desires, and amorous affections' in youth (APC 54). Within the text of Cavendish's romance we find the protagonist offering a critique of romance as a genre on moral grounds. The novel hence signals its effort to avoid provoking envy or 'wanton desires'. Rather, this romance evokes the contemporary civil war that was occurring at the time 'Assaulted and Pursed Chastity' was written and published, and demonstrates how it can specifically affect women. The first sentence of the narrative explains how the kingdom of a young Lady 'broke out into factious sores, and feverish ambition, into a plaguey rebellion, killing numbers with the sword of unjust war' (APC 48). Her family dies as a result of this civil war, and she subsequently finds herself in the

[19] Catty, *Writing Rape*, 10.

[20] Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Julia Conaway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford University Press, 1997), 319. Catty argues that by referring to the stories of both Lucretia and Virginia, Machiavelli suggests that 'the women's bodies [were] displayed publicly in order to incite political action'. Catty, *Writing Rape*, 21.

ominous situation of being displaced in a foreign land without wealth or familial connections. While the war is described as 'unjust', the narrative none the less uses romance conventions to explore women's relation to the political theory driving the English civil war. For example, the protagonist of 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity', who initially calls herself Miseria, lost her family thanks to war and is captured and enslaved by a bawd who traffics women for a prince.[21] Though in the romance genre aristocratic characters do attempt rape, it remains intriguing that Cavendish, during a civil war when the merits of monarchy were being fiercely debated, chose to open her story with a prince who enslaves women and manages brothels. Although this prince is not a king, the term identifying the character is politically significant since, in the early modern period, the term 'prince' could mean a king or monarch, and the terms 'prince' and 'king' were often used interchangeably in political writings. For example, in *The Prince* Machiavelli discusses 'princely government' and he opens his political philosophy explaining that dominions under hereditary systems are 'used to living under a prince'.[22] In Cavendish's romance, the prince/pimp 'sent for his chief officer the old bawd to know of her how his customers increased … she told him she had a rich prize, which she had seized on, and kept only for his use' (APC 50). While it is typical in the romance genre for there to be beautiful and chaste heroines resisting seduction or rape, in this story we find the victim of the attempted assault using political language and ideas that evoke parliamentarian polemics. For example, when the Prince attempts to rape this 'prize', Miseria defends herself by attempting to kill what she terms a 'tyrant to innocence' (APC 52). During the civil war the term 'tyrant' carries a significant political charge. Charles I was sentenced to death by a court set up by the parliament seven years before the publication of 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity', for being a 'tyrant' who was indirectly responsible for the 'rapines' and other atrocities occurring in the civil war.[23] This is just one of many instances where the story explores the politically charged topics of tyrannicide, rape and self-defence, and situates politically charged concepts, such as the right to resist authority, within the context of women.

[21] The protagonist gives herself various names throughout the story, so for the purpose of clarity this chapter will refer to her as Miseria, her first name in the text.

[22] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. Quentin Skinner and Russell Price (Cambridge University Press, 1988), 4, 5.

[23] Anon., 'The Sentence of the High Court of Justice Upon the King', in Samuel Rawson Gardiner (ed.), *The Constitutional Documents of the Puritan Revolution 1625–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906), 378, 380.

While it is true that one individual woman's tale of resistance to an enslaving prince does not immediately grant the permissibility of all subjects to resist their sovereigns in civil society, it is the case that the broader principle of resistance to authority in self-defence had been articulated in the era's political thought. In *Leviathan*, even Hobbes argues that an individual has the right to self-defence against a sovereign, because 'no man can transferre, or lay down his Right to save himselfe from Death, Wounds, and Imprisonment'.[24] Unlike other royalists, Hobbes argued that covenants that did not allow self-defence were void. Although Hobbes is known as a de facto absolutist, this aspect of his theory permits for a much more flexible model of government in relation to subjects' rights. Even so, this individual right in Hobbes's theory does not undermine his belief that subjects owe undivided obedience to their rulers. In contrast with Hobbes, Cavendish draws clear parallels between Miseria's individual situation and that of *communities* subject to tyrannical kingdoms, indicating that Miseria's own individual plight has larger political implications for monarchy. For example, later in the text, the reader is introduced to a 'tyrannical' monarchy where 'all the common people were slaves to the royal' (APC 69). Like the Prince, the royalty do not just enslave their people, they also sexually assault the women: with the exception of the royal women, the 'women were common to everyone's use' (APC 69). Similarly, while the subjects of the land of Amour are described as 'slaves', their king enslaves a neighbouring queen in an attempt to marry her without her consent (APC 89). The relations between enslavement, sexual assault and subjects' political rights are thus brought forward for closer inspection with these three overlapping instances of princes and kings enslaving and sexually assaulting their female subjects within the text.

The narrative explores these politically current topics throughout, as the heroine experiences a series of adventures and goes in disguises in her attempts to evade rape by the Prince, who happens to be married, despite which he follows her through various kingdoms in ardent pursuit. By both evoking the current civil war and establishing a story about a woman who attempts to protect and defend herself against a prince through violence and disguise, the romance registers and responds to what J. P. Sommerville refers to as 'the most commonly expressed political doctrines in early Stuart England', namely that subjects could never justifiably use force against the monarch, and that it was unlawful for subjects to take up

[24] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 98.

arms against the king.[25] Absolutists argued that the monarch was God's deputy on earth: hence obedience was necessary even if a monarch was tyrannical. Pamphleteer John Bramhall, whom David L. Smith identifies as a moderate, constitutional royalist,[26] even argued that 'as we suffer with patience an unfruitfull yeare, so we must doe an evill Prince as sent by God'.[27] Like famines and natural disasters, a tyrannical prince is caused by divine fiat and the people cannot resist without disobeying and rebelling against God. Robert Filmer, the absolutist author of *Patriarcha*, further claimed that inferiors, including women, should *never* disobey or rebel, even if their master commands them to sin. In this theory, the sin becomes the sin of the master and not the servant. Hence obedience is more important than individual moral judgment.[28] Although *Patriarcha* was published posthumously in 1680, Filmer wrote it well before the publication of 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity'.[29]

Cavendish situates women within this current political debate. Her text raises questions concerning women's relation to obedience and authority and renders these matters into the context of self-defence. In contrast to Bramhall and Filmer, who argued against the legitimacy of rebellion, Miseria claims that her attempted murder of a prince is justified: 'it is no sin to defend myself against an obstinate and cruel enemy, and know said she, I am no ways to be found by wicked persons but in death; for whilst I live I will live in honour, or when I kill or be killed I will kill or die for security' (APC 52). Miseria argues that murdering a prince in self-defence is not a sin, which parallels arguments by Henry Parker, one of the most influential parliamentarian pamphleteers, who argued that if the lives of people are endangered they are 'absolved of all obedience' so that they can 'seeke their own preservation by resistance and defence'.[30] Likewise, Miseria justifies self-defence from arbitrary power and violence as she

[25] See J. P. Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots: Politics and Ideology in England, 1603–1640*, 2nd edn (London: Pearson Education, 1999), 38.

[26] David L. Smith, *Constitutional Royalism and the Search for Settlement, c. 1640–1649* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), 220.

[27] John Bramhall, *The Serpent-Salve* (1643), 52.

[28] Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha*, in *Filmer: Patriarcha and Other Writings*, ed. Johann P. Sommerville (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 43–4.

[29] Filmer died in 1653, which was three years before the publication of 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity'. However, it is possible that some parts of the text were written as early as the 1620s. For more information on the dating of the text, see Johann P. Sommerville, 'Introduction', in *Patriarcha and Other Writings*, xxxii–xxxiv.

[30] Henry Parker uses the example of a general turning his cannon upon his own soldiers to illustrate this point. See Henry Parker, *Observations upon some of his majesties late answers and expresses* (London, 1642), 4.

reasons that 'the gods would not hear her, if she lazily called for help and watched for miracles neglecting natural means' (APC 50). Situating theories of self-defence within a theological context, this passage suggests that a woman who does not actively engage in self-preservation against a tyrant is irreligious or immoral. In contrast, John Birkenhead, editor and writer for the royalist newsletter *Mercurius Aulicus*, who in a sermon preached while the civil war was already well underway, equated absolute obedience and a refusal to rebel with Christianity itself:

> [W]e must performe passive obedience and absolute subjection, suffering without resistance, being subject without rebellion, even if [our superiors] should command the most unjust superstitious, idolatrous, prophane, or irreligious things which can be imagined; yet I say we must not rebell, unlesse we will renounce Christianity.[31]

Since the monarch was God's deputy on earth, attempting to murder a prince could be considered sacrilegious. But Miseria ironically claims that it is ungodly not to seek self-preservation against a tyrant, perhaps suggesting that the recent execution of Charles I, 'the Tyrant', was justified.

Charles I was often deified by advocates of divine right in the first half of the civil war.[32] Yet Miseria, while disguised as a male, later becomes Godlike in a foreign nation where they 'ador[ed] him as a god, and would have built altars, and offered sacrifices unto him; but he forbade them' (APC 75). The populace initially intended for her to be a human sacrifice, but she learns their language and appropriates technology in order to convince the population that she is of divine status, and should consequently not be killed:

> [T]he great sun … will destroy you with one of his small thunderbolts, killing first your priests and then the rest. With that shot off his pistol into the breast of the chief priest, wherewith he straight fell down dead; the noise of the pistol, and the flash of the fire, which they never saw before, and the effect of it upon the priest, struck them with such a horror, and did so terrify them, as they all kneeled down imploring mercy, and forgiveness. (APC 71)

[31] John Birkenhead, *A Sermon preached before his Majestie at Christ-Church in Oxford* (Oxford, 1644), 13. Like most absolutists, Birkenhead, however, did argue that there was one instance where subjects could resist the commands of a monarch: if the sovereign's orders were incompatible with the law of God. *Ibid.*, 12, 13. Yet Sommerville argues that 'a subject had to know, and not merely to believe, that his Prince's commands were ungodly' and a subject none the less was 'obligated to meekly accept' any penalties the sovereign might 'impose on them for their disobedience'. Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots*, 37–8.

[32] See Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640–1660* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 105.

Like the representation of religion in *The Blazing World*, power is maintained not only through Machiavellian leadership skills, but through the appropriation of technologies that appear as religious miracles: her pistol is used as an instrument to manipulate and to induce obedience in the population. The depiction of sovereign power as something derived *merely* through deception and scientific technology serves to demystify divine right ideology. Nigel Smith explains that for those who advocated monarchical government, power was understood as deriving from God alone:

> For Royalists, the belief that the King corresponded on earth to God's power in heaven, thus discounting any claims to the original consent of the people in establishing monarchy, was as comprehensively substantiated as it was widespread, drawing on scriptural, rhetorical and logical resources to confirm itself.[33]

For example, Birkenhead argues that 'there is no power but of God' as he warns against resisting a ruler; 'lest we will be found fighters against God'.[34] Sovereign power is derived from and implemented by God alone, it is not derived from people or earthly means. Consequently, from a divine right perspective, resisting earthly authority could equate to an indirect rebellion against divine authority.

In contrast to the tenets of royalist politics, an ideology of self-defence is reflected in an anonymous pamphlet printed in 1643, where the metaphor of chastity is used to encourage resistance to political authority. This pamphlet is comparable to 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' in that it uses the example of rape to encourage resistance to political authority. The pamphlet claims that 'it is lawfull [for people] to defend themselves against any private man that would offer violence to their chastity. Neither can any law of any Country justly deny this; For chastity is an Inherent good of which there can be no pretence, why any should be robbed, or deprived of it.'[35] A subject cannot be denied their inviolable right to defend his or her chastity. The concept of chastity is also linked with property rights within this pamphlet, since 'God no where disallowes absolutely the defense of our very goods, and so of our persons, from the outrages of any private violence' and 'No Law of any Country can justly deny this.'[36] Likewise, Miseria provides a similar argument as she conflates property with chastity, utilizing the language of property rights to

[33] *Ibid*., 100. [34] Birkenhead, *Sermon preached before his Majestie*, 3.
[35] Anon., *A few propositions shewing the lawfullnesse of defence against the injurious attempts of outragious violence* (London, 1643), sig. A2r.
[36] *Ibid*., sig. A2v.

persuade the Prince that his attempted rape is not lawful, 'for why should you rob me of that which Nature freely gave? And it is an injustice to take the goods from the right owners without their consent' (APC 52).

By arguing against rape within the discourse of property rights, Cavendish highlights women as political subjects in civil war debates about self-defence, but she also uses language notably similar to that of parliamentarian polemics, which used self-defence as a grounding principle for challenging the authority of the monarch. For example, in 1642, parliament announced that it was time 'to stand upon our defense, which nature teacheth every man to provide for'.[37] Miseria's description of her chastity as being a form of property is not unheard of in early modern romances. For example, Sidney's *Old Arcadia*, written at the end of the sixteenth century, portrays Pamela's chastity as property, in so far as she nearly 'found herself robbed of that she had laid in store as her dearest jewel'.[38] Even so, Pamela's elopement with Musidorus is interpreted as a crime against her father: Musidorus had 'ravished her not from herself, yet he ravished her from him that owed her, which was her father'.[39] Pamela's chastity is not described as her own property, but is legally regarded as the object of 'a most execrable theft', not from herself, but from the patriarch of her family. Cavendish's Miseria, in contrast, uses political language of property rights to articulate not only that her body is her *own* property, but more importantly, that a foreign, female slave has the right to kill or harm a prince who threatens her personal safety or property.

It is significant that these arguments are expressed during the politically volatile civil war period, since the romance registers contemporary debates concerning who has the right to self-defence and in what circumstances it should be allowed. Parliamentary apologists justified the regicide on the premise of self-preservation and insisted that they were driven to self-defence when they tried and executed Charles I. Yet Barbara Donagan claims that it was the parliament, not individuals, who were driven to defend themselves, since parliamentarian arguments concerning self-defence were 'in no way an argument sanctioning the individual rebel or inspired assassin'.[40] Parliamentarians and royalists alike asserted

[37] England and Wales Parliament, *A remonstrance of the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament* (London, 1642), 55.

[38] Sidney, *Old Arcadia*, 265. [39] *Ibid.*, 351.

[40] Barbara Donagan, 'Casuistry and Allegiance in the English Civil War', in Derek Hirst and Richard Strier (eds.), *Writing and Political Engagement in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 101.

that private individuals were not meant to actively resist government, and it was a widely circulated belief that individuals could never employ force against sovereign power; this was so even among thinkers who wanted to limit its power.[41] For example, though parliamentarian Henry Vane believed that people have the right to resist a prince, he none the less argues that this can only be done via government officials, since 'none are Judges of the Power and Priviledges of *Parliaments*, but themselves. For admit once, that [Parliament's] Judgment may be called in question, and disputed by private persons … [then] the *Fundamentals* of Government are plucked up by the roots.'[42] Consequently, only the parliament could have the authority to rebel against a monarch. The much more radical view was that which held that *private* individuals, and not just parliaments or communities, had certain inalienable rights.[43]

Significantly, Cavendish uses the character of an individual with no status and power to articulate revolutionary ideas concerning tyrannicide. Though she was formerly a Lady, while attempting to murder the Prince, Miseria is a female, foreigner and slave who is meant to become a prostitute. The text presents the issue of whether it is justifiable for such a character as Miseria to defend herself and kill a tyrannical prince in defence of her personal security. But such arguments allowing cases where a subject may kill a prince could have implications for the complex nexus of hierarchical relations in early modern society. For example, although the royalist clergyman Peter Heylyn held some moderate, constitutionalist views, in so far as he maintained that England had 'A rare mixture of government … wherein the *King* hath his full prerogative, the *Nobles* all due respects, and the *People* … are masters of their own purses, and have a strong hand in the making of their own Lawes', he nevertheless utilized the language of the Great Chain of Being to emphasize the importance of obedience to *all* superiors:[44]

> There is a golden Chain in *Politics*, and every link thereof hath some relation and dependence upon that before; so far forth as *inferiour Magistrates* do command the People, according to that power and those instruments which is communicated to them by the *supreme Prince*, the *Subject* is obliged to submit unto them, without any manner of *Resistance*.[45]

[41] Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots*, 70, 75. While absolutists generally believed that private individuals could defend themselves against the onslaught of another individual, 'they could never use force against a monarch'. *Ibid*., 70.
[42] Henry Vane, *The tryal of Sir Henry Vane* (London, 1662), 38.
[43] Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots*, 69–70.
[44] Peter Heylyn, *France Painted to the Life* (London, 1656), 217.
[45] Peter Heylyn, *The rebells catechism* (London, 1643), 16.

Heylyn envisions a complex matrix of relations that is entirely dependent upon a doctrine of nonresistance. All hierarchies are interrelated and dependent upon one another. Ann Hughes explains that during the early modern period, 'all hierarchical relationships were seen as inextricably connected', since fathers, kings and God were comparable 'and each type of rule was a model for, and helped to justify, the others'.[46] Since within the household husbands and fathers were perceived as analogous to monarchs, perhaps wives, within the context of Miseria's arguments for self-defence, could also assert rights within a marriage. Husbands were not prohibited by law from beating their wives. However, women who killed their husbands were severely punished. Such women were deemed to have committed petty treason and could be burned at the stake.[47]

Though it could be argued that Miseria is foreign, and therefore there is no political relation, obligation or contract between her and the sovereign, she none the less claims that she has certain inviolable rights. As Miseria claims the attempted rape would rob that 'which Nature freely gave', her argument justifying the morality of killing a prince is based entirely upon the premise that his actions contradict Nature. Consequently, Miseria evokes the concept of the Laws of Nature, which can be understood as certain unchanging rules which are so just that they are applicable to all humanity.[48] Since such laws were believed to be derived from 'truths', they would be the basis for authorizing state laws and notions of morality. R. S. White argues that the tradition of natural law was 'fairly implacably patriarchal, and all the commentators in both their language and the narratives tacitly assume its operation to be an exclusively male domain'.[49] An exception to this tradition can be found in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, where he explains that because there are no social contracts 'in this condition of mere nature', then 'Dominion is in the Mother'.[50] Cavendish also suggests that natural law applies to women through the character of Miseria, who believes that her chastity and her property were freely given to her by Nature, thus robbing her of them would flout natural law.

Miseria's belief that 'Nature freely gave' her certain rights corresponds to republican understandings of liberty. Skinner asserts that it was conventional wisdom among republicans to understand *liberty* as the natural

[46] Ann Hughes, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1991), 65.
[47] Tim Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 198, 23.
[48] For an introduction to the meaning and use of Natural Law in Renaissance literature, see R. S. White, 'Natural Law in History and Renaissance Literature', in *Natural Law in English Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1–20.
[49] *Ibid*., xv. [50] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 140.

state of humanity, as exemplified by Milton, who argued in *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* that no one 'can be so stupid to deny that all men naturally were borne free'.[51] Such ideas about liberty gave rise to the notion of natural rights that should be protected by the government.[52] However, the Prince has a very different interpretation of natural rights: he employs a similar language of natural law to justify his intended assault, by claiming that it would be 'lawful by nature' (APC 59). Likewise, the bawd uses the Laws of Nature to persuade Miseria to become a prostitute, by arguing that her old age makes her 'long acquainted with [Nature's] laws' and provides her with authoritative knowledge regarding what Nature intends for women and their bodies (APC 49). Natural law has no consistent definition in the text, yet is evoked by characters to further their own interests – whether it be rape, trafficking or self-preservation.

The text emphasizes the difficulties of defining natural law and understanding its exact relationship to human society. Renaissance political thinking also had difficulties defining natural law; there was no unanimity among writers about what natural law meant and whence it derived – even though it was evoked in the civil war era by theorists across the political spectrum to justify contradictory political opinions. For example, while Milton argues that people can lawfully rebel against a tyrant, since they are guided 'by the very principles of nature in [them]',[53] Hobbes contends that the natural state of humankind is anarchic war, and the natural and rational desire for self-preservation impels human beings to establish governments: only sovereign power has the capacity to effectively implement natural law so to maintain peace and stability.

In sharp contrast to Hobbes's theory of monarchy, in which the fundamental purpose of sovereign power is to quit, end and impede the 'natural' war, sovereign power throughout Cavendish's narrative *does not* protect people from pervasive violence, brutality and murder. In Miseria's attempts to escape rape by the Prince, she disguises herself as a boy and travels to various kingdoms by sea. One of the kingdoms she encounters was governed by a monarchy that 'was tyrannical, for all the common people were slaves to the royal' (APC 69). Yet, the people were not just enslaved by an arbitrary power, they were cannibalized by the aristocracy,

> for they had a custom in that country, to keep great store of slaves, both males and females, to breed on, as we do breed flocks of sheep, and other

[51] Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, 19, and John Milton, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (London, 1649), 8.

[52] Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, 19.

[53] Milton, *Tenure of Kings*, 18.

> cattle[.] The children were eaten as we do lambs or veal, for young and tender meat; the elder for beef and mutton, as stronger meats. (APC 69)

Miseria and her adopted father, a ship's master, are appalled by this government and after convincing the population they are divine, they ensure that this practice does not continue. Though Cavendish has been routinely described as staunchly royalist, this description of small children being eaten by royalty is certainly not a benign or harmonious view of monarchy. In fact, in *The Moderate*, a Leveller newsbook, an anonymous pamphleteer uses a similar analogy, arguing that because of policies of the king, 'we are bought and sold as sheep for slaughter'.[54] While puritans such as Lucy Hutchinson warned that the king was not 'satisfied till the whole land was reduced to perfect slavery', F. D. Dow suggests that for most republicans the 'concept of the "people" was unlikely to embrace the poor', nor were they likely to be 'concerned with the wide range of social and economic issues which affected the daily lives of the "poorer sort"'.[55] Yet Cavendish draws the reader's attention to the atrocities of the kingdom's slavery, even though slavery was permitted in the British empire, and many political thinkers, whether royalist or parliamentarian, did not dispute the practice.[56] Creating a parallel with the protagonist, Miseria, the people who are hunted and cannibalized are not granted control over their bodies: they are subject to the tyrannical desires of a monstrous aristocracy who consume the population, as the 'women were common to everyone's use, unless it were those women of the royal blood' (APC 69). Yet, the subjects are further deprived of the status of humans as they are not only cannibalized and bred as animals, but are hunted for sport, since 'the women hunted the females, the men the males' (APC 65). They exist in a state worse than slavery, since all areas of early modern culture, whether it was theology, humanism or science, represented animals as the antithesis of humans.[57] As argued in Chapter 1, to assert or demonstrate human supremacy, writers often discussed the inferiority of animals.[58] But in the absence of restraints placed upon the aristocracy, Cavendish depicts a ruling class which induces moral chaos, as the common people are treated like animals.

[54] Anon., 'From Tuesday Novemb. 14 to Tuesday November 21. 1648', *The Moderate* 19, 14–21 November, ed. Gilbert Mabbott (London, 1648), 154.
[55] Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of Colonel Hutchinson*, ed. Julius Hutchinson (London: Dent, 1965), 68. F. D. Dow, *Radicalism in the English Revolution 1640–1660* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 29.
[56] Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots*, 69, 137.
[57] Erica Fudge, *Perceiving Animals: Humans and Beasts in Early Modern English Culture* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 4.
[58] *Ibid*., 4.

Depicting cannibalism in the New World was not unusual, and colonialism was sometimes justified through the belief that natives violated natural law and needed to be conquered and reformed by Europeans.[59] Yet, Cavendish's text differs in that tyranny in the story is not derived from lack of government or laws, but instead is caused by a system of monarchy where the aristocracy has too much power over the common people. Significantly Cavendish claims that the royals of this macabre political system do not look entirely foreign, since they have skin that is 'wrought, like the Britons' (APC 69). Hobbes argued in *Leviathan* that 'the savage people in many places of *America*, except the government of small Families, the concord whereof dependeth on naturall lust, have no government at all; and live at this day in that brutish manner' of the warlike state of nature.[60] However, the natives in 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' clearly do have government, one that resembles European monarchy since there is a king, an organized religion and an aristocracy, but one that has failed to uphold what Hobbes believes is the basic obligation of a government – to protect the people from harm or death. Furthermore, juxtaposing this kingdom with Miseria's arguments for self-defence suggests that if Miseria claims the right to murder and resist sexual assault by a king, then the people of this kingdom would hence have the right to overthrow their government to also protect themselves from rape. Unlike Hobbes, who claims that contracts and sovereign power control the brutish laws of nature, Cavendish takes royalist ideas to a logical extreme, portraying a grotesque vision of what could come from royalist ideology where royal power manifests as an absolute tyranny: where a monarchical government can systematically murder, rape and treat the population like animals.

Not only are distinctions between humans and animals conflated, but also class rank is complicated in the text. Kate Lilley argues that the kingdom that is discovered in 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' is 'hierarchically colour-coded', with profound physical differences between the nobility and the rest of the people.[61] Initially, the two classes appear as two distinct species, for 'all those of the royal blood, were of a different colour from the rest of the people, they were of a perfect orange colour, their hair coal black' (APC 68). In contrast, the skin of the 'common' people is

[59] For example, Alberico Gentili, a professor at Oxford University, argued that New World inhabitants practised 'cannibalism and bestial practices', which was 'contrary to human nature', and such practices justified Spanish conquest in the region. See Brian Lockey, 'Conquest and English Legal Identity in Renaissance Ireland', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 65.4 (2004): 545, 548.

[60] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 89.

[61] Kate Lilley (1994), 'Introduction', in *Margaret Cavendish: 'The Blazing World' and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (London: Penguin Books, 1994), xxi.

'of a deep purple' (APC 63). Although this appears like an extreme hierarchical fantasy, the specific colouring of the people would be a powerful signifier in early modern culture. Sumptuary legislation, which regulated the personal lives of people, forbade all but the highest ranking in society to wear purple.[62] The charged politics surrounding the colour purple are evoked in the royalist newsbook, *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, which declares 'the *Purple-robe*, which ought to be accounted venerable and sacred, shall be prostituted to the lust and pleasure of the *Prophane vulgar*'.[63] As a powerful symbol of authority, the purple robe of the monarch has divine status in itself, unlike the people of the kingdom, who are '*Prophane*' and '*vulgar*' in comparison. Not only did sumptuary laws regulate colour, but fabrics were also used to designate class distinctions, and silk was a material that signified royalty almost as much as purple.[64] Thus it is quite significant that the *non-aristocratic* people wear a material made from barks of trees that 'looked as fine as silk, and as soft' (APC 63). Their hair is 'as white as milk, and like wool', which would perhaps remind seventeenth-century readers of the elaborate white wigs often made of animal hair and worn by the upper classes (APC 63). Though sumptuary laws were curbed by 1604, Aileen Ribeiro argues that 'the idea, in principle, of some kind of sumptuary legislation remained in many people's minds' later in the century.[65] Susan Vincent explains that as 'a cultural production of the privileged … apparel had a declared centrality to the realization of power, wealth, status and gender'.[66] Thus, it is quite significant that Cavendish, who is often presumed to be a staunch royalist, uses royal signifiers to describe the common people, who are simultaneously victimized by their monarch in various, horrific ways.

Though the depiction of the cannibalistic kingdom is in itself suggestive of anti-monarchic politics, there is yet another instance in the text where a monarch enslaves people. For example, 'the most vulgar people' in the Kingdom of Amour 'were rather slaves than subjects' (APC 89). Consequently, the Prince, the King of Amour and the cannibalizing

[62] For example, a statute of 1562 declares that nobody can wear any 'silk of the color of purple' except the king and queen and their close relatives. '496. Briefing Statutes of Apparel [Privy Council]', in *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, vol. II, *The Later Tudors (1553–1587)*, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1969), 202.

[63] Samuel Sheppard, John Cleveland and Marchamont Nedham, *Mercurius Pragmaticus*, nos. 36, 37 (London, 1648), ccc–cccI.

[64] Frances Elizabeth Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1926), 103, 115, 228–9.

[65] Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1986), 74, 87.

[66] Susan Vincent, *Dressing the Elite: Clothes in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2003), 6.

kingdom all have members of the ruling class who enslave their people in various ways. Cavendish is not the only political thinker to associate monarchy with slavery. In *An Act for the Abolishing the Kingly Office*, published in 1648/9, parliament pronounced that sovereign power had historically enslaved the people: '[sovereign power was] dangerous to the liberty, safety and publique interest of the people, and that for the most part, use hath been made of the Regal power and prerogative, to oppress, impoverish and enslave the subject'.[67] Though both royalists and parliamentarians used the rhetoric of slavery in their writings, this Act resembles Cavendish's literary representation of people being enslaved, oppressed and endangered specifically because of a monarchical political system.

II Popular sovereignty and consent

Though the text sympathizes with parliamentarian defences of tyrannicide against arbitrary power, in its representation of popular sovereignty it goes beyond parliamentarian politics. For example, the people in the country of Amity experience popular sovereignty after they prepared to rebel against the Queen's radical decision to appoint Miseria, the slave, who is disguised as a man, as viceregent and heir to the kingdom:

> [They] fell a murmuring, not only in that she left a stranger, but a poor slave, who was taken prisoner and sold, and a person who was of no higher birth than a shipmaster's son, that he should govern the kingdom, and rule the people; whereupon they began to design his death, which was thought best to be put in execution when she was gone.
>
> But he behaved himself with such an affable demeanor, accompanied with such smooth, civil and pleasing words, expressing the sweetness of his nature by his actions of clemency, distributing justice with such even weights, ordering everything with that prudence, governing with that wisdom, as begot such love in every heart, that their mouths ran over with praises, ringing out the sound with the clappers of their tongues into every ear, and by their obedience showed their duty and zeal to all his commands, or rather to his persuasions; so gently did he govern. (APC 92)

Although Miseria has no wealth, status or royal blood and is merely a 'poor slave', she maintains her sovereignty thanks to the people's opinion and her capacity for gentle leadership rather than force, hereditary lineage or notions of divine right, demonstrating a successful instance of popular sovereignty in the text: successful since Miseria becomes a heroic figure

[67] England and Wales Parliament, *An Act for the Abolishing the Kingly Office* (London, 1648/9).

who saves the Queen and the nation. Although her 'justice', 'prudence' and 'wisdom' might merely demonstrate an endorsement of the four cardinal humanist ideals of justice, prudence, temperance and fortitude within princely government, Cavendish in fact links such leadership with a popular election. When it was pronounced in the text that the 'Prince should be Viceroy in the Kingdom of Amity, all the soldiers, as if they had but one voice, cried out, Travellia shall be Viceregency; which was granted to pacify them' (APC 116). Although David L. Smith has noted that even moderate, constitutional royalists did not believe that there should be limitations on the monarch's power to choose military commanders or advisers,[68] we see here that Miseria is clearly elected by the army, rather than the monarch. Despite Hero Chalmers's claim that Cavendish's martial heroines of the 1650s in her fiction and drama were used to 'reassert the semiotics of royalism' by drawing from a royalist tradition of the *femme forte*, Miseria more closely represents 'agitators' from the parliamentary army who were elected by the soldiers to represent them and redress their grievances.[69] Miseria's election by the army not only situates women in republican leadership positions, it also further echoes Leveller beliefs concerning equality and government by consent. Such ideals are what Andrew Sharp claims were 'to mark the Leveller movement from all other radical movements of the time'.[70] Some Levellers even advocated suffrage rights for all men. For example, Colonel Rainborough exclaimed that the 'the poorest man in England is nott att all bound in a stricte sence to that Government that hee hath not had a voice to putt himself under'.[71]

The popular election of Miseria by the army against the very dictates of the monarch calls into question Broad and Green's contention that Cavendish's political theory is one where subjects can maintain their liberty of conscience, but only so long as they 'still practise an outward obedience to their ruler's judgments', which is viewed as the best way to ensure peace and security in society.[72] This would mean, according to

[68] David L. Smith, *Constitutional Royalism*, 7.

[69] Hero Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers 1650–1689* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 40, 46. Austin Woolrych, 'The Debates from the Perspective of the Army', in Michael Mendle (ed.), *The Putney Debates of 1647: The Army, the Levellers and the English State* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 58–60.

[70] Andrew Sharp, *The English Levellers* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), ix.

[71] Charles Harding Firth, ed., *The Clarke Papers*, vol. I (Camden Society, 1891), 301. However, most servants, apprentices, labourers and paupers were excluded from arguments for suffrage since, like women and children, they were believed to be represented by the head of the household. None the less, this would have doubled the number of men who could vote. See Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603–1714* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961), 130–1.

[72] Jacqueline Broad and Karen Green, 'Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle', in *A History of Women's Political Thought in Europe, 1400–1700* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 217.

Broad and Green, that 'Cavendish's views about liberty of conscience are not, therefore, at odds with her royalist sentiments'.[73] However, in the text, the entire army publicly refuses to obey their sovereign, who thereby concedes to their opinion. This fact presents a challenge to Broad and Green's belief that Cavendish held 'a conviction that civil war must be avoided at all costs, that citizens owe an absolute obedience to the government, and that governors ought not to tolerate dissent or faction of any kind'.[74] Furthermore, this popular election is not the cause of political instability. Nor is it in line with a political theory grounded upon the necessity of outward obedience to a sovereign.

The popular election of Miseria is also noteworthy considering the period in which the text was written. A notion developed in England sometime between 1644 and 1647 that expanded the concept of popular sovereignty to include the populace of the country rather than only the elected representatives in parliament, though this notion of the people did not include servants, vagrants or women.[75] Indeed, parliamentarian critics were generally not concerned with the rights or capacities of women or the poor. However, Katharine Gillespie explains that this altering of the understanding of the source and derivation of authority allowed a very different theoretical foundation for politics:

> As a founding principle, this radically transformed the terms upon which the authority of the ruler was predicated from a force that was commensurate with a higher, more preeminent law to one that was limited by that higher law because it flowed upward from the consent of the governed, each of whom was naturally empowered by their own status as an adult individual endowed with certain rights directly by God, rather than downward from God through a totem of patriarchal heads.[76]

Henry Parker provides an example of this understanding of popular sovereignty, as he declares that 'Power is originally inherent in the people'.[77] Likewise, William Prynne argues – in contrast to the tenets of divine right – that the people *create* the monarch: 'the Authority and power of the people which creates the Prince and Princely power, and augments or limits it … must needs be greater, then the Prince or royall power'.[78]

[73] *Ibid*. [74] *Ibid*., 201–2.
[75] Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 97.
[76] Katharine Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century: English Women's Writing and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 117.
[77] Parker, *Observations*, 1.
[78] William Prynne, *The Soveraigne Power of Parliaments and Kingdomes* (London: Michael Sparke Senior, 1643), 36.

Power is not propagated downward from God above, but is created from and by the consent of the populace. Cavendish's narrative demonstrates her interest in this political development, not only in the popular election of Miseria, but also in so far as she pointedly includes masterless men in the story, as the Prince and his pirates attempt to create an experimental 'commonwealth' derived from popular sovereignty (APC 87):

> [He] ended the strife amongst them, and begot from them such love and respect, that they made him their arbitrator, and divider of the spoils; which he performed with that justice and discretion to each one, that they made him their governor and chief ruler over them; which power he used with that clemency and wisdom, that he was esteemed rather as their god than their captain, giving him all ceremonious obedience. (APC 78)

The Prince is elected as their leader and obtains divine status through his leadership skills, popular sovereignty and consent, rather than hereditary right.[79] Deborah Boyle has argued that in *Orations* Cavendish later advocates a 'negative view of democracy' and 'she simply does not trust the majority of people to choose wisely'.[80] It would seem, however, that such a view that Cavendish's oeuvre overall is hostile to democracy is belied by 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity'. Republished in 1671, the text clearly shows leaders being elected by popular support of pirates, soldiers and the entire populace of the country of Amity, rather than holding office by hereditary right. Thus it is not the case that Cavendish consistently idealizes absolute sovereignty or hereditary hierarchy.

By the 1650s, the opinion that government *was* derived from the people was gaining currency, yet republicans still hesitated to assign active political rights to the wider populace, which demonstrates that the gap between the political ideologies of the Crown and its opponents could actually be quite narrow.[81] Even though the people were now perceived as the originators of government, parliamentarian theorists none the less reserved political power to the elite, in the form of the parliament, with the contention that the people did not have active, direct political power.[82] For example, parliamentarian writer Charles Herle argues that the 'Parliament is the peoples own consent, which once pass'd they cannot revoke'. and

[79] The Prince, however, does abandon his people and kingdom to pursue his individual desires. Perhaps this demonstrates Cavendish's rather pragmatic argument in 'A Moral Tale of the Ant and the Bee' that 'it is not such or such kinds of Governments, but such and such wayes of governing, that make a Commonwealth flourish' (*NP* 165).

[80] Deborah Boyle, 'Fame, Virtue, and Government: Margaret Cavendish on Ethics and Politics', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 67.2 (2006): 283.

[81] Dow, *Radicalism in the English Revolution*, 10.

[82] *Ibid.*, 14, 18 and 19.

that 'the people have reserved no power in themselves from themselves in Parliament'.[83] Active political rights were not extended to middle- and lower-class men, nor were women included. Sommerville argues that 'most political thinkers' during this time 'were agreed that the mass of the people was fit only to be ruled'.[84]

The distinction between royalists and parliamentarians was not always so clear-cut as portrayed in contemporary criticism,[85] but nevertheless ideas presented within 'Assaulted and Pursed Chastity' are out of alignment with royalist polemics, particularly in so far as it juxtaposes examples of popular sovereignty against violent, cannibalistic and enslaving monarchies – which would be incongruous with a staunchly royalist worldview. Indeed, Cavendish's interest in exploring republican ideas relating to women, slaves and masterless men highlights an even more revolutionary aspect of her thinking. Such politics leans more towards those of the radical Levellers, who argued not only for equality and greater suffrage rights for the male populace, but for the people's active political participation and agreement in government as well.[86] Although the Prince's commonwealth later becomes a 'Monarchy', where he 'reign[s] in his watery kingdom', Miseria seems to have a different relation with her people (APC 78). After successfully leading her army, Miseria indicates that she will actively serve the populace, since she offers her to them her 'life, health, or beauty, peace, pleasure, or plenty … to sacrifice to [their] service' (APC 116). Furthermore, the Prince reverses the master–slave dynamics of power within the narrative, as he claims that Miseria 'should also govern him' after their marriage (APC 116). Although such language of power might be interpreted as the language of Petrarchan love and desire, Miseria responds, locating such desire in relation to state governance, claiming that the Prince 'should govern her, and she would govern the kingdom' (APC 116). Here Cavendish is portraying both government and marital relations as an active, reciprocal arrangement of power between rulers and

[83] Charles Herle, *A Fuller Answer to a Treatise Written by Doctor Ferne* (London, 1642), 25.

[84] Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots*, 61.

[85] For example, see Barbara Donagan, 'Varieties of Royalism', in Jason McElligott and David L. Smith (eds.), *Royalists and Royalism during the English Civil Wars* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 66–88.

[86] Although some Levellers seemed to advocate suffrage for all men, Hill argues that even for Levellers, '"Free" Englishmen were those who could freely dispose of their labour, of their property in their own persons'. Hill, *Century of Revolution*, 131. For more information about the philosophical underpinnings of Levellers, see John Sanderson, *'But the People's Creatures': The Philosophical Basis of the English Civil War* (Manchester University Press, 1989). Sanderson argues that the 'Levellers were in effect demanding a secular republic characterised by a substantial degree of social and political equality'. *Ibid.*, 107.

people, or husband and wife, while including a much wider view of what constitutes 'the people' in a republic.

Cavendish's interest in expanding political rights to include women was perhaps influenced by Leveller women, who were active in politics.[87] The Leveller John Lilburne radically included women in his arguments concerning equality:

> [A]ll and every particular and individual man and woman, that ever breathed in the world … are, and were by nature all equall and alike in power, dignity, authority, and majesty, none of them having (by nature) any authority dominion or majesteriall power, one over and above another.[88]

Although Lilburne suggests that men and women are none the less naturally equal, the Levellers did not generally include women in their arguments for expanded male suffrage. Ann Hughes claims that in Leveller discourse, women were not perceived as having equal political rights, and that the movement still 'offered clear justification for the male head of household's monopoly of political rights'.[89] 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity', however, goes further than that by articulating popular sovereignty and individual right in the context of a female protagonist who performs a range of male political leadership roles as a military commander, priest and viceregent; thereby she includes women within civil war theories concerning individual rights.

As Miseria becomes a great military general through her own talents and merits, she later reveals her true sex to her army, who 'gave a shout, and cried out, Heaven bless you, of what sex soever you be' (APC 115). Not only are Miseria's public service, virtue and heroism undisturbed by her previous status as slave, her gender is not an obstacle to the army's 'affections of love … [which] came freely from [their] souls' (APC 116). Hence, Cavendish is portraying a model of leadership based upon merit rather than fixed social roles or aristocratic lineage.

[87] See Ann Hughes, 'Gender and Politics in Leveller Literature', in Susan D. Amussen and Mark A. Kishlansky (eds.), *Political Culture and Cultural Politics in Early Modern England: Essays Presented to David Underdown* (Manchester University Press, 1995), 162. For more information about Leveller women's involvement in politics see Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent*, 85–92.

[88] John Lilburne, *The Free-Man's Freedome Vindicated* (London, 1646), 11.

[89] Hughes, 'Gender and Politics', 181. According to Crawford, even 'female relatives of the Leveller leaders, Elizabeth Lilburne, Mary Overton and Katharine Chidley, justified their involvement in terms of women's customary roles. Nevertheless, despite the conservatism of their rhetoric, the female culture from which women's argument developed was significant in allowing a tradition of female activism and in sustaining an alternative view of community.' Patricia Crawford, '"The poorest she": Women and Citizenship in Early Modern England', in Michael Mendle (ed.), *The Putney Debates of 1647: The Army, the Levellers and the English State* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 216.

Cavendish's depictions of successful popular sovereignty in her romance have further political significance in that they challenge Hobbes's view of liberty. Hobbes defines 'A FREE-MAN' as 'he, that in those things, which by his strength and wit he is able to do, is not hindred to doe what he has a will to'.[90] For Hobbes, a free-man is simply a person who is uninhibited from exercising his or her will. Skinner argues that this definition 'is perhaps the most outrageous moment of effrontery in the whole of the *Leviathan*', since it contradicts an entire tradition of Roman and republican thought that believed men were free *only* when they were independent from arbitrary power and lived in a free state rather than under a monarchy.[91] These classical republican arguments rose to 'unparalleled prominence' during the civil war.[92] Yet Hobbes suggests that liberty is merely the *lack of external impediments* (on the exercise of one's will) and that the state of nature is the *only* condition in which individuals could experience full liberty. To Hobbes, laws are an external impediment to liberty understood according to the pure signification of the term: laws limit or restrict the individual from doing every thing he or she might have a will to do. Hobbes's definition of liberty therefore indicates that republics are then no freer than monarchies.[93]

Cavendish, in contrast, portrays monarchies as offering less freedom compared to political systems in which subjects have a voice in the political process. Cavendish's narrative juxtaposes a variety of political worlds, ranging from monarchies that profit from the trafficking of women or that hunt and cannibalize their subjects to political systems modelled upon republican principles of popular sovereignty in which subjects not only 'love and respect' their leaders but, more importantly, choose them. Such a comparison of political realities shows people under monarchies living in slavery without freedom, contrasted with subjects, such as the pirates and the army, who have fewer hindrances to liberty and who have more agency in government. Hence, Cavendish's notion of liberty has more affinity with republican ideas that asserted government existed in order to serve and obey the people.

Another important parallel between republicanism and ideas presented within the text concerns the question of arbitrary power in relation to liberty. Despite Broad and Green's contention that '[l]ike Hobbes, Cavendish maintains that obedience to a common power is a practical necessity',[94]

[90] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 146.
[91] Quentin Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 151–2, 154.
[92] *Ibid*., 142. [93] *Ibid*., 157.
[94] Broad and Green, *History of Women's Political Thought*, 209.

we see in the text how Cavendish instead evokes the republican notion characterized by Skinner, that if a ruler has the power to interfere arbitrarily in an individual's affairs, even if that ruler never intends to exercise such power, then the individual cannot be free.[95] This is emphasized in the depiction of the kingdom of aristocrats who hunt and feed on their subjects. After Miseria and her adopted father reform the kingdom and its unsavoury practices, they 'lived with great splendour, love and admiration amongst' the people, so much so that 'their persons were thought divine, their words were laws, and their actions examples, which they kept, and the people followed' (APC 75). Yet, regardless of the wealth, love, power and status they obtained, both choose to abandon this world. They instead 'like wise men that seek a retired and secured life from the pomp of dangerous glories, bethought themselves how they might get away, and return into their own countries again; for an humble and mean cottage is better beloved by the owner, than the bravest and stateliest palace, if it be another's' (APC 79). Miseria and her adopted father abandon a life of splendour and power on account of their belief that the monarch could, in theory, have arbitrarily interfered with their autonomy. Hence, they find the sense of freedom afforded by a 'mean cottage' to be preferable to an unfree life in a stately palace with its attendant luxuries, power and status as well as its 'dangerous glories'. Detlefsen suggests that Cavendish finds fear and liberty to be incompatible:

> Suppose that the sovereign did impose laws that exercised their power through fear, and this fear effectively directed the will. This would be a case of a lack of individual freedom for Cavendish (in contrast with Hobbes), for the will would be acting in accordance with something other than its own rational motivation. It would be forced into its actions through something that Cavendish considers external to the will itself – prior, fearful thoughts, for example. Fear and liberty are inconsistent for Cavendish. As a result, the realm of unfreedom is considerably wider for Cavendish than it is for Hobbes.[96]

Despite the advantages of living in a stately palace, an individual may be less free, on account of the fear they experience in that state, than a person who lives modestly yet autonomously in a cottage of their own.

[95] Quentin Skinner, 'Freedom as the Absence of Arbitrary Power', in Cécile Laborde and John Maynor (eds.), *Republicanism and Political Theory* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 88.

[96] Karen Detlefsen, 'Margaret Cavendish and Thomas Hobbes on Freedom, Education, and Women', in Nancy J. Hirschmann and Joanne H. Wright (eds.), *Feminist Interpretations of Thomas Hobbes* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 158–9.

Cavendish also offers a wide depiction of freedom when she portrays the Prince ruling the island commonwealth of pirates after capturing the disguised Miseria and her adopted father. When he discovers the true identity of Miseria, who has now presumably become his de facto subject, he threatens to assault her 'unless she would consent to live with him as his wife, in that island, wherein, said he, we may live free, and secure, without a disturbance' (APC 83). If Miseria consents to this contract, she will have a type of security and peace like that which Hobbesian contracts ideally would procure. Broad and Green argue that Cavendish's political theory is grounded on the premise 'that the sovereign's office is to secure peace and protection for citizens'.[97] If Cavendish's political theory is truly focused primarily on security in the state, the Prince's proposal should be enough to create a satisfying contract. This is particularly so since Miseria is undoubtedly attracted to the Prince, and later willingly marries him, on the news of his wife's death.[98] The Prince offers 'secur[ity], without a disturbance' on his island kingdom, but the proposed arrangement would go against Miseria's conscience (APC 83). While he claims that they would 'live free', Miseria would not have experienced liberty even though she would have 'no outward accusers' on this island commonwealth, 'yet [her] conscience will condemn [her]' (APC 83, 84). Miseria does not have genuine liberty in so far as the proposed contract contradicts her own internal conscience. Hence, the text provides a wide depiction of liberty wherein freedom of conscience within the establishment of contracts is necessary for an individual to have liberty. Consequently, Miseria and her adopted father outwardly pretend to accept the Prince's contract and appear loyal, yet in reality devise a plan of escape. This suggests that outward shows of loyalty do not actually induce political stability, thus casting doubt on Broad and Green's belief that Cavendish allows for people to have freedom of conscience inwardly, if only they show an outward obedience and submit to a coercive power for the sake of security: 'For Cavendish, a severe ruler is – paradoxically – the protector of human liberties: only by voluntarily giving up their absolute liberty to a coercive power can human beings have the peace and security they desire.'[99] Although their interpretation of Cavendish is based upon the politics of *The Blazing World* and

[97] Broad and Green, *History of Women's Political Thought*, 217.

[98] After some time 'she did not dislike his company; and grew to that pass, as to be melancholy when he was gone, blush when he was named, start at his approaching, sigh, weep, grew pale and distempered, yet perceived not, nor knew her disease; besides, she would look often in the glass, curl her hair finely, wash her face cleanly, set her clothes handsomely'. APC 58–9.

[99] Broad and Green, *History of Women's Political Thought*, 213.

Orations, one should note that the Empress of the Blazing World does not request that subjects privately hold their own opinions, but instead wants to persuade them (even if it is through disingenuous religious miracles) because she 'knew well, that belief was a thing not to be forced or pressed upon the people, but to be instilled into their minds by gentle persuasions' (*TBW* 164). Rather than having her subjects merely make an outward show of submission to her religious principles, the Empress instead desires that her people come to genuinely believe in her state religion and regime.

In contrast to the Empress's attempt at persuading the population to believe in her state religion, the Prince attempts to force Miseria into a contract which she feels would be dissonant with her freedom of conscience. Detlefsen argues that Cavendish provides an account of freedom that considers women's unique situation, and that in this regard at least, she diverges from Hobbes. Citing Skinner, Detlefsen demonstrates how Hobbes's theory of negative liberty is frequently depicted as one where a person is unfree to do as they will only whenever their attempt at a particular action is thwarted by an external force or impediment.[100] Yet Skinner contends that Hobbes distinguishes between an impediment (an external force) and an impairment, so he also holds that if an individual is not free because their power is blocked by a physical or psychological impairment, such as a sick man being unable to move from his bed, 'the question of whether the action is one that the agent is or is not free to perform simply does not arise'.[101] For Detlefsen, this distinction between impediment and impairment demonstrates that Hobbes's account of freedom does not allow for gender-specific scenarios.[102] Detlefsen posits that 'Cavendish's account', contrasts with Hobbes's in that she 'is able to say that women are *less* free than are men, should women have less power or ability to act due to socially developed, internal constraints. So for Hobbes, one does not lack freedom should one happen to lack the power to act. For Cavendish, one *does* lack freedom when one lacks power to act.'[103]

Detlefsen points out that in Cavendish's 'plays she clearly articulates the degree to which women have *less power* and thus less freedom than do men for unnatural, wholly conventional reasons, due to their diminished rationality [which is] due to their poor education.'[104] In *The Convent of Pleasure*,

[100] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 146, 149.
[101] Quentin Skinner, 'Thomas Hobbes on the Proper Signification of Liberty: The Prothero Lecture', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 40 (1990): 128.
[102] Detlefsen, 'Margaret Cavendish and Thomas Hobbes', 158.
[103] *Ibid.* [104] *Ibid.*

for example, the protagonist Lady Happy posits that if she 'should Marry the best of Men, if any best there be; yet would a Marry'd life have more crosses and sorrows then pleasure, freedom, or happiness: nay Marriage to those that are virtuous is a greater restraint than a Monastery.'[105] A married woman never truly experiences freedom, regardless of whether she contracts herself to a good, virtuous husband. Similarly, Miseria could not feel free under the Prince's forced marriage contract (even though it might render her secure) or as a powerful member of court under a ruler who could potentially interfere arbitrarily in her affairs. Moreover, 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' stresses that women experience less freedom than men, as demonstrated by Miseria, who is only able to obtain security from the arbitrary power of the Prince when at last she disguises herself as a man and appropriates male roles.

III Slavery and *Oroonoko*

This romance further explores the notion of liberty from arbitrary power in context of slavery. Although critics have not, to date, discussed the meaning of slavery in Cavendish's text, it is a recurring and prominent theme in 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity': the protagonist is enslaved twice, and the prospect of entire nations becoming forced into slavery is a constant threat. References to slavery occur a total of eighteen times within this short story, and even the Queen, 'who was an absolute Princess', is twice enslaved through both violent conquest and love (APC 86). The story demonstrates a preoccupation with defining both freedom and slavery. Anti-slavery sentiments, however, were not necessarily synonymous with anti-royalist thought. In fact, Nicholas Hudson contends that it was conservatives later in the eighteenth century who were the first to instigate an anti-slavery movement.[106]

An example of a Restoration text fusing royalist politics with slavery is Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*, a novella that influenced the abolition of the British slave trade. Within both of these female-authored texts, slavery and politics are central issues. A situating of Cavendish's representation of slavery in relation to *Oroonoko* will provide insight into the politics of anti-slavery rhetoric, and can help facilitate a clearer understanding of Cavendish's political position. Although the novella provides a compassionate representation of the atrocities that occur to Oroonoko, Anita

[105] Margaret Cavendish, *The Convent of Pleasure*, in *Plays, never before printed* (London, 1668), 3.
[106] Nicholas Hudson, '"Britons Never Will be Slaves": National Myth, Conservatism, and the Beginnings of British Antislavery', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 34.4 (2001): 560.

Pacheco claims that Behn herself 'is repelled not by slavery per se, which is unobjectionable when it involves common people'.[107] Likewise, Laura Brown reads *Oroonoko* as a political analogy of the fate of Charles I, where both royal figures are represented as heroic martyrs and victims of mercantile imperialism.[108] In contrast, Oddvar Holmesland notes that Oroonoko himself rebels against his own father and king, and argues instead that the text attempts to bridge the ideological schisms of feudal ideals, individualism, aristocracy and mercantilism. Indeed, *Oroonoko* appears to articulate very contradictory politics regarding slavery.[109] On the one hand, slavery is portrayed as the worst human condition: the 'most disgraceful of any; and to which they a thousand times prefer Death, and implore it'.[110] Yet the text does not entirely provide a clear anti-slavery position, since Oroonoko himself was a prince who had formally trafficked slaves, and this practice is never critiqued in the text. Oroonoko furthermore never regrets or reflects upon his own practice of enslaving others. Oroonoko's ideological position can be better understood and more clearly placed as he rallies the other slaves to revolt:

> Have they Vanquish'd us Nobly in Fight? Have they Won us in Honourable Battle? And are we, by the chance of War, become their Slaves? This wou'd not anger a Noble Heart, this wou'd not animate a Soldier's Soul; no, but we are Bought and Sold like Apes or Monkeys.[111]

While this speech of Oroonoko's urges popular revolt, Holmesland asserts that herein slavery is 'vindicated by a chivalric code of honor' that 'is set against the ignominy of profit being made the sole principle of trade and conquest'.[112] It 'would not anger' Oroonoko to be conquered 'honorably' in battle within a feudal context, as opposed to being bought and sold as a commodity by merchants within a mercantile economy. Thereby, *Oroonoko* can be read as a text demonstrating the political anxiety surrounding the growing slave trade. Throughout the text, merchants continually turn the feudal system upside-down, disordering hierarchical relations. Merchants trick Oroonoko and his court, not respecting or regarding Oroonoko's royal status, forcing them into 'common' slavery.

[107] Anita Pacheco, 'Royalism and Honor in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*', *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 34.3 (1994): 493.
[108] Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 55–8.
[109] Oddvar Holmesland, 'Aphra Behn's "Oroonoko": Cultural Dialectics and the Novel', *English Literary History* 68.1 (2001): 57–79.
[110] Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko: An Authoritative Text, Historical Backgrounds, Criticism*, ed. Joanna Lipking (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 26–7.
[111] *Ibid*., 52. [112] Holmesland, 'Aphra Behn's "Oroonoko"', 68.

Oroonoko's aristocratic status is not respected by Europeans in Surinam until he meets Trefry, an 'honorable' slave trader. In contrast, when *he* captures another royal, Oroonoko discriminates among captured slaves according to rank: 'he never put him amongst the Rank of Captives, as they us'd to do, without distinction, for the common Sale, or Market; but kept him in his own Court, where he retain'd nothing of the Prisoner, but the Name'.[113] The text depicts common or shared nobility, regardless of race or ethnicity. In contrast, as Margaret Ferguson notes, common slaves are 'traitors to Oroonoko's cause' and ultimately betray him.[114]

The contrast between class politics and representations of slavery in *Oroonoko* and their depiction in Cavendish's 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity', is sharp and significant. Rather than merchants, in 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' it is the *nobility* that are the tyrannical slave owners who exploit and enslave the peasantry. Not only do the various aristocracies presented in 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' enslave subjects, but even the Prince himself 'was a grand monopolizer of young virgins', who participated in the trafficking of women (APC 50). Not only is Behn's depiction of slavery ideologically distinct from Cavendish's, but her understanding of identity dramatically differs as well. Oroonoko can never sever himself from his royal persona. While attired in the clothing of a common slave, Oroonoko still radiates divinity, demonstrating that there is something extraordinary about him:

> The Royal Youth appear'd in spite of the Slave, and People cou'd not help treating him after a different manner, without designing it. As soon as they approached him, they venerated and esteem'd him; his Eyes insensibly commanded Respect, and his Behaviour insinuated it into every Soul. So that there was nothing talk'd of but this young and gallant Slave, even by those who yet knew not that he was a Prince.[115]

Regardless of his modest attire, Oroonoko's identity as a prince is fixed and unchanging; this endorses the royal mythos of a divinely sanctioned monarch. His divine, static self 'shone through all', even affecting the behavior of people who were unaware of his royal status. Pacheco claims that this conception of natural virtues associated with rank is 'the conceptual basis of hierarchy; through the mysteries of blood, virtue is supposedly transmitted from one generation of the ruling class to the next, so that power

[113] Behn, *Oroonoko*, 29.

[114] Margaret W. Ferguson, 'Juggling the Categories of Race, Class and Gender: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*', in Margo Henricks and Patricia Parker (eds.), *Women, 'Race', and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), 223.

[115] Behn, *Oroonoko*, 36.

is legitimated on the grounds of worthiness, authority presented as hereditary and innate'.[116]

Cavendish, however, in contrast to Behn's conception of royal identity, represents the Prince in her story as having a changeable, self-fashioned identity based upon performance. No mythic or transcendent royalty emanates through him while he is disguised as a common pirate, nor is his royalty recognizable to others; it is his talents alone which elevate his status within pirate society. The Prince successfully enacts the roles of many varied social categories; pirate, prisoner, commander of an army and prince once again. Unlike Oroonoko, people do not recognize innate nobility underneath his multiple disguises. Miseria creates a parallel plot-narrative that also explores self-fashioning; gender and class boundaries are fluidly crossed as she transforms from Lady, page, slave, god, human sacrifice, son, daughter, general, viceregent and queen. Both characters successfully role-play their various parts, demonstrating a multiplicity of roles that an individual can perform regardless of conventional markers of identity in early modernity, such as rank, kinship structures or gender. Rather than a mystical self, proceeding from unchanging social structures, the self is a dynamic and changeable locus of possibility. The sovereign itself is not immune to a constant flux of identities: '[fortune] gives oft times the beggar's lot to the King, the servants' to the masters, the masters' to the servants: and for the internal gifts which the gods have bestowed on men, are different, as the external are transitory' (APC 73). Like Shakespeare's *King Lear*, which dramatizes a king reduced to becoming a madman in a beggar's hovel, for Cavendish authority and status alter as a result of the transitory forces of fortune: even kings may play the role of servant. This essentially demystifies sovereign power, while highlighting how a hierarchical political structure is subject to the whim of fortune, rather than an unchanging hierarchical cosmos.

IV Slavery and female subjectivity

As Cavendish engages with republican civil war ideas, it is worth noting that the Prince proves to be an effective ruler in different political scenarios, such as when he is captured by pirates and sets up an island kingdom modelled on popular sovereignty, and later when he leads the kingdom of Amour in war against the kingdom of Amity. His ruling skills are never in question; rather the romance traces how the Prince in various political realities none the less attempts to find and assault the protagonist. This

[116] Pacheco, 'Royalism and Honor', 494.

relates to the situation of women in general throughout the narrative. As the text of 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' explores revolutionary politics, it is interesting that women in particular are constantly threatened with slavery and rape. Miseria was enslaved and almost forced to be a prostitute, and, as previously mentioned, even the Queen, 'who was an absolute Princess', is twice enslaved through both violent conquest and love. Likewise, the Prince, who traffics women, later becomes a pirate who plans to kidnap women from a neighbouring island for his men. Cavendish's depiction of female slavery is significant because of the wide deployment of the concept of slavery across the spectrum of seventeenth-century political thought. Subjects were considered to have free status and this was believed to be dependent on the right to own property. Even prior to the civil war in 1610, Thomas Hedley explains in a speech in parliament that there 'is great difference betwixt the king's free subjects and bondmen' since 'the king may by commission at his pleasure seize the lands or goods of his villani, but so can he not of his free subjects'.[117] Absolutists, in contrast, allowed to the sovereign authority over property. For example, Birkenhead argues that if 'the Queene will have me go into banishment, let her banish me; The earth is the Lords, and all that therein is. If she will have me sawen in sunder, I submit my self … If she will confiscate my goods, I am contented.'[118] Conflating his inherited lands, goods and body, which the Queen can sever and cut 'in sunder', Birkenhead suggests the sovereign should have absolute power over subjects' bodies and property rights; the passage quoted makes clear that he considers the sovereign to have a dominion analogous to that of God ('the Lord'). Birkenhead's position is indeed extreme, and, according to Sommerville, for other writers, the property rights of individuals were often a defended liberty, on the view that if property rights were not to be upheld, 'other liberties might prove indefensible'.[119] In contrast to Birkenhead, Milton claims that the notion that 'the King hath as good right to his Crown and dignitie, as any man to his inheritance, is to make the Subject no better then the Kings slave, his chattell, or his possession that may be bought and sould'.[120] Just

[117] Thomas Hedley, 'Speech', in *Proceedings in Parliament 1610*, ed. Elizabeth Read Foster, vol. II (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966), 192.

[118] Birkenhead, *Sermon preached before his Majestie*, 17.

[119] Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots*, 134–40. For example, a monarch, who could tax at will against the people's wishes, 'would have the financial resources to disregard the rights of his subjects'. Furthermore, if an absolute sovereign had the right to make laws without consent from the subjects, the established regulations on ownership could be altered. Consequently, questions of law-making, property and slavery were linked by this logic. *Ibid*., 134.

[120] Milton, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, 12.

as Cavendish portrays subjects being hunted, cannibalized and kept like animals by royalty, Milton argues that hereditary rights of the sovereign may interfere with the property rights of subjects: such a system contained the potential for subjects to be enslaved like animals. As long as slavery existed in the kingdom or remained a theoretical possibility, republican arguments were accordingly based upon questions of ownership. Property was an important discussion during the Putney debates: Maximilian Petty, a Leveller, argued during the debates that 'every man is naturally free; and I judge the reason why men when they were in soe great numbers [choose representatives is]' to 'preserve propertie'.[121] Consequently, Petty perceives protection of property rights as the very reason and foundation for the creation of governments.

Republicans would often argue that the sovereign right of taxation was not unlimited, because if a monarch could tax at will, then the ability to trade and own land would be impacted in a way to affect, and likely to impede, the liberty of the subject.[122] Cavendish's critique of slavery does not stem from a merely 'negative' concept of liberty like the one provided by Hobbes, which defines liberty as the *absence of external impediments* to one's motions, including opposition to the performance of what one wills to do. The speech that Miseria makes to her army, for example, includes powerful anti-slavery rhetoric as she pronounces that all 'noble spirits hate bondage, and will rather die than endure slavery' (APC 97, 98). Although this speech is given in the context of foreign conquest, we also find her encouraging her troops to go to war in order to defend their selves, their property rights and liberty:

> [T]hey will give us restless fears, unreasonable taxes, unconscionable oaths, whereby we shall lose the peace of our minds, the conversation of our friends, the traffic with our neighbours, the plenty of our land, the form of our customs, the order of our ceremonies, the liberty of a subject. (APC 97)

By invoking the spectre of loss of customs and ceremonies, this passage depicts fears of cultural conquest: if Cavendish means by this to link liberty with cultural autonomy, then she is articulating an ideal of liberty with content more extensive than the Hobbesian lack of impediments. In addition, the apparent drawing of a connection here between slavery and issues such as property rights and the threat of unreasonable taxes or restrictions on trade and land indicates the basis of the liberty of subjects,

[121] Firth, *Clarke Papers*, 312. [122] Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots*, 134.

which could in Miseria's view constitute grounds for revolt – a much wider ground than the Hobbesian system would offer.

Although property was often a central component of early modern theories regarding liberty and individual rights, equal rights to property did not extend to early modern women. Hence, women were excluded from developing rights of citizenship to a great enough degree that women's power and status was decreased in comparison to medieval feudalism.[123] Although there were various advantageous loopholes and contradictions in the legal system, early modern women often were denied the property rights that were available to men. Mary Carleton, in her defence against charges of bigamy, dramatizes the precarious legal position of married women as she complains that her husband 'and his Agents devested and stript of all my cloaths, and plundred of all my jewels, and my money, my very [bodice], and a payr of silk Stockings, being also pulled from me'.[124] Carleton's husband had the legal right to behave this way. When a woman married, she in theory lost all of her personal property to her husband, though daily practice was not always consistent with juridical theory.[125] Cavendish is the first early modern English woman to explore in print women's status in relation to the politics of slavery, although later women authors explored the connection. Mary Astell, who has been hailed as 'England's First Feminist', positions women within the discourse of the contentious philosophical and political debates regarding freedom and slavery:

> If *all Men are born free*, how is it that all Women are born slaves? as they must be if the being subjected to the *inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary Will* of Men, be the *perfect Condition of Slavery*? and if the Essence of Freedom consists, as our Masters say it does, in having a *standing Rule to live by*? And why is Slavery so much condemn'd and strove against in one Case, and so highly applauded and held so necessary and so sacred in another?[126]

By using the powerfully charged rhetoric of slavery, Astell reveals the contradictions of republican ideology in relation to gender. As men gained more rights within society, women were placed outside the logical parameters for men's equality and freedom. Despite republican concerns about liberty and

[123] Hilda L. Smith, *Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 202.
[124] See Mary Carleton, *The Case of Madam Mary Carleton* (London, 1663), 69.
[125] Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England*, 129–35.
[126] Mary Astell, *Some Reflections upon Marriage*, in *Astell: Political Writings*, ed. Patricia Springborg (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 18–19.

equality, the reason for the exclusion of women within the development of evolutionary rights was grounded in biology, on the view that women were naturally inferior.[127] For example, Parker claims that a 'wife is inferiour in nature, and was created for the assistance of man … but it is otherwise in the State betwixt man and man'.[128] Cavendish's romance challenges republican rationale for denying women the same rights. Miseria demonstrates her capacity for reason as she disguises herself as a man and successfully performs a plethora of male roles, such as a priest, a viceregent and a military general. Notably, English women could not be priests or viceregents, and few performed the roles of military leaders in early modern culture. Significantly, Miseria's identity is self-fashioned further outside typical determiners of early modern identity. The protagonist exists in a liminal, fluid state where her identity is not determined by gender, kinship structures, nation, rank and subjecthood. The text of 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' serves as an experiment in female subjectivity, as the protagonist provides names for herself such as Miseria, Affectionada and Travellia; these names derive from her own individual emotions and activities, rather than from other typical early modern markers of identity such as bloodline, marital status or kingdom. As Miseria explores identity outside the parameters of early modern kinship and political structures, she asserts that 'it is an injustice to take the goods from the right owners without their consent', thereby appropriating the concept of self-defence, and suggesting that any individual whatsoever, *not* merely the parliamentary body, may take up arms against authority to exert their right to preservation of self and property (APC 52).

The narrative's emphasis upon rape is evoked not only to discuss the fraught political issue of self-defence, but also to challenge republican assumptions about women. Rape legislation and female identity were intrinsically connected issues. Many historians have interpreted the ambiguous language of medieval rape legislation to mean that even if an individual woman agrees to a sexual act, it was regarded as rape without parental authorization; this effectively suppressed women's abilities to exercise their individual powers of consent.[129] Not only were women not legally able to consent, but rape was also understood in law as theft of property by one man from another. Any crime against the female body was a crime against the male estate, since the ravished woman was

[127] Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent*, 154.
[128] Parker, *Observations*, 19.
[129] The specific law is called the Second Statute of Westminster (1285). More information about this law can be found in Amy Greenstadt, '"Rapt from Himself": Rape and the Poetics of Corporeality

considered damaged goods.[130] Aristocratic fathers for example would give their daughter to friends and enemies in order to 'profit in some social, financial or political' way.[131] Consequently, to various degrees both women and slaves were understood as property that increased the value of a man's estate, and rape laws reflected and contributed to such social views of women as property.[132] But in 1597, over fifty years before the publication of 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity', a new law was passed which revised the medieval definition and legal status of rape.[133] Marion Wynne-Davies claims that this law not only provided more severe punishment for the crime – execution – it also effectively defined rape as being a crime against the woman herself, rather than that of a theft against her family.[134] There is, however, considerable court evidence which suggests that there was no subsequent increase in convictions, and that the crime of rape was still being perceived as a crime against property and class hierarchy.[135] None the less, in Wynne-Davies's view, after the Act of 1597, a woman's body was legally understood as being her own possession and not that of her nearest male relative.[136]

It is therefore significant that Cavendish uses a story focused upon rape to explore women's subjectivity and political rights. The 1597 law contributed to women being legally understood as individuals, and during this period all other areas of law failed to endow women with greater status as 'persons'. In early modern legislation, husband and wife were one person, sharing a single legal personality; that personality was moreover the husband's, and the wife's legal identity was eclipsed by her spouse. Since she technically lacked an independent juridical personality, a married woman in theory could not enter contracts, defend her rights in court, write a

in Sidney's *Old Arcadia*', in Elizabeth Robertson and Christine M. Rose (eds.), *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 314.

[130] Robin L. Bott, '"O, Keep Me From Their Worse Than Killing Lust": Ideologies of Rape and Mutilation in Chaucer's *Physician's Tale* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*', in Robertson and Rose, *Representing Rape*, 191.

[131] See *ibid.*, 190.

[132] In *Sociable Letters*, Cavendish explicitly compares the status of young women to disposable property as she argues that 'Daughters are to be accounted but as Moveable Goods or Furnitures that wear out.' Margaret Cavendish, *CCXI Sociable Letters* (London, 1664), 184.

[133] A discussion of this law can be found in Marion Wynne-Davies, '"The Swallowing Womb": Consumed and Consuming Women in *Titus Andronicus*', in Valerie Wayne (ed.), *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 130–1.

[134] *Ibid.*

[135] Barbara J. Baines, 'Effacing Rape in Early Modern Representation', *English Literary History* 65.1 (1998): 72.

[136] Wynne-Davies, '"The Swallowing Womb"', 131.

will (without permission from their husband) or own property.[137] While discussing the ideas of Hilda Smith, Stretton explains that an important 'feature of this society was the frequency with which lawyers, judges, and civic or religious leaders interpreted ostensibly universal terms, such as "householders", "property owners" or "the people", as applying only to men'.[138] Though women often had multiple vocational identities throughout their lives, the identity of a woman, in general, was still routinely overshadowed by her marital status as spinster, wife or widow.[139] A reading confined to extreme patriarchal polemics and laws, however, detracts from the colourful lives women actually led. Middle- and lower-class women, as previously discussed, participated in a wide variety of work in their daily lives, ranging from manual labour, crafts, service, teaching, running businesses and medical work, to prostitution and theft.[140] Even aristocratic women managed large estates, supervising and organizing servants and children. Housewifery required not only financial skills, but also could require knowledge of distillation, accounting, physic, agriculture, animal care, cooking, arithmetic, letter-writing, managing servants, surgery, dyeing, brewing, preserving and embroidery.[141] Although women contributed hugely to the running of society, married women were not full subjects in the law. Yet Miseria, who is owned by no man, claims that her body and chastity are her own: 'for why should you rob me of that which Nature freely gave?' (APC 52). Though Miseria has no living relatives,[142] she none the less never presents an argument that the rape would wrong the memory of her family or dishonour the family name; she instead defines it as a crime against her person, even though, as Laura Gowing argues, '[a]cross a whole range of discourses, women heard that their bodies were not theirs to command'.[143] Even inhabiting the thrice-lowly state of a woman, a foreigner and a slave, Miseria asserts that her body is still her own property.

The use of attempted rape as the fulcrum of the plot works to challenge republicans' exclusion of women, as well as early modern assumptions

[137] Stretton, *Women Waging Law in Elizabethan England*, 22–3.
[138] Tim Stretton, 'Women, Property and Law', in Anita Pacheco (ed.), *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 42.
[139] Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, 257–8.
[140] *Ibid*., 256–344.
[141] Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 26, 29 and 54.
[142] Miseria explains that her 'father being killed in the wars, [her] mother died for grief, and left [her] destitute of friends in a strange country'. APC 56.
[143] Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 53. The text, to an extent, reflects the predicament that many lower-class women faced; there is evidence that some people assumed that a master had the

about female modesty. The Prince's attempts to assault Miseria introduce rebellion, violence and chaos into the social order as Miseria cross-dresses to avoid his attacks, transgressing gender and class boundaries. It is significant that it is only through moving outside the parameters of femininity into male, public roles that she is able to defend herself. Judith Butler's seminal work on cross-dressing deconstructs notions of a 'true' core identity that is founded upon biological sex. Butler argues that cross-dressing instead reveals the performative aspects of gender, since 'the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also constituted as part of the strategy that conceals gender's performative character'.[144] Likewise, Miseria's self-investiture in performance of a plethora of male roles suggests that her identity and her subjectivity, rather than shaped and predetermined by biological sex, are a performance in flux. Cavendish's heroine thus reveals possible performances of gender transgression in an early modern context, deconstructing the discursive and juridical strategy that concealed women's subjectivity and individuality.

It is not just contemporary theorists such as Butler who have perceived subversive elements in drag. Women in early modern England who successfully cross-dressed, passing as male, could be prosecuted for fraud.[145] In 1643 Charles I issued a proclamation stating: 'Let no woman presume to Counterfeit her Sex by wearing mans apparell, under pain of the severest punishment which Law and our displeasure shall inflict'; this proclamation demonstrates the social anxiety that the female cross-dresser provoked.[146] Rachel Trubowitz explains that women who wore men's attire were thought unnatural.[147] Other transgressors such as foreigners and prostitutes were linked as well to the 'unnatural' cross-dressed woman, leaving a commonplace association of female cross-dressing with immodesty.[148] It was believed that sexual licence was advertised through their blurring of gender boundaries. It is therefore ironic that Cavendish creates a foreign, cross-dressed heroine, a slave who nearly becomes a prostitute to voice a fervent defence for female chastity. Although Barbara

right of sexual access to the bodies of their female household servants and there was little, if any, context in which a servant could complain of sexual harassment or rape. *Ibid.*, 62–3.

144 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 1999), 180.

145 Valerie Traub, 'Desire and the Differences it Makes', in Wayne, *Matter of Difference*, 98.

146 Ribeiro, *Dress and Morality*, 84.

147 Rachel Trubowitz, 'Cross-Dressed Women and Natural Mothers: "Boundary Panic" in *Hic Mulier*', in Cristina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki (eds.), *Debating Gender in Early Modern England, 1500–1700* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 187.

148 *Ibid.*, 185–9.

Baines contends that 'rape was a crime against property and a threat to the class structure and thus very much "between men"',[149] the theme of sexual assault in 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' offers a medium for exploring the possibilities of female subjectivity within the scope of parliamentarian and republican discourse. Miseria justifies her cross-dressing on the premise that self-defence of chastity is an inviolable right, specifically applied to women, which allows females to engage in a range of subversive behaviour such as cross-dressing, war, travel and the pursuit of public fame:

> And since no danger ought to be avoided, nor life considered, in respect of their honours; and to guard that safe from enemies, no habit is to be denied; for it is not the outward garments that can corrupt the honest mind, for modesty may clothe the soul of a naked body, and a sword becomes a woman when it is used against the enemies of her honour; for though her strength be weak, yet she ought to show her will; and to die in the defence of honour, is to live with a noble fame; therefore neither camp, nor court, nor city, nor country, nor danger, nor habit, nor any worldly felicity, must separate the love of chastity, and our sex. (APC 115)

Complicating the early modern feminine ideal of silence, obedience and chastity, which were perceived as being one and the same, Miseria disentangles these three ideals so that the outspoken, disobedient and public woman is ironically aligned with chastity. Though the axioms of female modesty conventionally limited women's activities in the public sphere, Miseria redefines modesty as a type of natural law permitting women to appropriate male clothing, roles and activities. By conflating cross-dressing and republican ideas concerning self-defence and property rights, the text provides a political theory of self-defence that extends beyond basic self-preservation, further providing a justification for the challenge to early modern roles and codes of conduct expected of women.

V Patriarchalism

Miseria further challenges another central royalist doctrine: patriarchalism, the belief that monarchical authority was not only derived from God, but was fatherly in origin. The most famous patriarchalist was Robert Filmer, although he did not introduce such ideas to England, since patriarchalism was not only common in early Stuart years, but was a burgeoning concept

[149] Baines, 'Effacing Rape', 72.

during the Tudor period.[150] Although Hobbes would break political convention to argue that power originally derived from mothers,[151] Filmer argued that the first 'kings' were actually fathers of families:

> As long as the first fathers of families lived, the name of patriarchs did aptly belong unto them. But after a few descents, when the true fatherhood itself was extinct and only the right of the father descended to the true heir, then the title of prince or king was more significant to express the power of him who succeeds only to the right of that fatherhood which his ancestors did naturally enjoy.[152]

Since early modern culture often understood the state as analogous to a family, Filmer bases his theory upon the premise that fathers and kings are intrinsically the same political entity, since the natural role of fathers evolved into kingship. Fatherly power is presented as natural and godly since it can be traced all the way back to Adam. 'I see not then how the children of Adam, or of any man else, can be free from subjection to their parents. And this *subjection* of children is the only fountain of all regal authority, by the ordination of God himself.'[153] Since fathers are not accountable naturally to their wives or children, the king also is not accountable to the people. Sommerville explains that patriarchalism was meant not only to account for the origins of government, but also 'to show that humans had not originally been free, but were born into civil subjection'.[154] Religious sanctions often were employed to uphold patriarchalism, and the fifth commandment 'to honor thy father and thy mother', according to one catechism, implied not only biological parents, but all authority figures from family to Church and commonwealth.[155] Consequently, society was meant to be ruled by patriarchs at every level.[156] However, the entire rationale of patriarchalism is founded not only upon hierarchy and obedience, but specifically upon dominating women and children. The patriarch's right to rule is based upon Adam's status as a father, and his ability to become a father rested upon marriage. Thus, the actual base of patriarchalism consisted of Adam's sexual or conjugal right to his wife. Because this necessarily preceded fatherhood, critics have argued that sexual dominance, rather than fatherhood, was actually the original base of patriarchalism.[157]

[150] See Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots*, 29, and Gordon J. Schochet (1988), *The Authoritarian Family and Political Attitudes in 17th Century England: Patriarchalism in Political Thought* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers), 43–4.
[151] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 140. [152] Filmer, *Patriarcha*, 10.
[153] *Ibid*., 7. [154] Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots*, 32.
[155] Dow, *Radicalism in the English Revolution*, 11. [156] *Ibid*.
[157] See Carol Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford University Press, 1988).

Though the obedience to fathers is a prerequisite for the political world in patriarchalism, when fathers or father-figures appear in Cavendish's literature, their status and relationships with women challenge assumptions within patriarchalism. For example, in 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity', the protagonist discovers a father-figure who adopts her as a son. He is not her natural, hereditary father, and more importantly, he is also a ship's master, of a lower class status than his 'son', so the story complicates hierarchical and patriarchal structures. It is also a relationship about mutual love, rather than patriarchal authority, since she is 'adopted through compassion and affection' (APC 83). Although the idea of sovereign love coincides with the royalist belief in mutual affection, this relationship is initiated primarily through consent, without respect to titles, riches or hereditary rights. Like Cavendish's scientific thought, which conceived bodies and atomic particles as uniting and functioning through consent, Cavendish's political theory also emphasizes the significance of republican notions of consent within political bodies. Even more remarkably, the text reverses the logic of patriarchalism, as Miseria's father inherits power from his daughter: 'the reserve she gave her old father in charge to bring in', claiming that she gave him 'this part to command, because I dare trust you faith, as well as your judgement, courage, and skill' (APC 96). This stands in striking contradiction to Filmer's understanding of power, which argued that only fathers can remit some of their authority to their sons, and that delegation of power works only *from* fathers *to* sons.[158]

Filmer further claims that this fatherly power includes the right to defend the whole family or commonwealth:

> [T]he king, as father over many families, extends his care to preserve, feed, clothe, instruct and defend the whole commonwealth. His wars, his peace, his courts of justice and all his acts of sovereignty tend only to preserve and distribute to every subordinate and inferior father, and to their children.[159]

Miseria ironically appropriates this fatherly role. She instructs and defends the nation and distributes power to others, demonstrating that stately power and successful statecraft are not gender-specific, nor limited to patriarchs.

[158] Filmer states 'It is the favour, I think, of the parents only, who, when their children are of age and discretion to ease their parents of part of their fatherly care, are then content to remit some part of their fatherly authority.' *Patriarcha*, 18.

[159] *Ibid*., 12.

VI Contract theory

Cavendish's romance 'The Contract' also interrogates complex power dynamics surrounding fathers in relation to the validity of marital/political contracts. Interestingly, in the text disobedience to fathers and father-figures equally causes both disorder and order to the entire socio-political system. The Duke disobeys his deceased father's wishes by ignoring his initial marriage contract with the protagonist, Deletia, who was a child at the time of engagement. But in contrast, Deletia must disobey her uncle, her only living patriarchal figure, to ultimately re-establish order in the narrative. She claims to have been 'taught to obey superiors, and to reverence old age', however, she none the less rebels against her uncle's wishes to *ignore* her original marriage contract with the Duke (TC 41). The text ultimately portrays various patriarchs providing conflicting demands as Deletia wrestles with the commands of her deceased father against those of her guardian, her uncle. Although Deletia's uncle 'hath agreed with the Viceroy: and his word hath sealed that bond, which he will never break', her direct disobedience to a patriarch ironically re-establishes the political order at the end of the story; thus the text challenges patriarchalists' understandings of the origin of power (TC 30). Perhaps Cavendish's critique of patriarchalism was influenced by Shakespeare, since not only was Cavendish the first person, man or woman, to write at length about his work, but a similar theme of disobeying fathers in order to ironically maintain a patriarchal, feudal system can be seen in *King Lear*.[160] The character Kent, who is later disguised as Caius, must disagree, disobey and ultimately deceive the King in order to best serve him and preserve his authority. Kent expresses this political and moral conundrum, stating 'Now, banished Kent, / If thou canst serve where thou dost stand condemned'.[161] Patriarchalism is similarly destabilized throughout 'The Contract', yet the crisis of order is resolved as the Duke and the adult Deletia freely choose to keep the original contract, creating an ending that ends a potential political crisis and ultimately restores the original order.

Though the story is specifically about matrimony, Kahn explains how in the seventeenth century 'the marriage contract was a charged metaphor

[160] Katie Whitaker claims that '*Sociable Letters* is now thought to be the first general prose assessment of Shakespeare's drama ever written.' Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: The Extraordinary Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, the First Woman to Live by Her Pen* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 258.

[161] William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear*, ed. Jay L. Halio, (Cambridge University Press, 1992), 1.4: 4–5.

for political obligation'.[162] James I drew from the tenets of patriarchalism and conceptualized his kingly authority as equating to marriage when he claimed, 'I am the Husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawfull Wife.'[163] An explicit link between marriage and politics is construed in the text itself, as the prince defines marriage in overtly political terminology:

> [F]or I had, nor have no more power to resign the interest I have in you, than Kings to resign their crown that comes by succession, for the right lies in the crown, not in the man, and though I have played the tyrant, and deserved to be uncrowned, yet none ought to take it off my head, but death, nor have I power to throw it from myself, death only must make way for a successor. (TC 29)

This passage advocates a royalist position which not only indirectly condemns the execution of Charles I, but further suggests that like marriage between husband and wife, the position of king is such that neither subject nor sovereign has the right to alter the system. Articulating the theory advocated by royalists, that once political consent is given, it can never be withdrawn, the story initially suggests that the contract between monarch and subjects cannot justifiably be broken or revoked.[164] According to royalist and absolutist John Maxwell, cancelling a contract between monarch and subject was as inappropriate as annulling a marriage:

> If it were granted that Royalty in a King *were* by contract betwixt him and his people, and resumable by the people upon the appearance of disadvantage, it cannot stand but in all inferiour contracts of lesse concernment the like should hold.
>
> Is there any act more freely done, then when a woman not subject to paternall authority, of perfect age, under no guardian, maketh choice of an husband, and as she fancieth? and, I pray you, may she afterward shake him off at pleasure? God forbid.[165]

Using the marriage contract as an example, Maxwell insinuates a sense of sexual immorality in relation to changing contracts. If a woman can leave a husband whenever she pleases, she is not only outside of patriarchal

[162] See Kahn, 'Margaret Cavendish and the Romance of Contract', 530.

[163] James I, 'A Speach, As it Was Delivered in the Upper House of the Parliament', in *King James VI and I: Selected Writings*, ed. Neil Rhodes, Jennifer Richards and Joseph Marshall (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 297.

[164] Hobbes argues, for example, that 'there can happen no breach of Covenant on the part of the Soveraigne; and consequently none of his Subjects, by any pretence of forfeiture, can be freed from his Subjection'. Because sovereigns cannot forfeit or revoke their political contracts 'they that are subjects to a Monarch, cannot without his leave cast off Monarchy, and return to the confusion of a disunited Multitude; nor transferre their Person from him that beareth it, to another Man, or other Assembly of men: for they are bound'. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 122.

[165] John Maxwell, *Sacro-sancta Regum Magestas* (Oxford, 1644), 99.

authority, but is not bound to ideals of marital chastity. There is something fickle and unchaste in changing contracts 'at pleasure'. In contrast, Milton argues in *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* that both political and marital divorces are acceptable under certain conditions.[166] Unlike Milton, 'The Contract' initially appears to reflect a very pro-monarchy stance, particularly since, like the political contract in England, the original marital contract is broken and restored. Once Deletia and the Duke have become adults, they fall in love, and the original contract is replaced by their affection, also demonstrating what Kahn believes is the 'royalists' fantasy that the relation between sovereign and subject could never be one of simple coercion, but will always – also – be one of affection and consent'.[167]

However, an understanding of the story as propagating royalist ideology is complicated by the Duke, who is originally coerced into his contract. He claims that he is contracted 'not with a free consent of mind; but being forced by duty to my father, who did not only command, but threatened me with his curse' (TC 39). Rather than enjoying a relationship of mutual, affectionate consent, the Duke explains that he is forced since his 'affections and free will renounced' the act (TC 39). But this is not the only instance of forced covenants. Indeed, coercion and exploitation of contracts is a recurring theme throughout the text. For example, the contract between the Viceroy and Deletia is made

> without the young Lady's consent; but the uncle told her afterwards, she must prepare herself to be the Viceroy's bride: and, said he, if you consent not, never come near me more, for I will disclaim all the interest of an uncle, and become your enemy. (TC 28)

In a society based upon patriarchal family structures, this is a significant threat, since without her uncle's blessing, Deletia would have '*been left destitute*' (TC 25). Though this threat is sinister, many contracts throughout the text are similarly created or broken out of fear of physical harm or violence. The Viceroy agrees to void his engagement contract with Deletia (and as a consequence, later establishes a new contract) only because he is threatened with murder. To makes matters even more complex, though Deletia later freely chooses the Duke, he threatens to kill her future husband in order to re-establish their contract. The story becomes a complex

[166] Milton argued that marital divorce based upon incompatibility should be allowed. See John Milton, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (London, 1644).
[167] Kahn, 'Margaret Cavendish and the Romance of Contract', 541.

web of complicated contracts that are established through some form of coercion or force.

'The Contract' not only presents covenants constantly being revoked, but further depicts the problematic foundations of contractual obligation itself. Victoria Kahn argues that 'The Contract' explores Hobbesian contracts based upon fear, coercion and rational self-interest in relation to the alternative model, contracts based upon love.[168] Hobbes argued that '[c]ovenants entred into by fear, in the condition of meer Nature, are obligatory'. Using the example of ransom, he contends that if he establishes a contract 'to pay a ransome, or service for my life, to an enemy; [he is] bound by it'.[169] However, like the marital contracts in 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity', which prove unsuccessful when attempted through force or conquest, 'The Contract' also explores the unreliability of contractual agreement based upon self-preservation and force. For example, romantic passions rule over the Duke's Hobbesian sense of self-preservation, as he risks his life to break the contract between the Viceroy and Deletia. Even when the Viceroy argues that 'you strike the King in striking me', the Duke is not deterred by fear of the sovereign or death itself, thus depicting that contracts of rational self-interest and preservation are not the most secure, since passions can easily lead an individual to life-threatening, irrational actions. Furthermore, since the Viceroy breaks his contract out of fear of death, his actions reveal that contracts based upon fear and force are intrinsically unstable, since an individual would always break contracts when threatened: 'I must do a desperate act to set my hand to a bond I mean to break' (TC 31). Though the story does seem to emphasize covenants founded upon love and affection, Cavendish simultaneously demonstrates the instability of 'Tyrant Love' (TC 43). According to Kahn, Cavendish paradoxically appropriates aspects of both conceptions of contracts since 'coercion takes the form of our very own passions: we are coerced, in short, by ourselves'.[170] Kahn further explains that this negotiation between two kinds of contracts is instigated by her agenda to revise absolute models of the marriage contract, allowing a more equitable relation between husband and wife. Accordingly, Kahn argues that Cavendish must negotiate through a precarious political dichotomy, for in emphasizing consent secured by affection, she runs the risk of justifying parliamentary critics of absolute sovereignty.[171] On the other hand, if

[168] *Ibid.*, 526–66. [169] Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 97.
[170] Kahn, 'Margaret Cavendish and the Romance of Contract', 561.
[171] *Ibid.*, 557.

romance and affection are merely coercion, then she has apologized for an extreme absolutism. Gillespie claims that 'the story allegorizes Cavendish's own dissent from the Protectorate in the name of her prior and binding agreement to the crown, the Duke appears as a *viable* and *legitimate* husband only after he has been injected into a matrix of possible alternatives'.[172] Though Kahn's and Gillespie's analyses are persuasive, and the tale in many ways appears as an analogy of a restoration of the monarchy within a revised sense of contractual obligation, the text still poses more questions than it answers, particularly since all types of contract are depicted as unreliable.

Although 'The Contract' portrays contracts based upon mutual love and consent as more effective than those motivated by force, love remains unsatisfactorily changeable within the text. Deletia claims that the relationship between the Duke and his wife was built upon 'a wrong foundation, or rather castles in the air, as lovers use to do, which vanish soon away' (TC 40). Love and affection are problematically unstable emotions. The Prince 'was forced by Tyrant Love to run in uncouth ways', indicating that emotions can temporarily displace free will and rational judgment (TC 43). Though love is more binding than force in the text, it is still unstable and unreliable as a base for a contractual obligation, demonstrating Cavendish's belief that covenants cannot control or subdue human nature, for 'if men do not naturally agree, Art cannot make unity amongst them, or associate them into one Politick Body and so rule them' (*PL* 47, 48).

VII Terms of consent

'The Contract' systematically confuses not only contract theory, but also ultimately all the theoretical foundations that support a restoration of monarchy. As 'The Contract' represents various covenants being broken, the text explores the terms in which a contract can be legitimately established, and under what conditions its validity continues. These were politically significant issues during the civil war, since all male subjects over the age of eighteen were required to pledge their loyalty to the new government of Cromwell, causing a furious pamphlet war debating whether it was legitimate to swear allegiance to the new government if one had previously sworn obedience to Charles I.[173] Kahn asserts that in Cavendish's

[172] Gillespie, *Domesticity and Dissent*, 129.

[173] Kahn, 'Margaret Cavendish and the Romance of Contract', 535. Nigel Smith defines the engagement controversy as 'the attempt by Commonwealth propagandists to encourage the swearing of

text 'the duke's breach of the original marriage contract, the engagement presented its would-be subscribers with a case of conscience that involved conflicting moral allegiances and legal obligations'.[174] However, in the text, since all contracts made by force are rendered void, and the only covenant that is adjudged legitimate is the one between the Duke and Deletia, which is derived by choice, the text suggests that only contracts which are established through consent without coercion can be valid; otherwise they can legally be repealed. Though it may initially appear as though Cavendish was against the possibility of divorce, marital or political – since, once consent is given, it is irrevocable – in 'The Contract', the Duke *does* actually divorce the only woman he is married to in the text: his wife. It is important to remember that his existing contract with Deletia is not marriage, but engagement. The question the text poses to the reader is: which contract is more valid, and what criteria establish this validity? These were politically pertinent questions, since men who were consenting to Cromwell were revoking their previous contract with Charles. What conditions made the Charles-contract revocable? Cavendish presents the initial engagement as being invalid until both parties gave their full consent, without coercion. Since the Duke's marriage was annulled because of affection for another, contracts are changeable depending on the ongoing affection of the parties, which resembles Milton's republican belief that the people may 'depose' a ruler 'though no Tyrant, meerly by the liberty and right of free born Men, to be govern'd as seems to them best'.[175] As Kahn notes, the text suggests that a monarch's position would be valid only with the 'ongoing consent and affection of the partners', which was not typical of royalist or Hobbesian understandings of contract, 'which involved an initial but irrevocable act of consent'.[176]

The narrative reconceptualises contract theory in various ways throughout. For example, the breaking of the original contract comes about not only because the Duke was coerced, but also because Deletia was not an adult. She claims that she 'was too young to remember him' (TC 7). Cavendish provides an original slant to contract theory as she focuses upon age in relation to consent. Parliamentarians generally believed that once the people gave consent to government, they no longer held an active role

oaths of allegiance to the new state, and the resistance to this attempt'. Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 44. Interestingly, Cavendish was the second wife of her husband, and on a personal level she would have been confronted with the conflicts and anxieties caused by oaths of allegiance to a new contract.

[174] Kahn, 'Margaret Cavendish and the Romance of Contract', 535.

[175] Milton, *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, 15.

[176] Kahn, 'Margaret Cavendish and the Romance of Contract', 529.

in it; their exercise of right pertained solely to the original consent. Yet the text poses a clear difficulty with that theory of sovereignty: the problem of the age of consent. Can a child consent to a political system? The Duke's current wife claims that her marriage contract is the only valid agreement, since the protagonist was

> too young to make a free choice, and to give a free consent. Besides, he doth disavow the act, by confessing the disagreeing thereto in his mind; and if she was to give a lawful consent, and his consent was seeming, not real, as being forced thereunto, it could not be a firm contract; wherefore, I beseech you, cast her suit from the bar, since it is of no validity. (TC 40)

Deletia herself even claims that the contract will be made valid only once she freely chooses as an adult and is of age of 'knowing of good from evil' (TC 38). This implies that *only adults* can consent to a government, since children have not yet developed their rational, moral facilities of judgment and thus cannot give free consent. This poses a crucial question: can an individual be bound to a contract, whether marital or political, to which they did not consent as an adult individual? Sommerville explains that the 'theory of government by consent struck at the central doctrine of absolutism – the contention that kings derive their power from God alone'.[177] Yet, Cavendish suggests that consent can be obtained only from individual adults. Such a stance has intriguing political implications, as it suggests that children are not subject to the political order. This indicates a more radical political ideal, since a sizeable population of the kingdom, young adults and young apprentices, would have the right to choose to consent to a government or not: the contract between the people and the government could not be entirely irrevocable.

'The Contract' becomes even more complicated when we learn that the marriage is also not between social equals: the Lady is 'meanly born' or of lower social status than the Duke (TC 40). The text questions who has authority in this situation – the law or social superiors? The story ends with the law overthrowing the Duchess's marriage contract, without heed to her superior social position. Since the marriage contract is an analogy for the political contract, this indicates that a king is not above the law. Mirroring the parliamentarian position, which emphasized that the king was subject to the legislature, the conflicts in 'The Contract' are settled in court, demonstrating that both the Duke and Duchess were subordinate to and regulated by the law alone. Although the sovereign was believed to

[177] Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots*, 65.

have a moral obligation to abide by set laws, they did not have to always follow them.[178] While Charles I was being tried, he disputed his 'pretended Judges', declaring: 'let me know by what Authority I am called hither'.[179] While Lucy Hutchinson exemplifies the republican concern that the king 'thought himself no monarch so long as his will was confined to the bounds of any law',[180] Filmer believed that a king *cannot* be tried in courts, since the laws existed only to represent the king's will.[181] Executing Charles I was offensive enough, but to have tried him through a court system was especially disrespectful to some. According to an anonymous royalist poem, the trial and execution of Charles I was analogous to murdering God:

> *Kings* are *Gods once remov'd*. It hence appears
> No *Court* but *Heav'ns* can trie them by their *Peers*.
> So that for *Charles the good* to have been try'd
> And cast by *mortall* Votes, was *Deicide*.
> No *Sinne*, except the *first*, hath ever past
> So black as this.[182]

The poem calls the execution a deicide, and emphasizes that the people cannot judge their ruler. Therefore, killing and judging Charles in the courts is analogous to murdering God – here it is represented as the worst sin humans have committed, with the exception of the Fall. Although the common law was perceived as the particular inheritance of the people,[183] in 'The Contract', the sovereign is not just respectful of the law, but is clearly subordinate to the legal system. If 'The Contract' is, as some critics suggest, an analogy for the political relation between sovereign and subject, then the story advocates the anti-absolutist doctrine that a monarch's power is limited, and not above the law, since all the individuals in the story are judged according to a judicial, legal system. While 'The Contract' initially appears to oppose regicide or the breaking of 'contract' between Charles I and his subjects, the text demonstrates that he is subject to judgment, just as Charles I was subject to the ruling of the courts that executed him. Rather than the law merely representing the pleasure of the king, the law is an institution to which all individuals, whether king or peasant, are subordinate. The story even concludes with the Duke pronouncing that

[178] *Ibid*. 54.
[179] Charles I, *King Charls his Tryal at the High Court of Justice* (London, 1650), 21.
[180] Hutchinson, *Memoirs*, 68.
[181] Filmer, *Patriarcha*, 50.
[182] Anon., '*Caroli*', in *Monumentum Regale: Or a Tombe, Erected for that incomparable and Glorious Monarch, Charles I* (1649), 29; quoted in Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution*, 16.
[183] C. H. McIlwain, 'The English Common Law, Barrier against Absolutism', *American Historical Review* 49.1 (1943): 28.

he '*shall willingly submit*' to the legal decision (TC 43). Kahn explains that since it is the husband, rather than the wife, that performs this gesture of submission, the text threatens traditional understandings of the marriage contract as a justification of political subordination and absolute sovereignty.[184] The Duke formally submits to inferiors; his actions reflect the republican belief that the monarch existed for the people, rather than the population existing for the monarch.

Like 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity', 'The Contract' not only advances theories critical of absolute monarchy, but it simultaneously draws attention to the gender dynamics of power implicit within republican discourse. For example, Milton explicitly links political and marital covenants as he asserts that 'as a whole people is in proportion to an ill Government, so is one man to an ill marriage',[185] yet the marital contract is not made between equals since man is 'the head of the other Sex which was made for him'.[186] Though Mary Lyndon Shanley suggests that contract theory became the basis for 'Liberal arguments about female equality and marriage',[187] Pateman claims that the assumption within much seventeenth-century contract theory (with the exception of Hobbes) was that because women lack the attributes of 'individuals', they are unable to consent to an original contract; that they are not born free.[188] Thus, patriarchal constructions of gender are a pivotal dimension of republican polemics. Although covenants facilitate men's rights and freedoms, Pateman maintains that 'the contract establishes men's political right over women'.[189] Cavendish, however, systematically challenges women's status in revolutionary discourse. The fundamental issue of the narrative is the legitimacy of Deletia's marriage contract in relation to patriarchal authority, which draws attention to the implications of gender hierarchy within contract theory. Likewise, Miseria demonstrates her natural capacities for reason and leadership, highlighting her status as an 'individual'. Consequently, both narratives indicate that women have the capacity *and* right to be political subjects.[190] Both texts suggest, applying republican theories to

[184] Kahn, 'Margaret Cavendish and the Romance of Contract', 556.
[185] Milton, *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce*, 2v.
[186] *Ibid*., 76. However, though marriage is still a patriarchal institution in the text, Milton none the less argues for a more companionate conception of marriage, where both men and women can break an unsatisfactory covenant.
[187] Mary Lyndon Shanley, 'Marriage Contract and Social Contract in Seventeenth Century English Political Thought', *Western Political Quarterly* 32.1 (1979): 80.
[188] Pateman, *Sexual Contract*, 6. [189] *Ibid*., 2.
[190] Kahn, 'Margaret Cavendish and the Romance of Contract', 531.

women, that women should be granted the same natural rights as men, within both the political and marital realm.

Cavendish innovates upon the traditional analogy between politics and the marriage contract. Kahn argues that this is done to constitute women as 'representative political subjects'.[191] In order for women to be full subjects, Cavendish reiterates a commitment to absolutism, while conceding and incorporating some of the more radical ideas about political obligation proposed by republicans.[192] And yet, Miseria espouses a defence of regicide and property rights, while Deletia's marital contract is only established through legislation and mutual, ongoing consent. Both texts draw from republican theory without countering them with monarchist doctrine or ideals. Furthermore, such politics overlap into a political discourse of women's liberty and status. Although at the end of 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity' a peaceful, stable monarchy is established, and sexual violence is conflated with romantic love as the protagonist marries her attacker (which was not uncommon in early modern romance literature),[193] the text explores changing legal understandings of rape within the volatile political debates of the civil war. 'The Contract' likewise explores the central tenets of contract theory in the context of women. Although Cavendish is routinely assumed to be a royalist thinker, both texts demonstrate a complex engagement with revolutionary ideas of the civil war period. Cavendish provides a unique perspective, adding a feminist dimension to republican arguments based on property rights, self-defence and contract theory. Skinner claims that writers of republican or what he terms neo-roman theory generally emphasized that liberty and natural rights consisted of 'freedom of speech, freedom of movement and freedom of contract, and … that all citizens have an equal right to the lawful enjoyment of their lives, liberties and estates'.[194] Cavendish's heroines embody these principles, as Deletia determines her own contracts and as Miseria claims her natural right to property, self-defence and even political speech that is critical of the Prince's tyrannies. By situating sexual politics and female subjectivity into natural law, contract theory and critiques of absolute monarchy, Cavendish creates a parallel between the rights of male subjects and the rights of women, consequently advocating

[191] *Ibid.*, 556. [192] *Ibid.*, 529.

[193] In her discussion of romance literature, Jocelyn Catty argues that the 'raped or threatened woman coming to pity or even marry her attacker is a common phenomenon. Such characters implicitly or explicitly define rape as an expression of love, rather than as a traumatic sexual crime.' Catty, *Writing Rape*, 29.

[194] Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*, 20.

increased marital and property rights for women, and the right to self-defence not only against tyrannical rulers, but also the wider patriarchal system of power.

To examine Cavendish's political theory is to demonstrate how her politics complement her natural philosophy, which depicts a more democratic, consenting and equal view of corporeality and the workings of natural phenomena. Although Cavendish is often described as a royalist, the political ideas residing in her natural philosophy and her romances exhibit a distinguishing feature: of non-conformity to royalist conceptions of power, religion, politics, family or law. Situating Cavendish's work within seventeenth-century political thought demonstrates the complex negations probably engaged in by some early modern people between their own political beliefs and those of their families. While Cavendish was raised in a royalist household, married a committed royalist and was exiled for years with the royalist court, her romances deeply engage with revolutionary ideas from the civil wars. Cavendish serves as a fascinating model and case study with which to explore the complex politics that subordinate subjects – such as wives, servants, apprentices, children and so forth – may have negotiated between their family's political positions and their own. Her insistence that republican notions of natural rights and contracts do apply to women, children, foreigners, the poor and the enslaved unmistakably identifies her as a unique and important figure in the thought and discourse of civil war politics and contract theory.

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