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Abstract

Writing at a time when women had few property rights, were given scarce educational opportunities, and were viewed as incorrigibly irrational, the largely autodidactic English intellectual Margaret Cavendish is fascinated by knowledge and how to secure for herself a place in the micro- as well as macrocosmic community of letters. In particular, Cavendish holds an abiding interest in what we now call "consciousness" which she attributes to every piece of matter. Throughout the universe, the three aspects of matter--inanimate, sensate, and rational--are omnipresent. While throughout all of Cavendish's eclectic literary creation, consciousness is the unifying principle. Her exploration of consciousness manifests itself across genres--in scenes from her fiction, in the themes of her poetry, in her philosophical principles, and in her explanations of the natural world. I maintain that although this is not commonly recognized, Cavendish's principle of pervasive consciousness is a premise throughout her writings.

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MARGARET CAVENDISH'S EXPLORATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS IN HER
WRITINGS

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Cynthia Rogan de Ramirez

November 2011

Advisor: Dr. W. Scott Howard

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Writing at a time when women had few property rights, were given scarce educational opportunities, and were viewed as incorrigibly irrational, the largely autodidactic English intellectual Margaret Cavendish is fascinated by knowledge and how to secure for herself a place in the micro- as well as macrocosmic community of letters. In particular, Cavendish holds an abiding interest in what we now call “consciousness” which she attributes to every piece of matter. Throughout the universe, the three aspects of matter—inanimate, sensate, and rational—are omnipresent. While throughout all of Cavendish’s eclectic literary creation, consciousness is the unifying principle. Her exploration of consciousness manifests itself across genres—in scenes from her fiction, in the themes of her poetry, in her philosophical principles, and in her explanations of the natural world. I maintain that although this is not commonly recognized, Cavendish’s principle of pervasive consciousness is a premise throughout her writings.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Writing at a time when women had few property rights, were given scarce educational opportunities, and were viewed as incorrigibly emotional and irrational, the largely autodidactic English intellectual Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673), is fascinated by knowledge and how to secure for herself a place in the micro- as well as macrocosmic community of letters. In particular, Cavendish holds an abiding interest in what we now call “consciousness” which she attributes to every piece of matter. Accordingly, she maintains that Nature as megacosm is coextensive with all of consciousness while individuals know only their own matter and, thus, themselves best; as such, other “centers of unified sense and reason”¹ (selves or consciousnesses) are increasingly more difficult to know the more they differ in nature or composition. Her exploration of consciousness manifests itself across genres—in scenes from her fiction, in the themes of her poetry, in her philosophical principles, and in her attempts to explain the natural world. I maintain that although this is not commonly recognized, Cavendish’s principle of pervasive consciousness is a premise throughout her writings.

¹ Karen Detlefsen’s phrase for Cavendish’s view of an individual’s sense of individuality and awareness, "Margaret Cavendish on the Relation between God and World," (426).

I explore Cavendish's biography and writings to highlight her premise: reason, sense, and matter co-exist everywhere; therefore, every thing has a type of self-knowledge. Through sense and reason, each unified center becomes aware of its self and its environment. Cavendish portrays many unified centers and their worldviews in her fiction from equestrian dukes to cross-dressing women warriors, from lice-men to human organs, from oaks to hares, and even from moral qualities to a world that exists in an earring. She develops how all have full and varied existences, but how none is ever completely knowledgeable or all-powerful. In her philosophy she constructs how matter is all that exists, that there are no immaterials, and an overview of how the whole functions. Throughout all the universe, the three aspects of matter—inanimate, sensate, and rational—are omnipresent. And throughout all of Cavendish's eclectic literary creation, consciousness is the unifying principle.

The thesis will be divided into seven sections: 1) this introduction; 2) a discussion of Margaret Cavendish and her life; 3) an explanation of terms; 4) a background to Cavendish's philosophy; 5) an overview of how Margaret Cavendish's explorations help further the development of Intersubjectivity in literature, and thus consciousness in literature; 6) Margaret Cavendish, her writing; and 7) a conclusion.

Chapter Two: Margaret Cavendish, her life

Margaret Lucas Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, is a highly autobiographical writer. She writes abundant prefaces and she addresses her readers often throughout her texts. However, her presence is even more pervasive than dedicatory materials; it is co-extensive throughout her writings. As Emma Rees explains in her book, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile*: “Her voice does not remain in the liminal, confined space of the peritext, but seeps into the body of each publication.”² As such, an overview of the Duchess’s life is instrumental to understanding her work and her persistent exploration of what consciousness is and where it exists. Whereas Rees in her book concentrates on Cavendish’s development of matters related to gender, genre, and exile, I will concentrate on gender, genre, and consciousness. Whereas, it is true Cavendish lived a type of exile during her whole life, it is also true that throughout her days she questioned what it is to be aware of one’s existence and thus to be aware that one knows that one exists. As Lisa T. Sarasohn explains in her book *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*, “Cavendish could reply to Descartes: I am, therefore I think.”³ For Cavendish, existence equates consciousness.

² Emma L. E. Rees. *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile*, (27).

³ Lisa T. Sarasohn. *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy During the Scientific Revolution*, (193).

Cavendish's life can be divided into four thematic epochs: her Lucas family upbringing, her time of waiting on Queen Henrietta Maria, her married life in exile, and her married life after the Restoration. As an overview, her childhood was spent in a very close-knit patrician family that had a clear division between males and females. Her attendance on the Queen was short, only two years, but it was instrumental in teaching her more about her priorities, values, and shortcomings on the personal level, and about courtly life on a social level. Her married life in exile, full of homesickness and economic uncertainty, felicitously provided her with intellectual stimulation, even though in some ways it continued to be insular. Once back in England, Cavendish was able to continue her intellectual pursuits with more security. All four epochs influenced her thoughts and writings.

The youngest of eight children, Margaret Lucas was born in 1623 to Thomas and Elizabeth Lucas. Even though Margaret esteemed her brothers, she did not know them well because there was a great age difference between them and herself, and also as a result of the custom that boys were schooled quite differently and separately from the girls. She was twenty-five years younger than her eldest brother and ten years younger than the youngest. She writes in her autobiography: "As for my brothers, of whom I had three, I know not how they were bred."⁴ Even though Cavendish's ostensive purpose in "A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life" is to portray the nobility of all of the

⁴ See Cavendish, "A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life" found in *Paper Bodies* edited by Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson, (43).

Lucases' descent and upbringing,⁵ she seems to regret the differences in educational possibilities⁶ wondering what deeds she could have done and what thoughts she could have produced with a more academic background. Many of her works of fiction are an investigation into women of noble upbringing's possibilities, often incorporating into these female characters different traits deemed as "masculine" in her time. As a result, gender traits and expectations, as well as terms such as "princely," "hermaphrodite," and "monster" indicate important themes throughout the Duchess's thought.

Cavendish makes it clear that whereas her brothers were instructed and supported in active endeavors, Margaret and her four sisters learned how to be gracious, dress well, and the bare fundamentals of reading and writing. Through her autobiography, Cavendish develops the picture of the Lucas women existing in a paradoxical active passivity. They did not learn what the men learned or interact with the outside world. They did not even learn what affluent, non-aristocratic women learned; it was as if learning anything of practical value would diminish their station. They rarely interacted with other families, as if they maintained they were a perfect society in and of themselves. She reminisces:

As for tutors, although we had for all sorts of Vertues, as singing, dancing, playing on Musick, reading, writing, working [needlework], and the like, yet we

⁵ Cavendish wrote about her descent that her "Father was a Gentleman, which Title is grounded and given by Merit, not by Princes; and 'tis the act of Time, not Favour," *ibid* p 41. She and her sisters "were bred Vertuously, Modestly, Civilly, Honorably, and on honest principles," (42). Her brothers "loved Virtue, endeavour'd Merit, practic'd Justice, and spoke Truth; they were constantly Loyal, and truly Valiant ..." *ibid* (43-4).

⁶ *Ibid*, "the breeding of men were after different manner of wayes from those of women," (43).

were not kept strictly thereto, they were rather for formalitie than benefit, for my Mother cared not so much for our dancing and fidling, singing and prating of severall languages; as that we should be bred virtuously, modestly, civilly, honorably, and on honest principles.⁷

From the superior judgment implied in “prating” as well as the diminishment of the other “Vertues,” Cavendish depicts women who feel entitled to be worshipped strictly as a result of their essential nobility and beauty. Tellingly, this attestation to a patrician upbringing is written with numerous spelling errors; the form may belie the content. Nonetheless, the Lucas women’s lives seem vacuous. With little interaction to the outside world and its concerns, but also no access to its knowledge, how could they learn to embody the principles the mother ostensibly valued? The women seemed to exist in a world of stagnant self-esteem. Cavendish may have become conscious of this in her later years.

Cavendish also alludes to the purpose of a woman’s life as held by many in her day which also seems to be always tacit in her family’s view of females: a woman’s purpose is explicitly to supplement, uphold, and adorn the men in her life. The Duchess often gives voice to this female duty in her texts even though it is almost always counterpoised by discordant points of view. On the second page of her “Orations of Divers Sorts, Accommodated to Divers Places,” Cavendish explains that “all the parts of the whole” are dedicated to her husband, William Cavendish, Marquis of Newcastle (later Duke). She finishes thus: “for I have dedicated myself and all my actions to your

⁷ Ibid, (43).

Lordship, as becomes/ Your Lordship's honest wife and humble servant."⁸ Cavendish here, as she often does, makes a show of her indebtedness and humility. It is unclear, however, how sincere her feelings of little worth truly are and how much they are a rhetorical and political move.

Another example of this societal tendency is seen in Cavendish's character's speech by one of the seven women speakers in "Female Orations, Part XI":

[W]e women are much more favoured by Nature than men, in giving us such beauties, features, shapes, graceful demeanour, and such insinuating and enticing attractions, as men are forced to admire us, love us and be desirous of us, insomuch as rather than not have and enjoy us, they will deliver to our disposals their power, persons, and lives, enslaving themselves to our will and pleasures; also we are their saints, whom they adore and worship, and what can we desire more than to be men's tyrants, destinies, and goddesses?⁹

Once again, women exist in an active passivity: there is nothing they can do as much as instantiate beauty. They must develop their comportment in such a way so that by their very essence, they enslave men to them. The corollary seems to be that if a woman is born without beauty, position, demeanor, and wealth, she has little hope of embodying any power in her own life. This perspective complements Cavendish's emphasis on nobility: some beings are born essentially better and more capable.

As is typical in Cavendish's writings, she presents an ambiguous contrast to the actively passive woman: her own mother, Elizabeth Leighton Lucas. In her

⁸ See Cavendish, "Orations of Divers Sorts, Accommodated to Divers Places," (115).

⁹ Ibid, (251).

autobiography, she depicts her mother as being quite capable of dealing with the management of a large estate and family, especially after the early death of her husband:

[A]nd though she would often complain, that her family was too great for her weak Management, and often prest my Brother to take it upon him, yet I observe she took a pleasure, and some little pride in the governing thereof; she was skillful in Leases and setting of Lands, and Court-keeping, ordering of Stewards, and the like affaires.¹⁰

Cavendish presents a complicated woman who complains in such a way that her family could see past her obvious requests for help to her true feelings towards her worldly duties: she felt capable of doing them and received a feeling of satisfaction from a job well-done. There is the understanding that Leighton Lucas complained because she felt that her society demanded a woman to be passive, that a woman could only perform such work under practical duress to provide for her family; therefore, the mother made a show of emphasizing that apparently she was the only person available to fulfill that crucial task and this granted her the permission to continue to do so.

The Lucas family was staunchly royalist. Subsequently, Cavendish's belief in monarchy would become an integral part of her philosophy and of her literature. Even though her family was well off, her father Thomas Lucas only earned a title later in life. As a result, some individuals in the nobility saw Cavendish as a social climber since she married above her original station. William Cavendish was a marquis when they married; later, he would become the 1st Duke of Newcastle-upon-Tyne for loyal services

¹⁰ Cavendish, "A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life," p. 49

to the crown. As such, the Lucas family's monarchism in general and Cavendish's belief in aristocracy in particular have many complicated nuances that play into her worldview and philosophy.

The Lucas family suffered many losses for their loyalty to King Charles I and Queen Henrietta Maria: lands, houses, income, and homeland. Cavendish laments that she was never even able to gaze upon her mother's and sister's ashes after having missed their funerals because of her exile on the Continent. These were lost during the Civil War when the people from the town who sided with the Parliamentarians against the Royalists attacked the Lucas manor and desecrated the tombs at the family home of St. John's near Colchester. For her brother, Charles Lucas, his royalism caused his death. In 1648, he was shot after the three-month siege of Colchester during the Second English Civil War. He was executed, along with fellow military officer Sir George Lisle, to discourage other men from being loyal to the monarchy. The royalist camp considered both men martyrs and wrote songs and poetry in their honor. After the Restoration in 1666, he was awarded a peerage and became Sir Charles Lucas. The eldest brother, Sir Thomas Lucas, suffered a severe head-wound in battle as well which, even though he survived, shortened his life.¹¹

¹¹ See Cavendish "A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life": "But this unnatural War came like a Whirlwind, which fell'd down their Houses, where some in the Wars were crusht to death, as my youngest Brother Sir *Charles Lucas*, and my brother Sir *Thomas Lucas*; and though my Brother Sir *Thomas Lucas* died not immediately of his Wounds, yet a Wound he received on his head in *Ireland* shortened his life," p. 5.

After hearing that Queen Henrietta Maria no longer had the number of attendants to which she was accustomed, Cavendish's monarchism motivated her to beseech her mother for parental permission to pay attendance on the queen. In 1643, the young Margaret arrived to Merton College, Oxford, where the royals had repaired for safety from the insurgents to become the Queen's maid-of-honor. At the royal "camp," the twenty-year-old ingenue was lost in the effervescent and critical banter from the courtiers, ladies, and visitors with which the Queen surrounded herself. After her two year attendance, Cavendish accepted the fact that she would never quite be able to fit in; she was shy, naïve, and too serious. "Attending on the queen, Margaret frequently observed the 'great factions both amongst the courtiers and soldiers,' but she later realized that she had been too young fully to understand the complex and devious machinations of all 'their intrigues.'"¹² She seems to have been disappointed about what royal life entailed.

A year later, after the loss of the Royalists at the Battle of Marston Moor, Queen Henrietta Maria and her entourage escaped to Paris. It was in France, that Cavendish met the widower who was to become her husband—Marquis William Cavendish, Marquess of Newcastle. Newcastle was a prominent loyalist who fought in many battles, taught Prince Charles II to ride, and provided entertainment for the monarchs as well. Even though he was thirty years older than Margaret, they had a mutually supportive

¹² Whitaker, Katie. *Mad Madge: The Extraordinary Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, the First Woman to Live by Her Pen*, (24).

relationship. His tutelage, connections, and prefaces that he wrote for her books were instrumental to her intellectual growth and output. Newcastle wrote poetry, plays, and treatises on such varied topics as good leadership as well as equestrianism. He was also a patron to several important English writers including Jonson, Davenant, and Dryden, as well as the philosophers Hobbes, Gassendi, and Descartes. Newcastle and his brother Charles Cavendish often entertained writers and philosophers for meals and long discussions. Cavendish esteemed her brother-in-law mentioning him in her poems and dedicating works to him. Charles was well-versed in Mathematics and Philosophy; he greatly influenced and supported Cavendish.¹³

Cavendish's presence at Newcastle's meals and conversations meant that she had social contact with many intellectual figures; however, since she was shy, spoke only English, and often played the woman's part of being silent, it is not known how much she actually participated. We do know that she both questioned and spoke with her husband and brother-in-law about basic concepts and eventually engaged them in more advanced discussions. As newlyweds they lived in Paris for three years and later at the prince's behest moved to the Netherlands in both Rotterdam and Antwerp for 12 years. In Antwerp they lived in Peter Paul Rubens' house "Rubenshuis" renting it from his widow.

¹³ See Anna Battigelli's *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind*: "He [Charles Cavendish] was such an active and engaged correspondent that Miriam Reik appropriately calls him one of the seventeenth century's 'philosophical merchants'" and "Psychologically, too, Charles Cavendish had all the characteristics of an ideal tutor, despite his disadvantageous physical stature—he was hunchbacked and dwarfish. Clarendon singles out his 'gentleness of disposition, the humility and meekness of his nature, and the vivacity of his wit,'" p. 47.

In 1660, Margaret and William Cavendish finally return to England after 16 years in exile. Newcastle had hoped to become part of Charles II's trusted advisors and had even written him a small book along the lines of Machiavelli's *The Prince*,¹⁴ but the new king gave him different sinecures, returned his lands, and thought that was more than sufficient.¹⁵ On March 16, 1665, King Charles II granted William and Margaret the title of Duke and Duchess of Newcastle as a repayment for moneys William had lent Charles I in 1639.¹⁶ Katie Whitaker, a biographer of Cavendish, explains how during this time the Newcastles went to London and spent exorbitant amounts of money on goods. One object they invested in was a portrait of Cavendish by Peter Lely. Whitaker explains, "[T]his was an image of grandeur, rank, authority, and wealth, created to celebrate the Newcastles' recent rise to the top of the ladder of aristocratic status."¹⁷ Cavendish had at last found herself in a position of enormous economic and social strength. Even though

¹⁴ Katie Whitaker. *Mad Madge: The Extraordinary Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, the First Woman to Live by Her Pen*, p. 223.

¹⁵ Ibid, "Eventually William received some regard for his long loyalty to the king when, on September 21, 1660, he attended the court at Whitehall to be sworn in as a gentleman of the bedchamber. This was one of the highest court appointments... But for William the post was a sinecure—at once symbolizing the king's favor and bringing a salary of £1,000 per annum. A job of more real power came his way on October 1, when Charles II made him lord lieutenant of Nottinghamshire... William would return home to Welbeck as the most important man in his county..." (233).

¹⁶ Ibid, William had to give £887 to Charles II to make up the difference to the amount that the king normally charged for dukedoms, (262).

¹⁷ Ibid, (263).

her new life was not without trials, she took advantage of the benefits it gave her and she published five new books and revised others before her death in 1673.

There are general tendencies throughout Cavendish's life that attest to the importance in her life of gender, genre, and consciousness. Firstly, Cavendish was very conscious of being a woman and what that meant for her position in society. This influenced her literary and philosophical texts. She addressed the issues of which roles women were allowed to fulfill in society, what marriage meant for women, how women were excluded from nearly every avenue of education, and how all of these conditions were based on and perpetuated through arbitrary conventions, not necessity. As a result of her travels abroad, Margaret garnered an appreciation for the different roles women can take and this may have encouraged her to place her heroines in unique roles outside the accepted norm for English letters. While living in the Netherlands she was fascinated by a woman who played "the best female actor that I ever saw,' utterly convincing whether she appeared in her petticoats or dressed as a man in doublet and breeches."¹⁸ This unnamed actress, the wife of a common itinerant, believably acted out the roles even of men; in other words, she was almost capable of inhabiting the consciousness of other people. Cavendish was so intrigued by the actress's ability to embody others that she

¹⁸ Katie Whitaker. *Mad Madge: The Extraordinary Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, the First Woman to Live by Her Pen*, (212-3).

rented out “a room overlooking the stage and went every day to watch their performances” although she could not understand a word of the foreign language.¹⁹

The actress fascinates Cavendish for being so eminently capable in her job, for her ability to act the part of man or woman, and for her utter individuality. I suggest that the Duchess strives to embody these very characteristics in her own life as well maintaining that these qualities invest one with uniqueness and power above and beyond gender. Rees affirms Cavendish’s obsession for the latter, being seen as unique, in

Margaret Cavendish Gender, Genre, and Exile:

Her determination to be so present in her texts has much to do with her anomalousness: far from being an impediment to her, the singularity in which she delighted proved, during the hazardous years of the middle of the seventeenth century, to be the very means by which she could make her voice and contentious opinions heard.²⁰

Being an extraordinarily doted woman, gives both the actor and the philosopher a stage from which to speak and to be heard. Nicole Pohl observes in her essay on *The Blazing World* that Cavendish “elevates the (female) subject to a new non-gendered and singular status and thus finally creates a truly emancipatory poetic space.”²¹ She thus builds a metaphorical space that she envisions as hermaphroditic with characteristics of both genders, but more importantly, characterized by singularly itself. “Her concept of

¹⁹ Ibid, 213. Also see Margaret Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, (261-2).

²⁰ Emma L. E. Rees. *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile*, (23).

²¹ Nicole Pohl. “‘Of Mixt Natures’: Questions of Genre in Margaret Cavendish’s *The Blazing World*,” (51).

hermaphroditism in fact contains three elements: the male, the female, and the individual, developing a triangular discourse.”²² I suggest that Cavendish searched to create this space of strength in her own life by means of her writings and her actions.

That space, however, is only open to the very few. Even though the actress is spectacular and singular, she will never have any real power because of her essential lack of nobility. She may act the part, but Cavendish, it is understood, truly embodies every one of those qualities. Singularity and inherent superiority are essential for success. “Cavendish’s self-presentation means that she attempts to emancipate herself and delineate her own right to discourse. The female advancement her words afford is singular.”²³ It is so unusual and exclusive a space that no one can occupy it except the Duchess herself.

Secondly, gender is associated with genre throughout Cavendish’s oeuvre. She questioned norms in dress, speech, and gender relations in her own life while developing in her literary output a corresponding experimentation. “Cavendish was arguably the first Englishwoman to fashion herself as an author—a woman who desired, and achieved, publication on an unprecedented scale, and in a wide variety of literary genres.”²⁴ Not only does she write poetry, drama, fiction, philosophy, and scientific investigations, she

²² Ibid, (54).

²³ Emma L. E. Rees. *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile*, (169).

²⁴ Stephen Clucas, ed. *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle*, (1).

intermixed within the same text different modalities. Once again as she creates a place for the unique individual, she also makes a place for the unique text. Even though she intermixed many different styles, the two most divergent forms she continuously blends are what she calls *reason* and *fancy*, texts on philosophy or what we now call science and texts that largely come from the imagination. This is how Cavendish could come to write *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World*, often identified as the first work of science fiction.

Sometimes her exploration of genres can seem excessive leading one to question why she does not focus her output in order to establish herself in one area. “But since Cavendish thought that reason and fancy existed along a continuum of conception and imagination, she felt entitled, and sometimes required, to explore the implications of all her ideas in all possible genres.”²⁵ Cavendish anchored her output, therefore, to her individuality. I posit that Cavendish had a developed sense that individuality is intimately tied to a sense of self, to consciousness, a connection to which we will now turn.

In conclusion to Cavendish’s life story, I will revisit how she constantly inserts herself within her texts by tying it again to the actress that could embody any dramatic part; this capability impressed the Duchess and supported her developing views on consciousness. This talent complemented that of one of her favorite writers who also possessed chameleon-like abilities, William Shakespeare. In her book *CCXI Sociable*

²⁵ Sarasohn, Lisa T. *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy During the Scientific Revolution*, (78).

Letters, Cavendish enthuses about how the Bard is able to depict individual consciousnesses and even utilize the characters' very ways of being as essential aspects of the story line.

Shakespear did not want Wit to Express to the Life all Sorts of Persons, of what Quality, Profession, Degree, Breeding, or Birth soever; nor did he want Wit to Express the Divers, and Different Humours, or Natures, or Several Passions in Mankind ; and so Well he hath Express'd in his Playes all Sorts of Persons, as one would think he had been Transformed into every one of those persons he hath Described; and as sometimes one would think he was Really himself the Clown or Jester he Feigns, so one would think he was also the King, and Privy Counsellor; also as one would think he were Really the Coward he Feigns, so one would think he were the most Valiant and Experienced Soldier...²⁶

Cavendish is not talking only about variety, but also about the depth of beings' being, their consciousness, and about how one person perceives him- or herself differently from the inside than others do from the outside.

Cavendish is cited as writing "the first sustained evaluation of Shakespeare as playwright"²⁷ favoring him over Ben Jonson for his ability to portray how different people truly are rather than as mere stock characters.²⁸ Interior life or consciousness

²⁶ Margaret Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, (177).

²⁷ Katherine Romack and James Fitzmaurice. *Cavendish and Shakespeare: Interconnections*, (2).

²⁸ Shannon Miller. "More critical of Jonson, Cavendish becomes an early voice in elevating Shakespeare over Jonson, a move she makes that both participates in and may help to shape the cultural debate about Shakespeare's elevation into the playwright 'for all time.'" See "Thou Art a Monument Without a Tombe," (9).

therefore comes to have an intrinsic value of its own.²⁹ James Fitzmaurice in his introduction to *Sociable Letters* explains: “Cavendish was not merely the first woman to launch a serious and sustained critique of Shakespeare. She was the first person to do so.”³⁰ Cavendish looked beyond what Fitzmaurice calls “the Restoration distaste for lower-class characters,”³¹ to esteem instead something she found remarkable: Shakespeare’s ability to portray different types of selves which she attributes to Shakespeare’s understanding of nature. She writes in a prologue to her plays: “Yet Gentle *Shakespear* had a fluent Wit/ Although less Learning, yet full well he writ/ For all his Playes were writ by Natures light,/ Which gives his Readers, and Spectators sight.”³² She is discussing about much more than mere types; she is expressing how Shakespeare actually becomes other people through an understanding of individual consciousnesses. She insinuates, therefore, that Shakespeare’s knowledge is of a deeper, more valuable kind since it reflects Nature’s understanding of how the universe functions.

²⁹ Margaret Cavendish. 123 of *CCXI Sociable Letters Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London, 1664) “[Y]et *Shakespear* did not want Wit, to Express to the Life all Sorts of Persons, of what Quality, Profession, Degree, Breeding, or Birth soever; nor did he want Wit to Express the Divers, and Different Humours, or Natures, or Several Passions in Mankind; and so Well he hath Express'd in his Playes all Sorts of Persons, as one would think he had been Transformed into every one of those Persons he hath Described.”

³⁰ James Fitzmaurice. “Introduction.” *Sociable Letters* by Margaret Cavendish, p.20.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Margaret Cavendish, “A General Prologue to All My Playes,” *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays*, p. 265.

Interestingly, Cavendish wrote her evaluation of Shakespeare in her book *CCXI Sociable Letters*, a text that complements her *Philosophical Letters*, and which was published in the same year. The former pragmatically deals with real, though veiled, lives while the latter looks at how reason can make sense of the physical world. Consequently, the first is much more fancy; the second, intellect. This is important for our purpose because according to Cavendish, knowledge consists of biography, society, nature, and the manner in which mind makes a whole of everything in order to build a base from which the individual can act, live, and create. Biography is bound to consciousness and consciousness to one's gender and innate quality. As such, mere experimental science will never be capable of reaching such heights. Such depth of understanding can be investigated and expressed in literature or art only by a person of unique individuality and nobility. The actress embodied knowledge of individuals' natures and manners, but could never hope to delve deeply into deeper wisdom. Shakespeare, on the other hand, was such an artist; Cavendish maintains that she is such a force of nature, as well.

Chapter Three: An Explanation of Terms

With such a varied oeuvre that intermixed genres and consistently strived for being original, Cavendish offers many areas for study. I have chosen to direct myself, however, to the area that I find to be a unifying theme to all her writings: consciousness. Since the English language has changed so much from Cavendish's time to now, I include a glossary that has two purposes: to define words that Cavendish used in particular ways that differ from our use today and to define words in order to justify my employment of current lexicon that would have been anachronistic in her time. I present these terms under two headings—those that deal with intrapersonal states (States of the Self) and those that deal with communal areas of study (Terms for Academic Disciplines).

States of the Self

Consciousness: Cavendish addresses and even wrestles with the awareness of one's self and interaction with one's environment through many techniques and genres, but she never uses the term "consciousness." She consistently portrays how entities, both human and other, use different aspects of their rationality to exist and move through their environments. Cavendish's closest term for consciousness is a phrase—each part of

matter has “self-motion, knowledge and perception.”³³ These three aspects are further explained below, but they basically correspond to matter’s active, rational, and sensing faculties.

Cavendish questioned human nature and our place in the world during the period of time that separated Descartes’ *cogito, ergo sum* in 1637 from John Locke’s depiction of consciousness as “the perception of what passes in a man’s own mind”³⁴ in 1690. During this era, awareness of what one can know was of paramount concern to many intellectuals; thus, examining the state of being aware that one knows, perceives, and senses—consciousness—and then developing a term for it was a logical consequence. In other words, I suggest many were developing an understanding of the concept of awareness of self that eventually found the accepted term “consciousness.”

Even today, the understanding of the term “consciousness” still contains ambiguities. Robert L. Solso in his book *The Psychology of Art and the Evolution of the Conscious Brain* tries to clarify the meaning with the acronym AWAREness. The capital letters stand for the prominent rung of attributes: Attention, Wakefulness, Architecture, Recall of knowledge, and the Emotive. The second rung of attributes includes novelty, emergence, selectivity, and subjectivity. Solso explains the purpose of the framework: “...I hope to demystify this sometimes slippery concept...The five elements of

³³ Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, (30).

³⁴ John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (115).

consciousness in the AWAREness model are an attempt to reduce the variance in defining the subjective experience we call consciousness.”³⁵

For the purpose of this thesis, when I speak about consciousness I rely on Cavendish’s phrase ““self-motion, knowledge and perception,”³⁶ and on Karen Detlefsen’s characterization of Cavendish’s concept as a “center of unified sense and reason.”³⁷ Cavendish’s often uses the analogous terms of self-knowledge, perception, sense, self-movement, mind, soul, and spirit, as well. These are intimately connected to motion, knowledge and the senses and I define them briefly follow below.

Self-Knowledge: This is one of the components of Cavendish’s terminology for consciousness. She explains, “[S]elf-knowledge, the ground of all perceptions, is a fixt, and inherent, or innate knowledge...”³⁸ In other words, for Cavendish self-knowledge has an essential, unchanging quality which is not an unusual principle. What could be seen as unique is her complete adherence to the tenet that matter is all there is; that means once a particular entity dies, the knowledge of that particular unity ceases to exist. The individual parts continue to have self-knowledge as being individual parts, but they will

³⁵ Robert L. Solso, *The Psychology of Art and the Evolution of the Conscious Brain*, (27).

³⁶ Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, (30).

³⁷ Karen Detlefsen, "Margaret Cavendish on the Relation between God and World," (426).

³⁸ *Ibid*, (166).

consecutively once again become part of other larger entities and as such the “self” is not constant.

Perception and Sense: Perception is another component of Cavendish’s tri-part terminology for consciousness. It intimately connects to “sense” such that the senses are the organs or the hardware that captures and processes the exterior information: whereas, perception is the input itself. Perception is “exterior knowledge,”³⁹ data about the world that comes in through the senses of the body. The fact that there are different centers of unified sense and reason is fundamental to Cavendish’s ontology. Without the separation between parts and bodies, there could be no consciousness since everything would be one heap of matter. Since there are different unities, information is localized and ignorance of other entities exists which necessitates a process for gathering information about those entities through senses in order to be able to continue as a particular center of unified sense and reason. Cavendish explicates, “[I]n all natural actions, there is a commerce, intercourse, or agreement of parts; which intercourse or agreement, cannot be without perception or knowledge of each other.”⁴⁰ Perceptions bring in information from the exterior and allow for communication between matter.

Self-Movement: This is the final component of Cavendish’s terminology for consciousness. It is in contradistinction to Western Philosophy’s longstanding principle of the Prime Mover, of an originary force that set everything in the universe into

³⁹ Ibid, (167).

⁴⁰ Ibid, (172).

movement (or in our day, the Big Bang). It is also in contradistinction to Thomas Hobbes' insistence on viewing the universe as composed of inert matter. Cavendish explains, "[N]ature has infinite ways of motions whereof none is prime or principal, but self-motion; which is the producer of all the varieties nature has within herself."⁴¹ She maintains that all change and movement in the universe originate in matter's capacity for self-motion and work in conjunction with matter's other qualities of self-knowledge and sense. As such, matter is never inert; its consciousness, which is completely composed of self-knowledge, perception, and self-movement, is coextensive with all that exists. This even extends to mental actions:

In short, conception, imagination, remembrance, experience, observation, and the like, are all made by corporeal, self-knowing, perceptive, self-motion, and not by insensible, irrational, dull, and moveless matter.⁴²

Self-motion, since it brings about the "interface" between entities, is also the catalyst for communication.

Finally, self-knowledge, perception, and self-motion are coextensive and co-existent. "[B]ut no motion can be without perception, because every part or particle of

⁴¹ Ibid, (74).

⁴² Ibid, (149).

nature, as it is self-moving, so it is also self-knowing and perceptive; for matter, self-motion, knowledge and perception, are all but one thing...⁴³

Mind: For Cavendish, this is rational matter and all movements of the mind are rational matter as well:

[T]he form or pattern in the architect's mind, is as much material, as the builded house itself; the only difference is, that the exemplar, or figure in the mind, is formed of the rational matter only, which is the purest, finest, and subtlest degree, and the other is made of grosser materials.⁴⁴

Everything that exists in Cavendish's view of the universe is matter; mind and actions of the mind are composed of finer matter.

Soul: For Cavendish, this is the sensation of the rational process. "And this natural soul, otherwise called reason, is nothing else but corporeal natural self-motion, or a particle of the purest, most subtle and active part of matter..."⁴⁵

Spirit: For Cavendish, this seems to be the moving part of matter. "[W]hat is there on earth that is not wrought, or made into figures, and then undone again by these spirits?"⁴⁶

Finally, mind, soul and spirit are coextensive and co-existent.

⁴³ Ibid (113).

⁴⁴ Ibid, (255).

⁴⁵ Ibid, (221).

⁴⁶ Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophical Fancies*, (54).

Terms for Academic Disciplines

Contemplative or Speculative Philosophy: The investigation of truth through the intellect and reason. It values discourse and disputation. Even though Experimental Philosophy (see below) uses reason as well, it is too dependent upon factors beyond the academic's control: "And hence I conclude, that experimental and mechanic philosophy cannot be above the speculative part, by reason most experiments have their rise from the speculative, so that the artist or mechanic is but a servant to the student."⁴⁷

Natural Philosophy: This is a subset of Philosophy proper. It investigates the structure and rules of nature, "a rational inquisition into the causes of natural affects."⁴⁸

Experimental Philosophy: The investigation of nature through setting up scientific experiments. Important for Cavendish is that this is by means of the bodily senses which are more fallible than reason is and, worse than that, there is the further filter of scientific instruments. "[H]ow can a wise man trust his senses, if either the objects be not truly presented according to their natural figure and shape, or if the senses be defective, either through age, sickness, or other accidents, which do alter the natural motions proper to each sense?"⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, (49).

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, (158).

⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

Art: Margaret Cavendish's term for experimental science. "Next, I say, that sense, which is more apt to be deluded than reason, cannot be the ground of reason, no more than art can be the ground of nature."⁵⁰ Even though she accepts the term to refer to any act of manipulation and, thus, could include painting and literature, in *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, she almost always means "experiments": "And therefore, I confess, I have but little faith in such arts, and as little in telescopical, microscopical, and the like inspections; and prefer rational and judicious observations, before deluding glasses and experiments..."⁵¹

Fancy: For Cavendish, fancy is the intellectual exercise of joining different mental phenomena together to create what Cavendish calls a "hermaphroditic" conception, a conjoining in the mind of different elements of different substances to create a new whole. She writes: "[F]ancy or imagination is a voluntary action of reason, or of the rational parts of nature..."⁵² Cavendish particularly employs the term "fancy" to stand for imaginative literature. She gives fancy an extremely high value:

But mistake me not, when I distinguish *Fancy* from *Reason*; I mean not as if *Fancy* were not made by the Rational parts of Matter; but by *Reason* I understand a rational search and enquiry into the causes of natural effects; and by *Fancy* a voluntary creation or production of the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid, (4).

⁵² Ibid, (272).

Mind, both being effects, or rather actions of the rational part of
Matter...⁵³

Cavendish often intersperses works of literary fancy alongside works of more pure academic interest; they support each other in the search for truth.

⁵³ Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, (152-3).

Chapter Four: A Background to Cavendish's Philosophy

I posit that Cavendish attempts to construct a stronger system of philosophy by bridging the gap between the Cartesian supremacy of reason and the Hobbesian belief in materialism. This gap, that causes an intellectual battle in the Duchess's time between whether to give precedence to mind/soul or precedence to matter⁵⁴ has implications in understanding human knowledge and thus consciousness. Cavendish believes that Descartes loses any sense of locus where mind can ever interact with matter in his system of thought when he so deliberately separates the immaterial soul from matter.⁵⁵ For Cavendish, the body with its senses of perception is necessarily an essential part of a

⁵⁴ Lisa T. Sarashon explains how Cavendish conceived of *matter* in her book *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy During the Scientific Revolution*. "...Cavendish described matter as infinite and eternal and having control over itself, eliminating the necessity of either Nature or her ministers. Cavendish also made it independent of time: matter lives always in the present as a function of its eternity. Moreover, it is unlimited and takes form only when divided by motion. In this sense, it goes from the smallest to the largest, with the very smallest still sometimes described as an atom. In a sense, matter absorbs the attributes of divinity: it is infinite, eternal, omnipresent, and one," (57).

⁵⁵ Margaret Cavendish. *Philosophical Letters*. "I cannot conceive, how a Spirit should fill up a place or space, having no body, nor how it can have the effects of a body, being none it self; for the effects flow from the cause; and as the cause is, so are its effects..." (197).

being's knowledge of nature.⁵⁶ in other words, the mind is not superimposed on an automaton of matter.

Conversely, when Hobbes insists that only mechanics can cause movement, he loses a connection where the mind, and thus consciousness, can truly be affected by anything except by outside forces (which naturally include biological processes in the brain); a mind, in other words, could never move itself. Cavendish maintains that consciousness has the ability to bring about non-coerced motion on its own through reason and fancy (Cavendish's term for *imagination*), by what she calls *voluntary actions*.⁵⁷

Both Descartes and Hobbes's systems deny essential properties of the Duchess's ontology; therefore, Cavendish does not choose one over the other. She constructs her own philosophy. She suggests a property of existence that others championed before her—matter and reason coexist throughout nature in each and every particle of matter. Consequently, nothing is inert; everything that exists contains knowledge and, thus, neither can reason exist without matter nor can matter exist without reason. In this way, everything is matter, and mind still has freedom to act.

⁵⁶ Cavendish's privileging of nature sets her apart from her contemporaries. She conflates both *Nature* as a personification of all that exists and *nature* as the essential qualities of a substance. See Sarasohn in *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*: "Cavendish reformulated the definition of nature in her works, mingling anthropomorphized metaphors of nature as a woman with a depiction of matter as internally self-moving and self-conscious" (9).

⁵⁷ Margaret Cavendish. *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*. "[B]y voluntary actions I understand self-actions; that is, such actions whose principle of motion is within themselves, and doth not proceed from such an exterior agent..." (19).

Cavendish examines different ways of becoming aware and interacting with the material world as directly as possible through her senses, her intellect, and every discipline of knowledge available to her.⁵⁸ She states that her goal is to “find out truth, or at least the probability of truth according to that proportion of sense and reason nature has bestowed on me.”⁵⁹ In several books, she explores natural philosophy, a term we generally translate today as *science*, but that she took literally as *the study of the wisdom of Nature*. She also criticizes what she calls *Experimental Philosophy* which would be science that relies too much on experiments rather than logic and reason. Ultimately, Cavendish maintains that the existence of consciousness is best attested to from a first person perspective⁶⁰ or by Nature herself.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Cavendish conflates a number of terms such as *mind*, *knowledge*, and *soul*, often using all three similarly to how we currently use the word *consciousness*. See for example the following passages from *Observations*: “the rational part, or the mind” (17); “parts of the soul or mind, being all self-moving” (24); “nay, as there is difference in the corporeal parts of their bodies, so in the corporeal parts of their minds, according to the old proverb, ‘So many men, so many minds’: For there are different understandings, fancies, conceptions, imaginations, judgments, wits, memories, affections, passions, and the like” (85); “As infinite nature has an infinite self-motion and self-knowledge; so every part and particle has a particular and finite self-motion and self-knowledge, by which it knows itself, and its own actions, and perceives also other parts and actions...” (138), “that his mind, or rational motions” (146); and “Reason must judge, sense execute; for reason is the prime part of nature, as being the corporeal soul or mind of nature” (210).

⁵⁹ *Ibid* (9).

⁶⁰ *Ibid*. “[F]or it is one thing to perceive the exterior figure of a creature, and another thing to perceive its interior, proper, and innate actions: also it is one thing to perceive exterior objects, and another to receive knowledge: for, no part can give away to another its inherent and proper particular nature” (141).

Another method through which Cavendish investigates consciousness is to switch among genres. Cavendish appreciates the possibilities of what she called “poetical” texts or “fancy.” Creative endeavors such as writing, art, and performative pieces provide a vital function in the development of reason. These arts can explore the consequences of our view of reality with greater amplitude. She goes so far as to attach her fictional *The Description of the New World, Called the Blazing World* to her philosophical work *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* and view them as integral parts. Lisa T Sarasohn explains in her recent book *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish*: “For Cavendish, there is a continuum between science and fiction. Both are equally important in elucidating her thought.”⁶² The Duchess maintains that philosophy and fancy are equally the fruits of reason and that the full range of these disciplines is needed to explore the human condition and consciousness.

I suggest that Cavendish’s texts, both fiction and nonfiction, point to the importance of consciousness in two manners—by example and also by default. On the positive side, since Margaret Cavendish’s ontology presupposes that all matter is conscious, she meaningfully portrays alternative consciousnesses which have been disempowered and voiceless in her world. She envisions a more just world with a more balanced give and take of standpoints. She allows a glimpse of what may be missing from

⁶¹ See *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*. “[A]nd as she has infinite corporeal figurative motions, which are her parts, so she has an infinite wisdom to order and govern her infinite parts.” (85).

⁶² *Ibid* (62).

a society in which brute force predominates and some individuals are not allowed to flourish. On the negative side, however, Cavendish's writings depict the superior need for hierarchy, monarchy, and patriarchy to keep a society of individual consciousnesses in order. She presents arguments that we now see as classist, racist and ultimately arrogant.⁶³ These principles promote the status quo and disallow action and even dialogue in many cases. For the Duchess, certain beings are imbued with a higher amount of reason, a higher consciousness, and some are more imbued with power: these individuals enjoy a greater ability to bring about change. Individuals with less knowledge and power need to abide by the decisions made by their betters because if they do not, chaos will result. Ultimately, whereas she offers a space for individual improvement through knowledge and the fruits of discourse, she then limits that space by the mandate of higher power and reason.

Tellingly, Cavendish can be seen as being made voiceless by the lack of published English women authors in her time and disempowered by the inability to benefit from the

⁶³ In her *A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding, and Life* found in *Paper Bodies* she speaks of why her mother did not allow her to converse with the hired help: "Not because they were servants were we so reserved, for many noble persons are forced to serve through necessity, but by reason the vulgar sort of servants are as ill bred as meanly born, giving children ill examples and worse counsel" (43). In her *A Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*, Cavendish describes her utopia as supporting "one sovereign, one religion, one law, and one language, so that the world might be one untied family, without divisions" (201). Her perfect society has place for variety only under strictly controlled parameters, since this breeds discontent and war. Monarchy provides a safe, secure world by suppressing faction between peoples of lower rank and quality. This is the impetus for why the Empress made her native country in the parallel universe "the absolute monarchy of all that world" by annihilating all other countries' navies and destroying many of their towns and cities with fire. See p. 212-4.

structured education that men of her class enjoyed. Nonetheless, she finds a way to communicate her voice and hone her knowledge since she is both certain of her capacity to think well and able to find the necessary support to publish in England. These biographical elements inform her literary output and her philosophical thought. Through her own persistence and her husband's endorsement, she is given the literary space at least to participate partially in the fervent debates of her time: specifically, on what reason can secure, how reason can be used to understand the world, and how philosophy affects the political. Reason, thus, became a cornerstone of Cavendish's philosophy. Reason, however, is exactly what her society tells her she cannot possess. Reason, mind, knowledge, and consciousness are what the intellectuals of her time say a woman lacks: no wonder Cavendish insists that their instruments and procedures only reach the exterior and have no clue of the consciousness that strives from within. Her life and works clearly contradict her culture's social biases against women.

According to many scholars Cavendish develops and espouses a philosophy of 'vitalist materialism.'⁶⁴ Traditionally, philosophy and science have considered Vitalism and Materialism as conflicting, even contradictory, points of view; therefore, a

⁶⁴ See for example: Jay Stevenson "The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish," Deborah Boyle "Margaret Cavendish's Nonfeminist Natural Philosophy," Sandrine Parageau "The Function of Analogy in the Scientific Theories of Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673) and Anne Conway (1631-1679)," Susan James. "The Philosophical Innovations of Margaret Cavendish," Sarah Hutton "In Dialogue with Thomas Hobbes: Margaret Cavendish's natural philosophy," and Lisa Sarasohn's *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy During the Scientific Revolution*.

philosophical perspective termed ‘vitalist materialism’ requires some explanation. On the one hand, Vitalism states that biochemical processes cannot solely explain the existence of life; therefore, matter cannot account for the fact that living beings come into existence and go out of existence. Matter is one thing; whereas how that stuff grows, lives, and reproduces is a result of a vital spark or *élan vital* in each bio-organism. This spark is separate from matter. They are two distinct elements. On the other hand, Materialism is the philosophy based on monism, not dualism, such that all of matter is composed of pieces which act together through various chemical processes or in other ways that can be scientifically validated; all that exists in the universe comes from this matter. Even if we do not know those processes, they exist and someday science will be able to comprehend them. There are physical causes for every action. As such, there is no immaterial spirit such as soul or mind that somehow superimposes itself on matter. In other words, natural processes themselves explain all change. An *élan vital* is superfluous. What is more, an *élan vital* is mysterious; science does not accept mysteries or miracles.

Pre-Socratic philosophers such as Thales, Anaxagoras, Epicurus and Democritus establish the philosophical-scientific tenet that everything is physical and that no supernatural entities are needed to explain what exists in the world. Lucretius writes his 1st century BCE poem *De rerum natura* explicating certain natural occurrences through material processes in order to alleviate human fear of the supernatural and of death. He

maintains that terror originates from too much belief in the mysterious⁶⁵ hoping to convince Gaius Memmius, a Roman judicial official to whom the poem is dedicated. Lucretius also seems to have a larger didactic purpose: he wants to lead others to be more rational and less superstitious about nonmaterial forces on the world.

Later, in the seventeenth century, materialists such as Hobbes and Cavendish again hold the principle that everything is material. This is a main component in their rebuttals of Cartesian dualism even though they are cognizant that this principle is risky to hold while living under governments that tend towards theocracies. These materialist philosophers are frequently accused of condoning or even promoting atheism because God is unnecessary to the mechanics of the universe. Because of the repercussions these accusations could bring, philosophers whose thought and work include mechanistic processes often address the issue of just where God fit into their systems to avoid the consequences of being branded atheist and suffering the attendant consequences. Then, as now, the prevailing worldview put pressures on philosophers' worldviews to create syntheses between their systems of logic and their hierarchy of values.

At the same time that Cavendish works diligently to overcome her feminine lack of formal education and thus develop a coherent philosophical system, being a woman

⁶⁵ Lucretius, *De rerum natura*. "With the sweete honie of my verse to guild/ These doctrines, if your thoughts could soe be held./ In fixt attention, while you see the good/ That will ensue, when nature's understood/ By this our verse explaine... First I those images of things explaine/ That to these other doctrines much pertain;/ Which falne from things like membranes, here and there/ Doe always wander in the spatious ayre./ These terror in our waking thoughts excite,/ These fill our dreames with horror and affright" (115).

possibly shields her from having to defend her work on such fronts as the accusation of atheism: her society's belief in the assumed absence of a woman's intellectual stature allows her to present ideas men could not. As such, she actively involves herself in the intellectual debates that during her time are stimulated by interaction with ancient philosophers and authors. Nonetheless, she is often extremely reticent to identify which books and authors, ancient or contemporary, she does study. By claiming erudition, she would open herself to the accusation of her books actually being written by a man since no woman could write with such knowledge and she would lose the justification to assert her originality. Cavendish, at almost all times, wishes to claim extreme originality: "All the materials in my head did grow/ All is my own and nothing do I owe."⁶⁶ Originality is intimately tied to her concept of the three aspects of matter, having a higher degree of rational matter could be seen as the fount of brilliance and innovation.

As a result of her reticence, it has been difficult for academics to trace her influences. Some critics and historians take her at her word that she is an utter original. Others seem almost to decide whom she reads by negative bibliography: if Cavendish does not mention an author in a text, it is probable that Cavendish is under an anxiety of influence and endeavoring to prove her original ideas. Vimala C. Pasupathi comments in a chapter called "Old Playwrights, Old Soldiers, New Martial Subjects" from the book *Cavendish and Shakespeare: Interconnections*: "If Cavendish intended to fashion herself

⁶⁶ Margaret Cavendish, "A General Prologue to All My Playes," *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays*, (266).

as a writer isolated from outside influence, her protestations often suggest, rather than deny the influence of other writers.”⁶⁷

For instance, Emma L. E. Rees develops the theory in her book *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile*, that Cavendish takes Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* as a springboard for her own fancy.⁶⁸ Rees suggests that Cavendish’s *Poems and Fancies* uses the model of the Lucretian poem to be able to present in a deceptively congenial way her philosophical principles. “Both writers must, for public consumption, coat with poetic honey the bitter pills of their respective projects.”⁶⁹ Rees maintains that *De rerum natura* establishes the precedent so that *Poems and Fancies* can be published at all,⁷⁰ but that nonetheless their projects are different; therefore, the resulting works of literature are quite diverse. Rees goes on to explain:

⁶⁷ Vimala C. Pasupathi, “Old Playwrights, Old Soldiers, New Martial Subjects,” (132).

⁶⁸ There is no academic agreement if it was possible for Cavendish to have read Lucretius. See Emma Rees, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile*: “Wolfgang Fleischmann makes the point that so great was Lucretius’s impact in the middle of the seventeenth century that even self-professed enemies of the ideas of Epicurus and Hobbes, such as the Cartesian Boyle, and the Anglican Glanvill, were not above borrowing his atomist theories. Thus there is a strong argument for the inference that what may perhaps be best defined as cultural osmosis was as responsible for Cavendish’s understanding of Lucretius as a more direct or formal engagement could be” (57).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, (61).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* “Cavendish does share with Lucretius the status of a pioneer engaged in a controversial and unpopular project: in his case, the dissemination of a radical philosophy; in hers, the publication of a woman’s work. For Lucretius, poetry renders his doctrine more palatable; for her it is a mode of expression which can be gendered as specifically, and safely, feminine, and so can facilitate her first entry into print,” (61).

This means at times she appears to be writing intentionally against the grain of Lucretius's argument, whilst still using his images as material for her own work. In this suggestive relationship, form is as important as substance. Frequently, she picks up on notions which Lucretius rejects, exploring them with as much enthusiasm and reverence as she demonstrates for his positive hypotheses... In her poems and in her fancies Cavendish writes in a Lucretian mode, even when, substantively, her philosophy is at odds with his.⁷¹

Above all, Rees returns to her point that Lucretius afforded Cavendish the model in which to poetically present her thoughts so the content could be accepted more easily.

Eileen O'Neill posits another example of Cavendish's anxiety of influence when she suggests that Cavendish's philosophy may have its greatest parallel to the Stoics. O'Neill, in her introduction to *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, gives a substantial background to what subjects and authors Cavendish dedicates herself. O'Neill underscores Cavendish's lack of citations of her Stoic sources and her desire to be viewed as an original:

Between 1664 and 1666 Cavendish was engaged in two intellectual projects. The first was her critical reading of scholars working in dioptrics, meteorology, hydrostatics, thermochemistry, and magnetic theory. Besides the writings of Hobbes, Descartes, Digby, Van Helmont, and Charleton, she also examined the experimental science of the members of the Royal Society of London, especially the work of Robert Boyles (1627-91), Robert Hooke (1635-1703), and Henry Power (1622-68). Second, she attempted to master the natural philosophy of the ancients. Since she read no Greek or Latin, she turned to Thomas Stanley's *The History of Philosophy* (1655-62), which provides paraphrases of the source material for reconstructing the views of the various ancient sects. In her publications that followed this period of study, she criticized the views of Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, Epicurus, and the skeptics; but notably absent was any discussion of the Stoics. It is possible that Cavendish's silence

⁷¹ Ibid, (56).

here was fueled by the fear that her critics would charge her with a lack of originality, arguing that she had simply repeated the views of the Stoics. And if there was one thing Cavendish wanted as much as fame, it was to have views that were as singular as her dress and manners...⁷²

Once again, Cavendish's lack of proper citing gives the strongest basis for positing influence. Even though O'Neill alludes to Cavendish's need to prove herself as completely original, O'Neill does not develop why this is so except to state that it is a rhetorical stance. O'Neill suggests that singularity is paramount to the 1655 Cavendish because she does not want to be accused of not actually having written her texts.⁷³ I will eventually posit that Cavendish's belief in the value of originality is intimately connected to her philosophy's tenet that all matter has reason and the best way to understand the consciousness of reason is to develop what is unique in oneself to the highest degree.

Cavendish desires to debate on the issues with her contemporaries that they were most intent on understanding whilst always developing as much originality as possible. Even though her ideas share many elements with that of Hobbes and she was also accused of being an atheist, her later philosophy is not grounded in an inert materialism like his in which existence is composed of myriad lifeless pieces. In fact, she argues that

⁷² Eileen O'Neill, "Introduction" to Margaret Cavendish's *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, (xv).

⁷³ See O'Neill, "Thus the Cavendish of 1655 who rightly feared that critics would question whether her views were original and whether the writing was her own, boasted of having read little philosophy. But by 1664, numerous publications later, Cavendish would now acknowledge that she was the serious student of Hobbes, Descartes, More, and Van Helmont," Ibid, (xxxv).

within each bit of matter are three fused and inextricable elements: the inanimate, sensitive, and rational. She writes: “there is such a conmmixture of animate and inanimate matter, that no particle in nature can be conceived or imagined, which is not composed of animate matter, as well as of inanimate.”⁷⁴ Since she determines that each particle of matter is imbued with a rational element, she also believes that all matter essentially contains some amount of consciousness. She reasons that matter is all that there is and it is impossible for awareness to be either superimposed on matter or for it to appear spontaneously; therefore consciousness in each piece of matter is the most logical possibility. This turn was unusual, although not unique, for a thinker in the 17th century.⁷⁵

As stated above, Margaret Cavendish is usually referred to as a ‘vitalist’ materialist; that is, a thinker who explains the universe as completely subject to matter’s component parts and its attendant processes while also attributing life to some one thing that cannot be ascribed to matter, an *élan vital*. This description of her thought, however, can be seen as being at once too restrictive and too broad.⁷⁶ It is too restrictive because Cavendish does not assign rationality to just the living; she states that what we usually

⁷⁴ Margaret Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, (158).

⁷⁵ Other thinkers with vitalist aspects in their philosophies were Jan Baptist van Helmont and Henry More. Vitalism proper then went on to play a large role in chemistry in the 19th century.

⁷⁶ See for example: Karen Detlefsen in her review of *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, Eileen O’Neill in her “Introduction to *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*”, Jacqueline Broad “Margaret Cavendish and Joseph Glanvill: science, religion, and witchcraft”.

call the inanimate—that is rocks, stars, and the smallest pieces of matter—have consciousness as well. To label her a ‘vitalist’ is too broad because it implies she is a dualist rather than a monist. Her disavowal of a dualist system operating in our universe is so strong that there are scholars investigating comparisons between the Duchess’s philosophy and Leibniz monist view of existence.⁷⁷ Cavendish sees rationality as an aspect of matter itself by maintaining that it is integral aspect, not superimposed, and is inseparable within each piece of matter. She explains: “those three degrees were so inseparably commixt in the body of nature, that none could be without the other in any part or creature of nature, could it be divided to an atom.”⁷⁸ Thus, rather than endorsing the conclusion that Cavendish espoused a vitalist materialism, I suggest that she upholds a ‘panpsychist’ materialism, meaning a system in which reason (and, thus, consciousness) exists as a fundamental character in all matter throughout the universe. I will discuss this in more detail below.

Cavendish views the obsessive belief in the power of science as hubris, such that man values himself, his science, and his consciousness and rationality over all other beings’ consciousnesses and the rational existence that Cavendish insisted all matter possesses:

⁷⁷ See for example the Catherine Wilson’s chapter “Two Opponents of Material Atomism: Cavendish and Leibniz” in the book *Leibniz and the English Speaking World*, eds Pauline Phemister and Stuart Brown, 2007, (5-50).

⁷⁸ Margaret Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, (24).

Thus some learned do puzzle themselves and the world with useless distinctions, into animate and inanimate creatures; and are so much afraid of self-motion, as they will rather maintain absurdities and errors, than allow any other self-motion in nature, but what is in themselves; for, they would fain be above nature, and petty gods, if they could but make themselves infinite; not considering that they are but parts of nature, as all other creatures: Wherefore I, for my part, will rather believe as sense and reason guides me, and not according to interest, so as to extol my own kind above all the rest, or above nature herself.⁷⁹

While Cavendish is deeply interested in what would come to be called “the Scientific Revolution” and particularly the experiments performed at the Royal Society of London, she is, however, skeptical of their methods and their true potentiality.⁸⁰ Cavendish criticizes the manipulation of Nature as a turning away from true wisdom.

At this point, a caveat is useful: As often happens when dealing with Cavendish, her views on the Royal Society are much more complicated, however, than mere rejection. She was, after all, the first woman that was invited to their building to observe their work and experiments. This, however, happened after she had criticized them in print. Her relationship with the Society includes contrasting elements of strong attractions and repulsions which include her rank of nobility, the status of her husband and her late

⁷⁹ Margaret Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, (112).

⁸⁰ Lisa T Sarasohn investigates Cavendish’s ambiguous relation to the Royal Society in her chapter “A Wonderful Natural Philosopher,” especially in the section “The Visit to the Royal Society Revisited.” See *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy During the Scientific Revolution*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010, pp. 25-33. Sarasohn explains: “Rather than being impressed with the achievements of the Royal Society, Cavendish reduced its most valued accomplishments to sideshow stunts” (32).

brother-in-law, her sex, her writings, the king's favor, and her audacity. These all created conflicting forces in the amount of acceptance offered to her by the Royal Society.

Chapter Five: An Overview of how Margaret Cavendish's Explorations Help Further the Development of Intersubjectivity in Literature, and thus Consciousness in Literature

I propose that Cavendish's exploration of consciousness is a part of one of the primary concerns and developments in literature in general, consciousness, especially if we describe this search as dealing with the human condition, the flourishing of individuals, and as self-definition of what it is to be a particular being. What is it like to be alive and know that one is living? How is it different to be one person than another? Can we learn from the mistakes other people have made? Am I a different person if certain characteristics I have always embodied now change? How is who I am altered by the people around me? By the society I live in? How do I change the world by living and acting within it? What would I be like if I were no longer human? In sum, literature and art explore what it is like to have consciousness and do so through an act of consciousness upon matter.

Some current scholars of ancient texts claim that literature attests to changes in human consciousness from Homer's time to our own. Bruno Snell in his book *Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy & Literature* develops the case that on a close reading of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, the perception of the separation between oneself and others, expressed in human self-consciousness, begins to come about, but that it is still

rudimentary.⁸¹ Snell explains that the eras of epic, lyric poetry, and drama chronologically succeeded each other and were a direct reflection of the progressive development of consciousness. The “chain-like series of events” in *The Iliad* was not an artistic decision.⁸²

Actually this feature of Homer’s style is a necessary function of the perspective in which he discerns man, his life and his world. According to his view—and there could be no other for him—a man’s action or perception is determined by the divine forces operative in the world; it is a reaction of his physical organs to a stimulus, and this stimulus is itself grasped as a personal act.⁸³

Snell argues that people in Homer’s time perceived that the gods’ thoughts and actions actually manifested themselves in human internal organs, thus creating people’s emotions. Furthermore, they believed that human actions caused by those feelings create a series of actions in a ripple effect. Homer truly perceived life as a chain of events and this is why he wrote as he did.

Snell suggests by the development of his argument that literary artists can be the impetus for the development of human consciousness; by artists giving voice to human possibility they lead their peers to perceive the existence of new options. Snell furthers

⁸¹ Bruno Snell, *Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy & Literature*. Snell unpacks how Ancient Greek words mean differently between Homer’s time and that of Plato and Aristotle’s. He explains that “[i]n the preceding period the body is a mere construct of independent parts variously put together” (6). He says that thus in the archaic era there is a weaker conception of one’s self, but apparently enough to create a narrative.

⁸² Ibid, (43).

⁸³ Ibid, (43).

his case by stating that the lyric writers were the first to consider how the past and future impinge upon an individual. He discusses the work of Sappho, Alcaeus, and Anacreon to show how consciousness took another step:

The lyric writers are imaginative enough to contemplate many situations which do not occur in actuality, and to experience fully the discrepancy between what is possible and what is real, between their hopes and the cruel present, between Being and Appearance. Nevertheless they do not picture perfection in the guise of an ideal for which a man strives, or which one might adopt as a model for the transformation of the world.⁸⁴

The ability to “picture perfection” for possible models for transformation and, thus, utopias, is another level in the development of consciousness. Margaret Cavendish wrote her own vision of a perfect world in *The Blazing World* (1666), following in the tradition of Plato’s *Republic* (c. 380 BCE), Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516), and Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1627).

Snell claims Sappho, Alcaeus, and Anacreon innovatively introduce new temporal levels into their poetry through memories and hopes for the future, and they develop nonmaterial space by depicting people who are absent from one another but nonetheless commune through their common emotion of missing each other:

In the expression of their private sentiments and demands the early lyrists try to reproduce those moments in which the individual is all of a sudden snatched out of the broad stream of life, when he senses that he is cut off from the ever-green tree of universal growth. Such are the moments which furnish man with his first glimpse of the soul.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Ibid, (64).

⁸⁵ Ibid, (65).

Snell is careful to say the “first glimpse of the soul” since he does not believe that the lyric poets have as yet become sufficiently self-conscious to realize a consciousness. This is an ambiguous statement since Snell seems to maintain a mind and body dichotomy; therefore, it can either mean that the poets have a soul of which they are not conscious or that they do not yet possess a fully formed soul.

If he were a materialist like Cavendish this lack of consciousness would mean that their matter is not developed sufficiently for deeper self-awareness to emerge and is as such a not fully formed “soul.” Snell does address this and seems to believe they did in fact have souls of which they were not yet fully conscious:

That the lyric poets put the non-physical in a separate category cannot, indeed, be cogently shown by citing the words ‘soul’ and ‘mind’, for our fragmentary material does not permit such conclusions, and perhaps the new ideas had not yet crystallized sufficiently to compel the coining of new terms for things spiritual. But a turn of speech here, and another there, allow us to state with some conviction that the lyrists had ceased to interpret the soul only by analogy with the physical organs.⁸⁶

Thus, the lyric poets performed the huge cognitive leap of differentiating their emotions, feelings, and actions from that of their environment. The consequence of this advance in consciousness is that a sense of responsibility for one’s own actions begins to become apparent; a sense of morality develops. There is a deeper sense of how one’s actions

⁸⁶ Ibid, (59).

affect other beings and objects in the environment, a more exact inner representation of one's existence in space and time.

Snell advocates for the view that consciousness is pro-active, has an inner-directed urge to obtain knowledge that more and more adequately maps itself upon the world. Some individuals have the capacity to open the human worldview to more effective means of being aware. Snell, thus, asserts that the very depth of human consciousness altered as a result of Sappho, Alcaeus, and Anacreon. I assert that this view of knowledge and consciousness is similar to Cavendish's. For the Duchess, individuals that are composed of a higher ratio of rational aspects and who develop these through their life are the natural leaders, the natural monarchy. I propose that this is a large component of Cavendish's obsession with fame.⁸⁷ Fame is the acknowledgement by others that one has contributed to the good of humanity.

Snell investigates how consciousness develops through literature's ability to point out possibilities, whereas other literary scholars are investigating how writing changes our way of interacting and still others how literacy itself changes individual consciousnesses and cultures at large. They discuss the characteristics of different genres such as detective, psychological, or postmodern novels and the merits of literary points of view such as first-person, omniscient, or even second-person. These can be viewed as explorations of differing states of consciousness. What can a character know? What can a

⁸⁷ See Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies*, "I have an Opinion, which troubles me like a conscience, that 'tis a part of Honour to aspire towards a Fame," (A4).

human being know? What do these investigations teach us about who we are and how we interact with our environment?

Consequently, literature recognizes point of view as embodying an essential element of entering into someone's consciousness. Exactly who has access to consciousness matters. George Butte argues that it is only in a female writer born one hundred years after Cavendish's death, Jane Austen, did *deep intersubjectivity* first come into literature.⁸⁸ That is, Austen in her novels is the first to be able to portray the interactions of different characters' consciousnesses and how these affect and change the action of the story. Consciousness of another's consciousness and that the other is conscious of how the first subject is affected in turn, create an interconnectivity of feelings and actions. "Deep intersubjectivity has made its appearance in storytelling in modern culture, and it has altered our sense of self and community and the discourses that

⁸⁸ Butte also examines what he calls "deep subjectivity," a consciousness self-reflectively looking at herself while doing something else. He explains: Not only do I know that I know ... but I have a very distinct impression that "I" am thinking about how I know that I know. That is, I occupy a position (however illusory), even as I write these sentences, that some "I" is thinking about how I am conscious that I am conscious. This series of self-awarenesses, each responding to a prior experience of "I" and so each in a sense embedded in the previous perception in a linear, not spatially radial, sequence, seems to me a version of what I have called deep intersubjectivity, and which I want now to call deep subjectivity. (And you, the "reader-effect" of this rhetoric, might also have some sensation of an I reading these words, and also of an I behind the reader of the reading, thinking about the reading, perhaps penciling a question mark in a margin. So you, or "you," are part of the labyrinth too.)" See George Butte, "I Know That I Know That I Know: Reflections on Paul John Eakin's 'What Are We Reading When We Read Autobiography?'" (303-4)

construct and reflect them.”⁸⁹ In essence, Butte is saying that literature has led the way again to a deepening of consciousness and possibly even a widening of qualia. This is important to my thesis that Cavendish prizes the search for knowledge by direct and holistic means that incorporate both our senses and our reason not only because it values a deepening sense of self, but also because some academics suggest that Cavendish’s work was a precursor to such intersubjective novels as those of Jane Austen.⁹⁰

Another Cognitive Literary Study theorist, Susan Zunshine, goes the next step in parsing the development of consciousness in literature. In *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*, Zunshine maintains that Virginia Woolf further develops literature’s ability to explore consciousness’ capacity to map out the embedding of characters’ mental states as they interact reciprocally and intersubjectively. Patricia

⁸⁹ Butte *I Know That You Know That I Know: Narrating Subjects from Moll Flanders to Marnie*, (4).

⁹⁰ For an example of Cavendish developing intersubjectivity, see her portrayal of three souls meeting in one body in *The Blazing World*: “[T]he Duchess’s soul being troubled, that her dear lord and husband used such a violent exercise before meat, for fear of overheating himself, without any consideration of the Empress’s soul, left her aerial vehicle and entered into her lord. The Empress’s soul perceiving this, did the like: and then the Duke had three Souls in one Body...” (194). As far as academic claims about Cavendish’s hand in the development of the novel, these have a long history. See her early biographer Henry Ten Eyck Perry’s introduction to his 1918 *The First Duchess of Newcastle and Her Husband as Figures in Literary History* where he claims that her own biography *The Life of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle* that “it is not unjustifiable to class the work as an embryonic novel.” (2). Also, the 1910 *Woman’s Work in English Fiction; From the Restoration to the Mid-Victorian Period*, by Clara H. Whitmore, begins with Cavendish as the first representative.

Cohen in her article “Next Big Thing in English: Knowing They Know that You Know” explains Zunshine’s stance:

“Humans can comfortably keep track of three different mental states at a time,” Ms. Zunshine said. For example, the proposition “Peter said that Paul believed that Mary liked chocolate” is not too hard to follow. Add a fourth level, though, and it’s suddenly more difficult. And experiments have shown that at the fifth level understanding drops off by 60 percent, Ms. Zunshine said. Modernist authors like Virginia Woolf are especially challenging because she asks readers to keep up with six different mental states, or what the scholars call levels of intentionality.⁹¹

Zunshine investigates some of Woolf’s techniques for dramatically portraying socially fraught trains of thought and how one consciousness is able to actively and concurrently keep track of so many states in herself and others. Interestingly, Zunshine contends that one important aspect to being able to track many states is the ability to accept that the characters are trustworthy and not to be doubted. Doubting another’s conscious state adds another level of intention and is therefore more complicated.⁹²

Cognitive Literary Study theorists esteem scientific theory and link their work to its tenets. This tendency is important for my thesis because Cavendish also values science to the point of setting up her own experiments and utilizing scientific findings in her

⁹¹ Cohen, Patricia. “Next Big Thing in English: Knowing They Know that You Know,” (np).

⁹² Susan Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*. “An author could play with multiplying the levels of embedded intentionality, as Woolf did, or an author could deliberately mislead us about the thoughts, desires, and intentions of her characters, as Sayers says all detective story writers should do; but it may take a presently unforeseen form of literary experimentation to usher in a work or a series of works of fiction that could successfully do both,” (131).

texts, but even more so because of how these relate to human flourishing and consciousness. From our current scientific point of view, the ability for a long-living species to maintain a cognitive map of other individuals' intentions is an evolutionary advantage. From a particular consciousness's perspective, the advantage may be seen as a possibility for more happiness or an abundance of qualia, those moments that allow an individual to truly feel he or she exists.

Zunshine uses the concept from cognitive psychology called *Theory of Mind* or *ToM* to advance her cognitive literary studies thesis that applying scientific results “into literary studies by showing how their research into the ability to explain behavior in terms of the underlying states of mind—or *mind-reading* ability—can furnish us with a series of surprising insights into our interactions with literary texts.”⁹³ Zunshine believes we are hard-wired to mind-read, to try to understand other people's intentions. Our consciousness actively seeks to understand consciousnesses found in our environment. It is a way to keep ourselves safe and it is a way to just have fun. She explains, “I advance and explore a series of hypotheses about cognitive cravings that are satisfied—and created!—when we read fiction.”⁹⁴

Cavendish would have appreciated this view of literature as satisfying cognitive cravings and being enjoyable. In one of her prefaces to *The Description of the New World, Called the Blazing World*, she stresses:

⁹³ Ibid (4).

⁹⁴ Ibid (4).

But *fictions* are an issue of man's fancy, framed in his own mind, according as he pleases, without regard, whether the thing he fancies, be really existent without his mind or not; so that reason searches the depth of nature, and enquires after the true causes of natural effects; but fancy creates of its own accord whatsoever it pleases, and delights in its own work. The end of reason, is truth; the end of fancy, is fiction: But mistake me not, when I distinguish *Fancy* from *Reason*; I mean not as if *Fancy* were not made by the Rational parts of Matter; but by *Reason* I understand a rational search and enquiry into the causes of natural effects; and by *Fancy* a voluntary creation or production of the Mind, both being effects, or rather actions of the rational part of Matter; of which, as that is a more profitable and useful study then this; so it is also more laborious and difficult, and requires sometimes the help of *Fancy*, to recreate the Mind, and withdraw it from its more serious contemplations.⁹⁵

Cavendish claims that both our knowledge and pleasure centers need to be nourished; they equally exist as aspects of the mind and rational matter. She implies that one without the other causes imbalance in the individual, in his or her consciousness. They are both needed for the development of knowledge.

Cognitive Literary Studies theorists point to the question of how consciousness creates art and how works of art affect consciousness. Zunshine attests:

Thus when I refer to Woolf's or Richardson's or P. D. James's experimentation with their readers' ToM and/or metarepresentational ability, what I really claim is that they push to their limits certain aspects of the *general, constant, ongoing experimentation* with the human mind that constitutes the process of reading and writing fiction.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, (152-3).

⁹⁶ Susan Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel*, (73).

These theorists work in the interface between literary criticism, philosophy of mind, and neuroscience. They accept as a principle that there is an evolutionary process involved in consciousness and seem to question where the writing and reading of literature will take humanity.

Snell, Butte and Zunshine maintain that the development of literature has a corresponding heightening in consciousness. As such, if consciousness is seen as the software we use to interface with the hardware of matter, these literary critics seem to say that our software has self-reflective feedback loops that upgrade the system. Literature and other artistic enterprises have become instigators in evolutionary processes in humans. Butte and Zunshine specifically concentrate on the development of the novel and synchronous cognitive abilities of consciousness. Cavendish's contribution to the novel has not yet received its proper due although literary critics are now studying *The Blazing World*, her anti-romances such *Assaulted and Pursued Charity* and even *Sociable Letters*.⁹⁷

Whereas these theorists investigate more scientifically what happens in the brain when we read literature, creative writers and artists wield matter in order to express what

⁹⁷ For example, see Josephine Donovan examination of *Sociable Letters* in "Women and the Rise of the Novel: a Feminist-Marxist Theory." "The characterization of women as a 'Subject that is more Sociable' not only is rejected by the narrator; it also inflects a certain irony upon the title of Cavendish's collection, the *Sociable Letters*, suggesting a note of bitterness and anger at being an intellectual subject relegated to the status of a sociable object—a resentment she expresses throughout the work. Yet, none of the major theorists of the novel—Bakhtin, Watt, Lukács, Goldmann—has paid any attention to Cavendish, despite her obviously critical role in the novel's emergence," (457).

they perceive through their consciousness. They materially explore what it is to be conscious and how to manifest their intuitions and findings. Artists explore through their mediums the qualia of consciousness, the what-it-is-likeness of existence. As such, Shakespeare, Austen, and Woolf express in words what they perceive to exist in the world. They create works that speak to our consciousnesses in such a way that we are able almost magically to imagine ourselves as someone else.⁹⁸

Moreover, as Martha Nussbaum explains in *Poetic Justice*, these great writers create our entryway into others' consciousnesses in a manner that is safe to our bodies, but at the same time rather subversive to the status quo. In great literary texts, we are not in worlds that are completely comfortable to us and in this way they can transform our consciousness.

Another way of putting this point is that good literature is disturbing in a way that history and social science writing frequently are not. Because it summons powerful emotions, it disconcerts and puzzles. It inspires distrust of conventional pieties and exacts a frequently painful confrontation with one's own thoughts and intentions. One may be told many things about people in one's own society and yet keep that knowledge at a distance. Literary works that promote identification and emotional reaction cut through those self-protective strategems, requiring us to see and to respond to many things that may be difficult to

⁹⁸ This urge to allow our consciousness to grow through vicarious experience is, thankfully, receiving appreciation in the literary world. See Katherine Vaz's statement for the Dayton Literary Peace Prize on winner Marlon James's book *The Book of Night Women*: "This is work of the most supreme literary quality, daring to transform language into such an original realm that readers come away haunted, short of breath, and staggered with the sort of visceral impact that reminds us why we read: Not merely to understand other lives or worlds, but to feel them," (n.p.). Vaz is privileging qualia, our feeling of what-it-is-likeness.

confront—and they make this process palatable by giving us pleasure in the very act of confrontation.⁹⁹

Good literature is subversive and often deals with real problems that rattle our conscious minds from day to day.

Margaret Cavendish appreciates the subversiveness of literature. Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson link her reactionary texts to her ability to occupy two contradictory stations at once in their introduction to *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader*: “The paradox [her ability to transcend the rigid categories of gender and class] begins to recede when we realize that her works illuminate the most significant preoccupations of her society precisely because she played with, probed, ridiculed or rejected the dominant assumptions that structured early modern beliefs and behavior.”¹⁰⁰ In her writings, Cavendish questions why society was the way it was and imagines new possibilities for how it could be. She is certain that she possesses reason and she is highly cognizant that many in power question if a woman could ever possess any real intellect; therefore, in essence what she does is correlate reason to the presence of mind, to the capacity for awareness and suggests it is a matter of innate degree and attained knowledge. This is subversive to the hierarchy of power in her lifetime even if she holds monarchy in the highest esteem because it allows for intelligence where society as a

⁹⁹ Martha Nussbaum *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, (5-6).

¹⁰⁰ Bowerbank, Sylvia L. and Sara H. Mendelson. “Introduction,” *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader*, 9.

whole maintained there could be none. Cavendish seems to believe that Nature herself creates beings who are naturally aristocratic and these individuals owe it to the world and to themselves to develop their innate capabilities. We today may not appreciate her particular desire for hierarchy, but we can delight in the power of her subversive writings and her desire to imagine a utopia where she gives a voice to the ostensibly powerless and acknowledges consciousness in the apparently dumb.

Why does this matter? Why should we want to give voice to the inarticulate? Ultimately, a world in which we have a better understanding of all types of consciousness would allow us the foundations on which to live in ways that are healthier and more respectful for everyone and everything. In other words, it would help to ensure dignity for all, instead of for the few. It would encourage we humans to take responsibility for our actions and not allow us to ignore our role as integral to the health and well-being of all of the universe. I aver, and suggest that Cavendish would support me, that believing we stand apart is not truly supported by the science of consciousness and that our attempt to lord over all creation is not supported by philosophy. Literary texts allow, in a way that straight science cannot, opportunities to explore what could be possible in our existence and experiment with what consciousness is. This is true today and was true when Margaret Cavendish was writing and experimenting with numerous genres.

Chapter Six: Margaret Cavendish, her writing

Margaret publishes her first book, *Poems and Fancies*, in 1653. The bulk of my presentation on her views of consciousness will come from this text since it covers many topics and is almost an overview of all the themes she would address in the years ahead. This is not to say that some of her tenets do not change—the characteristics of elements such as atoms, vacuum, and “the kernel of the brain” alter strongly—but her desire to have an active understanding of intellect, how humans use reason to move around in the world, and an overall structure that includes mind, bodily sensation, and the building blocks of matter is always paramount. As such *Poems and Fancies* is a good place to start.

It is also important to underline that from the beginning “fancy” was as important as reason: intellect is not as superior as often supposed for it does not have the capacity to imagine alternative ways of being if it is not supported by fancy. Literature and art are as crucial to human flourishing as reason and science. She also places a high importance on how “patterning,” the copying of patterns throughout creation, is the method through which bits of matter interact with other bits of matter. Cavendish holds that each body’s senses or perceptions “pattern” out information from other substances and use this knowledge to reason how the individual should proceed. This is a consequence of her strong materialism—the physical body is absolutely part of each being’s consciousness:

she does not maintain a Cartesian mind-body dualism. Since individual bits of matter all contain reason, Cavendish assumes that chaos could easily be the result; however, since we have a rather ordered world, she also assumes that there is a great deal of dialogue or communication in the universe between beings which results in creating harmony. As such, because of the transference of patterns and the relative harmony of the world, dialogue and discourse become extremely vital. *Poems and Fancies* contains much poetry that is set up as conversations.

One particularly interesting poem as far as consciousness is concerned is “A World *in an Eare-Ring*.” Claire Jowitt connects the poem to the famous portrait of Queen Elizabeth by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger called the “Ditchley” portrait.¹⁰¹ Jowitt suggests that many English subjects during the Restoration looked back upon the reign of Queen Elizabeth as a golden time. For Cavendish, however, there was the added element that Elizabeth was a woman who occupied the ideal position: she had power, was famous, and cultivated the perception that her body was England: the monarch’s consciousness carried the country to its greatest heights.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Claire Jowitt. "Imperial Dreams? Margaret Cavendish and the Cult of Elizabeth" (384).

¹⁰² Ibid, “What all these laudatory representations of Elizabeth I emphasise is the sense of nostalgia for a time when England was “great,” and “These persistent references to the perceived successes – military, economic, diplomatic – of Elizabeth’s reign perpetuate the myths about the Queen that paintings such as the “Ditchley” portrait sought to emphasise,” (390).

On another level, however, the poem is about different consciousnesses existing in the same space almost in parallel times or dimensions. Margaret sets up in the poem the possibility of worlds co-existing in close quarters without one being aware that the other exists.

There *Markets* bee, and things both bought, and sold, □
Know not the price, nor how the *Markets* hold. □
There *Governours* do rule, and *Kings* do Reigne, □
And *Battels* fought, where many may be slaine. □
And all within the *Compass* of this *Ring*, □
And yet not tidings to the *Wearer* bring. □
Within the *Ring* wise *Counsellors* may sit, □
And yet the *Eare* not one wise word may get.¹⁰³

Here in “A World in an Eare-Ring.” are parallel consciousnesses that have no perception of each other’s existence.

Or could it be that the smaller, more dependent world is aware of its state of relying on the other? This makes sense from a sociological perspective since people in positions of subordination utilize their rational abilities to create “antennas” for the movements of their superiors. Cavendish portrays this dynamic in her play *The Religious*. The heroine Lady Perfection, as her name denotes, is of the aristocracy. Her principle concern is with how she can always do what is right to the best of her ability, to be virtuous. She does not know many of the people who are in the lower classes. Mistress Odd-Humour, the daughter of a workingman, not only knows Lady Perfection but also when her wedding day is supposed to be and other facts about the Lady. In this play,

¹⁰³ Margaret Cavendish, “A World in an Eare-Ring,” *Poems and Fancies*, (45).

Cavendish depicts other differentials in power relations as well—the lower class is vigilant to the upper class’s movements, children to their parents, and women to men. She sees consciousness as working economically; people pay active attention to what can most affect their quality of life and what has a low probability to cause disruption to their lives will not be actively attended.

Once again, Cavendish has a deep understanding of Nature. Current science holds that predator and prey employ similar economic survival techniques in their environment: an individual searches out certain phenomena with its consciousness depending on its ecological niche. Predators utilize the ability to focus their consciousness on a single animal that they view as the weakest in order to be able to hunt successfully. For this, they have evolved a section of the retina called the fovea that allows clear, accurate, and detailed vision. Prey, on the other hand, have an open, general focus in order to spy trouble that comes from any direction. Their eyes are even set farther apart on the head in order to allow a wider range of vision. They need to be aware of more phenomena generally.

As Robert Procter emphasizes in his book *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, an individual makes conscious and unconscious decisions about which factors are going to be held actively in consciousness: “Part of the idea is that inquiry is selective. We look *here* rather than *there*; we have the predator’s fovea (versus the indiscriminate watchfulness of the prey), and the decision to focus on *this* is therefore

invariably a choice to ignore *that*.”¹⁰⁴ Consciousness and being aware that one is aware carries a cost in energy. The powerful are going to have a different type of focus of awareness than the weaker. Cavendish was conscious of this fact. This is why Mistress Odd-Humour knows about Lady Perfection: since she is of a subservient, lower social status, it is in her best interest to keep tabs on the actions of those who are above her. Lady Perfection, on the contrary, needs to stay focused on perfecting her virtue and, therefore, is less cognizant of other “noise” in her environs.

Returning to the “Eare-ring,” Cavendish alludes to different social spheres and how with a simple flick of the sovereign’s hand countless lives can be affected and even destroyed. This is also a reference to her power. In the Ditchley portrait, Queen Elizabeth stands upon a map of England. Cavendish seems particularly cognizant of how a change of focus can bring about the lack of awareness that other consciousnesses even exist. Sometimes these others are instrumentalized like the earring or like the map; they become mere objects in a worldview. The powerful bring about life-altering events in the lives of the voiceless even without the knowledge that they have done so.

Cavendish intimately knows that men were looking at women and assuming that there was little intellect, “nothing was really happening” in their brains. She, herself, claims umbrage for any deficiencies of her work in this supposed faulty nature of women in various passages. For example she implores, “but your goodness and civility being as

¹⁰⁴ Robert Proctor and Londa L. Schiebinger, *Agnology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance*, (7).

great as your learning, would rather conceal, than discover or laugh at those weaknesses, and imperfections which you know my sex is liable to”¹⁰⁵ written to the men at the “Most Famous University of Cambridge” and also the following to all professors: “I pray Consider my Sex and Bredding, and they will fully Excuse those Faults which must Unavoidably be found in my Works.”¹⁰⁶ Furthermore being a shy person she knows that people often assumed that she is a simpleton. These mistaken opinions contradict her own view of the value of her thinking process; she knows that appearances and unexamined judgments can deceive. Perhaps, this is the basis for how she could look around herself and believe that there is consciousness where we do not even know it exists. In the end, she sees consciousness as a result of the complicated forces of gender, learning, society, birth (which today she would probably call genetics), humors, wit, virtue, and life choices.

Hilda L. Smith explains in her essay “Margaret Cavendish and the False Universal” that Margaret “does not, as most of those in her century did—and as the majority of scholars continue to do today—establish standards for judging women by criteria based on either a distinct nature or distinct place in society.”¹⁰⁷ I suggest that Cavendish has layers to how she envisions the nature of humans in general, and women or men in particular. On one layer, she maintains a type of essentialism as far as souls and

¹⁰⁵ Margaret Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, (6).

¹⁰⁶ Margaret Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*. (40).

¹⁰⁷ Hilda L Smith, “Margaret Cavendish and the False Universal,” (107).

gender are concerned. On another, there are some characteristics in which all humans partake with other substances; that is, consciousness. She seems to envision a nesting of characteristics in each individual that starts from the most basic, the existence of consciousness with sensate and inanimate matter at every level, to more and more processes within the substance (ability to grow and procreate), to the ability to transport oneself, to the ability to use reason in a sustained and effective way to for envisioning and being in the world. Finally, individuals embody such characteristics as gender, and I would aver, a quality-of-being that results from the ratio of the rational, sensate, and inanimate aspects of matter coupled with learning from individual life experiences, the highest or finest of which would be a noble quality-of-being. This creates a natural monarchy that does not consist exclusively of men.

This hierarchy does, however, consist of individuals who are utterly unique; this, I suggest is Cavendish's grounding for her privileging of individuality and may be the origin of some of her literary flourishes. Smith, for example, comments on Cavendish's propensity for rhetoric that contains a "movement from ignorance to exclusion" and that "she begins an argument at one point and ends up at quite a different one."¹⁰⁸ To take a case in point, Cavendish begins one of her lines of reasoning by saying that women are guileless when it comes to most areas of public life as if it were somehow a deficit residing in women; her next step, however, is to change the playing field by saying that feminine lack of knowledge actually stems from a society that excludes women from

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, (104).

participation and thus its origin lies other where than in their very sex. Here, Smith is actually making six points: 1) Cavendish constructs arguments with contradictions, exaggerations, circular reason and other constructions that are not accepted in standard logic; 2) Cavendish probably employs such untraditional forms deliberately and subversively; 3) Cavendish has a strong opinion that culture is constructed by people and does not have to be as it is in practice; 4) access to learning is controlled by those who are in power; 5) those who are in power are men; and, finally, 6) only rarely is there a woman monarch or a woman with power. This explains why Queen Elizabeth is such a fascinating subject for Cavendish since she was a woman with power over many consciousnesses and material goods.

“A Dialogue betwixt Learning, and Ignorance”¹⁰⁹ is a poem in conversational form that plays on the various advantages to the individual in not knowing, in ignorance. Cavendish gives voice to her philosophical tenet that we are not able to maintain (sometimes we cannot even entertain) some knowledge in our consciousnesses, such as the impossibility of knowing God, all of nature, or other mysteries. Accepting this fact can help release us from worldly cares, save us from the despair that can result from the effort and futility of learning only to lose all knowledge in death, and relieve us of the anguish caused by the fact that we were happier in Eden than we could ever be after the Fall. Cavendish also states the obvious reality that many people choose not to expend the energy required for education and the development of a strong appreciation for strict

¹⁰⁹ Margaret Cavendish, *Poems and Fancies*, (84-5).

reason; this is often to be attributed to laziness and a desire to not accept personal responsibility. This dialogic poem suggests that human flourishing has a complicated relationship with learning and ignorance. The study of ignorance, of how and why we decide not to develop and maintain certain objects of learning of our environment only recently received a name, *Agnotology*. Cavendish perceptively saw four centuries ago that it is an important aspect and function of our consciousness.

“A Dialogue Between an Oake and a Man cutting him downe”¹¹⁰ is another poem in dialogue between a large, ancient and stately tree with the owner of the land who has come to cut it down. The oak tree puts forth many arguments about why the man should let him stand. The man retorts with utilitarian reasons that the oak is more valuable dead than alive. When the man asks: “Why do you wish to live, and not to dye,/ Since you no *Pleasure* have, but *Misery*?”, the oak replies: “Yet *I* am happier, said the *Oake*, then *Man*;/ With my condition *I* contented am.” Cavendish suggests that even though it is unusual that the man could even sense that the tree talks to him, his hubris still insists on being the arbiter of what has value and what does not, and then on ultimately possessing the decision of who shall live and who shall die. The poem ends with the following strophe:

Alas, *poore Oake*, thou understandst, nor can
Imagine halfe the misery of *Man*.
All other *Creatures* onely in *Sense* joyne,
But *Man* hath something more, which is *divine*.
He hath a *Mind*, doth to the *Heavens* aspire,

¹¹⁰ Ibid, (66).

A *Curiosity* for to inquire:
 A *Wit* that nimble is, which runs about
 In every *Corner*, to seeke *Nature* out.
 For *She* doth hide her selfe, as fear'd to shew
Man all *her workes*, least *he* too powerfull grow.
 Like to a *King*, his *Favourite* makes so great,
 That as the last, *he* feares his *Power* hee-ll get.
 And what creates *desire* in *Mans Breast*,
 A *Nature* is *divine*, which seekes the best:
 And never can be satisfied, until
He, like a *God*, doth in *Perfection* dwell.
 If you, as *Man*, desire like *Gods* to bee,
I'le spare your *Life*, and not cut downe your *Tree*.

Here, again, Cavendish condemns man's hubris in believing that he is the only being with reason and, thus, jumping from this mistaken belief to the further insolence that his mind, his consciousness, gives him a higher access to divinity, to royalty, and to the right to abuse his power. Ultimately, man acts in self-interest, a self-interest which based on mistaken premises creates unimaginable destruction throughout the world.

Poems and Fancies ends with the eleven-page allegory "The Animal Parliament" on how the mind rules over the body and spirit. At least to our modern ear, the title is a misnomer: there are no animals in this parliament. The elements of the allegory are actually different aspects such as thoughts and virtues inside the mind of a single, well-ruled human. "The *Soul* called a *Parliament* in his *Animal Kingdom*, which *Parliament* consisted of three parts, the *Soul*, the *Body*, and the *Thoughts*; which are *Will*, *Imagination*, and *Passions*."¹¹¹ The piece portrays a whole session where the King rules

¹¹¹ Ibid, (199).

while different aspects bring matters of state to consciousness. Different issues are raised, debated, and finally the king rules on what is to be accepted and what not. This is important for two reasons: how Cavendish in the piece sees the King as residing in the brain with a view reminiscent of Descartes and his pineal gland, and the negotiations that go on are in agreement with Dennett's view on how the brain decides which objects of the environment and the self are brought into consciousness and how the body maintains homeostasis.

Cavendish says about the brain: "The *Head* is the *upper House of Parliament*, where at the upper end of the said *House* sits the *Soul King*, in a *Kernel* of the *Braine*, like to a *Chaire of State* by himselfe alone, and his *Nobility* round him."¹¹² Here, she is imagining through her fancy Descartes' supposition presented in *The Passions of the Soul*: the pineal gland is the place in the brain where the soul interacts with the body. Cavendish slowly rejects Descartes' premise. In later texts, Cavendish makes light of this belief and more than ten years later, she opposes this view absolutely in both *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*¹¹³ and *Philosophical Letters*.¹¹⁴ "The Animal Parliament" develops what this Cartesian arena in the mind would be like. The

¹¹² Ibid, (199).

¹¹³ Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*: "Some learned conceive, that all knowledge is in the mind, and none in the senses: For the senses, say they, present only exterior objects to the mind; which sits as a judge in the kernel, or fourth ventricle of the brain, or in the orifice of the stomach, and judges of them; which in my apprehension, is a very odd opinion..." (pg 153).

¹¹⁴ Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters*, (111).

key aspects of which Cavendish would always maintain: the dialogic process whose decisions are ultimately the arbiter of what comes into full, bodily consciousness.

This brings us to the second point: Daniel C. Dennett in his book *Sweet Dreams: Philosophical Obstacles to a Science of Consciousness* calls this arena where impressions come in and a mandating force presides the “Cartesian theater in the mind.” He uses this term derogatorily since he insists that the whole view that there is a little person, the *homunculus*, in the brain who decides what to bring to consciousness and what is most rational is not sustained by neuroscience.

And as I have argued at length..., this imagined showcase, the Cartesian Theater, where everything comes together for consciousness, must be dismantled. All the work done by the imagined homunculus in the Cartesian Theater must be distributed among various lesser agencies in the brain, *none of which is consciousness*. Whenever that step is taken, however, the Subject vanishes, replaced by mindless bits of machinery unconsciously executing their tasks.¹¹⁵

By personifying the process the brain follows, Cavendish is actually able to ideate a mental picture very much like the one Dennett depicts above. There are processes, very much like legal or parliamentary procedures, the brain performs to decide which pieces of information need to become present to the conscious mind. The difference of course is Cavendish sustains that rationality is present in all bits of matter. In this way, her presenting a court where different aspects like lords and bishops need to clamor to be heard through reason of their argument or the passion of their speech begins to explain

¹¹⁵ Daniel Dennett, *Sweet Dreams: Philosophical Obstacles to a Science of Consciousness*, (69-70).

Cavendish's obsession with fame. She presents fame as the way certain thoughts, memories, or passions gain dominance in the body and the way certain people gain ascendance in history. She envisions a dialogue or a parliamentary process that decides which elements should be honored.

The book *CCXI Sociable Letters* includes passages where Cavendish presents 211 short pieces in epistolary form that deal with many topics from day-to-day life to create one side of a dialogue between esteemed correspondents. The "sociability" aspect is important to Cavendish: life is not a solitary existence, but a continual interplay between consciousnesses. The events she relates are a few experiences in Antwerp, her sense impressions, her memories, and her conclusions about what it is to flourish. The magistrate of her mind, the consciousness who keeps track of the goings-on and sense impressions from her experiences, correlates the impressions of these perceptions with reason to create thoughts worth reading and cherishing:

And thus Her thoughts, the Creatures of her Mind,
Do Travel through the World amongst Mankind,
And then Return, and to the Mind do bring
All the Relations of each several thing;
And Observation Guides them back again
To Reason, their Great King, that's in the Brain;
Then Contemplation calls the Senses straight,
Which Ready are, and Diligently Wait
Commanding Two these Letters for to Write,
Touch in the Hand, as also the Eye-sight,
These Two the Soul's Clerks are which do Inscribe,
And Write all Truly down, having no Bribe.

She presents reason and contemplation as the qualities she employs throughout the book to process the questions and comments that her epistolary interlocutors pose to her. The mind, or the consciousness, relies on reason which observes and describes thought processes and on contemplation which observes and describes sensory perceptions. Together these two gather the rational and sensory phenomena that the consciousness then processes to give the self a more true account of the world.

Observations on Experimental Philosophy is much more scholarly than *Poems and Fancies* or *CCXI Sociable Letters*. This is where Cavendish endeavors to relate a much more systematic body of thought about how the world is composed. She presents an even stronger materialist position than previously, thus giving an account of how and why she reasoned that matter is made of three “degrees.” Even here, however, she often presents her argument in the form of a dialogue between different parts of her consciousness. For Cavendish, knowledge always consists of the body, reason and a social connection:

The first difference did arise about the question, How it came, that matter was of several degrees, as animate and inanimate, sensitive and rational? For, my latter thoughts would not believe that there was any such difference of degrees of matter: To which my former conceptions answered, that nature, being eternal and infinite, it could not be known how she came to be such, no more than a reason could be given how God came to be: For nature, said they, is the infinite servant of God, and her origin cannot be described by any finite or particular creature; for, what is infinite, has neither beginning nor end; but that natural matter consisted of so many degrees as mentioned, was evidently perceived by her effects or actions; by which it appeared first, that nature was a self-moving body, and that all her parts and creatures were so too: Next, that there was not only an animate or self-moving and active, but also an inanimate, that is, a dull and passive degree of matter; for if there were

no animate degree, there would be no motion, and so no action nor variety of figures; and if no inanimate, there would be no degrees of natural figures and actions, but all actions would be done in a moment, and the figures would all be so pure, fine, and subtle, as not to be subject to any grosser perception, such as our human, or other the like perceptions are. This inanimate part of matter, said they, had no self-motion, but was carried along in all the actions of the animate degree, and so was not moving, but moved; which animate part of matter being again of two degrees, viz. sensitive and rational, the rational being so pure, fine and subtle, that it gave only directions to the sensitive, and made figures in its own degree, left the working with and upon the inanimate part, to the sensitive degree of matter, whose office was to execute both the rational part's design, and to work those various figures that are perceived in nature; and those three degrees were so inseparably commixt in the body of nature, that none could be without the other in any part or creature of nature, could it be divided to an atom; for as in the extruction of a house there is first required an architect or surveyor, who orders and designs the building, and puts the labourers to work; next the labourers or workmen themselves; and lastly the materials of which the house is built: so the rational part, said they, in the framing of natural effects, is, as it were, the surveyor or architect; the sensitive, the labouring or working part; and the inanimate, the materials: and all these degrees are necessarily required in every composed action of nature.¹¹⁶

Even though Cavendish advances her philosophical system, her trust in fancy and learning through dialogue is so complete that she chooses a very literary style to convey her convictions. It is as if she hopes that the dramatization of her thought process will be enough to convince the reader that this is the only way nature and matter could possibly be viewed.

As already stated, Cavendish attributes three intermixed aspects to all matter—inanimate, sensitive, and rational. The three aspects coexist within small pieces of matter.

¹¹⁶ Margaret Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, (23-4).

They also work together with other small parts to form larger parts of matter. Even though she does not elaborate on how they interact, she does enumerate some characteristics. She explicates for what employment each of the three aspects is responsible. She then advances that time is needed for more complex substances to come to be in the world, strife is part of the dynamic, opposites create balance and harmony, and discussion and social interaction are essential for all creation. Since all matter has reason, interaction is needed even between small organisms and small pieces of matter. Sometimes arbitration becomes necessary to foment peace and agreement and allay discord.

Cavendish continues on to explain how nature and individual consciousnesses interact. Nature is eternal and infinite; therefore, we as finite beings cannot hope to understand the infinite. Every piece of matter has some rational understanding as a result of being made up of the three aspects of rational, sensate, and inanimate. Even though rationality allows knowledge to come about, by definition each individual's consciousness of the whole is incomplete. The sensate aspect performs all movement that the rational informs it to do. The inanimate aspect makes up all the building blocks of existence that the sensate moves and the rational informs. If there were only animate degrees of matter, there would be no "natural figures and actions," no mixed compounds or more complex organisms. Movement would be instantaneous. It would be interesting to know what Cavendish thought would happen to time and also consciousness if this were the case.

As I mentioned above, since the rational instantiates what is most pure in nature in Cavendish's thought, a person that is noble therefore possesses more rational aspects as compared to sensitive and inanimate. Does this then create a hierarchy of consciousnesses and underscore Cavendish's belief in monarchy? *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* is a good text to explore this dynamic in Cavendish's thought. *The Blazing World* was published as a companion piece to *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*. Cavendish sees them as complimentary texts, the philosophical along with what she called the "romancical" and the "fantastical."¹¹⁷ In *The Blazing World*, when the ruler of the new world meets the abducted nameless young lady, he quickly falls in love with her, marries her, and makes her the Empress of all the land. In this purer world, which is actually where Paradise had been before the Fall, her nobility is immediately apparent. Later, the Empress and the literary character Margaret Cavendish's souls or consciousnesses travel to the writer's world and eventually enter into the Duke's body where the three have a platonic communion of souls. Since the story is fantastical it is hard to know how these occurrences should be interpreted, but it seems clear that certain souls or consciousnesses are nobler and that an almost bodily communion can be achieved between the purer beings.

Throughout Cavendish's oeuvre there is a constant exploration of how the individual develops her consciousness and a questioning about what are the best

¹¹⁷ Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, (124).

procedures to follow in order to achieve human flourishing. She presents a constant emphasis on the interaction of the rational, the body's senses, the stuff of the world, and how these three interact, change each other, and grow. As a monarchist, Cavendish esteems hierarchy and nobility; she appears to hold that different mixtures of the three aspects of matter create quality of being. Unfortunately, this creates a diminishing of certain individuals' consciousnesses, even though in other texts Cavendish seems to uphold the need in the world for all species and their equal value. Ultimately, I aver that for Cavendish as it had been with the three aspects of matter, different beings fulfil the roles to which they are most suited according to Nature's plan. This also explains why Cavendish has been a difficult figure for feminists to claim as their own—she argues for the nobility of some feminine souls but seems to undervalue the quality of many consciousnesses.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Margaret Cavendish was highly cognizant of how being a woman in her society created many obstacles for her goal to become an intellectual figure, but rather than become discouraged she endeavored to turn any impediments into benefits. It is as if she took her culture's assumption that women cannot think critically and are thus on the intellectual par of brute beasts, and she upended that assumption: Cavendish was certain she thought well and thus blamed her ignorant accusers. She essentially reasoned that they could not see or appreciate womanly intelligence and that they therefore suffered from hubris and often ignorance of the worse kind—an ignorance that masquerades itself as knowledge. This insight became a cornerstone to the Duchess's epistemology and ontology: the fact that one does not perceive another's reason and consciousness does not signify the lack of either intelligence or self-awareness in that other being. Cavendish reasoned that pervasive intellect is the very fount of order in the universe and omnipresent sentience is the wellspring of community. All matter ultimately searches towards self-preservation and thus towards holistic order. Even though Cavendish is also au courant of a contrary drive towards chaos, her faith in reason entails that by necessity knowledge holds that harmony is good. Reason strives for order in all things. Since all bits of matter contain reason, order should eventually prevail.

As such, Cavendish maintained an ambivalent attitude towards the developing area of science. What she called *Experimental Philosophy* strove for knowledge and order, but unfortunately did so through alienating and self-elevating techniques. Scientists are mistaken when they believe that by understanding the exterior of an entity, they can also comprehend the interior. And they suffer from hubris when they believe that the information they garner from nature somehow gives them power over her. As I stated at the beginning of this thesis: Cavendish believes that science's goal to master the universe through instruments and measurements will "ultimately reveal nothing but the futility of trying to penetrate nature."¹¹⁸ In its stead, she seems to have advocated the search for understanding by more direct, interconnected, and holistic means: we should employ our senses and reason, our bodies and brains, and our philosophy and imagination to build all of ourselves the best world possible.

For Margaret Cavendish the development of consciousness through the use of both our reason and our fancy is essential to a flourishing life. The Ethic of Reciprocity expressed in the Christian "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," but also in many other religious and secular forms, is based on the recognition that our actions can be extremely damaging to other beings. And this is exactly because they are beings, conscious beings. There is something worthy of devotion and consideration about a conscious being.

¹¹⁸ Lisa T Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy During the Scientific Revolution*, (195).

While listening to a speech given at Harvard in 2008 by another English woman writer, J K Rowling, who like Cavendish is often criticized for her choice of genre and her ability to draw a crowd, I saw why the attestation of consciousness to ourselves and to others has such force. It is not just free will that is at issue, even though that is immensely important; it is the need to be able to make a difference, to know that our consciousness is not just a trick of nature but something more vital. It is a deeply held conviction that when we are interacting with others in the world, we are interacting with a consciousness, not just a inert piece of matter. We ask ourselves, could it really be that our intuition that we have a consciousness and that other humans have one, too, merely a result of software or hardware? Rowling underlines the fact that it seems we have some responsibility because of interacting with other consciousnesses. Nonetheless, it is a gift and a burden:

If you choose to use your status and influence to raise your voice on behalf of those who have no voice; if you choose to identify not only with the powerful, but with the powerless; if you retain the ability to imagine yourself into the lives of those who do not have your advantages, then it will not only be your proud families who celebrate your existence, but thousands and millions of people whose reality you have helped change. We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside already: we have the power to imagine better.¹¹⁹

Rowling highlights the celebration of existence. Cavendish, as well, unashamedly searched after the state of being celebrated, of being remembered for the very fact that

¹¹⁹ J. K. Rowling, "Commencement Speech for Harvard University," (n.p.).

she lived and thought and wrote. Fame that creates the power to envision and bring about a better world, power that embodies the capability to labor to make that vision a little more possible: this is why consciousness and the pervasiveness of intellect were paramount to Margaret Cavendish.

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