

Chapter 17

“I AM MY LORDS SCHOLAR”: MARGARET CAVENDISH AND PATRONAGE

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IN MARGARET CAVENDISH'S first serious philosophical work, the 1655 *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, which she often acknowledged as her favourite among her many writings, she states, “I am my Lords Scholar.”¹ This claim might seem like the loving proclamation of a grateful wife, but given the patronage dynamics of the mid-seventeenth century, it is actually much more. By citing the role her husband William Cavendish, the Marquess (later Duke) of Newcastle played in exposing her to the natural philosophy of the time, she is also indicating that he is the authority who by his support becomes the patron who validates the veracity of her ideas. In two other early works, *Philosophicall Fancies* and *Poems, and Fancies*, both published in 1653, Cavendish also recognizes the role her husband's brother, Sir Charles Cavendish, played in supporting her forays into scientific thinking: “I do here dedicate this my Work unto you,” she writes in *Poems, and Fancies*, “not that I think my Book is worthy such a Patron, but that such a Patron may gaine my Book a Respect, and Esteem in the World, by the Favour of your Protection.”² And, moreover, to neglect to acknowledge his patronage would be a grave error on her part, as she also emphasized in *Philosophicall Fancies*:

To forget to divulge your noble Favours to me, in any of my Works, were to murder GRATITUDE [her capitalization]; Which I will never be guilty of. And though I am your slave, being manac'd with Chaines of Obligation, yet my Chaines feelee softer than Silke, and my Bondage is pleasanter then Freedome, because I am bound to your selfe, who are a Person so full of Generosity, as you delight in Bounty, and take pleasure to relieve the necessitated Condition of your Friends; and what is freely given is comfortably reciev'd and a satisfaction to the minde.³

Cavendish's sincerity is obvious, although perhaps fulsome to modern ears, in her recognition of the roles her husband and brother-in-law played in exposing her to the ideas current in natural philosophy and encouraging her efforts in publishing her own interpretations of them. But her acknowledgment of their support also indicates the norms of patronage, the system of mutual obligation and honour which governed social relations in the seventeenth century. Throughout her works in the 1650s and 1660s, Cavendish used the protocols of patronage to secure her place

1 Margaret Cavendish, *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London, 1655), sig. B1v.

2 Margaret Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies* (London, 1653), sig. A2r.

3 “To Sir Charles Cavendish,” in *Philosophicall Fancies* (London, 1653), sig. B4r–B5v.

in the learned community. In this, she was not unusual. The thinkers of this period knew that they needed the support of those of higher rank to validate their work: eminent philosophers such as Francis Bacon and William Harvey dedicated their works to the king, and Thomas Hobbes dedicated *De Cive*, an early political treatise, to William Cavendish. The marquess also moderated a debate about the nature of free will between Hobbes and John Bramhall, the Bishop of Derry, during his exile in France in 1645, which was eventually published in 1656. Hobbes notes in his preface to this work, *The Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance*, that he only published because although “There were some reasons for which I thought it might be inconvenient to let my answer go abroad; yet the many obligations wherein I was obliged to him, prevailed with me to write this answer.”⁴

William Cavendish was also a patron to literary men, including Ben Jonson, two of whose Masques were performed at Cavendish’s estates Welbeck Abbey and Bolsover in the 1630s, and Thomas Shadwell, who dedicated *The Virtuoso* to him in 1676 and proclaimed in a statement redolent of patronage tropes: “So long as your Grace persists in obliging, I must go on in acknowledging; nor can I let any opportunity pass of telling the world how much I am favored by you; or any occasion slip of assuring your Grace that all the actions of my life shall be dedicated to your service, who, by your noble patronage, your generosity and kindness, and your continual bounty, have made me wholly your creature.”⁵

Thus Margaret Cavendish had every opportunity to learn how patronage worked. The institution of patronage dominated the political world of early modern England before the English Civil War. It was informal, but its norms were known to everyone who sought to find preferment, whether from a king, an aristocratic lord, or a local member of the gentry class. It connected people in networks of dependence and obligation—the patron was acknowledged by the client as the powerful dispenser of honour and protection, which the client was obligated to receive with gratitude and service. The patron exhibited the virtues of magnanimity, magnificence, and generosity, to which the client responded with humility and trust. The relationship between patron and client, according to Linda Levy Peck in her study of Stuart patronage, was “at once symbiotic and symbolic,” testifying to the power of the patron and gaining the client “access to tangible and intangible resources,” including “land, office, position, status, and economic opportunity.”⁶ Richard McCabe has enumerated the several tropes that characterize the dedications to patrons in early modern England; they include courtesy,

4 Thomas Hobbes, *The Questions concerning Liberty, Necessity, and Chance. Clearly Stated and Debated between Dr. Bramhall Bishop of Derry, and Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury* (London: Cook, 1656), 2.

5 Thomas Shadwell, *The Virtuoso*, ed. Marjorie Hope Nicolson and David Stuart Rodas (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 3.

6 Linda Levy Peck, *Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Modern England* (Boston, MA: Routledge, 1990), 3, 57.

gratitude, loyalty, and favour and were based on themes first discussed by Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca in antiquity.⁷

Recent historiographical studies of these ties of interpersonal and power relationships have also emphasized the role of gifts, material and otherwise, in cementing bonds between people of different status and, we might add, people of different genders. This analysis is often based on the work of the French social scientist Pierre Bourdieu, who argues that the economics behind relationships of different status are often disguised in a kind of "game of honour" where "cultural or symbolic capital"—recognition, acknowledgment, and gratitude—are hidden behind professions of trust and ritual performance.⁸ And, supposedly, the gifts which establish these ties in early modern Europe are freely given and received, not limiting the freedom of either party in the exchange.⁹ The relationship between patron and client testifies to the nobility of the giver and the worth of the recipient and vice versa.

But long before any modern interpretation of cultural capital, William Cavendish's former client, Thomas Hobbes, had articulated a psychology of human behaviour in both the state of nature and the political state, which emphasized the power of honour and reputation. Examples of instrumental power, Hobbes writes in *Leviathan*, published in 1651 while Margaret Cavendish was in England, are "Riches, Reputation, Friends, and the secret working of God, which men call Good Luck." Such honour is often gained through "free gift," an essential element of relationships between the powerful and those who depend on them. Such analysis would make sense to Cavendish; it includes the right or hope to "gain thereby friendship or service from another, or from his friends; or in hope to gain the reputation of Charity, or Magnanimity." Such a gift, according to Hobbes, obligates the receiver to gratitude: "That a man which receiveth Benefit from another of meer Grace, Endeavour that he that giveth it, have no reasonable cause to repent him of his good will."¹⁰ Thus the symbolic capital Cavendish would gain through either gifting her books to universities or making them available to readers through publication would reflect glory on her. Whether she was the patron or client, the giver or receiver, her eminence was proclaimed.

And so the gift Cavendish gives to her husband and Sir Charles is her work, which honours their generosity in supporting her and creates a kind of obligation without diminishing her own freedom, honour, or position. She does not mention that *Poems*,

⁷ Richard A. McCabe, *"Ungainful Arte": Poetry Patronage, and Print in the Early Modern Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 79.

⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 118–20.

⁹ See especially Felicity Heal, *The Power of Gifts: Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) and Illana Krausman Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving: Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 62, 105.

and *Fancies*, and indeed all of her works, depends on the largesse of her benefactors in allowing her to publish very expensive volumes.¹¹

Cavendish does acknowledge, however, that she was “necessitated” to acknowledge her brother-in-law’s support, and not just because in 1651 she was relying on his financial aid as she sought to persuade a Parliamentary committee to release some of the funds her husband had forfeited because of his support of Charles I. In one remarkable way Margaret Cavendish differed from her philosophic fellows: she was a noblewoman, and noblewomen did not publish books. Aristocratic women were sometimes the patrons of scholars and intellectuals, but they were rarely writers and thinkers themselves. Some few were poets and novelists, like Mary Wroth, but those who wrote about philosophy, like Anne Conway, did not have their works printed, although their writings sometimes circulated in manuscript form. The majority of women whose books were published during the English Civil War were not members of the upper classes, and they overwhelmingly wrote devotional literature and were often proponents of heterodox religious ideas, a type of woman Cavendish despised.

So, as the first woman who wrote at length about scientific topics and published her works, Cavendish had to find a way to validate them. The obvious solution was to seek the protection of her husband and brother-in-law, who could testify to the worthiness of her work and the virtues of their author. The latter was particularly important because in putting herself on the public stage, Cavendish risked being classified as a woman of the streets. Immorality was the charge that accompanied those women who left the domesticated sphere of the home, as Cavendish well knew and addressed in many of her works. Indeed, Lady Mary Wroth, whose work Cavendish knew, had scandalized early Stuart society with both her 1621 romance, *Urania*, and the affair which the story depicted. A poem written shortly after Cavendish’s death indicates what was probably the most usual indictment of the writer:

Shame of her sex, Welbeck’s illustrious Whore ...
The great atheistical philosophraster,
That owns no God, no devil, lord nor master,
Vice’s epitome and virtue’s foe,
Here lies her body but her soul’s below.¹²

The danger of patronage for any woman was the degree of intimacy it could imply between a female client and her patron. According to the literary historian Dustin Griffin, a woman writer might be reluctant to “to enter into an arrangement whereby they implicitly engaged to exchange ‘benefits’ with a patron—especially a male patron—or to accept his ‘protection’ at a time when ‘protection’ was a euphemism for sexual keeping.”¹³ By

¹¹ I wish to thank Liza Blake, Lora Gerecois and Sara Mendelson for letting me know about the presentation copies of Cavendish’s works.

¹² The poem is printed in Douglas Grant, *Margaret the First: A Biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, 1623–1673* (London: Hart-Davis), 199.

¹³ Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 189.

placing her patronage relationship within the parameters of family, Cavendish avoided this supposition, but nevertheless, she continually defended her own virtue and modesty in printing her works.¹⁴ Cavendish may have been particularly sensitive about the charge of immorality if, as Katie Whitaker has suggested, Newcastle suffered from syphilis and was unable to have sexual relations. In correspondence between Newcastle and the courtier and virtuoso Kenelm Digby, the latter wrote to him about a marvellous cure for impotence made from powder of viper that helps "men grown eunichs by age become Priapus again."¹⁵ This could mean that Newcastle was her patron but not her lover.

Expanding beyond her own family members, Cavendish taps another source of support—her fellow virtuous women. Referring to Lord Denny's invective against Mary Wroth, Cavendish wrote in a dedication "To All Noble, and Worthy Ladies" at the beginning of *Poems, and Fancies*, "Work Lady, work, let writing Books alone, For surely wiser Women nere wrote one."¹⁶ This reference to her scandalous predecessor is curious in a defence of her own virtue, but she quickly amends the reference to defend her right to write, contrasting her own "honest, Innocent, and harmless Fancies" with the immoral behaviour of women who appear in public. She pleads for the upright women to give her protection against her female foes:

Strengthen my Side, in defending my Book; for I know Womens Tongues are as sharp, as two-edged Swords, and wound as much, when they are anger'd. And in this Battell may your Wit be quick, and your Speech ready, and your Arguments so strong, as to beat them out of the Feild of Dispute. So shall I get Honour, and Reputation by your Favours; otherwise I may chance to be cast into the Fire. But if I burn, I desire to die your Martyr; if I live, to be, Your humble Servant, M. N.¹⁷

Cavendish has expanded her patronage universe in this dedication where she tried to win the support of other noble and worthy ladies and thereby receive "Honour, and Reputation by your Favours." In her other works, Cavendish often disparaged most women for their wanton and frivolous behaviour, but here she recognizes the power and worth of a group of virtuous women who will protect her and her work. Even if they decline her service—that is, the gift of her book—she will become a martyr for the sake of their honour and presumably her own.

Cavendish, though she often cited her own bashfulness, was not shy in securing patrons for her books, whether they were unspecified worthy ladies or the many unnamed "readers" she writes to in the paratexts of the books she wrote in the 1650s

¹⁴ On family and patronage, see Ben-Amos, *Culture of Giving*, 17–44.

¹⁵ Quoted in Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: The Extraordinary Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, the First Woman to Live by Her Pen* (New York: Basic, 2002), 101. Whitaker discusses the details of this cure and how Digby planned to procure it from "a rare apothecary."

¹⁶ Margaret Cavendish, "To All Worthy, and Noble Ladies," *Poems, and Fancies*, sig. A4v. Compare "To Pamphilia from the father-in-law of Seralius": "Work o th' Workes leave idle bookes alone / For wise and worthier women have writte none," *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, ed. Josephine A. Roberts (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 33.

¹⁷ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, sig. A4v.

and 1660s.¹⁸ There is almost a frenzied voice in these addresses where she explains and defends her motives and work. Clearly, not everyone was thrilled by Cavendish's poetic and philosophic works. Some unidentified scholars even accused her of not writing her own books. William Cavendish rose to her defence at the beginning of the 1655 *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, putting his own honour on the line as he protected his wife/client:

Truly I cannot beleieve so unworthily of any Scholar, honoring them so much as we both do, that they should envie this Lady, or should have so much malice or emulation, to cast such false aspirations on her, that she did not write those books ... But here's the crime, a Lady writes them and to intrench so much on the male prerogative is not to be forgiven; but I know Gown-men will be more civil to her, because she is of the Gown too ... Whatsoever I have written is absolute truth which I here as a Man of Honour set my hand to.¹⁹

Here the marquess not so subtly reminds those scholars he has supported that they owe him and his wife deference and that their "emulation," which here probably fits into the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition, "Ambitious rivalry for power or honours, contention or ill-will between rivals" or "dislike or tendency to disparagement, of those who are superior," is a sign of jealousy and inferiority.²⁰ These envious men have behaved dishonourably in their obligations to their patrons, including Cavendish herself, who will now seek others to give her the honour she deserves.

Who are the scholars who have broken trust with the Cavendishes? One must speculate here, but there are some clues. In *Poems, and Fancies*, Cavendish added a somewhat incongruous dedication, "To Naturall Philosophers," in which she both downplays and excuses her book, "For I had nothing to do when I wrot it, and I suppose those have nothing, or little else to do, that read it." She awaits their judgement, "If I be prais'd, it fixes them [her ideas]; but if I am condemn'd, I shall be *Annihilated* to nothing: but my *Ambition* is such, as I would either be a *World*, or nothing."²¹ So idle natural philosophers who apparently had nothing better to do, and were perforce useless, are given the role of putting a seal of approval on Cavendish's philosophy, which, at the same time, is the product of her own empty hours and something which might gain her immortal fame. Humility struggles with ambition here, but whichever emotion wins, it's clear that natural philosophers are unworthy of honour. Moreover, although she might have heard some of their ideas, her philosophy is original. Likewise, in the Epilogue to *Philosophical*

¹⁸ On Cavendish's use of paratexts and the concept of authorial authority in Cavendish's work, see Melanie D. Holm, "Authority Sovereignty: Pleasure and Paratext in Margaret Cavendish's 'Blazing Worlds,'" *Restoration Studies in English Literary Culture* 41 (2017): 5–28, and Katharine R. Larsen, *Early Modern Women in Conservation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 138–65.

¹⁹ William Cavendish, "An Epistle to Justifie the Lady Newcastle," in Margaret Cavendish, *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, sig. A3r.

²⁰ OED "emulation", n., 2, 3.

²¹ Cavendish, *Poems, and Fancies*, sig. A6r.

and *Physical Fancies*, Cavendish claims that none of her ideas were stolen from René Descartes or Thomas Hobbes. She had dined with both in France but had not spoken to Descartes, who knew no English while she knew no French, and she had rarely exchanged words with Hobbes. Indeed, when she ran into Hobbes in London and invited him to dinner, "he with great civility refused me, as having some businesse, which I suppose required his absence."²² It is extraordinary that Hobbes would claim a prior engagement when his former patron's wife asked him to dine, but by this time Hobbes was seeking to reestablish his position in Cromwellian England, and therefore might have been unwilling to be seen with William Cavendish's wife.²³ Cavendish clearly saw her interaction with Descartes or Hobbes—or indeed any other thinkers—in terms of patronage dynamics, a factor which she emphasized in the Epilogue:

I had rather be forgotten, then scrape acquaintance or insinuate my self into others company, or brag of received favours, or take undeserved gifts, or belie noble Benefactors, or to steal, although I were sure the theft would never be discovered, and would make me live eternally.²⁴

Cavendish wanted neither the favours nor gifts of others to help her gain immortality, although her desire for fame was one of the main reasons she wrote and published in the first place. In fact, somewhat paradoxically, she employed a traditional patronage strategy of giving gifts of her books to other scholars and universities as a way to get her name out and have her own reputation elevated through their esteem. So she dedicates *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* "To the Two Universities," and she praises their worth so that they, in turn, can praise her—a very typical ploy between a patron and a client:

But I considering with my self, that if a right judgement, and a true understanding, & a respectful civility live any where, it must be in learned Universities, where nature is best known, where truth is oftenest found, where civility is most practiced, and if I finde not a resentment here, I am very confident I shall finde it no where, neither shall I think I deserve it, if you approve not of me, but I deserve not Praise, I am sure to receive so much Courtship, from this sage society, as to bury me in silence.²⁵

In such a case, Cavendish claims, it will be honour enough "to lie intombed under the dust of a university." She didn't have to worry; the universities received the gifts of her books throughout the 1650s and 1660s with rapturous praise. A note from Thomas Barlow, the Provost of Queen's College, Oxford, in 1656, is typical of all the rest:

²² Margaret Cavendish, "An Epilogue to my Philosophical Opinions," *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, sig. B3r.

²³ For more on the relationship between William Cavendish and Thomas Hobbes, see Lisa T. Sarasohn, "Thomas Hobbes and the Duke of Newcastle: A Study in the Mutuality of Patronage," *Isis* 90 (1999): 715–37.

²⁴ Cavendish, "Epilogue," *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, B4v.

²⁵ Cavendish, "Epilogue," *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, sig. B2r.

The like thanks, and (if possible) infinitely more, I must return in behalf of the University, and my self; being amazed at your goodness, and undeserved Kindness, that a person so Illustrious, and (for place and parts so) Eminent, should look upon so unconsiderable, and impertinent a thing in black, as I am, but that I know the Sun doth shine on Shrubs, as well as Cedars, and Princes many times cast their Favours upon persons infinitely below them; whence they can expect no return but gratitude; and when I fail to pay that Tribute (so justly due to your Honour) may I have your hate, which will be the greatest curse I am capable of.²⁶

Can we possibly take either Cavendish's letters to the universities or their replies to her at face value? It seems unlikely, but in William Cavendish's defence of Cavendish's originality, he claimed that "gown-men," that is, university scholars, would be more civil to her than other scholars, and perhaps he was right. It was possible in early modern England both to sincerely appreciate someone's expressed gratitude and at the same time think that there was some concrete benefit to be gained from them. This is part of the "tangible" rewards that Linda Levy Peck mentions in her discussion of patronage and that Bourdieu sees as the masked economic benefit lurking behind expressions of gratitude. The material gift Cavendish bestows is in itself a tangible possession, and many of the colleges, in both Oxford and Cambridge, which received her largesse deposited her books in their libraries. It may be that the "civility" which William Cavendish twice mentioned in his defence of Cavendish impelled them to do so. It was a social norm, inherited from Cicero and Seneca, which transformed gratitude into a signifier of virtue.²⁷

On the other hand, gifts could cajole the recipient into the obligation of response. Instead of the chains "softer than Silke" which Cavendish used to describe her ties with Sir Charles, there were iron shackles which compelled a rhetoric of flattery and obeisance. The libraries didn't have any choice but to accept the gifts of books from a noble lady, even one in exile due to her husband's actions during the English Civil War. By compelling their actions, Cavendish's status as a writer could rise in their reflected glory. And this literary ennoblement could itself enhance Cavendish's sense that she was the equal of other literary giants, liberating her from the apologetic and humble self-abasement and defensiveness which characterizes many of her paratextual notices in her early works. For example, in *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, she pleads with her "Honourable Readers," if they are going to compare her works with those of ancient philosophers, "to lay by the weaknesses, and incapacity of our sex; my inexperienced age, my unpracticed time, my faint knowledge, and dim understanding."²⁸ But in *Natures Pictures*, published a year after *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, there is a change of tone, indicating a growing self-confidence on the part of the author. She dedicates her work, which contains "Comicall, Tragical, Poeticall, Philosophicall, Romanticall and

²⁶ *A Collection of Letters and Poems: Written by several Persons of Honour and Learning, upon divers Important Subjects, to the Late Duke and Dutchess of New Castle* (London: Curtis, 1678), 70.

²⁷ On the Classical roots of gift-giving, see Heal, *Power of Gifts*, 17–18.

²⁸ Cavendish, "An Epistle to my Honourable Readers," *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, sig. A1v.

Moral Discourses," to her idle readers who may benefit from reading it, and she hopes "you'll like it, if not, I'm still the same, / Careless, since Truth will vindicate my Fame."²⁹

Perhaps the most compelling evidence of Cavendish's increasing self-confidence is the autobiography she appends to *Natures Pictures, A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding, and Life*. As Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson write in *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader*, it was quite unusual for anyone to write "a personal and secular autobiography" rather than a spiritual or political memoir in the early seventeenth century.³⁰ Despite claiming to be extremely bashful, to the extent of not being able to speak eloquently to anyone besides her own family members, Cavendish decides to do the future a favour by writing her autobiography, and thereby sidestep the present criticisms of her works, "not regarding carping Tongues, or malicious Censures, for I despise them."³¹ Her future fame itself, in this rendering, becomes her client, one of the several inanimate qualities which will function as her servants.

But Cavendish is not only the patron of her own future fame; she is also the servant of the gods. The frontispiece of *The Worlds Olio* (Figure 17.1) pictures her placed between Minerva and Apollo, an image which also appears at the beginning of the 1662 *Playes*, the 1668 *Plays*, the 1668 *Grounds of Natural Philosophy*, and the reissues of *Poems, and Fancies* (1668), *The Worlds Olio* (1671), and *Natures Pictures* (1671).

The gods of wisdom and light seem lost in reverence of Cavendish, who is draped in an imperial gown and who stands under two flowering graces, symbols of her radiance and fecundity. The engraving, based on a portrait by Abraham Van Diepenbeeck, is a graphic expression of the fame and status Cavendish sought. The image is turned upside down in another epistle, "To the Reader," in *Natures Pictures*: "My endeavor is to express the sweetness of Vertue, and the Graces, and to dress and adorn them in the best expressions I can, as being one of their Servants, that do unfeignedly, unweariedly, industriously, and faithfully wait upon them." The language of patronage and service here emphasizes Cavendish's relationship with the gods; in both picture and words, the glory and virtue of the author and her inspirations are lifted up to the celestial sphere. In the 1664 *Sociable Letters*, the Lord N. W. (clearly a pseudonym for William Cavendish) tells the Lady (an avatar for Margaret Cavendish) to whom the letters are addressed that she is like an empress:

though she was not attended, waited and served with and by Temporal and Imperial Courtiers, yet she was attended, waited on, and served by and with the sweet Graces, and her Maids of Honour were the Muses, and Fame's house was her Magnificent Palace. Thus

²⁹ Margaret Cavendish, "The Dedication" and "To the Reader," *Natures Pictures* (London, 1656), sigs. a4r, c4r. Larsen views this kind of patronage as "appropriation and adaptation governing oral and epistolary interchange within these textual spaces" by female authors "as a legitimate and strategic tool for social negotiations and political intervention (3).

³⁰ *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader*, ed. Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview, 2000), 12.

³¹ Cavendish, *Natures Pictures*, 367.



Figure 17.1. Frontispiece of *The Worlds Olio* (1655). The University of Sheffield Library.

was she Royally Born, and Divinely Anointed or Induded, and Celestially Crown'd, and may Reign in the memory of every Age and Nation to the world's end.³²

But by 1654 Cavendish felt that she was not being treated like an empress. She was fed up with her detractors and equally annoyed with the printers who had repeatedly mixed up portions of *Natures Pictures* and her earlier works by misplacing the order of her texts and poor transcriptions of her written copies (although she does admit that she has terrible handwriting).³³ Besides her pique, these charges against printers demonstrate another part of Cavendish's patronage strategy. She was writing for publication—not just to have her works placed in university libraries (some things are as true in the past as in the present) or read by those who had an idle hour to pass. She wanted immortal fame, to be sure, and the acknowledgement of her abilities, but she also wanted cultural or symbolic capital.³⁴ Honour and recognition were more important to her than the more tangible rewards she might have gained if the printers or sellers of her works would have been willing to share the profits they made on her books with her.³⁵

Not that economic considerations would be entirely foreign to Cavendish. She and her husband were in desperate financial straits while living in exile. William had spent his fortune in support of Charles I, raising an army that, after some initial successes, was defeated at the Battle of Marston Moor in 1644. After his marriage to Margaret in 1645, the couple lived largely on credit and the good will of the lenders, who were so impressed by the story of Cavendish's misfortunes—and undoubtedly his title (he had been promoted to marquess from earl in 1643)—that they "promised him, that he should not want any thing in whatsoever they were able to assist him."³⁶ By the time the Cavendishes moved to Antwerp in 1649, they were able to rent the former home of the artist Peter Paul Rubens, and the marquess opened a riding school, where many aristocrats and nobles, including the uncrowned Charles II, the Duke of Guise, and Don John, the Governor-General of the Spanish Netherlands, were able to watch his mastery of dressage. In 1657–1658 Cavendish published his first book on horsemanship, *La méthode nouvelle et invention extraordinaire de dresser les chevaux* (discussed in Elaine Walker's chapter of the current volume), which, as Peter Edwards and Elspeth Graham point out, was published by Cavendish to restore "his reputation—amongst both English émigrés and the European nobility—through more purely cultural forms,

³² Margaret Cavendish, "Letter 15," *Sociable Letters*, ed. James Fitzmaurice (Toronto: Broadview, 2004), 60.

³³ She castigates printers from her earliest works. See Cavendish, "The Epistle," *The Worlds Olio*, sig. O3r.

³⁴ Bourdieu, *Logic of Practice*, 188. On William Cavendish's similar aim, see Karen Raber, "William Cavendish's Horsemanship Treatises and Cultural Capital," in *Authority, Authorship and Aristocratic Identity*, ed. Peter Edwards and Elspeth Graham (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 331–51.

³⁵ McCabe, "Ungainful Arte", 60 argues that instead of royalties, publishers gave authors multiple copies of their books and sometimes required a subvention to publish the book.

³⁶ On William Cavendish's financial difficulties, see Margaret Cavendish, *The Life of the (1st) Duke of Newcastle & Other Writings by Margaret, Duchess* (London: Dent, 1916), 71–84, 77.

both performative and textual.”³⁷ When notables attended the marquess, his cultural capital rose, in part because, as he writes in his book, “Kings, Princes and persons of quality ... love pleasure horses, as an exercise that is very noble, and that which makes them appear most graceful when they show themselves to their subjects.”³⁸ Apparently, Cavendish had learned from his wife that one of the ways to achieve personal glory and gain the attention and favour of elite readers was to publish a work testifying to their exceptional status, regardless of the economic circumstances in which they lived.

With the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, the Cavendishes returned to England and husband and wife retired to their estates, which William spent his time restoring. Cavendish spent her time writing her major scientific works and publishing two volumes of plays in 1662 and 1668 and a collection of imaginary speeches in *Orations* (1662). *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* was expanded in a 1663 edition, which became the basis of the 1668 *Grounds of Natural Philosophy*. She published a number of other plays in the 1668 *Plays*. In addition, Cavendish published two long critiques of the major scientific and philosophical theories of the mid-seventeenth century, the 1664 *Philosophical Letters* and the 1666 *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, reprinted in 1668. Cavendish appended a prose romance to *Observations*, *The New Blazing World*, which was destined to become her most famous work and earn her the fame she sought, at least in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. In 1668, Cavendish completed her oeuvre with her *Life* of her husband.

The 1660s works demonstrate Cavendish’s increasing confidence in her own abilities and they sketch out a new patronage strategy. In the Dedication to *Playes*, Cavendish proclaims her devotion to her readers/clients and to herself:

TO those that do delight in Scenes and wit,
I dedicate my Book, for those I writ;
Next to my own Delight, for I did take
Much pleasure and delight these Playes to make.³⁹

Although *Playes* continues Cavendish’s customary practice of multiple epistles to the reader, full of apologies and explanations for her plays, she now gives herself a leading role in the acceptance of her works. In a sense, she has become her own patron. She no longer has to serve her readers—she only has to serve herself and, to some extent, her husband, to whom she also dedicates her work. She acknowledges that William’s own plays have inspired her to write her own, and although she had intended this to be her last work, she now feels impelled to write a life of her husband in some time to come. Once more, patronage is in the family.

³⁷ Peter Edwards and Elspeth Graham, “Introduction,” in *Authority, Authorship and Aristocratic Identity*, 31.

³⁸ William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, *A General System of Horsemanship in all It’s Branches, containing a Faithful Translation of that most noble and useful Work of His Grace* (London, 1743), 14. This is an English translation of *La Méthode Nouvelle*.

³⁹ Margaret Cavendish, “The Dedication,” *Playes* (London, 1662), sig. A2r.

As we have seen, it was not unusual for family members to use patronage to inculcate family loyalty. So when Cavendish published the 1663 edition of *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, she dedicated it to her husband, who, in spite of the hardships he had endured at fortune's hand, had encouraged her writing: "Yet you are pleased to Peruse my Works, and Approve of them, which is a Favour, few Husbands would grant their Wives; but Your Lordship is an Extraordinary Husband, which is the Happiness of Your Lordships, Honest Wife and Humble Servant."⁴⁰ But when Cavendish returned to addressing her readers in this work, it is clear that ultimately she has become her own major supporter:

I can assure you, Noble Readers, I was very Studious in my own Thoughts, and Contemplations, when I writ it, for all that time my Brain was like a University, Senate, or Council-Chamber, wherein all my Conceptions, Imaginations, Observations, Wit, and Judgment did meet to Dispute, Argue, Contrive, and Judge, for Sense, Reason, and Truth, and if you Please to give your Plausible Votes, they will have their Reward.⁴¹

Cavendish no longer needs the universities, or indeed any authoritative body, to approve her work. Her own brain will take over the job and reward her for revealing sense, reason, and truth. Her dependent status has been overturned. This judgement of her own self-worth is confirmed in a letter of thanks that the fellows of Magdalene College, Cambridge sent her in 1663, which was undoubtedly commenting on the goddess-like frontispiece of her works: "what shall we think of your Excellency, who are both a *Minerva* and an *Athens* to your self."⁴² In another letter sent to her from the fellows of St. John's College, Cambridge in 1665, after she had gifted them with her poetry and the *Philosophical Letters*, they acknowledged her thoughts on natural philosophy and proclaimed her to be an "ornament to Learning, and a Patroness to the Learned."⁴³ And in the second letter, they remark that Cavendish owes Nature nothing, "for whatever lustre and beauty of body or mind, she hath deckt and enriched you withal, your Grace has largely recompensed her, and are perfectly quit with her in these your elegant Poems, and Philosophy." In the language of patronage, Cavendish's brilliance in interpreting Nature has released her from any obligation to Nature.

Whether these Cambridge professors were sincere in their compliments or merely hoping for Cavendish's favour is difficult to tell.⁴⁴ But Cavendish herself took them seriously, perhaps because it is clear from these letters that some of the professors had read her work closely: they specifically refer to her critiques of Henry More, René Descartes, and Johannes Van Helmont, which appear in *Philosophical Letters*. In a dedication to

⁴⁰ Margaret Cavendish, "To His Excellencie the Lord Marquis of Newcastle," *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London, 1663), sig. Nnn1v.

⁴¹ Margaret Cavendish, "To the Reader," *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, sig. Nnn1v.

⁴² *A Collection of Letters and Poems*, 11.

⁴³ *A Collection of Letters and Poems*, 5.

⁴⁴ William Poole, a librarian at Oxford, has traced the fate of Cavendish's works at the university. I wish to thank Liza Blake for this reference.

Sociable Letters, “To All Professors of Learning and Art,” Cavendish wrote, “But although I have no Learning, you give me leave to Admire it, and to wish I were one of your Society, for certainly, were I Empress of the World, I would Advance those that have most Learning and Witt.”⁴⁵ In their thank-you notes, the professors do just that—Cavendish must have been very satisfied.

But Cavendish was not naive. She knew that patronage relationships could be tainted by self-interest and proceed from motives that were instrumental rather than sincere. In *Sociable Letters*, she commends two noblemen who “covet not Office, Authority and Wealth ... but when they are employed, they do not grow proud with their Authority and Place, nor richer by taking Bribes; nor do they partially Favour their Friends, nor are they Unjust to their Foes.”⁴⁶ According to Fitzmaurice, Cavendish probably had her husband in mind when she indicated the virtues of these lords. Indeed, Cavendish was all too aware that William had suffered because of the corruption surrounding the royal court both before and during the Interregnum, and she felt he had not been rewarded sufficiently—either with honour or place—by Charles II, even though he had been raised to the title of duke in 1663. Cavendish believed that advancement, which should be the reward of virtue and merit, was instead overwhelmed by favouritism and bribery, which was a cause of civil war. In Letter 88, Cavendish argued that a governor or general (William Cavendish was Prince Charles’s governor in 1638 and a commander during the Civil War) should be chosen for his worth and generosity, “But Officers, Gouvenours and Commanders are for the most part chosen by means of Bribes, Faction or Favour, and not for Fitness, Worth, and Merit.”⁴⁷ And she concludes in her *Life* of Cavendish, “My Lord ... had as great private enemies about His Majesty, as he had publick enemies in the field, who used all the endeavor they could to pull him down.”⁴⁸

William Cavendish had not received the honour he deserved; by 1664, Cavendish also believed that she had been treated uncivilly by most of the philosophic community. Seeking to increase her honour and stature, she challenged the position and power of the immaterialist philosophers, Descartes, Henry More, and Van Helmont, and the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. Cavendish had sent copies of her works to Henry More in 1663, to which he responded with surprise and thanks, but there is no evidence that he actually read any of them.⁴⁹ Hobbes had claimed that he did peruse a book of moral tales she had sent him in 1661 (probably *Natures Pictures*), but whether he had responded seriously to them or not is impossible to determine—he was living with his patron, the

⁴⁵ Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, 40.

⁴⁶ Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, 63.

⁴⁷ Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, 140.

⁴⁸ Cavendish, *Life*, 116. William Cavendish wrote a “Letter of Advice” to Charles II shortly before he was restored to the throne. The “Advice” is printed in Thomas P. Slaughter, *Ideology and Politics on the Eve of the Restoration* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1984), 179. On Cavendish’s political fortunes, see Sarasohn, “Thomas Hobbes and the Duke of Newcastle.”

⁴⁹ *A Collection of Letters and Poems*, 90–91.

Earl of Devonshire, at the time, who was her husband's cousin, so there may have been some contact or conversation. At any rate, Cavendish felt that her opponents should respond, even if they thought it was lacking in respect to dialogue with a woman. "But I cannot conceive why," she writes in a preface to *Philosophical Letters*, "it should be a disgrace to any man to maintain his own or others opinions against a woman, so it be done with respect and civility." In other words, as long as the debate is conducted with civility, it can commence. Such civility characterizes the relationship between equals in the hierarchical society of the seventeenth century: "I have done that, which I would have done unto me; for I am as willing to have my opinions contradicted, as I do contradict others." Any errors that readers might find in her book she will be glad to correct, "for a Philosopher or Philosophers is not produced on a sudden."⁵⁰

She did succeed in gaining the equality with other natural philosophers she felt was owed her when Joseph Glanvill, a defender of the newly formed Royal Society and the author of *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661), responded to the gift of her books with a serious and respectful discussion of their contents. Likewise, Walter Charleton, who had been her physician since the 1650s and was the author of several philosophical and medical texts, engaged her work in a long letter and, moreover, procured an invitation for Cavendish to attend a meeting of the Royal Society, the only woman to do so before the twentieth century.⁵¹

Enter the female philosopher Margaret Cavendish. What she is doing in *Philosophical Letters* is claiming the dignity awarded by a patronage society to those of outstanding ability. Essentially, she is challenging her opponents to a duel that could only take place between those of equal honour and standing. The duel continues in her next book, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, which is an extended critique of the new experimental natural philosophy espoused by the members of the Royal Society, and particularly of Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*, the signature text of the Society.⁵² "I am," she writes, "as ambitious of finding the Truth of Nature, as an honourable dueller is of gaining fame and repute." Perhaps the experimental writers will try to avoid the contest, claiming it is dishonourable to fight a lady. Such an excuse only demonstrates their lack of civility, but "the impartial World, I hope, will grant me so much Justice as to consider my honesty, and their fallacy, and pass such a judgment as will declare them to be Patrons, not onely to Truth, but also to Justice and Equity."⁵³

⁵⁰ Margaret Cavendish, "Preface," *Philosophical Letters: or, Modest Reflections upon Opinions in Natural Philosophy* (London, 1664), sigs. B1r–C2v.

⁵¹ These letters are printed in Cavendish, *A Collection of Letters and Poems*, 123–24, 137–42, 108–17.

⁵² I explore Cavendish's campaign against experimental science in *Reason and Fancy during the Scientific Revolution: The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 149–72.

⁵³ Margaret Cavendish, "The Preface to the Ensuing Treatise," *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (London, 1666), sig. D2v.

Patronage is now a characteristic of “the impartial World,” which becomes the defender of truth, justice, and equity, and consequently of civility and Margaret Cavendish. Moreover, the modern natural philosophers destroy the hierarchy of learning that the universities preserve in their respect for the ancients, introducing “a Chaos, [rather] then a well-ordered Universe by their doctrine.”⁵⁴ Cavendish is rewarding the universities for the regard they have given her, while condemning the Royal Society’s lack of civility.

In *Observations*, Cavendish included only a Preface, the epistle to Cambridge, and a dedication to her husband. Unlike in her earlier works, in which there are many paratextual letters, dedications, and *apologia* for her works, Cavendish seems to be confident enough in herself to plunge right into a long treatise on natural philosophy, followed by the *New Blazing World*. In one of her most famous expressions of self-regard and the only epistle addressed “To the Reader,” at the beginning of the romance, Cavendish writes, “For I am not Covetous, but as Ambitious as ever any of my Sex was, is, or can be; which makes, that though I cannot be Henry the Fifth, or Charles the Second, yet I endeavor to be Margaret the First.” And she adds that although fate and fortune have not given her a kingdom, “I have made a World of my own.”⁵⁵

Cavendish now equates her position with Henry V, the most famous warrior king of England and, most remarkably, with Charles II, the present ruler of the kingdom. In her own mind, she now heads the hierarchy which defines English society and, at least in fancy, has the power to be the font of all patronage. In the *Blazing World*, Cavendish’s heroine and alter ego becomes the Empress she had longed to be in *Sociable Letters*. The Empress, to whom the Emperor has conceded all authority, establishes schools composed of her subjects, various kinds of beast-men, to study natural philosophy. Revenge is sweet—the beast-men serve at her pleasure, and when she fears that they will cause disorder and rebellion in her realm, she contemplates disbanding them. But at first she hesitates to destroy them, fearing to break her former laws and thus appear inconsistent. But her new favourite, the soul of Margaret Cavendish, advises that she can do this with impunity in order to escape the possibility that her subjects might cause dissension in the state, as they had in her own world, where there are “more Gifts by partiality, then according to merit.” So much for the Royal Society and any others who challenge the preeminence of the duchess or the duke, at least in Cavendish’s imaginary world. And in the last line of Part I of *Blazing World*, using the vocabulary of patronage, the Empress declares Cavendish to be “not a flattering Parasite, but a true friend; and, in truth, such was their Platonick Friendship, as these two loving Souls did often meet and rejoice in each other’s Conversation.”⁵⁶ Cavendish has truly become her own patron, uniting patron and client, writer and subject, giver and receiver of favour into one glorified being.

⁵⁴ Cavendish, “The Preface,” *Observations*, sig. C2r. In her recent book on Margaret Cavendish, *The Well-Ordered Universe: The Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), Deborah Boyle emphasizes the role order played in Cavendish’s philosophy.

⁵⁵ Margaret Cavendish, “To the Reader,” *The Description of a New World called The Blazing World* (London, 1666), sig. B2r.

⁵⁶ Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 118, 122, 123.

Observations and *Blazing World* were reprinted in 1668 and *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* was reprinted in 1668. In 1667, Cavendish finally published her *Life* of William Cavendish. This year was a busy one for Margaret Cavendish, who visited the Royal Society in a grand procession which asserted her status of duchess as she swept up to Gresham College, where a huge crowd awaited her entrance. She was met by the president of the Society, Lord Brouncker, who carried a royal mace that had been presented to the institution by Charles II. Although both Samuel Pepys and John Evelyn found her to be ridiculous, Margaret Cavendish must have staged this event as a visible expression of her power and patronage. Even Robert Boyle, the most noble and famous member of the Society, was pulled into her orbit when he performed several experiments for her, to which, according to Pepys, she reacted with "admiration, all admiration."⁵⁷

By the time of her visit to the Royal Society, Margaret Cavendish had overcome the fears that had haunted her work. She had become adept at using the protocols of patronage—first through her family's position, and then by claiming the support of the universities—to insinuate herself into the honorific world of the seventeenth century. She learned how to use her position as a learned lady to counterbalance the disrespect and disregard with which she and her works were treated. As she produced more serious philosophic treatises, her own self-regard increased and she could almost literally become her own favourite and integrate an imperial persona into her consciousness. Patronage gave Cavendish the tools she needed to push the impartial world into a recognition that she demanded. In her very first work, Cavendish wrote, "'Tis true, the *World* may wonder at my *Confidence*, how I dare put out a *Book*, especially in these *censorious times*; but why should I be ashamed, or afraid, where no evil is, and not please my selfe in the satisfaction of innocent desires?"⁵⁸ Patronage, in all its permutations, gave Cavendish the cultural capital she needed, both internally and from her society, to become the glory of her age.

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⁵⁷ On Cavendish's visit to the Royal Society, see Sarasohn, *Reason and Fancy*, 25–33.

⁵⁸ Cavendish, "An Epistle to Mistress Toppe," *Poems, and Fancies*, A5v.

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