

A Princely Brave Woman

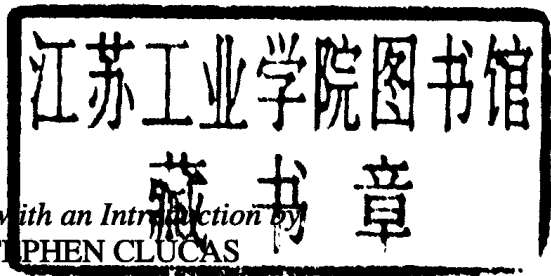
*Essays on
Margaret Cavendish,
Duchess of Newcastle*

Edited by
STEPHEN CLUCAS



A Princely Brave Woman

Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle



Edited with an Introduction by
STEPHEN CLUCAS

ASHGATE

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A PRINCELY BRAVE WOMAN

*This book is dedicated to two princely brave women:
Leah and Lauren*

Notes on Contributors

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Jay Stevenson is a freelance writer. He completed a doctoral thesis on Margaret Cavendish 'Physical Fictions: Margaret Cavendish and her Material Soul' at Rutgers University in 1997. His article 'The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish' was published in *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* in 1996.

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Abbreviations

- Glorious Fame Kathleen Jones, *A Glorious Fame: The Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, 1623–1673* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988).
- Grounds (1668) *Grounds of Natural Philosophy: Divided into thirteen parts: with an Appendix containing five parts. The Second Edition, much altered from the First, which went under the Name of Philosophical and Physical Opinions. Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Duchess of Newcastle* (London: A. Maxwell, 1668).
- Letters and Poems (1676) *Letters and Poems In Honour of the Incomparable Princess, Margaret, Dutchess of Newcastle* (London: Thomas Newcombe, 1676).
- Life (1667) *The Life of the Thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince William Cavendishe, Duke, Marquess, and Earl of Newcastle; Earl of Ogle; Viscount Mansfield; and Baron of Bolsover, of Ogle, Bothal and Hepple: Gentleman of His Majesties Bed-chamber; one of His Majesties most Honourable Privy-Council; Knight of the most Noble Order of the Garter; His Majesties Justice in Ayre Trent-North: Who had the honour to be Governour to our most Glorious King, and Gracious Sovereign, in his Youth, when He was Prince of Wales; and soon after was made Captain General of all the Provinces beyond the River of Trent, and other Parts of the Kingdom of England, with Power, by a Special Commission, to make Knights. Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, His Wife* (London: A. Maxwell, 1667).
- Life (1906) *The Life of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, To which is added The True Relation of my Birth Breeding and Life By Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle*, ed. by C. H. Firth (London: Routledge & Sons Ltd., 1906).

- Margaret the First Douglas Grant, *Margaret the First: A Biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957).
- Natures Pictures (1656) *Natures Pictures drawn by Fancies Pencil to the Life. Written by the thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle. In this Volume there are several feigned Stories of Natural Descriptions, as Comical, Tragical, and Tragi-Comical, Poetical, Romancical, Philosophical, and Historical, both in Prose and Verse, some all Verse, some all Prose, some mixt, partly Prose, and partly Verse. Also, there are some Morals, and some Dialogues; but they are as the Advantage Loaves of Bread to a Bakers dozen; and a true Story at the latter end, wherein there is no Feignings* (London: J. Martin and T. Allestrye, 1656).
- Natures Picture (1671) *Natures Picture Drawn by Fancies Pencil To the Life. Being several Feigned Stories, Comical, Tragical, Tragi-comical, Poetical, Romancical, Philosophical, Historical, and Moral: some in Verse, some in Prose; some Mixt, and some by Dialogues. Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and most Excellent Princess, The Duchess of Newcastle. The Second Edition.* (London: A. Maxwell, 1671).
- Observations (1666) *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy. To which is added, the Description of a New Blazing World. Written By the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princesse, the Duchess of Newcastle* (London: A. Maxwell, 1666).
- Observations (1668) *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy: to which is added, The Description of a New Blazing World. Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princesse, the Duchess of Newcastle. The second Edition.* (London: A. Maxwell, 1668).
- Orations (1662) *Orations of Divers Sorts, Accommodated to Divers Places. Written by the thrice Noble, Illustrious and*

excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle (London: [n.pub.], 1662).

- Philosophicall Fancies (1653) *Philosophicall Fancies. Written By the Right Honourable, The Lady Newcastle* (London: Printed by Tho[mas] Roycroft, for J. Martin, and J. Allestrye, at the Bell in St Pauls Churchyard, 1653).
- Philosophical Letters (1664) *Philosophical Letters: or Modest Reflections Upon some Opinions in Natural Philosophy, maintained By several Famous and Learned Authors of this Age, Expressed by way of Letters: By the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, The Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London: [no pub.], 1664).
- Physical Opinions (1655) *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions, Written by her Excellency, the Lady Marchionesse of Newcastle* (London: Printed for J. Martin and J. Allestrye at the Bell in St Pauls Church-Yard, 1655).
- Physical Opinions (1663) *Philosophical and Physical Opinions. Written By the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London: William Wilson, 1663).
- Playes (1662) *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London: Printed by A. Warren for John Martyn, James Allestry and Tho[mas] Dicas, at the Bell in Saint Pauls Church Yard, 1662).
- Plays (1668) *Plays, Never Before Printed. Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princesse, the Duchess of Newcastle* (London: A. Maxwell, 1668).
- Poems (1668) *Poems, or, Several Fancies in Verse: With the Animal Parliament, in Prose. Written By the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, The Duchess of Newcastle. The Third Edition* (London: A. Maxwell, 1668).

- Poems and Fancies (1653) *Poems, and Fancies: Written by the Right Honourable, the Lady Margaret Countesse of Newcastle*, (London: Printed by T[homas] R[oycroft] for J. Martin and J. Allestrye at the Bell in Saint Pauls Church Yard , 1653).
- Sociable Letters (1664) *CCXI Sociable Letters, Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London: William Wilson, 1664).
- Sociable Letters (1997) *Margaret Cavendish: Sociable Letters*, ed. by James Fitzmaurice (New York: Garland, 1997).
- True Relation (1814) *A True Relation of the Birth, Breeding, and Life, of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle*, ed. by Sir Egerton Brydges (Kent: Private Press of Lee Priory, 1814).
- Women, Texts and Histories *Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (eds.) Women, Texts and Histories 1575–1760*, (London: Routledge, 1992).
- Women, Writing, History *Susan Wiseman and Isobel Grundy (ed.) Women, Writing, History 1640–1740* (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1992).
- Worlds Olio (1655) *The Worlds Olio. Written By the Right Honorable, the Lady Margaret Newcastle* (London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye at the Bell in St Pauls Church-Yard, 1655).
- Writings (1994) *The Description of a New World Called the Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. by Kate Lilley, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992, repr. Penguin Books, 1994).

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Introduction

Stephen Clucas

After nearly three decades of feminist literary criticism, decades which have seen the recovery of a wide-ranging canon of women's writing, from the middle ages through to the twentieth century a collection of essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle hardly needs an apology. 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. Her pursuit of literary fame and reputation was vigorous and startlingly self-conscious. She wrote an epistolary dedication addressed 'To all the Universities in Europe,'¹ and presented the handsome folio volumes of her works to the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, and to prominent members of the nobility.² She maintained an argumentative philosophical correspondence with Joseph Glanvill and openly criticised the 'experimental philosophy' of the Royal Society and the philosophical writings of Thomas Hobbes and Henry More.³ And yet – as Kate Lilley has noted – Cavendish's works have frequently been interpreted as 'deformed in various ways: chaotic, old-fashioned, uneven, contradictory and insane.'⁴ Perhaps more than any other early modern woman writer Cavendish has prompted critical disclaimers, qualifications, and apologies. The necessity for these apologetics is not entirely clear. The unimpeachably canonical Sir Thomas Browne, whose style was condemned by his contemporary Sir Kenelm Digby for its 'wilde fantasticke qualities and moods,'⁵ does not require elaborate contemporary apologetics – there is no 'Sir Tom o' Bedlam' label to negotiate, as 'Mad Madge' must be repeatedly negotiated by Cavendish scholars. It is as if at some unconscious level of modern apologetics, beneath the principled complaints of women's unequal access to education, and consequent 'lack' of literary and philosophical mastery, we are still negotiating Margaret Cavendish's writings as transgressive, and thus in need of justification.

The uneasiness that has marked Cavendish's scholarly reception in the past is currently being revised in the light of re-emergent contexts for her 'lack' of order and method. As Anna Battigelli has recently argued in her book, *Margaret Cavendish: Exile of the Mind*, when viewed in the light of particular philosophical and literary concerns:

The very characteristics that have caused scholars to dismiss Cavendish – her lack of method, her willingness to embrace contradictions, her confidence in deductive thinking, her eccentricity and self-absorption – become historically significant.⁶

Margaret Cavendish, like many other early-modern figures, benefits from being located in appropriate discursive contexts. 'Discourse' itself, in fact, in the sense of speech, or conversation, is a neglected, but vitally important key to understanding Cavendish's work, which she often talks of in connection with familiar (and familial) conversation. In her *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* of 1655, for example, Cavendish defended her familiarity with the 'names and terms of art' as a natural attainment for a member of a 'family of quality', who are accustomed to use such language in ordinary discourse. Her family she says, were 'rational, learned, understanding and wittie' and so was their discourse (see illustration 1.1).⁷ She has learnt her discursive skills, she says, from 'my neerest and dearest friends as from my own brothers, my Lord brother, and my Lord,' and listening to their discourse, she says, has taught her more than others have gained from a formal education because of her natural wit:

For truly I have gathered more by piece-meals, then from a full relation, or a methodical education for knowledge; but my fancy will build thereupon, and make discourse therefrom, and so of every thing they discourse of [...]⁸

Charges of plagiarism lead her, however, to distinguish between the knowledge she acquired through 'intimate acquaintance and familiar conversation' and the more specialised knowledge that she might have gleaned from 'visiting and entertaining discourse' with 'professed Philosophers' (such as Descartes and Hobbes). Her exchanges with the philosophers in their circle she says was largely made up of 'cautionary, frivolous, vain, idle, or at least but common and ordinary matter'. She has, however, discoursed intimately with her 'husband, brothers, and the rest of my family' who although they neither 'Philosophers nor Scholars' are 'learned therein.'⁹ This point about the emergence of her philosophical talents in the context of familial discourse is re-iterated by William in his apologetic preface, where he defends her philosophical literacy from charges of unseemliness and plagiarism:

I assure you her conversation with her Brother, and Brother-in-law, were enough without a miracle or an impossibility to get the language of the arts, and learned professions, which are their terms, without taking any degrees in Schooles [...] but truly she did never Impe her high-flying Phancies, with any old broken Fethers out of any university[...].¹⁰

Ultimately, of course, it is these 'high-flying Phancies' of her own, that are the self-legitimizing grounds of Margaret's discourse, especially in the arena of natural philosophy, which she saw as a realm of particular philosophical liberty:

in natural things my natural reason will concieve them without being any wayes instructed; and so working a brain I have that many times on small objects or subjects will raise up many several phancies, and opinions therein, from which my