

## Margaret Cavendish's Books in New College, and around Oxford

Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623–1673), was one of the more fascinating writers of the seventeenth century.<sup>1</sup> An aristocratic cross-dresser, self-publicist, and obsessive producer and reviser of poetry and prose, of plays and letters, of fiction and of science, she struck many of her contemporaries as somewhat queer in the attic. As Dorothy Osborne wrote to her lover Sir William Temple in early 1653,

... let me aske you if you have seen a book of Poems newly come out, made by my Lady New Castle for God sake if you meet with it send it mee, they say tis ten times more Extravagant then her dresse. Sure the poore woman is a litle distracted, she could never bee soe ridiculous else as to venture at writeing book's and in verse too. If I should not sleep this fortnight I should not come to that.

Osborne subsequently got hold of the book, Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies* of that year, and declared swiftly that 'there are many soberer People in Bedlam'.<sup>2</sup> The diarist John Evelyn likewise had harsh things to say about the eccentric duchess, but when she visited the Royal Society—she was the first woman to attend a meeting of the society, and she published critiques of the work of Robert Boyle and Robert Hooke—Evelyn was star-struck, calling her another Zenobia, the warrior-queen of Palmyra. But Evelyn's wife Mary disliked Cavendish, and thought her, in Evelyn's biographer's phrase, the 'benchmark of absurdity'. 'I hope', as Mary sneered, 'as she is an Originall she may never have a Copie'.<sup>3</sup>

Cavendish was certainly voluminous. Rather unusually for a woman writer of the time she wrote directly and expressly for the press – she wanted recognition as a literary and philosophical authority, and she wanted it from a wider audience than could be reached by manuscript circulation.

Cavendish's earliest works were printed in London in the Interregnum while she herself was moving around between Paris, Antwerp, and London.<sup>4</sup> One of her first works, the *Philosophical Fancies* of 1653, was a small book, an octavo, but the *Poems and Fancies* of the same year appeared in folio, a format Cavendish preferred for all her subsequent works. This was an unusual, grandiloquent choice at the time—Cavendish liked her books to look

---

<sup>1</sup> For the printing and distribution of Cavendish's post-Restoration books see Douglas Grant, *Margaret the First: A Biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle 1623–1673* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957), esp. pp. 217-23, and Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, Royalist, Writer & Romantic* (London: Vintage, 2004), pp. 250-1, 258, 312-19. For Cavendish's press-corrections, see James Fitzmaurice, 'Margaret Cavendish on Her Own Writing: Evidence from Revision and Handmade Correction', *PBSA* 85 (1991), 297-307. This forms the basis of Peter Beal's entry for Cavendish in the Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts 1450–1700 (<<http://www.celm-ms.org.uk>>). Inexplicably, Fitzmaurice, and perforce Beal, does not recognize the existence of the New College copies, and is seriously incomplete in his knowledge of copies at several other colleges – hence this note. See also Elizabeth Scott-Bauman, *Forms of Engagement: Women, Poetry and Culture 1640-1680* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 77-8; and for this kind of argument extended to Cavendish's actual bibliographical structure, see Rebecca Bullard, 'Gatherings in Exile: Interpreting the Bibliographical Structure of *Natures Pictures Drawn by Fancies Pencil to the Life* (1656)', *English Studies* 92 (2011), pp. 786-805. My thanks to Justin Begley for comments on this note.

<sup>2</sup> *Letters of Dorothy Osborne to Sir William Temple*, ed. Kenneth Parker (London, 1987), pp. 75, 79 (letters of 14 April; 7 or 8 May 1653).

<sup>3</sup> Gillian Darley, *John Evelyn: Living for Ingenuity* (New Haven, 2007), pp. 211, 245.

<sup>4</sup> Cavendish's works were initially published by a partnership that would survive well into the Restoration, that of John Martyn and Richard Allestree, who would go on to publish various works for the Royal Society, notably John Wilkins's *Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (1668). See further Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, pp. 158-59. Bullard, 'Gatherings in Exile', pp. 796-77, suggests that Cavendish came to this partnership through her acquaintance Richard Flecknoe, whose poetic *Miscellanea* was published by Martyn and Allestree in 1653.

as imposing as she hoped they would sound.<sup>5</sup> She retained the same publishers up until her *Plays* of 1662; thereafter, publishers' names disappear from her imprints, indicating that Margaret was now bearing the whole cost of her books; these were in effect early vanity publications. In 1663 and 1664 she was employing the printer William Wilson, but from 1666 she used almost exclusively the atelier of Anne Maxwell for her books.<sup>6</sup> It may not be a coincidence that Cavendish, a major aristocrat with the money to employ whomever she liked as a printer, and a marked interest in promoting her own status as a woman writer, eventually decided to employ printing firms led by women.

Cavendish wanted to be lauded, and to this end she bombarded both individuals and institutions with copies of her books. The greatest corporate beneficiaries of her enthusiasm were the two English universities—the *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1663) was formally dedicated to Oxford and Cambridge—and in Oxford libraries alone I have counted over one hundred presentation copies of her books. Cavendish approached at least one foreign university too, for in 1658 she invited the Dutch natural philosopher Constantijn Huygens to present her *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* to the University of Leiden. The university's senate accepted the gift, and Margaret promptly sent the Dutch academicians the rest of her works then in print, along with a specially-printed index in Latin—English was not a language readily understood on the continent in this period.<sup>7</sup> She gave books to many English admirers, including the poet Thomas Shadwell, the philosophers Thomas Hobbes and Joseph Glanvill, and the physician Walter Charleton. Charleton, indeed, wrote in return long letters on her philosophy, and he would translate her *Life* of William Cavendish, her husband, into Latin. This was however the only one of Cavendish's books to reach print in scholarship's international language, despite the pleas of Trinity College, Cambridge, and the efforts of Christ Church, Oxford.<sup>8</sup>

Cavendish's initial contact for disseminating her books in Oxford was Thomas Barlow, Bodley's librarian from 1652 to 1660, and fellow (and from 1658 President) of Queen's.<sup>9</sup> In 1655 Barlow distributed copies of Cavendish's *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, printed in that year. In a letter dated 24 March he fawned over the duchess for her attentions to 'a poor impertinent thing in Black' (he was a clergyman), sending her the wording of the inscription he had placed in the copy he was delivering to Magdalen, and stating that he had similarly inscribed copies destined for the other colleges.<sup>10</sup> Barlow's next surviving letter to Cavendish, dated 3 September 1656, shows that he had received more books from Cavendish, this time for the Bodleian, the Vice-Chancellor, and for himself – but seemingly not for the college libraries. This was presumably her *Natures Pictures* of that year, which is indeed comparatively rare among the college holdings today. Barlow's next letter repeats almost verbatim some of the prose of his first letter: that he is a thing in black, that there is in the Bodleian a manuscript on the superiority of women to

---

<sup>5</sup> That the *Philosophical Fancies* came out just after the *Poems and Fancies* in 1653 is demonstrated by the colophon of the latter, which promises the appearance shortly of the former. Already in the early *Poems and Fancies* we can see pen-corrections to the text which are clearly authorially-directed (e.g. Bodleian, P 1.22 Jur.Seld).

<sup>6</sup> Anne Maxwell, the widow of another printer, was active from 1660 to 1674 – ninety-eight imprints bearing her name are known. Information from the British Book Trade Index (<<http://www.bbti.bham.ac.uk>>). For Maxwell and Cavendish see also Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, pp. 307, 312, where it is plausibly suggested that Cavendish used Thomas Milbourne for the Latin *Vita* of her husband because Maxwell's business was not able to type-set Latin text reliably.

<sup>7</sup> Grant, *Margaret the First*, p. 218.

<sup>8</sup> *A Collection of Letters and Poems* [hereafter *Letters and Poems*], pp. 9, 96-7.

<sup>9</sup> Barlow's letters to Cavendish are in *Letters and Poems*, pp. 66 (24 May 1665), 68-9 (21 May 1663), 70-1 (3 September 1656), 73-4 (2 February 1667).

<sup>10</sup> *Letters and Poems*, p. 66. Barlow's inscription can indeed be seen on several other college copies, e.g. those in All Souls, Queen's, and St John's colleges. But Magdalen no longer has its copy of this book.

men,<sup>11</sup> a thing he now acknowledges true ... one gets the feeling that despite Barlow's effusions he couldn't quite summon the effort to vary his praise.<sup>12</sup> Their correspondence only resumed after the Restoration, and on 21 May 1663, Barlow thanked Cavendish floridly for further deliveries, this time received solely for the library at Queen's. A final letter of 2 February 1667 thanks Cavendish for copies of the *Life* of her husband, one for the college, and one for Barlow's own library,<sup>13</sup> and this response shows that Cavendish's main contact in Oxford after the Restoration was not Barlow but 'Dr *Mayne*'. This is Jasper Mayne (1604–72), poet and clergyman, canon of Christ Church, and a beneficiary of the patronage of Margaret's husband William, who was also a literary writer, as well as an enthusiast for breeding and training horses. Mayne himself had informed Margaret in May 1663 that he had deposited copies of her books in the Bodleian, and also in the libraries of 'every single Colledge'.<sup>14</sup>

It seems true that copies of the duchess's books went to 'every single Colledge'. Of the colleges and halls then extant, all received copies, and most still hold anywhere between two and nine of her early editions; and although not all these books came from Margaret herself, most did. In Cambridge, the picture is the same: the older college libraries are awash with Cavendish, perhaps even more so than their Oxonian cousins.

For in general the Oxonians proved rather hollow in their praise of their self-appointed patroness. Granted, Thomas Lockey, Bodley's librarian in the early Restoration, wrote gracefully in response, and the accounts of his library show that a generous £1 was paid to the carrier of the Duchess's books; and the great John Fell of Christ Church sent a dutiful letter upon receiving copies for his college and his own library.<sup>15</sup> But the thank-you letter from Thomas Tully, Principal of St Edmund Hall, sounds rather as if Tully

---

<sup>11</sup> It is MS Bodl. 1030, by William Page of All Souls, c. 1630. Page also wrote a manuscript treatise on widowhood, which he likewise presented to the Bodleian (MS Bodl. 115), where he was encouraged by the librarian, John Rouse. There are other manuscript tracts of his in the libraries of Queen's and All Souls.

<sup>12</sup> That Barlow was privately lukewarm about the duchess's writing will come as no surprise to anyone used to the severely traditional Barlow. We might also note that the only copy in Oxford of the early *Philosophical Fancies* (1653), for instance, was a presentation copy to Barlow himself, as his inscription shows (Bodleian, 8° N 2 Art.BS). But as its shelf-mark suggests, this volume did *not* come in to the library with the rest of Barlow's books as part of his bequest in the 1690s (subsequently shelf-marked under 'Linc'), but must have been unofficially donated to the library by Barlow soon after he was given it, but only actually shelved in the Restoration under the new shelf-mark created to process the many unshelved accessions, 'BS'. It is interesting that Barlow, so effusive to the Duchess by letter, did not bother to keep this book long. Compare the more generous judgment of Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, p. 319.

<sup>13</sup> Barlow's own copy does not appear to be in either Queen's or the Bodleian, both of which retain their original presentation copy.

<sup>14</sup> *Letters and Poems*, pp. 93-4; see also pp. 82-3. Mayne also received copies for himself; and he attempted to find a Latin translator for Cavendish. In the event, only the *Life* of her husband ever appeared in Latin (see *Letters and Poems*, p. 106, for John Fell's letter to William Cavendish upon this translation). For Mayne see Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, pp. 258-59.

<sup>15</sup> Bodleian, Library records e. 8, fol. 165v, for the academic year 1662-1663; *Letters and Poems*, pp. 133-35 (Lockey, 20 May 1663), 97 (Fell, no date). Lockey's letter shows that in the Bodleian Margaret's works were, as a mark of respect to both patrons, shelved next to a work by her husband. This was his *La méthode nouvelle et Invention extraordinaire de dresser les chevaux* (Antwerp, 1658), initially shelved at BS 42. 'The volume contains forty plates by Clouet, de Jode, and Vorsterman after drawings by Van Diepenbeck. The printing alone cost in excess of £1300, and he was obliged to borrow money to see the book through the press' (ODNB). Lockey was as good as his word: see Thomas Hyde's 1674 Bodleian catalogue, under 'New-Castle', where we can see that the Duke's French first edition (the 1667 English version, unillustrated, and itself a further presentation copy from the Cavendishes, was subsequently shelved next to it), was indeed followed by his wife's various works. The Duke's massive book, presented in 1661, is still in the library, but shelved now as Antiqu.B.1658.1. He also presented his works on horsemanship as well as his wife's posthumous *Letters and Poems* (1676) to Cambridge University Library (J. C. T. Oates, *Cambridge University Library: A History from the Beginnings to the Copyright Act of Queen Anne* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Library, 1986), p. 385n).

regarded his pile of Cavendish copies as a personal gift, which it may have been;<sup>16</sup> and if the other colleges wrote, their letters were not retained and published, and it seems more likely that they were never sent. This, as several modern writers on Cavendish have commented, is in stark contrast to Cambridge, where particularly St John's and Trinity vied in obsequiousness, and the university as a body also sent several ecstatic letters. As Douglas Grant first pointed out in his study of Cavendish, the reason for this contrast is not hard to seek: the Cavendishes had ties to Cambridge University, not Oxford, and the Oxonians must have realized that the fundraising potential here was very limited. Fundraising through flattery is not a modern invention.

New College was a beneficiary of Margaret's ambitions. She is recorded in the library's Benefactors' Book thus:

Ilustrissima *Domina*  
DOMINA MARGARETA DUCISSA DE NOVO-CASTRA DD  
The life of the Duke of New-Castle.  
Orations of diuerse sorts.  
Philosophicall and Physical opinions  
Sociable letters  
Philosophicall letters or modest reflections  
Poems and Phancies  
Playes.<sup>17</sup>

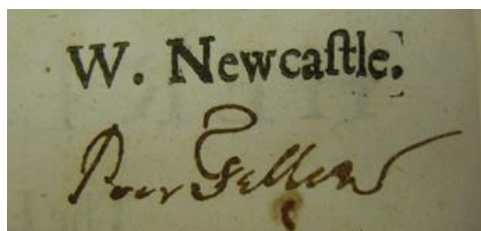
These six texts, all folios, are still in the college today, and this entry allows us to confirm that none has gone missing since their accession, which probably happened in several stages between 1662 or 1663, and 1667. 1667 is also the year in which Cavendish seemingly stopped presenting books to Oxford: there are no suitably-provenanced copies of her works in Oxford libraries from after that date. Our six books therefore comprise a complete post-Restoration Cavendish collection to 1667, with the exception of her *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* with its appendix, *The Blazing World*, ironically her two best-known works today. Indeed, this publication is very rare in Oxford in either of its editions (1666, 1668), and yet very common in Cambridge—which must mean that Cavendish's most engaged work (it is amongst other things a critique of Robert Hooke's *Micrographia* (1665)) was deliberately withheld from Oxford libraries.<sup>18</sup> Why was this?

<sup>16</sup> *Letters and Poems*, p. 95 (30 June 1663); that Tully kept whichever books had been sent to him as his own is strongly suggested by the presence in St Edmund Hall today solely of two later Cavendish copies, both printed in 1664, and both marked as authorial presentations. (Compare also the records of book donations to St Edmund Hall in MS Rawl. D 398, fol. 44r, where she is listed simply as giving 'Volumina suorum Operum in Fol:'.) And indeed, Tully's personal copy of the *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1663) is in the British Library, annotated by Tully with the names of possible translators for Cavendish's works to date (Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, pp. 258-59, 390n, copy at BL, 8407.h.9).

<sup>17</sup> New College, Benefactors' Book, p. 118, page headed with the date 1672, clearly belated: the immediately prior entries are the donations, also dated 1672, of college fellow Robert Sharrock and then the diplomat and knight Antonio Messia a Tovar y Paz (described as the *fercularius* or steward of Don John of Austria and his *orator* or representative to Charles II; he was also the dedicatee of William Fulman's *Academia Oxoniensis Notitia* (Oxford, 1665)). The entry for Cavendish is then followed by the bequest of college fellow Laurence Saintloe (d. 1675, aged 26). This is a typical example of the Benefactors Book lagging sometimes years behind the actual moment of donation. The oldest shelf-marks on the copies show that they were shelved in a line together from the point of accession; today they are BT3.13.4, BT3.25.9-14.

<sup>18</sup> This book was published in 1666 and then again in 1668. British copies of the 1666 edition are very scarce; of the two Oxford copies, one is in the English Faculty Library and therefore of modern institutional provenance; the other, in Queen's, came from Sir Joseph Williamson (1633-1701), and was not therefore presented to the college by Cavendish. The 1668 edition, of which the sole Oxford copy is Bodleian, C.4.15.Art. (*olim* A 1.21 Art), contemporary binding but no obvious marks of presentation, is held by no fewer than nine Cambridge colleges.

New College's copies show the standard corrections and tinkering tracked by Fitzmaurice in his survey of other Oxford copies. Typical, too, is the censorship that has been imposed in two places on Cavendish's *Life* of her husband, where a passage insinuating Charles I's tight-fistedness or at least impecuniosity is heavily blacked out, and two names supplied in a later marginal note are likewise deleted.<sup>19</sup> But there are various signs of early readers' reactions in a few copies. After William Cavendish's name at the end of his salutation to his wife at the start of her *Philosophical Letters* (1664), for instance, some droll New Collegian has written 'Poor Fellow'.



New College Library, Oxford, BT3.25.11

In another volume, the *Poems* of 1664, one 'Pinkney' has doodled his name, 'Nov. Coll.' and the date of 1722 (sg. c1r). This is an intriguing annotation, as there is no Pinkney listed in Foster's *Alumni Oxonienses* whose dates satisfy, and the elusive man may perhaps be a gentleman commoner or a clerk. Perhaps most interesting of all our copies, however, is the *Plays* of 1662, which has evidently been read closely, as many passages within one or two plays (*Youth's Glory*, and especially *The Lady Contemplation*) have been marked up by pencil as of especial interest. In a passage in praise of poets, for instance, a negative comparison with priests is marked up: 'when oft-times Divines, in stead of suppl[y]ing Oil, pour in corroding Vitriol, and in stead of healing Balsoms, pour in burning Sulphure, which are terrifying threats, and fearful menaces' (p. 231). Other passages deemed worthy of comment include: 'The Mind's a Common-wealth, and the Thoughts are the Citizens therein, and Reason rules as a King, or ought to doe: But there is no reason why we should vex our Thoughts with outward things, or make them slaves unto the world' (p. 229), as well as a whole speech on 'Want of Speech makes not beasts beasts, but want of Reason, & want of Reason makes a man a beast ...' (p. 224).<sup>20</sup> This copy is also enticing on account of two pencil-portraits drawn into it by perhaps the same reader who also marked up memorable passages. This mysterious pencil-portraitist has now been spotted in many early-modern New College books. As we add these portraits to our list we move a little closer to identifying our elusive cartoonist—who may also have been the college's most attentive reader of Cavendish. But did he really approve? For on the title-page of *Plays* in faint pencil too is a rude Latin epigram, '—Novit Fœmina nostra nihil', 'our woman knew nothing'.

William Poole  
Fellow Librarian

<sup>19</sup> *The Life of ... William Cavendish* (1667), pp. 8-9, 26. See Fitzmaurice, pp. 302-5, for these deletions. The first passage runs: 'Thus they remain'd upon duty [erasure by blacking out completely] until His Majesty had reduced his Rebellious Subjects, and then my Lord returned with honour to his Charge, viz. The Government of the Prince.' In many copies, including ours, the deletion has been restored by a later reader: 'without receiving any pay or wages from His Majesty'. In the Latin edition the first passage is translated: 'Ex eo itaque tempore in exercitu Dominus meus permansit, Regis tantum imperio obnoxius [my italics.]: & postquam Scoti rebelles ...' (p. 11) – so a different but still hard sentiment. The offending note on p. 26 is omitted.

<sup>20</sup> There are many other *sententiae* thus marked, e.g. on pp. 179, 183, 194, 200, 206, 207, 217, 219, and also much later in the volume at p. 654, against a passage on Lady Wit and her Nine Daughters.

*Appendix:*

On the following page I present a table of all the Cavendish copies published within her lifetime surviving in Oxford libraries today. It has been generated by collating the English Short-Title Catalogue with Oxford's online union catalogue, SOLO, and augmenting this with the results of direct enquiries and visits to libraries either partially or not yet at all represented by ESTC and/or SOLO.<sup>21</sup> My table excludes posthumous works, but includes some libraries post-dating Cavendish herself.<sup>22</sup> It inevitably includes several copies which reached their current positions by means other than authorial presentation. There is good evidence that some copies were donated that can no longer be traced; University College, for instance, certainly received six folios, as this is entered into their library benefactors' book, but only three can currently be located.<sup>23</sup> It seems likely that a handful of further copies will turn up as the various college libraries continue with their antiquarian cataloguing.

---

<sup>21</sup> ESTC/SOLO currently do not register Cavendish copies in the libraries of University, Oriel, Magdalen, Brasenose, and Trinity Colleges, or in St Edmund Hall, and in several other cases what is recorded on ESTC/SOLO falls short of what is actually held. Oriel's current catalogues, again, are silent, but the early-modern manuscript alphabetic catalogue for the library (shelfmark D.c.V.22) shows that five volumes were received, and they are in fact still on the shelves in the Senior Library, very high up indeed. My thanks to Marjory Szurko for assistance in the library.

<sup>22</sup> Thus the copies in Hertford today ought to descend from the libraries of Magdalen Hall and Hart Hall, the two institutions behind the modern Hertford College. The benefactors' book for the library of Magdalen Hall survives today in Hertford College, and Cavendish is noted there as the donor of two books; of the five recorded in Hertford today, the other three may therefore have come from Hart Hall, or from another source. Again, of Worcester College's two copies of the 1662 *Plays*, one comes from George Clarke's library, yet the other lacks the title-page; and the Worcester *Life of William Cavendish* bears a Gloucester Hall shelfmark (my thanks to Joanna Parker for this information). Perhaps therefore one of the *Plays* and certainly the *Life* descend from the prior Gloucester Hall collection. I have not systematically checked each college benefactors' book—but these will usually provide the best control of what volumes ought to be present where.

<sup>23</sup> See University College Archives, BE1/MS1/3, fol. 7; my thanks to Elizabeth Adams of University College for this reference.

Margaret Cavendish's Books

		Bodleian	University	Balliol	Merton	Exeter	Oriel	Queen's	New College	Lincoln	All Souls	Brasenose	Magdalen	Corpus Christi	Christ Church	Trinity	St John's	Jesus	Wadham	Pembroke	St Edmund Hall	[Hertford]	[Worcester]	[EFL]			
Philosophical Fancies	1653	(X)																									
Poems and Fancies	1653	X + (X)																									
The Worlds Olio	1655	(X)																									
Philosophical and Physical Opinions	1655	X						X			X						X + (X)	X	X	X					X		
Natures Pictures	1656	X		X	X													X									
Orations	1662	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X					X		
Plays	1662	X + (X)	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X			X	X	X					X + (X)		
Philosophical and Physical Opinions	1663	X		X	X		X	X + (X)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X					X		
CCXI Sociable Letters	1664	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X					X	X	
Poems and Phancies	1664	X + (X)	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X		X							
Philosophical Letters	1664	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X					X	X	
Observations upon Experimental Philosophy	1666							X																	X		
Life of Cavendish	1667	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X					X	X	X
Vita ... Gulielmi	1668	X													X												
Grounds of Natural Philosophy	1668	X																									
Playes never before printed	1668	(X)																							X	X	
Poems	1668	(X)																									
Observations upon Experimental Philosophy	1668	X																									
Orations	1668	(X)																								X	
Natures Picture	1671	(X)																									
The Worlds Olio	1671																									X	