

Introduction

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

Margaret Cavendish, *Poems and Fancies*, 1653, Aarv¹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹² Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 1.

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

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 156, 151.

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

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

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

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

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 155.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²¹ William Prynne, *The Sovereign Power of Parliaments and Kingdoms. Or Second Part* (London, 1643), 12.

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

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

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

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

²² DeGroot, *Royalist Identities*, 2. ²³ *Ibid.*, xv. ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁵ Robert Wilcher, *The Writing of Royalism, 1628–1660* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁷ Jason McElligott, *Royalism, Print and Censorship in Revolutionary England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007), 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³² *Ibid.*, 228. ³³ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁴ McElligott and Smith, 'Introduction', 11.

³⁵ John Maxwell, *Sacro-sancta Regum Magestas* (Oxford, 1644), 125.

³⁶ David L. Smith contends that the 'official position of the Restoration regime was based on Constitutional Royalist principles'. Smith, *Constitutional Royalism*, 297.

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 83–101.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴⁵ Margaret Cavendish, ‘A true Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life’ (NP 377).

⁴⁶ Margaret Cavendish, ‘A Moral Tale of the Ant and the Bee’ (NP 165).

⁴⁷ Margaret Cavendish, ‘The third Moral Tale of the Ant and the Bee’ (NP 166).

⁴⁸ Iyengar, ‘Royalist, Romancist, Racialist’, 650–1.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵¹ Early modern understandings of art included 'Human workmanship or agency; human skill as an agent. Opposed to *nature*'; 'art', n.2, *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, www.oed.com.ezpr1.villanova.edu/view/Entry/11125?rskey=tb9oK2&tresult=1, accessed 27 December 2013.

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁴ Boyle, ‘Fame, Virtue, and Government’, 282.

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

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

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

⁵⁶ Cavendish, 'A true Relation' (NP 370).

⁵⁷ James Fitzmaurice, 'Cavendish, Margaret, duchess of Newcastle upon Tyne (1623?–1673)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Online edition, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford University Press), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4940, accessed 21 March 2013.

⁵⁸ Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 39–40.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 40. ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 42–3.

⁶¹ Cavendish, 'A true Relation' (NP 373). ⁶² Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 55–6.

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

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

⁶³ Cavendish, 'A true Relation' (NP 374). ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁶⁵ Before settling in Antwerp, William and Margaret Cavendish stayed in Rotterdam for six months. Fitzmaurice, 'Cavendish, Margaret, duchess of Newcastle upon Tyne'.

⁶⁶ Margaret Cavendish, *The Life of the Thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince William Cavendish* (London: A. Maxwell, 1667), 57.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 55, 56. ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 56. ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

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

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

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

⁷⁰ See *PL* sig. ctr and *OUEP* sig. etv and sig. e2r.

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

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

⁷³ Rogers, *Matter of Revolution*, 27.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸⁴ Cavendish, *The Life*, sig. a2r.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸⁸ See *PL* 482, 455, 456 and 501, and *OUEP* 11 31.

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

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

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

⁹⁰ Barnes, ‘Familiar Epistolary Philosophy’, 59.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁹⁵ Rees, *Gender, Genre, Exile*, 149.

⁹⁶ For a more detailed account of how 'The Animall Parliament' and poems in *Poems and Fancies* address Descartes's mechanist physiology, see Semler, 'Cavendish's Early Engagement with Descartes and Hobbes', 336–7 and 352–3.

⁹⁷ Smith, *Constitutional Royalism*, 6. ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 243

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰² Cavendish, *The Life*, 2rv. ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, sig. c2r. ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 120. ¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, sig. d2r. ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 139–1.

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

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

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

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 122.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 127.

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

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

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

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

¹¹⁴ Margaret Cavendish, ‘To the Two Universities’ (*TPPO* sig. B2v).

¹¹⁵ Bathsua Makin, *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (London, 1673), 10.

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

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

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

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

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

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