Relocating Early Modern Women: Teaching Margaret Cavendish to a Broader Audience

Jennifer Topale
University of Denver, jennifer.topale@du.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/abo

 Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, Dramatic Literature, Criticism and Theory Commons, Educational Methods Commons, Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons, and the Literature in English, British Isles Commons

Relocating Early Modern Women: Teaching Margaret Cavendish to a Broader Audience

Abstract

Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, can be called many things: writer, poet, philosopher, woman, Royalist, eccentric rule-breaker, scientific collaborator, utopian thinker, and the list goes on. Unfortunately, access to her writings, typically her *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World,* are often limited in academic settings to courses centered on the seventeenth century, early modern utopian literature, Restoration literature, and possibly an early modern women writers class. Though these are all wonderful course topics, they are often upper-division courses specifically designed for English majors of the early modern period. Limiting Cavendish to only these courses means that most university students will not come across her texts, even if their institution requires at least one English elective course. Furthermore, Cavendish tends to be excluded from entry-level English courses because these courses are often designed around contemporary themes and texts that target students from diverse academic disciplines and non-English fields of study. Additionally, Cavendish is often seen as inaccessible to a wide audience because her writing style and philosophical experimentations can be difficult to process. In typical English classes, student understanding of literature is often assessed by requiring them to write academic essays that adhere to a very traditional structure, which can be intimidating to non-English majors. In order to introduce Cavendish to a broader student body, this essay will examine teaching her texts through multi-modal, student-centered, creative pedagogy using digital, visual, written, and verbal expressions that go beyond the traditional academic essay. A more diverse pedagogical approach to teaching Cavendish ensures that she can be read alongside, and in conversation with, more contemporary writers and texts.

Keywords

pedagogy, LGBTQIA+, gender, utopia, science

Creative Commons License

Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, can be called many things: writer, poet, philosopher, woman, Royalist, eccentric rule-breaker, scientific collaborator, utopian thinker, and the list goes on.[1] Unfortunately, access to her writings, typically her *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World,* are often limited in academic settings to courses centered on the seventeenth century, early modern utopian literature, Restoration literature, and possibly an early modern women writers class. Though these are all wonderful course topics, they are often upper-division courses specifically designed for English majors of the early modern period. At my current institution, Kutztown University, which is part of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education, Cavendish is not part of the standard English coursework because most of the course topics listed above are not offered. The university is a public institution situated in a rural township, but within a reasonable drive to larger cities, ensuring a diverse demographic of students from both urban and rural experiences, including first-generation students, non-native English speakers, and students considered underprepared for higher education. Unfortunately, these students will most likely never hear of Cavendish, unless they take the one-semester British literature survey course that is offered, but not required; even then, because the course includes the entirety of British literature, the inclusion of Cavendish will depend on the interests of the instructor teaching the course. While other institutions may have more course options, the increasing decline in humanities, specifically within English studies, continues to limit access to Cavendish. While Cavendish scholars are highly in favor of teaching her texts whenever possible, this essay attempts to speak to scholars outside of Cavendish studies who may be seeking to diversify their reading lists; therefore, the essay begins by proposing possible courses with rationale for the inclusion of Cavendish, followed by specific teaching strategies and assignments, in the hopes that Cavendish will become more widely studied across academia. Specifically, the Cavendish texts that will be discussed in this essay are: *The Blazing World*, *Convent of Pleasures*, her poem "A Dialogue Between an Oake, and a Man Cutting Him Downe," and Letter VI from her *Philosophical Letters*. While these texts can easily be incorporated into a variety of syllabi that do not focus solely on Cavendish, it is important to note that these are merely used as examples for thinking more broadly about teaching Cavendish. Instructors should be inspired to consider texts beyond those addressed here.

Reinstituting Cavendish

At many institutions, even those with a more robust English curriculum, Cavendish tends to be excluded from entry-level English courses because these courses are often designed around contemporary themes and texts that target students from diverse academic disciplines and non-English fields of study.

Cavendish is often seen by non-Cavendish scholars as inaccessible to a wide audience because her writing and philosophy can be difficult to process, and many non-English majors are intimidated by literature courses that require they write traditional academic essays. In order to introduce Cavendish to a broader student body, this essay will examine teaching her texts through multi-modal, student-centered, creative pedagogies using digital, visual, written, and verbal expressions that go beyond the traditional academic essay. A more diverse pedagogical approach to teaching Cavendish ensures that she can be read alongside, and in conversation with, more contemporary writers and texts.

While Cavendish has been excluded from many academic spaces,[2] when she is included, she tends to be frozen in the early modern period, which prevents her from being put into conversation with more contemporary themes that students view as significant or relevant to their own identities.[3] Resituating Cavendish's work by focusing on themes that students are directly grappling with makes her more inclusive and accessible. By reconsidering how we teach literature to college students, we can relocate Cavendish into the academic spaces from which she has been omitted. Because Cavendish's texts are often hybrid spaces, as Zelia Gregoriou suggests, her writings can be incorporated into various fields of study and genres, including those more specific to the postmodern student identity.[4] It is therefore vital that scholars begin to teach her works alongside texts that discuss the following topics: utopias, philosophy, science (whether fiction or not), gender & women's studies (including LGBTQIA+ identities), as well as proto-colonial themes (including travel narratives).

Blazing World as a utopia and/or travel narrative

Cavendish's *Blazing World* can easily be added to courses that teach utopian literatures and/or travel narratives because her hybrid text broadens the definition of what constitutes both a utopia and a travel narrative,[5] while also considering the role of women in positions of power. More's *Utopia* provides an initial definition and design for utopias as unlocatable islands that cannot be mapped, but as Gregoriou reminds us, Cavendish offers a utopia that breaks that mold and her goal is to create an artificial utopian world where her female readers can "pursue their own learning through self-fashioning, artificiality, and imitation of female partners" (467).[6] While considering the utopian theme in *Blazing World,* readers experience a feminine version of what constitutes a perfect society. While More's *Utopia* and Bacon's *New Atlantis* both offer utopian societies centered on a patriarchal system of government, Cavendish's utopian society is created, controlled, and ruled by women. Marina Leslie writes that Cavendish's postlapsarian paradise, "is spiritual and material, resplendent and yet also capable

of change and reform" (91), thus suggesting that Cavendish's female-inspired utopia is an interactive one in which Cavendish invites her readers to become their own utopian architects through the use of imagination.[7]

Situating Cavendish into utopian conversation is important because she offers a different philosophical viewpoint in her understanding of religion and gender from her male contemporaries. Moreover, she invites the reader into the act of imaginative worldmaking, which offers students a unique perspective on the purpose of utopian fiction. Therefore, Cavendish can be taught alongside other early modern figures like More, Swift, Defoe, Bacon, as well as later female writers that engage with worldmaking and utopian/dystopian themes, including Margaret Atwood and Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* and Gilman's *Herland*, like Cavendish's *Blazing World*, both engage with gender hegemony and power-dynamics, and therefore any entry-level literature course that is focused on themes of utopian/dystopian literature can easily incorporate Cavendish's *Blazing World.* In pairing *Blazing World* with these utopian & dystopian texts, I recommend cross-textual analysis of utopian literary elements, including location, government (laws, codes, regulations), religion and/or moral structure, economic systems, etc. These comparative conversations would encourage further scholarly research across these texts to better understand utopian/dystopian literature. I have used a simple Venn diagram to help students consider similarities and differences between Cavendish's utopia and More's. In small groups of 3-4, students work together to fill in the diagram, considering the different utopian literary elements. Students are given a large sheet of butcher/packaging paper and markers to create their diagrams. After completing their diagrams, each group chooses one member to explain their diagram to the rest of the class. Then, students are given an individual writing assignment asking them to consider how gender differences between Cavendish and More may, or may not, affect the utopian vision. This lesson can be incorporated using any of the other texts mentioned above. If comparing Cavendish to Atwood or Gilman, the writing assignment can be altered to consider factors beyond gender, such as contemporary concepts of utopian ideology.

Not only can *Blazing World* be read as a utopian text, but also as a travel narrative along with *Robinson Crusoe* or *Gulliver's Travels*. Asking students to do a close reading of the Duchess's initial engagement with, and eventual rule over, her newly discovered world, can be read in tangent with Crusoe's colonization of his newly discovered island, including his subjugation of Friday, as well as Gulliver's interactions with the natives across the different worlds that he visits. Pairing the Duchess's criticisms of early experimental science with Gulliver's observations of the experiments on the floating Laputa reveals that Cavendish's criticisms against

her society, specifically with regards to natural philosophy, were legitimate, and not simply the whims of an uneducated woman. It is important to consider that women during the early modern period, like men, were also dreaming of idealized societies, and imagining worlds and government systems that would solve the vast political and social problems that existed in England. Adding Cavendish's *Blazing World* to these courses provides solutions from a marginalized female perspective, thereby diversifying the curriculum. Reading the text comparatively with *Crusoe* and *Gulliver* can encourage classroom conversation on female autonomy and empowerment, and possible gender-differences in imagining the perfect society and interacting with the marginalized Other.

Blazing World as science fiction

Teaching Cavendish in a science fiction course can further position Cavendish into dialogue with contemporary themes. Though some may suggest that *Blazing World* is not science fiction because it predates the discovery of the genre, her text can still be labeled proto-science fiction and can be used to trace the origins of contemporary science fiction writing. S.E. Kile examines gate-keeping politics in science fiction and the complications of defining science fiction as a genre, which often keeps women and non-white minorities at the margins of science fiction communities.[8] Similarly, Megan Poole investigates the exclusion of Cavendish from the scientific community in the early modern period, which positions her as an early science fiction writer, instead of a scientist.[9] By reading Cavendish in courses that engage with scientific writing and/or science fiction, knowledge of scientific discovery throughout history is widened to consider marginalized identities and alternative scientific views. Juxtaposing Poole's and Kile's research reveals that the exclusion of women and minority voices in contemporary science fiction circles can be traced back to the exclusion of these same peoples from natural philosophy during the early modern period.

Students can better understand and engage with theories of gender and marginalization in contemporary science fiction by reading about Cavendish's struggles with the Royal Society. Through her critique of the Royal Society,[10] Cavendish became an ancestor to modern-day science fiction writers via her natural philosophy. Throughout *Blazing World,* she pushes the boundaries on natural philosophy, which is at the heart of science fiction storytelling today, as science fiction extends our understandings of science into the impossible (time-travel, aliens, zombies, etc.). Poole further claims that Cavendish's resistance to the Royal Society "invited other women to theorize alternative methods for scientific discovery through her own remaking of agency and materialism" (217), which has encouraged countless other women to engage with science fiction

writing, from Mary Shelley to Ursula K. Le Guin. Cavendish's influence on later female writers of science fiction means that she should be added to courses that investigate scientific discovery. Any literature course that investigates themes of science and/or science fiction would greatly benefit from adding *Blazing World* to its reading list because the text considers hegemonic access to science for marginalized outsiders, specifically women.

Blazing World teaching strategies and assignments

Cavendish's *Blazing World* can be included across disciplines and English courses, making it more accessible to non-English majors. Assigning creative and collaborative projects allows students the space to be at the center of their own learning, without feeling that they need to have advanced writing and reading comprehension skills. Creative and collaborative learning makes students feel less intimidated by the text. Individual and group projects can include developing: (1) a graphic novel adaptation of the story; (2) a board game or an online interactive game; (3) a website, slideshow, or Prezi presentation. These assignments can be designed to be applied broadly across different literary texts. Each of these projects target specific literary skills, including analyzing a text for theme, characterization, and literary devices. Because these creative activities are not focused on formal academic writing, and instead allow for fun engagement with a text, students are more willing to take risks in analyzing a text, without fear that they have misinterpreted the text. Additionally, working in groups means that if a student is struggling to accurately interpret a text, they can learn from their peers. Though some of these assignments may appear to echo pedagogical trends in high school, they can be reformatted for the post-secondary academic space by pairing the assignments with written tasks and requiring challenging guidelines for final submissions. Instructors may consider formatting the assignments as group projects or shorter individual assessments. These creative projects can then be used as preparation for individual summative essays, which should ask them to think about themes, characters, and literary devices across texts. Additionally, for each project, students, whether working in groups or individually, should be required to write a brief individual essay explaining their engagement with the project. Whether students create a graphic novel adaptation, board game/online game, website, slideshow, or Prezi, students should be required to showcase their understanding of *at least* 3 themes, all major characters, plot, and relevant literary devices. Their brief essay should further explain their understanding of these elements using textual evidence from *Blazing World* to support their analysis of the text. I leave directions for locating theme open to interpretation, but some instructors may decide to give students specific themes to focus on. I have found it most effective when students are able to use previous class conversation to

direct their engagement with the theme of any text. For the boardgame and online game assignments, students should additionally explain how their game addresses these different elements. These creative options give students from different fields of study ways to draw on their own interests to better understand Cavendish's fiction. Students who struggle with analyzing literature will discover that they can understand a challenging text using creative opportunities to showcase their learning, instead of being graded solely on a formal academic essay. Non-English majors can incorporate skills they are learning in other academic disciplines to interpret Cavendish's *Blazing World*.[11]

Convent of Pleasure in gender and women's studies

While earlier sections in this essay have addressed vital feminist readings of *Blazing World*, ensuring that the text can be added to any gender and women's study course, both *BW* and *Convent of Pleasure* can additionally be assigned in courses that consider LGBTQIA+ themes,[12] because as David Michael Robinson informs us, there are aspects of queer, bisexual, and lesbian characters in both texts (139).[13] Additionally, Horacio Sierra discusses queer history in early modern England, while considering how terms like "homosexual" and "lesbian" are defined in the twenty-first century (655), and how "[t]he absence of legislation against intimate female same-sex relations" relates to Cavendish's ideas on female identity (657), making Cavendish studies relevant to understanding sexuality in the early modern world.[14] Additionally, though Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* is often taught across gender and women's studies departments, most students will not understand her references to Cavendish because they have never been exposed to Cavendish's texts, and therefore excerpts from Cavendish should be taught alongside Woolf's feminist essay. As E Mariah Spencer reminds us, Cavendish's writing was an attempt to escape gendered violence prevalent during her period, and, "[u]nlike the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century women writers who needed rooms of their own (Woolf 4), an early modern writer such as Cavendish needed a whole world" (Spencer 377).[15] *Convent of Pleasure* would be an excellent text to pair with Woolf's essay to better critique and analyze her claims of Cavendish as a "giant cucumber" (Woolf 44). When pairing *Convent of Pleasure* with Woolf's essay, I prompt students to analyze Woolf's assertion that Cavendish (the cucumber) has "spread itself all over all the roses and carnations in the garden and choked them to death" (Woolf 44). Students must decide whether the cucumber is Cavendish herself, or her writing, and who/what the roses and carnations are in Woolf's analogy. After small group discussions of this prompt, students write individual brief responses explaining whether, as readers themselves, they agree with Woolf's interpretation of Cavendish. Cavendish's play deals emphatically with early modern women's rights and agency, as well as

progressive themes on sexuality and identity, and therefore is not "scibbl[ed] nonsense" (Woolf 44), making it ideal to discuss Woolf's assessment of her. Shaver informs us that many voices, "when they paid attention to Cavendish at all, were apt to be patronizing or even embarrassed, an attitude culminating finally in Virginia Woolf's" description of Cavendish (Shaver 200). Pairing Cavendish with Woolf would offer students the ability to consider biases against women writers, even by other women writers. While *Blazing World* can be a daunting read for many non-English majors due to her narrative style and the complexities of her natural philosophy, her plays are very accessible and relevant to contemporary experiences. By considering LGBTQIA+ identity and the female perspective in early modern literature through texts like *Blazing World* and *Convent of Pleasure*, we can revitalize interest in literature that has been disregarded by contemporary society. Adding Cavendish to these courses allows us to discuss queer identities and female agency across historical time periods to better understand contemporary experiences.

The Convent of Pleasure teaching strategies and assignments

Teaching *The Convent of Pleasure* alongside Shakespeare would also make her more approachable to non-English majors. I have had great success teaching *Convent of Pleasure* with both *Twelfth Night* and *The Merchant of Venice.* Students were able to discuss the different perspectives on love, marriage, gender, and other social constructs, using the same performance or drama-based pedagogy that instructors have used for decades with Shakespeare.[16] Research on pedagogy has shown that students better understand and engage with difficult texts using performance-based teaching practices. While many English classrooms grapple with Shakespeare's language and the problems of accessibility, it is important to recognize that the language in Cavendish's plays is simpler and much easier to process than Shakespeare's, making her more accessible. According to Ben Lathrop, drama-based teaching strategies increase student engagement, leading to enhanced and longer lasting learning (56);[17] therefore, her plays are a logical place to begin introducing her works to non-English majors. Teaching Cavendish's plays allows students to see some of the same themes in Shakespeare through the lens of a female writer and philosopher, diversifying their understanding of gender norms in the early modern period.

The pedagogical strategies used to teach Shakespeare can be applied to Cavendish's plays. In using a performance-based technique, I have students perform scenes from the play while we read together in class. I also have students work in groups, where they record themselves acting out an assigned scene that they present to the class. Additionally, I sometimes have students consider

examples of modernized film adaptions of Shakespeare's plays. I then assign a group project where they adapt *The Convent of Pleasure* for a modern audience. They are asked to consider the setting of their production, which actors they might hire to play each part, what their costume designs would look like, and what changes to the plot, language, or theme they might make to address contemporary conversations on gender and marriage. Students then act out a scene from their modern adaptation and explain the choices that they made in their production. In addition to acting out the scene, each student is required to write a brief individual essay explaining their understanding of the text. While not a performance-based strategy, another helpful multimodal project option is to have students create a "Hanging Mobile" that addresses the main theme of the play, as well as characterization, plot, and literary devices. For this assignment, students are asked to create a visual hanging mobile with pictures, index cards, ribbons, objects, and any other physical depictions of their understanding of the story. On individual index cards, students write out their interpretations for the theme, characters, plot, and literary devices. This project is again paired with a short essay that explains how the hanging mobile represents their interpretation, including specific details on how each object hung from the mobile depicts a literary element. I have also used a Twitter project, where students create profiles and tweets for the different characters in the play or create modern adaptations of the play depicted in tweets that consider contemporary gender norms and expectations, as well as how societal norms may have changed from the early modern period. For the Twitter project, students are placed into small groups, and each student is assigned a character that they will parrot. Throughout the reading of the text, students must tweet *at least* 3 times for each day of assigned reading. At the conclusion of the text, students are then required to write a brief essay explaining their interpretation of the character, including what motivates that character, and how that character's world view and actions compare to modern experiences and identities. These different multimodal assignments allow for non-English majors to meaningfully interact with the text in a way that moves beyond the formal academic essay to showcase what students have learned about the play's themes and characters.

Teaching Cavendish's philosophy

In addition to teaching some of Cavendish's plays, we should teach excerpts from her philosophical writings,[18] because as Jessica Gordon-Roth and Nancy Kendrick remind us, it is an erroneous belief that women in the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries did not engage in philosophical debate (269).[19] Roth & Kendrick further remind us that women philosophers' biographical details are often placed at the foreground of the discussion of their texts, the effects of which

can hinder the project of canon expansion because the arguments made by female philosophers get obscured and their authority as philosophers is denied (274).[20] For this reason, it can be helpful to introduce some of Cavendish's philosophical writings in general education English classrooms because so much of what we read in these classrooms is not dependent upon understanding much biographical or historical background. I have had tremendous success using creative writing prompts to engage students to better understand complex philosophical texts. Instructors can use a short excerpt, like Letter VI from her *Philosophical Letters*, which discusses the differences between imagination and sensation. Students are given a creative writing assignment where they write about something they imagine exists, but have never seen, and then something they have experienced personally. In small groups they discuss what they wrote about and how the two pieces might be similar or different, depending on whether it comes from their imagination or their memory. Through this creative writing assignment, students consider how they define their own philosophies on imagination, sensation, and memory, in order to better understand Cavendish's text through the processes of vision, experience, and recollection. This creative writing assignment is then aligned with a formal essay prompt that asks students to discuss Cavendish's philosophical complexities and the way her ideas may have contrasted with her contemporaries, allowing students to write cross-textually, by pairing her with other early modern figures. Additionally, I ask students to share their creative writing assignment with the class and we discuss contemporary interpretations on imagination, sensation, and memory in comparison to Cavendish's early modern interpretations in her *Philosophical Letters*.

Teaching Cavendish's poems

Cavendish's poems can also be taught in entry-level English courses. For example, her poem "A Dialogue Between an Oake, and a Man Cutting Him Downe," can be used to introduce students to the role of the speaker in a poem, as well as the idea of anthropomorphism. In order to teach poetic voice, I would highlight two stanzas from the poem as examples, one from the perspective of the oak tree and the other from the tree-cutter. I would then assign various choice-activities using this poem, including: 1) having the students write a compare/contrast essay explaining the different perspectives of the two speakers; 2) having students write their own version of the poem, where they have two different speakers (one human and one non-human) in conversation with one another; and 3) having students create a one-pager, which is a visual representation of their understanding of the text. The one-pager asks them to locate and present examples of imagery, tone, theme, and poetic devices from the poem in a visual representation, known as the "one-pager." Students have creative

liberty over their one-pager, but I often recommend that they use card-stock or a larger sheet of sturdy paper. Students may draw by hand, or use pictures from magazines or the internet that are glued onto their page. These pictures are in some way connected to the poetic elements of the text. Students add written text explaining the poem's imagery, tone, theme, and poetic devices, but they can put these texts anywhere on their page, making it a collage of information. In addition, students should submit a brief explanation of their one-pager, fully detailing how each image relates to their interpretation of the poem, including discussions on their understanding of the theme, tone, characters, and poetic devices. Using these differentiated assignments allows students several ways to participate in showcasing their understanding of Cavendish's poem and fosters a student-centered learning experience that embeds student-choice in the learning experience.

The works of Margaret Cavendish reveal that women were actively writing and publishing during the early modern period, and it is important that she continue to be read today by young scholars across academic disciplines. Though her writings do not always fit into specific genres due to their hybrid nature, the themes she addresses are still relevant in the twenty-first century. Additionally, having access to her writings allows students to further understand contemporary society and to locate their own identity within her texts. Because Cavendish's texts can be difficult for non-English majors and those taking introductory and intermediate English courses, using pedagogy that is student-centered and creative allows for a better understanding of her texts and brings her into conversation with more contemporary themes, such as science (including science fiction), gender & women's studies, hegemonic systems of power, and identity politics. Though this essay has attempted to provide some examples for creative pedagogical approaches to teaching Cavendish, there are many more assignments and teaching methods that can be used with her writings, and instructors should not feel limited in their own creativity to design assignments that can engage all types of students.

Notes

[1] This essay contributes to Part I of the "Concise Collection on Teaching the Works of Margaret Cavendish," guest edited by E Mariah Spencer, Aphra Behn Online, vol. 14, no. 1, 2024. To read the essays in this collection, follow this link: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol14/iss1/. Part II will be published in Fall 2024.

[2] See Margaret J.M. Ezell "Invisibility Optics: Aphra Behn, Esther Inglis and the Fortunes of Women's Works" for further discussion on the erasure of early modern women writers from English studies.

[3] See Anne Shaver's "Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle" on teaching Cavendish-specific courses and with other early modern writers (Milton, More, Shakespeare, and Bacon), as well as science fiction and utopian literature.

[4] See Zelia Gregoriou's essay "Pedagogy and Passages: The Performativity of Margaret Cavendish's Utopian Fiction" for greater understanding of hybridization and utopian designs in Cavendish's *Blazing World.*

[5] See Vanessa Rapatz's "'A World of her own Invention': Teaching Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World* in the Early British Literature Survey and Beyond" for further conversation on teaching Cavendish.

[6] Per Gregoriou, Cavendish offers a different definition of utopia, where women can create their own self-fashioned identities and imagine worlds they can control, unlike traditional utopian worlds that are designed for a male-audience.

[7] See Marina Leslie's essay "Mind the Map: Fancy, Matter, and World Construction in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*" for a better understanding of utopian themes in *Blazing World.*

[8] See S.E. Kile's article "Science Fictions: Early Modern Technological Change and Literary Response" for a better understanding of gate-keeping politics in contemporary science fiction. In Kile's assessment, one of the reasons that Cavendish criticized the Royal Society and the telescope was because as a woman in the early modern period, she was excluded from scientific discovery, including the ability to use scientific instruments (126). See also Emma Wilkins' notes to "Margaret Cavendish and the Royal Society" and Katie Whitaker's *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, Royalist, Writer and Romantic* for an alternative view of Cavendish's access to, and practical experience with, scientific equipment, including microscopes and telescopes. While Cavendish had access to these new scientific tools, she did not have access to the exchange of research circulated among the men of the Royal Society; this excluded her from fully engaging with scientific discovery, which Virginia Woolf criticizes in *A Room of One's Own* (44).

[9] See Megan Poole "A Woman's Optics: Margaret Cavendish, Sensory Mimesis, and Early Modern Rhetorics of Science." Poole writes that because early conversations on science were based on the experimental philosophy of Baconian logic, Cavendish's style and fancy were dismissed by many of her contemporaries (197). Cavendish's imagination makes her not a scientist, but a science fiction writer, who according to Poole, was able "to cast a skeptical glance at science and imagine alternate ways of knowing that anticipated feminist science studies" (198).

[10] Poole best summarizes her analysis of Cavendish and science when she writes, "Cavendish subverted established scientific epistemologies and practices, calling into question what science was and who could be considered a scientist" (204).

[11] Asking a freshman art major who struggles with academic essay writing to write a six-page essay on *Blazing World* will be much more challenging than asking that same student to create a graphic novel using their artistic abilities to show their understanding of the story.

[12] See Valerie Billing's essay "Teaching Queer Theory and the History of Sexuality with

Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure*" for a further explanation on LGBTQIA+ themes in Cavendish.

[13] See David Michael Robinson's "Pleasant Conversation in the Seraglio: Lesbianism, Platonic Love, and Cavendish's *Blazing World*" for a better understanding of LGBTQIA+ themes in *The Blazing World*.

[14] See Horacio Sierra's "Convents as Feminist Utopias: Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure* and the Potential of Closeted Dramas and Communities" for a better understanding of LGBTQIA+ themes in *The Convent of Pleasure*.

[15] See E Mariah Spencer's "'Mistress of a World': Margaret Cavendish, Gender and Science Fiction in Early Modern England" for a better understanding of Cavendish and science fiction.

[16] Additional texts by Shakespeare that can be read with *The Convent of Pleasure* include *Romeo and Juliet* and *As Your Like It.*

[17] See Ben Lathrop's "From Engagement to Empathy: Performance in the ELA Classroom" for further discussion on using performance-based teaching strategies in the classroom.

[18] See Peter West's "Teaching Margaret Cavendish's Philosophy: Early Modern Women and the Question of Biography" for a better understanding on teaching Cavendish's philosophy.

[19] See Jessica Gordon-Roth and Nancy Kendrick's "Recovering Early Modern Women Writers: Some Tensions" for further analysis on early modern women writers and philosophy.

[20] Ezell suggests that when attempting to include early modern women into the canon, often by feminist scholars, there is a focus on the historical influences these women had on gender politics, and not so much on their writings as literature. Ezell further emphasizes that the historical focus placed on these early modern women devalues their identities as writers (33).

Works Cited

Billing, Valerie. "Teaching Queer Theory and the History of Sexuality with Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure*" in "Concise Collection on Teaching the Works of Margaret Cavendish," guest edited by E Mariah Spencer. *Aphra Behn Online*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2024. https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol14/iss1/.

Ezell, Margaret J.M. "Invisibility Optics: Aphra Behn, Esther Inglis and the Fortunes of Women's Works." *A History of Early Modern Women's Writing*, edited by Patricia Phillippy, Cambridge UP, 2018, pp. 27–45.

Gordon-Roth, Jessica, and Nancy Kendrick. "Recovering Early Modern Women Writers: Some Tensions." *Metaphilosophy*, vol. 50, no. 3, Apr. 2019, pp. 268–85, https://doi.org/10.1111/meta.12357.

Gregoriou, Zelia. "Pedagogy and Passages: The Performativity of Margaret Cavendish's Utopian Fiction." *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2013, pp. 457–74, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12029.

Kile, S.E. "Science Fictions: Early Modern Technological Change and Literary Response." *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2017, pp. 111–45, https://doi.org/10.1353/jem.2017.0011.

Lathrop, Ben. "From Engagement to Empathy: Performance in the ELA Classroom." *English Journal*, vol. 110, no. 3, Jan. 2021, pp. 54–60, https://doi.org/10.58680/ej202131068.

Leslie, Marina. "Mind the Map: Fancy, Matter, and World Construction in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*." *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme,* vol. 35, no. 1. 2012, pp. 85–112, https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v35i1.19076.

Poole, Megan. "A Woman's Optics: Margaret Cavendish, Sensory Mimesis, and Early Modern Rhetorics of Science." *Journal for the History of Rhetoric*, vol. 24, no. 2, July 2021, pp. 195–222, https://doi.org/10.1080/26878003.2021.1920246.

Rapatz, Vanessa. "'A World of her own Invention': Teaching Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World* in the Early British Literature Survey and Beyond" in "Concise Collection on Teaching the Works of Margaret

Cavendish," guest edited by E Mariah Spencer. *Aphra Behn Online*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2024. https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol14/iss1/.

Robinson, David Michael. "Pleasant Conversation in the Seraglio: Lesbianism, Platonic Love, and Cavendish's *Blazing World*." *The Eighteenth Century*, vol. 44, no. 2/3, June 2003, pp. 133–66.

Shaver, Anne. "Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle." *Teaching Tudor and Stuart Women Writers,* edited by Margaret P. Hannay and Susanne Woods, The Modern Language Association, 2000 pp. 195–203.

Sierra, Horacio. "Convents as Feminist Utopias: Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure* and the Potential of Closeted Dramas and Communities." *Women's Studies*, vol. 38, no. 6, Sept. 2009, pp. 647–69, https://doi.org/10.1080/00497870903021539.

Spencer, E Mariah. "'Mistress of a World': Margaret Cavendish, Gender and Science Fiction in Early Modern England." *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Science Fiction,* edited by Sonja Fritzsche, Keren Omry, Wendy Gay Pearson, and Lisa Yaszek, Routledge, 2023, pp. 373–79, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003082934-56.

West, Peter. "Teaching Margaret Cavendish's Philosophy: Early Modern Women and the Question of Biography" in "Concise Collection on Teaching the Works of Margaret Cavendish," guest edited by E Mariah Spencer. *Aphra Behn Online*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2024. https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol14/iss1/.

Whitaker, Katie. *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, Royalist, Writer and Romantic*. Vintage, 2011.

Wilkins, Emma. "Margaret Cavendish and the Royal Society | Notes and Records: The Royal Society Journal of the History of Science." *Margaret Cavendish and the Royal Society*, Royal Society Publishing, 14 May 2014, www.royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/10.1098/rsnr.2014.0015.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. Ktoczyta.pl, 2020.