

Concise Collections: Teaching Margaret Cavendish, Part I

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Concise Collections: Teaching Margaret Cavendish, Part I

Abstract

This is the introduction of Part I of the "Concise Collection on Teaching the Works of Margaret Cavendish."

Keywords

Pedagogy, Philosophy, The Blazing World, Queer Theory, The Convent of Pleasure, British Literature

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The Spring 2024 edition of *ABO* continues the Concise Collections series, focusing on the prolific Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673).¹ Her extensive body of work, exceeding one million words, spans various secular subjects, including atomic theory, the plurality of worlds, cognitive processes, systems of education, gender, and sexuality. In a notable departure for a woman of the mid-seventeenth century, Cavendish published under her own name, strategically using paratextual materials to construct a nuanced authorial persona of creativity and genius.

In the dynamic landscape of pedagogy, Cavendish's complex corpus gives us a compelling focal point. Authored by respected scholars, the essays presented here provide nuanced insights into the diverse ways Cavendish can be introduced and explored across educational settings. In the opening essay, "Relocating Early Modern Women: Teaching Margaret Cavendish to a Broader Audience," Jennifer Topale discusses pedagogical strategies suitable for the introductory and intermediate English classroom. Vanessa Rapatz then offers, "'A World of her own Invention': Teaching Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World* in the Early British Literature Survey and Beyond," which includes several sophisticated approaches for teaching Cavendish's most famous work within the broader context of early British literature.

Expanding our purview, Valerie Billing considers the intersections of Cavendish's work with Queer Studies in "Teaching Queer Theory and the History of Sexuality with Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure*." This essay demonstrates how Cavendish's play can be transformative in teaching the history of sexuality and gender. Peter West's "Teaching Margaret Cavendish's Philosophy: Early Modern Women and the Question of Biography" then explores how Cavendish's philosophical texts enrich academic discourse, importantly discussing the historical exclusion of women from the philosophical canon. Concluding the Spring 2024 Cavendish collection, Martine Van Elk's "Politics, Authorship, and Philosophy: Teaching Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* in the Diverse Graduate Classroom" gives examples of dynamic integration within diverse graduate classrooms, emphasizing the intersectionality of Cavendish's literary and philosophical works.

Together, these essays provide educators and scholars with a diverse toolkit for imparting the richness of Margaret Cavendish's corpus in a wide array of educational contexts. Each essay offers a unique lens for reading an author whose popularity continues to grow, while collectively contributing to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the twenty-first-century classroom.

Note

¹ This essay introduces 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.