John Donne Journal
Vol. 29 (2010)

"poore *Donne* was out": Reading and Writing Donne in the Works of Margaret Cavendish

Lara Dodds

In her first published work, *Poems and Fancies* (1653), Margaret Cavendish quotes John Donne in "Of Light and Sight," a brief poem that satirically examines several competing theories of vision. "Provided that the *Braine* hath *Eyes* to see, / So *Eyes,* and *Braine*, do make the *Light* to be," she writes, "If so, poore *Donne* was out, when he did say, / If all the *World* were blind, 'twould still be day."[1] One of about 100 scientific poems that make up the first section of *Poems and Fancies*, "Of Light and Sight" contributes to Cavendish's poetic exploration of the possibilities and consequences of an atomic theory of matter. Taken as a whole, this opening section of the volume might be described as a creation myth or cosmography: the first poem in the section, "Nature calls a Councell . . . to advise about making the world," narrates the beginning of the world, and others, about the nature of air and fire, the size and weight of atoms, and the plurality of worlds, describe the world and its limits philosophically and metaphorically. In this context, Cavendish's first printed allusion to Donne's verse may seem curious.

A much shorter version of this argument was delivered at the John Donne Society Session of the 2007 meeting of the Modern Language Association Annual Convention. I would also like to thank the *John Donne Journal*'s anonymous reviewers for their astute suggestions and commentary on earlier versions of this essay.

[1]Cavendish, *Poems and Fancies* (London: 1653), p. 39. All further references to *Poems and Fancies* are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

The poet is present under erasure. He does not rule the "Universall Monarchy of Wit," but, in a complex interplay of poetic authority and philosophical speculation, Cavendish worries that "poore *Donne*" will be put "out" by the discoveries of the natural philosophers.[2]

In this essay I argue that Margaret Cavendish's atomic poetry, in particular her poem "A World in an Eare-ringe," offers a new perspective on what might be described as the problem of reading Donne. As important studies of the reception of Donne's poetry have demonstrated, Donne's legacy has long been a function of deliberate exercises in the creation and re-creation of a literary reputation. Walton's hagiographic biography, which interpreted Donne's writing and the events of his life as a romantic and, above all, coherent, narrative of pious conversion, was an early and influential attempt to shape Donne's legacy. For Walton, Donne's poems were "the recreations of his Youth," "carelessly scattered," and finally redeemed by the divine eloquence of Dr. Donne, the preacher.[3] As Ernest Sullivan's study of seventeenth-century readers and writers of "Donne verse" has shown, however, Donne's poetry was appropriated, read, and—in Sullivan's terms—written in ways that fly free of Walton's narrative: in addition to the elite readers we might expect, Donne's verse was also available, and useful, to a much wider and more diverse audience. Sullivan records a great variety of responses to Donne's works, which suggest that, for the seventeenth century, his was "an individual talent very much a part of an entire culture, a truly 'popular' poet."[4] This same dynamic is repeated in subsequent centuries,

---

[2]Thomas Carew, *The Poems of Thomas Carew*, ed. Rhodes Dunlap (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 74.

[3]Edmund Gosse, *The Life and Letters of John Donne* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1899), p. 78. See also Kevin Pask, *The Emergence of the English Author: Scripting the Life of the Poet in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 113–140.

[4]Sullivan, *The Influence of John Donne: His Uncollected Seventeenth-Century Printed Verse* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993), p. 48. See also Sullivan, "Who Was Reading/Writing Donne Verse in the Seventeenth-Century?," *John Donne Journal* 8 (1989): 1–16. Though some elements of A. J. Smith's narrative of Donne's reputation have been superseded by the research of Sullivan, Dayton Haskin, and others, his critical heritage volume remains an essential collection of early modern and modern commentary on the poetry. See

as the statements of influential critics such as Dryden and Johnson create a Donne suited to the critical preoccupations of the age, and, at the same time, obscure the more varied responses to and appropriations of Donne's verse that might be revealed by attention to a more diverse sample of readers and texts. Thus Johnson's account of Donne's characteristic wit as "heterogeneous" ideas "yoked by violence together" may be the nadir of Donne's reputation, but it, and its frequent quotation as representative of the eighteenth-century misunderstanding of Donne's virtues as a poet, is also a necessary precondition of what Dayton Haskin describes as the "myth" that Donne studies was invented in 1912.[5] Likewise, the reversal of Donne's reputation worked by the modernist revival produces yet another powerful version of the poet in which T. S. Eliot's appreciation of metaphysical wit as the cure for the modern malaise of the "dissociation of sensibility" was succeeded and amplified by the new critics' exquisite explications of the dramatic and linguistic complexity of Donne's lyrics, a critical practice that responded to the institutional demands of the post-World War II university. The remarkable twists and turns in Donne's reputation have recently led Ben Saunders to suggest that "Donne's poetry and the responses it has inspired together provide a uniquely appropriate site" for the investigation of critical desire.[6]

Margaret Cavendish's reading of Donne's poetry, and her subsequent writing of Donne-inspired verse, provides a significant and unexplored

---

Smith, *John Donne: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

[5]Haskin, *John Donne in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 8. By attending to the widespread nineteenth-century interest in Donne's biography and to the importance of Donne's nineteenth-century editors, Haskin shows the nineteenth-century Donne to be fuller and more various than had previously been thought. See also Haskin, "Reading Donne's *Songs and Sonnets* in the Nineteenth Century," *John Donne Journal* 4 (1985): 225–252; Haskin, "A History of Donne's 'Canonization' From Izaak Walton to Cleanth Brooks," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 92 (1993): 17–36; and Haskin, "New Historical Contexts for Appraising the Donne Revival from A. B. Grosart to Charles Eliot Norton," *English Literary History* 56 (1989): 869–895.

[6]Saunders, *Desiring Donne: Poetry, Sexuality, Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 3.

opportunity to examine an important early stage in the development of Donne's complex and contradictory reputation. Though recent accounts of Donne's seventeenth-century reputation have greatly expanded our knowledge of the variety of responses to Donne, there are still few extended studies of the response of women readers to Donne's varied representations of women and the feminine.[7] It is my contention that recognition of Cavendish as a reader of Donne is essential for our appreciation of Cavendish as a poet as well as for our understanding of Donne's legacy and reputation in the mid-seventeenth century. Hers is a critical and poetic voice whose significance is obscured if Donne's reputation is defined by Walton, Dryden, Johnson, and the like. Rather, her quotations, allusions, and, as I shall argue, poetic adaptations, are significant as part of a widespread reading and writing of Donne by, as Sullivan's research has shown, a diverse and numerous population of seventeenth-century men and women. The identification of Cavendish's debts to Donne is significant, further, because Cavendish's response to the cultural constraints on female authorship was to describe herself as an original and deny her intellectual and literary influences. Readers, early and late, too often took her at her word, offering interpretations of Cavendish's writing premised on her eccentricity and isolation.[8] As a result, scholars have not yet recovered the full extent of Cavendish's debts to her contemporaries and predecessors; nor have they appreciated her

---

[7]Exceptions include Paula Loscocco, "Inventing the English Sappho: Katherine Philips's Donnean Poetry," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (2003): 59–87; Donald W. Rude, "John Donne in the *Female Tatler*: A Forgotten Eighteenth-Century Appreciation," *John Donne Journal* 18 (1999): 153–166.

[8]In the most influential modern assessment of Cavendish's authorship, Catherine Gallagher argues that Cavendish modeled an ideology of absolute female subjectivity on that of absolute monarchy. In this way, she authorized her writing, but at the cost of "absolute privacy, void of other bodies, empty of other minds" ("Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England," *Genders* 1 [1988]: 30). Two recent monographs on Cavendish's work likewise use "exile" as the critical framework for interpreting Cavendish's achievement. See Emma Rees, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, and Exile* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), and Anna Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

creative appropriation and transformation of the English literary tradition.[9] This study of Cavendish reading Donne and writing Donne-inspired verse reveals a woman actively and self-consciously in conversation with literary tradition. In *Poems and Fancies,* Margaret Cavendish remakes a familiar poet and familiar poems to suit the conditions and ambitions of her authorship.

In the first section of this essay I examine the various circumstances, including the literary practices of Cavendish's family, the gendered conditions of authorship in seventeenth-century England, and the material circumstances of reading and writing, that influenced Margaret Cavendish's reading of John Donne's poetry. Over two decades ago, D. F. McKenzie described the history of the book as a history of "misreading": "Every society rewrites its past, every reader rewrites its texts, and, if they have any continuing life at all, at some point every printer redesigns them."[10] As many readers of this journal will recognize, the line about the sun and blindness that Cavendish attributes to Donne in "Of Light and Sight" is not in fact Donne's; rather, it appears in a piece probably written by a much less famous poet, Sir John Roe. His poem, "Come fates I fear thee not" (Elegy XIII), was first published in the 1635 edition of Donne's collected poetry.[11] While Cavendish's

[9]The one exception to this pattern is Cavendish's debt to Shakespeare, which has been explored in James Fitzmaurice and Katherine M. Romack, eds., *Cavendish and Shakespeare: Interconnections* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). There remains, however, little work on Cavendish's poetry and none on her debts to Donne. For studies of *Poems and Fancies,* see Randall Ingram, "First Words and Second Thoughts: Margaret Cavendish, Humphrey Moseley, and 'the Book,'" *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30 (2000): 101–124; Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, "'Bake'd in the Oven of Applause': The Blazon and the Body in Margaret Cavendish's Fancies," *Women's Writing* 15 (2008): 86–106; Sylvia Bowerbank, "The Spider's Delight: Margaret Cavendish and The 'Female' Imagination," *English Literary Renaissance* 14 (1984): 392–408; and Hero Chalmers, "'Flattering Division': Margaret Cavendish's Poetics of Variety," in *Authorial Conquests*, ed. Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003).

[10]McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (London: The British Library, 1986), p. 25.

[11]Cavendish's quotation is a close paraphrase of line 38 of "Come Fates I Fear Thee Not," which appeared as Elegy XIII in the 1635 and subsequent seventeenth-century editions of Donne's poetry. For a detailed argument in

misattribution of Roe's poem to Donne provides unusually direct evidence for McKenzie's claim that any understanding of works and authors must be mediated through the books that were available to historical readers, it is also one of a number of fortuitous accidents that allows for an unusually detailed examination of the reception of Donne's poetry by this seventeenth-century reader. Most significantly, Margaret's husband William Cavendish was also a reader of Donne and a writer of Donne-inspired verse. The contrasting responses to Donne by this pair of husband-and-wife poets provides an unusual opportunity to explore the intersection between the physical embodiments of literature in printed books and manuscripts, the social functions of verse, and the gendered conditions of literary authorship. William and Margaret Cavendish offer strikingly different appropriations of Donne's erotic poetry. William, who read and wrote Donne in manuscript, produced Donnean verse that fits easily into an amateur and coterie model of reading and composition. Margaret, who read Donne in print and wrote her own poetry for print publication, wrote Donnean verse that continues to fit uneasily within the dominant paradigms of poetic authorship.

The second section of this essay extends my portrait of Margaret Cavendish, John Donne reader, through a case study of the relationship between Cavendish's poem "A World in an Eare-ringe" and Donne's *The First Anniversary*. Donne's poetry, once recognized as a potential source of influence, suggests literary and philosophical contexts for poems that have too often been "under-read" as straightforward autobiographical statements.[12] Likewise, Cavendish's creative adaptation of the central conceit of *The First Anniversary* in "A World in an Ear-ringe," offers a pointed rebuke to Dryden's well-known judgment that Donne's love poetry fails because it "perplexes the Minds of the Fair Sex with nice

---

favor of Roe's authorship, see H. J. C. Grierson, ed., *Donne's Poetical Works*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1912), 2:cxxviii–cxxxv. Donne scholars have accepted Grierson's attribution, and "Come Fates" has not been printed among Donne's poems in subsequent editions.

[12]For the argument that early modern women's poetry has been under-theorized and "under-read" see Carol Barash, *English Women's Poetry, 1649–1714* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 20.

Speculations of Philosophy."[13] For Cavendish, it is precisely Donne's "Metaphysics," his challenging poetic response to the fundamental transformations of a worldview threatened by early modern natural philosophy, that inspires her own reworking of the traditional functions of the symbolic feminine in erotic and religious verse.

* * * *

About a decade before Margaret Cavendish's debut in print, probably sometime in late summer or fall of 1645, William Cavendish, then Marquis of Newcastle and soon to be Margaret's husband, also alluded to John Donne by name in a poem.[14] "Love, that word's too litle, like motes to the Sunne, / Love forty years agoe, serv'd Doctor Dunne / But wee'r beyond it farre," he wrote in one of a series of love poems addressed to Margaret during their courtship.[15] These poems were copied by a professional scribe and preserved in a manuscript volume of William's literary work, and they were edited and published by Douglas Grant, Margaret's biographer, in 1956. Here, as in Margaret's allusion in *Poems and Fancies*, Donne is a contested source of poetic authority. For William, however, Donne is primarily the master of the erotic lyric, the author of love poems that provide the measure of William's own literary and erotic prowess.

Together with Margaret's quotation of "Donne" in *Poems and Fancies*, this allusion provides an unusual opening into John Donne's poetic legacy during the seventeenth century. Margaret and William Cavendish are husband-and-wife poets who each used Donne's verse in pursuit of a variety of social and literary goals. For William, writing largely within the conventions of manuscript verse circulation, Donne's persona became a model for his performance of courtship and Donne's characteristic

[13]John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker, H. T. Swedenberg, Jr., and Alan Roper, 20 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956–), 4:7.

[14]For a description of Margaret and William's courtship, see 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), pp. 69-80.

[15]Douglas Grant, *The Phanseys of William Cavendish* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1956), p. 63. All further citations of William's courtship poetry are from this edition and cited parenthetically in the text.

conceits an important influence on his style.[16] For Margaret, who published all of her works in lavish printed editions, Donne's name became a synecdoche for English literary tradition and, as I shall argue in the second half of this essay, his poetry the occasion for a reconsideration of the function of the symbolic feminine in erotic and religious verse. Crucially, these readers of Donne provide a rich opportunity to examine the ways in which the social and material circumstances of reading and authorship may have shaped Donne's legacy.

William's Donne may be glimpsed in two manuscripts. These volumes, a poetic miscellany and a fair copy compilation of William's poetic works, reveal William as an owner, patron, and poet of Donne-inspired verse within a system of manuscript circulation. The first of these manuscripts is a large folio, probably compiled between 1621 and the 1630s, which includes an extensive collection of nearly 100 of Donne's poems. Now housed in the British Library, this volume, which is largely written in the hand of a single professional scribe, is usually called the Newcastle Manuscript because its contents reflect the interests and patronage relationships of William and his family.[17] For instance, the manuscript records William's patronage of Ben Jonson with copies of the two entertainments Jonson wrote for William and several letters and poems from poet to patron.[18] In his recent study of this manuscript, Hilton Kelliher has described it as "just the sort of compilation that one

---

[16]Grant is no doubt correct in his observation that William's style is an "alliance of Jonson and Donne" (*Margaret the First; a Biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, 1623–1673* [London: Hart-Davis, 1957], p. 79). In what follows, however, I attempt to isolate Donne's influence on William's tone, subject matter, and imagery.

[17]Hilton Kelliher has identified the scribe as William's long-serving secretary, John Rolleston. The most extensive discussion of this manuscript is to be found in Kelliher, "Donne, Jonson, Richard Andrews and the Newcastle Manuscript," *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700* 4 (1993): 134–173.

[18]For discussion of Cavendish as Jonson's patron, see James Fitzmaurice, "William Cavendish and Two Entertainments by Ben Jonson," *Ben Jonson Journal* 5 (1998): 63–80; Anne Barton, "Harking Back to Elizabeth: Ben Jonson and Caroline Nostalgia," *ELH* 48 (1981): 706–731; and Nick Rowe, "'My Best Patron': William Cavendish and Jonson's Caroline Dramas," *The Seventeenth Century* 9 (1994): 197–212.

might have expected from a patron and man of letters like Newcastle."[19] Simultaneously displaying William Cavendish's literary taste and his generosity as a patron, the volume is material evidence of the social and personal relationships created and nurtured through the composition and circulation of manuscript verse.

The large collection of Donne's verse in the manuscript does not reflect a personal relationship between William and the poet, but its presence does help explain William's allusions to Donne in his later courtship poetry.[20] Arthur Marotti has suggested that the circulation of Donne's poetry beyond its original coterie context had the paradoxical effect of reinforcing Donne's "importance as an eminent 'author'" while at the same time making his poetry available in a literary system characterized by "textual instability and vulnerability to appropriation as literary property."[21] As a poet, William was strongly influenced by this dynamic. If the Newcastle Manuscipt suggests Donne's prestige as an "author," William's second "Donne" manuscript, a volume titled "The Phanseys of the Marquess of Newcastle Sett by him in verse att Paris" suggests how one seventeenth-century reader and writer of manuscript verse understood such literary property.[22] When Douglas Grant published poems from the first section of this manuscript in 1956, he described William's poetry as an "admirable illustration of the cavalier attitude to love." Grant praises William's verse for its sincere expression of romantic love but judges the overall achievement of the poetry to be limited by "a lack of seriousness. He was in poetry as in everything else

[19]Kelliher, pp. 157–158.

[20]The Newcastle manuscript has been assigned to the traditional Group I of Donne manuscripts, and Kelliher has determined that the copy-text was likely a "single authoritative collection containing no pieces dateable to later than 1614" (p. 154). The British Library shelf mark is Harley 4955. The siglum assigned to this manuscript by the *Variorum* editors is B32.

[21]Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 159. See also Ted-Larry Pebworth, "John Donne, Coterie Poetry, and the Text as Performance," *Studies in English Literature* 29 (1989): 61–75.

[22]This volume is written in a secretary's hand with occasional additions and corrections by William and Margaret. For a full description of this manuscript and its contents, see Grant, *The Phanseys of William Cavendish*, pp. xxix-xxxiii. The British Library shelf mark is Add. MS 32497.

an amateur."[23] The amateur qualities of these verses, however, reflect the social and occasional nature of much seventeenth-century verse and are precisely what is most interesting about William's courtship poetry. William pursues his courtship of Margaret Lucas through a remarkable reframing of Donne's verse made possible, I suggest, by the conventions of manuscript poetry. Though temporally and geographically distant from the original coterie context of the composition of Donne's verse, William is able to draw on the Donnean example to construct his own poetic identity. He thus adapts Donne's poetic conceits, a range of poetic voices, and a Donnean philosophy of love to the circumstances of exile, courtship, and marriage.

William's debts to Donne's poetry include experimentation with a range of poetic personae, including the libertine raconteur and the celebrant of a spiritualized heterosexual love, the imitation of specific poetic conceits, and a figurative style that we have learned to call "metaphysical." William adapts both Donne's language and his characteristic fusion of the spiritual and sensual to the occasion of his courtship. As a group, the poems suggest an extensive familiarity with Donne's poetry and a willingness to appropriate the language or sentiments of this poetry in service of the present occasion. For instance, even the ghoulish imaginings of a cynical and disappointed lover, such as the speaker of "The Apparition," are adapted in a poem such as "Loves Ghost": "When you leave lovinge me I'le die, and then / My Ghost shall haunt you, for I'le rise againe / Att Curfue tyme; and att the dead of Night. / I will appeare, your Contious Sole to fright" (p. 33). More commonly, however, William draws inspiration from poems such as "The Sun Rising," "The Good-Morrow," and "The Canonization" in order to describe the lovers as isolated from political and material concerns. These lovers find the world in each other and thus become the world. William appears to have been particularly taken with "The

[23]Grant, *The Phanseys of William Cavendish*, pp. xxvi, xxi. The fullest literary assessment of William's verses is in Grant, *Margaret the First*, pp. 75–81. Other discussions of these poems treat them as straightforward biographical glosses on William's courtship of Margaret. See Geoffrey Trease, *Portrait of a Cavalier: William Cavendish, First Duke of Newcastle* (New York: Taplinger, 1979), pp. 148–151, and Kathleen Jones, *A Glorious Fame: The Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, 1623–1673* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988), pp. 42–52.

Canonization." He resorts frequently to the representation of the lovers as the repository of sacred mysteries, canonized and worshipped for the model they offer to the dull inhabitants of the mundane world. For instance, in "Love's Sunne" the lovers are "joyn'd" as "one Sunne, your love and mine, / On Mortall Lovers Ever to Shyne" (p. 62). Likewise, in "The Constellation," the fullest exploration of this theme, William culminates a narrative of his courtship of Margaret Lucas with an image that recalls the final stanza of "The Canonization," where the lovers of the poem are invoked for a "pattern of your love."[24] As in "The Canonization," here the speaker contrasts the pure love of the speaker and his beloved with the small-minded derision of the social world. William's poem begins with a vivid and humorous portrait of a young lover possessed by "Wilde Phansey," a self-love that drives him to construe love as possession. A lover of this type "Thinkes greatest Ladys prostitute must bee / Unto his will" (p. 47). By contrast, the speaker's love for Margaret Lucas, who is named in the final line of the poem, serves as a model for "mortall lovers," who

> waken'd from their dreames,
> Can live and love but by our scatter'd Beames.
> But Purity of love, they all will say,
> Is onely our love, that perpeatuall day.
> (p. 48)

In these poems, the speaker frequently resorts to a contrast between the transcendent love he shares with his beloved and the "mortall lovers" who venerate this example with a kind of religious devotion. In this respect, William imitates the performance of a challenging heterodoxy so common in Donne's poetry. William's fusion of the sacred and the erotic is more complete in "Love's Preparation," where the speaker refers to his upcoming marriage as "my Easter day," a celebration following the "long lent" of grief caused by the death of William's first wife, "my onely losse, / My darke Good Friday, and my shamefull Crosse." The poem continues, however, to celebrate the new beginning that accompanies the second marriage. In a bibliographical image that is both material and

[24]Donne, "The Canonization," in *John Donne*, ed. John Carey (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), line 45. The texts of Donne's erotic lyrics are taken from this edition and cited parenthetically in the text.

"metaphysical," the speaker predicts that the lovers will become "love's Bible When wee'r bound together" (p. 53). Here, William's wordplay suggests that the partners, bound in marriage like separates bound in a single book, will become a sacred guide, or Scripture, for others in love. Grant called this poem "unusual" and "unpleasant";[25] however, this poem may be read more charitably as William's attempt to recreate the combination of the sacred and the secular that is such a common feature in Donne's verse.[26]

William's "Donne" is the consummate love poet, the Donne praised by Helen Gardner as a love poet with "no predecessors . . . and virtually no successors of any stature" "on the theme of mutual love."[27] Given their origin in courtship and marriage, William's poems emphasize the superiority and even transcendence of mutual love, often celebrating heterosexual love in terms that mingle the sacred and profane. Several of William's poems adapt Donne's characteristic image of the lovers' union as sphere, world, or planet in order to describe heterosexual love as mutually fulfilling, permanent, and the source of uniquely meaningful experience. "And now good morrow to our waking souls" Donne writes, "let us possess one world, each one hath one, and is one" ("The Good Morrow," 8, 14). Elsewhere, the "world's contracted" to the lovers' room ("The Sun Rising," 26), while "in this our universe / Schools might learn sciences, spheres music, angels verse" ("A Valediction: of the Book," 26–27), or a beloved's tear may be "A globe, yea world by that impression grow, / Till thy tears mixed with mine do overflow / This world" ("A Valediction: of Weeping," 16–18). William adapts such conceits and sentiments in his poem "Loves Fluid Soles":

> When happily Wee mett, all did admire
> To see our fluid Soles turn'd all to fier,
> Whose sublim'd suttle motion none did doubt,

---

[25]Grant, *Margaret the First*, p. 143.

[26]Donne uses a similar image in "Valediction to His Book," in which the lovers' letters may be read as a "book" by readers of various types: "Here Loves Divines, (Since all Divinity / Is love or wonder) may finde all they seeke, / Whether abstract spirituall love they like" (28–30).

[27]Gardner, "The Argument About 'the Extasy,'" in *Essential Articles for the Study of John Donne*, ed. John R. Roberts (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1975), p. 256.

> Feeding one another, could not goe out.
> Minglinge our selves thus, still must be the same,
> Each living still Eternally in flame;
> But parted, gross thick melancholy Vapors
> Extinguisht light, putt out our loving Tapers;
> And where before two sunns when wee wer mett
> Disjoyn'd, turn'd now Each to a dull Planett.
> In whirlepooles moving to meet; if so, then
> Love will inflame Us both to sunnes agen.
> (p. 54)

These lovers, like so many of Donne's, are observed by others and have souls inflamed and awakened by love. As in the "The Good Morrow," which describes lovers who "Love so alike, that none doe slacken, none can die," William's lovers create an endless flame. Though united by a "Minglinge [of] our selves," these lovers "still must be the same." In the last stanza of the "Good Morrow," the lovers achieve permanence and perfection in love through a curious kind of stasis, such that love becomes a consolation for mutability. William likewise suggests that his lovers achieve permanence and immortality through their union. Separated from each other, the speaker and his beloved are the "dull planets" of a Copernican universe, lacking intrinsic light of their own. Together, they are raised by the effect of love to the status of suns, illuminating each other and the world with light, life, and goodness.

William's debts to Donne thus extend from the reworking of specific conceits to the general and pervasive presence of characteristically Donnean tone, technique, and subject matter. This mixture of influences can be seen in "The Unexpressible love," the one poem in which William alludes to Donne by name. In this poem, the speaker asserts, through a series of increasingly improbable hyperboles, that his love for his beloved exceeds the representational possibilities of, first, "any language," then, "Algebrase, Arethmatick," and finally, even the "World's Hieroglyphics" (p. 63). The speaker seeks to "finde out some new way how to move / The greatest Witts to gesse but at our love," but he worries that the word "Love" itself lacks the capacity to express the experience of these lovers:

> Love, that word's too litle, like motes to the Sunne,
> Love forty years agoe, serv'd Doctor Dunne,
> But wee'r beyond it farre; our wise delight

> Is what we know, not know that's Infinite:
> Then tis a God to all love Else; then thus
> All Lovers as our Creaturs worship Us.
> (p. 63)

In this poem, Donne serves as a pattern for the speaker's erotic identity as well as a foil for William's superior performance as a lover-poet. This poem, like William's courtship poetry more generally, draws upon Donne for imagery and sentiment. Here, again, William seems to recall "The Canonization," in his image of lovers worshiped by others who have become their "Creaturs." Likewise, William's esteem for Donne is revealed in the appearance of his name in the poem's conclusion. Donne's reputation as the most eloquent lover is what allows the citation of his name to have its intended rhetorical effect, which is the demonstration of the speaker's hyperbolic claim that his "unexpressible" love cannot be described by alphabets, mathematics, or other love poetry, even that of Dr. Donne. Donne's function in this poem, therefore, is precisely to be superseded. In this respect, the temporal location of Donne's love "forty years agoe," is significant in several ways. First, it locates "love" in a distant yet idealized past, when William, now a 53-year-old man courting a 22-year-old woman, was in his own youth and when the religious and political divisions that led to William's exile remained in the future. Second, it seems likely that William's "forty years agoe," is an approximate reference to Donne's marriage in 1601, which suggests that William understands Donne's love poetry, like his own, to be a performance in service of a specific social occasion. Yet even if the love that "served" Donne cannot be definitively identified with his marriage to Ann More, William's specification of Donne's poetry temporally does have the additional effect of locating it materially and culturally. William's Donne is not to be found in print, but in manuscript, a Donne who is not yet, in Arthur Marotti's words, "installed in literary history as an author in the modern sense of the term" and not yet "extricated from the immediate sociocultural contexts" in which his verse was read and written during his lifetime and, as William's poetry demonstrates, for decades after his death.[28]

---

[28]Marotti, "John Donne, Author," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 19 (1989): 79.

Finally, this poem, or, more precisely, the relationship that William here establishes with "Donne," suggests the different terms upon which husband and wife establish their claims on literary tradition. In his edition of William's poems Grant remarks that powerful cultural expectations prevented Margaret Cavendish from responding in verse to her husband-to-be's Donnean example: "Margaret's letters in answer to these poems are their necessary complement: the lover could afford verse, the mistress only prose."[29] Margaret replied in a series of letters that reported on the protocol of court life and attempted to manage the political fallout of their courtship and marriage. She warns, "it is not ushall to give the Queen gloves or any thing eles," and offers advice on breaking news about their engagement to the queen: "if you ples to right a lter to her and send it to me I will delever it that day you send for me. I think it no pollese to desples the Quine, for though she will doe us no good she may doe us harme."[30] Margaret's letters do demonstrate her political and rhetorical savvy, but there is, nevertheless, some truth in Grant's remarks. Though Margaret Cavendish eventually experimented with many of the genres of early modern literature, she never wrote much in the way of love poems. The contrast between William's elaborate, if inexpert, poetic conceits and Margaret's pragmatic responses confirms a conventional gendering of literary ambition. William uses Donne in order to reaffirm erotic and poetic prowess, and he also imitates Donne formally, placing himself in the emulative relationship to a prior poet that is characteristic of Renaissance poetics. Within the terms of William's poetic courtship, Margaret-as-beloved inhabits the typical position of the feminine in Renaissance lyric, serving as a projection of male subjectivity, ambition, and competitive emulation. Perhaps because William can more easily assimilate the occasion of his poetic composition to Donne's circumstances, either as a writer or as a lover of women, his poetry, even if not entirely successful, is recognizable as a deliberate imitation of Donne's poetic example. We shall need to look elsewhere for Margaret's Donne.

It is in this respect that Cavendish's misreading, to use McKenzie's term, of the spurious elegy "Come Fates" is significant. Just as William's

[29]Grant, *The Phanseys of William Cavendish*, p. xxvi.

[30]Grant, *The Phanseys of William Cavendish*, pp. 107, 15. Margaret's letters to William have also been published as Appendix B of Battigelli, pp. 119–132.

temporal location of Donne's poetry "forty years agoe" invokes the social and material conditions of lyric poetry in the early seventeenth century, Margaret's misattribution helps us to reconstruct the historical conditions of her reading and writing. In a literary system suspended between manuscript and print conventions, misattribution is inevitable and, also, suggestive. As Arthur Marotti observes, "more poems are misattributed to Donne than to any other English poet."[31] These misattributions testify to Donne's prestige as the premier lyric poet in the English tradition and reveal the qualities that contemporary readers associated with Donne's name and poetic style. Once they reach print, however, such misattributions tend to be quite "sticky." "Come Fates" was attributed to Donne in an unknown number of manuscripts;[32] however, after first appearing among Donne's elegies in the second posthumous edition of 1635, the poem persisted as a part of Donne's print oeuvre until Grierson's edition of 1912. Margaret's quotation of a line from "Come Fates" thus suggests that she encountered Donne's poetry in print.

Cavendish attributes quotations to Donne by name three times in her many works. In addition to the allusion in *Poems and Fancies* (1653), she quotes a couplet from "The Storm" in *Playes* (1662) and a line from "Upon the Annunciation and Passion" in *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666). Significantly, "Come Fates," unlike Cavendish's pair

---

[31]Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric*, p. 158.

[32]The actual number of manuscript copies of this poem (as well as the presence or absence of attribution to Donne) is difficult to determine. Grierson explains that when "Come Fates" does appear in manuscripts it typically appears in sequence with the other poems he has attributed to Roe. He discusses H40 (B30), RP31 (O30), L74 (B40), A10 (B2), O'F (H6), and S (H7) (modern sigla in parentheses). Given the large number of scribal copies of Donne's verse discovered since Grierson's edition, it seems likely that "Come fates" is attributed to Donne in further manuscripts. Because the poem drops out of the Donne canon after Grierson's edition, however, it cannot be traced in discussions of Donne manuscripts. In the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* (London: Mansell; New York, Bowker, 1980–), Peter Beal explains that he must exclude spurious poems from his Index, but also suggests that "The Donne apocrypha would be an interesting study for investigation in its own right, both as a gauge of Donne's popularity and influence and for the light it may throw on early verse collections incorporating poems by him" (p. 259). As far as I know this study has not yet been undertaken.

of post-Restoration Donne quotations, does not appear in the Newcastle Manuscript.[33] Though Cavendish may have had access to this manuscript during the couple's European exile or after their return to England, it could not have been the only text of Donne's verse known to her during the period in which she composed *Poems and Fancies*. Although one cannot rule out the possibility that Cavendish had access to another manuscript that attributed this poem to Donne, it seems likely that her knowledge of Donne comes from the second (1635), third (1639), or fourth (three issues: 1649, 1650, and 1654) editions of Donne's collected verse.[34]

If Cavendish did read Donne in one of this series of seventeenth-century printed editions, she found there a model of poetic authorship strikingly different from that suggested by the Newcastle Manuscript, where poetry is embedded in particular social relationships. Even the poems of a famous "author" such as Donne take on a more personal cast in a manuscript such as this, where they are written in the hand of a family retainer and appear next to texts that celebrate the owner-reader's patronage of the arts. By contrast, as several scholars have argued, the printed editions deemphasize the personal and occasional circumstances for verse characteristic of manuscript circulation, while providing the material that begins to create Donne as a modern author. In a process begun in the 1633 edition and intensified in the subsequent issues, Donne is transformed, in Marotti's words, from "from coterie poet to English author."[35] Looking into the second or third edition, Cavendish found an engraved portrait of the young Donne accompanied by Izaak Walton's biographical verses and poems, lauded as "the best in this kinde, that ever this Kingdome hath yet seene," newly arranged, in

[33]For "The Storm" see fol. 102 and for "Upon the Annuntiation and Passion" fol. 110.

[34]These three editions have many similarities. The editors of the *Variorum* describe 1639 as a "page-for-page resetting" of 1635. The fourth edition "retains the overall organization of" 1635/39, though the 1650 issue includes several pages of new material added by John Donne Jr. to the end of the volume. See Gary Stringer, ed., *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, Vol. 2: The Elegies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2000), pp. lxxx–lxxxi, and Grierson, ed., *Donne's Poetical Works*, 2:lx–lxxiii.

[35]Marotti, "John Donne, Author," p. 72. See also Leah S. Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 192-198.

contrast to the poems of 1633, in distinct generic groupings that clearly separate secular and divine poetry.[36] In the fourth edition, which largely preserved the arrangement of poetry of the second and third, Cavendish may have read John Donne Jr.'s dedicatory letter to William Craven, later the Earl of Craven, a soldier, a staunch supporter of the Stuart monarchy, and a patron of the arts. Lamenting the political unrest of "this unlucky age," John Donne Jr. situates his father's poetry in old-fashioned patronage relationships now mediated by print: "although these poems were formerly written upon severall occasions, and to severall persons, they now unite themselves, and are become one pyramid to set your Lordships statue upon, where you may stand like Armed *Apollo* the defendor of the Muses, encouraging the Poets now alive to celebrate your Acts by affording your countenance to his poems that wanted only so noble a subject."[37] Indeed, this dedication speaks powerfully to the ways in which print can provide new "occasions" for the reading and writing of lyric poetry. John Donne Jr. acknowledges the social and occasional contexts of the original composition of his father's poetry, but he suggests that in this new edition Craven's name allows the poems to transcend those occasions and thus be read, and imitated "by Poets now alive," in terms that suit the times. In this respect, John Donne Jr.'s dedicatory letter reflects the palpable sense of loss that was often the subtext of printed volumes of poetry in the middle decades of the seventeenth century. In numerous prefaces from this period, poetry is a bulwark against change, a means of preserving what is lost while acknowledging a profound cultural rupture. Lyric poetry memorializes a dispersed court and mourns the "untuneable times."[38] As Abraham Cowley writes in the preface to his 1656 *Poems*, "a warlike, various, and a tragical age is best to *write of*, but worst to *write in*."[39] As Marotti and

[36]John Donne, *Poems by J. D.* (London: 1635), sig. A2v.

[37]John Donne, *Poems by J.D.* (London: 1650), sigs. A3v, A4r.

[38]"To His Friend, on the Untuneable Times," Robert Herrick, *The Poetical Works of Robert Herrick*, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 84. See also Warren L. Chernaik, "Books as Memorials: The Politics of Consolation," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 21 (1991): 207–213, and Louis B. Wright, "The Reading of Plays During the Puritan Revolution," *Huntington Library Bulletin* 6 (1934): 73–108.

[39]J. E. Spingarn, ed., *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century*, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1908–1909), 2:80.

others have shown, the movement of poetry from manuscript to print meant a decontextualization: poems were removed from the specific and local contexts of their composition and recontextualized as general and universal and newly available for reading by a new audience. In the context of Civil War and Royalist defeat, the publication of what was once coterie verse re-creates in print connections between readers who have been dispersed by war and exile.

For Cavendish these same circumstances are both politically troubling and essential to her writing life. In an epistle addressed to "All the Writing Ladies," Cavendish wonders how the age in which she writes influences the forms of intellectual and political agency she inhabits. Cavendish suggests that "in many Ages men will be affected, and dis-affected alike":[40] in some ages there is a "Common-wealth of those governing spirits, where most rule at one time," others an Aristocracy "when some part did rule," others a "pure Monarchy, when but one rules," and still others "it seemes as if all those spirits were at defiance, who should have most power, which makes them in confusion and War." Her own age is clearly recognizable in the competition of defiant spirits for power and preeminence. Yet Cavendish recognizes that unusual circumstances may provide opportunities that are unavailable in more settled times:

> 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 do in every Kingdome, let us take the advantage, and make the best of our time, for feare their reigne should not last long.

For Cavendish, this "advantage" is provided at least partially by print. As John Donne Jr.'s preface to the fourth edition makes clear, Donne is no longer the Donne of forty years ago, but a Donne available, through print, to a new generation of readers and writers, including a poorly educated daughter of a gentleman, newly married to a disgraced aristocrat, with an ambition to write for "after Ages."[41]

---

[40]This epistle follows page 160 of *Poems and Fancies*, but is itself unpaginated.

[41]In the dedicatory letter to her brother-in-law, Sir Charles Cavendish, Cavendish writes that her ambition as a writer is to "Spin a Garment of

As Cavendish's biographer observes, Donne is one of two non-dramatic English poets that Cavendish cites by name, and she does so three times in her published works.[42] The first of these allusions is the attribution to Donne of a line from the elegy "Come Fates, I fear thee not" in the brief poem "Of Light and Sight."

> *Philosophers*, which thought to reason well,
> Say, *Light,* and *Colour*, in the *Braine* do dwell;
> That *Motion* in the *Braine* doth *Light* beget,
> And if no *Braine* the *World* in darknesse shut.
> Provided that the *Braine* hath *Eyes* to see,
> So *Eyes,* and *Braine*, do make the *Light* to bee.
> If so, poore *Donne* was out, when he did say,
> If all the *World* were blind, 'twould still be day.
> Say they, *Light* would not in the *Aire* reigne,
> Unlesse (you'le grant) the *World* were one great *Braine*.
> Some *Ages* in *Opinion* all agree,
> The next doth strive to make them false to be.
> But what it *is,* doth please so well the *Sense*,
> That *Reasons* old are thought to be *Non-sense*.
> But all *Opinions* are by *Fancy* fed,
> And *Truth* under *Opinions* lieth dead.
>
> (p. 39)

In this poem, Cavendish addresses the philosophical and scientific problems associated with the nature of light and, more generally, perception itself: is light a physical property that may be observed and measured objectively? Or, alternately, is light merely the epiphenomenon of human consciousness, a subjective experience tied to the perceptions of the observer? Here, Cavendish attributes the latter perspective to unnamed "Philosophers" who solipsistically locate all perception in human consciousness as part of their "attempt to reason well." On the other hand, the empirical and mechanistic view of light is associated with "Donne," to whom is attributed a common-sense affirmation of external reality. Yet "Donne" has an odd status in this poem. He is marshaled as

---

Memory, to lapp up my Name, that it might grow to after Ages" (*Poems and Fancies*, sig. A2r).

[42]Whitaker, p. 19.

an authority in Margaret's satiric rejection of a self-centered philosophy, but he is also "poore *Donne*." Margaret's cynicism limits the authority, poetic or otherwise, that "Donne" might have. "Poore *Donne*" is all too likely to be put "out" by philosophical fancies that bury truth under opinion.

Cavendish's citation of this line from "Come Fates" in "Of Light and Sight" demonstrates a complex interaction with "Donne's" authorial identity. On the one hand Cavendish seems to radically transform the context and meaning of the line she quotes. In "Come Fates," "Donne's" observation that "The Sunne would shine though all the world were blind" is a self-deprecating acknowledgment of the futility of the speaker's attempts to gain control of his passions. The premise of Elegy XIII is that the speaker no longer fears Fate because his suffering in love cannot be relieved even by Death. Instead, he believes that his mistress has defeated "Fates, Love, Death, as well as mee" (10).[43] The poem chronicles the speaker's increasingly futile efforts to assert mastery over his beloved's destabilizing effect on the psyche. The speaker, however, is complicit in his subjection to the mistress's tyranny. The poet's own writing betrays him: "And if Death should prove false, she feares him not; / Our Muses, to redeeme her she hath got" (19–20). This antagonism between the poet and his beloved culminates in a desperate declaration of hatred:

> I hate,
> And pray Love, All may: He pitties my state,
> But sayes, I therein no revenge should finde;
> The Sunne would shine, though all the world were blind.
> (35–38)

The speaker's desire for revenge is futile. Though Love pities the speaker's "state," he cannot provide a remedy for it, because the beloved's beauty, like the sun, is too powerful and absolute. The heat and light of the sun are not contingent upon the individual's perception any more than the speaker is able to counter his beloved's beauty with his own, or others', "hate." For "Donne," a commonplace, even clichéd, observation about the sun functions metaphorically as well as literally by establishing

[43]The text of "Come Fates" is cited from Appendix B in Grierson, ed., *Donne's Poetical Works*, 1:407–410.

an analogous relationship between lover and beloved and the observer and world. By contrast, Margaret removes the quotation from its erotic context and writes a poem in which the problem of perception is the explicit content of the poem rather than its metaphoric ground.

In this respect, it is significant that the line she quotes has all the marks of a commonplace: memorable and witty yet also a sententious statement of common knowledge.[44] Though the practices of commonplacing often served to disperse authorial identity, elevating sentiment over voice, a central element of Margaret's act of quotation is the importance of the author's name. One primary element of Donne's influence in Cavendish's work is the power of his name as a synecdoche for literary tradition itself. In this respect, Cavendish's two later quotations of Donne resemble that in *Poems and Fancies*. In each of Cavendish's allusions, Donne is a source of learning, authority, and a witty turn of phrase. In "The Lady Contemplation" (*Playes* 1662), the character Lady Ward quotes lines 35–36 of Donne's verse epistle, "The Storm": "I remember a witty Poet, one Doctor Don, saith, Sleep is pains easie salve, and doth fulfil / All Offices, unless it be to kill."[45] In *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666, 2nd ed. 1668), Cavendish turns to Donne yet again to illustrate her contention that "some opinions in philosophy, are like the opinions in several religions, which endeavouring to avoid each other, most commonly do meet each other": "for as the learned Dr. Donne says, the furthest east is west, and the furthest west is east."[46] By associating Donne's name with the

---

[44]Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 8.

[45]Cavendish, *Playes* (London: 1662), p. 219. This quotation was also excerpted in Joshua Poole's *English Parnassus*, a rhyming dictionary, thesaurus, and collection of poetic commonplaces (Sullivan, "Who Was Reading/Writing Donne Verse in the Seventeenth-Century?," p. 11). See the entry for "Sleep" on p. 483 (sig. 2M3) of *The English Parnassus* (1657). This volume arranges anonymous snippets of verse by theme or topic.

[46]Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. Eileen O'Neil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 209. Here Cavendish alludes to line 21 of "Upon the Annuntiation and passion falling upon one day 1608 " ("As in plaine Maps, the furthest West is East") or, possibly, lines 13–14 of "Hymne to God my God, in my Sickness" ("As West and East / In all flatt Maps (and I am one) are one."

quotation of a commonplace, Cavendish resembles the readers and writers described by Ernest Sullivan in his study of Donne's print legacy in the seventeenth century. Sullivan observes that many readers used Donne's verse as a commodity; however, those of high social station were more likely to see that "the prestige of Donne's name was part of the value of the commodity, and they generally capitalized on that prestige by identifying Donne as their source."[47] For Cavendish, the acknowledgment of Donne's name is significant because it is a means by which she aligns herself with literary tradition.

Together, Margaret's and William's allusions provide a valuable snapshot of the legacy of Donne's poetry and reputation in the middle decades of the seventeenth century, a period of important transition for English literature. William Cavendish's courtship poetry for Margaret Lucas suggests an understanding of poetry that is personal, private, and occasional. A biographical record of a courtship and an extended experiment with the metaphysical style, these poems show William using Donne's poetry to negotiate the meaning of love and marriage, constructing love in terms that provide consolation for the social and political failures of the 1640s. For Margaret, by contrast, "Donne's" wit becomes matter for a philosophical and universal aesthetic far from the original coterie context of his verse and his name one of a limited number with the power to conjure the English literary tradition to which she aspires.

* * * *

Though explicit citation of Donne's verse in *Poems and Fancies* is limited to "Of Light and Sight," the recognition of Cavendish as a reader of Donne opens new avenues of inquiry for understanding both Cavendish's poetry and the meaning of Donne's verse to succeeding generations of English poets. Specifically, the atomic poetry that opens the volume is, like Donne's *The First Anniversary, An Anatomy of the World* or Milton's *Paradise Lost*, an important attempt to create a suitable poetic representation of a world reordered by mechanical speculation, astronomical observation, and microscopy. Almost fifty years ago, William Empson argued that the plurality of words, an old philosophical

[47]Sullivan, *The Influence of John Donne*, p. 46.

problem given new urgency in the seventeenth century by the speculations of Bruno, the theories of Kepler, and the observations of Galileo, is central to Donne's poetry. Donne, Empson maintained in his controversial essay, "Donne the Space Man," "was interested in getting to another planet."[48] Donne's poetry has long been valued for its ability to bring the startling implications of new philosophy into conversation with a powerful sense of the loss such discoveries entail. For more orthodox critics as well, Donne's achievement as a poet lies at least partially in his ability to successfully merge the philosophical with the poetic. In T. S. Eliot's influential argument, Donne's poetry resists the division of the rational scientific outlook from other aspects of human life: "a thought to Donne was an experience."[49]

Cavendish's poetry, by contrast, has suffered critical neglect as a result of its liminal status between science and literature.[50] Cavendish's interest in science, in the words of one critic, "has generally been regarded as unfortunate by literary critics and irrelevant by historians of science."[51] Just a few years after Eliot's praise of Donne as the last redoubt against the dissociation of sensibility, Virginia Woolf suggested that Cavendish might have benefited from it. Woolf laments Cavendish's lack of discipline—her writing poured out "higgledy-piggledy in torrents of prose, poetry, and philosophy"—and suspects that she would have had more success had she more rigorously pursued her philosophical vocation: "she should have had a microscope put in her hand. She should have been taught to look at the stars and reason scientifically."[52] I contend, however, that the best poems of *Poems and Fancies* are

---

[48]Empson, "Donne the Space Man," in *Essays on Renaissance Literature*, ed. John Haffenden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 78.

[49]Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1932), p. 247. For a useful discussion of the debates surrounding the philosophy in Donne's poetry, see William Kerrigan, "What Was Donne Doing?," *South Central Review* 4 (1987): 2–15.

[50]The atomic poems of *Poems and Fancies* have been examined by historians of science, who have placed them within the history of atomism in England. See Robert Kargon, *Atomism in England from Hariot to Newton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), and Stephen Clucas, "The Atomism of the Cavendish Circle: A Reappraisal," *Seventeenth Century* 9 (1994): 247–273.

[51]Battigelli, p. 48.

[52]Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (New York: Harvest Books, 1989), p. 65.

metaphysical in the fullest sense. Like Donne's, these poems respond to the fundamental transformation wrought by philosophy on the traditional understanding of the place of humans in the world. Cavendish's poem, "A World in an Eare-ringe," I argue in the remainder of this essay, may be read productively as a response to or rewriting of Donne's *The First Anniversary*, a poem in which the anatomy of the traditional world's physical and moral decay contains within it a devastating portrait of the autonomous material and social worlds that will replace it. Cavendish's "A World in an Eare-ringe" participates in the project of identifying an appropriate poetics for the description of the spatial, social, and theological consequences of the "new philosophy." Specifically, Cavendish's poem responds to and critiques Donne's use of the feminine as a bulwark against the dissolution of the world's coherence. Whereas Cavendish elsewhere "can't afford" the metaphorical and poetic invention defined as a masculine prerogative, here, in a poem that imitates the *First Anniversary*'s witty reversals of microcosm and macrocosm, she offers an alternative culmination to the traditional meanings of the symbolic feminine in religious and erotic verse. Donne's poem is famous for its lament that "new philosophy calls all in doubt" and its fear that the consequence is a world that is lost. Cavendish's poem, driven by the same energy, offers instead a celebration of the fundamental epistemological and ontological transformations of the new.

For Cavendish, speculation about the substance of matter in its smallest part, the atom, leads to speculation about the organization of matter on a cosmic scale, the world. In a prefatory letter addressed to natural philosophers, Cavendish articulates her reasons for writing philosophical poetry with a perceptive assessment of the complex interaction of gender, genre, and subject matter. She claims that the poetic form of her atomic speculations protects them (and their author) from the immodesty of their very existence and the manifest unorthodoxy of their content: "the Reason why I write it in *Verse*, is, because I thought *Errours* might better passe there, then in *Prose*, since *Poets* write most *Fiction*, and *Fiction* is not given for *Truth*, but *Pastime*."[53] This woman writer's public entry into natural philosophy is not a transgression because her works are merely poems; likewise, this philosopher's frank exploration of the consequences of atomic theory is

[53]This epistle "To Natural Philosophers" is unpaginated.

not a challenge to orthodoxy because it is only fiction. The remainder of the letter, however, identifies what is at stake in this seemingly frivolous poetry by insisting upon the philosophical and metaphorical connections between the "atom" and the "world":

> I feare my *Atomes* will be as small *Pastime*, as themselves: for nothing can be lesse then an *Atome*. But my desire that they should please the *Readers*, is as big as the *World* they make; and my *Feares* are of the same *bulk*; yet my *Hopes* fall to a single *Atome* agen: and so shall I remaine an unsettled *Atome*, or a confus'd heape, till I heare thy *Censure*. If I be prais'd it fixes them; but if I am condemn'd, I shall be *Annihilated* to nothing: but my *Ambition* is such, as I would either be a *World*, or nothing.

This passage, like Cavendish's paratextual strategies more generally, eloquently combines the competing demands of feminine modesty and authorial ambition. Describing her poems as themselves "atoms," Cavendish emphasizes the disparity in scale between the likely achievement of her poetry and her ambitions for it. The atom and the world are opposed to one another in terms of scale, of course, but also in terms of coherence and order. In its language and imagery, this passage alludes to seventeenth-century debates about atomist natural philosophy. Atomism was consistently associated with atheism because its premises suggested that matter was eternal and ruled by chance. Many theologians and natural philosophers penned attacks upon atomism during the middle years of the seventeenth century because of the "extreme materialism of atomism, which asserted that only atoms and the void exist."[54] When Cavendish refers to the atom as "unsettled" and

[54]Matthew R. Goodrun, "Atomism, Atheism, and the Spontaneous Generation of Human Beings: The Debate over a Natural Origin of the First Humans in Seventeenth-Century Britain," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (2002): 210. Goodrun identifies Henry More's *Antidote against Atheism* (1653), Richard Baxter's *Reasons of the Christian Religion* (1667), and Meric Causabon's *Of Credulity and Incredulity in Things Natural and Civil* (1672) as among the attacks on atomism during this period. See also Charles Trawick Harrison, "The Ancient Atomists and English Literature of the Seventeenth Century," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 45 (1934): 1–79.

constitutive of a "confused heape," she participates in what Stephen Clucas has identified as the dominant discourse of atomism in seventeenth-century England. The atom is consistently represented in terms that reflect distaste for the "separate, the divided, the multiple."[55] In its formlessness, its insubstantiality and instability, the atom is opposed to the "world," in the important early modern sense of the entire material universe or the ordered system of all created things.[56]

The wit of this passage thus depends upon Cavendish's recognition that atomic speculation results in a fundamental reordering of matter and cosmos. Metaphorically equivalent through the principle of the microcosm and macrocosm, the atom and world threaten to exchange places. Atoms (and poems) combine to create a world; the writing self is a world in its ambition and crumbled to "an unsettled Atome" in its fears. This philosophical and metaphorical connection between "atom" and "world" provides the organizing principle of the opening section of *Poems and Fancies*. As the indivisible building blocks of nature, atoms create worlds. In "A World Made by Atoms," each atom moves autonomously and independently until a "new World" arises by "chance" (p. 5). Yet atoms also are worlds, as Cavendish speculates in the series of poems that conclude the first section of *Poems and Fancies*. In "It is Hard to Believe, that there are Other Worlds in This World," "The Many Worlds in this World," and "A World in an Eare-ringe," the atoms that constitute the indivisible grounds of matter are themselves generative of self-sufficient and autonomous worlds. Anna Battigelli and Bronwen Price have each usefully read these poems in the context of epistemological doubt, suggesting that the atom is a means to question the reliability of sensory perception.[57] The metaphorical connection between atoms and worlds in

[55]Clucas, "Poetic Atomism in Seventeenth-Century England: Henry More, Thomas Traherne and 'Scientific Imagination,'" *Renaissance Studies* 5 (1991): 329.

[56]*Oxford English Dictionary*, s. v. "atom," n., sense 3: "With reference to ancient Greek philosophy: a hypothetical particle, minute and indivisible, held to be one of the ultimate particles of matter"; sense 8: "The smallest conceivable part or fragment of anything; a very minute portion; a particle, a jot" and "world"; sense 9: "The material universe as an ordered system the system of created things; heaven and earth; the cosmos."

[57]See Battigelli, ch. 3; Bronwen Price, "Feminine Modes of Knowing and Scientific Enquiry: Margaret Cavendish's Poetry as Case Study," in *Women and*

these poems, however, suggests that Cavendish is also more broadly concerned with the ontological, theological, and political challenges posed by a plurality of worlds, in which the unique status of human life on earth as well as the unity and coherence of creation are put into question by the heterogeneity, division, and multiplicity of a universe filled with a potentially infinite number of inhabited worlds.

"A World in an Eare-ringe" has not been widely anthologized, nor has it yet received substantial critical or scholarly attention.[58] It is, however, one of Cavendish's most interesting and poetically effective works. The poem is premised on the possibility that a woman's earring may contain within it a microcosmic world; the earring may be, the poem begins, "a Zodiacke," "Wherein a Sun goeth round, and we not see. / And Planets seven about that Sun may move, / And hee stand still, as some wise men would prove" (p. 45). After establishing this microcosmic world as itself a product of the "new philosophy," Cavendish develops an extended portrait of the inhabitants of this alternative world. In many ways the world of the earring is familiar and conventional; the earring contains lightning, thunder and wind, earthquakes and mountains. Here are cities and stately houses, churches and priests, markets, governors and kings. The most interesting part of the poem, however, is its exploration of the relationship between the earring world and the lady's ear from which it hangs. While the inhabitants of the earring go about their daily activities, the ear itself remains aloof, isolated. Indeed the most important structuring principle of this poem, almost a refrain, is the repeated claim that the ear remains distant and unaffected by its earring world. Earthquakes may bring down mountains, and "nere stir the *Ladies Eare*, nor *Ring*"; priests can teach, and send "pious *Teares* to *Heaven*" "and yet the *Eare* not know which way they're gone"; warriors are slain in battle, "and yet not tidings to the *Wearer* bring"; counselors sit with the king, "yet the *Eare* not one wise word may get." When the earring

---

Literature in Britain: 1500–1700, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 117–139. For a broader consideration of atomic theory and epistemology, see Christoph Meinel, "Early Seventeenth-Century Atomism: Theory, Epistemology, and the Insufficiency of Experiment," *Isis* 79 (1988): 68–103.

[58]See Appendix (pp. 173–174) for the full text of "A World in an Eare-ringe."

breaks, the poem concludes, the "*World* is done" and its lovers, at least, "into *Elysium* run" (p. 46).

Like Donne's *First Anniversary*, Cavendish's "World in an Eare-ring" is a poem of cosmic scope in which the world is spatially and metaphorically dependent on a feminine principle that is concretely personified as well as abstract and universal. In "A World in an Earring," the earring is explicitly a microcosm, potentially one of many, with a spatial relationship to the Lady. Cavendish constructs a world that is, literally, pendent to woman. Indeed, in another poem, Cavendish speculates that women may have a "*World* of *Worlds*, as *Pendents* in each *Eare*" ("Of Many Worlds in this World," p. 45). Donne's poem, by contrast, describes the world itself. However, in his poem's hyperbolic praise of a deceased young woman, *The First Anniversary* presumes a similar spatial relationship between her and this world. The typical relationship of microcosm (individual human body) and macrocosm (world) is reversed so that "she" becomes a powerful feminine force "to whom this world must it selfe refer, / As suburbs, or the Microcosm of her" (235–236).

Though the *Anniversaries* may have been the only poems for which Donne sought print publication, this decision was one he soon regretted.[59] In two letters of 1612, Donne describes the printing of his verses as a "descent" for which he cannot grant himself pardon.[60] Donne's concern about the public exposure enabled by print may have been justified; soon after the 1611 appearance of the *First Anniversary* readers criticized Donne's indecorous praise of Elizabeth Drury, the young woman identified on the poem's title page as the "she" whose "untimely death" had inspired the work. According to William Drummond, Ben Jonson claimed the poem was "profane and full of Blasphemies," to which Donne replied that he "described the Idea of a Woman and not as she was" (p. 240). Donne elaborated on this statement in a letter to G.

---

[59]John Donne, *The Epithalamions, Anniversaries, and Epicedes*, ed. W. Milgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. lvii.

[60]Gary Stringer, ed., *The Variorum Edition of the Poetry of John Donne, Vol. 6: The Anniversaries and the Epicedes and Obsequies* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1995), p. 239. Further references to the *Variorum* commentary are cited parenthetically by page number in the text.

G., where he explains that he cannot be accused of saying too much, because

> my purpose was to say as well as I could: for since I never saw the Gentlewoman, I cannot be understood to have bound my self to have spoken just truths, but I would not be thought to have gone about to praise her, or any other in rhyme; except I took such a person, as might be capable of all that I could say. If any of those Ladies think that Mistris *Drewry* was not so, let that Lady make her self fit for all those praises in the book, and they shall be hers.
>
> (p. 239)

As this passage suggests, *The First Anniversary* both is and is not a poem in praise of the specific virtues of Elizabeth Drury. Donne insists that his own integrity as a poet requires (and serves as proof) that the daughter of his patron is, in her "person," deserving of the elegiac praise that the poem records; at the same time, Donne suggests that the meaning of the poem transcends the particularities of Drury's life. The praise of feminine virtue in this poem provides a model for female behavior that may be understood to describe any woman who achieves it. This early commentary on the poem, as well as much modern criticism, arises from the sense that the death of a single individual, whom scholars frequently refer to as "the girl," is too insubstantial to sustain the moral and philosophical import of the poem's reflections upon the world's decay. As the editors of the *Variorum* Commentary on the poem suggest, "much commentary, especially that since 1950, has attempted to explain who or what Donne had in mind in his portrait, beyond its obvious origin in the life and death of Elizabeth Drury" (p. 293). The "she" of the poem has been variously identified as the world soul, the human soul separated from the body at death, a symbol of perfection, harmony, and cosmic order, the image of God in man, the Virgin Mary, Astraea, Wisdom, Justice, a Platonic ideal, and the Logos (pp. 293–317). What most interpretations of *The First Anniversary* have in common, therefore, is an attempt to demonstrate the decorum of the poem, to bridge the gap between the particular and the universal, between an atom and the world.

Cavendish's poem depends for its effect on a similar juxtaposition of the great and small. "A World in an Eare-ringe" exploits the disparity between the aristocratic woman's earring, a luxurious and perhaps even

frivolous ornament, and the full political and social world that the earring contains. The Lady is influenced by nothing that occurs in her earring world, neither the physical shocks of earthquakes and thunder, nor the "wise word[s]" that the ear may not "get." In this context, we might read the woman with the earring as a comic exaggeration of the disdainful lady of the Petrarchan tradition. This lady does not merely neglect a human lover, but rather an entire world. Thus one potential reading of this poem is that the lady, preoccupied with the superficial pursuits that Cavendish elsewhere identifies as women's province, remains oblivious to the broader political and philosophical consequences of the atomic philosophy. For Cavendish, however, such practices of decorative adornment are figures for natural and poetic creativity. As she writes in the prefatory materials of *Poems and Fancies*, poetry belongs most "properly" to women because it is the work of Fancy, a faculty that women are naturally and socially predisposed to exercise. Cavendish claims that women's brains work in *"Fantasticall motions*,"

> as in their *severall*, and *various dresses*, in their many and singular choices of *Cloathes*, and *Ribbons*, and the like; in their *curious shadowing*, and *mixing of Colours*, in their *Wrought workes*, and divers sorts of *Stitches* they imploy with their *Needle*, and many *Curious* things they make, as *Flowers*, *Boxes, Baskets* with *Beads, Shells, Silke, Straw* or any thing else; besides all manner of *Meats* to cure: and thus their *Thoughts* are imployed perpetually with *Fancies*.
>
> (sig. A3r)

As this passage suggests, Cavendish explicitly revalues the conventional association of the feminine with the surface of things in order to justify her decision to write and publish poetry. By aligning poetry with the daily pursuits of the gentlewoman, Cavendish both feminizes poetry and affirms the creative nature of women's "work."[61] This association of poetic fancy with women's creative activities transforms women from the objects of poetic invention to its agents. The Lady is one of many

[61]For further discussion of the rhetoric of "work" in Cavendish's poetry and prose, see Lara Dodds, "Margaret Cavendish's Domestic Experiment," in *Genre and Women's Life Writing in Early Modern England*, ed. Michelle M. Dowd and Julie A. Eckerle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 151–168.

representations of female agents throughout *Poems and Fancies*. In this respect, the poem's lack of concrete detail connects the Lady to the self-representations of the female author as well as to the varied representations of Nature that occur throughout the volume. For instance, in a group of poems titled "Fancies, The Severall Keyes of Nature, which unlock her severall Cabinets," Nature is described as an aristocratic housewife whose various activities are metaphorically equivalent to the endless cycle of birth, growth, and death in the natural world.[62] This unnamed lady with an earring thus becomes, like the translation of Elizabeth Drury into "she," broadly symbolic of Woman and, by extension, Nature. In fact, Cavendish's unnamed Lady raises the interpretive problem of the "Idea of a Woman," just as insistently as Donne's "she." As the voluminous and inconclusive commentary about the true nature of Donne's "she" demonstrates, readers continually struggle to reconcile the obvious patronage context of *The First Anniversary*, its occasionality, with a desire for the universal and the exemplary. Cavendish's poem, which, by contrast, was always designed for print publication, does not pose this interpretive dilemma, but it raises others that may be deemed equally pressing. First, it contests, if only implicitly, Donne's "Idea of a Woman" by associating this Lady with the images of feminine creative agency—both human and nonhuman—that appear elsewhere in the volume. Second, the curious status of the earring world raises the possibility of multiple allegorical readings of the poem that are at once suggestive and indeterminate. Perhaps the earring world represents our world—its inhabitants are certainly familiar—and the Lady its absent and neglectful deity. Or, perhaps the earring world is an other world, potentially one of many, discovered by the atomists within our world and offering through its autonomy a rebuke to traditional cosmology. By inviting readers to view the earring world as, alternately, microcosm and macrocosm, "A World in an Eare-ringe" is probably best described as a species of poetic and philosophical provocation. This charming portrait of ear, earring, and

[62]See *Poems and Fancies*, pp. 126–154. The poem most relevant in this context is "Natures Dress," in which an extended simile describes the beauty of the natural world through comparisons to the adornment practices of aristocratic women.

world also engages the most fundamental questions raised by the discoveries of seventeenth-century astronomy and microscopy.

In summary, The *First Anniversary* and "A World in an Eare-ringe" share several important structuring principles. Each describes an abstract and universal feminine. Both are based upon a vertiginous reversal of the microcosm and macrocosm in which the world becomes small and the individual female soul or body great. Further, each examines the relationship between an abstract female force and the order, coherence, and harmony of a world decentered and destabilized by astronomical discovery and mechanical theories of matter. Finally, Donne's "shee, shee is dead" (183, 237, 325, 369, 427) is matched by the repeated assertions that the ear does not hear or know. Whereas Donne's poem situates the death of "she" within a framework of mourning and religious consolation, Cavendish's poem proposes the troubling possibility that the Lady may be permanently and irrevocably unreachable. In each case, however, the effect of the repetition is to raise, insistently, questions about the relationship between this world and the next or, perhaps, between the world we know and all the possible worlds—microcosmic, cosmic, or supernatural—that we cannot.

The First Anniversary echoes and reworks the relationship between the world and the feminine that is characteristic of Donne's erotic lyric. Perhaps the most useful description of this relationship is William Empson's comment on the philosophical distance between Donne's early poetry and *The First Anniversary*. Writing of the famous passage, "tis all in peeces, all cohaerance gone," Empson remarks that Donne had once been "very thankful to be merely an atom or a planet." In the erotic lyrics, Donne celebrated the potentially liberating and transformative nature of the recognition that inhabited worlds exist. The young Donne "believed that every planet could have its Incarnation, and believed this with delight, because it automatically liberated an independent conscience from any earthly religious authority."[63] In the erotic poems, the other world is the repository for what David Norbrook has described as an "utopian impulse" in Donne's poetics. The other world is a means of making autonomous space for lovers who become kings and gods, a means of imagining an alternative social order in which Donne may conduct a "radical rethinking of conventional hierarchies and a search,

[63]Empson, pp. 89, 81.

however flawed, for a more equal kind of relationship with the women of the poems."[64] Though *The First Anniversary* is more orthodox than the erotic lyrics, its return to the images of the world and of the atom suggests an important continuity. Indeed, the famous passage about the new philosophy could be seen as a rejection or satire of erotic lyrics in which the speaker and his lover become a world, a sphere, an atom or a phoenix. Each of these images is another attempt to achieve an adequate poetics for the perfection, the mutuality, the unprecedented newness of the love inhabited by the speaker and his beloved. In the *First Anniversary*, they become, instead, successive representations of the decline of the natural and social worlds man inhabits:

> And new Philosophy calls all in doubt,
> The Element of fire is quite put out;
> The Sun is lost, and th'earth, and no mans wit
> Can well direct him where to look for it.
> And freely men confesse that this world's spent,
> When in the Planets and the Firmament
> They seeke so many new; then see that this
> Is crumbled out againe to his Atomies.
> 'Tis all in peeces, and cohaerence gone;
> All just supply, and all Relation:
> Prince, Subject, Father, Sonne, are things forgot,
> For every man, alone thinkes he hath got
> To be a Phoenix, and that then can bee
> None of that kinde, of which he is, but hee.
> (205–214)

This passage, which Douglas Bush labeled the "*locus classicus* for the scientific unsettling of the Jacobean mind," powerfully describes the cosmic, social, and even psychic disruption portended by the new philosophy.[65] Like Cavendish nearly four decades later, Donne

[64]Norbrook, "The Monarchy of Wit and the Republic of Letters: Donne's Politics," in *Soliciting Interpretation: Literary Theory and Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. Elizabeth D. Harvey and Katharine Eisaman Maus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 13.

[65]Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), p. 132. For the extensive tradition of commentary on this passage, see Stringer, ed., *Variorum, Vol. 6*, pp. 402–416.

acknowledges the metaphorical link between the world and the atom. As the theories of Copernicus and Bruno and the discoveries of Kepler and Galileo multiply the number of worlds "in the Firmament," so is the world of the poet "crumbled out againe to its atomies." Unlike their function as figures for permanence, mutuality, and harmony in the erotic lyrics, here worlds and atoms are linked as equally productive of error and disorder.[66] As most critics have noted, the multiplication of the macrocosm into "worlds" and its simultaneous dissolution into isolated "atoms" no longer aware of their place in the macrocosm has disruptive political consequences. Just as the physical elements of the once unified world are now "lost," so the guarantees of social identity are "forgot." The earth, now a planet, is in motion. Individuals in society likewise are no longer organized in a single vertical organization, but rather threaten to become dispersed randomly in an undifferentiated space, each a "phoenix" in his deluded assumptions of power and autonomy.

In this passage, we see what many critics have characterized as Donne's mature hostility to modernity. Donne laments the loss of a coherent and closed world and attempts to repair it through the apotheosis of Elizabeth Drury's "Rich Soule." In this view, the developments of modern science are nothing more than further proof of the decay of the world.[67] *The First Anniversary* anatomizes the traditional world's physical and moral decay; however, this poem, like the erotic lyrics, continues to associate the feminine with the possibility of a new and better world. Donne describes a feminine principle that provides order and form to the world she subtends: "Her name defin'd thee, gave thee forme, and frame." Though the loss of that ideal female corresponds to the decay and corruption of the world, the same force offers the possibility of reunion and renewed coherence: it is "shee by whose lines proportion should be / Examin'd, measure of all Symmetree" (309–310). More specifically, "she" represents a principle of renewal that is figured through the trope of a new world:

---

[66]Clucas, "Poetic Atomism," p. 328. See also David A. Hedrich Hirsch, "Donne's Atomies and Anatomies: Deconstruced Bodies and the Resurrection of Atomic Theory," *Studies in English Literature* 31 (1991): 69–94.

[67]Catherine Gimelli Martin, "*The Advancement of Learning* and the Decay of the World: A New Reading of Donne's *First Anniversary*," *John Donne Journal* 19 (2000): 163–203.

> and though she have shut in all day,
> The twilight of her memory doth stay;
> Which, from the carcasse of the old world, free,
> Creates a new world, and new creatures bee
> Produc'd: the matter and the stuff of this,
> Her vertue, and the forme our practice is:
> And though to be thus elemented, arme
> These creatures, from home-borne intrinsique harme,
> (For all assum'd unto this dignitie,
> So many weedlesse Paradises bee,
> Which of themselves produce no venomous sinne,
> Except some foraine Serpent bring it in)
> Yet, because outward stormes the strongest breake,
> And strength it selfe by confidence growes weake,
> This new world may be safer, being told
> The dangers and diseases of the old:
> For with due temper men do then forgoe,
> Or covet things, when they their true worth know.
> (73–90)

Following the opening lament for the death of Elizabeth Drury in which Elizabeth's death is associated with the death of the world itself, this passage defines the metaphorical and theological premise of the rest of the poem. As O. B. Hardison argues, lines 75–76 are central to the meaning of the poem because they define the poem's two worlds as the "carcasse" that remains after her death and the new world "created by her memory and formed on the pattern of her virtue."[68] In this passage Donne perhaps alludes to 2 Peter 3:13: "Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." The plurality of worlds of *The First Anniversary* are thus contained within Christian eschatology and a unified, and traditional, cosmos; they are not scattered through an infinite space, but are, rather, temporally successive, with a new world replacing the old and exhausted world that all sinful humans know.

We are now prepared to account for the most significant difference between *The First Anniversary* and "The World in an Eare-ring."

---

[68]Hardison, *The Enduring Monument: A Study of the Idea of Praise in Renaissance Literary Theory and Practice* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962), p. 173.

Though Cavendish's poem does not have the verbal complexity of Donne's, it is equally interesting in its philosophical speculations. Cavendish does not shrink from the consequences of scientific speculation about plurality of worlds as many other poets of the period do, and, as a result, she is also able to reimagine the symbolic meaning of the feminine in a way that frustrates or denies the restrictive binary in which women are praised as abstract ideals or blamed as the all-too-physical embodiment of temptation. Donne's "she" serves as the world's unifying soul, a powerful force that, though dead, "works upon" the "creatures" (455) of the world who remember and praise her through the medium of Donne's verses. The relationship of Cavendish's unnamed Lady to her pendent world, however, is more ambiguous and oblique. She does not hear the voices of the world's inhabitants or feel disturbances of its natural phenomena. She is not a "Magnetique force" with the power to "draw, and fasten sundred parts in one" (221, 222); if her earring breaks, this "*World* is done." The world must continue, perhaps even to its end, without the possibility of the Lady's intervention. Cavendish and Donne thus inhabit the two ends of the continuum Mary Blaine Campbell has identified in early modern writers' responses to the other world. Whereas Donne seeks to fold the other world back into a traditional world of faith and order, "to make it continuous with the world of home, imaginable," Cavendish envisions a world that is "alternative" rather than "supplementary" and as a result creates a symbolic female unencumbered by traditional religious and erotic imagery of the feminine.[69] For Donne, and many of his readers, "she" is ultimately defined by the same traditions of praise and blame that underlie the erotic lyrics. "How witty's ruine!" Donne exclaims, reproducing the misogynous paradox in which woman is man's desire and his downfall: "For that first marriage was our funeral" (104). By contrast, "A World in an Eare-ring," represents a woman, and a world, defined neither by the tradition of symbolic praise of woman, nor of blame. Cavendish's Lady is not responsible for her world; she is neither a sacrificial and redemptive force, nor an Eve.

[69]Campbell, *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), pp. 130, 21.

* * * *

As Virginia Woolf recognized, Donne's poetry depends on women: as objects of desire, subjects of praise, readers, and patrons. When we seek to learn more of such women, however, they too often disappear into the poetry: "the noble ladies who brought so strange an element into Donne's poetry, live only in the reflection, or the distortion, that we find in the poems themselves."[70] One consequence of this distortion has been an unfortunate narrowing of the potential responses to Donne's poetry that are typically allowed to women. On the one hand, some of Donne's poems have been understood as prescriptive patterns for women's lives. As Richard Whitlocke wrote of *The Anniversaries* in 1654, just one year after Cavendish published *Poems and Fancies*, Donne's "she" "may serve for *Pattern*, or *Rule* to trye the reall *worth* of *Feminine worthies* by, that is, who deserveth to share in her (or the like) praises, who to *prescribe imitation* to *others* of their owne or *attract* the *Affections* of the *other Sex.*"[71] On the other hand, the great majority of the erotic poems have sometimes been deemed inaccessible to women's understanding. According to Dryden, Donne "affects the Metaphysics, not only in his Satires, but in his Amorous Verses, where Nature only shou'd reign; and perplexes the Minds of the Fair Sex with nice Speculations of Philosophy, when he shou'd ingage their hearts, and entertain them with the softness of Love."[72] Neither of these formulations of women's relationships to literary tradition and, more specifically, Donne's challenging representations of the feminine, however, allow for women's creative engagement with their reading.[73]

---

[70]Woolf, *The Second Common Reader* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1932), p. 30.

[71]Stringer, ed., *Variorum, Vol. 6*, p. 293. Whitlocke may be drawing upon Donne's comment on these poems in the letter to G. G., which was published in *Letters to Several Persons of Honour* in 1651: "If any of those Ladies think that Mistris *Drewry* was not so, let that Lady make her self fit for all those praise in the book, and they shall be hers" (p. 239).

[72]Dryden, 4:7.

[73]There is considerable scholarship on early modern women's reading. For a consideration of the relationship between prescriptions regarding women's literacy and actual practices, see Heidi Brayman Hackel, "The Countess of Bridgewater's London Library," in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*,

Cavendish's various responses to "Donne" offer, I suggest, a more nuanced view of what women may have found in the verses designed for their seduction, imitation, instruction, or exclusion. As a young woman, Margaret was courted with a kind of Donnean verse that, according to Dryden, should have perplexed her. As we have seen, however, William's verse presumes, at the very least, his beloved's familiarity with Donne's name and reputation. During this courtship, Margaret did attempt to preserve a gendered literary decorum. She praises William for his poetry and wit and insists that her own composition of personal letters is not an improper or "masculine" transgression. "I am sory you have metamophosis my leter and made that masculen that was efemenat," she writes, explaining "My ambition is to be thought a modest woman and to leve the title of a gallante man to you; for nature would seme as defective to give a woman the courage of a man as to give a man the weknes of a woman."[74] But Margaret also responds critically and independently to William's poetry in these letters, warning him against the artificial conceits of love poetry and telling him, in the postscript to one letter, to "lett your eye lemet your poetry."[75] The young Margaret Lucas responded with wit to William's Donnean conceits, explicitly challenging William's verse portrait of her with a rejection of the conventional poetic hyperbole that Donne exploited to such effect in *The First Anniversary*. Mixed with her praise of William's verse is an explicit rejection of the trope of the cruel mistress, a characterization that Margaret is not willing to accept. She reclaims ownership of her self, or at least her representation, by rejecting his, explaining that she is "more unighted and contracted than is represented from your lordship."[76] Describing herself as true and faithful, Margaret rejects the male-authored portrait that, as Woolf recognized, too often stands in for women's words and lives.

In her later poetry, Cavendish goes further to claim for herself an identity not accorded to the feminine in the poetic tradition that William inherits. In *Poems and Fancies*, Cavendish returns to Donne, the poet

---

ed. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 138–159.

[74]Grant, *The Phanseys of William Cavendish*, p. 108.

[75]Grant, *The Phanseys of William Cavendish*, p. 104. Battigelli transcribes this passage as "lett your ere lemet your poetry" (p. 125).

[76]Grant, *The Phanseys of William Cavendish*, p. 105.

who was a subtext in the texts of her courtship and marriage, and adapts his name and, as I have argued, his poetry to new occasions. For this writer, at least, the social and private nature of manuscript verse circulation confirmed her roles as woman and wife. By choosing unambiguously to use print as the medium of her authorship, Cavendish clears for herself a space to explore the philosophical consequences of Donne's "metaphysics." "A World in an Eare-ring" is a compelling and thoroughly modern response to the epochal transformations of world-view in the seventeenth century. In this way, Cavendish completed Donne's *Anatomy*, producing both an other world and an other Donne.

Mississippi State University

Appendix

A World in an Eare-Ring.

An *Eare-ring round* may well a *Zodiacke* bee,
Where in a *Sun* goeth round, and we not see.
And *Planets seven* about that *Sun* may move,
And *Hee* stand still, as *some wise men*, would prove.
And *fixed Stars,* like *twinkling Diamonds*, plac'd
About this *Eare-ring,* which a *World* is vast.
That same which doth the *Eare-ring* hold, the *hole*,
Is that, which we do call the *Pole*.
There *nipping Frosts* may be, and *Winter* cold,
Yet never on the *Ladies Eare* take hold.
And *Lightnings, Thunder,* and great *Winds* may blow
Within this *Eare-ring*, yet the *Eare* not know.
There *Seas* may *ebb*, and *flow*, where *Fishes* swim,
And *Islands* be, where *Spices* grow therein.
There *Christall Rocks* hang dangling at each *Eare,*
And *Golden Mines* as *Jewels* may they weare.
There *Earth-quakes* be, which *Mountaines* vast downe fling,
And yet nere stir the *Ladies Eare,* nor *Ring.*
There *Meadowes* bee, and *Pastures fresh,* and *greene*,
And *Cattell* feed, and yet never seene:
And *Gardens* fresh, and *Birds* which sweetly sing,
Although we heare them not in an *Eare-ring*.
There *Night*, and *Day*, and *Heat*, and *Cold*, and so
May *Life*, and *Death,* and *Young,* and *Old* still grow.
Thus *Youth* may *spring*, and severall *Ages* dye,
Great *Plagues* may be, and no *Infections* nigh.
There *Cityes* bee, and stately *Houses* built,
Their inside *gaye*, and finely may be gilt.
There *Churches* bee, and *Priests* to teach therein,
And *Steeple* too, yet heare the *Bells* not ring.
From thence may pious *Teares* to *Heaven* run,
And yet the *Eare* not know which way they're gone.
There *Markets* bee, and things both bought, and sold,

Know not the price, nor how the *Markets* hold.
There *Governours* do rule, and *Kings* do Reigne,
And *Battels* fought, where many may be slaine.
And all within the *Compasse* of this *Ring*,
And yet not tidings to the *Wearer* bring.
Within the *Ring* wise *Counsellors* may sit,
And yet the *Eare* not one wise word may get.
There may be *dancing* all Night at a *Ball*,
And yet the *Eare* be not disturb'd at all.
There *Rivals Duels* fight, where some are slaine;
There *Lovers mourne*, yet heare them not complaine.
And *Death* may dig a *Lovers Grave*, thus were
A *Lover* dead, in a faire *Ladies Eare.*
But when the *Ring* is broke, the *World* is done,
Then *Lovers* they into *Elysium* run.