

**Margaret Cavendish:**  
**Renaissance Book History and Editing Women Writers**  
Summer 2024

Instructor: Professor Liza Blake | [liza.blake@utoronto.ca](mailto:liza.blake@utoronto.ca)

Class Time and Location: Monday through Thursday 8:45am-12pm; Location TBD



### **Course Description**

This course is about the fascinating, extravagant, and prolific Renaissance woman Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623–1673). Together we will read gender-bending short stories, poetry about atomic philosophy and allegories of the mind, first-hand accounts what it was like to live in seventeenth-century England, audaciously experimental drama, and one of the first science fiction novels ever written (in 1666). We will think about why this woman writer has been excluded from the canon for so long, and how we might edit her work for increasing inclusivity.

In our field trips will literally follow in Cavendish's footsteps over the different phases of her life, starting with her time serving in Queen Henrietta Maria's court in Oxford, moving to Antwerp (Belgium) where she lived in exile for much of her adult life, and moving back to London and then her own Bolsover Castle in England. Visiting museums, rare book libraries, and historical buildings, we will learn about early modern book history, the English Civil War, the history of science, and early modern country houses. The course will also offer students a thorough training in early modern book history and editorial theory and practice: students will visit rare book libraries, learn about the early modern printing press and the history of book binding, and learn editorial theory and practice; students will have an opportunity to produce their own edited version of a Cavendish text for their final project for the course.

### **Required Texts**

Texts will be provided online at no cost, so you will not need to cart around expensive and heavy texts as you travel to and from the UK. If you prefer to read in hard copy I will make the texts available early enough for you to print before you travel. But if you prefer to work only with online texts, that is OK, as long as you have a way to bring it to class!

## Course Requirements

Because this class has a focus on teaching you the basic skills to do book history, textual bibliography, and editorial theory, the assignments may look a bit unusual; I will be asking you to take what you have learned about early books and about editing and to complete editorial assignments, rather than writing more traditional papers. The skills you are used to deploying for an English course (close reading, literary and textual analysis) will still be very much a part of our class discussions and will factor into the assignments as well – but as you will learn, the ability to close read at all comes from the work of editors producing final texts for us to analyze. If, however, you would rather write a more traditional paper for the final project, I will give you that option as well.

The assignments below are still tentative, but will give you a sense of how the class will be graded.

### Editing Cavendish: Assignment Series

Book History Worksheet 5%

You will be asked to read essays introducing key concepts in book history, and answer questions about what you learned, and demonstrate you have a grasp on key concepts and ideas relating to book history.

Editing 101 Worksheet 5%

You will be asked to read essays introducing key concepts in textual edition, and answer questions about what you learned, and demonstrate you have a grasp on key concepts and ideas relating to book history.

3 “Editorial Solutions” 30%

Margaret Cavendish’s books offer particularly complicated case studies for editors, because she was unusually involved with her books after they were printed, often annotating copies, sending them out as presents, and including different parts of prefaces depending on the recipient. She also writes in strange ways formally. These targeted assignments will explain the complicated book history around one of the Cavendish texts we are reading, and ask you to think about how you would manage this unusual situation as an editor. We will also spend time in class discussing these.

Final Cavendish Edition OR Final Paper 20%

For the final project of the course, you will have a choice: either an edition of ~5 pages of a Cavendish text, based on textual research, or a 7-8 page final paper, incorporating at least one secondary source. More info on these two options will be provided in class.

2 Quizzes 15%

You will take two in-class quizzes, which will build on our class discussions and ask you to extend the analyses we have already undertaken as a group. If you are keeping up with readings and attending classes, these should be very easy!

Attendance and Participation 25%

Regular attendance in class is key, as class is where you will learn the skills necessary to think about book history and the history of editing, and also where we will practice the close reading and analytical skills necessary for success on the two quizzes.

## Course Schedule

(Readings are provisional, but give you a sense of what the arc of the course and some of the readings will be. This schedule will be finalized closer to the summer.)

### ***Week 1: Cavendish at Court – Histories of the Book***

(Aug. 5-9)

#### Visit:

- Merton College, Oxford [the college where Margaret Cavendish (then Lucas) lived while serving in the court of Queen Henrietta Maria during the start of the English Civil Wars]

Learn (topic): Cavendish's Biography, Cavendish's Book-Management

Learn (skill): Book History and Textual Bibliography

#### Read:

- from *Nature's Pictures*: "A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life" [Cavendish's autobiography telling of her upbringing]
- *The Presence* (play) + Bonus Scenes [a delightfully strange play about a Princess who falls in love with an idea of a person only to meet them later; the person's gender changes several times; also featuring several auto-biographical depictions of Cavendish's time in Henrietta Maria's court]
- selected poems (by assorted authors) on the seventeenth-century poetic "Platonic Love debates," popularized by Queen Henrietta Maria
- *Poems and Fancies*: Prefatory Material [explaining her ambitions as a writer and attempting to rally other women around her], poems from Part 3 [poems exploring topics of imagination and poetics, and poems that think about Nature as a housewife;], "Upon the Theme of Love" [a poem about why she doesn't bother writing poems about love]

### ***Week 2: Cavendish Abroad – England, Europe, Exile***

(Aug. 12-16)

#### Visit:

- English Faculty Library (or another rare book library), Oxford [an exploration of Cavendish's books surviving in rare book libraries all around Oxford—surviving because she deposited them in local college libraries so that scholars could read her]
- History of Science Museum, Oxford [a journey on your own, doing a "scavenger hunt"]

Learn (topic): English Civil War, Exile Culture Abroad

Learn (skill): Editorial Theory

#### Read:

- *Poems and Fancies*, “Phantasm’s Masque” [autobiographical allegorical drama that tells of Cavendish’s travel to Paris, and/or is a theory of how the brain works]
- *The Life of the Duke* (biography of her husband), selections [descriptions of her husband in the English Civil War, with interesting book history and editorial quandaries]
- from *Nature’s Pictures*: “The Traveling Spirit” [short story about a man’s spirit that travels with the help of a witch]
- from *Nature’s Pictures*: “Tale of a Traveller” [novella about a person named “Travelia” who cross-dresses to travel, whose pronouns are changed by Cavendish, by hand, differently in different copies, giving opportunities to think about trans-inclusive editing practices]
- *Bell in Campo* [play about women who get frustrated with their husbands and start their own army, and take over the world, possibly inspired by prominent “women warriors” in the Low Countries; interesting editorial quandaries in this play]
- *Poems and Fancies*, (from) Part 5 [poems about war, including one from the perspective of her soldier-brother’s corpse after he was killed in the English Civil Wars]

### ***Week 3: Cavendish Abroad and in London – Science and Fiction***

(Aug. 19-23)

#### Visit:

- [August 21] Westminster Abbey, London, England
- [August 22] Hendrik Conscience Heritage Library, Antwerp, Belgium [library holding two books donated by Cavendish, both with corrections and writing in her own handwriting!]
- [August 22] Plantin Moretus Museum, Antwerp, Belgium [museum explaining the history of a famous historical printing press, and teaching the history of early modern printing more generally]
- [August 23, returning to Oxford]

Learn (topic): History of Early Modern Science

Learn (skill): Editorial Practice (introductory)

#### Read:

- *Poems and Fancies*, Part 1 [atom poems – poetry about how atoms make up everything in the world, existing in two different arrangements]
- *Philosophical Fancies*, selections [a natural philosophical treatise written in poetry and prose]
- *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, selections [a treatise addressing members of the scientific Royal Society, explaining flaws in their methodologies and epistemologies and telling the men to stop mansplaining nature]
- Historical accounts of Cavendish’s visit to the Royal Society, and excerpts from seventeenth-century Royal Society members (to see what Cavendish is critiquing)
- *The Blazing World*, Part 1 [Beginning of a science-fiction novel where a woman travels to another planet, becomes Empress, and sets up scientific societies]

#### ***Week 4: Cavendish at Home – Legacies and Literary Forms***

(Aug. 26-30)

##### Visit:

- Welbeck Abbey, southeast England [historical Cavendish estate, with an art gallery including her famous full-length portrait]
- Bolsover Castle, southeast England [castle destroyed in the English Civil War, that her husband gifted her during her lifetime]

Learn (topic): Early Modern Country Houses; Early Modern Engravings and Portraits

Learn (skill): Editorial Practice (advanced)

##### Read:

- *The Blazing World*, Part 2 [science fiction novel continued – woman returns to home planet and things somehow get weirder]
- *Convent of Pleasure* [queer play of a woman who inherits money and sets up a secular woman-only “Convent” for women to enjoy their own company]
- *Poems and Fancies*, “The Knight and the Ruined Castle” [poem about Bolsover castle, which we will visit this week]
- *Poems and Fancies*, from Parts 2 and 4 [poems on Fame and legacy]
- *World’s Olio* and *Nature’s Pictures* [essays on Fame and legacy]