



Writing to Posterity: Margaret Cavendish's "A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life" (1656) as an "autobiographical *relazione*"

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Article abstract

L'essai autobiographique de Margaret Cavendish, intitulé *A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life*, et publié dans la première édition de *Natures Pictures* (1656), peut être lu comme une « *relazione* autobiographique ». Par la publication de cette brève autobiographie, dans les premières années seulement d'une carrière soutenue et prolifique de vingt ans, Cavendish répond à des rumeurs qui ont commencé à circuler à son sujet parmi ses contemporains. En tant que récit polémique circulant oralement et sous forme écrite, et parfois avec des significations contradictoires, la *relazione* s'avère utile comme grille d'analyse permettant d'examiner les réponses autobiographiques de Cavendish à ces rumeurs. Cet article montre la finesse avec laquelle elle choisit la relation comme modèle générique de son récit, dans laquelle elle insiste sur la vérité comme moyen de dépasser ses contemporains et de rejoindre un lectorat « d'autres âges » plus réceptif à l'image publique qu'elle construit d'elle-même.

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L'essai autobiographique de Margaret Cavendish, intitulé A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life, et publié dans la première édition de Natures Pictures (1656), peut être lu comme une « relazione autobiographique ». Par la publication de cette brève autobiographie, dans les premières années seulement d'une carrière soutenue et prolifique de vingt ans, Cavendish répond à des rumeurs qui ont commencé à circuler à son sujet parmi ses contemporains. En tant que récit polémique circulant oralement et sous forme écrite, et parfois avec des significations contradictoires, la relazione s'avère utile comme grille d'analyse permettant d'examiner les réponses autobiographiques de Cavendish à ces rumeurs. Cet article montre la finesse avec laquelle elle choisit la relation comme modèle générique de son récit, dans laquelle elle insiste sur la vérité comme moyen de dépasser ses contemporains et de rejoindre un lectorat « d'autres âges » plus réceptif à l'image publique qu'elle construit d'elle-même.

In *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*, Northrop Frye remarks of the Romantic poet and visionary that "[i]t is pathetic to read his letters and see how buoyant is his hope of being understood in his own time, and how wistful is the feeling that he must depend on posterity for appreciation."¹ Blake is not the first writer who, misunderstood in his own age, presciently anticipates a more appreciative audience. Margaret Cavendish, one of the most prolific women writers of the seventeenth century, was aware early in her career that her contemporaries had little understanding of her literary achievements. In a brief text entitled "An Epistle" that serves as preface to her 1656 autobiography, Cavendish declares that "for the sake of after-Ages, which I hope will be more

just to me than the present, I will write the true Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and to this part of my Life.”² The autobiographical essay — her “True Relation” — is a self-portrait by an emerging author who had only begun publishing her writings three years earlier. The timing of this autobiography is in itself remarkable, for it is worth asking why at the age of 33 she felt it necessary to tell the story of her life. Moreover, why deploy the phrase “true relation” so deliberately in the “Epistle” that precedes the autobiographical narrative, and in doing so, why invoke the genre of the *relazione* to convey this truth? The assertion of “truth” and the generic choice of a “relation” are announced with deliberation and repeated in the title of the autobiographical narrative itself, “A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life.” In what follows, I will address these questions by reading Cavendish’s narrative as a kind of “autobiographical *relazione*.”

Margaret Cavendish’s early life

Born in 1623 into a staunch royalist family, Margaret Lucas at the age of 20 joined the court of Queen Henrietta Maria during a tumultuous time in English history. Because of the civil wars, the court had already moved from London to Oxford and, the following year, Lucas followed the Queen into exile in Paris. There the young maid of honour met and within a year married William Cavendish, a gentleman scholar, literary patron of such authors as Ben Jonson and William Davenant, and one-time governor of the Prince of Wales. William Cavendish had served as commander-in-chief of King Charles I’s forces in the north of England until their defeat at the Battle of Marston Moor in 1644. Despite the three decades’ difference in their ages, the marriage between William and Margaret was by their accounts exceptionally happy. William had several surviving children from his marriage to his first wife, but he had none with Margaret, which left her free from the demands of pregnancy, childbirth, and childrearing. Although her inability to become pregnant was a source of regret to them both, Margaret portrays William in this as well as in other texts as a devoted husband, no doubt in part because of his strong, active support of her intellectual pursuits and literary endeavours, and because of their shared interests in literature, politics, and natural philosophy.

Margaret Cavendish included this autobiographical essay in the first edition of *Natures Pictures* (1656), a collection of short fictional narratives written

while she and her husband were living on the continent along with numerous other royalist exiles prior to the Restoration of Charles II in 1660. The autobiography itself is fairly brief at just under 9,000 words in length, with its content summarized in its defensively worded conclusion:

I verily believe some censuring Readers will scornfully say, why hath this Ladie writ her own Life? since none cares to know whose daughter she was, or whose wife she is, or how she was bred, or what fortunes she had, or how she lived, or what humour or disposition she was of? (pp. 390–91)

The autobiography describes her parents and siblings, her husband, William, and his brother, Charles, who became a close friend and tutor to Margaret until his death in 1654. These family histories make up the first half of the narrative; the second half focuses on herself — her activities, interests, and disposition — with commentary on her own character and personality offered in ways that seek to justify her activities and refute rumours that began to circulate about her after she began publishing her writing during a visit to England from 1651 to 1653.

The idea of a “true relation”

Given that much of the autobiography offers a spirited response to these oral reports that had begun to circulate among her contemporaries, it is worth examining the conceptual and generic grounds underpinning the promise of veracity in the title of “True Relation.” The truth claims Cavendish makes are meant to compete with oral rather than written discourse, for her life did not become the subject of biographical study until centuries after her death. Yet the claims themselves cannot be taken at face value. As R. S. White observes, it is not simply that autobiographers slant the truth, but that we need to question the authenticity of these narratives. White derives from Paul de Man this argument on the undecidability of the truth-status of autobiography, because as a linguistic act, autobiographical narration is both figurative and arbitrary; and from Stephen Greenblatt, the often cited observation that in the early modern period there arose “an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process.”³ It is somewhat ironic that these

“after-Ages,” to adopt Cavendish’s term for her target audience, are both deeply sceptical about the truth status of self-representational narratives and yet more receptive to her work than her contemporaries. Writing this brief autobiography only a few years into what would be a twenty-year writing career, as if, like Blake, she is already aware that she, too, must “depend on posterity,” Cavendish anticipates the trajectory of negative critical reception we now know would plague her critical reputation until recently. In this essay, I want to discuss the artfulness of her insistence on truth as a way to bypass her contemporary readers, with the autobiography instead constructing an implied readership in unspecified “after-Ages” who presumably will be more attuned to her style.

The second term — “relation” — requires more extended comment, in part because it has not yet been addressed in scholarship on Cavendish’s autobiography. Filippo de Vivo’s study of ambassadorial “*relazioni*” in *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* defines the *relazione* as a medium of communication in the form of reports presented by ambassadors to sovereigns and political leaders at home.⁴ Ambassadors would, when occasion required it, leak the contents of *relazioni* to family members, who would circulate written copies, or forward their contents orally, in the form of rumours, to other Venetians.⁵ As de Vivo observes, *relazioni* are of interest as forms of political communication that circulate information and ideas concerning political institutions and events, but can also be seen as objects of exchange that serve partisan, economic, or professional interests.⁶ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, such diplomatic usage of the word “relation” occurs in English as early as 1560 in a reference to a report by the English king’s ambassador.⁷ The link between the “relation” used by Cavendish as a generic framework for her autobiography and official documents such as ambassadorial reports provides a lens through which to reconsider Cavendish’s “True Relation” in a new light, as if Cavendish seeks to indicate in her title the implicitly political nature of her narrative as well as to confer legitimacy on the arguments it advances.

The primary definition of the term “relation” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is more generalized than that of the Italian term *relazione* as discussed by de Vivo. The first *OED* definition identifies the term “relation” as “[t]he action of giving an account of something; narration, report. In early use also in to make relation: to relate, recount.”⁸ This definition incorporates two components involved in storytelling, that of the activity of telling — “the action of giving an

account” — as well as the account itself, specified by the *OED* as a narration or report. The word thus signals its status as a speech act in addition to asserting the nature of its narrative content. This is the sense in which the term “relation” is usually used in early modern English publications, as in Robert Parsons’s *A relation of the King of Spaines receiving in Valliodolid* (1592).⁹ Interestingly, in texts published in English prior to 1656, the word “truth” is invoked with remarkable frequency as a collocation of the word “relation.” A search of *Early English Books Online* for texts published between 1473 and 1656 with the word “relation” in the title produces 2,437 records; over 1,000 of these texts use the phrase “true relation,” the assertion of truth being driven at times by an obvious motivation, as in the anonymously authored pamphlet, *A true relation of the birth of three monsters in the city of Namen in Flanders*.¹⁰ Up until the 1640s, such texts address a variety of topics, including war reports, new world discoveries, reports of deaths from disease in London, accounts of malformed infants at birth and other unusual biological phenomena, murders, accidents, religious testimony and polemic, news reports from colonies, an earthquake, and various editions of the play, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*.¹¹

Two distinct patterns of change occur over time, in that the numbers of texts employing the phrase “true relation” in their titles dramatically increase, but the range of topics they address narrows. The first 135 texts using this phrase in the title were printed between 1584 and 1640, the numbers of such texts increasing annually. A dramatic upsurge in frequency as well as in the politicized content occurs in the early 1640s. Between 1641 and 1650, there were 801 titles printed with the term “true relation” in the title, an exponential increase in comparison to its much less frequent use during the five decades prior to 1641. This increase in occurrence was accompanied by a narrowing of topical range, the vast majority of publications during the 1640s being concerned with political issues and events, such as the eight-page pamphlet *A Short and True Relation of the life and death of Sir Thomas Wentworth, Knight, Earle of Strafford* (1641), or the six-page pamphlet *True intelligence from the vvest: or A true relation of the desperate proceedings of the rebels, and cavaliers gathered together at Angry-Fisherton in Wilt-Sheire* (1647).¹² It is, of course, the case that the sheer number of print publications, especially pamphlets, dramatically increased during this politically turbulent decade of civil wars and revolution, but it remains noteworthy that the phrase itself, “true relation,” comes to be used during the 1640s almost exclusively in titles of texts with political content.

These works commonly incorporate a polemical element that supports and at times embellishes the factual content, explaining and defending actions of historical and political import. The phrase “true relation” captures this marriage of fact and story, in which factual “truths” are framed within explanatory and justificatory narratives. These patterns of increasing numbers accompanied by a reduction in variety of subject matter demonstrate that by the 1650s a correlation between politics and the phrase “true relation” had become well established in print publication. Interestingly, there is a corresponding decline in occurrences once the political turmoil subsides, the king of England, Charles I, having been executed on January 30, 1649, and England shortly thereafter proclaimed a Commonwealth by its Parliament. Only 135 titles invoke the phrase “true relation” during the six-year period between 1650 and 1656, the year that Cavendish published her autobiography. It is, of course, ironic that the claim to be speaking the truth, which in modern Western culture has long been associated with objectivity and impartiality, became wedded so definitively during the mid-seventeenth century to political and polemical argumentation.

Confronting rumour in “True Relation”

Another aspect of Cavendish’s autobiography that has not often been addressed in recent scholarship is the significance of the short “Epistle” that is placed just before “True Relation” in *Natures Pictures*.¹³ Although this prefatory text is brief, running to no more than 1,650 words, the “Epistle” refers on half a dozen occasions to rumours and false reports about Cavendish and her writing. The first of these deals with rumours that doubt her capacity for scientific thought: “I have heard, that some should say my Wit seemed as if it would over-power my Brain, especially when it works upon Philosophical Opinions” (p. 363). Her paraphrase of this cutting assessment alludes specifically to her second publication in natural philosophy, *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), although two previous publications, *Poems, and Fancies* (1653) and *Philosophical Fancies* (1653), pursue similar ideas influenced by the new scientific thought.¹⁴ It must have taken some courage to paraphrase such derogatory assessments of her intellect, yet she proceeds to cite additional rumours, including another one that doubts her authorship of these works: “I have heard some should say, that my Writings are none of my own, because when some have visited me, though

seldome I receive visits, they have not heard me speak of them” (p. 363). If her sense of these reports is correct, it is ironic that some attack her for overreaching by venturing into scientific thought — which implies belief in her authorship of these works — yet others are sceptical because she speaks neither about her writing nor her ideas. This is the nature of her dilemma, for she was profuse and articulate with the pen, but shy and silent in company. This helps to explain why Cavendish would choose to write and publish the story of her own life at this early stage in her career.

Such comments take aim at the heart of Cavendish’s emerging sense of herself as a writer engaged in intellectual and scientific inquiry. In 1656 the Royal Society was not yet in existence, but Cavendish had become acquainted with developments in early modern science by conducting experiments and examining objects through microscopes and telescopes in the family laboratory as well as through discussions with her husband, William, and his brother, Charles. William Cavendish had diverse interests in equestrian training, literature, natural philosophy, and the new instruments of science.¹⁵ Charles Cavendish, who lived with William and Margaret during their exile in Antwerp and then accompanied Margaret to London, sharing lodgings with her during her two-year visit to England from 1651 to 1653, is described by the seventeenth-century biographer John Aubrey as a “great Master” of mathematics.¹⁶ Charles also read widely in Galilean mechanics, psychology, physiology, optics, ethics, and poetics, and corresponded with other English and European intellectuals.¹⁷ With William’s wide-ranging intellectual and literary interests and Charles’s specialist expertise and knowledge of the most up to date scholarship, Margaret was fortunate in her tutors. Equally stimulating for this novice of natural philosophy was the intellectual milieu in which she lived; visitors to the family homes in Paris and Antwerp included such notable intellectuals as René Descartes, Pierre Gassendi, and Thomas Hobbes, the latter frequently a visitor of the Cavendish brothers on the continent and at the London lodgings of Charles Cavendish and Margaret.¹⁸ The literary culture in the Cavendish household was also a source of enrichment for Margaret, given William’s friendships with dramatists and poets like William Davenant, Richard Flecknoe, John Birkenhead, and Edmond Waller.¹⁹ Despite her good connections, however, Margaret Cavendish would have understood only too well the power of rumour to shape one’s social position and reputation, given her experiences as a lady in waiting at court. In the reactions to her first published works — the rumours to which

the “Epistle” refers — Cavendish discovered that being married to the former governor of the Prince of Wales offered little protection from the power of rumour. The “Epistle” preceding the autobiography serves, then, as a statement of her motivation in taking this unusual step, opposing these false reports circulating orally with her “true” version published under her name.

The power of rumour to shape a writer’s reputation is evident in perhaps the most famous twentieth-century response to Margaret Cavendish. In *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), Virginia Woolf makes much of Dorothy Osborne’s negative characterization of Cavendish in response to reports circulating orally after the publication in 1653 of *Poems, and Fancies*. Osborne’s letter to her fiancé, William Temple, sums up public opinion: “[T]hey say ’tis ten times more extravagant than her dress. Sure, the poor woman is a little distracted, she could never be so ridiculous else as to venture at writing books, and in verse too [emphasis added].”²⁰ Osborne’s contempt for the volume’s reported extravagance — its poems addressing topics not usually found in women’s verse — is presented as the general view, but the antipathy Osborne expresses here to women “writing books... in verse” is aimed specifically at Cavendish’s decision to publish her writing. The intensity of this hostility to publication is somewhat curious, for Cavendish was not the first early modern woman to publish in her own name, nor was she the first English female poet to do so. Yet Osborne’s out of hand repudiation of women’s published verse has been taken up as representative of the general view. This view persists in modern criticism. In her study of writing and gender, Wendy Wall argues that during the Renaissance, authors from elite ranks resisted print publication as vulgar and common, so that aristocratic women were discouraged from publishing their works because of their class as well as gender.²¹

Despite these constraints, however, women writers from a variety of ranks found ways of negotiating such strictures in order to publish their writing. A growing number of works by women had by this time been published and were known to have female authors; indeed, several included their names or aristocratic titles, or both together, either on the publication’s title page or in its prefatory materials. Women writers from a range of middle and genteel ranks openly declaring their authorship prior to Cavendish include the well-known patron and writer, Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, other poets such as Amelia Lanyer, Diana Primrose, and Anne Bradstreet, and women writing in a range of other genres, such as Mary Wroth (Sidney Herbert’s niece), Rachel

Speght, and Elizabeth Clinton. As Steven W. May suggests, the reluctance of early modern aristocratic authors to reveal their identities in print has been overstated;²² the evidence suggests that May's observation applies in similar ways to early modern women writers. What is interesting about Cavendish's "Epistle" and "True Relation" is that she displays in these texts a heightened sensitivity to the power of such rumours to shape her reputation, taking the reports seriously enough to paraphrase them so that she can respond. In doing so, she pits her written version of the truth against a more ephemeral version circulating in oral discourse. It is, of course, the case that mentioning these reports introduces them into print. Although she takes a seemingly more transitory, oral version and gives it greater substance by printing it, she gains some control over the content by offering her own paraphrased version. It is these transitions and confrontations between the oral and the written that make the *relazione* such a fitting generic frame for her attempt at intervention.

Posterity has proven her fears about her reputation to be well founded, for generations of scholars have presented Cavendish and her writing through a series of negative historical filters that continue to mediate understanding of this writer. The extent to which her contemporaries deemed her insane has been exaggerated by recent biographers strongly influenced by Woolf's assessment of Cavendish's psychological health as unstable.²³ Statements by Cavendish's contemporaries about her flamboyance, her daring, and her unusual quest for fame through writing have been taken up by scholars and modern biographers in contradictory ways, according to Katie Whitaker, whose recent study, *Mad Madge: The Extraordinary Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, the First Woman to Live by her Pen* (2002), points out that, contrary to assumptions circulating commonly in modern scholarship, the monicker "mad Madge" was not used by Cavendish's contemporaries.²⁴ It is also worth noting that in 1656 Cavendish's reputation, as a woman writer who published her own works, who wrote in a field — natural philosophy — usually limited to men, and who had a distinctive flair in her mode of dress, was still somewhat circumscribed, for she was known primarily among the genteel classes. She had not yet become the celebrity who a decade later would draw flocks of curious onlookers from a range of classes when she went to London, after she became a Duchess and much of her husband's wealth and estates had been returned to him. The felt need to confront rumour as a recognition of its power to shape one's reputation

may explain why a writer would decide to publish an account of her life at the beginning rather than at the end or at least at the zenith of her career.

**Autobiography, politics, and the family:
the point of writing a “True Relation”**

Sidonie Smith argues that of the two available streams of formal autobiographical writing current in the mid-seventeenth-century — the first a tradition of religious life writing going back to Augustine, and the second a secular tradition of *res gestae* — neither applies to Cavendish’s “True Relation.”²⁵ Smith’s study shows that the androcentricity of the tradition of *res gestae*, in which the writer’s public acts and accomplishments were the subject of the writer’s life story, made it unavailable to early modern women writers. Nevertheless, Smith observes that framing one’s life in terms of familial relations is typical of women’s secular life writing in the early modern period, so in this sense Cavendish is not at all unusual in foregrounding members of her family and idealizing her life within the family in the first half of the autobiography. Moreover, Natalie Zemon Davis’s discussion of women as historical writers during the early modern period suggests that other options for life writing could also be explored, given that boundaries between the memoir, history, and other prose narrative forms were fluid in the seventeenth century. For example, Davis defines Cavendish’s biography of her husband, William, as a form of “particular history.”²⁶ Not one to see a lack of predecessors as a limitation, Cavendish imported the genre of the *relazione* into an autobiographical narrative that infuses its focus on the family with political significance.²⁷

Although Cavendish’s invocation of the term “truth” could in the most obvious sense be used to distinguish her autobiographical essay at the end of *Natures Pictures* from the “feigned” content of the rest of the collection, this assertion of truth, I argue, is more politically motivated, giving the text a polemical edge that has not yet been adequately addressed in recent scholarship on this text. It is noteworthy that of the more than 1,000 pre-1656 publications mentioned above that include the phrase “true relation” in their titles, none of these is an autobiography. In adopting the phrase for her life story, Cavendish is thus breaking new ground in publishing a woman’s autobiography with a political dimension, even if it does not follow the traditional form of the *res gestae*.²⁸

By the mid-seventeenth-century, as I noted above, the phrase “true relation” when used in print operates within a highly politicized rhetorical register. In the rest of this essay, I want to turn to the content of Cavendish’s text to support my claim for its status as a kind of autobiographical *relazione*. In adopting the *relazione* as a generic indicator, I take from it three aspects: its status as a political document, or at least, as a form of discourse often concerned with political matters; the nature of the ambassadorial *relazione* as a form of oral as well as written discourse; and its truth claims, whether valid or not.

Although Cavendish appears to follow a conventional trajectory by framing her account within the context of family, when she recounts her transformation from daughter to wife, she also indicates how political events shape her life story. For example, during the civil war, after the court had moved to Oxford, the young Margaret Lucas noticed an opportunity to become one of Henrietta Maria’s maids of honour, for “hearing the Queen had not the same number she was used to have... I wooed and won my Mother to let me go” (p. 373). Margaret indicates that she served in the court for two years, accompanying Henrietta Maria to France, “untill such time as I was married from thence” (p. 374), for the young maid of honour had attracted the notice of William Cavendish when he attended the Royalist court in exile. As a strong royalist, Margaret is careful not to make the link between insurrection and personal opportunity, but that link emerges nevertheless in the way in which the chronology of her entry into court life, and from there into marriage, is framed.

The narrative takes on a decidedly polemical tone in the sections that trace the fortunes and misfortunes of members of her family, in that her descriptions of family members often resonate with implicit political meanings. For example, in remarking that her father was wealthy but not “a Peer of the Realm,” she observes that “at that time great Titles were to be sold, and not at so high rates, but that his Estate might have easily purchased, and was prest for to take, but my Father did not esteem Titles, unless they were gained by Heroick Actions” (p. 368). Given that her father died during her infancy in the early 1620s, this criticism of a system in which titles were obtained by purchase rather than by honour or inheritance takes aim at the Jacobean court, especially at the late George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, whose great wealth was in part earned in just this manner.²⁹

The emphasis placed on order in her childhood home gives rise to a more generalized critique of the court. It is true, she states, that

we did not riot, but we lived orderly; for riot, even in Kings Courts, and Princes Palaces, brings ruin without content or pleasure, when order in less fortunes shall live more plentifully and deliciously than Princes, that lives in a Hurlie-Burlie, as I may terme it, in which they are seldom well served, for disorder obstructs. (p. 369)

This comparison between family and court life hints at disapproval of the “Hurlie-Burlie” of the latter, associating court culture with disorder. The comparison supports her subsequent portrayal of herself as an innocent at court:

I neither heeded what was said or practic’d, but just what belong’d to my loyal duty, and my own honest reputation, and indeed I was so afraid to dishonour my Friends and Family by my indiscreet actions, that I rather chose to be accounted a Fool, than to be thought rude or wanton. (p. 374)

This passage is usually read as an apology for her pronounced shyness, which she both explains and defends. She claims a lack of familiarity with courtly customs, but shrewdly frames the alternatives as a choice between shyness, which causes her to be “accounted a Fool,” and custom, that of following “what was said or practic’d” by others, but which would cause her to be “thought rude or wanton.” The implied criticism of courtly custom as “rude or wanton” leaves bashfulness as the more honourable choice; as Cavendish learned, however, it remained an untenable solution for one of the Queen’s ladies, when any departure from custom would attract notice in a milieu governed by well defined behavioural codes. Cavendish signals an early interest here in the value of political order and the upright conduct of courtiers; these are themes developed more fully in *Sociable Letters* (1664) as well as in *Blazing World* (1666), the most famous of her fictional works, written a decade after the autobiography.³⁰

The politicization of family life applies equally well to her portrayal of the two brothers who died as result of injuries suffered in the civil wars. As Smith observes, Cavendish describes her brothers in the same heroic terms used earlier for her father, although in the case of Thomas and Charles Lucas, with more justification. These two brothers were “excellent Souldiers, and Martial Discipliners,” and her eldest brother, John, although winning less military fame in the civil wars, was “not less Valiant than they were” (p. 371). Referring to their military service “under the States of Holland,” she observes that Thomas and

Charles chose to serve in the Wars rather than “to live idly at home in Peace” (p. 371). The contrast here is between the Dutch wars in 1637 and the peace of pre-Civil war England, but the remark nevertheless resonates with new meaning when uttered in the context of 1656, during the Protectorate, when many royalists had returned home and made their peace with their republican enemies. Such an option was not open to Margaret and her husband, William, who remained in exile first in France and then in the States of Holland until 1660.

Even her account of her mother, Elizabeth Lucas, is framed in political terms. Elizabeth’s “Heroic Spirit” enabled her to survive the loss of her “Goods, Plate, Jewells, Money, Corn, Cattle, and the like,” which were taken by the “Barbarous people” who “cut down their Woods, pull’d down their Houses and sequestred them from their Lands and Livings” (pp. 376–77). Cavendish’s observation that these people “would have pulled God out of Heaven, had they had power, as they did Royaltie out of his Throne,” inserts a political dimension into this characterization of her mother and of her family’s losses, reminding her readers that the local hostility to the Lucas family had a strongly anti-Royalist dimension. Just as her mother’s “Majestick Grandeur” remained undiminished by the family’s political misfortunes, so too was Elizabeth’s “beauty... beyond the ruin of time” and presumably, political ruin as well (pp. 376–77). The staunch loyalty of the Lucas family to Charles I is the rock upon which the reader’s veneration of that family is meant to be founded; in the case of this woman’s autobiography, the framing of her life in private experience inevitably invokes a highly public, political agenda.

Margaret offers more direct if less sustained commentary on William Cavendish’s politics, but her strategy here is that of succinct redefinition. She cites the republican view of William as “the greatest Traitor to the State,” but recasts the accusation into Royalist terms as “the most loyall Subject to his King and Countrey” (p. 380). When she discusses the loss of William’s estates after the civil war, Cavendish shifts the emphasis away from William to herself, focusing on her lack of success in petitioning the parliamentary committee. She attributes the loss of William’s estates not to his politics, untenable in the current situation in post-civil war England, but to the Parliamentary Committee’s unfair treatment of her in comparison to other royalist wives. The committee at Goldsmith Hall refused her a portion of her husband’s estate “as [other] wives had allowed them,” but “few or no other [wife] was so hardly dealt withal” (p. 379). In sum, under the veil of discussions of family life, Cavendish offers

political critiques of court life and republicans alike without once raising doubts about her royalist sympathies. Throughout the first half of the autobiography, she encodes the fortunes and misfortunes of her two families in a politicized rhetoric that precludes an anachronistic separation between public and private, political and personal spheres; Cavendish shows that for mid-seventeenth-century royalist exiles, such dimensions were inseparable.

In the autobiography and "Epistle," Cavendish directly confronts a series of alternative narratives that circulate in the form of rumours. The closing remarks of the "Epistle" present the autobiography as a form of rhetorical revenge. This will be the "true" relation she writes in order to counteract the falsehoods spread by those "carping Tongues [and] malicious Censurers, for I despise them."³¹ As a written document, the autobiography displaces the rumours circulating as oral versions of a story she now claims the right to tell. Her strategy seems on the surface to be straightforward: in the autobiography, she identifies the rumours, and then addresses each of them in turn, often denying them, but with some interesting equivocations framing such denials. For example, in describing her brothers' hobbies and pastimes as "fencing, wrestling, shooting, and such like exercises," she states they had no vices, "as I did know, unless to love a Mistris were a crime" (p. 372). Having admitted what might seem a flaw, she immediately retracts this admission with a denial, "not that I knew any they had, but what report did say," reinforcing this denial with the observation that "usually reports are false, at least exceed the truth" (p. 372). She has acknowledged the possibility of a vice, questioned its status as such, and then denied it twice over, so that by the end of this discussion, the reader is left uncertain about her position on whether or not one or the other brother did indeed "love a Mistris," or if so, whether she considers it to be vice, virtue, or something else entirely.

A similar series of denials and admissions speaks more directly to her concerns about her own reputation. Although Cavendish and her husband, William, were living in exile in Antwerp during the early 1650s, she found it necessary to travel to England to ask for relief. Not only were their funds depleted by this time, but she had also heard that "my Lords Estate amongst the rest of many more estates, was to be sold, and that the wives of the owners should have an allowance therefrom" (p. 379). As she explains, this report "gave me hopes I should receive a benefit thereby" (p. 379). In the biography of her husband published in 1667, she retells this story, explaining that the wives

and children of banished royalists could submit claims for compensation when confiscated lands were put up for sale by Parliament.³² In both accounts she indicates that her brother, John Lucas, presented the petition on her behalf to the Committee for Compounding, but acknowledges that she attended the session in person. It is only in her autobiography, however, that she expresses particular interest in quelling rumours that she appeared on several occasions in public in connection with the imminent sale of William's estates.³³ In an apparent reply to these unnamed rumours, she declares:

I did not stand as a beggar at the Parliament doore, for I never was at the Parliament-House, nor stood I ever at the doore, as I do know, or can remember, I am sure, not as a Petitioner, neither did I haunt the Committees, for I never was at any, as a Petitioner, *but one in my life* which was called Gold-smith's Hall [emphasis added]. (p. 379)

A series of categorical denials — “did not,” “never was,” “nor stood I ever,” “not as a Petitioner,” “neither did I haunt,” “never was at any” — precede her ultimate admission that she did indeed attend and petition at Goldsmith's Hall, although, as she indicates, she received nothing from the Committee.³⁴ This pattern of denial and admission is repeated again in her attempt to counteract the force of rumour, in which “some reported, I was at the Parliament-House, and at this committee and at that Committee” (p. 380). She is at pains to deny this report, first acknowledging only the initial visit: “as that Committee [at Goldsmith's Hall] was the first, so was it the last, I ever was at as a Petitioner,” but subsequently admitting that “'tis true I went sometimes to Drury-House to inquire how the land was sold, but no other ways” (p. 380). These vacillations between denial and admission qualify the rumours by clarifying and redefining the meaning attached to her attendance at parliamentary offices.

A similar pattern of denial-with-admission surrounds her claim that she socialized rarely while in London and away from her husband, even as she acknowledges in one sentence four different types of social interactions, each of which was repeated on several occasions: “I gave some half a score visits and went with my Lords Brother to hear Musick in one Mr Lawes his House, three or four times, as also some three or four times to Hide Park with my sisters, to take the aire, else I never stirr'd out of my lodgings, unless to see my Brothers, and Sisters” (p. 382). Some of these visits, such as the musical performances

at Henry Lawes's house and the processions around Hyde Park, would have been of a more public nature than she admits. A similar denial-and-admission surrounds rumours of the clothes she wore during these outings, given that "report did dress me in a hundred several fashions: 'tis true when I did dress my self, I did endeavour to do it to my best becoming" (p. 382). The reports themselves, in their emergence as well as their substance, imply that she must have appeared in public while in London. However, her re-articulation of the truth tones down the reports of her dress from "a hundred several fashions" to "my best becoming," as if she recognizes the factual heart of these exaggerations and wishes to extract a nugget of truth by admitting only to what is valid and fair. By engaging with these false reports she can then replay them in her own words, on her own terms, in order to refashion the "truths" they express. Yet the tendentious tone of her rhetoric runs the risk of making her version of events sound as polemical as the rumours she confronts, producing a tension between the presentation of truth and the desire for rhetorical revenge.

However, as Cavendish simultaneously qualifies, corrects, and denies the rumours that circulate around her, truth becomes as negotiable as it is slippery. She is appalled by the power of language to deceive, arguing that "trafficking with idle words bring[s] in false reports, and vain discourse," and is equally vexed by the difficulty in getting control over what linguists call the illocutionary force of language, even as she is herself adept at eliding narrowly circumscribed meanings. She is particularly alarmed at the power of the spoken word, especially when it is women who speak, observing that women circulate rumours about each other, with "words rushing against words, thwarting and crossing each other, and pulling with reproches, striving to throw each other down with disgrace, thinking to advance themselves thereby" (p. 380), as if women's verbal aggression is as injurious as physical aggression. Just as *relazioni* circulate in both oral and written form, so does language in the form of rumour take on a life of its own. Cavendish's autobiography is an attempt to wrest control of the meaning of her life from others and redefine it in her own terms. This emphasis on self-definition, in which she claims to write this "True Relation" about her self, her motivations, and her interests, is what makes this a singular and distinctive example of a *relatione*. This *relatione*'s reporter makes herself the central topic, becoming, as Smith observes of autobiographers in general, a self-historian.³⁵

In her discussion of truth-telling in women's autobiography, however, Smith argues that poststructural interrogations of the fictive nature of historical writing concurrently shape our understanding of the nature of truth in autobiographical writing. It is not merely that the autobiographical subject is seen as a discursively constructed entity, but that there is no essential self to which we have access in order to measure the historical veracity of her story.³⁶ Yet Smith acknowledges that autobiographers strive to meet expectations of truth-telling associated with life writing. In suggesting various strategies of representation frequently used in women's autobiography to address or circumvent such expectations, Smith suggests one model, that of "excessive truth-telling," that resonates with the emphasis Cavendish places on truth in her "True Relation."³⁷ Cavendish draws on the genre of the *relazione* to underwrite her claims for veracity, which are made repeatedly throughout the autobiography, the concept of "truth" invoked explicitly more than a dozen times to characterize her mode of self-representation. These professions of sincerity culminate in her claim that "whatsoever I was addicted to, either in fashions of Cloths, contemplation of Thoughts, actions of Life, they were Lawfull, Honest, Honorable, and Modest, of which I can avouch to the world with a great confidence, because it is a *pure Truth*" [emphasis added] (pp. 387–88). However, through the above-noted series of denials and admissions, truth itself assumes a level of fluidity in the autobiography — more a negotiated discourse than an essential, measurable quality — that belies her claims to be speaking "pure Truth," that is, without rhetorical artifice.

If we are to read Cavendish as she invites those of us in the "after-Ages" to do, to read from posterity, we need to consider her identification of an implied reader who she assumes needs to be told that London "is the Metropolitan City of England" (p. 372), that riding around Antwerp in one's coach is a custom "which we call here a Tour, where all the chief of the Town goe to see and be seen," or that Antwerp itself is "a passage or thorough-fare to most parts [which] causeth many times persons of great quallity to be here, though not as inhabitants, yet to lodge for some short time," by way of explaining to her readers the recreations available to "the effeminate Sex" (pp. 385–86). Her implied reader seems to be one whose temporal and geographical distance precludes such basic social and cultural knowledge. Her explanation of London's status and Antwerp's social significance suggests she addresses not her contemporaries, but those "after-Ages" mentioned in the "Epistle" (p. 363); it is worth noting

that her portrait of Antwerp as a centre of social activity remains historically informative for modern readers of Cavendish, because it makes her life in Antwerp sound less isolated than the portrait of political, social, and psychological exile predominating in recent scholarship on her life and work.³⁸ Cavendish's autobiographical assertions confirm the argument that she is using the generic medium of a "true relation" to reach past the inaccuracies of contemporary reports, in her words, "[not] to delight, but to divulge, not to please the fancy, but to tell the truth" (p. 391). The insistence on truth and the urgency with which she tells her story emerge from a desire to occupy a place in history, and to set the record straight for posterity. "True Relation" is written with a sense of history, because of the way Cavendish weaves political concerns into the story of her own life, as well as through its evocation of a reception in "after-Ages." But of course, the invocation of posterity, which is consistent with the desire for fame she expresses in this and other texts, is in itself a rhetorical technique designed to characterize her detractors as narrow-minded, partisan, or deficient in imagination.³⁹

Pursuing this comparison between the early modern *relazione* and Cavendish's autobiographical narrative has shown the implicit, historical significance of the language of "truth" and "relation" that Cavendish nominates as her primary motivation for telling the story of her own life, but the *relazione* has also proven useful for this analysis as a generic model of politicized narrative that circulates in both oral and written forms with various, sometimes contradictory meanings. Reading this autobiography as a response to reports and rumours circulating in oral discourse reveals a writer deeply aware that her public image can be fostered by forces beyond her control. This "True Relation" is Cavendish's attempt to re-fashion that image as well as intervene in its transmission to an "after-Age." This work is no ordinary instance of self-fashioning, however, for the audience she imagines as more receptive is not composed of her contemporaries, and we now know that this process of self-definition was undertaken in a milieu that would prove hostile to the idea of the self she was attempting to define. In seeking to address a future audience she hopes — perhaps with some measure of naiveté — that future readers will be "more just" to her than her peers, and attempts — perhaps with some measure of audacity — to ensure that she occupies a place in history. Having specified her intended audience in the "Epistle," she again identifies them at the conclusion of "True Relation" as those "after-Ages" who might "mistake, in not know-

ing I was daughter to one Master Lucas of St. John's neer Colchester in Essex, second Wife to the Lord Marquis of Newcastle, for my Lord having had two Wives, I might easily have been mistaken, especially if I should dye, and my Lord Marry again" (p. 391). Part of her strategy in gaining control over a public image whose aspects she finds disturbing is to reassert the private connections through which that image is to be mediated. Having been misunderstood in her own time, she is justifiably worried that subsequent readers might similarly mistake who she was, or even worse, forget her. Her fears of the former have been confirmed in a sense, given the various apocryphal stories about Cavendish that have circulated since her death.⁴⁰ The autobiography serves as an early intervention in this process, even as we recognize the negotiation of truth underway within it. With respect to her fear of being forgotten, it is safe to say there is now little chance of that at this point.

Notes

1. Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 4. I am grateful to my colleague, Sean Lawrence, for his responses to an early draft of this paper. I am much indebted to our editors, Thomas Cohen and Germaine Warkentin, for their warmth and generous support throughout the process of writing and revision.
2. Margaret Cavendish, "An Epistle," in *Natures Pictures Drawn by Fancies Pencil to the Life. Written by the thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London, 1656), Wing N 855, 363. The "Epistle" appears on pages 363–67, just before the autobiography, "A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life," in *Natures Pictures*, pp. 368–91. Throughout my paper, page references to the "Epistle" and "A True Relation" will appear in parentheses in the main body.
3. R. S. White, "Where is Shakespeare's Autobiography?" in *Early Modern Autobiography* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), pp. 176–78; Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," *Modern Language Notes* 94.5 (1979), pp. 919–30; and Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 2.
4. Filippo de Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 57.

5. De Vivo, p. 63.
6. De Vivo, pp. 2, 57–58.
7. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “relation,” 1.b., <http://dictionary.oed.com> (accessed May 15, 2010). The earliest citation in the *OED* for this usage of the term “relation” is as follows: “1560 J. DAUS tr. J. Sleidane *Commentaries* f. cxxv, The kyng of Englande... sent thether his Ambassade,... who in the begynning made his relation.”
8. For this definition see the *Oxford English Dictionary* online, (1.a. s.v. relation), (1.b.), “An instance of relating or narrating something; a narrative, an account, a statement.” This meaning is closely related to the primary definition, but places greater emphasis on the act of narration. It is interesting that another meaning of the term “relation” more often used in contemporary speech as an aspect of *relationships* is enumerated as the second, rather than the primary, level of meaning in the *OED* as “[a]n attribute denoting or concept expressing a connection, correspondence, or contrast between different things; a particular way in which one thing or idea is connected or associated with another or others; a link, a correlation; the fact of being so connected, associated, etc.; connection, association. Freq. with to, between, or with.”
9. Robert Parsons, *A relation of the King of Spaines receiving in Valliodolid, and in the English College of the same towne, in August last part of this yere. 1592* (Antwerp, 1592), STC 19412.5.
10. The full title is *A true relation of the birth of three monsters in the city of Namen in Flanders as also Gods Iudgement vpon an vnnaturall sister of the poore womans, mother of these obortiuie children, whose house was consumed with fire from heauen, and her selfe swallowed into the earth. All which hapned the 16. of December last. 1608* (London, 1609), STC 18347.5.
11. Most of these titles are attributed to Shakespeare, as in *The late, and much admired play, called Pericles, Prince of Tyre With the true relation of the whole historie, aduentures, and fortunes of the said prince... By William Shakespeare* (London, 1609), STC 22334.
12. *A Short and Trve Relation of the life and death of Sir Thomas Wentworth... Who was beheaded on Tower-hill, the 12. of May, 1641. With certaine Caveats to all men, of what degree soever, to take warning by his fall* (London, 1641), Wing S3557A; and *True intelligence from the west: or A true relation of the desperate proceedings of the rebels, and cavaliers gathered together at Angry-Fisherton in Wilt-Sheire... . Written by a gentleman of good quallity in the said town, and published for satisfaction of all those that desire true information* (London, 1647), Wing T2711.

13. An exception is the brief acknowledgment of the emphasis on rumour in this “Epistle” by Line Cottegnies in her essay, “The ‘Native Tongue’ of the ‘Authoress’: The Mythical Structure of Margaret Cavendish’s Autobiographical Narrative,” in *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (Madison, WI: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), pp. 107–8.
14. *Poems, and Fancies: Written By the Right Honourable, the Lady Margaret Countesse of Newcastle* (London, 1653), N869; *Philosophicall fancies. Written by the Right Honourable, the Lady Newcastle* (London, 1653), Wing N865; and *The philosophical and physical opinions written by Her Excellency the Lady Marchionesse of Newcastle* (London, 1655), Wing N863. A fourth collection of brief essays and thoughts on a variety of topics was also published during this period. See *The World’s Olio Written By the Right Honorable, the Lady Margaret Newcastle* (London, 1655), Wing N873.
15. Lynn Hulse, “Cavendish, William, first duke of Newcastle upon Tyne (bap. 1593, d. 1676),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/view/article/4946> (accessed August 12, 2010).
16. John Aubrey, *Aubrey’s Brief Lives*, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick (Jaffrey, NH: Nonpareil, 1999), p. 58.
17. E. I. Carlyle, “Cavendish, Sir Charles (1595?–1654),” rev. Timothy Raylor, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4928> (accessed 13 Aug 2010).
18. Hobbes had been tutor, secretary, and companion to a cousin of William Cavendish, the second earl of Devonshire (who was also named William Cavendish) until the latter’s death in 1628, and was again retained by the Countess of Devonshire as tutor to the third earl until 1637. The *ODNB* entry on Hobbes suggests the historical importance of his friendship with the Newcastle Cavendishes, William and his brother Charles, who “played a key role in awakening Hobbes’s scientific interests,” and who in part prompted Hobbes’s turn to political philosophy in the late 1630s. See Noel Malcolm, “Hobbes, Thomas (1588–1679),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2009, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13400> (accessed September 5, 2010).

19. Aubrey, p. 23. An account of William Cavendish's patronage of and collaboration with Davenant and Flecknoe is discussed in the *ODNB* entry by Hulse, noted above. William is also noted for his patronage of poet and dramatist, Ben Jonson, who died prior to Margaret's marriage. A detailed account of the intellectual culture in the Cavendish home in Antwerp during the 1650s and its influence on Margaret Cavendish is presented by Katie Whitaker in *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. 90–94 and 104–32. In her biography of her husband, Margaret Cavendish extends this portrait of their intellectual and social lives in Antwerp, in which she indicates that all "Persons of Quality" who came to Antwerp paid visits to William, such visitors including the exiled King Charles II as well as his brother, the Duke of York. See *The life of the thrice noble, high and puissant prince William Cavendishe, Duke, Marquess and Earl of Newcastle... written by the thrice noble, illustrious and excellent princess, Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, his wife* (London, 1667), Wing N853, p. 76.
20. Dorothy Osborne, *Letters from Dorothy Osborne to Sir William Temple*, ed. Edward Abbott Parry (London, 1903), pp. 81–82; qtd in Whitaker, p. 156. See also Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Hogarth Press, 1929; rpt. London: Grafton, 1977), p. 60.
21. Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), pp. x and 281.
22. Steven W. May questions the historical validity of the apparent "stigma of print" among aristocratic writers in "Tudor Aristocrats and the Mythical 'Stigma of Print'" in *Renaissance Papers* 11 (1980), pp. 11–18.
23. Woolf's notoriously negative assessment of Cavendish's work and mental state as "a vision of loneliness and riot" is presented in the exceptionally influential *A Room of One's Own*, p. 59.
24. Whitaker, pp. 357–59.
25. The secular tradition of *res gestae* records the writer's public acts and accomplishments as the subject of one's life story. See Sidonie Smith, "'The Ragged Rout of Self': Margaret Cavendish's *True Relation* and the Heroics of Self-Disclosure," in *Early Women Writers: 1600–1720*, ed. Anita Pacheco (London: Longman, 1998), p. 114.
26. Natalie Zemon Davis, "Gender and Genre: Women As Historical Writers, 1400–1820," in *Beyond Their Sex: Learned Women of the European Past*, ed. Patricia H. Labalme (New York, London: New York University Press, 1980), pp. 153–83.

27. Cavendish's talent for merging and creating hybrid generic forms is mentioned frequently in recent scholarship, and addressed in particular throughout the essays collected in *Authorial Conquests*, ed. Cottagnies and Weitz.
28. In their surveys of early modern women's autobiographical writings, Sharon Cadman Seelig and Ramona Wray find Cavendish's decision to publish "True Relation" remarkable, given that most forms of women's life writing in the seventeenth century were not written for publication. See Seelig, *Autobiography and Gender in Early Modern Literature: Reading Women's Lives, 1600–1680* (Cambridge, UK, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 3; and Wray, "Autobiography," *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. Laura Lunger Knoppers (Cambridge, UK, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 198.
29. According to Roger Lockyer, Buckingham's biographer, there were 81 peerages in 1615 when Buckingham began his rise to power as King James I's favourite, yet by the time of Buckingham's death in 1628 this number had risen to 126 extant peerages, an increase of more than 50 per cent in just thirteen years. See Roger Lockyer, *Buckingham: The Life and Political Career of George Villiers, First Duke of Buckingham 1592–1628* (London: Longman, 1981), p. 54.
30. Cavendish, CCXI. *Sociable Letters: Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London, 1664), rpt. as *Sociable Letters*, ed. James Fitzmaurice (Peterborough, ON: Broadview, 2004), especially letters 11, 12, and 56; and *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing-World. Written By the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princesse, The Duchess of Newcastle. Appended to Observations upon Experimental Philosophy. To which is added, The Description of a New Blazing World. Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princesse, The Duchess of Newcastle* (London, 1666), rpt. in *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (London, 1992), pp. 119–225.
31. Cavendish, "An Epistle," p. 363.
32. Cavendish, *Life of... William Cavendish*, p. 71.
33. William Cavendish's estates had been subjected to seizure or "sequestration" several years earlier, but Margaret's petition to the Committee for Compounding with Delinquents was prepared in response to Parliament's recent decision to sell the properties. For details on this process, see Whitaker, pp. 130–31 and 133–34.
34. *The Records of the Committee* state that on Dec. 10, 1651, "Margt., wife of the Earl, petitions for her fifth of her husband's estate, sequestered for delinquency according to the ordinances of Parlt., having no other means of livelihood. Noted as re-

- fused, the Earl being an excepted person, and she married to him since he became a delinquent, so that at the time of the marriage he had no estate." See Richard Welford, ed., *Records of the Committee for Compounding with Delinquent Royalists in Durham and Northumberland During the Civil War Etc. 1643–1660*, The Publications of the Surtees Society, Vol. CXI, (Durham: Andrews and Co., 1905), p. 340.
35. Sidonie Smith, "Construing Truth in Lying Mouths: Truth-telling in Women's Autobiography," in *Women and Autobiography*, ed. Martine Watson Brownley and Allison B. Kimmich (Wilmington, Delaware: SR Books, 1999), p. 34.
 36. Smith, "Construing Truth," pp. 34–35.
 37. Smith, "Construing Truth," pp. 36, 45–46.
 38. See, for example, Anna Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1998); Emma L. E. Rees, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press; New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003); Rees, "Triply Bound: Genre and the Exilic Self" in *Authorial Conquests*, ed. Cottagnies and Weitz, pp. 23–39; and Helen Wilcox, "Selves in Strange Lands: Autobiography and Exile in the Mid-Seventeenth Century," *Early Modern Autobiography: Theories, Genres, Practices*, ed. by Ronald Bedford, Lloyd Davis, and Philippa Kelly (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006), pp. 131–58.
 39. She admits in this autobiography that "my Ambition inclines to vain-glory, for I am very ambitious, yet 'tis neither for Beauty, Wit, Titles, Wealth or Power, but as they are steps to raise me to Fames Tower, which is to live by remembrance in after ages" (389). The topic of fame is ubiquitous in Cavendish's writings, mentioned frequently as an aspiration in prefatory materials and serving as the subject of prose essays and dialogues. Early examples can be found in *Poems, and Fancies* (1653) sig. A3r, sig. A4r, and 53–58; *The World's Olio* (1655) sig. A1v, sig. B1r, sig. B1v, sig. B2r, and 1–3; and *Natures Pictures* (1656) sig. a2v, sig. c1r, and 103.
 40. Whitaker surveys these apocryphal stories in the "Epilogue" to her biography of Cavendish, pp. 347–59.