

All things considered, *Women and Race in Early Modern England* provides a thought-provoking look at race in texts and culture in the early modern period. MacDonald's attention to historical and cultural backdrops for the texts in question especially illuminates her arguments.

Margaret Cavendish. *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*. Ed. Eileen O'Neill. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. xlvii + 287 pp. \$60.00. Review by JAMES FITZMAURICE, NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY.

For the last ten years or so, those who work with early women writers have understood that, in spite of what Dorothy Osborne wrote to William Temple, Margaret Cavendish was not "distracted" and did not belong in Bedlam. This is not to deny that Cavendish was flamboyant in dress or odd in behavior but only to assert that her writing, which was once ridiculed, is now taken seriously. Plays by Cavendish are understood these days as having fascinating, if equivocal, protofeminist elements. Her autobiography is often discussed within the context of women's life writing, and her romances are studied in light of Royalist political theory. Two biographies have appeared in the last five years. She also is studied by historians of science, but, for those who are not well versed in seventeenth-century and classical philosophy, Cavendish's scientific speculation has remained almost impenetrable. Eileen O'Neill's edition of *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666) will go a long way towards making what Cavendish had to say on a variety of scientific subjects understandable for those whose main interests in Cavendish lie elsewhere. Fortunately for those scholars, O'Neill's introduction is lucidly written and manages to treat highly technical philosophical questions without resorting to a great deal of jargon. Historians of science, of course, will be pleased to find that what O'Neill takes to be Cavendish's most important single volume on natural philosophy is once again available in print.

Cavendish often claimed that she did not read the work of others and that instead she generated philosophical understanding out of her own unaided imagination. It is true that because she was a woman she had no access to formal education, and it is also the case that she had no male mentor or correspondent, as had Anne, countess of Conway, in the person of Henry More. Nevertheless, Cavendish did not generate all of her thinking out of her own imagination, and O'Neill does an excellent job of finding the sources of Cavendish's scientific speculation, most notably in Thomas Stanley's *History of Philosophy* (1655–62), but also elsewhere as with Van Helmont's book on chemical vitalism, *Oriatrike, Or, Physick Refined* (1662). In other instances, Cavendish shows at least "second hand knowledge . . . [as with] Cicero's rendering in *De Fato* of the Stoic distinction between 'auxiliary and proximate causes,' as opposed to 'perfect and principal' causes" (xxx). Indeed, O'Neill's project is to situate Cavendish among seventeenth-century and classical philosophers of science.

Although Cavendish began by accepting Lucretian atomism, she soon adopted a view more in line with the Stoics, which was that the universe is continuous and that discrete atoms cannot exist independent of a natural whole. So, too, the impossibility of vacua, which if they existed would deny the continuity of all things. At the same time, Cavendish was a materialist and held that no spirit existed in the universe outside of matter. Matter, then, she classified as inanimate, sensitive, and rational. Matter that one encounters in nature is a mixture of these three types and is self-moving rather than moved by external forces. Its movement is, in addition, sympathetic rather than mechanistic. O'Neill uses the example of a hand throwing a ball to illustrate what Cavendish is trying to say. Cavendish would deny that a hand imparts motion to a ball when the ball is thrown. Rather, the matter in the ball is in sympathy with the matter in the hand and moves itself so as to "pattern out" the hand. Cavendish's early articulation of her system in *Philosophical Fancies* bears considerable resemblance to the system created by Francis Bacon, who argued in favor of "active spiritous matter" and "gross matter" in *Novum Organum*.

O'Neill suggests that Cavendish may have become acquainted with the Stoics while in Antwerp and points out that her house there had once been owned by Peter Paul Rubens, who was involved in a Neostoic circle. Rubens' brother was a follower of Justus Lipsius, a prominent Neostoic. Another group, the Newcastle Circle, more clearly influenced her thinking, and it contained her brother-in-law, Sir Charles Cavendish, Thomas Hobbes, and Kenelm Digby. Cavendish was, according to O'Neill, "one of the few seventeenth-century thinkers . . . to side with Hobbes in espousing a materialist philosophy that denied the existence of incorporeal souls in nature," though he was a mechanist and she was not (xiii).

Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy, itself, is conveniently divided in this edition, as it was in the first, into sections, mostly of a page or two, on clearly demarcated topics such as "Of Congelation or Freezing," and "Of the Universal Medicine." In considering this last topic, Cavendish spends some time being less theoretical than one might suppose for she writes,

But to return to the universal medicine; although I do not believe there is any, nor that all diseases are curable; yet my advice is, that no applications of remedies should be neglected in any diseases whatsoever; because diseases cannot be so perfectly known, but that they may be mistaken; and so even the most experienced physician may be many times deceived, and mistake a curable disease for an incurable; wherefore trials should be made as long as life lasts. (243)

Cavendish shows this practical side from time to time.

O'Neill is perhaps a little coy in her final appraisal of Cavendish as a philosopher of science. O'Neill does make clear that the philosophy is not daft but, apparently, neither is much of it original and it had almost no effect on contemporary philosophers. For O'Neill, Cavendish is most notable as a highly competent woman philosopher, who dared to publish her notebooks. Cavendish scholars may wish that O'Neill had said more about the Newcastle Circle and in particular looked into Cavendish's interactions with Sir Charles Cavendish or Kenelm Digby. Those interactions, however,

may be more the matter of biography than of an introduction to a volume of philosophy.

Richard Terry. *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past: 1660–1781*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. xii + 354 pp. \$72.00. Review by JAMES FITZMAURICE, NORTHERN ARIZONA UNIVERSITY.

Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past asserts that its central project is an examination of the notion of English literature in the long eighteenth century. That notion is neither unambiguous nor uniform, and it lurks behind various labels including “*belles lettres*” and “poesy.” Nevertheless, the idea of English literature that emerges from the book is not altogether unfamiliar. English literature presupposes the selection of a group of valued imaginative texts, including representatives from earlier times. As might be imagined, Richard Terry devotes a good deal of space to canon formation. His approach combines a judicious amount of theory with a good deal of attention paid to what he takes to be important agents influencing the canon: anthologies, biographical dictionaries, and school curricula.

Terry begins by looking at the belief that “literature” was an invention of the “mid- to late eighteenth century” and at the consequence of that belief, that “the application of the term [literature] to writings earlier . . . constitutes an unwarrantable anachronism.” He has in mind, of course, Eagleton’s widely read *Literary Theory*, along with books by others like Alvin Kernan and Douglas Lane Patey. Terry is meticulous in observing the meanings of words at various points in time and often describes semantic shift, so it is no surprise when he asserts that the idea of literature existed within the meanings of other terms earlier than 1750 and that discussions of this idea are not necessarily anachronistic.

Less interesting for me than his arguments with those who theorize literary history broadly is Terry’s dealing, chapter by chapter, with a set of specific topics related to his enterprise. In one chapter, for instance, he offers a close examination of the relationship