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Margaret Cavendish and the Frustration of Genius

Seventeenth-Century Philosopher, Margaret Cavendish was a self-taught woman who wrote numerous plays and poems, biography and autobiography, philosophical essays, and science fiction. However, her work was sometimes thought to be the work of her husband, and male philosophers of the period largely ignored her views. This paper will examine Cavendish's prefaces and other front matter, as well as her comments throughout her works, where she expresses her frustration about her exclusion from formal education and her lack of responses from her contemporaries. I will argue that while she does claim that her lack of education was an important factor in her lack of status, she frequently emphasizes her sex as the main barrier to inclusion. Finally, I will discuss the ways in which Cavendish argues that women are as capable, if not better at certain intellectual pursuits.