ABSTRACT

Anne Conway (1631-1679) fits into standard narratives of seventeenth-century natural philosophy only as a footnote, that rare example of a well-documented educated woman. The focus placed on print publication by the history of science community means that most scholarly work views Conway through her metaphysical treatise, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, which was printed eleven years after her death.

In early modern England, however, print did not carry the same cultural weight as today. Manuscript and letters were not viewed as less important methods of communication. Instead, each mode had its own norms and culture which intertwined in complicated ways. Privileging printed work flattens many aspects of early modern natural philosophy, but especially erases the involvement of women, who participated more freely in manuscript- and letter-based culture.

This leads back to the archive, where Anne Conway's surviving correspondence--much of it published in 1930--provides a wider perspective on her life and work. Via letters, Conway received information on natural history and natural philosophy from as far away as Italy and Constantinople; discussed Descartes, Euclid, and the Kabbala; and orchestrated at least one debate between friends. Careful reading of her correspondence also suggests that Anne Conway's home, Ragley Hall, was the site of an ongoing dialogue about these and similar topics. She continually brought people to live and converse with her at Ragley: men and women, Quakers and Cambridge scholars, relatives and friends of friends.

The ideas of community and the neighborhood have an important place in the historical literature on the early modern period, particularly in relation to women's lives and identities. Bringing this perspective to bear on Anne Conway, I use the term "intellectual neighborhood" to describe the network which Conway created and maintained to gather information about the world as well as people with whom to discuss that information, and to construct a place for herself as a natural philosopher.

Anne Conway's Intellectual Neighborhood

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

But, Madam, I cannot but take your LadyShippe to bee y^e greatest merchant that is this day in England, for here you adventure your Brother into Italy, and there your Husband into Ireland[;] surely they are two of y^e highest price jewells you have, this makes your correspondence too, as great as any, dispatching constantly your letters towards west and east; receiving from either place constant answers . . . .

-- Thomas Baines to Anne Conway, [late 1653?] (BL Add MS 23215 f.20)

THE HISTORY OF ANNE CONWAY

Anne Finch was born on December 14, 1631. At the age of twenty, she married Edward Conway (later 3rd Viscount Conway) on February 11, 1651, and seven years later gave birth to her only child; that child died less than two years later on the fourteenth of October, 1660. Anne Conway died on the 23rd of February in 1679. Throughout her forty-eight years of life, she suffered from "fits"--in modern medical understanding, probably extreme migraine headaches.

These facts are more than we have for many women of Anne Conway's time. They tell one story, and we tell another in the assumptions with which we fill the blank spaces between

birth and marriage, wedding bed and a child-sized coffin, until her final rest beneath a plain stone.

The addition of one fact complicates these initial narratives: in 1690, eleven years after she died, a treatise written by Anne Conway was published in Amsterdam. A preface informs readers that the treatise, written in fragments by "an English Countess, a woman learned beyond her sex" (Conway, 1996:7)--was found after her death in a notebook and translated from English to Latin for publication, "so that the whole world might derive some profit from [it]" (ibid). Entitled *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* in English re-translation (the original manuscript has been lost), it provides a vitalist and monist natural philosophical system. Its existence disrupts the conventional story about early modern women, but that story has remained valuable, and so people have repeatedly misattributed it or passed it off as a remarkable exception to the rule.

The former of these illustrates the extent to which people can convince themselves out of facts in service to a preferred narrative of early modern women's silence. "Burke's *Peerage* attributes [the *Principles*] to her husband" (Hutton, 2004:232), and the anonymity of the first printed edition led to "Heinrich Ritter's assumption that van Helmont[*] was the author rather than the editor of her *Principles*" (Merchant, 1979:268).

Deeming Anne Conway's *Principles* a remarkable exception, on the other hand, frees scholars from having to fully incorporate her example into the wider pattern for early modern

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[*] Francis Mercurius van Helmont (1614-1698), son of Paracelsian alchemist Jan Baptista van Helmont (1579-1644), first met Anne Conway when he consulted on her medical needs in 1670. He lived at her home, Ragley Hall, on and off until she died. Like Anne Conway, he converted to Quakerism; he also brought the Kabbala into Anne Conway's intellectual sphere.

expectations of women's behavior. Instead, they must only explain why she was exceptional, and these accounts typically boil down to the sentiment that she was lucky.

Yet the facts you begin with influence the stories that you tell. If you first encounter the facts listed at the beginning of this chapter, the shock of the *Principles*' existence makes the *Principles* and Anne Conway's intellectual life necessarily exceptional. If, however, your first encounter with Anne Conway comes from Smith College historian Marjorie Hope Nicolson's collection *Conway Letters*--five hundred pages of correspondence, largely to and from Anne Conway, on topics ranging from natural philosophy to natural history, experiment to theory, and Descartes to Copernicus and Quakerism--learning that she had penned a treatise might not be such a surprise.

Nicolson herself came to the subject not from the *Principles* but via Anne Conway's good friend Henry More.[*] Her interest in early modern history led her "through . . . the letters which Henry More, the Cambridge Platonist, wrote to the Lady Anne Conway during the last half of the century . . . to the correspondence of the rest of the family" (Nicolson, 1930:ix). She spent a year tracking down these letters, at the British Museum and the Public Records Office (now the British Library and National Archives) as well as other archives, and transcribed them.

Chief among its benefits for some scholars, the *Conway Letters* established incontrovertibly that Anne Conway had written the *Principles*. However, it also uncovered a vast trove of letters to, from, and about an early modern female intellectual and presented them publicly for study.

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[*] Henry More (1614-1687), one of the Cambridge Platonists--a group of theologians and philosophers--tutored Anne Conway's half-brother John Finch at Cambridge, by whom he was introduced to her in 1650. Their friendship, largely conducted through letters and one of the most important in both their lives, continued until Conway's death.

The quantity of surviving correspondence--along with hints that much has been lost--speaks to the extent to which the letters embody Anne Conway's contact with the external physical world and with the world of ideas. Her "fits" were sometimes so bad she could not leave her bed, and they grew worse over the course of her lifetime, making much travel an impossibility. Through letters, she maintained relationships with friends and family, gathered information about the world, and carried on a near-constant dialogue about the nature and the qualities of the universe. The window they provide onto her life and work also gives us a peek at the environment of her home.

Nicolson's colossal undertaking in making these letters widely available is the giant on whose shoulders scholars stand today to study Anne Conway--as well as an invaluable resource for studying the interactions of gender and natural philosophy in early modern England. Unfortunately, though attention on Anne Conway has increased over the past few decades, the *Conway Letters* mostly plays back-up to the *Principles*' center-stage position, and the exceptional-woman narrative of Anne Conway's life still dominates.

When in the late 1970s and early 1980s the field of feminist history of science began to flourish, Anne Conway was that rarity--a well-documented woman with intellectual pursuits from the fairly distant past--which necessarily attracted attention. Better yet, feminist scholars could draw connections from Anne Conway to Leibniz, a man with an established place in the history of science, to legitimize her place in the field. References in Leibniz's work to the "late Platonist Countess of Conway" (Hutton, 2004:233) definitively established that he knew of Conway; they had a mutual friend in Francis Mercurius van Helmont; and the obvious similarities between their systems, both vitalistic, one-substance metaphysical schema where the

smallest piece was referred to as a "monad," suggested that her work had been an important influence which was looked over in the history of science for misogynistic reasons.

Carolyn Merchant herself wrote the inaugural article in this portion of scholarship on Conway, published one year prior to the publication of *Death of Nature*. Its title, "The Vitalism of Anne Conway: Its Impact on Leibniz's Concept of the Monad," suggests its direction. She concludes that "The influential role that Anne Conway's ideas played in [Leibniz's] decision to use this concept [of the monad] has hitherto not been recognized because of a series of scholarly errors" (Merchant, 1979:268) involving the anonymity and misattribution of authorship. Other scholars, carrying on Anne Conway's torch, have delved further into the detail and implication of her work on its own merits: Steven Schroeder's 2007 article, though misleadingly titled "Anne Conway's Place: A Map of Leibniz", focuses on locating the metaphysical system presented in the *Principles* among those of Democritus, Plato, Descartes, and Henry More.

Features found in Schroeder's and Merchant's work carry over to most examinations of Anne Conway published in journals of philosophy and its history: these investigate the metaphysical system described in Conway's treatise and situate it in relation to those of other (overwhelmingly male) philosophers (Merchant, 1979; Duran, 1989; McRobert, 2000; Schroeder, 2007; arguably Hutton, 2004). This focus seems aimed at legitimizing Anne Conway by placing her in the pantheon of great (male) philosophers. As the history of philosophy overall still subscribes to the Great Man--or occasional exceptional Great Woman--narrative, this may not be surprising, but it distorts Conway's life to focus entirely on the *Principles*.

The history of science does not much better by her. There, work tends to include Conway as a token; she really did theology or philosophy, many authors imply, but due to the lack of experimentalist women in the early modern period, she'll have to do--and there's always

that connection with Leibniz (Hutton, 1997; Watts, 2005; Da Costa, 2006; Watts, 2007). One writer argues that Conway used "religious" content in her treatise as a way to demur from claiming male-centered "scientific" knowledge (Corporaal, 2004).

All of these fail to take into account that theology and experimentalism did not form a dichotomy in the seventeenth century. Instead, both frequently stood under the sign of natural philosophy, along with what we now refer to as philosophy. Pigeonholing Conway as interested in theology, in pre-modern science, or in philosophy relies on disciplinary boundaries not extant in her lifetime.

Where can we find work which does not attempt to fit Anne Conway into these modern categories? She certainly remains an early modern woman, though how we theorize that changes how we may talk about her. The proclivity of early modern women's historians for biography--and for the investigation of social dynamics through individual women's archival remains--makes it somewhat surprising that few references to Conway exist in this strand of academic literature.

Anne Conway also frequently gets lost in the historical literature on early modern women's writing, which tends to exclude questions and examples of natural philosophy. Even when she is included, her work is rarely incorporated in any thorough way. In one of these rare references, Hobby brings Conway up only to bemoan the "narrowness of the constraints that kept this woman confined to her home" (Hobby, 1988:193) and theorize that Conway's intense and debilitating headaches were caused by "repressed female anger and frustration" (ibid). Given that Hobby also gets biographical information about Conway wrong (she never corresponded with Leibniz), it's clear that Conway's presence is largely a gesture.

Examining Anne Conway in her historical and social context as a seventeenth-century woman interested in natural philosophy has remained a fallow field. Sarah Hutton's 2004 intellectual biography, *Anne Conway: A Woman Philosopher*, is the sole scholarly book entirely focused on Conway. Between this work and her 1992 edition of the *Conway Letters* (adding the philosophical letters previously omitted), Hutton is definitively the greatest contributor to the study of Anne Conway since Marjorie Nicolson.

While following the same pattern of other philosophical work on Conway, Hutton orchestrates a far wider range of sources than any other writer to provide context for the *Principles*. Her study even includes other women, although their treatment suggests they are being used as tokens: she raises the names of several women, including Margaret Cavendish[*] and Lady Ranelagh,[†] and then dismisses the possibility of connection with Conway fairly quickly for lack of evidence. As her focus rests on putting the *Principles* in relation to Conway's friends' systems of thought, this is understandable but nevertheless unfortunate, since this focus means that much interesting and valuable information in Hutton's book is passed over quickly or relegated to the footnotes.

Hutton's treatment of Anne Conway leaves other things to be desired, as well. In achieving her stated aim of "widen[ing] interest in [Conway] as a philosopher" (Hutton, 2004:13), she does a huge amount of work and handles most of it with grace and a careful expository hand; but several issues mar this important companion piece to the *Conway Letters*.

[*] Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673) was one of a very few women to openly print works of natural philosophy in the seventeenth century. Her fame in the history of science has been preserved largely on this count and because she was once invited to be present at a Royal Society demonstration.

[†] Katherine Boyle, Viscountess Ranelagh (1615-1691), participated in the Invisible College and the Hartlib Circle, both letter-based natural philosophical networks during the Interregnum (1649-1660), and provided a kind of "salon" in London during this period. She is remembered both for these activities and for her close relationship with her brother Robert Boyle (1627-1691), a major figure in the Invisible College and in the Royal Society, who lived in her house beginning in 1668 and had his laboratory there.

For one, Hutton frequently cannot resist the lure of putting her subject into a modern context: "For someone so grievously afflicted by pain, Anne Conway complains astonishingly little about her suffering," Hutton says, and only after a lengthy paragraph documenting this lack of complaint--and lauding Conway for her restraint--sees fit to add that "Her stance is more understandable in seventeenth-century terms" (Hutton, 2004:31) where medicine was unreliable. While Conway's suffering was no doubt intense, the experience of pain and the expectations surroundings its expression depend on cultural factors and therefore cannot be judged by our standards.

The common elision of "natural philosophy" as an olden-days term for "science" turns up here too, in Hutton's note that "More was interested in Cartesianism as a body of natural philosophy rather than as metaphysics" (Hutton, 2004:43)--as though one could meaningfully separate the two.

As well, Hutton does not distinguish well between modern and early modern ideas of publication, print, and manuscript. She uses the word "published" to refer only to print publication, despite the strong thread of historical scholarship on what Love terms scribal publication (Love, 1993), and assumes that substantial written work was always intended for print, as when she refers to the "delay" in printing Anne Conway's *Principles* after her death (Hutton, 2004:225). This muddies the waters somewhat; in discussing the manuscript treatise among Conway's brother's papers, Hutton says that it was "clearly prepared for publication" (Hutton, 2004:101), leaving readers to wonder for which mode of publication it was prepared.

Lastly, Hutton repeatedly frames her subject as a victim of her society, her gender, and her illness. She is not the only scholar to have done this, but to do so in the midst of such an impressive and important work emphasizes how inappropriate it is. Hutton tells us that "Anne

Conway's collaborative space was confined to what was possible within the social and physical constraints that circumscribed her intellectual activities" (Hutton, 2004:10) and, similarly, that the "isolation forced on her by illness" meant that Conway's pursuit of philosophy was "very much a private and domestic activity" (Hutton, 2004:34). Implicitly, these statements ask: had Anne Conway been born into our modern era, or had she been a man untroubled by headaches or "fitts", what more could she have done?

From my perspective, that question misses the point. Had Anne Conway been born in the 1990s--or even been a man--she would not have been the same person. We cannot "read between the lines of the linguistic norms of social intercourse" (Hutton, 2004:30) to recover Anne Conway's inner self, untouched by society or long illness; to claim that we could risks as deep a misconception as the claim that the content of Anne Conway's natural philosophy is entirely contingent on her experience as a chronically ill woman. "External factors" may have "constrained" (Hutton, 2004:28) Anne Conway's expression, but they also created her--and the pathways through which she constructed her intellectual world. To deny her agency is to do her a grievous disservice.

In this work, I will attempt to restore Anne Conway's agency to her by coming to her story out of the archive, that is, by first reading her letters rather than the *Principles* as constitutive of her work, and moving toward a historical approach to Anne Conway and her life.

HISTORY PROPER

To formulate a more nuanced representation of Anne Conway as an early modern British woman, we must turn to the historical literature for this time period. How historians understand

and write about people in her general historical and social group suggests a new avenue for writing about Anne Conway herself: community.

The major feature of the historical literature on early modern women is its emphasis on "the embeddedness of individuals in their families and communities, and the consequent impossibility of separating identity from family and community in this period" (Dolan, 2010:305). Community itself remains a "contested concept in early modern scholarship" (Walker, 2008:61): its numerous definitions have "no common feature beyond the involvement of people" (Shepard and Withington, 2000:3). Several overlapping, yet distinct definitions and uses of "community" from the early modern women's historical literature include: "denot[ing] sets of organic, hierarchical and consensual social relations with implicitly conservative undertones" (Shepard and Withington, 2000:3), "the converse and critique of modernity in general, and modern concepts of 'society' in particular" (ibid), "evoking a golden age of caring, consensual and participatory relationships, and masking conflict or processes of exclusion" (Tarbin and Broomhall, 2008:4), and making explicit the ways in which early modern communities "were highly stratified and inevitably immured in some degree of conflict" (Walker, 2008:61). The emphasis placed on community by historians also varies, especially when considering the extent to which communal and/or individual identity shaped the early modern English people.

Another concept closely linked with the community is that of the neighborhood, which has a narrower range of definitions. "For women of all classes, the collective entity termed 'the neighbourhood' was made up of those families of roughly equal status who acknowledged reciprocal ties of friendship facilitated by geographical propinquity" (Mendelson, 2008:155). Specifically lower in the social order, "[w]omen turned constantly to their friends and neighbours

for advice or assistance, making the home a social as well as domestic space" (Capp, 2003:51), but this could be said almost equally for noblewomen, who carried out a "round of reciprocal visits" (Mendelson, 2008:156). In one case, the neighborhood "led the vanguard in demonstrating their loyalty" (Mendelson, 2008:163) to a woman in an abusive marriage--exhibiting the agency and power of the female-centered neighborhood.

For most, the neighborhood consisted of "those families whose dwellings were within walking distance in the same village or urban parish" (Mendelson, 2008:155), while other, wealthier women defined a neighborhood by the possibility of a day-trip visit in a carriage. However, sending and receiving letters allowed women to remain in frequent contact with further-flung locations. "Letter writing positioned gentry women at the heart of a whole series of county and national" (Crawford and Gowing, 2000:215), not to mention international, networks--networks like the one which Anne Conway created and scrupulously maintained throughout most of her life.

And while the postal system wasn't anything like fast--it could take months for a letter to reach Anne Conway from her brother John Finch in Constantinople--transportation for physical visits was not much better. For another woman, Anne Dormer, visiting friends in Oxford (12 miles distant) entailed a "long journey [which] prevented her from seeing [them] . . . more than 'once in a year, or twice at most'" (Mendelson, 2008:156). By comparison, for Anne Conway, John Finch's stay in Italy may not have rendered him much less available than a semi-distant neighbor.

Interpreting a network of correspondents as a neighborhood requires alteration of the idea. The lack of physical presence would make the "neighborhood" of letter-writers less effective in immediate material ways, and the slow pace of mail contrasts with the typical day-

trip visit definition of the neighborhood in general. However, the emotional and intellectual weight of the neighborhood can easily be extended into letters.

Viewing Anne Conway in light of this reworked notion of the neighborhood shows that, far from being a victim of her circumstances, she used them to the best advantage. Her correspondence functions as a social and intellectual neighborhood. Letters provided a venue for her to learn, to test ideas, and to work in dialogue with ideas from books that she read--as well as the thoughts of her like-minded friends and family, which relationships she maintained by the same method even when they lived in other countries.

We can back up this hypothesis with a few examples from Anne Conway's life. She received a "seventeenth-century correspondence course in Cartesian philosophy" (Hutton, 2004:36) from Henry More after being introduced to him by Finch via letter. Finch himself, and his life companion Thomas Baines, sent her natural history from Italy and manuscript treatises on topics such as varying theories about the tides. Conway also orchestrated a theological debate between Henry More and the Quaker George Keith through letters. When she converted to Quakerism, Finch sent her a long disquisition against Quaker customs, all the way from Constantinople. The primacy of written correspondence in her life point toward dialogue as the method of her natural philosophy, and (as I discuss further in Chapter Two) as product, too.

Letters, too, brought together the community which lived in Anne Conway's house. Her librarian Mrs. Sarah, her companion Mrs. Foxcroft, and her friend Francis Mercurius van Helmont lived in Conway's home, Ragley Hall, for years. The latter two of these certainly met Anne Conway because of mutual friends' correspondence. A number of others came and went at Ragley, including Henry More, many Quakers (including George Keith), and a large number of medical practitioners. It was only when members of Anne Conway's intellectual neighborhood

were at a distance that letters were produced, and so (sometimes) preserved, but it is through these letters that we catch hints of the localized community at Ragley.

To say that Anne Conway "collected" people whose thoughts intrigued her may be putting it strongly, but creating what some refer to as a "kind of salon in her home" (Findlen, 2002:186) could not happen accidentally. For natural philosophical purposes, in effort to cure her headaches, and to have intellectual conversationalists nearby, Anne Conway welcomed people of varying genders, education levels, and natural philosophical inclinations into her home. This centralized and explicitly domestic community formed the complementary obverse of the intellectual neighborhood as carried out in letters. While also dialogic, it functioned in different ways and along different contours of society.

I wish to open up this concept of the "intellectual neighborhood" in the following chapters. In Chapter Two, I analyze *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* as a dialogic composition intended for manuscript distribution to her friends and explore how that perspective changes how we read both the *Principles* and Anne Conway's archive. Chapter Three explores the layout of the "intellectual neighborhood" of Anne Conway's life through the modes of written and spoken correspondence, while Chapter Four pushes back against those dichotomies and investigates the cross-mode dynamics of Anne Conway's neighborhood with the case study of Henry More. Finally, Chapter Five, which functions as an epilogue, asks what implications this perspective has for the broader study of early modern natural philosophy.

ADDENDUM

It is impossible to identify the amount to which early modern people thought of themselves as individuals, and the extent to which they held instead a strong communal identity.

Mainstream historical scholarship usually errs on the side of the individual: we speak of Anne Conway as an individual who existed, lived, died. On the other end of the spectrum, some scholars involved in the theory of history would instead have us talk about "Anne Conway" as a socially constructed site, regarding that site as a locus of intersecting discourses.

Which is the most accurate or truthful way to tell the story of "Anne Conway"? Nobody can say for certain. However, looking at Anne Conway's community--with her placed squarely in the center--may function as a mild corrective to the individualist scholarly literature about her.

To that end, in this thesis I refer to Anne Conway as an individual who had agency and who brought together like-minded individuals into a community--one disharmonious at times and perhaps by definition, one divided even in method between letters and domesticity, but a community all the same, engaged in mutually beneficial dialogue. Through creating this community, she created her own identity within it as an intellectual woman and a natural philosopher.

CHAPTER TWO

The Most Ancient and Modern, Manuscript Philosophy

When print has preserved a lengthy composition on natural philosophy, it seems natural to historians of philosophy and science (such as Hutton) that that should form the focus of their work. Certainly it requires no particular justification. Print, to modern eyes, has a certain amount of inherent finality and authority; once printed (we tend to assume) a book stands somewhat outside of history, it is culturally important, and while its contents can be set in the cultural milieu of its creation, they do not have to be. That, for one example, the early modern English did not believe these statements about print is not always given sufficient consideration. As a result, fixing attention on archives or correspondence when there are perfectly good printed objects to examine often requires justification.

In general, the academic discipline called history--as opposed to the "histories-of" specific disciplines--established long ago that archival research is a worthy tool in its own right. Yet something about studying the history *of* science, the history *of* philosophy, lends itself to the studying of primarily printed works.

Part of it is, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the focus that remains on the Great Men and occasional Great Women of science and philosophy. Part of it is the source material, particularly for historians focused on the sort of work Anne Conway did. Historians who read volume upon volume of tax records may or may not discover anything about the metaphysical ideals held by those who paid tax, though they will learn much about how those people perform calculations. A historian focusing on complicated ideas about the universe may well choose to look at the longest and fullest documents, and print's ability to preserve long documents cannot be disputed.

Part of it, too, comes from the nature of the field's self-definition: to study the history *of* science, we must first decide what science is, and then--because "science" as a term was only invented in the nineteenth century--we must decide what else to study. Studying "what led to science" requires every scholar to decide for themselves which pieces of the puzzle are important. There is often an implicit question in the history of science: "How does this lead to what we call science today?" The openness of the discipline comes from the open-ended quality of this question, but the wording still implies limitations--which is perhaps one reason why many works of "history of science" end up in history or English departments.

When looking for what became science, the institutions that do science today are often assumed to have done "what-became-science" in the past. These institutions, like the Royal Society, tended to have printed Transactions or Correspondence, which contributes to the print focus that still lingers in the history of science.

Figures such as Lady Ranelagh, whose work was never printed (and for that matter, largely still hasn't been) but who doubtlessly contributed to natural philosophy, escape this set of assumptions. These are few and far between, partly because of the low survival rate for letters.

If a natural philosopher ever appeared in print, however, the history of science generally attends more keenly to the printed work.

This creates a false dichotomy. While the Transactions of the Royal Society may have been printed, they originated in and took the form of letters--letters that its secretary sent and received, or read and passed on. Letters like the ones sent by the Invisible College and the Hartlib Circle during the Interregnum, and like the ones Anne Conway and her friends sent to one another.

The assumption that almost everything important in the past was, has been, or was intended to be printed is patently false, especially when applied to the history of early modern natural philosophy. So is the assumption that the most important facet of writers who contributed directly to "printed natural philosophy" is their appearance in print.

In the early modern period, the line between print and manuscript today did not exist in early modern England, or at least not in the form that we know it. According to Peter Beal, it was "still, essentially, a manuscript culture, for all the growth of the printing press" (Beal, 1998:3). Though manuscript and print functioned in different ways, both were valid modes of producing a text for sale or distribution. "The extent, implications, efficiency, and *normalcy* of scribal publication have remained unreported and unstudied," D.F. McKenzie writes, and "because of that gap in our knowledge, we have perhaps too readily assumed the 'non-publication' of texts . . . simply because there is no printed edition" (McKenzie, 2002:247).

More than that, "manuscripts of poems, dialogues, political, philosophical, legal, and antiquarian discourses and compilations remain largely the prerogative of cultivated gentlemen (and just occasionally of ladies as well)--and are demonstrably more valued than printed books"

(Beal, 1998:30). Manuscripts provided a "sense of privilege at being close to the writer, at being one of a more select community than the amorphous readership of print" (McKenzie, 2002:248).

Sometimes, even a printed book had been distributed first in manuscript. If it had, it probably would have been passed around a group of acquaintances or other interested parties; it might have been copied and re-copied; passages might have been written out into commonplace books, blank books in which early modern people kept pithy sayings or good turns of phrase. Some of the acquaintances might have written to the author themselves, if they knew who had written it, or have composed their own response--to then be sent around by the same method.

If the book in question had been written and intended for manuscript publication, then, the printed object that we now possess may be better read as a fossil. It has been preserved, but in a dead and much-diminished form. *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* is (I claim) a similar item. While probably not circulated in manuscript during Anne Conway's life, the material it contains stems from the ongoing dialogic work being done at Ragley Hall and through various steams of written correspondence, and it may have been intended for such private distribution.

Coming to this conclusion brings us back around to the archive's usefulness. If we only have the bones embedded in rock, we will be pardoned for hypothesizing the musculature and the fur or feathers; but if, as in Anne Conway's case, we have a large quantity of the animal itself (her letters), bending our whole attention to the bones (the *Principles*) is a remarkable and somewhat peculiar decision.

In the rest of this chapter, I will establish the grounds on which I claim that the *Principles* were intended for manuscript publication; contextualize the treatise in her archive by suggesting

a period of composition; and argue further for attention to the archive by examining the meanings and implications of dialectic and dialogue.

TALKING ABOUT MANUSCRIPT

Texts moved from manuscript to print, and vice versa, constantly throughout the early modern period and, as mentioned above, the modes were not as sharply delineated as they are now. Manuscripts appeared in hundred-copy scribal editions; printed books were produced in small numbers for authors hoping for patronage. In this sense, arguing that a particular text "ought to" be considered a manuscript text is a contradiction in terms, especially when taking into account its obvious appearance in print.

However, several factors combine to make the *Principles* fit comfortably in the manuscript category. These chiefly concern the paratext of the *Principles'* earliest printed editions: the 1690 Latin edition, printed in Amsterdam, which forms the basis for the 1996 English translation by Coudert and Corse; and the 1692 edition in English, translated by "J.C." from the 1690 Latin version and published in London, reprinted by Peter Loptson in 1982. Both are ultimately based on the originally printed text, which was translated into Latin by unknown parties but unquestionably prepared for the press by van Helmont--it appeared alongside two of his own works at a time when he needed support for his ideas in the Quaker community.

The most basic reason to consider the *Principles* not intended for print publication comes from the short preface appended to all three: Anne Conway (or rather an "English Countess") "wrote these few chapters for her own use, but in a very small and faint handwriting" (Conway, 1996:7)--J.C. renders the last phrase "in a very dull and small Character" (Conway, 1982:147)--which were found after she died. To the extent that we can trust this preface, which was

probably written by van Helmont, this appears fairly obvious: Anne Conway never intended to show the work to anybody at all.

Another, longer preface has also survived, although it wasn't printed until the 1992 edition. Internal evidence suggests that it was co-written by van Helmont and More, and unlike the printed version, it identifies Anne Conway by name. This one tells the story differently: "Thou art to understand, that they are only Writings abruptly and scatteredly, I may add also obscurely, written . . . towards the latter end of her long and tedious Pains and Sickness; which She never had Opportunity to revise, correct, or perfect" (Conway, 1996:3). Assuming that this preface is more reliable because it goes into more detail about Anne Conway's life and refers to her as "our Friend, this Excellent Lady" (Conway, 1996:5), would be premature; but since the 1690 edition was almost definitely for van Helmont's self-promotion, the printed preface has little authority to stand on.

The adjective "obscurely" in this passage from the longer preface is noteworthy; while it can mean "indistinctly" or "faintly"--pointing towards the printed preface's description of Anne Conway's handwriting--it can also mean "inconspicuously" (OED), and I think that is the reading that we should take. Near the end of her life, Henry More and van Helmont both spent significant amounts of time living at Ragley Hall but, according to these prefaces, neither knew of the *Principles'* existence until they found the notebook after her death.

More's statement that Conway never had "Opportunity to revise, correct, or perfect" the *Principles* (Conway, 1996:3) stands out as well. The chapters may have been written "for her own use" (Conway, 1996:7), but as she never had the chance to fix them, there's no certainty that she planned to keep them for her own edification. That claim, made as we can assume by van Helmont, seems directed more to make a show of Anne Conway's virtuous silence (even though

the *Principles* were printed anonymously): she never intended her work for print; she never even intended to show it to anybody.

That anonymity would not, of course, have been as effective in that time as it is now. The *Principles* "saw print as part of an attempt by Van Helmont to defend his position" on various metaphysical issues to Quakers (Hutton, 2004:228). Given that "Anne Conway's fame as a Quaker convert and learned lady was well known in Quaker circles, and was spread by Quaker missionaries and their associates abroad" (Hutton, 2004:229), even merely name-checking an "English Countess" may well have been enough to bring Anne Conway to mind for the printed *Principles*' audience.

To see this further, however, we must inspect the original Latin title-page. "By means of the title, the book . . . reflected on itself by imagining the social and intellectual spheres to which it contributed and belonged" (Cormack and Mazzio, 2005:49); and the *Principles* are no different. The translated title, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, appears to derive from the 1692 edition; the original Latin title is much longer. Fortunately, Loptson reprints it:

> Principia philosophiae antiquissimae et recentissimae de Deo, Christo & Creatura id est de Spiritu & Materia in genere quorum beneficio resolvi possunt omnia problemata, quae nec per Philosophiam Scholasticum, nec per communem modernam, nec per Cartesianam, Hobbesianam, vel Spinosianam resolvi potuerunt. Opusculum Posthumum E Lingua Anglicana Latinitate donatum, cum Annotationibus ex antiqua Hebraeorum Philosophia desumtis. (Conway, 1982:61)

Along with "Amstelodami 1690", this is all the text reproduced by Loptson. The title-page, of course, does not carry Anne Conway's name--but it says "Opusculum Posthumum . . . donatum," approximately "a little work given posthumously."

As part of a larger volume with two of van Helmont's works, it might not have had more information (such as the printer's name) in any case, but the paucity of title-page information is strikingly similar to the simple title-pages found on scribally-produced manuscripts. Typically, "the manuscript . . . eschews announcing itself; whereas the printed book needs, in a sense, publicly to create its own context, its own social justification, its own clientele" (Beal, 1998:18). The title does all the work of this justification and contextualizing: it is a posthumous work; it is not only philosophy, but about "God, Christ, and Creation; it is about the Spirit and Matter in type [kind?]" and it is placed in the network of similar thinkers by the name-checks to Descartes, Hobbes, and Spinoza--in a negative sense. Yet it is not "a trade advertisement" (Beal, 1998:18) as print title-pages were. It only establishes intellectual content and context.

For early modern women, death could "create the right circumstances for her virtues to be made public without compromising her honour" (Beal, 1998:168), but here Anne Conway is maintained as a private figure even within the printed object of the *Principles*.

In a sense, then, even the original printed edition of the *Principles* fit roughly into the manuscript category. It was directed to a specific audience, which already had foreknowledge of certain aspects (Anne Conway's identity, the controversies in which van Helmont was mired); it did not feature trade advertisements; and it did not stand as a public monument to Anne Conway's virtue, as most posthumous printed works by early modern women do.

In the same way that this blurs the line between print and manuscript, the *Principles*' original manuscript may have existed in the blurry region between manuscript publication and letters.

The gap between scribally-prepared manuscripts and letters in the early modern era was small too--or perhaps non-existent. Poems "in manuscript circulation might be reshaped to serve

particular ends . . . [and] letters . . . were also prone to such appropriation, operating in a manner that does not easily fit a simplistic notion of a two-way epistolary exchange" (Daybell and Hinds, 2010:9). Even if only the recipient read them at their destination, others could be involved: the letter might be written by a secretary, and the influence of the person who signed it could range from word-for-word dictation to simply giving a few major points on which to touch.

Many letters in Anne Conway's correspondence show this confusion between private and public, letters and manuscripts: the Keith and More debate, for example, with Anne Conway acting as mediator and conductor--both as a conduit and as one who directs the performance of a group--or the letters which Finch sends from overseas with a note to copy out their contents and send them to More. The several lengthy letters on Cartesianism from More to Conway that Nicolson declared treatises and excluded from the original *Conway Letters* also fit here.

When Conway's archive breaks the pattern, it is in the direction of secrecy, as when Henry More promises at her request "the keeping of all such letters secret" (Nicolson, 1930:53), in other words, not to copy and send them on to others. In such context, if Anne Conway had written her *Principles* for print publication, it would have been a massive sea-change.

Whatever ends Conway intended for her *Principles*, viewing it as a manuscript composition allows us to contextualize it in her archive. Not only can we see where threads of ideas or possible inspirations originated, but we can also better understand why she may have written it at all. In particular, placing the composition of Anne Conway's *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* in the period 1676-1677--when many of her closest friends were incommunicado--allows us to see the *Principles'* composition as an alternative in the absence of conversation with her "intellectual neighbors."

WHEN DID ANNE CONWAY WRITE HER *PRINCIPLES*?

To begin with, we must establish the plausibility of hypothesizing this time-frame. Marjorie Nicolson and Sarah Hutton have each offered their theories on when the *Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* were composed. Beginning with these gives us some frame of reference to accept or against which to push back.

Nicolson says it "was begun after [Van Helmont's] arrival at Ragley in 1671 . . . [and] the absence of any influence of Quakerism shows clearly that it was laid aside before her interest in that movement began" (Nicolson, 1930:453), i.e., around 1675. That Anne Conway could not have written the fragments which became the *Principles* without van Helmont's influence is easy enough to prove, if only by the footnotes in the printed *Principles*--almost all of which reference kabbalistic learning, supposedly-ancient Jewish knowledge (the kabbalistic texts most popular in early modern Europe were in fact fairly recent). Her "acquaintance with Christian kabbalism [through Henry More] undoubtedly enhanced her receptivity towards genuine Jewish kabbalism which she first encountered when she met Francis Mercury van Helmont" (Hutton, 2004:156). Through van Helmont, she became acquainted with the work of Peganius[*], another kabbalist, to whose work the footnotes in the *Principles* refer.

However, the internal evidence points away from the end limit Nicolson proposes. While no overt reference to Quakerism exist in the text as printed, several explanations can justify that absence, and in fact Quaker influences--particularly the influence of Keith and More's debate on the extension of the soul of Christ--runs through a significant portion of the text.

For one, the paucity of proper nouns in the *Principles* as a whole makes it unsurprising that the word "Quaker" is absent from the text. Descartes' name is raised only in the title (which

was added later) and in the section where she defends her theories against a hypothesized charge of Cartesianism. Yet in a way, Conway's system of the monad--which defines spirit and matter on a continuum (the entirety of which is ultimately made up of one substance)--is always having to define itself in opposition to the theories of Descartes, given their wide popularity and their place in her own introduction to natural philosophy. Similarly, Sarah Hutton has shown how much correspondence exists between Henry More's ideas and the *Principles*, in that "her rejection of dualism was itself entirely consistent with More's own arguments" (Hutton, 2004:92), but More's name appears nowhere. Even the Kabbala is conspicuously absent in the main text: almost all of the overt references to the Kabbala, kabbalistic learning, or even "the Hebrews" occur in footnotes, which were probably added after her death.

As well, while the Quakers became more accepted toward the end of the seventeenth century, they were still regarded as a peculiar bunch both by wider society and by many of Conway's friends and family. Whatever aim the text had, if she intended it to be read by anyone other than herself or van Helmont, omitting the word "Quaker" would probably allow its intended audience to absorb it with less prejudice.

When putting the *Principles* into print, however, why didn't van Helmont add footnotes to the Quaker ideas as well as the kabbalistic ones? He did print it partially as evidence of support for his ideas in the Quaker community, after all--but the intended Quaker audience would not need to be told that these ideas were Quaker ideas, and may not have been so familiar with kabbalistic learning.

Quaker influence in the ideas or the text itself would thoroughly disprove this end date, and indeed, as Hutton says, "[w]hen we set Anne Conway's *Principles* into the context of the

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* "Peganius" was a pseudonym for Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (Nicolson, 1930:318), a kabbalistic writer

Ragley debates, alongside the writings of both Keith and Van Helmont generated by those debates, we can see that all these texts contain similar sets of questions, preferred answers and recurring arguments and doctrines" (Hutton, 2004:211). Based on this, Hutton proposes that Anne Conway composed her *Principles* at some point in the last four years of her life, 1675-1679.

I will not attempt to replicate Hutton's extensive exploration of the similarities here. One example should serve to illustrate the viability of a composition date after 1675, and the Keith-More debate provides both such an example and a beginning to contextualizing the *Principles* in Anne Conway's archive.

Chiefly between December 1675 and February 1675/6 (letters no. 255-259), with letters mentioning the debate as late as April 1677 (letter no. 264), Anne Conway mediated a debate between Henry More and George Keith: each participant sent their letters to her, and she forwarded them on to the other party. This discussion centered on the question of whether Christ's soul had extension (i.e., physical dimension). More thought it did not; Keith, perhaps unsurprisingly for a Quaker, believed that it did, and that Christ's soul extended throughout the world.

While most of the letters do not survive (particularly More and Keith's to each other, and Conway's to either More or Keith), the letters that Henry More sent in the packets to Anne Conway summarize some of his points and his frustration with Keith's theories. And Conway, it seems, was not just a listening ear: More says at one point that she "conceives [Keith's opinions] would faciliate the understanding of many places of Scripture" (Nicolson, 1930:417), while he thinks it creates problems for many more, and in the next letter adds that Conway's "answeres to

the collection you have made of the proofs of his opinion seemes to me very considerable and such as makes his arguments fall short of a proof of what he would assert" (Nicolson, 1930:420).

The *Principles* gives evidence of Anne Conway's thoughts on the matter. In Chapter VII of the *Principles*, she details the characteristics of matter, Christ, and God. One of the "incommunicable attributes of God and Christ," she writes, "is . . . intimate presence" which is given "primarily to God and secondly to Christ . . . and as Christ shares mutability and immutability and eternity and time, he can be said to share spirit and body and consequently place and extension" (Conway, 1996:50). She then links this to the Quaker idea of Christ inside every person, writing that "his body is a different substance from the bodies of all other creatures . . . . [I]t can truly be said that he is intimately present in them, yet is not to be confounded with them" (ibid). It's hard to see why Nicolson missed this clear influence of Quakerism in general, and of the Keith-More debate in particular, but it seems that she did.

This pushes the composition of the *Principles* after 1675, a claim that Sarah Hutton also supports: she says that "[t]he last four years of Anne Conway's life were . . . crucial in the genesis of her philosophical system" (Hutton, 2004:203), and suggests that "In its final form, it was probably produced no more than a couple of years before she died" (Hutton, 2004:220).

The closer that the composition date is pushed to Anne Conway's death, however, the less likely it is that she had the strength to write. As Hutton notes, "[a]lready by 1675 she maintained her correspondence only with the help of a secretary, Charles Coke (or Cook)" (Hutton, 2004:215); the pain came and went, but certainly her health was failing. In late 1678, Anne Conway wrote to her husband that she had "not been able to have my bed made for above these three months" (Nicolson, 1930:448).

Placing the composition of *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* in 1676-1677, then, is at least plausible.

CONTEXTUALIZING THE PRINCIPLES

In order to contextualize this hypothesized composition period, we must reconstruct Anne Conway's correspondence following the More-Keith debate. In the *Conway Letters*, after the letters from More to Conway about his discussion with Keith, there stands one letter from More to Conway about the health of family and friends (Nicolson, 1930:426-7) from March 1676. After this, the next letter in the More and Conway correspondence is from almost a year later: April of 1677.

Sarah Hutton's revised edition includes in the appendices a letter written by Lord Conway which mentions More's presence in the Conway household in June 1676 (Hutton, 1992:534), so the gap in their conversation could not have been quite so long as the letters make it seem. Significantly, though, More's letter of April 3 (Nicolson, 1930:429-430)--to which Nicolson ascribes a year of 1677 on the strength of internal evidence--begins with an apology to Conway for his laxity in correspondence. He had been preparing his "Philosophicall volume" for publication, and "forgott every thing beside" (Nicolson, 1930:429).

Van Helmont, by More's telling, had also been involved with Peganius on the publication of the *Kabbala Denudata*. The next surviving letter from More to Conway, dated by him April 29, 1677, says that he "understood by Mr Cookes [Lord Conway's secretary's] letter that Monsieur Van Helmont was gotne to Sulzback to Mr Knorr, when as I understood by himself that he intended for Holland onely, and that he would be back before the spring" (Nicolson,

1930:431). Van Helmont, then, was gone from Ragley for at least the winter, and probably working with Peganius on the *Kabbala*.

Simultaneously, John Finch was in Constantinople and far less communicable than in previous times. This combination of circumstances means that during this winter, three of Conway's closest friends were all but incommunicado. Even her long-time companion Mrs Foxcroft had left Ragley Hall (Nicolson, 1930:430). Putting the *Principles*' composition in this period also explains why neither van Helmont nor More knew about it: they were both absent, distracted by their own work and distracted by the work it took to put a volume into print.

It suggests a partial motivation, too: that, bereft of the vibrant conversations that usually took place in Ragley Hall or arrived frequently by letter, Anne Conway turned to writing a longer piece that, while it used elements of dialogic form and participated in several threads of ongoing discourse in her life, talked most with itself.

The simple absence of other conversation does not wholly explain the *Principles*' composition, but there is at least one other partial explanation. Namely, if the *Principles* was (as I suggest) created within the manuscript and dialogic tradition of Conway and her intellectual neighbors, looking for personal reasons for some features of the treatise's argument might not be out of the question.

Given the absence of specific nouns such as Quakers and kabbalists within the text, the *Principles* may have been written to make the ideas of these unconventional groups more palatable to her friends by placing them into a framework of natural philosophy. Conway could not have failed to know that her nearest and dearest--with the exception of van Helmont--would fail to understand the appeal of Quakerism, still an extremely unconventional religion. The "long disquisition on the irrationality of the Quakers' speech and manners" (Nicolson, 1930:434)

that Finch sent Conway after her conversion is evidence enough of his disapproval, and brother and sister had been close enough that she could not have been too shocked at his stance. And while More grew to accept the Quakers, he was skeptical of them and their ideas for a long time. One way to make sense of Quakerism for More would be to put it into a frame of natural philosophy--something coherent that resolved problems in his own thought and in that of other thinkers.

Providing a natural-philosophical reasoning for her new Quaker beliefs also fits into Finch and Conway's established relationship. Finch had always sent his sister letters from abroad containing natural history and local color, and at least once sent her a natural-philosophical manuscript treatise in parts (BL Add MS 23215 f. 32-33). Perhaps Conway, going in a different direction with her natural philosophy and religious beliefs--if it is possible to extricate one from the other--sought to repay the favor in communicating new information to him.

Another link between Conway's treatise and Finch comes from a letter from Finch to Conway in the British Library's manuscript collection that has been largely misattributed. This letter (BL Add MS 38855 f. 107) resides in the Hodgkin Papers, almost everywhere identified as a letter written by Finch, but its recipient is listed variously as "---" and, in one spectacular misreading, as Thomas Baines. (As the letter concerns Finch's journey to Constantinople, a journey on which Baines accompanied him, this last attribution makes little sense.)

Further, the letter is addressed to "DD", Finch's common abbreviation for "Dearest Dear", his nickname for his sister. Early on in the text, Finch hopes "this will meet wth some favourable minute that may render its perusall not unacceptable; for I trust in God your accessions admitt of

some intermission" (BL Add MS 38855 f.107)--"accessions" having an archaic definition of "a coming on or attack of illness, emotion, etc" (OED, "accession", definition II).

Accepting that this letter was in fact from Finch to Conway, as Sarah Hutton does (Hutton, 2004:97) offers another tentative connection between Conway's *Principles* and Finch. He writes of the journey to Constantinople, and then of the people in Constantinople: "In this Country as yett I cannot Say y^{t} I have mett wth any Publick determinations y^{t} are repugnant to reason and Justice and I would to God {I speake it with grief[)] the Christians here were governd' as much by reason as the Turkes, but they forgett Our Saviours Doctrine of Peace and Love, render Christian religion ridiculous to [the] Turkes and Jewes" (BL Add MS 38855 f.107).

The Christianized Kabbalistic framework, in which Judaism was basically Christianity with a few tweaks, gave Conway a response to Finch's observation that Turkish people were governed by reason--as well as solving the problem of the splintering of Christianity. Her *Principles* addresses both of these: "If the phrase concerning the three distinct persons were omitted--for it is a stumbling block and offense to Jews, Turks, and other people, has truly no reasonable sense in itself, and is found nowhere in Scripture--then all could easily agree on this [the existence of the Trinity]" (Conway, 1996:10). Framing Christ not as a distinct person but as a mediator, an entity that bridged the gap between God and creation, seemed to Conway far more likely to be accepted by Jewish and Islamic people.

Writing this treatise may have been, in part, intended as a peace offering and an opening of conversation: about Conway's new interests, about Quakerism and Kabbalistic learning. She must have known that telling Finch about Quakerism would not go over well, and while we have no recorded opinion of Finch's on Kabbalism, he was a "devout Protestant" (Hutton, 2004:110) and rarely discusses religion with her. Why not set these new ideas into a treatise--a

continuation of the conversation they had been having for her entire life--and elide the negative connotations associated with "Quakerism" or "the Kabbala" by using their intellectual contributions, not their names, and framing it as a useful tool for Finch's situation?

Nicolson suggests that during this period, "Perhaps for the first time in her life, Anne Conway did not miss his letters" (Nicolson, 1930:434), distracted by her newfound intellectual communities of Quakers and kabbalistic thinkers, and after he sent his screed against Quakers this may be a correct assessment--but we have no way to know. By this point, Conway's "accessions" did not admit of much intermission and, as the preface to her *Principles* says, her ideas were only ever written down in a scattered way: no form that could be easily collated and shipped off to disprove Finch's arguments.

Whether Conway wrote the *Principles* for exactly these reasons, it's impossible to say. In any case, biographical explanations for philosophical content can be pushed too far. However, the lines of similarity between events and concerns in her life during the period 1676-1677 and the general outlines of the *Principles*' argument lends credence to the theory that they were composed during that time.

DIALOGUE AND DIALECTIC

Granting this time-frame for the *Principles*' composition, and so granting this context from the archive, raises other questions. If Anne Conway only wrote the *Principles* when her correspondents were out of regular contact, it suggests two possibilities: her correspondence was a distraction from what we might refer to as "her own work"; or that she preferred to work out natural philosophical questions by writing letters, and only the long absence of such letters could drive her to set ideas out on paper in the style of the *Principles*. I find the latter more credible,

but either is plausible. Viewing it differently, one could see Anne Conway's maintenance of her intellectual neighborhood as her only option for natural philosophical contact, and so she ended up spending her time and energy on that instead of "her own work."

I put the phrase "her own work" in quotation marks because the implication that the *Principles* are Anne Conway's property--or intellectual work--in a way that her letters and conversations weren't places importance on individualism over community (which held different values in the early modern era) along with print over manuscript and speech. It's true that the material of her letters and conversations was typically only printed by her male friends, and implicitly claimed as their own work by putting their names on it, but for that matter, the *Principles* were only printed by van Helmont to support his own metaphysical beliefs--using her reputation as the Quaker English Countess, so esteemed by the community that he did not have to name her to invoke her presence.

As described before, the *Principles* comes in part from the ongoing conversations in Anne Conway's intellectual neighborhood. Those conversations took place in both manuscript and speech--yet another mode of early modern communication. It's important to remember that as manuscript coexisted and coexists with print, orality coexisted and coexists with both manuscript and print (and now digital). As Ong says, "[t]he basic orality of language is permanent" (Ong, 1982:7). In early modern England and today, orality operates in different ways than the "orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print, [or] 'primary orality'" (Ong, 1982:11) did. Other modes' various influences (as well as differences in cultural environment) affect the patterns, but spoken communication did not become less-than manuscript, or less-than print, when those methods were invented. Rather, it changed alongside them.

However, when primacy is placed on printed documents, both manuscript and speech are often devalued. This can be seen in natural philosophy, where written, single-author dialogic works are frequently referred to as "dialectic": the questions and answers of Plato, for example. The presence of a single author makes many of the questions rhetorical, intended to elicit a specific answer which the author wishes to put forth. Yet dialectic and rhetoric were both originally arts of speaking. Plato himself lived in a society that still relied partly on spoken rhetoric: "the beginnings of Greek philosophy were tied in with the restructuring of thought brought about by writing" (Ong, 1982:28).

A through-line can be drawn, more or less, from these ancient authors to Anne Conway--particularly given the attention paid to ancient learning by many early modern natural philosophers. The *Principles* makes use of rhetorical questions frequently--for example, "for in what way could [time] be finite or measured since it has no other beginning than eternity itself?" (Conway, 1996:12). Larson argues that the conversational control granted by letter-writing "is all the more pronounced in the case of an artificial one-sided interchange: 'The imagined dialogue . . . has an advantage of the real conversation: one can manipulate one's partner . . . . The fantasy dialogue thus reveals more about the ventriloquist than the puppet'" (Larson, 2011:140), and this may be true of the *Principles*.

Letter-based or (especially) spoken conversation did not give so much control. Rather than puppets, one has fellow actors, who can deviate from expected responses or scripts. Modes such as letters and speech, however, have a history of being discounted as not entirely legitimate or respectable modes of knowledge creation--especially when used by women. In the early modern era, women's conversation with their neighbors--though it was both often useful in practical ways and functioned as a kind of social glue--was often denigrated as "gossip."

Perhaps partly this insult shows the power which female conversation could deploy, in "policing the boundaries of acceptable behavior" (Capp, 2003:59), but it also displays the extent to which early modern English society placed more importance on what men had to say.

If Anne Conway preferred correspondence to composition of documents like the *Principles*, then, it shows that she did not want a puppet. She wanted fellow actors, and had them; she took center stage, too.

That Conway was the center of her intellectual neighborhood is saying something deeper than just that, though. As Conway herself says in her *Principles* when talking about the spirits which make up each person's soul, the central spirit "is called central because all the other spirits come together in it, just as lines from every part of the circumference meet in the center and go forth from this center" (Conway, 1996:55), and just as other people (and their ideas) met at Ragley Hall in person or through letters. She uses other adjectives for this central spirit, too: it is "central, ruling, or principal" (ibid), as--if I may continue the analogy--Anne Conway was the ruler or the principal spirit of her intellectual neighborhood.

While the form of the neighborhood was not new or original, some aspects of how Anne Conway used it are exceptional. The next two chapters explore the contours of the intellectual neighborhood, through letters and in the home, and otherwise examine facets of this community which Anne Conway created and maintained.

CHAPTER THREE

Anne Conway's (Intellectual) Neighborhood

As discussed in Chapter Two, letters were as close to formal manuscript as the latter was to print in this era. If we take letters, manuscripts produced for sale, and printed works as three distinct but overlapping and intertwined categories--and if we discard the assumption that printed work was the most legitimate form of publication or dissemination of information, as we must in this period--Anne Conway's lifelong correspondence looks less like an attempt to participate on the sidelines of a print-dominated (and male-dominated) natural philosophical realm, and more like a successful means of taking her place in the active center.

And that center was active. Sarah Hutton suggests many intellectual influences for Anne Conway, but she also tries to pinpoint where Anne Conway may have been an intellectual influence on her friends, and where she may have contributed to the works which van Helmont and More put into print as a result of their time at Ragley Hall. Undoubtedly, Anne Conway's ideas had impact in her community while she was alive as much as--or even more than--they had in other communities after her death; she and her friends organized around dialogue, as method

and as product. Discounting this impact would mean discarding the larger part of Anne Conway's life and work.

This tactic was not unknown in the period, as we have seen--even printed works had many markers of dialogue--but Anne Conway is an interesting case study. She dwells on the margins of what we currently see as the main "scientific" community in early modern England in several ways: she does not receive credit for practicing experimental philosophy; her treatise seems, to modern eyes, almost entirely theological in character; and she's female, frequently ill, and often could not leave her home--a far cry from, for example, the male virtuoso traveler and explorer that stereotypically characterizes natural history in this period.

Yet through the connections that make up her intellectual neighborhood, Anne Conway acquired much information about the world and many theories as to why things were the way they were. Both at a distance via letters and in her own home, she created a community that would sustain her intellectually and support her pursuits.

THROUGH LETTERS

As mentioned before, letters were one of Anne Conway's primary intellectual outlets. Through letters, she gained information--information she wanted, information that her friends and relatives thought she would like to have--and participated in overlapping and ongoing conversations.

Two of the most important correspondences of Anne Conway's life were with Henry More, and with her brother John Finch and his partner Thomas Baines. These serve as my case studies for her life in letters. Of course, both of these overlap with the second subject of this chapter, Anne Conway's intellectual network in her home. John Finch and Anne Conway visited

each other when he was in England; Henry More came to Ragley Hall, and Anne Conway went to Cambridge at least once; but all three of these men carried out the greater part of their intellectual relationships with Anne Conway via letters.

HENRY MORE

If there is one thing on which Anne Conway scholars agree, it is the importance and primacy of Anne Conway's correspondence with Henry More, Cambridge Platonist, natural philosopher, and religious thinker. By volume, the surviving Conway-More correspondence certainly beats all of Anne Conway's other letter-based friendships; it also thoroughly tracks Anne Conway's life from before her marriage to after her conversion to Quakerism. Together, they studied natural philosophy in many of its aspects, including Cartesianism, Christian kabbalism, and millenarianism.

Nicolson focuses on More's side of this story: she calls Anne Conway his "greatest personal influence" (Nicolson, 1930:45), their friendship a "Platonic love story" (ibid), and More "at least as memorable in his devotion to Anne Conway as Swift in his love for Stella" (ibid). None of this can be denied. Nor can the fact that he "called her his 'Heroine Pupil'" (Nicolson, 1930:49) or that "when in 1652 he produced his first important prose work, *An Antidote Against Atheism*, he . . . dedicated the work to her, with whom so many of its problems had already been discussed" (ibid).

Yet More provided much for Anne Conway as well, from the "kind of seventeenth-century correspondence course in Cartesian philosophy" (Hutton, 2004:36) that began their exchange of letters, to new ideas for remedies to try, to the More-Keith debate which brought out for testing ideas that Conway found interesting enough to include in her own composition.

It's important to remember, as Hutton emphasizes, that their friendship did not mean they saw eye-to-eye on everything. "More's thought provided a viewing frame" (Hutton, 2004:73) for Anne Conway's early participation in natural philosophy, but she did not agree with all of his arguments. Quite the opposite: "in her religious life . . . and in her philosophy . . . Anne Conway would take a position independent of his. And at times she was directly critical of his theories" (Hutton, 2004:73).

Of course, so was More critical of her theories and ideas--as both Hutton and Nicolson are quick to point out, More and Conway conversed for most of their lives on a fairly equal playing field (to the extent possible for a self-educated noblewoman and a university man of no particular status). In a more general sense, though, without dialogue and mutual critique, neither of them could have developed their ideas so thoroughly or coherently. Their intellectual friendship depended upon both of them bringing their perspectives to each other's thought to inspire new ideas, find weak spots in arguments, and present counter-examples and alternatives.

This point resonates with the early modern historical literature on community: far from a harmonious unity, "division and conflict may be central to the creation of a sense of community, uniting people in debate about its defining values rather than agreement about core ideals" (Tarbin and Broomhall, 2008:4). Some definitions of science rest heavily on the idea of the scientific community's agreement, but as important is their disagreement, whether in modern or early modern times. Division and conflict often leads to greater complexity and understanding.

Understanding this is one of the places where Sarah Hutton's work falls down. She is quite right to observe that "More's earliest letters to Anne Conway show that his method of instruction was to encourage his pupil to evaluate arguments in a series of objections and replies" (Hutton, 2004:46), and that "in the *Principles* she adopts an interrogative approach to argument .

. . . She often makes her points as answers to questions . . . or as anticipated objections" (Hutton, 2004:50). However, confusing correlation and causation, Hutton then attributes "Anne Conway's interrogative stance, her customary presentation of issues in terms of objections and replies . . . [to] the induction to philosophy she received from Henry More" (ibid).

While it's irrefutable that Henry More influenced Anne Conway's intellectual framework, not least by providing her with a thorough grounding in Descartes' theories, Anne Conway uses some of the same techniques even in her first surviving letter--which she wrote approximately a year after Henry More began writing to her, and in the same month that her correspondence with More turned from "a tutorial programme . . . [to] a dialogue of ideas" (Hutton, 2004:74). On an entirely different topic than those about which she wrote to More in that first year, Anne Conway explains to her father-in-law, "Some doubt whether there was any written Learning before the flood but I read of Jude making mention of Enochs Apochrypha which is enough to decide that question . . ." (Nicolson, 1930:37). She doesn't use question marks, but plenty of early modern texts don't; the form of dialogue (or dialectic), question and answer, is there.

True, More's method might just have made a swift impression upon her as the best way to investigate and expound upon natural philosophy. However, given that Anne Conway's father-in-law used similar tactics--"if it be sayd that they did interprete dreames, I say that [Cardamus] teatcheth how to doe it without the helpe of the Devill" (BL Add MS 23213 f.20-24) find it more likely that More provided material for their dialogue and avenues along which it could run--not the idea of dialogic learning itself.

FINCH AND BAINES

John Finch (1626-1682), half-brother to Anne Conway, conducted a life "as cosmopolitan as Anne Conway's was confined" (Hutton, 2004:95)--a statement difficult to deny. He studied at Oxford and Cambridge and received a medical degree in Italy as well as serving as a diplomat in Italy and Turkey. He had links with the Royal Society as early as 1661, the year after its official founding, became a Fellow in 1663 (ibid), and sent information on natural history--and theories about natural philosophy--gathered in his travels back to England.

Finch met his life companion, Thomas Baines (1622/4-1681), at Cambridge. They quickly became inseparable: Baines traveled with Finch to Italy, where he also gained a medical degree in Padua, and thereafter followed him to Constantinople. After Baines' death there, Finch brought his body back to England, to be interred at their shared alma mater of Christ's College, Cambridge.

Marjorie Nicolson best sums up their close connection with the reflection that "[t]heirs was one life, not two" (Nicolson, 1930:463). Their shared life "was very much that of the gentleman scientist, or *virtuoso*" (Hutton, 2004:95): wealthy (admittedly, Finch more than Baines: the Finch family owned the building which is now Kensington Palace), traveled, scholarly--and producing letters and treatises on their findings.

More of Finch's work than Baines' has survived. Like many Fellows of the Royal Society, he prepared and disseminated his work in manuscript. Hutton claims that "[a]lthough for a time he practised as an anatomist, and although he spent much of his life observing the phenomena of nature, Finch never published anything" (Hutton, 2004:100)--but, as noted before, Hutton conceptualizes "publication" as equivalent to production of a printed volume.

The manuscript treatise Finch composed on theories of the tides, discrediting opinions from Galileo to Descartes, does not survive. We only have a description in a letter to Conway,

laying out his thoughts and noting that "For a Demonstrative argum^{t} to move the Flux of the Sea, I shal de[s]payr of unlesse I should make a voyage into all Seas of the Known World, and of the unKnown too they communicating" (BL Add MS 23215 f.32-33).

Finch also sent Conway other people's books, in both print and manuscript. In one letter from Italy, he refers to three books: Descartes' *Principles*, "another booke a Manuscript will doe you no hurt to peruse I can assure you: It was my [Brother Franks] writing at Oxford from our [Tutour] there . . . If you are in yor mathematiques yet when I come to [Seville] I will find you copernicus his systeme of the world but y^{t} [it] will not perhaps be worth ye Price of ye Paper it will take up" (NA SP18/24/9).

Thomas Baines, who produced no surviving manuscript treatises, fades into the background of Hutton's work. It's clear that he carried on correspondence with Anne Conway independently of Finch, but only a few of these letters survive. Unfortunately, no close account of Baines' life and work exists. This makes a certain amount of sense, given that Baines is in some ways similar to Anne Conway: some of his correspondence survives, ripe with investigation into the natural world; he evidently contributed to Anne Conway's, Finch's, Lord Conway's, and (probably) Henry More's investigations; yet he produced no volume of printed work, left no manuscript treatise, and has survived mostly on the coat-tails of John Finch--and Finch on those of More and Conway.

Some of the letters which survive from Baines to Anne Conway begin with excuses for his writing instead of Finch (the messenger was leaving, and Finch was busy or sick or asleep), but some, like a c.1653 letter, do not. "I know you desire an account of those fruits heere wch the season of ye yeare hath hitherto afforded us," he writes, lists several which are worse in Italy than

in England, and then continues--evidently out of personal experience--"I knowe Madam, you presently enquire into ye reasons" (BL Add MS 23215, f.20).

More than most of Anne Conway's surviving correspondence, this letter points toward the fact that much of the correspondence which Anne Conway received conveyed information that she wanted. It was not vague charity toward an ill woman that inspired Baines to write; he was fulfilling a desire that he knew she had for knowledge.

While Baines and Finch did not travel on Anne Conway's command--despite Baines' statement that she "adventure[s]" her relatives into various countries (BL Add MS 23215, f.20)--through their letters, Anne Conway could pursue a form of "travel by proxy". To be the sort of gentleman scientist that Finch and Baines were, one had to be able to travel; but if you could not go far from your home, perhaps you might learn something about natural-historical phenomena in other lands by keeping up a correspondence with these travelers, vicariously participating in their experiences, and integrating them into your own ideas about the world.

Near the end of BL Add MS 23215 f.20, Baines writes, "I forgott to mention one great ornament of there gardens Heere, the orange and lemmon trees; and How they come to growe heere and not with us; but I dare say your owne philosophy can make it out, and [may] doe better than I have done" (ibid). Evidently he ran out of time, paper, or both--he then apologizes for the hasty composition of the letter--but nonetheless it's characteristic of Anne Conway's life in correspondence. He gives her facts and ideas, and attempts to explain them, but in the end it's clear that he is not writing this because he feels himself an expert on the topic. He writes to her because she wants information about Italy, and while she isn't there (and probably couldn't go there), he can and he is.

Similarly, Finch writes to his sister at the end of a discourse on the nourishment of plants: "Lastly It moves me much to be of this opinion what I and Mr Baines observed in passing Mount [Pampion], wee saw a Fir Tree grow out of the Top of a great peice of Rock wch had fallen down nay it grew out of the very Top of the Stone as if it had risen out of the middle of a Table, so y^{t} there was not the least imaginable Earth wch could give it Nourishment" (Add. MS 23215 f.14-15). Observation fueled natural history. The wider range of observations that you could make--for example, a mountain with a tree growing right out of a stone--the more confidence you could have in your theories. However, if you trust your correspondents to notice the appropriate details, you don't have to actually be there to learn something.

Saying that Anne Conway gathered information about the world through her brother and Thomas Baines sounds somewhat like she manipulated them for her own ends, but both Finch and Baines' affection for her is real, as is hers for them. They send her the information that she wants because they love her, and because they want to help her, not because she has ensnared them with her female wiles. However, this sort of network, when taken out of context or taken to the extreme, could be cast as possessing such "evil" and "necessarily feminine" qualities, and has been. Similar concerns echo behind Bernard Capp's argument that the social work of "gossip" was integral to early modern English society, but when scorned, it was cast as an unproductive, tale-telling, exclusively female failing (Capp, 2003).

Many scholars in early modern England acquired knowledge of the natural world via letters and manuscripts. To a large extent Anne Conway merely participated in that world, but her use of the tactic does have different connotations, to modern scholars if not to her contemporaries.

IN THE HOME

Examining the domestic experience of a life for which the only evidence we have is letters is, admittedly, a paradox. The extent to which we can construct Anne Conway's life in her home may necessarily involve smaller claims and more piecemeal arguments. Yet as Sarah Hutton says of female figures in Anne Conway's life, we can "catch glimpses across the broken record of [her] correspondence" (Hutton, 2004:112) of what Ragley Hall must have been like and the ways in which Anne Conway made it the center of her intellectual sphere.

MRS. FOXCROFT

Mrs. Elizabeth Foxcroft lived at Ragley Hall as Anne Conway's companion between 1665 and 1671. Her invisibility in the literature on Anne Conway can be partially justified: the lion's share of our knowledge about Anne Conway comes from her correspondence--and Mrs. Foxcroft, who lived in Anne Conway's home, did not have to write letters to her. As Henry More once noted, "'And my absence from Kensington [where Anne Conway then lived] is the cause why your Ladiship writes, for if I were there, you should not write, but speake'" (Nicolson, 1930:47). Perhaps this is why she only garners passing reference in a list of Anne Conway's "female acquaintances . . . [with] educated interests" (Hutton, 2004:112) in Hutton's work.

However, the fact that Anne Conway did have female acquaintances with educated interests typically receives little notice amid the flurry of male thinkers. Mrs. Foxcroft particularly deserves more attention for her role in bridging the gap between Anne Conway's communities of letters and home. She lived at Ragley for at least four years, and to the extent that we can "catch glimpses across the broken record of Anne Conway's correspondence" (Hutton, 2004:112), she played a major role in Anne Conway's intellectual life during that time.

Mrs. Foxcroft's place in the Ragley Hall household is unclear in some respects. As early as April 1665, More writes that he is "glad Mrs Foxcroft is with you. I hope she will divert you with some confabulations or other" (Nicolson, 1930:235)--"confabulation" in this period meaning "a familiar talk or conversation" (OED). Mrs. Foxcroft introduced the works of Jacob Behmen (a "shoemaker-prophet" (Nicolson, 1930:297)) to Anne Conway and her crowd, one indication that her interests lay in similar directions as Anne Conway's. It is also "quite possible that the original motivator [for Anne Conway's interest in Quakerism] was Elizabeth Foxcroft" (Hutton, 2004:178), and given the impact that the Quakers had on Anne Conway's life and work, this is a significant point.

Evidently Mrs. Foxcroft read Anne Conway's letters to her; More writes to Anne Conway once that he "will write [Edmund Elys' poetry] as legibly as I well can, without putting Mrs Foxcroft to any charges in paying the wrting master for the bettering my hand" (Nicolson, 1930: 301). Even if Mrs. Foxcroft had not previously known the intellectual touchstones of Anne Conway's life--Descartes, More's philosophy, or kabbalism, to name a few--she would quickly have become familiar with them.

As well, many letters to Anne Conway during this period present their service to Mrs. Foxcroft: while this can be dismissed as mere formalism, it's notable that Finch, Baines, and More all habitually send their service to Mrs. Foxcroft, while Lord Conway never does.

Anne Conway's husband had some interests similar to his wife's, but was never immersed in her intellectual environment. In a rare letter from Anne Conway to her husband that mentions learned pursuits, she writes, "If your ambition in the study of Euclid be onely to exceed me, you have reason to be satisfied already, for I have not proceeded one proposition since you left" (Nicolson, 1930:148), suggesting that they had been reading it together before his departure.

However, he frequently erased or downplayed Anne Conway's intellectual pursuits to his friends. One letter from Lord Conway to (probably) Heneage Finch, Anne Conway's eldest half-brother, makes reference to Anne Conway being "fallen very hard to the learning of Greek" (Nicolson, 1930:266). The transcript in the *Conway Letters* does not make note of the fact that, in the original letter, this phrase was crossed out--evidently in a draft stage--to leave only the details of his wife's illness (SP63/346/94).

Mrs. Foxcroft at times seems to have written letters for Anne Conway, too. One letter of More's refers to "both your Ladiship and Mrs Foxcrofts last letter" (Nicolson, 1930:300). Yet Henry More and Mrs. Foxcroft also carried on an independent correspondence: in 1669, More writes to Mrs. Foxcroft expressing sorrow for Anne Conway's illness and then discussing a book recommendation which Mrs. Foxcroft had given him; in letters to Mrs. Foxcroft, he asks her to give his service to Anne Conway, and vice versa. Given the open nature of most letter-writing in the early modern period, it's unsurprising that two people with similar interests in the same household might become almost indistinguishable via written correspondence; but the intertwined exchanges demonstrate how similar Mrs. Foxcroft's interests were to Anne Conway's and Henry More's.

Being Anne Conway's companion, then, included a certain amount of intellectual opportunity: if not first exposure to this community--Mrs. Foxcroft knew both More and Anne Conway at least tangentially before moving into Ragley Hall--then the freedom to pursue these interests while her husband was away in India. Living with Anne Conway gave Elizabeth Foxcroft access to the large library of Ragley Hall, leisure time to read about and explore these topics, and another woman with whom to discuss them.

For Anne Conway, the last of these benefits also applies. It was not the only advantage. Having somebody to read her letters and to update her friends on her health when she was ill would have been extremely convenient. However, later in her life her husband's secretary, Charles Coke, took over some of those duties--acting as scribe for her letters and keeping a log of her last sickness's progression--so they cannot be the only, and probably were not the most important, reasons for having a female companion. As well, Charles Coke mostly wrote letters on Anne Conway's explicit direction, and the details of her last sickness were sent only to her husband--far from the intermingled correspondence and group of shared friends that Anne Conway enjoyed with Mrs. Foxcroft.

It's worth pointing out that exactly the same dynamic could not have occurred between Anne Conway and a man with natural philosophical interests. For one, the role of companion to a noble lady was explicitly gendered female. Van Helmont lived in Ragley Hall for many years, but--for example--he never wrote letters for Anne Conway (although Henry More wrote letters intended for both to read). However, van Helmont and Mrs. Foxcroft's roles in Anne Conway's life were very similar. In this case, perhaps their difference in social status to Anne Conway is of more importance than their gender.

I will explore these connections more fully in the section on van Helmont. For the moment, though, I would like to turn to the role of Mrs. Sarah, Anne Conway's librarian.

MRS. SARAH

Mrs. Sarah has remained a puzzle over the decades since Nicolson's initial publication of the *Conway Letters*. While letters to Anne Conway frequently mention her, her surname never appears, which makes it difficult to figure out who she was. Nicolson suggests that Mrs. Sarah is

"the 'Sarah Bennett' who is mentioned in the *State Papers* as having accompanied Anne Conway to France" (Nicolson, 1930:57) to attempt medical treatment of her headaches, which seems plausible, but "whether she was some connection of Anne Conway's half-brother, Simon Bennett, can only be surmised" (ibid).

Whatever her initial connection with the Finches or Conways, Mrs. Sarah was brought into Anne Conway's circle. Finch refers to Mrs. Sarah as "your library keeper" (Nicolson, 1930:57) in a 1651 letter to Anne Conway, which is itself an incongruous statement which nobody seems to have bothered to check against societal expectations in that time period: Giles Mandelbrote, who co-edited the 1640-1850 volume of the *Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland*, had never heard of a female librarian in this era. Again we see Anne Conway creating opportunities for women of lower status with intellectual interests, in this case to take care of her book collection.

As with Mrs. Foxcroft, Finch and Baines and More send her their service on a regular basis while Lord Conway never mentions her, implying that Mrs. Sarah was not simply a servant hired to dust the books. Especially given that cataloguing systems were rudimentary in this period, knowing something about the topics covered in a library would be necessary to organize it, to perform maintenance, and to find books in it; and, given the pattern of service sent and Anne Conway's tendency to discuss intellectual topics with whoever was willing to listen, Mrs. Sarah was almost definitely a participant in the discussions of natural philosophy that took place at Ragley Hall. Not only was Mrs. Sarah's position as library-keeper an anomaly for the period, then, but she was not restricted to that role. After all, Finch, Baines, and More never sent their service to any other servants in Anne Conway's household.

Sarah Hutton acknowledges that Anne Conway "certainly had contact with intelligent and educated women" (Hutton, 2004:238) in her home, including Mrs. Sarah, Mrs. Foxcroft, and Priscilla Evans (who was a Quaker, and whom Anne Conway hired as a maid in the last few years of her life). Yet the next sentence, to my mind, contradicts that statement: "But [Anne Conway] was dependent on sympathetic men for her contact with the world of ideas" (Hutton, 2004:239).

For me, the point of demonstrating Anne Conway's domestic interactions with these women is to bring out the "world of ideas" that she created within Ragley Hall, without (for most of her life) reference to men. True, her husband's money probably helped to fill her library; true, her father-in-law's, brother's, and male friends' belief in her intellectual capabilities allowed her wider access to intellectual material; but the letters sent back and forth from Cambridge or Italy landed in Anne Conway's control, in her house, which she chose to open to these "intelligent and educated" women.

In short, the female people with whom Anne Conway talked over the material in the letters should not be counted at a lower rate than the male people who sent the letters to her. It all fed into the dialogic process: the letters making their slow way across counties or continents, responding and rebutting and adding-on, as well as the running conversation at Ragley with Mrs. Sarah or Mrs. Foxcroft--or, later, van Helmont, as he filled a similar role for her--into which letters dropped like crumbs into a pool of birds diving for insects or fish, changing the ripples' pattern but not initiating the ripples wholesale.

VAN HELMONT

Francis Mercurius van Helmont does and does not fit into the pattern created by Mrs. Sarah and Mrs. Foxcroft. Like them, he lived at Ragley Hall for a significant portion of time and largely contributed to the domestic dialogue there; like them, he had no place among the English gentry; unlike them, he was male, a frequent international traveler, and left Ragley Hall for long stretches to carry on his own travels. He may have brought in more intellectual influences, such as the Kabbala and Quakerism, than Mrs. Sarah or Mrs. Foxcroft, but without more evidence it's difficult to say--and Mrs. Foxcroft may have had interests in Quakerism before van Helmont appeared on the scene (Hutton, 2004:64n).

Van Helmont also had certain similarities to Anne Conway herself. He was not a part of a university community, as Henry More was, and had no clear intellectual home-base. His natural philosophy seems, like hers, to be mostly conducted through letters. However, he did travel frequently and widely, augmenting his letters with visits to friends in Germany and Hungary (and, of course, England)--something that Anne Conway could not do.

Henry More's awareness that intellectual conversation was ongoing at Ragley Hall became heightened when van Helmont was there. More wanted to be in on the conversations between van Helmont and Anne Conway, and his letters throughout the last decade of Conway's life reflect that. Even more than usual, he expresses his wistful desire to be with them and participate in their conversation.

The degree to which this can be attributed to gender is uncertain. More sees van Helmont's identity as more distinct from Anne Conway's than either of the identities of Mrs. Sarah and Mrs. Foxcroft. However, this largely springs from van Helmont's wider travels and greater intellectual reputation--both of which, of course, are not predicated on his masculinity but are supported by it.

As well, van Helmont came into Conway's life first as a medical practitioner to give advice on her illness; their friendship only developed afterward. In this light, their relationship was unlikely: Conway (and her friends and relations) asked countless people to provide advice or treatment, and of those, almost none stayed in her life after their consultation was over. Given the language barrier--More says in 1670 that van Helmont "can speake French and Italian, but Latin very brokenly" (Nicolson, 1930:323)--the fact that van Helmont almost immediately moved into Ragley Hall speaks to the overwhelming speed of their attachment. Both seem to have recognized a kindred spirit in the other. By 1671, More suggests that "Mr V Helmonts converse and physick" will help Conway (Nicolson, 1930:331), giving intellectual stimulation first billing in their friendship--even before the "physick" for which Conway had first found him.

No correspondence to or from van Helmont exists among the Conway Papers, so like Mrs. Sarah and Mrs. Foxcroft, we must piece together van Helmont's relationship with Anne Conway. The existence of a language barrier makes this lack understandable, and points out how difficult it must have been for Conway and van Helmont (or More and van Helmont) to talk even in person. Here the existence of the intellectual neighborhood notably eased conversation: More consistently writes to Conway, even when van Helmont is at Ragley, and conveys such sentiments as "I am as impatient to see Mounsieur Vanhelmont as he to see me" (Nicolson, 1930:386) via Conway. Perhaps Conway translated More's letters into Latin for van Helmont's hearing.

This connection between the written letter and the spoken conversation leads us back to contemplating the division created in this chapter between the two modes of Anne Conway's neighborhood. In this particular case, can More's words for van Helmont be categorized into the letter (where they appeared and were preserved) or the home (where they were conveyed to their

intended recipient's ears)? No easy answer to the question exists.

Many other phenomena in the intellectual neighborhood do not fit neatly into this dichotomy either. The following chapter explores several of these in greater depth.

CHAPTER FOUR

Breaking Down Dichotomies

Written correspondence can never be completely separated from spoken discourse. As I began to explore in the section on Mrs. Sarah in Chapter Three, the letters and the real-time conversations were two parts of the same dialogic process for Anne Conway and her intellectual neighbors. "The reading of a letter was an integral part of the letter's transaction" (Stewart and Wolfe, 2004:181), and this extends to the discussion of its contents.

The best documentation of these discussions centers on Anne Conway's later years, when several men involved in the print culture of natural philosophy spent significant portions of time at Ragley. Keith, More, and van Helmont put forth "what might be described as a penumbra of texts . . . which supplement the epistolary record" (Hutton, 2004:203). That verb ("supplement") is apt, as the printed texts are the lingering residue of their conversations. "Remarkably," Hutton writes, "the majority of these texts are dialogic in character" (Hutton, 2004:205), but it is not so remarkable given the context of dialogic natural philosophy as discussed earlier. The written or printed version reflecting that is not surprising.

However, the dialogic nature of the printed texts does attest to the ongoing nature of the conversations at Ragley, and to the continuity between it and the worlds of letters and print. Hutton describes Anne Conway as "director of and participant in their debates" (Hutton, 2004:203) ("they" are here Keith, More, and van Helmont) specifically with reference to their presence at Ragley Hall, but it's as accurate a description of her part in the Keith-More debate--which was conducted entirely through letters. Henry More in particular moved easily between these two modes of Anne Conway's intellectual neighborhood. His example provides a useful case study.

TRAVERSING MODES

Henry More, like many of Anne Conway's friends, both wrote to her and saw her in person. The interspersal of his visits with his letters, however, makes his case an unusual one. Finch and Baines visited Anne Conway frequently when they were in the country, but were away for significant portions of time; van Helmont spent most of the last years of her life at Ragley Hall, and does not seem to have carried on correspondence with her while away; Mrs. Foxcroft lived with her for several consecutive years; but Henry More came and went as his own intellectual commitments and Cambridge's schedule allowed, and wrote to her frequently the rest of the time.

The first thing to note is, of course, that Henry More and Anne Conway's friendship was not divided neatly into pieces. They were always themselves, whether communicating through the written or the spoken word. However, like any friendship that begins in one medium and transfers itself to another, there were sometimes oddities of translation. One letter, written after one of More's visits to Anne Conway at Kensington, is troubled with the lack of words in which

to communicate, via letter, the transformation their friendship has undergone in person. "I profess, Madame," he writes, "I never knew what belonged to the sweetness of friendship before I mett with so eminent an example of that virtue . . . . But discretion bids me temper myself, and absteine from venturing too farr into so delicious a theme" (Nicolson, 1930:70-71).

Scholars frequently cite this passage to demonstrate the depth of their affection, and it does that, but it also shows the boundaries on what can be said, and how. While at Kensington, More probably did not ramble on about his emotions. That belongs to the written letter, one which is composed after the shock of separation. It shows both how much joy More took in their in-person interactions and how necessary their correspondence was as a piece of their friendship: it filled gaps between visits, true, but it also permitted them to say things that they could not in person. Despite or because of the "linguistic norms of social intercourse" (Hutton, 2004:30) that pattern their letters, those letters were potentially more free in some ways than the interactions they had at Kensington, Cambridge, or Ragley.

In their correspondence after the death of Anne Conway's son, these dynamics recur in noticeable form. "Her reply to More . . . bespeaks the reaches of experience that social categories and rational discourse do not penetrate" (Hutton, 2004:33) as she tells him that she cannot--or will not--rationalize away her emotions. "It is a letter which both reveals and conceals. But this letter uses the terminology and categories of an acceptable stereotype" (ibid), that of the weak-willed woman. Through the standard norms of phrasing and cliches, Anne Conway and Henry More could communicate their deeply felt emotions.

Their letters also contain natural philosophical content, of course. When More says that "[y]our letters are so far from creating any trouble to me, that they are the best refreshments that I can meet with" (Nicolson, 1930:90-91), he refers to her "spirit as deeply tinctured with

benignity as adorned with true judgement and knowledge" (Nicolson, 1930:91), giving equal weight to Conway's virtues as her intellectual prowess. But the emotional content of their friendship should not be reduced or belittled.

Patronage also characterized their relationship. Anne Conway's status and wealth allowed her to present More with gifts and opportunities. Many of the latter he turned down, not wanting to leave Cambridge (even when internal feuds put him out of favor), but physical presents he seems to have accepted with gratitude. Early on in their friendship, he writes that "I am not at all conscious to myself of any such service I have done your Ladiship, as that you should with so great and unexpected a measure of liberality and generous gratitude requite it as you have in the boxe you have sent me, where you have gone double above any imagination of mine, I being not able to conjecture what was in it till I open'd it" (Nicolson, 1930:91).

This "boxe" probably contained "that so equable liquor you lately broached at Kensington" (Nicolson, 1930:93), but Conway gave him other things as well. Much later, we find proof that Conway bought More experimental equipment: "I . . . am sensible of Monsieur Van Helmonts paines as well as your Ladiships cost," he says, "for all my Hydrostaticall knacks" (Nicolson, 1930:405). It's worth noting that the "knacks" themselves seem to have at least been given at Ragley Hall, from which he has recently departed, but his formal thanks come in the form of a letter. Even something so rooted in their in-person interactions as equipment bought for him for use in her home requires mention in their written correspondence. The events of, feelings within, and objects given in the context of a friendship using both letters and in-person interactions overlap dramatically.

This connection between Anne Conway and experimental philosophy--through More and his "Hydrostaticall knacks"--deserves further exploration. This and other considerations of Anne Conway's intellectual neighborhood demand a wider view of her circumstances and associations.

WIDER VIEWS: SCIENCE BY PROXY

Print attribution carries a lot of weight in decisions about whose participation in experimental philosophy counts, especially when historians of science are the ones drawing the lines. As Steven Shapin writes, Robert Boyle's credit for experimental work and "knowledgeability probably consisted in his capacity to 'make sense' of what was going on in his laboratory" (Shapin, 1994:382) and his status as a gentleman--not in designing or performing the experiments, or even in observing the results. Shapin takes Boyle as the primary shaper of the early modern notion of a gentleman-philosopher. This gentleman-philosopher identity depends heavily on Boyle's ability to appear in print.

Bringing these ideas into Anne Conway's context reveals the lack of recognition she has received as patron to More and van Helmont. Like Boyle, she had physical conditions that prevented her from carrying out experimental work; again like Boyle, she "made sense" of the experiments carried out in her home on equipment she purchased. In the letter following the one in which More thanks her for his "knacks," he reports to her about experiments he's carried out with water again in Cambridge, "as we tryed it so carefully at Ragley" (Nicolson, 1930:406)--implying that she had probably been present for the previous set of experiments, and certainly knew enough about them that he does not have to elaborate on the experimental design or purpose.

Since Anne Conway's main experimental involvement with More and van Helmont occurred when they were living at Ragley Hall, few further references to this work exist in her correspondence. However, the casual nature of More's remarks about it make it plain that her attendance at their experiments is not an extraordinary occurrence, nor simply the right of presence accorded to a patron who has provided funding, but a collaborator's due.

Given her preference for private dialogue, it's hard to see Anne Conway emerging in print as an experimental philosopher, like More or Boyle did. However, the evidence of her correspondence with More--and the fact that necessarily, most of their experiments would have been domestically located and hence less likely to appear in letters--make her engagement with experimental philosophy clear.

Similarly, the travel and natural history by proxy that Anne Conway engaged in through Finch and Baines' letters mirrors that which the Royal Society carried out through its Fellows' missives. The correspondence of Henry Oldenburg, first secretary of the Royal Society, contains "the principal record of the Society's external, and especially its international, relations during the first seventeen years of its existence" (Hunter, 1989:245). Like Conway's archive, this collection shows that, "[q]uite apart from its function in simply exchanging news about recent publications and discoveries, it is apparent again and again . . . how effective the correspondence was in stimulating international research, often on the very topics that Oldenburg reported" (Hunter, 1989:246).

While other members of the Royal Society carried on similar letter-based conversations, Oldenburg emerged as the center of that group, even filling a role like that of Conway in the Keith-More debate by passing letters along to their intended recipients (after, of course, reading

them). Unlike Conway, Oldenburg printed some of these missives in the *Transactions* of the Royal Society, but this too can be thought of as a residue of the conversations.

Re-interpreting Anne Conway's archive, then, we see a much wider scope of intellectual interests than most scholars recognize in her work. These interests include experimental philosophy and natural history--two disciplines traditionally understood to be off-limits for early modern women.

WIDER VIEWS: PRINT AND MANUSCRIPT

The debates and discussions did not emerge at Ragley Hall only after the men showed up. Rather, their presence meant that these conversations got printed and thus have survived. Conversation which is not written down lives on in the heads of its participants, but it dies with them; written conversation which is not printed can be easily lost through natural disaster or a relative disregarding its importance.

More, Keith, and van Helmont all produced printed dialogic works of natural philosophy as a result of their time at Ragley. Van Helmont claimed authorship of "*A Cabbalistical Dialogue* (1684), as well as *Adumbratio kabbalae christianae* (1677), and *Two Hundred Queries concerning the Revolution of Human Souls* (1684)" (Hutton, 2004:204). To these we can add *The way to the city of God . . . written by George Keith in the year 1669* and "the scholia which More added to the Latin translation of his *Opera omnia*" (ibid).

While Hutton proposes that "[t]he dialogic character and context of these texts is suggestive of collective rather than single authorship" (Hutton, 2004:205), the dichotomy of collective or single authorship becomes murky in this situation. If one person wrote down the conversation that three people had, whose name goes on the book? Who is "really" the author?

To what extent does this impose modern norms of authorship onto early modern culture? Hutton says that "it seems right to consider Anne Conway as co-author of at least some of [these texts]" (ibid)--but again, the notion of co-author (or, for that matter, ghostwriter) depends on a number of cultural artifacts not in place in early modern England.

It's clear, though, that these works owe significant debts to Anne Conway's thought and influence. The fact that "[i]n a significant sense, many members of English society in Restoration England could not appear in 'public'" (Iliffe, 1995:175) as authors or creators of texts, including as printers and technicians, also meant that contributions from women like Anne Conway were rarely visible in the print "public." However, the idea of single authorship complicates the situation further: only one name appeared on each book that came out of the Ragley Hall conversations--van Helmont's, or More's, or Keith's--despite the fact that all three men probably contributed to the content of most of these volumes. Perhaps Anne Conway's Quaker maid, who was "'a fair Latin scholar'" (Nicolson, 1930:422), contributed as well. How many names would we need on the spine of every book to give each contributor his or her due?

The question is more or less a red herring; the printed result, while dialogic in form, was no more than the dead impression of their living conversations. Anne Conway's own *Principles* records part of her contribution to this dialogue. Yet this red herring also holds a nugget of truth: that these biases in the printed impressions are what have kept researchers (other than Hutton and Nicolson) from looking toward Anne Conway and her "circle of acquaintances" (Hutton, 2004:112), both male and female, for the origins of these ideas.

CASTING WIDER NETS

According to Jason Scott-Warren, "the most useful concept for thinking about manuscript communities . . . is that of the network" (Scott-Warren, 2000:19). The idea of the "network" implies an open, inter-connected grouping of nodes which are linked in various ways. Anne Conway's intellectual neighborhood shares these traits: each of the participants had many correspondents, not all of whom also knew each other; they formed new friendships via mutual acquaintance (for example, Henry More probably introduced his friend Dr. Worthington's aunt--Mrs. Foxcroft--to Anne Conway); and they shared information even with distant members of the network. Again touching on Henry More, we find that he copied his friend Edmund Elys's poetry to send to Anne Conway (Nicolson, 1930:301), but neither ever hints that Elys and Conway knew one another. The term "neighborhood" alludes sometimes to a self-contained unit, but Anne Conway's intellectual neighborhood was certainly more a somewhat-arbitrarily-defined section of a bustling city than a planned suburb.

Given that many of Anne Conway's friends had many further connections, it's reasonable to ask how far her network extended past what we can see in her surviving letters. By definition these links are impossible to prove, but we can gesture toward some places where looking at her neighborhood as part of a manuscript network expands the scope of information or contacts that she may have possessed.

For one, it's likely that Anne Conway's contact with the Hartlib circle was more extensive than the surviving record shows. Henry More thanks Conway in one letter for "intermediating" between him and "Mrs. Dury" (Nicolson, 1930:158)--that is, Dorothy Durie. Among other things, Mrs. Durie wrote about theological matters and the need for women's education,

participated in the Hartlib circle, and was a close friend of Henry Oldenburg (first secretary of the Royal Society) as well as Lady Ranelagh's aunt.

The Hartlib circle, a "vibrant circle surrounding the intelligencer Samuel Hartlib . . . [f]rom 1642 to 1660 . . . was based in London but solicited, copied and circulated letters from members living all over continental Europe and in the American colonies" (DiMeo, 2009:43-44). Their interests included natural philosophy, along with medicine, religion, and education. Linking Anne Conway to this important letter-based natural philosophical group of the Interregnum places her in a network which included many important figures in early modern natural philosophy--in England, on the Continent, and in the New World. The reference in More's letter locates Conway on the outskirts of this network, but Dorothy Durie's interests are similar enough to Conway's that it's easy to postulate a stronger relationship at least between those two women.

Princess Elizabeth, who frequently turns up in books about women in the early modern history of science for having corresponded with Descartes on matters of natural philosophy, stands as a related example. More's mention of Mrs. Dury is unclear on "whether the letter in question was one sent by the Princess to Lady Conway, or a letter by the Princess that was circulating in the Dury-Hartlib circle" (Hutton, 2004:154). However, the suggestion of contact is there, as is the ever-constant blurring between manuscript and letter. The Hartlib circle was not even the strongest connection between Conway and the Princess: "the key point of contact . . . was Van Helmont, whose links with her [Elizabeth's] family went back as far as 1648" (ibid). In 1671, More again thanks Conway "that you do that honour to my writinges as to send them to the Princesse" and refers to Princess Elizabeth as "Van Helmonts friend" (Nicolson, 1930:337).

We can also draw a connection from Anne Conway to Ralph Cudworth--another of the Cambridge Platonists, and a friend of Henry More. "There are certainly parallels between his philosophy and hers," Hutton says, "[b]ut . . . unless she had access to his manuscripts, his philosophy would not have had any formative impact on hers" (Hutton, 2004:93). Positing the copying of a manuscript, and its transferral through mutual good friend More, does not take much speculative effort. Alternatively, since Conway did visit Cambridge more than once, it's possible that she could have talked to Cudworth himself about his thinking.

Reconstructing more connections pushes farther into the realm of speculation. Anne Conway's father-in-law was good friends with Kenelm Digby*; she certainly read Robert Boyle's books and may have known him.

Conway might also have met Lady Ranelagh at some point. The fact that Anne Conway used Ranelagh's "Pall Mall address . . . as a forwarding point for items being sent to Ragley" (Hutton, 2004:126), often pointed out as an indicator of their friendship, may instead point toward the Conway-More-Boyle link, as Boyle was living at Ranelagh's home during that time. However, since More and Boyle's most public interaction was a fierce debate over experimental results, their friendship may not have been strong enough to introduce Conway to Boyle in that manner. Again, no evidence has survived to prove one way or the other.

If evidence emerged that Conway was more closely associated with the Hartlib circle, that might provide the best proof possible, as the temporal overlap of Anne Conway and Lady Ranelagh's natural philosophical correspondence took place during the Interregnum. While Ranelagh probably participated in discussions of natural philosophy after the Royal Society's

* Kenelm Digby (1603-1665), who was among the second group of Fellows elected to the Royal Society in 1660, investigated and wrote about chemistry and plants.

founding and especially after her brother Robert Boyle moved in with her in the late 1660s, it seems likely that her activity shifted toward her physical neighborhood and away from her own letter-based intellectual network. (In Chapter Five, below, I explore the applicability of the intellectual neighborhood to Ranelagh's work more fully.)

Still, the number of additional links for which we have some modicum of evidence suggests that Anne Conway's network as she experienced it was much larger than any surviving materials indicate. Some would not have been represented via direct letters, either, but manuscript treatises--which she might have sent on to others before her death, or left in the library of Ragley Hall (which has not been preserved).

While the lack of evidence means we can never be sure, it also means that the potential is there for a larger sphere of her knowledge and influence. Ignoring that possibility creates a false impression of her life, restricted by what surviving letters we possess and our ideas of how women could operate intellectually in early modern culture.

TRUTH IN ANNE CONWAY'S WORLD

Given the wider network suggested in the previous section, it's reasonable to ask how Anne Conway and the other members of her neighborhood navigated and evaluated truth-claims.

For the Royal Society and, more broadly, natural philosophical practice in early modern England, Steven Shapin has argued that "[g]entlemanly society greatly valued the means to dissent without disaster and just those institutionalized means were . . . purposefully transferred to a reformed philosophical practice where they constituted solutions to problems of epistemic and moral order" (Shapin, 1994:xxx). Organizing knowledge-making by that schema excludes women, something that Shapin touches on briefly: within this 'gentlemanly' culture, the general

belief was that "[c]ategories of people--women and the vulgar in particular--in whom those faculties [perceptual sensitivity] were poorly developed might therefore be constitutionally prone to undisciplined and inaccurate perceptions" (Shapin, 1994:77).

Meanwhile, outside of the gentlemen's club, he merely hypothesizes that "as servants dealt with servants, and women with women, they were able to warrant their collective reliability and to sort out truthful from untruthful individuals in their midst" (Shapin, 1994:406). For a scholar who brings such considerable intellectual resources to bear on the question of gentlemen and natural philosophy and who fills four hundred pages in the process, it is a remarkably flippant statement. Could we not simply say that "as gentlemen dealt with gentlemen, they were able to warrant their collective reliability?"

In any case, Anne Conway's example breaks these boundaries. She associated with gentlemen as well as women, Quakers of various status, and servants. Other women dealt with various groups as well, to a greater or lesser degree--including Lady Ranelagh, who Shapin dismisses with similar paucity. Gentlemen, and Fellows of the Royal Society, also associated with Anne Conway and Lady Ranelagh. Somehow More found himself capable to laud Conway's "true judgement and knowledge" (Nicolson, 1930:91); somehow all of these groups found ways to validate claims to truth or knowledge, across boundaries of gender, class, and religion.

How, then, did Anne Conway establish trust and truth in her intellectual neighborhood, with these various and sometimes competing perspectives from all sides? Did she simply see gentlemen as more reliable? Did trust "merely" run along the sort of acquaintanceship lines which are usually associated with the Middle Ages?

One vector intriguing to contemplate is that of Quakerism. Late in life, Anne Conway decided to hire only Quaker maidservants, such as the Latin scholar Priscilla Evans. Could a shared religious affiliation have provided the basis for trust between Conway and Evans, or even Conway and George Keith? Along similar lines, kabbalism connects Conway to van Helmont (via More). What would a natural philosophical community formulated along such religious similarities look like? Is Anne Conway's intellectual neighborhood distinct from that of Robert Boyle not in gender of its central figure, but in religious inclination?

A broader study is necessary to answer these questions, but asking them--with an eye toward networks and neighborhoods like Anne Conway's--begins at least to open the door to new studies of natural philosophy's early modern dynamics.

CHAPTER FIVE

Asking New Questions

Widening our gaze to look at early modern English women's participation in natural philosophy overall raises further questions. Can we apply the concept of the "intellectual neighborhood" more widely? Is Anne Conway exceptional simply for having such a neighborhood? Does using the "intellectual neighborhood" as a lens bring certain details more sharply into relief, or suggest new ways to look at other figures?

I argue that we can, and that it does. The question of Anne Conway's exceptionalism may be unanswerable, but the intellectual neighborhood provides a way to look at female early modern English natural philosophers which is centered squarely on those women themselves and the methods they chose to use. Lady Ranelagh and Margaret Cavendish, the two of the three early modern female English natural philosophers typically recognized (along with Conway), present another example of the intellectual neighborhood and a counter-example to the pattern. The intellectual neighborhood can also be used to expand the boundaries of who "counts" as a natural philosopher.

Lady Ranelagh's participation in natural philosophy and medicine has been widely acknowledged. As DiMeo (2009) shows, Ranelagh participated actively in more than one letter-based circle with natural philosophical interests during the Interregnum. After the Restoration of the monarchy and the founding of the Royal Society, the written evidence of her interests in natural philosophy drops off markedly.

However, her brother--Robert Boyle--moved in with her scant years afterward, and other friends of hers with similar interests lived nearby, including Henry Oldenburg. "Though it has been thought that she was only tangentially connected to Boyle's circle of scientific friends, many of her contemporaries noted . . . that they dined with both Boyle and Ranelagh on their visits to the Pall Mall home" (DiMeo, 2009:69), suggesting that Ranelagh's natural philosophical interests remained.

Positing a shift in the center of Lady Ranelagh's natural-philosophical activities from letters to physical proximity (or even that oft-referenced "domestic sphere") is a step others have taken before. Scholars have argued that "though women were excluded from formal academies [such as the Royal Society] they continued preparing medicines, perfecting chymical techniques, debating the latest philosophies, and trying new scientific instruments, all by using the household as a place of learning" (DiMeo, 2009:134) through the end of the seventeenth century. The men around whom groups like the Hartlib circle had emerged went into the academies, and let their letter-based natural philosophy lapse.

On the surface level, this looks much like what happened with Lady Ranelagh, but it is not the whole story. For one, the mode of natural philosophy practiced by Anne Conway and her intellectual neighborhood did not change from the Interregnum to the Restoration, so this transition was neither immediate nor universal. DiMeo argues that "there were also personal

religious reasons why [Ranelagh] turned her attention" away from natural philosophy after the Restoration (DiMeo, 2009:137).

As well, it may just have been easier for Ranelagh to conduct natural philosophy in her home after the Restoration and the Royal Society's inception. Having access through Boyle and Oldenburg to the Royal Society's information and discussions would have been valuable, and she could participate in these conversations in her own home--without worrying about lost letters or slow mail speeds. A switch from the dominant mode of letter-writing to that of discussion and experimentation within the home (or geographic neighborhood) when one's closest intellectual companions lived in the immediate vicinity is more plausible than a sudden and complete change of interests.

What about Margaret Cavendish? She looks like the perfect counter-example to the idea that early modern women could participate in natural philosophy through an intellectual neighborhood, and in some ways she is. Her appearance in print and her presence at a Royal Society demonstration mark her out as directly opposite to Anne Conway in mode and style. Despite her many connections in the wider world of natural philosophy--including the Royal Society--it seems that she never had a community to call her own.

If we assume for the moment that the intellectual neighborhood was an accepted mode of female participation in natural philosophy, though, we may forgo the assumption that Cavendish's isolation was to be expected. "What she obviously missed" is not "the community of scholars to which only men had access", but more generally any group--like Conway's or Ranelagh's--"where her ideas could have been brought to others' attention and been argued, tested, and perhaps sharpened" (Smith, 1982:93). We can ask what specific traits and dynamics in Cavendish's situation or character produced her isolation. Reading her decision to appear in

print as deliberately distancing herself from certain groups--for example, the letter- and manuscript-based networks--grants Cavendish more agency in her isolation. Looking at how her status in society, higher than Conway's or Ranelagh's, may have affected how she could and could not navigate through the social and intellectual world, focuses more on Cavendish's constraints but particularizes them to her situation.

Besides reframing work on acknowledged natural philosophers such as Cavendish and Ranelagh, the concept of the intellectual neighborhood opens up avenues to find other contributors and thinkers whose work has thus far been sidelined. Aphra Behn[*] stands as a good example in this category: despite evidence of her interest in Cartesianism--through her translation of Bernard de Fontenelle's *Plurality of Worlds*--she is rarely discussed as a natural philosopher. Much of this stems from the fact that few of her letters survive, and her printed works were overwhelmingly plays and poetry.

Nonetheless, if we are conducting a survey of female natural philosophers in early modern England, perhaps Behn should take a place among them. True, she disavows having knowledge enough to write her own *Plurality*, but given that scholars routinely question such statements of modesty in printed prefaces written by men, that isn't enough to shake the emphatic proof of her translation. That Cavendish--and many male natural philosophers, including Henry More, Robert Boyle, and Francis Bacon--also produced poetry and work for the stage only throws greater contrast on this problem of pigeonholing.

Without discovering more of Behn's correspondence in somebody's attic, there is no way to sketch the extent of her involvement with natural philosophical communities. Having a

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[*] Behn (c.1640-1689) remains famous as one of the first women to make a living entirely by her pen--in her case, chiefly by writing for the stage.

printed translation attributed to her is lucky enough; the survival rate for manuscript and letters is much lower. Mrs. Foxcroft definitely wrote many more letters than the few that are now in the British Library, and most of those probably contained natural philosophy--but only the few that were filed with Anne Conway's archive now remain.

Which other figures--men or women--have vanished through their letters' destruction, or through the simple fact of their work functioning along spoken dialogic modes rather than through written ones? Some, like Mrs. Sarah, only appear by sheer chance in other people's letters which have been preserved themselves by luck. Much of Anne Conway's correspondence has not survived. What other Mrs. Sarahs might have been lost there? We need to look for more Mrs. Foxcrofts and Mrs Sarahs, more tangential evidence of women's active participation in natural philosophy through letters and manuscript, and we need to ask how widely their own neighborhoods spread.

Only then can we answer the question, Is Anne Conway exceptional? First, too, we must ask: Exceptional how? Anne Conway certainly had more societal advantages than many other women, and more familial advantages too. She created intellectual opportunities for other women by bringing them into her household, a move that also provided her with like-minded companions.

And, maybe most of all, Anne Conway's life and work is a well-preserved example of a mode of knowledge production that was probably more wide-spread. That adjective, "well-preserved," is exceptional in and of itself. Through the past three centuries, as print has dominated natural philosophical (and scientific) endeavors more and more, the evidence of manuscript- and letter-based communities has dwindled. It has been deemed insignificant,

unimportant, and backward. Reclaiming that history--reclaiming Anne Conway's history--adds more than just Anne Conway's name in the list of thinkers.

Looking at early modern natural philosophy from the perspective of the intellectual neighborhood can reorient our view on all of its participants. It's easier to see the dialogic elements of Conway's life and work, since she never put anything into print herself, but other figures and groups used these tools of knowledge-making as well. Henry More's process was the same as Anne Conway's, centering on their conversations and experiments at Ragley; but his diverted into print. Ranelagh and Boyle's processes may not have been so different, either.

More than anything else, this shows the value of looking at such marginal or marginalized thinkers as Conway. Examining how they participated in communal activities despite what we now see as stringent societal restrictions can illuminate new aspects of the community as a whole. The history of science, after all, is not just the story of great men (or great women) or the story of the ones who published first, the ones who printed bigger, who distributed more widely, who got all the credit. It is the story of communities--overlapping, producing discord as often as harmony, arguing and discussing, checking each others' work and supporting each others' endeavors--working toward a wider or greater or deeper understanding of the universe.

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