

# Utopian Negotiation: Aphra Behn and Margaret Cavendish

Oddvar Holmesland



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Aphra Behn (1640-1689) and Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673) were two of the boldest women authors of seventeenthcentury England. They made gestures toward a utopian future involving female emancipation and gender agreement, but depicted a world too complex for simple answers. In the first book-length exploration of the two authors together, Holmesland reevaluates the nature of utopianism in the writings of both, considering a wide range of their literary output. Both writers try to avoid fixed positions, exploring areas in between, seeking mediating solutions through "utopian negotiation." Requiring more equal gender relations, for instance, they challenge patriarchalism; however, while seeking to redefine the heroic code of honor, idealizing gentleness in men, they call for a femininity with heroic resources. Aspiring to such ideals of male-female mutuality, both authors extend this thinking to their view of the body politic. Capacious in scope, this book illuminates the work of two ground-breaking writers, and in doing so, gives them a much deserved, wider audience.

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