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 **First Words and Second Thoughts: Margaret Cavendish, Humphrey Moseley, and "the Book"**

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Each word in the phrase "the history of the book" raises questions, even the definite articles: What does "the" book look like? How is it made? How is it read? Who or what distinguishes "the" book from "a" book? Surely the founding scholars of "the history of the book" did not mean for these definite articles to be read so literally or so archly, and in practice, scholars like Roger Chartier and Roger Darnton privilege study of particular books over generalizations about "the" book.¹ But in discussions of seventeenth-century English literary books these innocuous articles sometimes assume their definitive force. Ben Jonson is said to have (re-)invented the book with his *Workes* (1616), and the significance of later books seems to depend upon their conforming to Jonson's (re-)invention: since Jonson's folio is a monumental collection carefully selected and arranged to enshrine the achievements of a monadic, proprietary author, so, too, will other examples of the book be crafted monuments that either, in the case of posthumous editions, arrange and preserve the authors' remains, or, in the case of books published during their authors' lifetimes, celebrate accomplishments so far and anticipate the future glories of rising poets.² Limited to this understanding of "the" book, accounts of literary books in seventeenth-century England can retrace a familiar line that begins with Jonson's *Workes* and runs through such points as Shakespeare's *First Folio* (1623), Herbert's *The Temple* (1633), Donne's *Poems* (both 1633 and 1635), and Humphrey Moseley's publications of the 1640s and 1650s, especially Milton's *Poems* (1645).³ This linear history of books obviously reaffirms the centrality of canonical authors; major writers, besides being major writers, seem also to have been the agents or the beneficiaries of crucial technological innovations. And although this line of major books has effectively shown that "the" book, as the idiom goes, has a history, it slights the many literary books that seem to have nothing but a **[End Page 101]** history, that seem to exert no influence on modern understandings of books, authorship, and readership.

Margaret Cavendish's debut in print, *Poems, and Fancies* (1653), is one of many such books. Although *Poems, and Fancies* seems to have been remarkable for Cavendish's contemporaries (it is, after all, a folio of secular poems published by an exiled marchioness during the first year of the Protectorate), her book is rarely analyzed in surveys of seventeenth-century books of poetry. Cavendish's first book nevertheless invites such analysis, for its famous prefatory material shapes the book's place among other books published in the mid-seventeenth century. Because prefaces record emerging assumptions about the production, circulation, and proper use of texts, they have long been important archives for theorists and for historians of early modern literature, such as W. W. Greg, whose collection of "Prefaces and Such" to early modern plays reflects a complex variety of transactions among authors, readers, regulatory agents, and stationers.⁴ Roger Chartier has argued more recently that prefatory material reveals authors' and publishers' strategies for securing proper appreciation of their books, so that prefaces offer specific evidence about contemporary writing, publishing, and reading.⁵ Cavendish's first prefaces accordingly register her initial understandings of authorship, readership, and print, and her understandings differ sharply from those presented by that exemplar of "the" book, Humphrey Moseley, the stationer whom Ann Baynes Coiro has justly called "the leading purveyor of high literary culture in the seventeenth century."⁶ Cavendish and Moseley define their concepts of books in prefaces, and the profound differences between their definitions demonstrate that, however teleological twentieth-century accounts may become, the book was still under active negotiation almost fifty years after Jonson is said to have (re-)invented it. This active negotiation complicates sweeping claims about "the" book, and indeed, *Poems, and Fancies* defies critical and historiographic...

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