SCIENCE, POLITICS AND UTOPIA IN MARGARET CAVENDISH'S WORKS

Arzu ÇEVİRGEN

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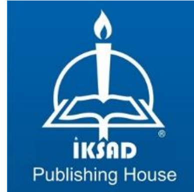

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INTRODUCTION

> Then let us have our Libertie againe,
> And challendge to our selves no Sov'raigntie;
> You came not in the world without our paine,
> Make that a barre against your crueltie:
> Your fault beeing greater, why should you disdaine
> Our beeing your equals, free from tyranny?
> If one weake woman simply did offend,
> This sinne of yours, hath no excuse, nor end.
>
> - - Aemilia Lanyer, "Eve's Apology"

Aemilia Lanyer, with these lines, draws attention to the necessity of abolishing the gender hierarchy in every sphere of life. Only by the empowerment of women can they overcome male oppression and achieve equal rights with men in all aspects of life, including art, education, science, and politics. However, the hierarchical structure of the seventeenth-century England continued to exclude women from social, intellectual, and political spheres, so suppressing their self-expression and public speech. Margaret Cavendish (1623–1673) had great determination to create her literary works in such an environment characterised by male-dominated systems and cultural norms. Despite the limitations and biases of her era, she became a highly productive writer who challenged traditional literary and socio-cultural standards by venturing into a wide range of genres, including poetry, drama, and utopian literature. Within this restrictive atmosphere, Cavendish realised that she had no choice other than expressing her opinions through literature. Accordingly, the aim of this book is to examine how as a woman writer, she presents her accomplishments in several domains

such as science, literature, philosophy, and politics through her literary works. In line with the main purpose of the book, the introductory part will concentrate on the condition of women in the seventeenth century to understand Cavendish's contributions to the male-dominated scientific, political and literary world.

Throughout centuries, women have been imprisoned in the domestic sphere with the household responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, and raising children, which has made them subservient to men. During the seventeenth century, women's social role, which was determined by patriarchal laws and the Church, was tied to principles such as chastity, silence and obedience. Women were expected to behave in accordance with the idealised Christian qualities, including "wisdom, piety, humility, meekness, love, constancy, charity, good household government and godly devotion" (Trill 33). Furthermore, their social roles were designated as obedient daughter, submissive wife and good mother. A woman's status, and even her name were determined by the man with whom she had a relationship through birth or marriage. Thus, during the seventeenth century, marriage held significant value in relation to its impact on women's social status. Thomas Edgar, the compiler of the book *The Lawes Resolutions of Women's Rights* (1632), which is regarded as the first book in English that brings together laws concerning women's rights, argues that

> [i]t is true, that Man and Wife are one person, but understand in what manner. When a small brooke or little river incorporateth with Rhodanus, Humber, or the Thames, the poore Rivulet loseth her name, it is carried and recarried with the new associate, it beareth no sway, it possesseth nothing during coverture. A woman as soone as she is married is called covert, in Latine nupta, that is,

> vailed, as it were, clouded and over-shadowed, she hath lost her streame. I may more truely farre away say to a married woman, her new selfe is her superior, her companion, her master. (124-25)

As it is seen in this book, which draws attention to the socially accepted roles of women in the seventeenth century, women lived in the shadow of their fathers before marriage, and then they were subordinate to their husbands who had a dominant position within the institution of marriage as well. As pointed out by Trill, "as a result of their association with Eve, women were perceived to be inherently unruly and intemperate and were aligned metaphorically with the 'body,' which required the guidance of the 'head' (that is, father or husband) in order to be kept in check" (31). In the seventeenth century, the principles shared by social norms and Christianity dictated that women must be subservient. These imperatives had negative effects on women's social standing as they endorsed female subordination.

However, women's social class determined their rights and, to a certain degree, granted them freedom in relation to their educational opportunities. Barrett asserts that in the seventeenth century, education was exclusively available to women who were born into educated families, whereas individuals from the working class, regardless of gender, were denied access to education (7). The influence of Humanism, which originated in the fourteenth-century Italy, was also evident among the educated classes in early modern England. Smith explains that it was limited to universities, which excluded women, and it was primarily applied to family administration and public office, which were not considered women's responsibilities (10). The objective of

humanist education, therefore, was to provide males with guidance regarding their obligations towards God, family, and nation.

Moreover, Renaissance humanism was closely connected to the professional life of a gentleman, since education shaped his ideals and guided his actions as the leader of a household, owner of a local political or legal position, or part of the royal administration (Smith 11). The relationship between humanist education and public duty flourished during the 1630s. Yet still, women did not find a place in such male-oriented educational programme as it specifically trained men for public positions. As Clare suggests, regarding the role of women, male humanists like Vives, Erasmus, Thomas More, Thomas Elyot, and Roger Ascham held progressive beliefs about the education of women, particularly noblewomen; however, the purpose of female education was seen as limited to personal development rather than the acquisition of formal abilities (37). During the seventeenth century, the idea of providing women with a completely equal education was dismissed since it would pose a danger to the dominant power of men (D'Monté and Pohl, "Introduction" 10).

Accordingly, in the seventeenth century, grammar schools were only available to boys. At these educational institutions, male students acquired a comprehensive understanding of classical subjects, with a particular focus on Latin. Additionally, they occasionally received training in Greek and Hebrew. The sons of the aristocracy and gentry either enrolled in these grammar schools or received education from private tutors so they obtained higher education at a university whereas the daughters of the upper class never had equal educational

opportunities. For instance, prominent noblewomen like Margaret Cavendish and Ann Fanshawe received their education in the confines of their own homes, under the teaching of their mothers. In addition to grammar schools, there were also "contemporary dame schools and boarding schools" special for women that focused on teaching reading, writing, and practical skills related to "motherhood and housewifery" (D'Monté and Pohl, "Introduction" 9). Women's education, indeed, was primarily associated with their responsibilities as mothers and wives, and was deemed acceptable only if it served the benefit of the family and society. The daughters of the gentry, like Sarah Davy, were registered in these types of educational institutions. Katherine Philips, a woman of noble birth, also received her initial education at home before being enrolled in Mrs. Salmon's school. According to Hobby, these institutions prioritised teaching girls the skills such as singing, dancing, needlework, and French, rather than focusing on the study of classical authors, which was the main focus of education for middle-class boys (*Virtue* 192).

Due to male dominance in the field of education, women were systematically excluded from the literary world, too. Only women of aristocratic and educated backgrounds, who had privileges due to their social standing, were able to engage in literary production. Nevertheless, men disapproved of women's writing because they held the belief that women were subordinate, possessed limited knowledge, and lacked self-control (Crawford 163). Men maintained that women, due to their limited access to education and perceived intellectual abilities, were incapable of being both women and writers, especially poets. As Pearson asserts, if women were not motivated to actively engage in reading or writing,

they were instead encouraged to serve as muses and inspire male poets, or were regarded as "passive texts to be read" (84). Due to such negative comments on women's ability to write, poetic creativity had been ascribed to male writers.

Moreover, the concept of authority (*auctoritas*), a crucial factor causing the limited production of literary works by women compared to men, has traditionally been attributed to males rather than women. Barratt states that "[t]he supreme and highest *auctor* (the Latin word from which 'author' ultimately derives), the creator of the universe, the First Cause, was God Himself who in the Middle Ages was indisputably male" (5). For that reason, authorship has been attributed for many centuries to male poets, and women have been disregarded and excluded from the literary world. According to Wynne-Davies, it was very challenging for a woman to separate herself from her perceived position of inferiority within the dominant worldview, as the term "authorship" was closely associated with male "authority" (18). Therefore, the belief that authority and authorship were not compatible with femininity was the reason why women had limited educational opportunities and why there were fewer books written by women (Barratt 4).

Another obstacle to women's writing in the seventeenth century was their position in the public and private spheres. According to Sharrock, writing was a way for individuals to express themselves publicly (109). Therefore, for women who were confined to the conventional role of being wives and mothers, writing could be risky since it challenged social norms and expectations. Graham argues that "[w]riting the self for such women," was "a matter of negotiating,

exploiting or denying a whole range of social and discursive determinants" (217). Thus, women in the seventeenth century were particularly restricted from speaking publicly or publishing their work. As Pearson suggests, "[t]he woman writer was often depicted as a whore because of her intrusion into a public sphere and her control of the pen, a metaphorical penis" (88). When writing was perceived in such sexual context, women, who were traditionally expected to display modesty, were accused of impropriety, resulting in the ruin of their family's reputation.

However, throughout centuries, women writers have presented diverse justifications for writing and have employed multiple strategies to both produce and publish their works. As Pearson puts forward, literacy can be seen as a domain associated with women, governed by the goddess Athena, where authority is held by symbolic female figures, and access is granted by female Muses (84). Women, at first, frequently employed this conventional symbolism to advocate their own ability to engage in literature as both authors and readers (Pearson 84). Later, they tried to validate their writing by defining it as virtuous. Female mystics during the medieval period, for instance, believed that their connection to God enabled them to receive divine instructions to write, and their writings served as evidence of their obedience and modesty in fulfilling God's will to write. Margaret Cavendish, who provided another justification for identifying writing as virtuous, thinks that it is better for her to engage in writing rather than indulging in gossip (*PF,* "To All Noble and Worthy Ladies" 62).

Women writers realise that their subordinate position in writing is also related to the language used by male writers because the exploitation of women starts with language that is controlled by men. As Saul, Diaz-Leon and Hesni argue, men possess significant power through their capacity to control language, as “the maleness of language contributes to the invisibility of women” (par. 23). In order to express themselves, women need to destroy the dominant influence of men on language. As the language has been encoding male privilege, “oppressor’s language,” called by Rich, is inadequate to present women’s experience (151). Women should have access to language used by male writers in order to change the representations of authority that oppressed and portrayed them as submissive. It envisions the notion of *Écriture féminine*, also known as “women’s writing,” which was introduced by French feminist and literary theorist Hélène Cixous in her 1975 essay “The Laugh of the Medusa.” In her essay, she asserts that “woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing” (253). Otherwise, men would continue to classify women as silent and “invisible” individuals in the “asylum corridor” (Morgan 46). To avoid being labelled as such, women writers, also referred to as “The Thieves of Language or Female Prometheuses” by Claudine Hermann in 1979, have consistently attempted to steal language throughout history (qtd. in Ostriker 69). In order to develop a clear definition of women’s roles, it is necessary to achieve equality between the languages used by female and male writers. Women thus need to embrace a new attitude to assert their voices, express their talents, and demonstrate their capacity for achievement. Significantly, as argued below, Cavendish displays her ability to write in

various fields, science in particular, through a choice of language associated with women's everyday experiences.

During the seventeenth century, women writers employed another remarkable strategy, described by Hobby as "making a virtue of necessity," to resist the demands of men who wanted to control them (*Virtue* 8). They chose genres deemed appropriate for female authors and focused on subjects traditionally associated with women's domestic sphere. Therefore, they produced conduct books which were among the most popular works written by women between the years of 1500 and 1700. According to Wayne, conduct books, which "came in the form of manuals, dialogues and commentaries on behaviour, marriage or the household," gave advice on women about "the practice of daily living," and "their audience included all readers who sought direction in how to lead a godly and proper life" (56). Despite being predominantly created by men, the conduct books produced by women writers at the beginning of the seventeenth century gave a new direction to women's writing. These books were mother's advice books "where the writer's role as mother offers her a position of authority from which to speak" (Wayne 56). Thus, they granted women authority through motherhood. Mother's advice books, specifically intended for women to teach wisdom to their children, were already written before the seventeenth century. However, the ones written in the seventeenth century demonstrated that they were "not innocent productions" because "they were fully embedded in the social and economic relations from which they arose and on which they had some effect" (Wayne 66). As Salzman argues, mother's advice books "are the clearest example of the construction and

dissemination of a specifically female writing community" (43). Several of these texts were composed in manuscript form, intended solely for use in the family, while a small number were printed. Dorothy Leigh's *The Mother's Blessing* and Elizabeth Jocelin's *Mother's Legacy to her Unborn Child*, published in 1616 and 1624 respectively, can be regarded as two notable works that were written, printed, and republished in that particular tradition (Suzuki 43).

In addition to mother's advice books, women writers in the seventeenth century wrote skill books about housewifery, medicine, and midwifery. One of the most popular skill books was receipt or recipe books, which focused on foods and medicines. For example, Montagu Walter's *The Queens Closet Opened* (1655) provides an extensive description of the recipes used in the kitchen of Henrietta Maria, the spouse of King Charles I. The subtitle of the book, "Incomparable Secrets in Physick, Chirurgery, Preserving and Candying, &c. Which were presented unto the Queen By the most Experienced Persons of the Times, many whereof were had in esteem when She pleased to descend to private Recreations," indicates that these recipes involve exceptional knowledge in the fields of medicine, healing, preservation, candying, and more.

A significant portion of receipt books were handwritten documents; however, they were predominantly published during the second half of the seventeenth century. Hannah Wolley can be accepted as the first woman who made her living by publishing such books. Especially, her voluminous work in the 1660s and early 1670s encouraged women to write in this tradition. For example, in 1678 Mary

Tillinghast printed a cookery book called *Rare and Excellent Receipts* through which she tries to teach the cooking skills to women. Besides cookery books, Wolley also wrote medical recipes. During the seventeenth century, women who wrote such recipes were in danger of being accused of engaging in witchcraft. Wolley was lucky because she avoided punishment, but other women such as Joan Peterson did not. In 1652, she was accepted as a witch and thus executed for her crimes. Another woman writing recipes for medicine is Mary Trye. She published her *Medicatrix*, *Or, The Woman-Physician* (1675) in order to advocate women-physicians. In this book, she presents a list of the medicines that she can prepare and gives information about which medicine to use for curing various illnesses. Women could write on scientific subjects like medicine and childbirth with their own experiences and first-hand knowledge; however, among these writers, Cavendish stands out for her courage to write about experimental science.

Like the skill books on housewifery and medicine, the books on midwifery which emerged in the second half of the seventeenth century were essential for women in the seventeenth century. They provided explanations on reproductive anatomy, the processes of conception, pregnancy, and childbirth, as well as treatments for different infections, womb prolapses, and abnormal presentations during labour. The most popular one was *The Complete Midwives Practise* (1656), a collection including the notable works of Louise Bourgeois, an influential French midwife from the early seventeenth century who served the French royal family. It is surprising that despite the high death rates among women in

childbirth and new born infants, no college offered any professional midwifery training. Hence, in order to teach other women about pregnancy and childbirth, women writers documented their experiences through diaries and memoirs, specifically focusing on the risky and potentially fatal nature of pregnancy for women during that era. Their concern was focused on their troubled marital relationship and the process of pregnancy.

Moreover, women wrote diaries to document their religious experiences. The oldest known diaries in English are attributed to Lady Grace Sherrington Mildmay (1522-1620), who likely kept a spiritual diary, and Lady Margaret Dakins Hoby (1571-1633), a devout Puritan. Lady Grace Sherrington Mildmay compiled a retrospective account with religious reflections for her daughter between 1570 and 1617. Lady Margaret Dakins Hoby's diary, written from 1599 to 1605, demonstrates her focus on details about daily life, which is commonly seen in diaries, along with her religious enthusiasm (Sage 187). Furthermore, during the seventeenth century, women writers wrote a significant number of letters that can be considered essential in the field of women's writing and history. These letters covered both personal anecdotes and public events pertaining to the condition of women at that time. Graham asserts that there is a widespread belief that a considerable amount of published self-writings, which were not accepted as valuable literary works, emerged in the seventeenth century (210). The autobiography and biography might also be considered innovations of the seventeenth century, as this period witnessed a significant rise in the production of such literary works (Hobby, *Virtue* 78). Through these kinds of published writings,

women writers like Hannah Wolley, Elizabeth Cellier and Theodosia Alleine shared their own experiences. Margaret Cavendish also wrote a biography of her husband. Yet still, in that period these writings by women were also disregarded by male writers since they were considered to have so-called secondary literary merit.

In the seventeenth century, particularly from 1630 to 1689, politics and religion were closely intertwined. Women made efforts to create various political and religious works in order to contribute to social, religious, and political matters. They wanted to change government policy by arguing that they should be allowed to express their opinions since they were subject to and affected by state affairs. However, since the 1650s, they had been largely discouraged from actively participating in politics and eventually faced censorship during the Restoration period (Hobby, *Virtue* 17). Between the 1640s and 1650s, there was a rise in the number of prophetic works authored by women, although the majority of these writings were produced by a small group of female writers including Eleanor Davies (or Douglas), Eleanor James, Anna Trapnel, and Jane Lead. They had the belief that they were God's messengers and were hence gifted with divine inspiration. In addition to these subjects and genres, translation was the most widely recognised and appropriate genre for women in the seventeenth century, as it did not necessitate profound creativity or extensive knowledge (Clare 45).

It is observed that during the seventeenth century, women faced significant limitations and obstacles that prevented them from engaging in literary pursuits across a wide range of subjects and genres. Additionally, it was hard for women to publish their works. Over the

course of centuries, as in the seventeenth century, the field of publishing had been mostly controlled by men, since editors, critics, and publishers were exclusively male. At the time, numerous women who created diaries, letters, advice for children, recipe books, or religious works of various types did not identify themselves as "writers," while others in the early modern period, like Anne Dowriche, Mary Sidney, Aemilia Lanyer, and Margaret Cavendish, "presented themselves as authors" by publishing their works on a wide range of subjects and in various genres (Woods et al. 302). Evidently, women's authorship was primarily associated with the distribution of their writings through print rather than composing in manuscript form. As King argues, there was an obvious distinction between "print (vigorous, demotic, progressive) and manuscript (attenuated, elitist, nostalgic)" in that print was seen as "public" and "masculine" while manuscript was regarded as "private" and "feminine" (130). During this time, it was challenging for women to distribute or publish their own writings: "to do so was a bold, much criticised and frequently isolated action" (Wilcox, "Introduction" 2). However, some women challenged these limitations imposed upon them and emerged as pioneers in diverse fields. The first autobiography in English was written by Margery Kempe and was published in 1501; the first translation of a secular text was done by Margaret Tyler and was published in 1578; the first play known to have been written by a woman was Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedie of Mariam* which was published in 1613; the first secular autobiography was published by Margaret Cavendish in 1656; Sarah Jinner (1658-1664) was the first woman to earn her living by writing; the first play scripted by a woman to be performed on a British stage was composed by Katherine Philips in 1663

(Wilcox, "Introduction" 4). These accomplishments by women writers are noteworthy advancement for women's writing and print culture.

However, during the early seventeenth century, poets (both male and female) avoided engaging in printed circulation to prevent being associated with "commercialism;" and some women were hesitant to participate in this practise due to concerns about immodesty, as they were taught that chastity, silence, and obedience were considered essential virtues during that time (Hageman 192). Some of these aristocratic poets, who chose not to print their works, kept their writing private while the others preferred manuscript publication rather than print as "manuscript copies were more prestigious than printed books" (192). Aristocratic women would prefer to distribute their poetry in manuscript form, until they were ultimately published with the help of a male family member. Nevertheless, as Clare indicates, although aristocratic women had more free time to write and more chances to share their work through manuscripts or publications, their high social status might have made them more constrained in the type of literature they produced (46) and their writing was not regarded as equally respectable as that of men of the same social status.

Evidently, seventeenth-century women endeavoured to engage in writing during a period when the act of women's writing was regarded as an unacceptable and unsupported pursuit. Until 1640, only a small number of women were able to write for publication. The majority of these published works authored by women were disregarded, even with a significant number of them being falsely credited to male writers. As noted by Crawford, between the years of 1616 and 1620, "the total

number of new publications by women was a mere eight" while "the total number of works published in that half-decade catalogued in Pollard and Redgrave's *Short-Title Catalogue* was around 2240; indeed, "women's publications amounted to only 0.5 per cent of all publications in that decade" (158). Over the period from 1630 to 1689, despite being encouraged to be quiet and modest, over two hundred fifty women managed to publish their written works (Hobby, "Usurping" 67). Clearly, the number of women's publications was extremely limited. However, their numbers gradually increased each passing decade.

Moreover, the impact of the Civil Wars and the Interregnum on women's writings was noteworthy, resulting in a significant increase in their numbers. Crawford attributes this growth to two factors: First, the Wars compelled women to assume several unconventional roles. With the absence of husbands, fathers, and sons who were either engaged in warfare or living in foreign lands, women assumed the role as protectors of their households, advocates for their properties, and overall caretakers of their families' well-being. Second, in order to discuss matters of politics, they had to participate actively in contentious debates (160). The encounter with criticism and hatred prompted them to enhance their arguments, hence resulting in additional publications. The petitions that women issued in April and May of 1649 for the release of the imprisoned Leveller leaders provide a vivid demonstration of this (160). Particularly, after the censorship of the press was collapsed in 1641 women gained much freedom to publish. Moreover, "[t]he period of greater political stability after 1688 encouraged an increase in middle-class literacy and leisure, accompanied by a growth in the publishing trade" (Shaw,

"Introduction" 5). As Shaw argues, "[w]omen writers had opportunities as never before and although their participation in this expanding literary market was still limited by ideals of feminine decorum, both the amount and variety of their writing increased" ("Introduction" 5). Thereby, in order to mostly take part in the male-dominated literary tradition or to create an alternative literary tradition, women writers, to some extent, got strength from their publications even though they were restricted. As Crawford expresses, while most of the names in their tradition are not well-known today, it is worth noting that the tradition persisted until more recent times with notable writers like Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) and Katherine Philips (1631/2-1664) (173). Furthermore, such names as Anna Maria Schurman (1607-1678) and Aphra Behn (1640-1689) were added to them by the end of the century.

Like women's publishing their works, their literacy was problematic in the seventeenth-century England, too. Thus, it is not surprising that the rates of female literacy were lower than those of males in all social classes. More specifically, as Cressy puts forward, at the time of the Civil War, "nine-tenths of women were illiterate, compared with two-thirds of men" (121-22). Pearson states that literacy was traditionally measured by one's ability to write her/his own name; however, at this time, writing was taught as a different skill and at a later stage than reading. As a result, even someone who could not write her/his name could nevertheless have proficient reading skills (81). Additionally, Spanish humanist and educationalist Juan Luis Vives asserts that a woman did not have the right to "follow her own judgement" in the choice of reading so that she was controlled by "wise

and learned men" (qtd. in Watson 34). Since the conduct books were widely recommended for women readers, women's reading, like their writing, was regulated by men and it was permitted or allowed in a way to shape them as chaste, silent, and obedient women. Reading non-permitted books for women was associated with "disease, madness, deception, rebellion and transgression of the boundaries of acceptable femininity" (Pearson 86).

In spite of all these obstacles that women faced in the seventeenth century, Margaret Cavendish, a remarkable woman with her appearance, behaviour, and achievement, managed to become a prolific writer of the seventeenth-century England. More specifically, writing at a time when women had limited educational opportunities, were deprived of property rights, and were regarded as quite emotional and irrational, Cavendish secured a place for herself in the male-dominated literary world through her works. However, she was not satisfied with these achievements in writing because she wanted to gain lasting fame and recognition through the publication of her remarkable works. From this vantage point, especially by breaking the social norms that define seventeenth-century women, Cavendish tried to redefine her role as one who deserved to become a widely esteemed and accomplished literary woman throughout centuries.

In this context, Margaret Cavendish's personal life, family background and the places where she lived shaped her thoughts and literary life. Cavendish's life can be divided into three periods such as her upbringing in the Lucas family, her life as a maid to Queen Henrietta Maria, her married life in exile and her prolific literary life supported by

her husband following this marriage, especially after the Restoration. Margaret Lucas Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673), was born into an aristocratic family in Colchester, Essex. Margaret Lucas was the youngest of the eight children of Sir Thomas Lucas, a wealthy landowner in Essex, and his wife Elizabeth Leighton Lucas. In her autobiography, *A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding, and Life* (1656), in which she basically presents her intellectual development as a woman writer along with her family background and upbringing, she firstly tells her father's noble birth and then states that her father, who was banished for a time under Queen Elizabeth's reign, was restored to his estate by James I, where he "died peaceably, leaving a Wife and eight Children, three Sons, and five Daughters" (369). Her mother succeeded in managing her husband's estates and family after the unexpected death of her husband which is explained by Margaret Lucas as follows:

> [A]nd though she would often complain, that her family was too great for her weak Management, and often prest my Brother to take it upon him, yet I observe she took a pleasure, and some little pride in the governing thereof; she was skillful in Leases and setting of Lands, and Court-keeping, ordering of Stewards, and the like affaires. (*TR* 49)

She clearly admired her mother's stance in life, which had an immense influence on her behaviours. As Shattock argues, "[u]nder her mother's aegis, family life was relaxed and indulgent, education undisciplined, and Margaret's penchant for flamboyant dress encouraged, a characteristic for which she was notorious in later life" (312). Her childhood in this sense might be seen as advantageous due to the presence of her mother, a powerful female figure, as opposed to her father, a male character who imposed restrictions on her. From a young

age, she recognised that social class and sex were crucial factors in shaping an individual's upbringing. Regarding this matter, she affirms that as a woman in an aristocratic family, she was "bred Vertuously, Modestly, Civilly, Honorably, and on honest principles" (*TR* 369). Her education adhered to the conventional standards expected for a daughter of the gentry. Contrary to her brothers, who were given specific career instructions to have a profession, she and her sisters were just taught to be kind and morally upstanding. As pointed out by Margaret Lucas, "[a]s for tutors, although we had for all sorts of Vertues, as singing, dancing, playing on Musick, reading, writing, working, and the like, yet we were not kept strictly thereto, they were rather for formality than for benefit" (*TR* 369). These lessons were not rigidly regulated because they were more for appearance rather than actual educational purpose. Owing to the various areas in which her brothers were bred, they were able to engage in military and governmental matters, as well as academic endeavours, as part of their education. Regarding this matter, she asserts that her two brothers were "excellent Soldiers," and her oldest brother, who was more knowledgeable in the fields of arts and sciences, was "a great Scholar" (*TR* 371). Yet, her education was conducted in traditional gender-based educational standards.

Despite being brought up in accordance with the then-current social norms, Cavendish grew up in a stable environment until the Civil War which resulted in the destruction of her family's properties and estates. Because of their Royalist sympathies, the Lucas Family had to escape to Oxford, where Charles I and his queen resided in exile, following the beginning of the war. Margaret Lucas wanted to become

one of Queen Henrietta Maria's Maids of Honour, a strong ambition instilled by her mother, who was renowned in court circles for her "great beauty" (Kunitz and Haycraf 89). Following the Royalists' loss in 1644, the Queen and her court were forced to seek refuge in France, and Margaret Lucas also accompanied her into exile. The second period in Cavendish's life starts with this accompaniment to the Queen. As Katie Whitaker, a biographer of Cavendish, suggests, "[a]ttending on the queen, Margaret frequently observed the 'great factions both amongst the courtiers and soldiers,' but she later realized that she had been too young fully to understand the complex and devious machinations of all 'their intrigues'" (*Mad Madge: The Extraordinary* 24). Hence, her time in court was brief and unsatisfying as she, who described herself as "fearfull, and bashfull" (*TR* 373), realised that she would never be able to adapt to this role. The third period starts with her marriage to William Cavendish. She was able to break her previous connections when she was residing at court in France upon meeting and marrying William Cavendish, a prominent Royalist who held the titles of Marquis and eventually Duke of Newcastle. Stone referred to it as a "companionate marriage" (n. pag.), which is explained by Cavendish as follows: "[N]either could Title, Wealth, Power, or Person entice me to love; but my Love was honest and honourable" (*TR* 375). By marrying her first and true love, she was able to change certain unfavourable notions associated with her, being labelled a "natural fool" due to her shyness and eccentricity (Kunitz and Haycraft 89). Clearly, this marriage would provide her with unprecedented opportunities in her literary career.

William Cavendish, who was a poet, playwright and writer on horsemanship, "was the grandson of Sir William Cavendish, a Privy Councillor and Treasurer of the Chamber to Henry VIII, Edward VI, and Mary Tudor" (Kunitz and Haycraft 90). Following the execution of Charles I in 1649, the Cavendish family moved to Antwerp. They stayed there for a duration, with the exception of the years 1651-1653 when Margaret Cavendish went back to England alongside her brother-in-law, Sir Charles Cavendish, in order to gain an income from her husband's estate. However, this endeavour ended up being unsuccessful. Consequently, they faced economic difficulties until the monarchy was reinstated in 1660, at which point Margaret and William Cavendish, who had spent sixteen years in exile, returned to England with Charles II. In 1665, Charles II granted them the titles of Duke and Duchess as a kind of compensation for the financial assistance that William had provided to Charles I in 1639 (Whitaker, *Mad Madge: The Extraordinary* 262). During this period, they travelled to London and spent a significant amount of money on various items, including a portrait of Cavendish painted by Peter Lely. This portrait symbolised "grandeur, rank, authority, and wealth," serving as a celebration of the Newcastles' recent ascent to the highest levels of aristocratic hierarchy (*Mad Madge: The Extraordinary* 263).

Cavendish obviously used her husband's significant economic and social power to her advantage to produce and publish her works. Especially during their time in Antwerp, William Cavendish and his brother Sir Charles Cavendish tutored Margaret Cavendish in the fields of science and philosophy. As William Cavendish was the patron of

notable English writers like Ben Jonson, Sir William Davenant, and John Dryden, as well as philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, Pierre Gassendi, and René Descartes, William and Charles Cavendish frequently organised meals and engaged in long discussions with these intellectuals. By virtue of her husband's connections with the Royalists and intellectuals, she was offered the opportunity to become a part of the literary group associated with the Cavendish family. As she was shy, silent, and spoke only English, she was largely unable to participate in their conversation. Yet still, despite her limited and unqualified education, her literary career was influenced by her interactions with diverse intellectual figures and the support of her husband and brother-in-law. As a result, she wrote extensively in a wide range of genres, including poetry, prose fiction, drama, letters, autobiography, biography, fiction, and even science fiction. Regarding this matter, she expresses her desire to engage in writing stating that "I confess my ambition is restless, and not ordinary; because it would have an extraordinary fame. And since all heroic actions, public employments, powerful governments, and eloquent pleadings are denied our sex in this age, or at least would be condemned for want of custom, is the cause I write so much" (*Life* xxxix). Cavendish was well aware of her gender in the male-dominated culture, yet she possessed the bravery to write during a period when women were not allowed to receive a formal education. This lack of education prevented women from engaging in writing on subjects that required an understanding of science and philosophy. However, from 1653 to 1671, Cavendish, as a woman writer, produced fourteen so-called scientific books on various subjects including "atoms, matter and

motion, butterflies, fleas, magnifying glasses, distant worlds, and infinity" (Merchant 270).

While writing her works, she substituted her fancy with any scientific approach, an attempt and a strategy that refers to Cavendish's endless imagination and curiosity which will be elaborated upon in the following parts of the book. Due to her unconventional approach, she was criticised, and her works were ignored. However, as a result of her interest in science, and also of the current social and political issues of her time, she produced remarkable works. In 1653, she published *Poems and Fancies* and *Philosophicall Fancies*, which was revised as part of *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655 and 1663), and as *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (1668). As Shattock posits, Cavendish whose "interests were eclectic, sometimes maverick, her work impulsive and undisciplined" also dealt with "[c]ontemporary science, natural history, the natural world, human behaviour, [and] language" (313). Furthermore, in her plays such as *Plays* (1662), *the Convent of Pleasure* (1662), *Bell in Campo* (1662), and *Plays never before Printed* (1668) she presented her views on the condition of women through different representations of women characters. Despite all criticism, she sent some of her published works to the libraries of the universities with a designation as "written by the thrice noble, illustrious and excellent Princess the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle" (Shattock 313). Moreover, she wrote a utopian fiction, *The Description of a New World Called the Blazing World* (1666), in which women's sovereignty is presented and glorified. In 1656, she published *Natures Pictures,* which included an

autobiography; *A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life*, and she also published a biography of her husband in 1667.

Throughout her literary life, Cavendish was exposed to harsh criticism. Even women writers such as Dorothy Osborne, a contemporary of Cavendish and a writer of letters, mocked her literary efforts by saying "[s]ure the poor woman is a little distracted, she could never be so ridiculous else as to venture at writing books and in verse too. If I should not sleep this fortnight I should not come to that" (100). In fact, she was criticised not only because of her writings but also because of her appearance including her weird clothing. She was notorious for her desire for writing in various genres and topics without having formal education, and her eccentricity through which she is characterised as "the world's most ridiculous poet" (Pile 94). However, Cavendish defines her eccentricity in relation to her works and appearance, which was against the gender stereotypes in the seventeenth century, as creativity and originality. Especially regarding her dress, she states that "I took great delight in attiring … especially such fashions as I did invent myself, not taking that pleasure in such fashions as was invented by others" (*Life* 312). She chose to dress in attractive clothing of her own design. As claimed by Whitaker, for instance, while going to a play she was accompanied by a velvet-clad footman and wore an "antique dress … which bared her breasts, to reveal scarlet-trimmed nipples" implying such a style of "heroic women of antiquity" (*Mad Madge* 294). Because of Cavendish's peculiar appearance, in a letter written in 1818, Mary Evelyn describes her as a lady "of so much extravagance and vanity" that she should be "confined within four walls"

(qtd. in Whitaker 355). However, in her various works, Cavendish reminds the readers of the relationship between her wit and her distinctive appearance or eccentric behaviour that she exhibits as follows:

> I should weep myself into water, if I could have no other fame than rich coaches, lackeys, and what state and ceremony could produce, for my ambition flies higher, as to worth or merit, not state or vanity; I would have my actions known by my wit, not by my folly, and I would have my actions so wise and just, as I might neither be ashamed or afraid to hear myself. (*SL* 93)

Cavendish emphasises that her wit makes her follow interests which are seen as unusual for the seventeenth-century women and she overtly states that she would prefer being dead to being known for her outlook rather than her wit. That is why, through the originality of her wit that she calls fancy, she wants to gain recognition and lasting fame.

In order to grasp what Cavendish means by fancy, it would be helpful to have a brief look at how the term is often used interchangeably with imagination. The terms fancy and imagination were often employed by poets and writers like Homer, Plato, Aristotle and Thomas Hobbes throughout history. The concept of fancy is a term only defined in detail by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* in the early nineteenth century, and thus it is commonly associated with him, especially in the context of poetic imagination. However, Cavendish's use of the term should not recall Coleridge's classification of imagination. Cavendish does not evaluate fancy and imagination as different faculties, but instead, she uses these two terms interchangeably. Moreover, the term fancy becomes the representation of her curiosity and

enthusiasm for numerous fields of study. Cavendish thinks that fancy is part of the creative process of the mind and the best way to perceive creative power. Bowerbank proposes that fancy represents her "true wit" which "is natural wit unrestrained" (393). Cavendish possesses an innate talent that to some extent compensates for the need for formal education, and she states that "Learning is Artificial, but Wit is Natural" (*OEP*, "To the Reader" 11). Her fancy offers various alternatives as it enables her to overcome the limitations and strict rules of the dominant institutions of the seventeenth century. Due to her use of fancy, she has been subjected to mockery and criticism. For instance, in *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf tries to find a seventeenth-century "Judith Shakespeare" and sees in Cavendish's works "a vision of loneliness and riot … as if some giant cucumber had spread itself over all the roses and carnations the garden and choked them to death" (59-60). By employing the metaphor of a cucumber, she demonstrates that Cavendish entered the realm of literature with her eccentric nature, and her works were driven by an unconventional compulsion rather than a deliberate intellectual purpose. Yet still, she acknowledges Cavendish's sincere passion for poetry despite her lack of a formal education.

Although Cavendish's use of fancy may appear somewhat ridiculous, it is actually a paradoxical element that solidifies her distinctive position. By deviating from the norms followed by learned writers, she avoids engaging in direct rivalry with them and instead embraces a relatively modest approach to establishing her presence in the literary world. In *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, Cavendish sincerely expresses her weak points and warns her readers by saying that

"I shall not need to tell you, I had neither Learning nor Art to set forth these Conceptions, for that you will find yourself" (476). The reason for her "naivete of method" can be attributed to her limited education and absence of access to knowledgeable and intellectual communities (Bowerbank 393). However, she manages to overcome her educational deficiencies by using fancy as a writing strategy, which presumably enhances her originality and strong creativity. Fitzmaurice argues that Cavendish delights in depicting herself "as a solitary genius who depended on the power of fancy to conjure up original compositions" or to create "fancies" ("Fancy" 199-200). Makin, who also esteems Cavendish's genius based on her fancy, asserts that the Duchess of Newcastle, through her own natural brilliance rather than formal education, surpasses many learned men (10). Through her modest strategy, Cavendish portrays herself as a solitary genius. Furthermore, she assumes the roles of a "melancholic," a "harmless eccentric," and most notably, a "happy wife" as a defence against criticism and to strategically avoid any possible challenges to her decision to publish her works (202-3). Various other roles that she acquires through her fancy also grant her authority and capacity to write. In "To All Noble and Worthy Ladies," a preface to *Poems, and Fancies*, she describes fancy with words that belong to women's daily lives. There is fancy

> in their several and various dresses (in their many and singular choices of clothes and ribbons and the like), in their curious shadowing and mixing of colors, in their wrought works and diverse sorts of stitches they employ their needle in, and many other curious things they make (as flowers, boxes, baskets; with beads, shells, silk, straw, or anything else), as also in all manner of meats to eat. And thus their thoughts are employed perpetually with fancies. ("To All Noble and Worthy Ladies" 61)

Cavendish defines fancy by using the images from the domestic world and associates fancy with women by presenting the relationship between fancy and fashion. Moreover, she identifies fancy with vanity, even justifies it, and therefore, she claims that it is "so natural to our sex" (*PF* 61). In fact, she unveils fancy as the essential quality in writing, particularly in poetry, and believes that "*Fancies* bound up with *Verse*" bring a poet lasting fame (*PhF* 84).

Stating that she employs fancy both in her poems and prose writings, Cavendish distinguishes herself from such writers as John Dryden and Sir Philip Sidney who received classical education and adhered strictly to neo-classical literary rules. Cavendish refuses to follow literary rules and wants women writers to leave "Forms, Terms, Words, Numbers, or Rhymes ... to Fools" (*SL* 7-8). She believes that fancy enables women to "move their braine another way" (*PhF* 87). Thus, she asks for "the free and noble style / Which seems uncurbed [unbridled], though it be wild" (*PF* 212). For Brown, Cavendish's "literary method [the use of fancy] is really a refusal of method" which is mainly related and attributed to reason (33). Throughout history, male writers like Jonathan Swift and John Milton, have consistently emphasised the existence of a hierarchical relationship between reason and imagination. A clarifying example is the conventional subordination of imagination to reason in Swift's *A Tale of a Tub and Other Satires* (1704). Swift associates fancy with "madness" by highlighting that madness is the triumph of fancy over reason (114). In a similar vein, Milton advocates the superiority of the power of reason, which is associated with men, over fancy as follows:

But know that in the soul
Are many lesser faculties that serve
Reason as chief; among these fancy next
Her office holds; of all external things,
Which the five watchful senses represent,
She forms imaginations, airy shapes,
…
Oft in her [Nature's] absence mimic fancy wakes
To imitate her; but misjoining shapes,
Wild work produces oft, and most in dreams,
Ill matching words and deeds long past or late. (*Paradise Lost* V, 100-13)

Milton claims that reason is superior to fancy, as reason is the sign of order and close to nature, but fancy is the representation of disorder and thus unnatural. Different from both Swift and Milton, Cavendish perceives fancy as inherently related to women. She opposes their ideas by saying that reason is enslaved by necessity, whereas fancy is natural and voluntary (*BW,* "To the Reader" 123-24). Cavendish advocates the use of subjective expressions unrestrained by reason and rules, and favours the notion that fancy enhances individual creativity and originality. She describes her desire by saying "I had rather sit at home and write … I must say this on behalf of my thoughts, that I never found them idle; for if the senses bring no work in, they will work of themselves, like silkworms that spins [sic] out of their own bowels" (*TR* 208). Cavendish, therefore, as a woman writer, goes beyond the imposed limitations of both the society and the established rules of the male-dominated mainstream literature. Like the silkworm to which she refers, she manages to take on all of the roles that were unacceptable at the time.

In the light of what has been explained so far, this book analyses Cavendish's efforts to create an unconventional style and her claim a place in the male-dominated literary world. With this aim, it examines "Atomic Poems" in her poetry collection *Poems, and Fancies* (1653), her closet drama *Bell in Campo* (1662) and her fantastic utopian fiction, *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* (1666). The first chapter analyses Cavendish's fascination with science. The second chapter delves into her exploration of the realities of her era, particularly the Civil War, to demonstrate that she addresses matters besides science. Lastly, the third chapter explores how she further reveals her interest not only in science but also in politics and all aspects of life through a utopian narrative. After an in-depth analysis of her whole oeuvre, this study concludes that Cavendish refashions herself as an "authoress" in the male-dominated literary world by employing various genres and addressing different topics.

In line with these objectives, in the first chapter, Cavendish's "Atomic Poems" in *Poems, and Fancies* are analysed to discuss how she employs atomism and materialism, in her own way, in poetry. The chapter reveals that Cavendish presents her own perspective on "matter" and "motion," drawing on the concepts of atomism and materialism which were developed by the philosophers and scientists of the seventeenth century. It argues that she uses atoms as the primary theme in her "Atomic Poems" to demonstrate her "vitalist materialism," which represents the active nature of matter. At the core of her materialistic thought, matter is endowed with vitality and liveliness in relation to the motion in atoms. This approach represents a departure from the

perspectives of Thomas Hobbes, Descartes, and Henry More, who all defended the notion of matter's inherent passivity like old materialists. The chapter also suggests that through Cavendish's own appreciation of matter, she re-evaluates everything related to human existence including the creation of the universe, human understanding, natural phenomena, health, sickness, life, and death in terms of atoms. As a result, this chapter discusses how she reshapes her position in the male-dominated world of science and literature by using atoms as a metaphor to bring a new perspective to science in her poetry.

In the second chapter, Cavendish's closet drama *Bell in Campo*, which reflects her political perspectives and her beliefs regarding the social and political roles that women might have, is primarily analysed. The play selected for this chapter is remarkable as it explicitly focuses on the political events of her time that Cavendish personally witnessed. She published nineteen plays in two collections *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (1662), which includes the play *Bell in Campo*, and *Plays Never Before Printed* (1668). This chapter particularly examines Cavendish's *Bell in Campo* in order to explain how she presents a diverse range of possibilities concerning the position of women in both political and domestic spheres. It argues that the play explores the themes of warfare, virtue, and the social status of women, through which Cavendish offers a critical analysis of the social and political concerns prevalent during her era. It also reveals that Cavendish not only illustrates the unfavourable circumstances experienced by women in the real world but also emphasises how a woman can gain a new status by

being "heroickess" and "Generaless" in a fantastic heroic world. Considering the political and historical background of the period, it is suggested that Cavendish scrutinises what a woman can do in such a political world.

In the third chapter, her fantastic utopian fiction, *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* is examined to display how Cavendish expresses not only her scientific and political thoughts but also her ideas on social structure by creating a utopian world of her own through her fancy. In this work, she sets up an ideal scientific academy founded by a woman who is, indeed, the fictionalised version of Cavendish herself. In this imaginary world, she attributes herself various roles ranging from being the head of a scientific academy, an authoress, creatoress, empress, political leader and a savior; all shaped by Cavendish's scientific, political and social ideas. Through an in-depth study of *The Blazing World*, the chapter aims at demonstrating how Cavendish presents her accomplishments in particular and the potential of all women in general. It also explores how she liberates herself from the social and political limitations, and redefines her female self through various roles, albeit in a fictional setting. In this imaginary world, she freely expresses her ideas on a variety of topics including science, natural philosophy and politics, and presents the accomplishments of a woman in acquiring freedom, power and authority; at least, in her own utopian and fantastic worlds.

CHAPTER 1

"MY *AMBITION* IS SUCH, …": MARGARET CAVENDISH AS A CREATOR AND NATURAL PHILOSOPHER IN "ATOMIC POEMS"

This chapter aims to scrutinise Margaret Cavendish's "Atomic Poems" in *Poems, and Fancies* (1653) in relation to how she employs atomism and materialism and offers a new viewpoint about matter, even though her "Atomic Poems" cannot be regarded as a scientific study or a discussion of the atomic theory. Interestingly enough, with her ideas on "matter" she might be considered to have envisioned the emergence of new materialism coined in the second half of the 1990s. However, Cavendish presents her ideas through an approach which is shaped by both her enthusiasm in science and her own perception based on what she calls fancy. While employing some of the terminology related to atomism, matter and motion of atoms in particular, she uses her natural wit, rather than any scientific theory to express her ideas. Cavendish uses fancy as a strategy in writing her work.[2] Due to her keen interest in atomism and materialism[3] which were developed by the scientists and philosophers of the seventeenth century, Cavendish introduces her own understanding of the universe based on two inseparable terms, "matter" and "motion." For Cavendish, fancy is related to the physical movements

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[2] In the thematic organisation and grouping of the "Atomic Poems," I followed a similar pattern in H. Sadun's article "Where Science Meets With Fancy: The Atomic Poems of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle" (2005).
[3] Hereafter, while dealing with the materialist approach of the seventeenth century, the term old materialism, which signifies the passive nature of matter, will be used. However, while addressing the current materialist approach, the term new materialism, which stands for the active nature of matter, will be used.

of matter in her mind; and is, therefore, "material." As atoms embody innate liveliness, Cavendish chooses them as a theme in her "Atomic Poems" to indicate her "vitalist materialism,"[4] – which signifies the dynamic nature of matter – and by presenting them as a metaphor of her female self, she refashions herself in the male-dominated scientific and literary world. In line with this primary objective, this chapter initially introduces the scientific developments of the seventeenth century and the role of women in this scientific field. Then, it investigates how Cavendish, as a woman devoid of any scientific education, perceives the concepts of atomism and materialism and thus employs these ideas within the framework of her literary works. The introductory part is followed by the analysis of "Atomic Poems" which sheds light on her distinct role in establishing herself as a female poet, ultimately leading to her stepping into the male-dominated scientific world and hence her attainment of recognition and fame.

When Cavendish wrote *Poems, and Fancies,* she was in London, where she went with her brother-in-law Charles to request the Parliament for some income from her husband's estates. In 1651, William's confiscated estates were going to be sold to finance the Parliament's ongoing war in Ireland (Black et al. 1). As a traitor despised by the Parliament and exiled under the threat of death, William was powerless in this situation. However, as Whitaker suggests, William's wife might petition for one-fifth share, which was the percentage allocated to all delinquents' spouses under English law, who were considered innocent and politically passive dependents of their wrongdoer husbands (*Mad*

[4] Called by Lisa T. Sarasohn (*Natural Philosophy* 35) and Deborah A. Boyle (63).

Madge 136). Cavendish expresses her decision to accompany Charles by saying "[f]or I, hearing my Lord's estate amongst many more estates was to be sold, and that the wives of the owners should have an allowance therefrom, it gave me hopes I should receive a benefit thereby" (qtd. in Bowerbank and Mendelson 51). She expected that some income from William's estates would provide a favourable opportunity for herself and her husband to alleviate their financial difficulties while living in Antwerp during their exile. Margaret Cavendish and William arrived in London in 1651, and the Cavendishes' financial situation began to improve in 1652 due to the release of Charles's properties from sequestration in June 1652, as reported by Whitaker (*Mad Madge* 151). This release ensured the family's financial security.

Despite facing difficulties with the Parliament and feeling melancholic due to her separation from her husband, Cavendish persisted in writing poetry in this period. She engaged in an intense program of reading and self-education with the help of her companion Charles in London which led to the creation of her first published book. According to Siegfried, *Poems and Fancies* served as "intellectual cartography" for Cavendish as she meticulously studied various scientific works to understand the natural world, including texts by (Sir Walter) Raleigh, Hakluyt, and Purchase for a broad view, and works by Euclid, Aristotle, Lucretius, Dee, Galileo, Descartes, Hobbes, and others to delve into the details of nature's intricacies (Siegfried, "Introduction" 7). Before her return to Antwerp in early 1653, she chose to compile *Poems and Fancies*. Yet still, she lacked the courage to express her intention to publish her poems to anyone. She explains that she did not seek

permission from any friend since the dread of being rejected kept her quiet, and she mentions an old saying that suggests "it is easier to ask pardon than leave [ask for permission beforehand]. For a fault will sooner be forgiven than a suit granted" (*PF* 64). According to Whitaker, Cavendish only shared her plans for publication with her maid, Elizabeth Chaplain, who is now known as Lady Elizabeth Toppe, after marrying Sir Francis Toppe, an English merchant in Antwerp and a significant figure in controlling the Newcastle household (*Mad Madge* 158). Elizabeth was introduced to Cavendish as her maid in their youth and faithfully served throughout her life, accompanying her during her distressful travels in exile. Furthermore, Elizabeth, despite being married, accompanied her mistress to London and played a significant role in supporting and promoting Cavendish's first publication. As Whitaker states, Elizabeth likely served as an intermediary, delivering Cavendish's manuscripts and letters to the booksellers in London who would publish *Poems, and Fancies*, the title Margaret had chosen for her volume (*Mad Madge* 158). In "An Epistle to the Lady Toppe," Cavendish expresses her gratitude towards Elizabeth and especially emphasises her determination to publish her work:

> For though my ambition is great, my designs are harmless and my way is plain honesty—and if I stumble at folly, yet will I never fall on vice. 'Tis true, the world may wonder at my confidence, how I dare put out a book, especially in these censorious times. But why should I be ashamed or afraid where no evil is, and not please myself in the satisfaction of innocent desires? For a smile of neglect cannot dishearten me; no more can a frown of dislike affright me (not but I should be well pleased and delighted to have my book commended). But the world's dispraises cannot make me a mourning garment. My mind's too big, and I had rather venture to commit an indiscretion than lose the hopes of fame. (*PF* 63)

Cavendish guesses the criticism that will likely be directed at this first published work. However, she opts to take risks rather than staying at home and completing mundane tasks. As a reply to the Duchess's epistle, in "To Her Grace the Duchess of Newcastle," Elizabeth reveals her admiration for Cavendish and conveys her belief in Cavendish's achievement of success and recognition by declaring, "[y]ou are not only the first English poet of your sex, but the first that ever wrote this way" (*PF* 65). For Elizabeth, anything written later will only be a copy of her original work, so anybody who writes later must acknowledge Cavendish as their model.

Cavendish's publishing procedure for her first work *Poems, and Fancies,* ended in 1653 (shortly after her return to Antwerp), when it was printed by Thomas Roycroft and published by John Martin and James Allestrye, who were partners having London's leading publishing house. When Cavendish returned to Antwerp in 1653, she found a husband who wholeheartedly supported her writing and publication pursuits. She was deeply grateful for his support, which facilitated the publication of her subsequent works. Accordingly, she states that "though Your Lordship hath many Troubles, great Cares, and much Business in your particular Affairs, … you are pleased to Peruse my Works, and Approve of them so well, as to give me Leave to Publish them, which is a Favour, few Husbands would grant their Wives; But Your Lordship is an Extraordinary Husband" (*PO* 46). William disregards society's reactions to his attitude because what matters most is his love for his wife. Supported by her husband, Cavendish continued her literary endeavours during the period she spent in Antwerp. Moreover, she maintained her

career as a writer when they returned to England in 1660, after the restoration of the monarchy (Baker 59; Partner 70; Fitzmaurice, "Introduction" xx).

After Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies* were published without any revisions, she recognised some errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar. In one of her epistles, Cavendish, who was exposed to the dissatisfaction of her contemporaries about the mistakes in her first publication, expresses her anger to the publishing house with the following words: "The printer should have rectified that" (*WO* 93). As Whitaker suggests, in her collection, Cavendish identified almost 200 printing errors including false rhymes, incorrect numbers, misprinted words, and unclear transitions between speakers in her poetic dialogues, which resulted in misunderstandings and false interpretations (*Mad Madge* 177). She corrects these inaccuracies within years, leading to the publication of three editions of *Poems, and Fancies*: 1653, 1664, and 1668. Furthermore, its modern spelling edition, revised by Brandie R. Siegfried, was published in 2018. This book uses the 2018 edition titled *Poems and Fancies with The Animal Parliament*, which is a modernised version based on the 1668 edition, as a primary source. The book begins with multiple dedicatory epistles and six poems. The collection consists of five main parts, Parts 1–5, including a total of two hundred seventy poems. Each section also includes prose dedications, asides, and dramatic interludes. The volume contains a prose narrative titled *The Animal Parliament* following Part 5, and ends with a conclusion with four poems. The collection comprises a total of two hundred eighty poems. *Poems and Fancies* covers a wide range of topics including

natural philosophy, political theory, mathematics, local history, folklore, and moral philosophy.

The first part of *Poems and Fancies* includes "atomic" and "mathematical poems," classified by Siegfried, which reflect Cavendish's scientific and mathematical interests ("Introduction" 23). In "atomic poems," she questions the atomism of the seventeenth century by emphasising the dynamic characteristics of atoms. In "mathematical poems," she mostly writes poems that explore the concept of the circle, a geometric shape. Through these poems, she aims to illustrate the circle's connection to ethical matters, specifically wisdom and justice. The second part of the book, which is introduced as *Moral Philosophy and Moralists*, includes moral discourses and numerous dialogues with the natural world, such as dialogues between man and nature, body and mind, melancholy and mirth, wit and beauty, learning and ignorance, and anger and patience. It especially focuses on the significance of sympathy in both moral and natural philosophy. Moreover, it explores the complex nature of the human mind and its desire for recognition. The third part of the book further examines the human mind by focusing on fancy. Cavendish emphasises the significance of this section by saying "I must entreat you to read this part of my book very slowly—and to observe very strictly every Word you read—because in most of these poems, every word is a fancy" (*PF* 229). Cavendish suggests that readers read slowly in order not to miss the general meaning of the poems. Furthermore, in this part, there are various poems on nature where nature is personified as a housewife. The fourth part of the book consists of poems about fairies. Instead of describing the fairies, she uses them as a

metaphor to address the topic of conflict in politics and religion. In the fifth part of the book, Cavendish presents a group of poems that explore the theme of war, stressing the inescapable nature of human mortality and its profound effects. The last part of the book consists of a prose work titled *The Animal Parliament*. Cavendish posits that the parliament is comprised of three distinct components, namely the soul, the body, and the thoughts including will, imaginations, and passions (*PF* 347). The various subjects explored in *Poems and Fancies* demonstrate its originality and all-encompassing nature.

Margaret Cavendish's curiosity about science is related to the increasing interest in this field both in England and continental Europe. Founded in 1660, the Royal Society was responsible for conveying the results of scientific research, especially the advancements in science during the Restoration period (1660-1689), to the country's agenda. This development was the factor that strengthened Cavendish's interest in science. Therefore, it is crucial to briefly introduce the scientific developments during that era to determine the extent to which women are included in the field of science. As the oldest national scientific society in the world, the Royal Society, officially known as the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge, had a significant role in the rise and institutionalisation of science. Following the establishment of the Royal Society, its weekly meetings were held in Gresham College in Bishopsgate Street until Henry Howard, who later became the sixth Duke of Norfolk, offered his residence to the Royal Society due to the fact that the Great Fire of London in 1666 had damaged the College (Lyons 64). The Royal Society, thus, started to

gather at Arundel House, Howard's residence in the Strand between the years of 1667 and 1674. Later, when Gresham College was restored, it became the new home for the society until 1710. At that time, the Society acquired its own premises by purchasing Crane Court in Fleet Street, which was previously owned by a physician (Weld 395). Indeed, at first glance, private residences of gentlemen such as the rooms of the professor of geometry in Gresham College and the home of Henry Howard became the "place of experiment," but then Royal Society was accepted as the "house of experiment" in the seventeenth century which exemplifies how science was institutionalised (Shapin 373). Regarding this matter, in the public rooms of the Royal Society, notable natural philosophers like Robert Boyle (1627-1691) and Robert Hooke (1635-1703) demonstrated their experimental expertise to the diverse group of scholars from different countries who were members of the Royal Society.

As "[t]he legitimacy of experimental knowledge" was based on "a public presence at some crucial stage or stages of knowledge making" (Shapin 384), ideas derived from this experimental knowledge were not considered valid until they were presented in the public spaces of the Royal Society which inevitably restrained women from entering the scientific field. Numerous male intellectuals such as naturalists, botanists, anatomists, mathematicians, astronomers, and physicists sent their works to the Royal Society for publication in England and they tried to have a report of the Royal Society's appreciation which played a fundamental role in scientific publication. For example, English philosopher Francis Bacon (1561-1626) first proposed a logical system

for the scientific process through which he emphasised the significance of experiment in science, and then he published his *Novum Organum Scientarum* (1620) and *The New Atlantis* (1627) in order to present his scientific ideas based on observation, study, and experimental knowledge.

In the seventeenth century, the concept of "New Science," which signifies the importance of experiments and observations in scientific studies, became prominent (Waddell 157). This novelty in the seventeenth-century natural philosophy[5] excluded women writers of the time from attending any scientific research. As many philosophers, such as the French philosopher René Descartes, supported Bacon's scientific method, the belief that knowledge is gained through scientific research based on experiments and dominated the seventeenth-century science. Written with a keen eye on experiment, some published scientific works of the period such as Anglo-Irish chemist Robert Boyle's *The Sceptical Chymist* (1661), in which he describes a chemical element, Robert Hooke's *Micrographia* (1665), the first bestselling scientific work, and Isaac Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687) laid the foundations of modern science. In fact, all these scientific publications prove that the aim of the New Society was "the acquisition of information" as well as gathering it (Hall 173). It seems clear that the individuals who managed to lead the Royal Society to success by doing

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[5] In the seventeenth century, the term "natural philosophy" was used interchangeably to refer to science.

this revolutionary innovation in the field of "New Science" were exclusively male authors and scientists.

Experimental science of the seventeenth century depended primarily on observations and experiments to collect and evaluate data. As all the facts and principles were formulated in this manner, formal education played a crucial role in acquiring knowledge in the seventeenth-century scientific world. Women, thus, were excluded from this scientific world due to their lack of education. However, through her husband's Royalist and social connections related to his economic and social status, Margaret Cavendish had a chance to meet esteemed scientific and literary intellectuals within the Circle around the Cavendish family. Her lack of knowledge prevented her from actively participating in intellectual discussions inside the circle. Nevertheless, motivated by her high social position and scientific curiosity, Cavendish stated her desire to participate in one of the Royal Society's meetings. Some members of the Royal Society had doubts regarding the potential consequences of Margaret Cavendish's visit. Although they feared that her visit would "bring ridicule" to the Royal Society and harm the Society's efforts to be seen as a respected institution, the Royal Society agreed to accept Cavendish's request to attend one of their meetings (Sarasohn, *Natural Philosophy* 30). Pepys describes her visit by putting emphasis on her appearance as follows:

> Anon comes the Duchesse, with her women attending her; among others, that Ferrabosco of whom so much talk is, that her lady would bid her show her face and kill the gallants. … The Duchesse hath been a good comely woman; but her dress so antic and her deportment so unordinary, that I do not like her at all, nor did I hear her say anything that was worth hearing, but that she was full

> of admiration, all admiration. (qtd. in *Natural Philosophy,* Sarasohn 30)

Cavendish drew attention with her unusual and appealing clothing rather than her interest in science. More importantly, Cavendish became "the first woman to be invited to attend a meeting of the Royal Society" in 1667, which caused trouble among her contemporaries (Lawrence 30). She questions the exclusion of women from the Royal Society and uses it as a theme in her literary works. In *The Blazing World* (1666), for instance, she presents an imaginative world where she creates an ideal scientific institution, similar to the Royal Society, but led by a woman who represents Cavendish's own intelligence, ambitions, and interest in science. Through this narrative, Cavendish not only questions the dominant gender expectations of her era but also expresses a deep criticism of the discriminatory practices within modern scientific establishments. She challenges conventional power dynamics and establishes the validity of women's intellectual contributions by placing herself at the forefront of this conceptual scientific domain. In doing so, especially in *The Blazing World*, she undertakes a sophisticated conversation about gender, authority, and the creation of knowledge.

Cavendish recognised that literature, poetry in particular, was the only possible vehicle for her to express her views on science. In her first publication, *Poems, and Fancies* (1653), she specifically selects atom as a prominent subject or metaphor. According to Battigelli, this choice is motivated by the atom's capacity to symbolise various phenomena, including "the physical universe, the political world, [and] the mind" (39). For Cavendish, all these phenomena are explained by means of the

principles of atomism. While dealing with these matters, she faced criticism from her peers for being a female author whose scientific writings were perceived as lacking adequate scientific grounding. However, in her *Poems, and Fancies*, she expresses her determination to write about scientific issues as a woman by stating that "for all I desire is fame. And fame is nothing but a great noise, and noise lives most in a multitude. Wherefore, I wish my book may set at work every tongue" (61).

The "Atomic Poems" reflect how Cavendish was inspired by the theory of atomism and materialism she had heard in the Cavendish Circle, and how she reinterpreted natural phenomena in terms of atoms and their motion. As Kargon posits, in the seventeenth century various scientists and the new philosophers "turned to a more 'mechanical' philosophy: the explanation of phenomena in terms of the mechanics of matter and motion," which highlights the philosophy of "the atomic doctrine" in Ancient Greece (1). In relation to this doctrine, "[t]he ancients had explained phenomena on the basis of the size, shape, and motion of particles of matter" which appealed to the scientists and philosophers of the seventeenth century (Kargon 3). Specifically, they were influenced by the classical atomism invented by the ancient Greek philosophers Democritus and Epicurus, and their Roman counterpart Lucretius, who can be accepted as the fathers of atomism. Additionally, the former were also deeply influenced by the latter's materialistic thought. In contrast to her male contemporaries, Cavendish does not employ their theories of atomism and materialism that are grounded in formal education. On the contrary, she simply creates her own

materialism "through the way she perceives atomism" without relying on any scientific foundation, and thus uses it while writing poems about atoms (Sadun 189).

Understanding atom, the most fundamental unit of matter, has taken hundreds of years in relation to the discoveries of electron, nucleus, proton, and neutron. In approximately 450 BC, Democritus introduced the term *atomos* which means "indivisible" in Greek. According to his notion of atomism, atoms "are infinite in number, qualitatively absolutely identical, and distinct only by shape and size" (19) which is directly identified with "*continuity*" (Melsen 20, emphasis original). Indeed, for him, all matter was made of these indivisible different particles. Furthermore, in relation to Democritus's atomic theory, "[m]otion is a primitive property of atoms" and "[l]ike the atoms themselves, it is eternal and incorruptible" which affirms their relentless motion (Melsen 19). These two hypotheses give the basic idea of atomism, particularly within the realm of philosophy. Over time, further concepts and theories regarding the physical nature of atoms were included into Democritus's philosophical framework about atom. For example, in 1802, the English scientist John Dalton (1766-1844) put forth his atomic theory, which had parallels with the ideas offered by Democritus. Moreover, Dalton made additional contributions to Democritus's concept of atomism. McLean explains five principles of Dalton's atomic theory as follows: 1) "All matter is composed of atoms" which are indivisible; 2) "Atoms cannot be created, destroyed, or separated into smaller particles;" 3) "All atoms of a given element are the same" or identical especially in properties; 4) "Different elements

have different types of atoms, and they can be identified by their atomic weight" and finally, 5) "Atoms of one element can combine with atoms of another element into chemical compounds with the same fraction of each type of atom" which presents how compound elements are formed from atoms in definite proportions (17). All the discoveries show that it has taken hundreds of years to understand the basic structure of an atom, which contains Joseph John Thomson's discovery of "electron" in 1897 (Challoner 30), Ernest Rutherford's discovery of the existence of nucleus in 1911 (Arabatzis 120) and Rutherford's discovery of "proton" (Taylor 142), and James Chadwick's discovery of "the neutron" in 1932 (Gregersen 167).

In the seventeenth century, the Newcastle Circle played a significant role in the development of atomism, which was initially put forward by the above-mentioned philosophers. The Circle consisted of English philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, Kenelm Digby, and Walter Charleton as well as French thinkers like René Descartes, Pierre Gassendi, and Marin Mersenne. The communication among these intellectuals played a crucial role in the development of atomism in England. Indeed, these members of the Circle met in Paris when the English members were in exile in France. During this time, William Cavendish, Margaret Cavendish's brother-in-law, introduced her to these intellectuals. Cavendish was deeply influenced by these philosophers' discussion of the new mechanical philosophy, which motivated her to look into natural philosophy. Margaret Cavendish, who was in close contact with these scientists and philosophers around the Cavendish family, witnessed their conservations about classical atomism in

particular. She observed the ongoing debates on atomism with "her untamed method," called by Bowerbank as such (402), and thus merges fancy with science while using it as the basic theme in a group of poems. As Sadun argues, in "Atomic Poems," she "unites what she knew and heard about atoms and her imagination in order to give a new definition of the world" (189). Therefore, without being an active participant of this circle and possessing a right to express her ideas, she, in a sense, created an alternative perspective, a kind of pseudoscience about the existence of the universe. As pointed out by Mendelson, Cavendish "was not making ultimate truth claims," but rather "entertaining herself and her readers with harmless 'fancies'" ("God" 34). By employing the subject of atoms, a topic widely discussed during the seventeenth century, as the central theme of her poetry, she tries to assert her presence in the predominantly male spheres of science and literature.

In fact, Cavendish's idea of atomism is closely related to her understanding of materialism. The notion of materialism in ancient Greece was revived during the seventeenth century, and Thomas Hobbes's concept of materialism, which also underlines the passive nature of matter, gained widespread recognition. Materialism holds the belief that everything is composed of matter and all phenomena arise from material interactions. The origins of materialism are commonly attributed to the ancient philosophy of atomism, which is connected to its understanding of matter's inherent passivity. Based on the distinction between passive matter and active matter concept, materialism is categorised into two forms: old materialism and new materialism. Accordingly, old materialists, who followed atomism's conception of

matter as passive, viewed matter as a passive entity consisting of distinct and simple bodies, particles, or atoms. Matter, which is not alive for them, can only be defined by its fundamental attributes of size, shape, and motion. As Tillman posits, “[i]n Western thought, matter is passive in the sense that any impetus for change or dynamism must be given to it from without; it has no agency of its own” (30). In the modern mechanistic perspective related to old materialism, there has been a growing tendency to depict nature as consisting of distinct entities referred to as “atoms” or “corpuscles,” which exhibit a mechanical interlocking and are moved by “someone (God) or something (force)” (Gamble, Hanan and Nail 115). Thus, according to old materialists, matter does not possess inherent motion, but rather it is propelled by an external entity known as force. Evidently, matter lacks inherent creativity and agency; rather, it is subject to being influenced by God and the fundamental principles of nature that he establishes.

In contrast to old materialists’ understanding of matter “as essentially passive, non-performatively constituted, and discretely self-contained” (113), new materialists consistently highlight the inherent vitality, dynamism, and agency of matter, characterising it as “alive,” “lively,” “vibrant” and “*active*” (Gamble, Hanan and Nail 111). New materialists claim that “materiality is always something more than ‘mere’ matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable” (Coole and Frost 9). For several decades, feminist theory has heavily focused on contemplating and formulating theories concerning the essence of matter and materiality in relation to human existence. The reason for that is that

throughout history women have been perceived as having a stronger connection to the material aspects of life compared to males. As Tillman suggests, the process of assimilating women into matter often serves to belittle them as the more submissive sex, or to justify why their subordinate roles are inherent and unalterable (30). New materialist feminists critically examine the fundamental nature of matter and materialism in relation to the issue at hand, with the aim of challenging the systems of oppression and patriarchy. Accordingly, they criticise old materialists' mechanistic view of matter which emphasises that matter is passive and separable. Tillman explains that matter moves according to "universal," "timeless," and "fixed" laws, and it changes as a result of random encounters with other matter that also follows these laws. And feminists reject the concept of nature and matter as "fixed" due to the implications it has on women's perceived inferior capabilities, inherent characteristics, and social roles that cannot be escaped (30-31).

Another aspect of the mechanistic approach involves the concept that matter is divided or separated, implying a significant distinction between matter and mind, and this separation between the mind and the body has deeply influenced people's self-understanding as thinking individuals, causing many to believe that cognition and thought are not activities of matter or material bodies. It is clear that new materialist feminists question the conventional notions of matter that have historically been employed to restrict women's social responsibilities. Evidently, feminist (new) materialism emphasises the dynamic relationship between mind and matter, including will, intention, intellect,

and social forces. This dynamic and interactive matter is not inert or passive, but has agency, enabling it to cause change (Tillman 31-32).

As a matter of fact, Cavendish's appreciation of matter has some parallels with the concept of "vitalist materialism" – which has recently been discussed by Sarasohn and Boyle – in that both emphasise the vitality of atoms. Yet still, Cavendish's difference lies in that by presenting atoms as a metaphor for her female self, she indeed asserts her presence in the predominantly male-dominated world of science and literature. Evidently, contrary to the scholars of the seventeenth century, who were particularly influenced by old materialists' ideas about the "passive" structure of matter, Cavendish put forward new ideas about the "vitality" of matter, and offered a picture of the universe in her "Atomic Poems" accordingly. In employing matter as a subject and metaphor in her poetry, Cavendish's perception bears similarities with the perspectives of new materialists, who emphasise the dynamic nature of matter and the inextricable connection between matter and mind. However, Cavendish's views are not grounded in scientific studies but rather in fancy. She even defines what she calls "fancy" by employing the vitality of atoms. For Cavendish, the concept of fancy is intimately connected to the physical movements in her mind, and hence is "material." She compares herself to self-moving atoms. Like these atoms, she feels unrestrained in her capacity to explore scientific subjects that were traditionally deemed inappropriate for female writers.

To have a more profound understanding of "Atomic Poems," it is worthwhile to examine Cavendish's perspective on the function of fancy

in her poetry. Fancy is viewed by Cavendish as a creative and innovative act of inspiration. Gorman argues that

> [f]ancy is the 'Creator' of innate, independent thoughts, but also the medium for presenting thoughts for the perception of others, in which sense it is a 'Creation'. As a 'naturall' creation, an original in nature, the faculty of fancy is also a material substance both answerable to and influential over the processes of natural philosophy. It is intimate with the creative powers of nature and beyond the limited focus of scientific empiricism. (53)

Fancy is characterised as both the "Creator" and a "'naturall' Creation" in terms of its material nature. Therefore, the "Atomic Poems" initiate the endeavour of constructing a creative world for Cavendish. She considers the book of *Poems, and Fancies*, which contains her poems about atoms, as "her child" - a concrete manifestation of the product of her intelligence (Gorman 172). The atoms that Cavendish uses in her poems have the ability to provide her with an authorial reputation.

Accordingly, Cavendish, in *Poems, and Fancies,* states that atoms symbolise the flow of her thoughts as a woman writer. She emphasises the significant role atoms have in shaping both the world and her opinions. She expects that her poems on atoms please the readers. They appear in the first part of the collection, and Cavendish begins "Atomic Poems" with epistles. Before delving into the analysis of these poems, it is crucial to explain Cavendish's epistles in order to comprehend her literary strategies. In the epistle "To Natural Philosophers," for instance, she assures her readers that what they will find in these poems is a fanciful journey, even though "the subject be light and the chapters short, perchance the other may please better; if not the second, the third; if not the third, the fourth; if not the fourth, the fifth" (67-68). Her poems lack

any rules and poetic form, and do not follow a certain thematic pattern. As Hock suggests, her work *Poems, and Fancies* "becomes, through this method, something of a choose-your-own-adventure story, wherein both writer and reader explore nature's mysteries through choice and pleasure" ("Fanciful" 780). In her prefatory epistle, she conveys an apology for her writing in such matters related to nature without having a formal education as a woman: "I never read nor heard of any English book to instruct me. And truly, I understand no other language—not French, although I was in France five years. Neither do I understand my own native language very well, for there are many words I know not what they signify" (66-67). Cavendish apologises because she is aware of the fact that it is almost impossible for her to establish a scientific foundation for such an extensive subject matter. However, this apology, in a way, demonstrates her courage. She intrepidly states that she is writing poems on natural philosophy by using her knowledge of other philosophers' views on atoms, which she has acquired through discussions with her husband and brother-in-law:

> But the ignorance of the mother tongues in which learning is propagated makes me ignorant of the opinions and discourses in former times; wherefore, I may be absurd and err grossly. I cannot say I have not heard of atoms, and figures, and motion, and matter—but not thoroughly reasoned on. But if I do err, it is no great matter, for my discourse of them is not to be accounted authentic. (To Natural Philosophers" 67)

For Cavendish, the way to avoid criticism that may arise because of possible errors is to replace the scientific basis with fancy. Hock clearly describes this situation by stating that she "domesticates error through the topoi of modesty and fancy" ("Fanciful" 783). She uses her

apology as a strategy in order not to be exposed to the severe criticism of male writers and scientists in the seventeenth century. In doing so, she clarifies that her objective is not to challenge them.

Another strategy employed by Cavendish is to express her thoughts through poetry, setting her work apart from those that prioritise prose in their endeavour to discuss scientific and philosophical themes. She explains the reason behind her choice to write in verse, which she believes to be a more suitable genre for female writers. She states that "the reason why I write it in verse is because I thought errors might better pass there than in prose, since poets write most fiction, and fiction is not given for truth but pastime. And I fear my atoms will be as small pastime as themselves, for nothing can be less than an atom" (To Natural Philosophers" 67). Cavendish believes that fancy best suits poetry because fancy is "the poetic expression of the natural and variable motion of thoughts" (Hock, "Fanciful" 783). By clarifying her choice in embracing verse, Cavendish presents her excuse for "error" and "ignorance." When addressing the issues on natural philosophy, due to her lack of formal education she acknowledges her inability to write scholarly treatises similar to the ones produced by scientists. Her curiosity and imagination manifest in her ability to write in verse, and she is entirely aware of this talent and devotes herself to follow this creative path. Accordingly, she explains her determination by saying that "my ambition is such that I would either be a world or nothing" (To Natural Philosophers" 67). These words uttered by Cavendish are the expression of her strong ambition for lasting fame regarding atoms.

Significantly, in the epistle addressed to her brother-in-law, Cavendish calls attention to women's roles and their intellectual capacity in writing poetry. She says that

> [t]rue it is, spinning with the fingers is more proper to our sex than studying or writing poetry, which is the spinning with the brain. But I, having no skill in the art of the first (and if I had, I had no hopes of gaining so much as to make me a garment to keep me from the cold), I made my delight in the latter, since all brains work naturally, and incessantly, in some kind or other, which made me endeavor to spin a garment of memory to lap up my name, that it might grow to after ages. ("To Sir Charles Cavendish, My Noble Brother-in-Law" 59)

Cavendish attempts to substitute a conventional female occupation with the act of writing because she lacks the ability to engage in needlework. She "prudently puts the distaff before the pen" but she "characterizes writing as little more than a different medium for 'Spinning,' which makes poetry, spinning with the brain, a viable alternative to the distaff, spinning with the fingers" (Hock, *Erotics* 332). These two kinds of spinning are suitable for women with respect to the motion of their brains, and if the one has not developed, the other skill comes in. Her needlework is a manifestation of her creative authorship through which she aims to gain eternal fame. Cavendish once again priviledges fancy when discussing traditional female activities:

> [P]oetry, which is built upon fancy, women may claim as a work belonging most properly to themselves, for I have observed that their brains work usually in a fantastical motion, as in their several and various dresses, in their many and singular choices of clothes and ribbons and the like, in their curious shadowing and mixing of colors, in their wrought works and divers sorts of stitches they employ their needle in, and many other curious things they make, as flowers, boxes, baskets with beads, shells, silk, straw, or anything else—besides all manner of meats to eat.

> And thus their thoughts are employed perpetually with fancies.
> For fancy goeth not so much by rule and method, as by choice.
> ("To All Noble and Worthy Ladies" 61)

According to her, fancy, like any other endeavour, is a natural quality that every woman possesses. In addition, like other activities typically associated with women, fancy is an activity that provides a means to express themselves. When designing garments, women employ their imagination to create a wide range of distinctive and original clothes. Cavendish argues that women can employ fancy without limitation, as it is not subject to strict rules and patterns. As "choice" shapes fancy, it allows women to express their opinions freely and without limitations. Likewise, women can also employ fancy when writing poetry. According to Hock, Cavendish acknowledges the significance of the "poetic fancy" as a vital tool for producing the works of natural philosophy because it provides "the imaginative expression of the natural and variable motion of thoughts" (*Erotics* 302).

Accordingly, in her "Atomic Poems," Cavendish deals with various issues ranging from the creation of earth to human understanding. While explaining these issues in terms of atoms, she focuses on the relationship between atoms, their motion, matter, and the universe. At the very beginning of her poems on atoms, she emphasises the significance of motion as it has a crucial role in the process of creation. In her opening poem titled "A World made by Atoms," Cavendish states that "[s]mall atoms of themselves a world may make, / For being subtle, every shape they take. / And as they dance about, they places find" (1-3). Cavendish talks about the structure of the universe made up of atoms, stating that the world is formed by the combination

of atoms of different shapes and sizes. Moreover, she draws an unusual analogy between dancing and the motion of atoms. By selecting a verb that indicates movement, she emphasises the inherent vitality of atoms which includes both constructive and destructive qualities. Her view on atom's innate vitality is relevant to her ideas on her "vitalist materialism." For Cavendish, atoms dance freely and their random dance, with their several "forms and motions," (15) can, "by chance," create "a new world" (17). Highlighting the dynamic nature of atoms, she refers to the material foundation of the universe by asserting that random motions of atoms create a world.

For a better understanding of Cavendish's "Atomic Poems," it is necessary to know how she explains the dynamic characteristics of atoms with the categorisation of matter in her work titled *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666). In this work, Cavendish first divides matter into two "degrees" or types as "animate" and "inanimate;" and then makes another classification specifying that the animate matter itself has two "degrees," "sensitive" and "rational." Cavendish suggests that nature consists of these three different types of matter: sensitive (animate) matter, rational (animate) matter, and inanimate matter (*OEP* 168). According to Cavendish, sensitive and rational matter are free and self-moving while inanimate matter cannot move by itself. She explains the relationship between these three types of matter in detail by saying that the rational represents "the soul," the sensitive represents "the life" and the inanimate represents "the body of infinite nature." These three "degrees" of matter are combined and interconnected, therefore, they cannot be separated from one other. Together, they form "one infinite

and self-moving body of nature" (*OEP* 206). For Cavendish, all elements of nature have perception because "every action of nature is a knowing and perceptive action" (*OEP* 15). Thus, Cavendish's materialism is characterised as "vitalist" due to her assertion that all entities possess both life and knowledge. Contrary to the ideas of old materialists, Cavendish advocates that the universe comes into being by largely animate/active self-moving matter that involves sentimentality and rationality.

However, Cavendish's view has some aspects that clash with the fundamental principles of the era. More specifically, her ideas about the creation of the world related to atoms contradict with the basic religious views of the age. As Battigelli puts forward, Cavendish "reveals no interest in securing a place for God in the new atomist systems under discussion. Instead, she reveals her own speculative delight with what appeared to be the infinite number of possibilities and permutations of a natural order governed by atoms" (51). Hence, Cavendish's representation of atoms as entities capable of "several motion" challenges the theological beliefs commonly accepted during that period. For Cavendish, everything in the universe and the universe itself consist of atoms, and their combinations due to their motion are the basis of this existence. By depicting the atoms not only as creators but also governors, she appears to be questioning the hierarchical role of God in the existence of animate or inanimate things. Accordingly, she questions the idea of "the Great Chain of Being" which underlines a hierarchical order among all existing things. Within the framework of the Great Chain of Being, everything has its own particular place and function in the

universe. God is placed at the very top of the chain, which starts with God and descends through angels, humans, animals, and plants to minerals. While expressing her ideas about matter, Cavendish also questions the Christian cosmology, asserting that eternal and infinite qualities are attributed to God alone. As Cavendish questions this classical view, Mendelson calls her as "[t]he great atheistical philosophraster, That owns no God, no devil, lord nor master" (*Mental World* 60). In the light of what Meldenson states, in the world that Cavendish presents in "Atomic Poems," the presence of God is not seen as essential for creation, as atoms possess the inherent capability to initiate the creation process by their own motion. Creation starts when "several workmen serve each others turns" (16). The creation of the world is attributed to the movement of dancing atoms, providing an alternative perspective on the formation of the universe. By touching upon a theological matter at the very beginning of her "Atomic Poems," Cavendish seems to offer an alternative story of creation and explicitly expresses her challenge to commonly accepted ideas and ultimate interpretations in natural philosophy. Kargon expresses Cavendish's fearless attitude concerning atoms by saying that "atoms, of themselves, could make a world was near heresy" (75).

Cavendish, who seems to question the idea of God and creation, takes it one step further by privileging women, who have a subordinate position in Christianity, and assigns them outstanding roles in her poems. As Sarasohn suggests, in her work, "atomism itself is presented in the context of a materialist metaphysics in which a corporeal, gendered creator, called Nature, directs material principles, also gendered, to

establish a world and all that is in it using atoms" (*Natural Philosophy* 36). Instead of presenting a hierarchical order in which God is the leader, Cavendish establishes an order in which Nature manages the creation process. God is replaced with Nature in the world Cavendish portrays in "Atomic Poems." Cavendish personifies Nature as a woman who brings together her handmaidens such as Motion, Figure, Matter, and Life in order to "advise" them in creating the World in "Nature Calls a Council, Which Is Motion, Figure, Matter, and Life, to Advise about Making the World." As Stevenson argues, "[w]hen Nature and her friends agree to get started, creation creates itself: matter materializes, motion moves, life lives" (534). Cavendish personifies every one of these natural forces. Although Motion, Figure, Matter, and Life seem to subordinate Nature, they possess their own agency and aim. Cavendish tries to integrate these female figures into various spheres from which they have previously been excluded. Nature declares that "it is my nature, things to make, / To give out work, but you, directions take (9-10). And by this work, "you will pleasure have therein" (11). If Nature and her companions agree, they will do fine works and take pleasure. Accordingly, Nature tells her aim:

> You'll breed the Fates in housewif 'ry to spin,
> And make strong Destiny to take the pains,
> (Lest she should idle grow) to link some chains.
> Inconstancy and Fortune turn a wheel;
> Since both are wanton, cannot stand, but reel.
> but reel. (12-16)

Cavendish's Nature is portrayed as a powerful mistress who has the capacity of strong management over her workers. According to Hock, she is a diligent mistress, selecting assignments for her subordinates that

align with their individual traits: "[T]he Fates will spin, strong Destiny link chains, and even reeling Inconstancy and Fortune are not chastised for their wantonness but rather instructed to put it to good use turning a wheel" (*Erotics* 306). Despite being under the control of Nature, women do not have a subordinate position in this world due to their collaborative efforts. All of them equally take pleasure from this collaboration. In "Poets have most Pleasure in this Life," Cavendish explains how Nature is the source of happiness for poets as well:

> Nature most Pleasure doth to poets give,
> If pleasure in variety doth live.
> Each sense of theirs by fancy new is fed,
> Which fancy in a torrent brain is bred.
> Contrary 'tis to all that's born on Earth,
> For fancy is delighted most at's birth. (1-6)

Similar to the way in which Nature derives pleasure from the act of bringing out a novel organism, the poet takes pleasure from the act of producing her poetic composition. Like Nature, the poet takes the role of a creator in the process of producing her work. Accordingly, Cavendish assumes the role of a creator by writing her poems about atoms. Gorman thinks that through the representation of atoms in her poetry, Cavendish generates new worlds both on the page and in the mind (172). In order to enjoy and experience a fruitful process of writing, it seems that Cavendish wants her mind to remain equally active, just like the active matter.

Moreover, after she has explained the role of the self-moving atoms in the creation of the world, she describes their physical forms and functions in existence in order to show their role in the working of the

human brain in particular. According to Cavendish, the world consists of four different shaped atoms, including square, round, long, and sharp atoms. In her "The Four Principal Figured Atoms Make the Four Elements," she explains how these eternal atoms in various shapes have different functions:

> The square flat atoms as dull earth appear;
> The atoms round do make the water clear.
> The long straight atoms like as arrows fly,
> Mount next the sharp and make the airy sky.
> The sharpest atoms into fire do turn (1-5)

The atoms produce four different elements at the same time; square atoms form the earth, round ones form the water, long ones form the air, and sharp ones form the fire. Sharp atoms burn due to their "piercing quality" (6) and this characteristic "makes them active; active, light, / Which makes them get above the rest in flight" (7-8). For Cavendish, among them, sharp atoms have a significant place not only in relation to the substance they produce but also in their role in the formation of fancy.

Cavendish also explains the working of the human brain in terms of atoms. She suggests that the sharp atoms have a purpose beyond just creating fire. In her "Of Loose Atoms," Cavendish explains that a sharp atom that creates fire without any contact with other elements is the most creative one because a creative mind has sharp atoms and "from them do fancies fly" (2) while the round and square atoms "are dull, and sleepy" (4). Accordingly, Cavendish, who explains the fundamental nature of the elements of the universe as atoms, also draws a parallel between this perception and workings of the human mind.

As Stevenson argues, Cavendish thinks that atoms in her brain clash, resulting in the emergence of her fancy (532), and thus, her ideas become the product of the "fanciful motions of her brain" (536). The motion of atoms in Cavendish's brain presents the vitality of sharp atoms, and thus, it displays the active nature of her fancy. Cavendish tells how fancy works through atoms' shape and motion. In relation to the motion in her brain, she argues that her thoughts, which have self-moving characteristics like atoms, are also material. Cavendish employs atoms as a metaphor to explain not only the creative process experienced by a poet but also all phenomena associated with life. While it is acknowledged that certain aspects of Cavendish's assumptions lack scientific grounding, it is noteworthy that several of her concepts exhibit characteristics that bear resemblance to the fundamental principles of the concepts discussed in her time. Cavendish, as Hequembourg argues, further suggests that "all qualities and attributes are material and inhere in bodies" (176). For Cavendish, not only thoughts but also human character is determined by atoms, their shape and motion. If the movement leaves the body all these qualities are wiped out, because "life doth only in a motion lie" ("Motion Is the Life of All Things" 6). If the motion in Cavendish's brain ends, she loses her ability to create her "Atomic Poems."

As stated, Cavendish uses atoms not only as a metaphor to explain her writing process as a woman poet, but also as a metaphor to question the social and political problems prevalent in the seventeenth century. Battigelli believes that throughout her career, Cavendish uses atomism "as a metaphor for the brutal and frightening clash of conflicting

certainties" (149) and hence, her atomism can be accepted as both a "metaphor for society and for the mind" (158). She primarily talks about the distinction between creative faculties of women and men, which is presented by different figured atoms in men's and women's brains:

> Wherefore, it has seemed hitherto as if Nature had compounded men's brains with more of the sharp atoms, which make the hot and dry element, and women's with more of the round atoms, which figure makes the cold and moist element. And though water is a useful element, yet fire is the nobler, being of an aspiring quality. ("To Poets" 227)

In her explanation of poetic creativity, Cavendish touches upon not only the form of atoms but also the importance of fire, which is an element mostly discussed in her poems. With the identification of fire with men's creativity, Cavendish questions whether men's creative faculty is higher than women's. As Cunning argues, for Cavendish, "men and women are both up to the task of the highest levels of intellectual achievement, but that there are structures within the plenum that make the realization of a woman's potential almost impossible" (14). According to Cavendish, the superiority of men in literary creativity is attributed to the presence of a higher atomic structure in their brains. This shows that women's inferior position is based on a scientific foundation by the male-dominated scientific world. However, Cavendish argues that creativity is inherent in the atomic structure of the mind, regardless of one's sex, as both male and female brains possess sharp atoms. By presenting a new viewpoint about the sharp atoms that men and women have in equal amounts, Cavendish reveals the possibility of a change in the common perception of women's inferiority in literary accomplishments. The idea of "change" has the potential to alter the

stereotypical ideas in society. She explains the notion of change in terms of atoms and their motion: "Tis several figured atoms" such as square, round, long, and sharp (1) fit together properly as being "one body," (4) they will "make change" ("What Atoms Make Change" 1). For this change, she emphasises the importance of order and harmony between atoms because a consistent body is formed when a series of precise movements are executed accurately. Price explains "that atoms differ in shape, size and motion; that their shapes are significant to the production of physical qualities; and that a change in nature is a result of changes in the motions of atoms and their configurations as solid bodies" (125). Therefore, similar to atoms, individuals possess inherent variations that determine their physical qualities. It is the several motions of atoms that make the change:

> If all the atoms of one matter be,
> As fire, air, water, earth, and these agree,
> Then must their several figures make all change
> By motion's help, which orders as they range. ("Change Is Made by Several Figured Atoms and Motion" 1-4)

Clearly, everything has atoms but in different amounts. Although the motion and the figures of atoms are different, they should agree on "quantity, weight, quality" ("The Weight of Atoms" 5). This agreement is essential in the composition of matter, and consequently, in the formation of the universe and the mind. As a result of their agreement, the more "infinite of matter," the more "infinities of worlds" are created ("Of Infinite Matter" 7-8). Through the harmony and unity between them, atoms, which differ in shape, size and motion, create an infinite world. Otherwise, atoms will create "disproportionable things" ("What

Atoms Make Change" 7) resulting in formlessness and chaos. She presents the importance of balance and agreement in creativity, and accordingly, she tries to bring a new perspective to atoms by looking for and asking for a new order that privileges women's equal rights in the literary and scientific world. A stable and well-structured social order is offered with Cavendish's emphasis on harmony and unity.

In addition to its association with creativity, fire is given a privileged role in Cavendish's "Atomic Poems" with respect to its relationship with the existence of natural phenomena. Motion makes sharp atoms "mount high" and "fly" ("Of Sharp Atoms" 1-2) and "[b]y their swift motion, to bright fire they turn, / And being sharp, they pierce, which we call burn ("Of Sharp Atoms" 5-6). Additionally, these atoms that bring out fire move like "stream" in flame through which they produce light (2), flowing like a fluid but "fire without a flame is sharp alone" ("Of Atoms That Make Flame" 6). Besides light, sharp atoms produce heat and they are "scattered all about" like "dust" ("Of Fire and Flame" 9-10). Such atoms that create heat also create cold "[l]ike pincers sharp that nip, and do take hold" ("What Atoms Make Heat and Cold" 1-2).

Cavendish also aims at explaining matters associated with chemistry with atoms. She wonders about the reason for the faster burning rate of a spark of fire compared to a larger flame, and in "What Atoms Make Fire Burn, and What Flame," she states that fire is dry and falls into parts, and these parts vary in sharpness based on their degrees: "The sharpest atoms keep the body hot;" and hence, they fly forth in order to give heat (5). Cavendish also makes an effort to explain

phenomena such as life and death with atoms. For her, life is determined by sharp fire atoms. She emphasises that despite their smallness, ants can eat a dead horse when they come together. For Cavendish, similar to ants, atoms have inherent power unless they are made weaker by other atoms. When sharp fire atoms meet a body, the weakest ones, which flit, "turn [air] to flame" (19) and die at the end, while the sharpest ones cling and join the "firmest bodies" (23). She metaphorically emphasises the concept of strength through unity which is another significant issue presented in "Atomic Poems." The notion of unity holds great significance in the seventeenth-century social and political structure, which is marked by a fragmented social unity and the prevalence of conflict and war. Cavendish explains the significance of unity in both social and personal domains once again by using atoms as a metaphor. In "In the Center Atoms Never Separate," she emphasises the power of unity among atoms by stating that "[t]hey lie so close and do so firmly bind, / As them no form nor motion can unwind" (3-4). She thinks that only with their close connection, they manage to cling to each other, form a circle, and are not separated. She points out that with their quick motion, especially sharp atoms go to the center of the earth: "There gathering close, and so become a sun" ("All Sharp Atoms Do Run to the Center, and Those That Settle Not, by Reason of the Straightness of the Place, Fly Out to the Circumference. Sharp Atoms Running to the Center Make the Sun" 6). She, at the same time, gives an explanation of how the Sun gives heat that is based on its motion. By defining it as "A world of fire," she positions the sun in the centre (9). Cavendish states that when the centre possesses strength, those in its vicinity can coexist harmoniously under its attractive force.

Cavendish also explains human relations with atoms. She is inspired by the underlying principles of human relations such as sympathy while discussing the significance of order and harmony among atoms. As Clericuzio suggests, Cavendish thinks that "the motions of atoms are directed by an internal principle of action which she styles sympathy" and the atoms that "sympathise unite forming different natural bodies" (86). For Cavendish, sympathy implies the shared essence between entities. She suggests that the sympathy in each figure helps them come together, and from this union, four elements – "Earth, Air, Water, [and] Fire" – come into being to be entire ("Of the Sympathy of These Four Principal Figured Atoms" 3). Moreover, in her "Of the Four Principal Sorts of Atoms," Cavendish states that through sympathy, atoms produce "new forms" such as minerals, vegetables and animals (5). Cavendish describes sympathy as the force that guides atoms and puts them in order, which shows how she uses sympathy not only as a feeling but also as a scientific term by presenting it as a correlation between entities. During the formation, motion is of crucial importance: "… Motion, as their shepherd, drives them so / As not to let them out of order go ("Of the Sympathy of These Four Principal Figured Atoms" 9-10). Loose atoms, akin to straying sheep, are hindered by motion in order to maintain order. For her, besides sympathy, another essential thing in this process of formation is void that makes the motion of the atoms possible. Due to void and direction of the motion, the atoms move without being constrained:

> Motion and matter can new figures find,
> And the substantial figures turn and wind.
> Thus several figures, several motions take;

> And several motions, several figures make.
> But figure, matter, motion, all is one,
> Can ne'er be separate, nor be alone. ("Motion Is According to the Figure" 13-19)

Evidently, Cavendish's central concern in several other poems is the subject of unity. This particular poem also emphasises the need for unity. According to Cavendish, for the creation of anything or any form, there should be unity among matter, motion and figures. In "All Things Last or Dissolve according to the Composure of Atoms," Cavendish focuses on the importance of atomic combination and the distance in the process of formation. Firstly, she maintains that "the moving atoms" make everything in the world (4). Then, she emphasises that body's sturdiness over time is related to its connection with close atoms. For example, the "small vegetables" have loose outlying atoms which cause their quick death (9-10). Atoms, with their good combination, lay much closer and thereby, animals can live longer than vegetables (11-12). Likewise, "strong trees" have a longer lifespan due to the same underlying cause (18). Interestingly enough, motion "tosseth" loose atoms in bodies which are "soft," "porous" and "thin," and keeps them "from their places keeps; so life goes out" (23-28). As long as there is unity between atoms in a formation, there will be no separation. If several figured atoms are closely connected, they create new things: "[A]s those figures join in several ways, / So they the fabric of each creature raise" ("The Joining of Several Figured Atoms Make Other Figures" 3-4).

Throughout her "Atomic Poems," Cavendish says that harmony and order are necessary for the world formed by atoms. Harmony among atoms provides health and a long life while the absence of this harmony

leads to the manifestation of diverse disasters, diseases and even death. In relation to the significance of agreement among atoms, she primarily states that "[s]ome motion with some atoms doth agree, / Fitting them to their place, just as may be; / Where they by Motion's help so strong do grow" ("An Agreement of Some Kind of Motion with Some Kind of Atoms" 1-3) In her "Motion Directs While Atoms Dance," Cavendish continues to explain the harmony of the atoms during their dance because this harmony, for her, is the sign of "health, which life depends upon" (7). She states that "When sick, and well, the body is by fits, / Atoms do fight, but none the better gets" ("What Atoms Cause Sickness" 1-2). According to her, the disharmony caused by the fighting of atoms leads to not only "sickness in men" but also "[t]hunder in the air," "[e]arthquakes, and winds" which "make disorder great" ("Atoms and Motion Fall Out" 2-3). Moreover, if the movement stops as a result of disharmony, the dance ends and it results in death. When the order in nature and life is disturbed, it leads to the emergence of sickness and chaos. From a wider perspective, it is evident that she emphasises the importance of harmony to draw attention to the fatal consequences of war and the subsequent social divisions it might cause. She states that the fight between atoms causes war:

> Some factious atoms 'mongst themselves combine,
> And strive some formed body to disjoin.
> Round atoms do beat out the sharp; the long,
> With flat atoms do fight; thus all go wrong.
> Those which make motion General in their war,
> By his directions much stronger are. ("A War betwixt Atoms" 1-6)

What Cavendish alleges here is that a war between atoms breaks out when factious atoms force some formed bodies to disjoin. As she

asserts, "factious persons … are not onely the cause of the taking away our goods … and our lives, but our religion, our frends, our laws, our liberties, and peace; For a factious man makes a commotion, which commotion raiseth civil wars … a factious man is a humane Devil" (*WO* 42). Cavendish, who experienced the civil war, criticises the authoritative figures in the seventeenth century due to their role drifting society into war. She describes the political and social upheavals she experienced through the fight between atoms. For her, everything that is good or ill in the world is made and controlled by atoms and their motion:

> Thus life and death, and young and old,
> Are as the several atoms hold.
> Wit, understanding, in the brain,
> Are as the several atoms reign.
> And disposition, good or ill,
> Are as the several atoms, still.
> And every passion, which doth rise,
> Is as each sort of atom lies.
> Thus sickness, health, and peace, and war,
> Are as the several atoms are. ("All Things Are Governed by Atoms" 1-10)

In addition to the poems categorised as "Atomic Poems" in *Poems and Fancies,* Cavendish occasionally uses atoms to clarify several other issues in other sections of the book. For example, in some poems in the fourth part, Cavendish uses atoms to explain metaphysical issues. She, at times, has tendency to find answers to some inexplicable issues with reference to supernatural things. Her ideas on atoms are strengthened by the presence of supernatural figures. Regarding her belief in the existence of fairies, she states that

> I wonder any should laugh or think it ridiculous to hear of fairies, and yet verily believe there are spirits, which spirits can have no

> description, because no dimension. … [Yet, fairies] are only small bodies not subject to our sense, although they be to our reason. For Nature can as well make small bodies as great, and thin bodies as well as thick. … And if we can grant there may be a substance, although not subject to our sense, then we must grant that substance must have some form, and if some form, why not of man as well as of anything else? And why may not rational souls live in a small body as well as in a gross, and in a thin, as well as in a thick? ("To the Reader Concerning Fairies" 275)

Cavendish's use of the metaphorical representation of atoms as fairies serves as a means to embody and conceptualise the existence of invisible entities. In her "The City of These Fairies Is the Brain," Cavendish describes the place where these fairies live by stating that "The City [of them] is the Braine" (1). As Sarasohn points out, "the motion of the atoms or the motion of the fairies had determined understanding and will" and in her work "matter, also dancing, produces cognition and imagination" (*Natural Philosophy* 59). Cavendish thinks that "in every brain may dwell / Those creatures we call fairies" ("Of Fairies in the Brain" 1-2). Personifying atoms as fairies, she states that the movement of these fairies in her brain gives inspiration, revealing the layers of imagination that each person possesses.

Despite the presence of some recurrent themes, when examined as a whole, in her "Atomic Poems," Cavendish presents her ideas regarding the creation of the universe, human cognition, natural phenomena, and all aspects of human existence from birth to death. In presenting all the possibilities for these issues, she merges science with fancy, and modestly expresses her ideas on natural philosophy. Regardless of the unwelcoming attitude of the scientific community towards women, she manages to take her own part as a woman by expressing her own

understanding of the universe with her vitalist view of natural and intellectual creation in "Atomic Poems." Through her extraordinary method, the use of fancy, and employing unconventional, at times far-fetched metaphors, Cavendish accomplishes "her own [literary and] scientific revolution," attaining the fame that she always yearned for (*Natural Philosophy* 190).

CHAPTER 2

"FAME WILL BE YOUR SCRIBE AND WRITE YOUR ACTIONS": MARGARET CAVENDISH AS A "GENERALLESS" AND "HEROICKESS" IN *BELL IN CAMPO*

This chapter aims to examine Margaret Cavendish's closet drama *Bell in Campo* (1662) in order to demonstrate how Cavendish assigns multiple roles to her fictional self, such as "generalless," "tutoress," "instructress," "ruler," "commanderess," and "heroickess," in a fantastical heroic world. This representation serves to illustrate Cavendish's radical redefining of women's roles during the upheaval of the English Civil War. This chapter, accordingly, scrutinises Cavendish's portrayal of women's capabilities and their power in the context of the political and historical conditions of the period as reflected in her *Bell in Campo*. In line with this main aim, it initially focuses on Cavendish's close connection with Queen Henrietta Maria during the English Civil War to elaborate on women's roles in wartime; and then, on the capability of women to achieve success in both political and domestic spheres in terms of their position in such a male-dominated political world when they have equal rights with men by presenting a diverse range of possibilities.

Margaret Cavendish published nineteen plays in two collections *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (1662), which includes the play *Bell in Campo*, and *Plays Never Before Printed* (1668). Despite being written during the English Civil War (1642-1651), Cavendish's *Bell in Campo*

was not published until 1662. Cavendish wrote in the genre of closet drama, taking into consideration the political atmosphere of the time. Stanton defines the genre as "a category meant to encompass dramatic works believed to have been authored in the private domestic space for an audience of readers, as opposed to public stage plays written by commercially engaged authors for an audience of paying spectators" (75). This genre started to gain popularity during the Civil War years due to the prohibition of public theatre performances in 1642. Cavendish explains the reason behind her writing in closet drama as follows:

> The reason why I put out my plays in print, before they are acted, is, first, that I know not when they will be acted, by reason they are in English, and England doth not permit, I will not say of wit, yet not of plays; and if they should, yet by reason all those that have been bred and brought up to act, are dead, or dispersed, and it would be an act of some time, not only to breed and teach some youths to act, but it will require some time to prove whether they be good actors or no. (*BC* 210)

Straznicky argues that the closet dramas produced during the period of theatre closure from 1642 to the Restoration were exclusively authored by Royalists, and she asserts that these Royalist authors and publishers employed closet drama as a "form of subversive political discourse" (357). Female authors such as Elizabeth Cary and Cavendish, who faced limitations in public speaking, used this genre as a medium to freely discuss their political thoughts and effectively communicate with their intended audience. By composing her plays with the intention of being read rather than performed on a stage, Cavendish also managed to liberate herself from the restrictions of dramatic tradition. She explains her purpose in writing her plays to be read as follows:

> [T]he printing of my plays spoils them forever to be acted; for what men are acquainted with, is despised, at least neglected; for the newness of plays, most commonly, takes the spectators, more than the wit, scenes, or plot, so that my plays would seem lame or tired in action, and dull to hearing on the stage, for which reason, I shall never desire they should be acted. (*BC* 211)[6]

In the dedication to the *Bell in Campo,* she explains that she writes her plays primarily for her own "pleasure and delight," and states that "[f]or all the time my plays a making were, / My brain the stage, my thoughts were acting there" (25). Holmesland suggests that Cavendish designed her plays not only to be read but also "to be enacted in the private imagination" (45). Cavendish wants her readers to imagine the actions in their mind, so offering them great pleasure.

Since the play is about the repercussions of the Civil War on women, in the first place, it would be better to elaborate on Cavendish's involvement with the Civil War to set a ground for the discussion of the play within the general socio-political framework of the period. Although she was far away from the horrors of the battlefield, she as an individual was well aware of the dangers and destructive consequences of the battle. She has knowledge of the ravages of war, how it ruins families, leaving women all alone and separating them from the beloved male members of the families. Long before *Bell in Campo*, Cavendish conveyed her views on warfare in some of the poems in her *Poems and*

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[6] On July 1st, 2007, a short version of Margaret Cavendish's two-part play, *Bell in Campo*, was performed at Bolsover Castle in Derbyshire, England, at the end of the Seventh Biennial International Conference of the Margaret Cavendish Society (Shanahan 192). Shanahan argues that none of Cavendish's theatrical works were performed during her lifetime or afterwards. It is only in recent years that a record of performances has started to emerge (192).

Fancies. These poems provide a deeper and more thorough comprehension of the various ideas explored in the play. As one of the most prolific women writers during the period of the English Civil War, Cavendish felt the war's impact, and depicted its effects in her works. As Ross and Scott-Baumann argue, Cavendish's poems, which were primarily written in the 1650s, do not frequently address political issues directly, but they do reflect the tensions, philosophical and moral dilemmas created by the Civil War (200). In the fifth part of *Poems and Fancies*, she specifically portrays a comprehensive view of world history, the inevitability of human mortality, conflicts such as battles and civil war, as well as the themes of heroism, grief, mourning, remembrance, and the profound consequences of death. Prior to delving into the war poems, Cavendish, in her epistle "To All Valiant Soldiers," vividly depicts the cruelty of war:

> You may justly laugh at me if I went about to censure, instruct, or advise in the valiant art and discipline of war. … For I never saw an army together, nor any encounters, in my life; but only by chance a troop or regiment march on the highway. Neither have I the courage to look on the cruel assaults that men (as I have heard) will make at each other; but according to the constitution of my sex, I am as fearful as a hare. For, I shall start at the noise of a potgun, and shut my eyes at the sight of a bloody sword, and run away at the least alarm. (*PF* 308)

In her letter, Cavendish openly acknowledges her lack of knowledge in writing about military issues due to her lack of first-hand knowledge. However, she understands the savagery of warfare and its impact on individuals of both sexes. Therefore, she is courageous to write about the realities of war. Accordingly, she states that "[o]nly my courage is, I can hear a sad relation, though not without grief and

chillness of spirit. But these armies I mention in this part were raised in my brain, fought in my fancy, and registered in my closet" (*PF* 308). As Pasupathi argues, this epistle to soldiers "mingles concession and confession with fearless self-promotion, and ultimately fashions her a brave writer, if weak soldier" ("Old Playwrights" 134). Cavendish, as a woman, refuses being a passive observer of war merely. Instead, she chooses to comment on war in relation to her own personal experiences as an individual living in a period of Civil War.

In her poem "A Description of the Fight," Cavendish portrays the tragic images of the reality of war. Especially, the depiction of the soldiers is highly disturbing, with explicit descriptions of their brains crushed, their eyeballs hanging, and their lungs straining for their last breath:

> Some with sharp swords (to tell, O most accursed!)
> Were above half into their bodies thrust.
> From whence, fresh streams of blood along did run
> Unto the hilts, and there lay clodded on.
> Some, their legs dangling by the nervous strings;
> And shoulders cut, hung loose, like flying wings.
> Heads here were cleft in pieces, brains lay mashed;
> And all their faces into slices hashed. (1-8)

Cavendish presents disturbing visual images to emphasise the horrific reality experienced by soldiers in war. More specifically, she provides a detailed account of a realistic picture of deceased soldiers by conveying the mental and physical damage that remains after a war. Burdened by their unyielding pain, the soldiers hold a deep desire for death as a means of liberation: "Their restless heads, not knowing how to lie, / Through grievous pains, did quickly wish to die" (45-46).

Cavendish's meticulous and vivid portrayals function as a powerful denouncement of the brutality and futility of war, emphasising its capacity to wipe out both the physical and emotional aspects of human existence. At the end of the poem, Cavendish compares the soldiers to horses to convey how a human being is stripped of his humanity by losing all his aim in life. The horses have no apparent reason for dying, whereas humans sacrifice their lives for the sake of "vainglory" (159-60). Neither horses nor men comprehend the reason behind their sacrifices, and both are destined to die.

Patriotic ideals imposed on soldiers make them act with the belief that dying in battle is an honor for men. In "A Battle between Honor and Dishonor," Cavendish tells the fight between Honor and Dishonor to present the conflict in men's mind. She personifies honor and dishonour as two women, and shows the meaninglessness of quest for honor in war. Dishonor disobeys Honor's laws and arms against her. Honor also raises a military force to combat Dishonor's army with the aim of protecting her sovereignty. The leader of Honor's army is "Gen'rosity," while Dishonor's army is headed by "Partiality," "Reachery," "Perjury," and "Unthankfulness," with "Suspicion" and "Envy" following closely (44-52). Cavendish focuses on the process of the war rather than its outcome. The clash between Honor and Dishonor, thus, remains unresolved at the end of the poem and the discussion does not reach a definitive conclusion. This unresolved debate and the absence of peace between them emphasise the futility of war. In "Upon the Funeral of My Dear Brother, Killed in These Unhappy Wars," Cavendish once again underlines the futility of war, this time with a reference to her brother's

death and tragic waste. Sir Charles Lucas, a Royalist commander, had successfully defended the city of Colchester for more than two months, but the Parliamentary forces executed him in 1648 after a court martial (Hopkins 7). According to Walker, Cavendish is plainly troubled by the idea of her brother dying alone, without his family by his side (57). In the poem, she gives voice to her brother who expresses his loneliness not only at the moment of his demise but also throughout his funeral:

> Alas! Who shall my funeral mourner be,
> Since none is near that is allied to me?
> Or who shall drop a sacrificing tear,
> If none but enemies my hearse shall bear? (1-5)

Cavendish presents war as a force that divides families and isolates individuals. In "An Elegy upon the Death of My Brother," Cavendish further elaborates on the tragic death of her brother. Her brother's heroism and his reputation as a brave soldier who sacrificed himself for monarchy will be glorified by the survivors, and people will bestow upon him their admiration and acclaim. However, everything seems insignificant because his "heroic mind," which surpasses all the admiration and praises of humanity, no longer exists due to his early death (10-13).

Despite her lack of direct involvement in warfare, Cavendish in most of her poems expresses her thoughts on war, especially women's wartime roles both in domestic and public spheres through her memories, enriched by considerable amount of fictional details. In her poems, Cavendish portrays the evil and destructive nature of war through the gaze of a woman who witnessed it passively from a distance. In

contrast, in *Bell in Campo*, she asserts that when confronted with an inevitable battle, women should actively assume roles that suit them rather than passively observe from afar. She explicitly emphasises that these roles they embraced have the potential to alter the course of the war. This belief in the potential of women to actively take part in war stems from her position as a lady of Queen Henrietta Maria, as well as being the sister of two brothers, Charles and John, who actively engaged in wars. Later on, she gained further insight about war as the spouse of an exiled Royalist leader. Cavendish lived at the time of significant turmoil in English history, characterised by social and political division. This chaotic situation was born as a result of this disorder that lasted from 1642 to 1660. James I, the first Stuart monarch of England from 1603 to 1625, experienced a significant conflict with the Parliament that caused a rebellion against his successor, Charles I. Like James I, Charles I assumed the position of an absolutist monarch, which resulted in the outbreak of the Civil War in 1642 between the Royalists and the Puritans. The war ended in 1649 with the triumph of the Puritans, leading to the execution of Charles I. Oliver Cromwell governed England from 1649 to 1660 after being appointed by the Parliament, during which he established a Puritan Commonwealth administration abolishing the monarchy. After Cromwell's death, the Puritan Parliament opposed the accession of his son, Richard Cromwell. Consequently, Charles II, the son of Charles I, took authority when he returned from exile in 1660 and restored the monarchy (Cunning 4; Ross and Scott-Baumann, "Introduction" 3-5). The Lucas family had allied with the monarchy before Margaret's birth, and thus, Cavendish's close relationship as a royalist with the significant political figures of the time, particularly

Charles I and his wife Queen Henrietta Maria, shaped her perspective on war.

Cavendish was deeply influenced by Queen Henrietta and took her as a role model. Therefore, it is essential to delve into the active involvement of the Queen in the War before referring to the play *Bell in Campo*. Queen Henrietta Maria actively engaged in military campaigns on behalf of her husband during the English Civil War. Before the War, the Queen visited the Low Countries, which are Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Upon her return from the Low Countries, from which she brought troops and weapons, she embarked on a journey across England, engaging in battles for several months, until she eventually reunited with her husband in Oxford. It was in 1643 that she officially established her court there (Plowden 35). Stanton points out that Queen's public display of female heroism during the Civil War positioned her as the leader of a dispersed group of women who were privately engaging in actions to protect their homes and towns and to help their husbands (72-3). Henrietta Maria played a significant role in the military and political affairs. For example, White attributes the success of the Royalists at the battles of Seacroft Moor, Stratton, Manchester, But'ton-upon-Trent, and Bristol, as well as the capture of Tadcaster and Scarborough, directly to the several forms of support provided by Henrietta Maria (189).

Henrietta Maria's active participation in the war was also presented in the letter she wrote for her husband. As she arrived in Bridlington from Holland, accompanied by William Cavendish, she intended to take her ladies and recently acquired soldiers to Oxford. However, they

encountered a blockade by four parliamentary ships right at the coastal town, which is told by the queen as follows: "[T]he balls were singing round us in fine style, and a serjeant was killed twenty paces from me. We placed ourselves then under this shelter, during two hours that they were firing upon us, and the balls passing always over our heads, and sometimes covering us with dust" (Dauncey 179). According to Stanton, by her engagement in military activities including managing the resources, securing money and troops, and traveling across England, the queen assumes the role of "royalist adventurer" which signifies the heroic potential of a woman (74). She was accused of high treason and faced impeachment by the Parliament due to her military achievements as a woman (Battigelli 11). The Queen's enemies are said to claim that during the Civil War, Charles would never have survived without the help of the "Generalissimo," representing the Queen (De Lisle 61).

Cavendish's role as a maid to Queen Henrietta Maria, whom she greatly respected, significantly influenced her perspective on war. The onset of the Civil War had an immediate impact on her life, as the Lucas family, who were loyal to the monarchy, had their home invaded by a violent mob; as a result, the Lucas family moved to Oxford along with other Royalists (Haynes 725). Margaret Cavendish, née Lucas, after witnessing the victorious arrival of Queen Henrietta Maria in Oxford in 1643, decided to serve as a maid of honour to the Queen (Jones 2). Grant states that "Margaret Lucas, irresistibly attracted by the romantic figure presented by the Queen, which so nearly corresponded to her own idea of herself as a princess famous for all heroic and feminine virtues, begged her mother to allow her to volunteer as a maid of honour" (54).

Although her family, especially her mother, initially opposed to the decision because of her naivety and noted beauty, she eventually accepted it (Haynes 725-26). During her service to the Queen, Cavendish had a chance to see court masques which affected her pursuit of drama. Despite the fact that the last court masque, which was published, was performed in 1640 before Margaret Lucas's arrival, the court at Oxford continued to organise masque performances, even during the ongoing war (Battigelli 188). Cavendish is influenced by these court masques, and due to her interest in these masques she produces similar short plays. *Bell in Campo*, written in a similar style to the court masques, is defined by Gross as "a masque celebrating the generalless's heroic victory, evoking Henrietta Maria and the genre's royal legacy of feminine power" (180).

Her marriage and family life also inspired some of the episodes in *Bell in Campo*. As a member of the Queen's court, Margaret Lucas was compelled to flee to France in the 1640s, together with the Queen and other royalists (Herrick 191). While living in France in exile, she met and married another loyal follower of the Queen, William Cavendish, who had previously served as the commander of the troops that accompanied the Queen on her military campaign prior to her return to Oxford (Gross 180). Cavendish had the opportunity to learn about the Queen's heroic achievements through her husband. Thus, her marriage and her experiences during the Civil War and the years of exile not only served as inspiration for her play *Bell in Campo* but also played a significant role in developing her identity as a playwright. Her marriage provided her encouragement for her writing and helped her to find her

public voice. Her banishment from her own country resulted in a transformation in her domestic role, hence creating an opportunity for her to assert her identity both as a wife and writer.

The events in the play *Bell in Campo* are mostly narrated by the nameless male characters who are referred as "gentleman" individually or relayed through soliloquies or conversations. Before moving on to the main topic, Cavendish introduces, at the very beginning of the play, the amazement expressed by three gentlemen over a woman's ability to write a play:

> 2 GENTLEMAN A woman write a play! Out upon it, out upon it, for it cannot be good, besides, you say she is a lady, which is the likelier to make the play worse, a woman and a lady to write a Play; fie, fie.
>
> 3 GENTLEMAN Why may not a lady write a good play?
>
> 2 GENTLEMAN No, for a woman's wit is too weak and too conceited to write a play. (*BC* 29)

The anonymity of these male characters may serve as a manifestation of the biases held by a male-dominated society towards women. Especially, the second Gentleman's remarks concerning his doubts about woman's talents in writing a dramatic work are significant. Voicing the common prejudices of the male-dominated society, he thinks that if a woman has written a good play "I will say nobody will believe it, for if it be good, they will think she did not write it, or at least say she did not" (*BC* 29). He further believes that "the very being a woman condemns it, were it never so excellent and rare, for men will not allow women to have wit, or women to have reason, for if we allow them wit, we shall lose our pre-eminence" (*BC* 29). Similar to the concept of

"authoress" as discussed in the second chapter, Cavendish, here, consciously touches upon the issue of women's authorship to assert her own identity as a female playwright. She questions the common tendency during that era to accuse women of plagiarism. Her play is indeed an answer to such prejudices, and it demonstrates that a woman has enough wit and skill to create a noteworthy play.

In *Bell in Campo,* the Kingdom of Faction, symbolising the Parliamentarians, declares war against the Kingdom of Reformation, symbolising the Royalists. The Lord General starts to make his preparations to lead the Reformation army in their battle against the invaders, while his spouse, Lady Victoria, expresses her resolute determination to join him. Initially resistant, the Lord General ultimately accepts the Lady's offer, resulting in several spouses accompanying their husbands on the journey. Upon arrival at the battlefield, men assert the need for moving women to a town nearby, in order to ensure their safety and prevent any potential danger. These women's anger in the face of this situation leads them to establish their own army. In the end, the female army led by Lady Victoria successfully engages in the battle and effectively saves the male army from danger, resulting in a complete defeat of the Kingdom of Faction's military forces. Men, who recognise women's success in war, celebrate Lady Victoria as a natural heroine and give social and domestic rights to the victorious women.

Along with this main plot, the play also consists of subplots, that are crucial in observing the impact of war on women's private lives, depriving them of their husbands and the happiness of family life. The stories of Madam Jantil and Madam Passionate are indeed the examples

of how women respond to the changes that war brought. Madam Jantil isolates herself entirely from society to mourn over her husband's death, which eventually leads to her own death next to her husband's tomb. In contrast to Lady Jantil, Madam Passionate, following a short period of severe grief, prefers to remarry and selects an attractive young man as a spouse. In the end, she regrets getting married because she is abused by her second husband. Cavendish employs these subplots to illustrate the unfavourable circumstances experienced by women during and after the war while in the main narrative, she emphasises how a woman might attain a privileged position in society.

The roles of the female characters are examined through the juxtaposition of two different types: those who choose to accompany their husbands to war and those who opt to remain at home. Lady Victoria prefers to engage in war while Madam Jantil and Madam Passionate decide to stay at home. Through Lady Victoria, Madam Jantil, and Madam Passionate, Cavendish provides a variety of attitudes regarding marital relations of women representing their social class. As Walden posits, "the aristocratic Lady Victoria is 'coequal' with her husband; the genteel Madame Jantil is given form and meaning by her husband; and the commonplace Madame Passionate is practical and worldly about having a husband" (87). In addition to these female figures, Cavendish introduces two other women characters, Madam Whiffell and Madam Ruffell, to exemplify the inherent weakness of women that prevents them from participating in war. Cavendish depicts all the female figures as the embodiments of the social difficulties and responses of encountered by women during the war. In addition,

Cavendish brings to the fore Lady Victoria's extraordinary characteristics by contrasting her with other women who do not want to resist the roles imposed by male-dominated society.

Cavendish, through her protagonist Lady Victoria, makes an assessment of women's traditional domestic roles in wartime, which are determined by the dominant patriarchal ideology. In the opening scene of the play, two Gentlemen describe Lord General, leader of the Kingdom of Reformation, and his preparation for war against the Kingdom of Faction. He is presented as "a man that is both valiant and well experienced in wars, temperate and just in peace, wise and politic in public affairs, careful and prudent in his own family, and a most generous person" (*BC* 32). As an excellent soldier, he meticulously makes preparations for the battle, symbolising the patriarchal society's strict discipline and order in military matters. However, he feels sad as he has to leave his young and virtuous lady behind him. The sharp contrast between the public role of men in going to war and women's domestic role in staying at home and waiting for the return of their husbands to home is evidently observed in this scene. This gendered division gives passive roles to women and restricts their participation in politics and war.

Lady Victoria wants to change her conventionally defined role by trying to convince her husband to allow her to join the war. To achieve this goal, she makes use of her persuasive speech by employing the values of the patriarchal society for her own benefit. She puts emphasis on her husband's devotion to her, and states that "I love you the best, preferring the best of what is yours; but I am but in the second place in

your affections, for you prefer your honour before me; 'tis true, it is the better choice, but it shows I am not the best beloved, which makes you follow and glue to that and leave me" (*BC* 34). As Ji argues, Lady Victoria converts the Lord General's public military duty into an individual decision "between (private) love and (public) honor" (210). Lord General, whose name is not given in the play as he is the representation of the voice of the patriarchal society, emphasises the conventional notion of women as a weaker creature: "Nature hath made women like china, or porcelain, they must be used gently, and kept warily, or they will break and fall on death's head" (*BC* 36). He asserts that women, because of their fragility, are unable to adapt to the harsh conditions of the military camp. According to him, the conversation between the male soldiers is "rough and rude" which is "too boisterous for ladies" (*BC* 35). Lady Victoria employs the strategy of exploiting her husband's concern about cuckoldry to dissuade him from his choice of not accompanying her to the battlefield. She informs him that if she remains, she will either die due to severe pain or bring shame upon him by the rumours about adultery. She reminds him of Penelope, a wife who, when left alone, suffered from the threat of sexual assault and how hard she tried to preserve her chastity throughout her husband's prolonged absence:

> [T]hough the siege of her chastity held out, yet her husband's wealth and estate was impoverished, and great riots committed both in his family and kingdom, and her suitors had absolute power thereof; thus though she kept the fort of her chastity, she lost the kingdom, which was her husband's estate and government, which was a dishonour both to her and to her husband. (*BC* 36)

Lady Victoria asserts that in men's world, women who are left

behind become subject to physical abuse and accusations of dishonesty, which tarnish the reputation of their husbands. According to Raber, Cavendish's portrayal of Penelope as a "negative example" of chastity is indicative of the social change brought about by the Civil War ("Warrior Women" 427). This is because, considering the active role of Queen Henrietta Maria during the war, Penelope's passivity could be seen as a drawback. Raber suggests that Cavendish prioritises active self-defense rather than adopting a passive stance of "besieged chastity" (428) because for Cavendish, "only an active virtue and an aggressive honor are useful to the state" (427). After Lady Victoria has explained the disadvantages of staying at home, she once again emphasises the significance of her presence alongside her husband by saying "if you let me stay behind you, it will be a thousand to one but either you will lose me in death, or your honour in life, where if you let me go you will save both" (*BC* 36). As pointed out by Ji, "Cavendish finds in actual women warriors of her times a new model of active female agency that explores militant chastity rather than passively maintaining defensive chastity against assaults" (213-14). As an uxorious husband, Lord General accepts his wife's accompaniment, reflecting Cavendish's views on women's roles in the institution of marriage. The relationship between Lord General and Lady Victoria reminds Charles I's humble attitude towards Queen Henrietta Maria during the Civil War. Similar to Lord General, Charles I "was an uxorious husband, the only seventeenth-century monarch who took neither mistresses nor lovers" (Kishlansky 17). As a man who values his wife's opinions, during the war, he willingly accepted his wife's support with her heroic action. For example, in the 1640s, Queen Henrietta Maria travelled to the

Netherlands to buy military equipment for her husband, and Charles I intended to use these resources to strengthen his military efforts during the ongoing civil conflicts in his kingdom (Ailes 146). Throughout the play, the reference to the Queen's wartime support and reputation are made to justify the positive effect of women's active role in war and marriage.

Cavendish also creates a realistic setting, once again drawing on her own experiences. Lady Victoria initiates her rebellion after she and the other wives, who accompany their husbands, are abandoned in a garrison town located approximately "two days' journey from the Army" (*BC* 45). Carlton expresses that there were two main types of military areas during the English Civil War: the field army and the garrison town (195). As the garrison town is commonly associated with stability, passivity, and comfortable domestic life, the soldiers' children and wives frequently resided in the garrison town, and during the ongoing war, Cavendish spent two years in a royalist garrison town at Oxford (Carlton 195). Lady Victoria becomes outraged and refuses to remain in the garrison town due to women's inherent fragility and need for protection there. Victoria tries to enlighten women about their current circumstances, and motivates them to proactively engage in action:

> Most heroic spirits of most chaste and loving wives, mistresses, sisters, children or friends, I know you came not from your several houses and homes into this army merely to enjoy your husbands, lovers, parents and friends in their safe and secure garrisons, or only to share of their troublesome and tedious marches, but to venture also in their dangerous and cruel battles, to run their fortunes, and to force destiny to join you to their periods; but the masculine sex hath separated us, and cast us out of their companies, either out of their loving care and desire of preserving

> our lives and liberties, lest we might be destroyed in their confusions, or taken prisoners in their loss, or else it must be out of jealousy we should eclipse the fame of their valours with the splendor of our constancy; and if it be love, let us never give the preeminence, for then we should lose that prerogative that belongs to the crown of our sex. (*BC* 46)

As the garrison town becomes the representation of private space, the politics of domestic and public identities of women are depicted through it as well. The fourth Gentleman reminds the restricted duties of ladies in warfare by saying "it hath been a practice by long custom, for women to be spectators in their battles, to encourage their fights, and so give fire to their spirits; also to attend them in their sicknesses, to cleanse their wounds, to dress their meat; and who is fitter than a wife?" (*BC* 39). According to the gentleman's description, women mostly are expected to serve as observers and helpers, and it indicates women's pre-determined roles in domestic matters in the army. Although the wives first follow the male troops, they are subsequently excluded from participating in the fight, and men abandon them to remain in a garrison town as the conflicts occur. Following the suspension, Lady Victoria decides to establish an exclusively female army, since she holds the belief that heroic women are capable of performing heroic actions:

> [W]herefore if we would but accustom ourselves we may do such actions, as may gain us such a reputation, as men might change their opinions, insomuch as to believe we are fit to be copartners in their governments, and to help to rule the world, where now we are kept as slaves forced to obey; wherefore let us make ourselves free, either by force, merit, or love, and in order, let us practice and endeavour. (*BC* 48)

Cavendish criticises the traditionally imposed social roles on women, which portray them "as slaves forced to obey" their husbands.

She declares that through their heroic actions, women can change their standing in patriarchal social structure as "copartners in their governments" (*BC* 48). According to Cavendish, women can redefine their identities through "practice and endeavour" (*BC* 48). She believes that women have the ability to achieve recognition and fame by performing heroic action. Moreover, this part of the play highlights the significance of women's consensus as the primary factor that will motivate them to take action. Lady Victoria, who sees unity between women in their military pursuits, says that "[n]oble heroickesses, I am glad to hear you speak all as with one voice and tongue, which shows your minds are joined together, as in one piece, without seam or rent" (*BC* 47). These "worthy heroickesses" swear that they will obey their "generalless," "tutoress," "instructress, ruler and commanderess," and submit to her punishments and rewards (*BC* 49).

To describe Lady Victoria's new role, Cavendish first uses the word "generalless" which indeed is an allusion to how Queen Henrietta Maria is commonly seen. As pointed out by Gross, the phrase "Generalissima," which is used interchangeably with the term "generalless" became popular in referring to a female leader after the publication of *The King's Cabinet Opened* by the Parliament in 1645, and *The Oxford English Dictionary* records the first occurrence of its use to describe Henrietta Maria (196). In *Bell in Campo*, Cavendish also deals with the real story about the Queen's dog. Grant summarises the event by stating that upon the Queen's return to Bridlington Bay in Yorkshire, following her exile in Holland, her force was subjected to bombardment by the Parliamentary army. Under the bombing, she

realised that she had accidentally left her lap dog in the place where she had been staying. Despite the danger to her own life, she bravely went back in order to rescue her beloved pet (53-54). In the play, this story is given within the context of the negative effects of women's presence in warfare. The first Gentleman puts forward the idea that women are also obstacles to men on the battlefield with the following words:

> [t]he Lord General was accounted a discreet and wise man, but he shows but little wisdom in this action of carrying his wife along with him to the wars, to be a clog at his heels, a chain to his hands, an encumbrance in his march, obstruction in his way; for she will be always puling and sick, and whining, and crying, and tired, and froward, and if her dog should be left in any place, as being forgotten, all the whole army must make a halt whilst the dog is fetched. (*BC* 38)

As an admirer of Queen Henrietta Maria, Cavendish gives reference to this event to break down the prejudices not only about her role in battle but also about women's involvement in military affairs. Contrary to the masculine perspective, interpreting this event as an expression of women's vanity, Cavendish employs it to draw attention to women's sensitive, loving, and generous nature towards all living creatures. Raber asserts that during that period, the event about the Queen's dog was widely discussed and regarded as a manifestation of "her luxury" and "indulgence;" however, Royalists considered it as an act of heroism ("Our Wits" 487).

Furthermore, as a "generalless," the victory of Lady Victoria demonstrates the celebration of her power and her heroism. After Lady Victoria has been selected as "generalless" by her troops, she gains absolute authority, allowing Cavendish to revise the traditional gendered

hierarchy. Lady Victoria assumes a leadership role similar to that of her husband's. She leads the female army as the "Generalless," and guides them to victory as warriors. According to Walden, Lady Victoria's class-based supremacy is most evident in her establishment of laws and regulations for the women's army, which she does by writing them on a brass tablet. This is described in a manner that draws parallels to the Biblical story of Moses and the presentation of the Ten Commandments (77). Lady Victoria explains fifteen rules which are all crucial like the statements in the Bible, and she assigns tasks to women, which also indicates her superior position among women: "Enter the Lady Victoria with a great company of women, after a table of brass carried before her, she stands upon the heap of turfs, and another woman that carried the table, wherein the laws and rules are inscribed; she bids her read them" (*BC* 51). In *Bell in Campo*, with the reference to "Moses" and "the Ten Commandments," Cavendish in a similar manner gives a picture of a woman leader endowed with miraculous powers. It is with this power that she outshines her ability to help individuals and guide them to the right path.

As a "tutoress" and "instructress, Lady Victoria teaches the requirements by clarifying the logic behind each law. For example, she prohibits her "heroickesses" from participating in "the company of men, whilst they are in arms or warlike actions, not so much as to exchange words, without the Generalless her leave or privilege thereto" (*BC* 56). She explains its reason "that men are apt to corrupt the noble minds of women, and to alter their gallant, worthy, and wise resolutions, with their flattering words, and pleasing and subtle insinuations, and if they have

any authority over them, as husbands, fathers, brothers, or the like, they are apt to fright them with threats into a slavish obedience" (*BC* 56). Hence, she orders her army to maintain a safe distance from the male army, and wants them to conceal the heroic plans of the female army. Moreover, according to Ji, Cavendish employs this discipline as a means "to reconcile female militancy with chastity, emphasizing the moral supremacy of the female army" (222). Lady Victoria deliberately excludes men from her military camp to prevent any potential distractions or decrease in morale. According to Swetnam, Cavendish intentionally presents such a scene to question the common belief that women, being "crooked by nature," tend to follow in the footsteps of their first leader, Eve, who swiftly caused the downfall of the man with her ambitious and promiscuous character (193-94). Cavendish portrays women in a different manner compared to the misleading depiction of Eve that deceives men. She criticises the perception of women's infamy by portraying males as the main catalysts of corruption.

Throughout the play, Lady Victoria is depicted as a benevolent leader who prioritises the well-being of the women under her rule and endeavours to make the right decisions for their benefit. As a result, as stated, she breaks all ties with the male army except for the diplomatic necessities. In order to communicate with the male army for political affairs, she selects a few women as messengers, but strictly isolates them from the rest of the female army: "[T]hese women shall neither be of the body of our army, nor keep amongst the army, nor come within the trenches, but lie without the works in huts, which shall be set up for that purpose" (*BC* 56). Lady Victoria continues to discipline her female

soldiers with laws about their leisure activities. She prohibits engaging in any form of gambling involving money or alcohol, allowing only games that involve obtaining meat to eat. She explains that gambling for drink leads to soldiers to become drunk and unhealthy, and drunken soldiers are not suitable for military duty. In addition, she asserts that gambling for money has a negative impact on soldiers, since those who lose get angry and fights arise as a result. She does not allow her army to "lie in garrison towns," because these towns "breed or beget a tenderness of bodies and laziness of limbs, luxurious appetites, and soften the natural dispositions, which tenderness, luxury, effeminacy, and laziness, corrupts and spoils martial discipline" (*BC* 54). Thus, she commends them to "be always entrenched abroad," since "the open fields, and casting up trenches makes soldiers more hardy, laborious and careful, as being more watchful" (*BC* 54). However, the most important thing they should focus on is always "having arms to wear," and "they shall sleep, eat and rest, and march with them on their bodies" (*BC* 51). Last but not least, anyone who violates any of these rules or commands will be subject to the death penalty, while those who fail to adhere to them strictly will face severe penalties. In this section, Cavendish gives a full picture of what she means by an ideal social order through the rules of Lady Victoria.

Moreover, Lady Victoria is shown as an insightful and compassionate leader who values the welfare of her troops. The work frequently depicts her as a leader who employs power and authority not for personal gain, but for the advantage of those who endorse and have faith in her. Walden describes Lady Victoria's vision as a leader by

stating that "[t]he troops of women are an undifferentiated mass of female humanity that is capable of taking action against the forces of factionalism because they have been knit into a powerful active force by the vision of their leader" (81). Cavendish improves women's roles, changing them from passive wives to active soldiers. Cavendish, thus, provides women with a new identity that has a social function. More specifically, by presenting a new model with her new roles as a "generalless" and "tutoress," Cavendish proves how a woman gets public agency by means of this action. At the end of the play, it is revealed that their accomplishments prove to be worthy not only to their kingdom but also to their gender.

Lady Victoria is also depicted as a leader who always treats women under her authority with respect, and she never has contempt for them. She consistently communicates with them in a manner that motivates and upholds their sense of dignity. She addresses her soldiers and army in a number of ways like "Noble Heroickesses" and "Amazons" to encourage them, and she uses the titles of "the Female Army," "the Effeminate Army," and "the Amazonian Army" to distinguish her unique military force. However, Cavendish's use of the word amazon may appear problematic, as the term is commonly associated with cruelty, brutality and violence. The Amazon myth goes back to the ancient times even predating the era of Homer, and has been employed in literary works, sculpture, and painting throughout history. Carney summarises the shared characteristics seen in several legends concerning the Amazons: The Amazons are known as warrior women who intentionally remove one breast to enhance their archery skills. They engage rarely in sexual

relations with men only for the purpose of reproduction. They raise their daughters but give up or kill their sons, or subject them to domestic tasks. At last, they reside in communities exclusively comprised of women (117). Accordingly, the Amazon myth has been commonly regarded with a negative connotation; Homer, for example, refers to the Amazons as "antimen," describing them as "wild," "unrestrained," and "unwed females," and he describes them as "liminal figures, living somewhat beyond the outskirts of the Greek world: not the girls next door but the girls on the next block but one" (qtd. in Stewart 576). This description emphasises their exclusion from the mainstream society and the challenge they posed to traditional male-dominated system. As the myth includes the representation of a group of violent women who enslave men, such cruelty on behalf of women overshadows their heroism. Hence, such an image categorises women as outsiders. Therefore, the word "Amazon," according to Maggie, has frequently been used as a negative label to denounce women who have defied social expectations (327). In that regard, the representation of the Amazons not only mirrors how society views women and power, but also highlights the nature of women's ability to take action and resist authority. It is observed that leaving aside its negative connotations, Cavendish employs the myth of Amazons to enhance her ideas about women's military achievements. In the play, Cavendish once again questions the conventional depictions and attributions associated with women, as she does in her earlier literary works. She brings to the fore the positive aspects of this myth by emphasising that women can be strong warriors.

Through referring to the Amazons, Cavendish demonstrates the possibility of women's superior position to men in their ability to fight and govern. Cavendish presents the heroic sides of Amazonians rather than their brutal sides. Pasupathi clarifies their achievement by saying that Lady Victoria's "Amazonian army not only defeats Faction, but also bends the Reformers to reform. Dramatizing war and interrogating her country's lack of roles for women in national governance, *Bell in Campo* is a fantasy of triumphant militarism that rewrites the outcome of England's civil wars while simultaneously authorizing women's participation" ("New Model" 657). Lady Victoria's warrior women do not prefer to kill men; instead, they try to form an army despite them. According to Bonin, the space created by the warrior women "is utopian because it offers women an alternative to the domestic sphere as well as opportunities for political agency" ("Worlds" 139). Even though it may be regarded as utopian, Kleinbaum posits that "the Amazon image [a woman] can be herself, and the property of no one else: In this dream, she can fly" (226). With her women warriors, Cavendish demonstrates the potential for women to overcome the gendered binary opposition by redefining their inherent position and place. Accordingly, instead of men rescuing women, it is the female army fighting to save men.

The warrior women depicted by Cavendish have profound knowledge of war tactics, and they demonstrate the capacity of acquiring new abilities during times of difficulty. After Lady Victory has received the news that Lord General is severely wounded and most of the male soldiers were killed, she encourages her military forces to immediately initiate action to help the male army:

> Noble Heroickesses, I have intelligences that the army of Reformation begins to flag, wherefore now or never is the time to prove the courage of our sex, to get liberty and freedom from the female slavery, and to make ourselves equal with men: for shall men only sit in Honour's chair, and women stand as waiters by? shall only men in triumphant chariots ride, and women run as captives by? shall only men be conquerors, and women slaves? shall only men live by fame, and women die in oblivion? no, no, gallant heroicks raise your spirits to a noble pitch, to a divine. height, to get an everlasting renown, and infinite praises, by honourable, but unusual actions: for honourable fame is not got only by contemplating thoughts which lie lazily in the womb of the mind, and prove abortive, if not brought forth in living deeds. (*BC* 81)

Lady Victoria emphasises that if the female army fails in battle, women warriors will be exposed to harsh criticism from the male army. However, if they come victorious then it will result in recognition of their martial capabilities, and they will honour these women. She states that "if you arm with courage and fight valiantly, may men bow down and worship you, birds taught to sing your praises, Kings offer up their crowns unto you, and honour enthrone you in a mighty power" (*BC* 81). Lady Victoria suggests that instead of lamenting in passivity, women should make their enemies suffer physically through their heroic actions. In the end, they will become "the mothers of glorious actions" (*BC* 81) and achieve everlasting fame: "May time and destiny attend your will, / Fame be your scribe to write your actions still; / And may the gods each act with praises fill" (*BC* 82). At first, the male army rejected the female army's request for help, but their gender prejudices were shattered when they emerged victorious at the end of the war, with the help of women. To declare their admiration of ladies and express their appreciation, Lord General sends a letter to women warriors:

> To the most excellent of her sex, and her most worthy Heroickesses.
>
> You goddesses on Earth, who have the power and dominion over men, 'tis you we worship and adore, we pray and implore your better opinions of us, than to believe we are so unjust as to take the victory out of your fair hands, or so vainglorious as to attribute it to ourselves, or so ungrateful as not to acknowledge our lives and liberties from your valours, wisdoms, and good fortune, or so imprudent as to neglect your power, or so ill-bred as to pass by you without making our addresses, or so foolish as to go about any action without your knowledge, or so unmannerly as to do anything without your leave; wherefore we entreat you and pray you to believe that we have so much honour in us, as to admire your beauties, to be attentive to your discourses, to dote on your persons, to honour your virtues, to divulge your sweet graces, to praise your behaviours, to wait your commands, to obey your directions, to be proud of your favours, and we wear our lives only for your service, and believe we are not only taken captives by your beauties, but that we acknowledge we are bound as your slaves by your valours. (*BC* 92-93)

These complimentary words of the Lord General are highly significant because the heroic achievements of women despite all the obstacles are acknowledged by a man of a prominent social status. According to Ji, "[a]lthough the female army's victory and the change in the male army's attitude toward women warriors are Utopian wishes that Cavendish could not realize in reality, such an imaginary victory is significant for women's political awakening" (226). Lady Victoria presents how women achieve self-realisation: "[G]allant Heroickesses, by this you may perceive we were as ignorant of ourselves as men were of us, thinking ourselves shiftless, weak, and unprofitable creatures, but by our actions of war we have proved ourselves to be every way equal with men" (*BC* 94). At the beginning of the play, the males hold the belief that women should serve as their slaves. However, at the end of

the play, after witnessing their heroic accomplishments and capabilities, they state that they shall be their wives' slaves. This image of slavery differs significantly from the enslavement of cruel women in the Amazon myth. In this context, Cavendish interprets slavery as an act of wholehearted devotion, and offers an alternative meaning to this myth. Accordingly, Raber puts forward that the significance of Cavendish's Amazon army lies not in its passive defence of its own virtue or its symbolic connection to the monarchy and nation, but rather in its proactive involvement in military operations ("Warrior Women" 429).

Following her depiction of women's equal political authority with men, Cavendish presents ways of enabling women to attain equality within the domestic sphere as well. As a reward for the victory of the female army, the King gives "a blank [page] for the female army to write their desires and demands" (*BC* 110). The King gives women the opportunity to openly express their ideas. After all these accomplishments, Lady Victoria appears as a victorious commander, reflecting the meaning of her name:

> *The Lady Victoria was adorned after this manner; she had a coat on all embroidered with silver and gold, which coat reached no further than the calves of her legs, and on her legs and feet she had buskins and sandals embroidered suitable to her coat; on her head she had a wreath or garland of laurel, and her hair curl'd and loosely flowing, in her hand a crystal ball headed with gold at each end, and after the chariot marched all her female officers with laurel branches in their hands, and after them the inferior she soldiers, then going through the stage, as through the city, and so entering again, where on the midst of the stage as if it were the midst of the city, the magistrates meet her, so her chariot makes a stand, and one as the recorder speaks a speech to her.* (*BC* 116 emphasis original)

Before the declaration of women's new rights, in the stage direction, Lady Victoria's ceremonial entrance is presented in detail to celebrate her authority. Witnessing Lady Victoria's magnificent entrance, the recorder begins to praise her on behalf of the Kingdom of Reformation. He states that "[v]ictorious lady, you have brought peace safety and conquest to this kingdom by your … valiant actions, which never any of your sex in this kingdom did before you. Wherefore our gracious King is pleased to give you that which was never granted nor given to any before, which is to make you triumphant, for no triumph is ever made in monarchies" (117). The King fulfils the demands of the female army and grants rewards for the achievements of all women warriors. The recorder declares the rights of all "Heroickesses" by saying that in the kingdom, women will be mistresses in their homes, sit at the top of the table, manage the finances, order their servants, buy provisions, claim their own jewels, plates, and furniture, wear fashionable clothes, go abroad, eat when they want, attend balls, plays, masques, preaching, and churchings, and be of their husbands' counsel (117).

Cavendish's great desire, which *The Blazing World* also depicts, is to create an ideal world where women assert their voices more prominently. Revealing this dream through her literary works, particularly in a closet drama that would be read by the courtiers and her immediate circle, Cavendish manages to express her expectations aloud. Such a utopian structure and this idealistic community will equally enhance the quality of life for men. While creating this world, Cavendish uses her first-hand knowledge about court life. The reference to masques

serves as an additional link to the influence of Queen Henrietta Maria, and this "legitimizes women's agency, and along with the overall scene supports women's participation in theatre, … possibly even signifying the text's publication as a Restoration play, when women first acted on the stage" (Gross 209). During the Civil War in particular, women's engagement in cultural activities, including attendance to theatre performances, participation in religious events, and travelling abroad, is notably limited. Cavendish presents these behaviours to pay attention to the changing nature of women's roles in both private and public spheres. Through these rights, women assume a new role of household leadership, which can be regarded as a criticism of the patriarchal social model especially presented at the very beginning of the play.

Besides all these rights, the King gives special rights to Lady Victoria which also ensures that both Lady Victoria and Cavendish's female warriors do not vanish into the realm of myth once the conflict concludes; their achievements as soldiers result into "political recognition and public memorial" (Raber, "Warrior Women" 430). The king has issued an order that poets will praise her; her heroic deeds narrated in the stories will be recorded in the kingdom's library; the arms with which you fought will be displayed in the King's armoury (*BC* 117). These privileges distinguish Lady Victoria as an epic hero/heroine. Furthermore, she will always adorn herself with a laurel garland; she will be granted a position alongside the children of the King; women who commit dishonourable acts that bring shame to their gender will be punished more harshly than before, since they have failed to follow her noble ideals. Those who have followed her footsteps will be properly

honoured by the state; her portrait will be immortalised in brass and placed in the centre of the city (117). Hence, Lady Victoria as a wife and as a "Generalless," exemplifies the capacity of a woman to change her private and public roles.

The play also focuses on two other women characters, Madam Jantil and Madam Passionate, who do not participate in the war between the Kingdom of Reformation and the Kingdom of Faction. In order to highlight Lady Victoria's heroic characteristics, Cavendish introduces these women characters. Both women serve as unfavourable examples that contrast with the courageous and active Lady Victoria. The undesired aspects of widowhood during the war are introduced through these individuals, who become widows as a result of their husbands' deaths in battle. A young, beautiful woman Madam Jantil, with her constant mourning and melancholy, embodies traditional female practices of mourning during the war. According to Schiesari, melancholy "appears as a specific representational form for male creativity, one whose practice converted the feeling of disempowerment into a privileged artefact," and thus, it had a significant role in the artistic temperament of men during the seventeenth century (7-8). However, Trevor claims that Cavendish's *Bell in Campo* is a valuable source for understanding the melancholic state of women (21). In the play, Cavendish questions why women's sorrow is frequently seen as passive and insignificant in wartime. Cavendish warns women against passivity, as it can result in melancholy. Lady Victoria strongly refuses her husband's command to stay at home during his time at war, as she wishes to avoid suffering from such melancholy. She states that "if I stay behind

you, the very imaginations of your danger will torture me, sad dreams will affright me, every little noise will sound as your passing bell, and my fearful mind will transform every object like as your pale ghost, until I am smothered in my sighs, shrouded in my tears, and buried in my griefs" (*BC* 35).

Unlike Lady Victoria, Madam Jantil is not aware of the destructive effects of melancholy. At the beginning of the play, the young Madam Jantil seems eager to accompany her husband, Seigneur Valeroso, to the battle due to her feelings of jealousy. Her husband expects his wife to remain at home and wait for him. She contemplates her husband's desire to engage in warfare without his wife around, and suspiciously accuses him of having a mistress to accompany him. She describes the woman as "one that perchance hath more beauty than you think me to have; with whom you may securely and freely sit in your tent, and gaze upon; or one that hath more wit than I, whose sweet, smooth, and flattering words may charm your thoughts, and draw your soul out of your ears to sit upon her lips" (*BC* 43). Lord Valeroso openly professes her affection for her spouse, and convinces her to remain in their home. Due to her young age and beauty, he considers that the battlefield is not suitable for her. Therefore, she will remain safe at home. As a submissive, passive and obedient wife, she obeys her husband's command. However, she gets sick shortly after her spouse leaves. Her melancholy manifests in sleep disorders, nightly wanderings, and the appearance of nightmares. Her mind is filled with fear, and she describes her intense suffering throughout the terrible separation from her husband, and recounts her nightmare:

> I saw his face pale as a lily white,
> His wounds fresh bleeding blood like rubies bright;
> His eyes were looking steadfastly on me,
> Smiling as joying in my company;
> He mov'd his lips as willing was to speak,
> But had no voice, and all his spirits weak;
> He shak'd his hand as if he bid farewell,
> That brought the message which his tongue would tell;
> He's dead, he's dead, asunder break my heart,
> Let's meet in death, though wars our lives did part. (*BC* 58-59)

After she has seen the ghost of her husband, she receives news of his death in battle, and her dreams serve as a psychological response to the grief caused by her husband's death. Instead of committing to a new marriage, she strongly insists on taking part in "the ritual performance of remembering" (Helt 39). Cavendish's depiction of this female figure was influenced by her deeply sorrowful mother, who continued to grieve even after the death of Cavendish's father (Whitaker, *Mad Madge: The Extraordinary* 24). The play extensively portrays Madam Jantil's ritual performances of remembering and reverence, often in an exaggerated manner, which is another element that makes a woman passive and imprisons her to domestic life. Hufton suggests that a "woman's first task after her husband's death was to demonstrate to society that she venerated his memory" (220), and Madam Jantil can be observed as an exemplary embodiment of a woman's conventional mourning process over her husband. When she sees the crying of her steward, she says that "[l]ife is a curse, and there's none happy but those that die in the womb before their birth, because they have the least share of misery; and since you cannot weep out life, bear it with patience" (*BC* 65). However, she "does far more than bear her grief with patience — her melancholy is active in relation to both aesthetic creation and performance" (Nelson

and Alker 19). For Cavendish, this action reflects her desire to seek relief by alleviating her obligations, rather than stepping into a creative process. Initially, she wants her steward to sell all her jewellery, cutlery and household furniture at the highest possible price in order to present her employees with a reward for their long-standing efforts. Then, she wants her to employ highly experienced artisans, who specialise in stone carving or cutting, to construct a tomb based on her specific instructions. She begins her demands for the building of her husband's tomb:

> [A]s first I will have a marble piece raised from the ground about half a man's height or something more, and something longer than my husband's dead body, and then my husband's image carved out of marble to be laid thereupon, his image to be carved with his armor on, and half a head-piece on the head, that the face might be seen, which face I would have to the life as much as art can make it; also let there be two statues, one for Mercury [the messenger of the gods in Roman mythology], and another for Pallas, these two statues to stand at his head, and the hands of these statues to join and to be laid under as carrying the head of my husband's figure; on the right side of his figure, let there be a statue for Mars, and the hand of Mars's statue holding the right hand of my husband's figure, and on the left hand a statue for Hymen [the Greek god of matrimony], the hand on the place of the heart of my husband's figure. (*BC* 66)

Her "construction of an extravagant funeral monument" is "a specifically royalist act, reasserting iconography as a means to establish identity and resisting the iconoclastic impulses of the parliamentarians" (Nelson and Alker 30). Madam Jantil's desire to build a gorgeous tomb for her husband is the symbol of her social status. Accordingly, the tomb is carefully depicted, adorned with numerous statues and a vast forest surrounding it which is enclosed by a brick wall. For Scodel, it reminds the lavish funeral monument of Charles Cavendish, the father of William

Cavendish (25). Throughout the play, Cavendish occasionally presents sections from her own life. To honour his memory, Madam Jantil takes responsibility for the construction of such a gorgeous monument, which becomes a magnificent space where she will display her grief. There, she also presents her dedication to her husband:

> Love is so strong and pure it cannot die,
> Lives not in sense, but in the soul doth lie;
> Why do I mourn? his love with mine doth dwell,
> His love is pleas'd mine entertains it well;
> But mine would be like his one embodied,
> Only an essence or like a godhead. (*BC* 70)

Such excessive passivity is reflected as something that leads the woman to death. Madam Jantil gives in to grief and dies beside her husband's grave. Her death can be considered a marital union because her body is buried alongside her husband. D'Monté describes it by saying Madam Jantil "lies on the ground, trying literally to bury herself in the earth as she proclaims her own elegy" (116). Consequently, Lady Victoria's statement that "love and life are joined together" is justified at the end of the final scene of the subplot (*BC* 35). Cavendish also dramatizes the themes of fate and death with symbolic meanings to explain the impact of Civil War on individuals. According to Nelson and Alker, Madam Jantil's performance vividly reveals the painful memories of the Civil War, and illustrates how it deeply affected her mental state, emphasising "the fragility of the human condition" (26). They further suggest that "[a]llowing a woman to assume the role of tragic heroine and royalist elegist for the losses of the past and the instability of the present is a radical act" (27). Cavendish presents Madam Jantil's attitude as heroic because she embodies the conventional manifestation of

mourning that arises from the traumatic experience of the Civil War. Yet still, Cavendish places significant importance on a woman who is both active and heroic.

In contrast to Madam Jantil, the other widow in the play, Madam Passionate, despite her old age, chooses to get into a new marriage without mourning properly. At the beginning of the play, she rejects accompanying her husband, Monsieur la Hardy, to the battlefield. Furthermore, she endeavours to convince her spouse not to engage in warfare: "Why should you go to the wars now you are in years, and not so fit for action as those that are young, and have their strengths about them? besides, we have lived a married pair above these thirty years, and never parted, and shall we now be separated when we are old?" (*BC* 44). Cavendish expresses her own anti-war approach by depicting Lady Passionate. Monsieur la Hardy asks his wife to cease her tears and pray for her safe return from the battlefield with dignity, then leaves. Following her recovery from the illness caused by the death of Monsieur Le Hardy, Madam Passionate follows the suggestions of her servant, Doll Pacify:

> There is no way … but to please yourself still with the present times, gathering those fruits of life that are ripe, and next to your reach, not to endanger a fall by climbing too high, nor to stay for that which is green, nor to let it hand whilst it is rotten with time, nor to murmur for that which is blown down by chance, nor to curse the weather of accidents for blasting the blossoms, nor the birds and worms of death, which is sickness and pain, for picking and eating the berries, for nature allows them a part as well as you, for there is nothing in the World we can absolutely possess to ourselves; for Time, Chance, Fortune and Death, hath a share in all things, life hath the least. (*BC* 77)

Madam Passionate's eagerness to remarry, demonstrated by her final marriage to Monsieur Le Gravity, exemplifies an attitude favoured by some widows during the Civil War. By making this decision, women have the potential to attain or lose their social status. Madam Passionate embodies the misery of a widow who experiences a fall in her position in society. Tomkins thinks that "a husband's death represented economic disaster, since it frequently either initiated or exacerbated poverty. Remarriage was a route to economic survival, but the majority of widows found remarriage difficult because widowhood had rendered them too poor to be attractive in the marriage market" (157). Women from the lower class tend to have a preference for remarriage, whereas women of higher social status, who have acquired the financial means and freedom to have an enjoyable and independent life, prefer not to remarry.

Hufton clarifies the concept of widowhood not only as a personal tragedy but also as a social issue, since "these were women alone, some in command of money and assets, others so poor without a man to support them that they might threaten public morality" (221). The widows may easily face accusations of immorality due to the patriarchal norms. According to Gross, Madam Passionate assumes the role of a conventional widow, serving as both "an object of humor" and "a vehicle for misogynist representations; she is old and smelly yet vain and simpering, also drunk and lecherous," all characteristics repulse her suitors, yet they persist in their pursuit for her wealth (193). Madam Passionate, who has a lower social status compared to both Lady Victoria and Madam Jantil, naively accepts one of her suitors' compliments and marries Monsieur Le Gravity, a gentleman, who "might be her grandson,

or son at least” due to his young age (*BC* 108). However, after her marriage, she deeply laments her decision as her young husband carelessly wastes her property, and engages in an extramarital affair. She expresses her sorrow as follows:

> O unfortunate woman that I am, I was rich, and lived in plenty, none to control me, I was mistress of my self, estate and family, all my servants obeyed me, none durst contradict me, but all flattered me, filling my ears with praises, my eyes with their humble bows and respectful behaviours, devising delightful sports to entertain my time, making delicious meats to please my palate, sought out the most comfortable drinks to strengthen and increase my spirits, thus did I live luxuriously, but now I am made a slave. (*BC* 109)

Lady Passionate’s case is the representation of women’s vulnerable nature. She is objectified and abused by her second husband who is greedy for money. Despite not being obligated to marry again as a widow due to her husband’s property, she remarries and experiences an awful end. According to Gross, Madam Passionate reflects a “feminine lack of self and domestic governance” (193). As a result of her failed remarriage, she has become a slave who is disrespected by her servants, as they only obey the master who controls the finances. It is evident that Madam Passionate has entirely lost her dignity.

In addition to Madam Jantil and Madam Passionate, Madam Whiffell and Madam Ruffell do not accompany their husbands in war in the play. Captain Whiffell wants to take his wife along with him to the battlefield, but Madam Whiffell refuses her request by saying “[a]las husband I am so tender, that I am apt to catch cold if the least puff of wind do but blow upon me; wherefore to lie in the open fields will kill

me the first night, if not, the very journey will shatter my small bones to pieces" (*BC* 41). Madam Whiffell's choice is a reference to the conventional belief that women are unable to participate in warfare due to their weak nature. She accepts the ideas of patriarchal society that she will be "clog," "chain," "encumbrance" and "she will be always puling and sick, and whining, and crying, and tired, and froward" (*BC* 38). She represents the conventional justification of being too weak and fragile to confront it. Her attitude shows a lack of desire to make progress by releasing the social roles imposed upon her. Like her, Madam Ruffell takes refuge in the same excuse in order not to accompany her husband, Captain Ruffell. Furthermore, she strictly refuses it by saying that

> What with a knapsack behind me as your trull? Not I, for I will not disquiet my rest with inconveniences, nor divert my pleasures with troubles, nor be affrighted with the roaring cannons, nor endanger my life with every pot-gun, nor be frozen up with cold, nor stew'd to a jelly with heat, nor be powdered up with dust, until I come to be as dry as a neat's tongue; besides, I will not venture my complexion to the wrath of the sun, which will tan me like a sheep's skin. (*BC* 41-42)

As pointed out by Gross, she not only expresses "feminine weakness," but also exhibits "feminine vanity and self-indulgence," prioritising her own pleasure, relaxation, and appearance over her husband and any sense of responsibility (191). She does not agree with adhering to "the fashion for wives to march" (*BC* 41), and does not want to follow "General's lady as a common trooper doth a commander" (*BC* 42). She declares that "I will be Generalissimo myself at home" (*BC* 42). By using a military title, she emphasises her supremacy within the domestic sphere in the absence of her husband. Confronted with Madam Ruffell's rejection, Captain Ruffell responds by threatening to bring

along the household's laundry maid and kitchen wench as camp followers. She says that "while you ride with your laundry-maid in your wagon, I will ride with my gentleman-usher in my coach" (*BC* 42). Madam Ruffell's statement hints her husband's previous assumption of engaging in illicit relations with a servant. The scene depicts the Captain as a helpless and potentially cuckolded individual who is unable to control his wife. The play merely offers excuses for Madam Whiffell and Madam Ruffell's choice of not to accompany their husbands. The fate of these women and their husbands remains mysterious.

To conclude, in her play *Bell in Campo*, Cavendish explores the social and political roles of women in the context of the Civil War. In this play, she demonstrates the potential for women to gain new roles and positions in both private and public domains, together with men. The potential roles that women take on in these spheres are not achieved through a radical attempt at overthrowing the patriarchal system, but rather through a strategic approach that aims at gradually improving the status of women. By portraying women as victorious and better than men in war, she demonstrates the ability of women to change from ordinary housewives to national heroines. Thus, the play is a celebration of female heroism and power as it represents a number of women who gain domestic and social rights both in private and public spheres. Cavendish celebrates women's empowerment through assigning new positions to the female protagonist of the play such as "generalless," "tutoress," "instructress," "ruler," "commanderess," and "heroickess."

CHAPTER 3

"I ENDEAVOUR TO BE *MARGARET* THE *FIRST*": MARGARET CAVENDISH AS A "CREATORESS" AND "AUTHORESS" IN *THE DESCRIPTION OF A NEW WORLD, CALLED THE BLAZING WORLD*

The primary objective of this chapter is to examine Margaret Cavendish's work of fantastic utopian fiction, *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World*[7] (1666), with the purpose of demonstrating how she constructs a utopian world of her own which is different from the conventional utopian narratives. Like the "Atomic Poems," this work is also the product of her endless curiosity and interest in science. In her utopian work, she establishes her conception of an ideal scientific academy led by a woman who is, indeed, the fictionalised version of Cavendish herself. In relation to the common issues presented in utopias such as science, law, social order, religion, administration, philosophy, education, and the condition of individuals, the main female character of the work takes up various roles such as "creatoress" and "authoress" through which Cavendish claims, how as a woman, she can be successful even if it is in an imaginary world. In fact, by giving new roles to a woman, Cavendish liberates herself from social and educational constraints, thereby refashioning herself through expanding opportunities and possibilities for women. She creates an imaginary realm shaped with her yearnings and desires. It is such a fantastic and utopian realm that it enables her to freely express all her thoughts on

[7] Hereafter the work will be referred to as *The Blazing World*.

various subjects including science, war, natural philosophy, monarchy, and politics.

In line with the main purpose of this chapter, it first concentrates on the rise and development of the idea of utopianism and how Cavendish, as a woman writer, employed this genre and contributed to it. Moreover, it also aims at a study of the underlying motivation behind her creation of a personal utopia. The introductory part is followed by an analysis of *The Blazing World* with an end to reveal how she changes the commonly accepted social roles in her imagined world. Such changes enable her to assume various roles that she cannot have in reality such as being a creatoress, authoress, empress, head of a scientific academy, political leader, and a saviour.

Derived from the Greek word *ou-topos* –"no place," utopia is basically defined as "a non-existent society" (Sargent, "In Defense of Utopia" 15). To be more precise, through Thomas More's pun on the word utopia, it has been used as an equivalent for *eu-topia* – "good place" and thus, its definition is reshaped as "a non-existent good place" (Sargent, *Utopianism* 2). And, it has been over-elaborated as "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which the reader lived" (Sargent, "Three Faces" 9). In much the same way, Vieira suggests that utopia is described as "the desire for a better life, caused by a feeling of discontentment towards the society one lives in" (6). Based on these definitions, a utopia can be deemed as ideal solely on the condition that it facilitates the disappearance of imposed restrictions on individuals. In

this respect, utopia might be accepted as not only a kind of reaction to the undesirable present conditions but also an aspiration to overcome all the difficulties by the imagination of a possible alternative (Vieira 7). Furthermore, it is clear from its definitions that utopias cannot be achieved, but they can serve as a guide for the creation of alternative societies and the discovery of alternative solutions to the problems in the real world.

Sargent, in discussing his definition of utopia, puts forward that the critics should refrain from using the words "perfect" and "perfection" while they define the word utopia ("What is a Utopia?" 158). What is significant at this juncture is that the idea of perfectness in utopias is problematic because no utopia is perfect, and in all of them there are flaws. Accordingly, Sargent puts emphasis on the meaning of the words "perfect" and "perfection" as "finished, completed, without future change," and cogently argues that there is no such finitude in any utopia as they are in progress ("In Defense of Utopia" 13). Indeed, people yearn for a better situation or place instead of a perfect one. Due to this flaw in utopias as well, they cannot be accepted as perfect in that one person's utopia may be another's dystopia, a word used to identify "a nonexistent bad place" (Sargent, "Utopia" 2405). Based on this, it is important to acknowledge that the depiction of these imagined utopian societies is primarily authored by men, leading to the inclusion of male-centric cultural norms that subsequently shape the representation of women; and utopias may propose an improved standard of living for the majority of their residents, albeit not necessarily for all, including women in particular. The majority of utopian narratives produced by male writers,

in this sense, may be perceived as dystopian scenarios from which the perspectives of women are excluded to a large extent.

It is undeniable that individuals have engaged in utopian thought since “the dawn of humankind” (Sargent, “Utopia” 2403). Hence, the description of such a superior social model in comparison to the existing one has been stated in various historical and literary sources, including but not limited to “ancient Sumer, classical Greek and Latin literature, the Old Testament, Buddhism, Confucianism, … Hinduism,” (2405) “Islam, and Daoism” (Sargent, “Utopia” 2407). More specifically, for Sargent, the best-known early non-Western utopia can be accepted as “The Peach Blossom Spring,” a poem by the Chinese poet T’ao Yüan Ming (365–427), which describes a peaceful peasant society (“Utopia” 2407). As the utopian idea is fundamentally rooted in the aspiration for a better life, it is exemplified by various mythical narratives such as “the Island of the Blessed, the Land of Cockaygne, Elysium, Shangri-La and the Garden of Eden” (Pohl 51). Additionally, classical myths and fantasies such as “Lucian’s True History and Hesiod’s Golden Age of Kronos” (Pohl 56) can also be regarded as early examples of utopian writing. Claeys and Sargent explore the long-standing existence of utopias throughout history by stating that

> [t]he first eutopias [utopias] we know of are myths that look to the past of the human race or beyond death for a time when human life was or will be easier and more gratifying. They have various labels—golden ages, Arcadias, earthly paradises, fortunate isles, isles of the blest. They are peopled with our earliest ancestors; heroes and, very rarely, heroines; the virtuous dead; or, in some cases, contemporaneous but little-known noble savages. These eutopias have certain features in common—simplicity, security, immortality or an easy death,

> unity among the people; unity between the people and God or the gods, abundance without labor, and no enmity between human beings and the other animals. If women are included (they often are not), they give birth without pain. These eutopias are achieved without human effort and are seen as a gift of nature or the gods. (*The Utopia Reader* 2)

As also explained by the two distinguished utopian scholars, even though utopian thought has always been on the agenda of humanity since antiquity, these utopias rarely include women characters or heroines. Indeed, all these are the foundation of "utopianism," which could be basically evaluated as male-dominated.

Under these circumstances, women writers including Cavendish, therefore, lack an established utopian tradition peculiar to women to provide them with a model. For this reason, Cavendish was inspired by the existing male tradition and used it to create her personal utopia. Three well-known examples, two of which were written in the same period as Cavendish, are remarkable in understanding the absence of women's voice in male utopian tradition. As one of the prominent examples of utopia as a male-authored literary genre, Thomas More (1478-1535)'s *Utopia* (1516) not only enabled the emergence of the term but also designated the formal characteristics of the genre. In relation to More's identification of the basic characteristics inherent in the genre, Vieira explains three principles of literary utopia concerning its narrative structure as follows: 1) It commonly "pictures the journey (by sea, land or air) of a man or woman to an unknown place (an island, a country or a continent);" 2) The utopian traveller, once there, "is usually offered a guided tour of the society, and given an explanation of its social, political, economic and religious organization;" 3) Typically, this

journey "implies the return of the utopian traveller to his or her own country, in order to be able to take back the message that there are alternative and better ways of organizing society" ("The Concept of Utopia" 7). As a model for the following male-authored utopias, More's *Utopia* begins with the discovery of Utopia, a crescent-shaped island that is situated in an unknown place, by a Portuguese sailor Raphael Hythloday. After he learns about its inhabitants, customs, judiciary, educational, financial, and administrative systems within five years, he returns to England and tells them the alternative ways of creating a better society. Moreover, as a remarkable representation of traditional utopias, More's *Utopia*

> is fully mapped, boasting uniform towns that are geometrically organized with a centrally located seat of power from which the sovereign can conduct surveillance. Infrastructure supports the discipline of inhabitants; architecture and institutions encourage certain behaviours and discourage others. Ancient books, repeated rituals, pervasive symbols and signs ground authority in the traditional utopia. Clothing is issued and regulated. Dissenters are expelled or incarcerated. (Johns 174)

Despite its focus on an improved community, More's *Utopia* presents a distinct perspective on the status and role of women, which does not align with the notion of equality. For example, power related to the social organisation of the city of Utopia is completely patriarchal and hierarchical: "Each household … comes under the authority of the oldest male. Wives are subordinate to their husbands, children to their parents, and younger people generally to their elders" (More, *Utopia* 80). Furthermore, the enforcement of certain practices into this society ultimately precludes the achievement of absolute equality between the two sexes. Significantly, within this system, women "have been forced

to labour endlessly and bow to humourless patriarchs," which underlines how they "have fared poorly in traditional blueprint utopias" (Johns 174). In addition to the social organisation in Utopia, the family structure is also characterised by an order of patriarchy: "When a girl grows up and gets married, she joins her husband's household, but the boys of each generation stay at home, under the control of their oldest male relative" (More, *Utopia* 79). The manifestation of patriarchy can also be observed in its religious system, where women are expected to confess their sins to their husbands prior to attending the church. Indeed, the prevalent portrayal of women as subordinate to men is apparent in numerous domains, even in daily life. For example, male superiority is observed during meals and religious practices, where men and women are seated separately. It is clear that the portrayal of women in More's *Utopia* is characterised by their subordinate position.

Another example written by a male writer is Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun* (1602) which is structured in the form of a poetical dialogue, wherein a Grandmaster affiliated with the Knights Hospitallers engages in conversation with a Genoese Sea-Captain who is his esteemed guest. The book, through this conversation, provides an account of a theocratic society characterised by communal ownership of assets, women, and children. The inhabitants of the City of the Sun reside within a utopian society that is ruled by a group of priests who adhere to religious and philosophical beliefs. Evidently, there is a notable absence of any reference to the potential for a woman to attain the position of authority as head of state in The City of the Sun. Likewise, in Campanella's utopia, the representation of women stands out through

their subservient and excluded status. Another example is Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1627), which portrays a fictional island, Bensalem, that is encountered by the crew of a European vessel subsequent to their navigation mistake in the Pacific Ocean, located to the west of Peru. In this utopian work, Bacon presents a depiction of the future of not women but human exploration and understanding, articulating his hopes and principles for the advancement of humanity in general, without putting a direct emphasis on women's role in this advancement. Thus, it serves as a symbolic representation of social advancement, embodying a steadfast belief in the potential of scientific and technological endeavours that are spheres inaccessible to women.

Male authors who wrote like More and followed his footsteps continued to depict a social structure characterised by a hierarchical framework, wherein men wielded ultimate authority. As Lilley points out, "[b]oth the writing and reading of utopias has until recently been thought of as the province of well-educated men, exploring and debating the possibilities for systematizing happiness – their happiness – within an 'enlightened' public sphere which, in part, defined itself through the exclusion of women as agents, and by contrast with a feminized private sphere" (103-104). Not surprisingly, by looking at such issues as administration, philosophy, education, law, and order through the perspective of women's subordination, it is evident that traditional utopias, also called "blueprint," "classical" or "end-state" utopias (Johns 174), maintain patriarchal dominance. For Bonin, "[b]ecause such utopian narratives valorize natural law and depend upon patriarchal paradigms for marriage, family, and the state, they seldom [or never]

question women's nature and place" ("Margaret" 339). Within this particular framework, it is evident that the conventional utopias that have emerged are the direct result of the perspectives held by individuals adhering to hetero-sexist patriarchal ideologies. These utopias, which are predominantly centred around male experiences, inevitably constitute dystopias for women, wherein their existence is characterised by the imposition of subservience to men. The persistence of gender inequality within utopian societies has prompted women writers such as Christine de Pizan (1363-1430), Mary Cary (1621-1663), Aphra Behn (1640-1689), Mary Astell (1666-1731), Sarah Scott (1720-1795), Frances Harper (1825-1911), and Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) to write utopias in order to engage in the creation of utopian narratives as a means of envisioning and constructing their own liberated spaces.

Indeed, women writers' initial attempts at writing utopias date back to the fifteenth century since there is no reference to any earlier examples of utopia written by women. Brief information about the two early examples would be beneficial in terms of grasping Cavendish's contribution to the utopian genre. As the first example of these attempts, Christine de Pizan endeavors to construct a utopian society of accomplished women in her literary work, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405), with the aim of demonstrating the exceptional capabilities of women. Even if she advocates women taking part in important realms, women in this work lack the ability to make their own decisions. De Pizan constructs an ideal city for the living of all great ladies, who are women of noble spirit, in the world. She underlines that women possess the capability to serve the divine and contribute to the enhancement of

society with equal efficiency as their male counterparts. For her, even though women are lazy and engage in frequent consumption of food, she remarks that women who possess rationality and education have the ability to protect themselves from the pressure of their husbands. Yet still, due to the male-dominated social norms of the time, de Pizan's book concludes with a statement that women must fully obey their husbands because those women who disobey their spouses are "like creatures who go totally against their nature" (406). Indeed, throughout the text, she attempts to present a city where women should not be regarded as worthless beings as long as they adhere to the existent social gender roles. Considering the social conjuncture of the period it was hard for her to be more assertive.

Another attempt is Mary Astell's *Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1694), in which she advocated for the creation of an educational establishment exclusively dedicated to addressing the unique requirements of women. This institution would serve as a refuge for women seeking respite from a hostile and oppressive society dominated by men, which was structured to cater primarily to male interests. Like de Pizan's utopia, in this utopia, women are not given essential roles in society even if the establishment of an educational institution considering the special needs of women is by implication a reflection of a desire for equal rights for both sexes. Indeed, considering both attempts, it appears that both women writers could not go beyond the limits determined by the male-dominated social norms of the time, and they could not create a utopian tradition that is totally different from the

male tradition. What they did in this sense is trying to represent women in an existing literary tradition rather than creating a new one.

Women's utopian writing in the seventeenth century touches upon "questions of control, knowledge, opportunity and freedom, through an attention to sociality and culture [rather than delving deeply into] the political and juridical" issues (Lilley 104). To be more precise, the utopias by women deal with women in particular who are freed from the oppression of men in the fields of management, religion, education, marriage, family, law, order, and property. *The Blazing World* as one of these utopias was first not accepted as a utopia by male critics of the twentieth century who looked down on Cavendish, and it was not included in utopian studies even though it contained both the common subjects and the main structure of the traditional utopias. As Lilley argues, "[u]ntil very recently *The Blazing World* has elicited only passing and derisive attention as a curious example of a fantastic kingdom with an absolute monarchy" (120). As an example for the critics who harshly criticised Cavendish, Manuel and Manuel claim that Cavendish's *The Blazing World* is "so private" that it borders on "schizophrenia" and thus, it can be considered a personal fantasy of a female dreamer rather than a utopia (7). Added to this, Trubowitz suggests that "[y]et while an important contribution to the utopian genre, *Blazing World*, like many of the Duchess's other texts, has been bypassed in favour of works by her male counterparts" and "[e]ven its special distinction as the first utopia written by a woman in England has not encouraged historians of utopian thought to give *Blazing World* sustained, serious scrutiny" (229). *The Blazing World* is acknowledged by only a limited number of studies,

which are Lyman Tower Sargent's specialised checklist and R. W. Gibson and J. Max Patrick's specialist list titled "Utopias and Dystopias 1500-1750." These sources concur with the notion that Cavendish's work stands as the sole example of a utopia created by a woman during the seventeenth century (Lilley 106).

In contrast to the male and female writers, Cavendish's motivation for establishing her utopia is solely centred on constructing an ideal world tailored to her own desires rather than offering ideas related to any social change. In other words, she priviledges personal pleasure and individual fulfilment above a better social order. For this reason, Cavendish's *The Blazing World* differs from other forms of utopian dreaming. As Seber states, "[i]t is … through this utopian and idealized world that Margaret Cavendish fulfils her desires, which as a woman she can hardly – or even never – experience in the real world" (87). Accordingly, in her work, Cavendish presents the Empress, a fictionalised portrayal of herself, in various roles, the two most prominent of which are the roles of being the "authoress" and "creatoress." Cavendish presents these two roles in a multi-layered narrative and in an elaborate manner. These two roles are in fact interrelated and complement each other through the motif of journey, romance and epic elements enabling Cavendish to play with the levels of reality.

As expressed in the introduction, the authority and authorship were attributed to men in the seventeenth century, as they have been for centuries, and women were deprived of the right to govern and to produce literary works. Since authorship was a sign of authority, it was

impossible for women to write by going beyond this limitation. However, the idea of designing such a personal utopian world allows Cavendish to be a "creatoress" and "authoress." As she underlines it in "To the Reader," "I have made a world of my own: for which no body, I hope, will blame me, since it is in every one's power to do the like" (*BW* 124). She maintains a degree of literary modesty, which may be regarded as a "topos" among women writers.

Despite the fact that Cavendish's utopia at first sight looks too personal, it deals with a wide range of social issues. Although she claims that her aim is to fulfil her personal desires rather than making the initial endeavour to promote and advocate for women's involvement in scientific and philosophical pursuits, she creates a utopian world for herself and offers the possibility that each woman is able to do it personally. In order to accomplish her aim, Cavendish, indeed, produces "an experimental piece of [utopian] prose fiction, a generic hybrid of romance, philosophy, and fantasy" or fancy not for asserting women's potential in general but for asserting her own accomplishments and identity (Bowerbank and Mendelson, "Introduction" 32). In Cavendish's other works, there is also a desire to create different worlds shaped by personal yearnings and desires, which are alternatives to the real world. For example, in a poem titled "A World in an Earring," she talks about the possibility of the existence of multiple worlds. She depicts a fictional universe that exists in an earring that adorns a lady's ear. This world, including the sun, planets, and celestial bodies, is inhabited by individuals who experience mortality, longing, grief, and love (*PF* 129-30). As also suggested by Iyengar, "Cavendish's imagined infinity of

worlds also allows the possibility of freedom - not in another's fictional universe, but in one's own" (668). This represents a significant deviation from and a major contribution to various other works of utopian literature such as More's *Utopia*, Campanella's *The City of the Sun,* and Bacon's *The New Atlantis* which often endorse traditional gender roles and hierarchical power structures. The social framework established by Cavendish is distinguished by the absence of limitations based on sex, allowing herself to occupy positions of authority for her private self and exert substantial impact on a male-dominated world.

The Blazing World was initially published in 1666 and later reissued alongside her more sober work on science, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, in 1668. At the very beginning of *The Blazing World*, Cavendish explicitly declares that her work is "a work of fancy," that is, "a voluntary creation or production of the mind" (123). She clarifies her choice of fiction by stating that "[t]he end of reason is truth, the end of fancy is fiction" (*BW* 123). She emphasises the dichotomy related to the attribution of reason to science and of imagination to fiction; the former attributed to men, the latter to women. Moreover, as Macleod cogently argues, "scientific outsiders would have to rely on fantastical stories to discuss their scientific thoughts, or at the very least use fiction to find an audience open to such discussion" (28). Therefore, Cavendish uses fiction extensively in this book, just like in "Atomic Poems." Indeed, the narrative in this context sometimes contains so many fantastic elements that *The Blazing World* is even categorised as science fiction by some critics. Besides science fiction, "Cavendish's world-making fiction combines philosophy, satire, and romance in an

inventive, if unstable, narrative with links to utopia, the imaginary voyage, philosophical dialogue, autobiography, [and] political allegory" (Dodds, *The Literary* 123). Imagination and fiction enable Cavendish to envision the possibilities in an imaginary world for herself, and she generates a new framework for her own scientific ideas and her own subjectivity.

The Blazing World opens with a prefatory poem written by William Cavendish praising his wife's accomplishments:

> Columbus then for Navigation fam'd
> Found a new World, America 'tis nam'd
> Now this new World was found, it was not made,
> Only discovered, lying in Time's shade.
> Then what are You, having no Chaos found
> To make a World, or any such least ground?
> But your creating Fancy, thought it fit
> To make your World of Nothing but pure Wit.
> Your Blazing-World, beyond the Stars mounts higher,
> Enlightens all with a Celestial Fire. (*BW* 121)

William Cavendish believes that Margaret Cavendish's attempt to create a new world is superior to the endeavours of explorers of the New World, who merely discovered pre-existing parts of the world. As Holm argues, this prefatory poem underlines the spirit of the text in that "[w]riting her new world is more satisfying than conquering portions of this terrestrial one because there is no more pleasure in having control over authorizing what others think to be true than in imitating what others have authorized as truth" (19).

Defined by Iyengar as a "romantic utopia," Cavendish's work begins with an abduction story in which a merchant falls in love with a

young lady (649). Due to his socioeconomically disadvantaged position in comparison to the lady, the merchant realises the impossibility of marrying her. Therefore, he abducts her and decides to embark on a journey to an overseas nation:

> But when he fancied himself the happiest man of the world, he proved to be the most unfortunate; for Heaven frowning at his theft, raised such a tempest, as they [the merchant and some few sea-men] knew not what to do, or whither to steer their course; so that the vessel, both by its own lightness, and the violent motion of the wind, was carried as swift as an arrow out of a bow, towards the North Pole, and in a short time reached the Icy Sea, where the wind forced it amongst huge pieces of ice. (*BW* 125)

As Lilley posits, "the merchant's initial crime against rank and property/propriety is appropriately punished by a fatal crossing between worlds, while the 'distressed Lady' not only providentially makes this transition unscathed, but profits greatly by it" (122). Such poetic justice that provided the main character's journey, enables her to transcend the constraints of the real world, thereby leading her to a new journey of self-discovery and realisation. Moreover, Brataas explains the significance of her transition by asserting that the only individual who effectively surpasses the restricting threshold at the moment of entry, as well as throughout the fiction, is a female (227). Evidently, the fantastic plot of Cavendish's fiction begins with a romance motif of "woman in distress" portraying a woman as physically incapable of defending herself. However, this abduction story that at first makes the lady a passive victim ironically grants her freedom, because the abduction story turns into an adventure story for her.

In contrast to the traditional utopian narratives featuring male protagonists embarking on voluntary journeys to unfamiliar and isolated locales or islands, the heroine in this particular work experiences an unexpected displacement. Due to the storm and extreme cold, the sailors lose the control of their ship, and consequently, they are "all frozen to death, the young Lady only, by the light of her beauty, the heat of her youth, and protection of the gods, [remains] alive" (*BW* 126). Yet unknowingly, in the North Pole, the lady passes the new Pole of another world:

> [T]he boat still passing on, was forced into another world, for it is impossible to round this world's globe from Pole to Pole, so as we do from East to West; because the Poles of the other world, joining to the Poles of this, do not allow any further passage to surround the world that way; but if any one arrives to either of these Poles, he is either forced to return, or to enter into another world. (261-62)

After departing from the real world, the boat ventures into the Blazing World, which is named "for the extraordinary brightness of its comet-like stars," as stated by Whitaker (*Mad Madge: The Extraordinary* 282). Anthropomorphic bear-men, the inhabitants of this world, notice the boat coming to the shore. At the beginning of the narrative, Cavendish introduces a woman's achievement. This woman "leaves behind the men of her world, whose bodies seem human but whose actions prove bestial, and moves into a world of men whose bodies are bestial but whose actions prove humane ('men-as-beasts' becomes 'beasts-as-men')" (Brataas 229). After pulling the lady out of the boat in order to take her to their city, the bear-men sink the boat full of dead men. They bring the lady to their city which has many caves

instead of houses, but when they realise that she is neither suitable for "the temper of that climate, nor "their diet," they decide "to carry her into another island of a warmer temper" which is inhabited by fox-men (*BW* 127). Unlike the rapacious merchant who kidnapped the lady, bear-men are sensitive enough to realise that she is unable to keep up with the circumstances. The fox-men are also impressed by the beauty of the young lady and agree to take her to the Emperor of this new world.

At first glance, this journey to the unknown scares the lady; "yet she being withal of a generous spirit, and ready wit, considering what dangers she had past, and finding those sorts of men civil and diligent attendants to her, took courage" and realises that these creatures are friendly (*BW* 130). Throughout her journey, the lady encounters the rest of the inhabitants of this world who are "men of different sorts, shapes, figures, dispositions and humors;" some are "worm-men, some fish- or mear-men, some bird-men, some fly-men, some ant-men, some geese-men, some spider-men, some lice-men, some fox-men, some ape-men, some jackdaw-men, some magpie-men, some parrot-men, some satyrs, some giants, and many more" (*BW* 133-34). In fact, so-called animals exhibit a greater degree of humane behaviour compared to those men who kidnapped her. Sarasohn makes a comment about the use of beastly men as characters and contends that Cavendish's attribution of humane qualities to beastly-looking men illustrates the shared destiny of women and beasts, both of whom are subjugated by masculine oppression, and she continues by saying that "[b]y emphasizing the rationality that characterizes stones, beasts, and women, Cavendish's universe became both animate and free, and the existence of a female natural philosopher

possible" ("Leviathan" 53-54). When the lady starts to understand their language from their use of some signs and words which shows her intelligence and ability to communicate, she feels safe and happy because for her, "novelty discomposes the mind, but acquaintance settles it in peace and tranquility" (*BW* 130). After they have visited various kingdoms and islands, they arrive at the island named "Paradise," where the Emperor of the Blazing World dwells. Dodds suggests that the Empress discovers in the Blazing World a society that is already ideal in its hierarchical unity, which is fitting for its placement in Paradise (*The Literary* 139). However, Cavendish's choice of naming the capital city of this world as "Paradise" is rather ironic because when the lady first arrives at the capital city, she observes that it is neither a paradise for women nor a place in which she can assert her identity. Nevertheless, as events develop, the utopian narrative's opportunities for women reveal that, with sufficient power, the main character can transform this place into a real paradise.

In Cavendish's work, the journey motif presented through the protagonist's transition to the North Pole functions as a figurative representation of the pursuit of knowledge. The journey undertaken by the protagonist encompasses not only a physical expedition, but also a cognitive journey, thereby reflecting Cavendish's inclination towards scientific and philosophical pursuits, and her conviction in the significance of intellectual inquiry. Broadly speaking, through the journey motif, "[d]escriptions of celestial worlds, like utopias, paralleled the discovery of the New World, offering fertile ground for visions of rebirth, return, or redemption for the social and cultural problems of the

Old World—whether on the moon, in a new land, or in an alternate world" (Brataas 223). It also adds layers of reality giving reference to real life and appealing to reader's imagination by presenting a journey into a world which is unknown to the reader at the time, as well. As Cottegnies suggests,

> [i]t is most probably the North-West passage Cavendish had in mind. It is worth noting here that just as the New Atlantis is unknown to, and protected from, the rest of the world, or More's island is sheltered by its perilous gulf, the Blazing World is unknown to us, because the passage discovered by the heroine is normally blocked by ice. Cavendish's own version of the Northern passage – an aspiration into another world, contiguous to ours – can thus be interpreted as a very personal musing on the geographical and logical crux posed by the Pole: it offers a fanciful answer to the puzzle posed to a non-specialist reader by the idea of the North Pole. (75)

According to Vieria, utopia "normally pictures the journey (by sea, land or air) of a man or woman to an unknown place (an island, a country or a continent)" (7). The journey motif in utopian literature which Vieira defines is observed to provide a framework for the narration of an unknown imaginary world that constitutes an alternative for the present reality in numerous literary works such as More's *Utopia* and Gulliver's travel to the flying island Laputa where the inhabitants are keen on scientific fields such as maths and music in Jonathan Swift's *The Gulliver's Travels* (1726). As Brataas claims, "Cavendish's utopia is both realistic and imaginative in space because it is located in the far north: a uniquely paradoxical space as it was an imaginary world within the real world that remained simultaneously known and unknown" (224). More important, the north is "simultaneously fantastical and philosophical, a space more of fancy than reason" (Brataas 224).

Margaret Cavendish, thus, uses a highly imaginative place and begins her utopia with the journey of a lady from the real world into a fantastic world which joins the real one at its pole, following the pattern of the blueprint utopias in terms of her use of journey motif. However, the place at which the protagonist arrives at the end of her journey is not designed to give equal rights to women. For this reason, it is possible to claim that Cavendish does not tell the reader about a pre-existing ideal world as in the journey motif in traditional utopias, she rather transforms a male-centred social structure into a world where there are no restrictions for her as a woman. This male-centred structure can be observed at the very beginning of the work when she is objectified as a woman who is presented as a gift to the Emperor. Cavendish's use of journey motif is, therefore, different from the conventional journey motifs in the majority of utopias in that she does not travel to an ideal place that has already been established by others but she later changes this world in a way to fulfil her need for authority and power.

The protagonist of *The Blazing World* becomes aware of the hierarchical structure in the society, and thereafter undertakes initiatives aimed at affecting social, scientific, religious, and political transformations. The lady's revolutionary ideas in this new world bear similarity to Cavendish's own thoughts, and she is represented as a female leader who establishes a utopian society with her reforms. As a representation of her attempt at social reform, the idea of absolute authority explored in *Bell in Campo* is further elaborated in this work. The lady initially attains authority in opposition to her assigned social

roles in reality. However, it is ironic to see that she acquires power and authority with her marriage to the Emperor:

> No sooner was the Lady brought before the Emperor, but he conceived her to be some goddess, and offered to worship her; which she refused, telling him, (for by that time she had pretty well learned their language) that although she came out of another world, yet was she but a mortal; at which the emperor rejoicing, made her his wife, an gave her an absolute power to rule and govern all that world as she pleased. But her subjects, who could hardly be persuaded to believe her mortal, tendered her all the veneration and worship due to a deity. (*BW* 132)

Just like Cavendish, the Empress assumes the social status of her husband, the Emperor, whose role in the narrative is to advance the romantic storyline by elevating the Lady who experiences social mobility that Cavendish attains (Iyengar 660). With this episode, Cavendish pays tribute to the presence of her husband's support in real life. As in *Bell in Campo*, Cavendish's social status is similarly emphasised in this work when the Empress's portrait is drawn. With the unrestricted authority bestowed upon her by the Emperor, the Lady is able to construct her own idealistic society. She reforms the administrative system, religion and scientific studies in the Blazing World. Only after the coronation, this man-made paradise begins to reinstate the concept of Eden, wherein women are entitled to unrestricted self-expression, actively pursue intellectual and creative pursuits, and peacefully coexist through unity. Hence, it provides an opportunity for her to design an ideal community for women, free from the social limitations that exist in the lady's own world.

The lady acquires dignity in the Blazing World and the initial response of the inhabitants in acknowledging the lady as a divine being is indicative of their recognition and validation of her supremacy and authority. In the new world, as the Empress, the lady possesses unrestricted authority to govern the nation according to her own volition. As Lilley remarks, her new position can be regarded as "young lady's secular apotheosis and perpetual blazoning" through which "an abduction narrative … shifts quickly into a romance plot of deserved but providential female advancement" (122). By portraying the lady's new role as a leader, the narrative once again exceeds a simple romantic story. The Lady's rise to power and her evolution from an outsider to a sovereign ruler of the Blazing World is presented with a great coronation ceremony:

> [O]n her head she wore a cap of pearl, and a half-moon of diamonds just before it; on the top of her crown came spreading over a broad carbuncle, cut in the form of the sun; her coat was of pearl, mixed with blue diamonds, and fringed with red ones; her buskins and sandals were of green diamonds: in her left hand she held a buckler, to signify the defence of her dominions; which buckler was made of that sort of diamond as has several different colours; and being cut and made in the form of an arch, showed like a rainbow; in her right hand she carried a spear made of a white diamond, cut like the tail of a blazing star, which signified that she was ready to assault those that proved her enemies. (*BW* 133)

It reminds of the commendation ceremony of Lady Victoria in *Bell in Campo*. Both of them are the representations of women's power, authority, and prosperity. The coronation ceremony of the Empress where she gained not only power and authority but also wealth is the symbolic representation of her future accomplishments. Reminiscent of

the roles of "creatoress" and "authoress" that Cavendish assumed in creating a world for her own, the lady will create a new world with the same roles. Moreover, the lady, who is not named in the narration so far, but referred to as Virtue, acquires the title as the "Empress." Brataas thinks that Cavendish's deliberate choice to withhold the character's name serves to shift the reader's focus towards her commanding presence, rather than any predetermined assumptions that may arise from a specific name or title associated with her sex (229).

In constructing her own private utopia, Cavendish employs another characteristic of the classical utopias; the use of an utopian traveller, who "is usually offered a guided tour of the society, and given an explanation of its social, political, economic and religious organization" (Vieira 7). Soon after becoming the Empress of the Blazing World, the lady is offered a guided tour of this new world by the anthropomorphic animals. Through her discussions with these humanimals, the Empress gradually learns about the scientific, educational, administrative, and religious systems of this world. After learning their systems, the Empress begins to implement her own rules upon the inhabitants of this world for improvement and betterment. Thus, the Empress, who gives priority to science and arts, first builds various societies and schools where the anthropomorphic animals work in different fields:

> The bear-men were to be her experimental philosophers, the bird-men her astronomers, the fly-, worm- and fish-men her natural philosophers, the ape-men her chemists, the satyrs her Galenic physicians, the fox-men her politicians, the spider- and lice-men her mathematicians, the jackdaw-, magpie- and parrot-men her orators and logicians, the giants her architects, etc. (*BW* 134)

The anthropomorphic animals are assigned specific duties based on their inherent capabilities, highlighting the significance of acknowledging and appreciating unique dissimilarities among them. This also emphasises the possibilities for collective efforts in establishing a harmonious community. Iyengar argues that

> [j]ust as species difference in Cavendish's seventeenth-century world is used to assign "beastly" work to black women and domestic work to white ones, just as gender difference is used to assign domestic work to white women and intellectual work to white men, so species difference among the "ordinary sort of men" in *Blazing World* alters the kind of scientific work that they can do. Unlike in the historical world, however, species difference does not bar them from participating in intellectual work altogether; it does, however, limit them to engaging in empirical science, in observations of physical objects in the material world. (662)

The Empress observes the differences among the species. However, instead of creating a hierarchical system, she values their various characteristics and assigns roles accordingly, thereby increasing their contributions as members of her society. For instance, bird-men conduct an investigation on the characteristics of wind, fish-men inquire about the reasons behind the salinity of the sea, worm-men explore the origins of minerals, and lice-men, in a somewhat critical manner towards Robert Boyle, endeavour to measure the weight of air. After the Empress has assigned different tasks to the anthropomorphic beasts compatible with their nature, she raises numerous questions to the appropriate specialists which shows that she has a questioning mind. The Empress demonstrates her curiosity by seeking knowledge regarding the origins of the sun's high temperature, the multiple factors influencing wind formation, the mechanisms underlying snow formation, the fundamental

components of biological systems, the logic behind the scientific classification of strange creatures, and the paradoxical nature of nettles, which possess both harmful and healing properties (*BW* 136-40). By creating a central character who stands with her interest in natural philosophy, questioning mind and curiosity to learn more, Cavendish draws attention to the marginalisation of women in the scientific community in seventeenth-century England.

The sections about the scientific academy are noteworthy as Cavendish tries to express her personal views on science but her main aim is to criticise the methodologies employed by the Royal Society. After the Empress has learned the practices of the scientific academy, she wants to implement her scientific reforms with the aim of developing new approaches to experimentation and scientific studies. Through her protagonist, Cavendish's presentation of new techniques provides a satirical portrayal of experimentalism, a prevalent method in the scientific community of the seventeenth century. She criticises the Royal Society as an institution rooted in rigid rules and resistant to embracing new ideas. She claims that science is not limited to people who have received formal education; an individual without having formal education might still gain new information through observation. The Empress's anthropomorphic animals inform her about natural phenomena and the secrets of the universe that they have discovered by their observations. However, through the course of time, the method that they use to discover the basic principles of nature and workings of the universe does not please the Empress as she does not favour the system that establishes the strict rules. For instance, the Empress is puzzled

when she sees the disagreement among her bear-men, her experimental philosophers, who perceive different opinions by using their instruments called telescopes and commands them to break them, and explains that "if their glasses were true informers, they would rectify their irregular sense and reason" (*BW* 141). Cavendish's intention is to demonstrate her extensive knowledge of contemporary studies and developments by providing specific examples in her work.

Accordingly, the bear-men display their microscopes to the Empress in order to underline that unlike telescopes, their microscopes cannot mislead them because they show the smallest speck of things and thus, they do not need to comprehend. Through these microscopes, they can easily "enlarge the shapes of little bodies, and make a louse appear as big as an elephant, and a mite as big as a whale" (*BW* 142). Firstly, the bear-men show the Empress a grey drone-fly and explain their observation that "the greatest part of her face, nay, of her head, consisted of two large bunches all covered over with a multitude of small pearls or hemispheres in a trigonal order" (142) and their numbers are 14000 (*BW* 143). The Empress is curious about the criteria used to assess their categorisation as hemispheres. According to the bear-men, each small pearl is a perfect eye and is "covered with a transparent cornea, containing a liquid within them," which resembles "the watery or glassy humour of the eye" (143). The Empress retorts that they might be "glassy pearls" rather than eyes, and thus, their microscopes cannot provide them with accurate information (143). Although she tends to avoid deep intellectual discussions beyond her capacity, she is able to express her thoughts broadly. As Bowerbank and Mendelson suggest, "[t]he

conference with the various natural philosophers is conducted as a pleasurable exchange of ideas, so much so that the bear-men and worm-men feel free to laugh when the Empress's opinions seem naive to them" ("Introduction" 33). These humanimals here react to the Empress's opinions with a level of tolerance that is not expected and possible in the real world. Evidently, Cavendish's work portrays a utopian society where a woman is encouraged to express her ideas openly on matters that have traditionally been considered the domain of men. Regarding this matter, the bear-men say that "the world … would be but blind without them, as it has been in former ages before those microscopes were invented" (*BW* 143). Yet still, the Empress states that it is not right to examine nature with mechanical instruments such as telescopes and microscopes because they mislead them and cause them to misunderstand the universe.

Cavendish, who is aware that scientific research based on all these technological developments is limited to individuals with a formal education, emphasises that people are capable of making observations despite their lack of technological devices and scientific education. The Empress further argues that "nature has made your sense and reason more regular than art has your glasses, for they are mere deluders, and will never lead you to the knowledge of truth; wherefore I command you again to break them; for you may observe the progressive motions of celestial bodies with your natural eyes better than through artificial glasses" (*BW* 141-42). Thus, Cavendish explicitly questions the prevailing scientific methodology of the era, which prioritises experimentation and reason. For her, one can personally learn or

understand things about natural philosophy with bare eyes rather than using any scientific equipment. After the Empress has observed a grey drone-fly, she examines charcoal, leaves of a nettle, a flea, and a louse under the microscope and presents her scientific thoughts. She criticises experimental science by arguing that it lacks the capacity to yield concrete practical advantages. Moreover, after the Empress possesses a thorough knowledge of their equipment, she concludes that "nature's works are so various and wonderful, that no particular creature is able to trace her ways" (*BW* 157). Indeed, by presenting new techniques about scientific matters, Cavendish emphasises the capacity of women to participate in the scientific field by using their natural senses. For Cavendish, studies in science can be conducted by observation instead of experimentation.

The Empress has the desire to undertake some reforms in religion and politics with the aim of providing more active roles for women at least in her imaginary world. In the first place, she asks whether they are "Jews, Turks, or Christians?" (*BW* 135). The priests of the Blazing World, who do not know these groups, explain their faith by saying "we do all unanimously acknowledge, worship, and adore the only, omnipotent and eternal God, with all reverence, submission, and duty" (*BW* 135). As Cottegnies asserts, the religious practices observed in the Blazing World are notably lacking in "specificities": The inhabitants are simply characterised as "pious, but secular" (84). The Empress learns that women are excluded from being a part of this religious system in the Blazing World. Women, even children, are prohibited from engaging in the matters related to the church and the state. Furthermore, they are not

granted the opportunity to participate in any public employment. More specifically, women stay at home during times of worship and "say their prayers by themselves in their closets" (*BW* 135). This practice differs from that of males, who often visit the church to engage in acts of worship. This distinction arises from the belief that the presence of women is perceived as a hindrance to the act of praying to God. Moreover, the priests and governors are castrated in order to keep them away from marriage "for women and children most commonly make disturbance both in church and state" (*BW* 135). The exclusion of women within these institutions is indicative of the patriarchal underpinnings of the social structure in the Blazing World. Seeing that women in the Blazing World face similar restrictions like the women in the seventeenth century, the Empress goes on making reforms in the new world she governs. Through her religious reforms this time she assumes the role of a saviour especially for women living in the city of this man-made "Paradise." In a short time, by her preaching, art and ingenuity, the Empress

> did not only convert the Blazing World to her own religion, but kept them in a constant belief, without enforcement or blood-shed; for she knew well, that belief was a thing not to be forced or pressed upon the people, but to be instilled into their minds by gentle persuasions; and after this manner she encouraged them also in all other duties and employments, for fear, though it makes people obey, yet does it not last so long, nor is it so sure a means to keep them to their duties, as love. (*BW* 164)

In this way, the Empress establishes a better belief system as opposed to the one that has existed in the country. This narrative draws attention to the Empress's new role as a priest, wherein she possesses complete authority to alter the male-dominated religious structure. It is

crucial to recognise that both in real life and the Blazing World, women find themselves constrained by predetermined cultural expectations, even during the act of praying. Therefore, the Empress makes a decision to construct churches in a way to enable women to practice their newly adopted religion freely. Consequently, women are able to carry out their religious beliefs without constraint in any place of their choice.

Following her religious reform, the Empress has now embarked on a process of political reform in order to teach them the truth she believes in. To fulfil her aspirations as an authoritative female monarch, the Empress also undertakes a reform of the political system, as she has done in the matters of religion. As the Empress, she shows her support for absolute monarchy by approving the answers of the inhabitants of "Paradise" to her questions concerning the nature of an ideal government:

> They answered, that as it was natural for one body to have but one head, so it was also natural for a politic body to have but one governor; and that a commonwealth, which had many governors was like a monster with many heads: besides, said they, a monarchy is a divine form of government, and agrees most with our religion; for as there is but one God, whom we all unanimously worship and adore with one faith, so we are resolved to have but one Emperor, to whom we all submit with one obedience. (*BW* 134)

Evidently, before the Empress had arrived the Blazing World, there was one Emperor, "to whom they all submitted with the greatest duty and obedience, which made them live in a continued peace and happiness, not acquainted with other foreign wars, or home-bred insurrections" (130). However, by presenting political reform,

Cavendish allows the Empress to become an absolute female monarch. Despite being married, the Empress possesses ultimate power and rules over the Blazing World independently, like Elizabeth I. Trubowitz points out that in the Blazing World, "the 'Tyrannical Government' of men [from the perspective of women] is replaced by a magical and mythological mode of female rule" because "Cavendish's utopia is governed by an all powerful and magnificently accoutred Empress" (231). With the emphasis on the protagonist's "female monarchical self" (Trubowitz 229), Cavendish underlines the political events at the time and her opinions about these events. Her strong ties with the court of Charles I before he was beheaded, and then with Charles II, undoubtedly shape her mind as the supporter of monarchy. Referring to the years of the Civil War and then the Interregnum under the rule of Oliver Cromwell, Cavendish highlights the difficulties she faced as a woman in expressing her political opinions. Cavendish as a Royalist privileges monarchy as the best system of governing in *The Blazing World.*

Reminiscent of her manner in "Atomic Poems," Cavendish uses atoms to present her ideas about the indivisible nature of sovereignty. The Empress assumes the responsibility of upholding order and stability in society, and her status as a monarch underscores the notion that strong and unwavering leadership is indispensable for preserving social order:

> [T]here is nothing in nature that can subsist of, or by itself, (I mean singly) by reason all parts of nature are composed in one body, and though they may be infinitely divided, commixed and changed in their particulars, yet in general, parts cannot be separated from parts as long as nature lasts; nay, we might as probably affirm, that infinite nature would be as soon destroyed, as that one atom could perish. (*BW* 151)

The Empress's assertions regarding the nature of atoms "–infinite, ever changing, self-moving, yet divided into discrete parts whose divisions are always collapsing– could equally well be a statement of Cavendish's views on the 'female monarchical self'" (Iyengar 664). The demolition of the monarchy, just like the division of the atom, would have disastrous consequences.

Indeed, the Empress's scientific enthusiasm is not only limited to the concrete and the observable things but also about metaphysical issues. In the seventeenth century, the Royal Society did not deal with the existence of spirits because they could not be explained by science. Cavendish tends to reply some unanswered metaphysical questions with supernatural elements. The Empress invites highly bright and knowledgeable spirits to her palace, seeking information on natural phenomena and the prevailing conditions in her hometown. As Macleod asserts, "[t]his portion of the text [the arrival of spirits] is perhaps the most fanciful of *The Blazing World* as it leads to an investigation of the immaterial and unobservable, as well as inter-world travel and the inhabitation of souls within other bodies" (33). With the help of these spirits that can travel between the two worlds, the Empress's understanding of natural phenomena and her perspective on the functioning of natural events are detailed. The Empress first wonders about the characteristics of spirits that can move through the materials they hold on to, and then she learns that they do not have "bodily sense," but rather "only knowledge" (*BW* 168).

Cavendish contributes to philosophical debates of her time. The existence of incorporeal things in the world was a highly debated topic

during the seventeenth century. Thomas Hobbess argued for the nonexistence of such entities, whereas, Hobbess' contemporary Henry More advocated their existence, and Cavendish defended their absence in nature while acknowledging the existence of supernatural incorporeal substances (Duncan 395). According to Duncan, Cavendish believes that "human beings have incorporeal supernatural souls and that the corporeal world works in an orderly way because of the workings of irreducibly thinking things" (404). The Empress receives information from spirits on many subjects such as the universe, matter, numbers, animals, God, belief, and mind, and evaluates them from her own perspective. Moreover, by means of spiritual entities, she attains knowledge pertaining to the accomplishments and advancements made by writers, scientists, and philosophers. She, in a way, compensates for her lack of knowledge in various areas through the use of spirits as a tool for providing her with information about the world.

Another area of interest for Cavendish is the study of Cabbala, "the ancient tradition of explaining holy texts through mystical means" (*OED*). Cabbala provides her with the chance to delve into a range of subjects, including philosophical and spiritual matters, which were deemed inappropriate for women during that era. The Empress asks the spirits whether there exists an individual capable of writing Cabbala. As for the origins and meaning of Cabbala, also known as Kabbalah, it represents a scholarly tradition of mystical thinking aimed at clarifying the fundamental aspects of the universe, involving the relationship between the divine and the material world. According to Katz, the study of Cabbala dates back to the Renaissance and the Renaissance's focus on

textual analysis, aimed at reuniting the classical text with its original classical significance, inevitably carried religious connotations (55). Greek and Roman literature ceased to serve as a means of illustrating Christian principles and ethics. Instead, it began to be regarded as a collection of texts produced in a particular historical and cultural setting. Although there is no definite timeline, thought to date back to Erasmus, similar techniques were employed in the study of Holy Scripture. Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) was the pioneer in incorporating the Jewish mystical tradition, known as the Cabbala, into Christian biblical study. In time, Cabbala was considered a suitable domain for linguistic experimentation and analysis. It was a part of Renaissance eclecticism and the first fascination of Renaissance scholars with the Old Testament extended beyond its literary content, encompassing various mystical interpretations and applications of its teachings. In the first half of the sixteenth century, both Protestants and Roman Catholics shared the belief that in order to achieve complete Christian comprehension, it was imperative to engage in the study of the Old Testament, the Hebrew language, and even the Jewish mystical tradition known as the Cabbala (Katz 55-58). In the seventeenth century, *Kabbala Denudata*, the most extensive compilation and translation of Hebrew Cabbalistic materials accessible to the Latin-reading audience at the time was published (Coudert 84). During this period, Christian Cabbalists saw the Cabbala as the sole authentic and ancient source of knowledge, encompassing religious, intellectual, scientific, social, and political aspects and the root of Cabbala was Jewish, not pagan; for this reason, it was considered "the most ancient source of divine wisdom" (Coudert 85).

A number of interpretations concerning the reason for Cavendish's choice of writing a Cabbala are possible. Since Cabbala was associated with and was a study of the Old Testament, which was regarded as God's original words to the Jews (Zucker 6), writing a Cabbala would automatically give her authority and an opportunity to discuss various issues. As Johnson also argues, in Cavendish's time, although during the period "between the Commonwealth and restored monarchy, when cabala was practised by respected philosophers," Cavendish, as a woman, "draws on the power and authority of Cabbala, blending its intellectual nature and condition with the uncertain circumstances of England to create a peaceful, generative World" (61). Christian Cabbalists defined Cabbala as "a definitive source that conclusively demonstrates the validity and all-encompassing nature of the Christian revelation," including the Jews (Coudert 85). Cavendish's choice of Cabbala could function as a criticism of the conflicts and sectarian divisions among different religions and within the Christian religion itself. Additionally, Cabbala is described by Johnson in Cavendish's time as

> an intellectual method of obtaining knowledge and had been connected to secret political behavior and damaging religious activity earlier in the century. This myriad of associations, their particular connections to secret, powerful knowledge – scientific, religious, and political – makes cabala a uniquely potent creative device with the ability to communicate a multitude of meanings and at the same time no exact meaning. The ambiguousness and powerful traditions of cabbala gave Cavendish the flexibility to experiment with potentially dangerous concepts within the safety of its history and uncertainty. (62)

As also seen in Johnson's description, together with religious doctrines, Cavendish was also able to deal with subjects such as natural phenomena and mystical issues that were forbidden to women at the time. The Cabbalistic writings produced during Cavendish's era were characterised by their nature as philosophical treatises, whereby ideas were formulated and problems were debated, devoid of any use of fictitious elements. Traditional cabalistic works, such as the Zohar, employed narrative devices as allegorical tools to clarify and exemplify cabalistic principles. Despite the inclusion of mystical beings and elements in these writings, they are not classified as science fiction or fantasy, unlike *The Blazing World.* The aforementioned deviation from conventional and modern cabalistic generic structure serves as an illustration of Cavendish's blending of the classical form with her distinctive style in symbols and philosophy (Johnson 77).

Since the study of Cabbala was generally related to occultism and obscurity of meaning, writing a poetic Cabbala provides Cavendish with a flexible medium through which she can easily question and criticise the then-current practices in society through various figures of speech and metaphors in an aesthetic style. So, she employs Cabbala as a literary device, which thereafter serves as a vehicle for the creation and administration of her own fantastic world. Similar to the Empress's tendency in the scientific academy to abstain from intellectual discussions beyond her capacity, her scribe persuades the Empress to write "a poetical or romancical Cabbala" rather than a religious, political, philosophical or moral one, which are open to discussion and require knowledge. The Empress emphasises that in this particular kind of

Cabbala, referred to as “poetical or romancical Cabbala,” she has the freedom to employ metaphors, allegories, similitudes, and other literary devices as she sees fit which paves the way for her use of fancy (*BW* 183). Indeed, Cavendish, with her work *The Blazing World*, makes her own Cabbala in which “not only does Cavendish ‘recreate the mind’ but also envisions a powerful monarch who establishes peace, sets religion beyond conflict, and explores complex questions of science” (Johnson 61). By choosing a female scribe for a female empress, and taking into account her suggestions to produce a new form of Cabbala, Cavendish effectively illustrates the potential for a woman to establish her own distinct Cabbala, different from the prevailing male-centric tradition. Thus, Cavendish adapts the insights, wisdom and principles of Cabbala to philosophise and write on the meaning of existence. By writing a Cabbala, she also poses a direct challenge to the experimental approach adopted by man-made science of the time and uses Cabbala as a means to comment on the metaphysical world.

As stated, the Empress endeavours to construct her own Cabbala, deviating from established forms, in an effort to develop a comprehensive understanding of the universe through her own perspective. She wants this endeavour to involve a collaborative effort with immaterial spirits. Thus, the Empress requests mystical help in composing her Cabbala, and asks the immaterial spirits to write down her Cabbala. The spirits explain that their inability to possess physical hands precludes them from engaging in the act of writing a Cabbala. Hence, they suggest her to choose Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle as her scribe. The significance of the scribe’s function lies in

the requirement for those who possess both good writing skills and a certain level of formal education in order to effectively carry out this responsibility. By including herself as a fictitious character into the narrative, Cavendish, the author, adds an additional fictional layer to her literary creation, so giving her the opportunity to fulfil one of her personal desires. As the spirits posit, although Cavendish is not as "learned, eloquent, witty and ingenious" as the spirits of famous writers such as "Aristotle, Pythagoras, Plato, Epicurus," or contemporary writers such as "Galileo, Gassendi, Descartes, Helmont, Hobbes, and Henry More," she is "a plain and rational writer" (*BW* 181). Cavendish provides herself with a fictitious persona through which she aligns herself with these notable figures. The spirits further explain that "the principle of her [the Duchess's] writings, is sense and reason, and she will without question, be ready to do you all the service she can" while the male writers will "scorn to be scribes to a woman" (*BW* 181). The spirit of Margaret Cavendish enters into the fantasy world as the scribe of the Empress to write her Cabbala. In a short span of time, the Empress establishes a profound friendship with the spirit of the Duchess of Newcastle which can be regarded as "the text's strongest form of fantasized utopian doubling" (Lilley 122). Based on Lilley's suggestion, Cavendish here ascribes double roles to herself; first as the Empress and second as the scribe going beyond the limits of a fictional creation. Cavendish takes a new role within the narrative by assuming her own name, which symbolises an important phase as she holds absolute authority and power as both an author and a female leader, a privilege that she cannot have in the real world.

Cavendish in the narrative adorns her fictitious self with similar yearnings and desires. The Duchess wishes to create a world in which she would become an empress like the Empress of the Blazing World. Cavendish emphasises the significance of a woman's ambition to establish and govern her own world by assigning herself two roles; firstly, as an Empress who is a creatoress, and secondly, as a Duchess who is both an authoress and a creatoress. In order to help the Duchess achieve her desire, the Empress asks the spirits to find a world that is weak and easily conquered, but the spirits warn that such an attempt will not ultimately bring happiness to the Duchess. With an implicit reference to social unrest prevalent in her time, Cavendish through the character of the Empress suggests that conflict between different regimes does not lead to happiness. As to the beliefs held by spiritual entities, conquerors often fail to derive pleasure from their conquests "for they being more feared than loved, most commonly come to an untimely end" (*BW* 185). Thereupon, the spirits tell the Empress the way by which the Duchess can create a world in her own mind devoid of political terror:

> [E]very human creature can create an immaterial world fully inhabited by immaterial creatures, and populous of immaterial subjects, such as we are, and all this within the compass of the head or scull; nay, not only so, but he may create a world of what fashion and government he will, and give the creatures thereof such motions, figures, forms, colours, perceptions, etc. as he pleases, and make whirlpools, lights, pressures and reactions, etc. as he thinks best; nay, he may make a world full of veins, muscles, and nerves, and all these to move by one jolt or stroke: also he may alter that world as often as he pleases, or change it from a natural world, to an artificial; he may make a world of ideas, a world of atoms, a world of lights, or whatsoever his fancy leads him to. And since it is in your power to create such a world, what need you to venture life, reputation and tranquility, to conquer a gross material world? (*BW* 185-86)

The advice given by the spirits about the construction of an imaginary realm in mind reminds the Duchess that individuals, regardless of sex, possess the capacity to create a world by using the power of their imagination. Upon this, the spirits emphasise that "by creating a world within yourself [rather than being Empress of a material world], you may enjoy all both in whole and in parts, without control or opposition, and may make what world you please, and alter it when you please, and enjoy as much pleasure and delight as a world can afford" (*BW* 186). Constructing a fictional world of one's own and assuming leadership in it is indeed a way of escape from the difficulties and constraints inherent in the real world. Thus, the primary objective underlying the Empress's support for the creation of a new world for the Duchess is related to a desire to escape from the constraints of patriarchal tradition, at least in her imagination. In line with this, as Gallagher argues, the Duchess "[n]ot having been born a monarch, she cannot, like man, gain empire through conquest" and thus, "she retreats to the empire of mind, where her absolute rule is undisputed" (137).

The construction of the Duchess's imaginative world differs from the perspectives and methodologies advocated by some male philosophers, including Pythagoras, Plato, Epicurus, Aristotle, Descartes, and Hobbes. Her deviation from these philosophers' methodology in spite of her reference to them results both from her lack of formal knowledge about their philosophy and from her desire to assert a different system established by a woman. As pointed out by Walters, "[a]lthough both the characters satirize and critique many of the theories, each philosophical system was able to form or create an actual political

world in a sense, since thoughts are material in Cavendish's natural philosophy" (176). Cavendish emphasises that the world created within one's own mind, particularly from a female perspective, brings much success and provides an enhanced feeling of pleasure. Consequently, the Duchess resolves to "make a world of her own invention":

> [T]his world was composed of sensitive and rational self-moving matter; indeed, it was composed only of the rational, which is the subtlest and purest degree of matter; for as the sensitive did move and act both to the perceptions and consistency of the body, so this degree of matter at the same point of time … did move to the creation of the imaginary world; which world after it was made, appeared so curious and full of variety, so well ordered and wisely governed, that it cannot possibly be expressed by words, nor the delight and pleasure which the Duchess took in making this world of her own. (*BW* 188)

The world of the Duchess not only facilitates her liberation, but also functions as a temporary construction that can be easily dismantled at her own desire, as it is a product of her imagination confined entirely to her perception. These self-representations indicate that, as a woman, she lacks the opportunity to correct the unfair practises existing in politics of the real world, but she possesses the potential to break down and reinvent an alternative universe whenever unwanted circumstances arise in the world of her imagination.

In order to emphasise the ideal nature of female imaginary worlds that the Empress and the Duchess have created, Cavendish uses the utopian journey motif once again but in a different manner. As opposed to the journey motif used in traditional utopias, this journey's final destination is not a better but a worse world; but the real world. The guide, who is generally found in utopian travels, is the Duchess herself.

She provides the Empress information about the order of the real world filled with divisions and conflicts. The Empress expresses a desire to embark upon a journey to the Duchess's nation in order to acquire new knowledge that would be useful in the development of her fictional world. After the Empress has learned that if she can make such a world in her mind like that of the Duchess, she realises that she will be the "mistress of two worlds, one within [her Blazing World], and the other without" her (*BW* 186). Despite the Duchess's efforts to change the Empress's decision about visiting her country, which is "very much disturbed with factions, divisions and wars," the Empress cannot be persuaded (*BW* 189). This journey to the real world allows the Empress to make a comparison between her perfect world and the Duchess's real world.

Consequently, the souls of the Duchess and the Empress arrive at the Duchess's country and the Empress immediately starts to observe and learn the established social structure of the Duchess's world. The Empress, who travels the country in a short period, undertakes a comprehensive exploration of alternative systems of governance, with a special focus on the system of patriarchal monarchies. During her investigations, she becomes acquainted with the adverse consequences associated with male rulers in various nations and cities, leading to her profound astonishment:

> [T]here were so many several nations, governments, laws, religions, opinions, etc. they should all yet so generally agree in being ambitious, proud, self-conceited, vain, prodigal, deceitful, envious, malicious, unjust, revengeful, irreligious, factious, etc. She did also admire, that not any particular state, kingdom or commonwealth, was contented with their own shares, but

> endeavoured to encroach upon their neighbours, and that their greatest glory was in plunder and slaughter, and yet their victories less than their expenses, and their losses more than their gains, but their being overcome in a manner their utter ruin. But that she wondered most at, was, that they should prize or value dirt more than men's lives, and vanity more than tranquility; for the Emperor of a world, said she, enjoys but a part, not the whole; so that his pleasure consists in the opinions of others. (*BW* 190)

The Empresses realises that the patriarchal system of governance engenders conflict, destruction, and bloodshed instead of fostering peace, serenity, and friendship. This particular system stands in stark opposition to the fictional universes governed by female monarchs depicted in the worlds of both the Empress and the Duchess. The Duchess gives advice to the Empress to create an alternate world in the Empress's own mind, disregarding the prevailing structure in the Duchess's country. The basis for this is given that "your Majesty's mind is full of rational corporeal motions, and the rational motions of my [the Duchess's] mind shall assist you by the help of sensitive expressions, with the best instructions they are able to give you" (*BW* 188-89). The Empress, who has been persuaded once again, proceeds to create an imaginary world of her own:

> [A]fter she had quite finished it, and framed all kinds of creatures proper and useful for it, strengthened it with good laws, and beautified it with arts and sciences; having nothing else to do, unless she did dissolve her imaginary world, or made some alterations in the Blazing World she lived in, which yet she could hardly do, by reason it was so well ordered that it could not be mended; for it was governed without secret and deceiving policy; neither was there any ambition, factions, malicious detractions, civil dissensions, or home-bred quarrels, divisions in religion, foreign wars, etc. but all the people lived in a peaceful society, united tranquility, and religious conformity. (*BW* 189)

Therefore, the creation of these two worlds by the main characters in Cavendish's utopian narrative presents the inherent ability of women to construct their own universe as a strategy for evading the limitations and oppression that exist in real life. The journey motif, which is turned upside down in this part also provides Cavendish as a writer with an opportunity to criticise, compare and contrast male rulers with female ones. Cavendish argues that a woman can achieve her liberation, without relying on other's support. She suggests the possibility of creating an idealised world within their minds, that is far beyond the reach of male interference. This personal sphere allows women to pursue their desires without directly confronting the constraints imposed by patriarchal norms of the real world. As suggested by Walters, "[i]n the text, the author is placed in a quasi-divine position as creator of worlds that contain living, rational, sentient beings. Like the voluntarist position of the cosmos, an individual author can arbitrarily create worlds and realities, each governed by contradictory laws and principles" (176). Cavendish emphasises the power of imagination by granting both the Empress and the Duchess God-like positions as creators of an infinite number of imaginary worlds.

The first part of *The Blazing World* ends with Cavendish's constructing a utopian world personalised to her own desires, including a range of social, scientific, religious, and political reforms. The motivation for this endeavour stems from her desire to redefine her status in various fields as a woman. Cavendish's intention to illustrate the ideal nature of her constructed world is evident in her composition of the second section of *The Blazing World*, whereby she portrays a nation

characterised by conflict and disorder as opposed to the Blazing World. In the second part, to further highlight the role of the Empress related to her political reform in particular, Cavendish makes references to Elizabeth I, a prominent female figure in British history. The Empress's desire to wield complete control of her realm aligns closely with the absolute power that Elizabeth I had as a female monarch. The deliberate choice of Elizabeth I, a woman of considerable influence, as a role model, is evidently related to Cavendish's desire to assert her own personal power and authority. When the Empress residing in her tranquil Blazing World receives terrible news from spirits about the distressful situation in her homeland, she does not remain indifferent to the outbreak of war in her homeland. With her ultimate power and authority, the Empress makes the decision to embark on a journey to her nation with the purpose of safeguarding her people from external threats. The Duchess, serving as both the scribe and counselor, seeks for the availability of passages to the Empress's native country. After she learns from the syrens or mear-men that a singular channel exists into their world with limited dimensions that only a vehicle no larger than a packet-boat may traverse it, the Empress expresses her desire for the anthropomorphic animals to create highly inventive ships that could swim under water. In this way, the Empress would have the chance to take her own forces in the Blazing World to the battle in her own country which is Cavendish's another contribution to utopian literature. In conventional utopian narratives, the inhabitants of the ideal world are typically depicted as refraining from engaging with the real world. The protagonist is the only one who is responsible for returning to her/his country to tell an alternative way of life. Moreover, as Holm suggests,

through this journey from the utopian world to the real world, Cavendish breaks away significantly from the realm of romance into the domain of epic literature (17). The Empress's preparations for war at sea are depicted in detail, much like in an epic narrative. During the course of her journey, the residents of the Blazing World and the spirit of the Duchess accompany her. Like in *Bell in Campo*, Cavendish uses religious motifs to support female authority by depicting the Empress walking on water, reminiscent of Jesus. When they arrive at the real world, the Empress acts like a war goddess and delivers a speech addressing her countrymen:

> *I come not to make bargains with you, or to regard my own interest, more than your safety; but I intend to make you the most powerful nation of this world; and therefore I have chosen rather to quit my own tranquility, riches and pleasure, than suffer you to be ruined and destroyed. All the return I desire, is but your grateful acknowledgment, and to declare my power, love and loyalty to my native country.* (*BW* 210, emphasis original)

Moreover, Cavendish tries to create a character similar to Elizabeth I. The Empress's desire for respected fame and ultimate power in her homeland is reminiscent of Elizabeth I's achievement of supreme authority over her own nation, but also her courage for self-sacrifice for her country. The speech of the Empress, as Trubowitz asserts, is very much reminiscent of Elizabeth I's Tilbury speech[8] (234). Like Elizabeth

[8] The historical event of the Spanish Armada's defeat in 1588 has been widely regarded as a significant military triumph for England. This is a recording of Queen Elizabeth I's speech to her troops, who had gathered at Tilbury Camp with the purpose of safeguarding the nation from a potential Spanish invasion. The effective repulsion of a large-scale invasion significantly enhanced the authority of Queen Elizabeth I of England. In her address, Elizabeth articulates her conviction in her capacity as a female leader, asserting that "I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king and of a king of England too - and take foul scorn

I, the Empress wants to make her native country the most powerful nation; in return, she expects the loyalty of her countrymen, who will live in peace and security. According to Lilley, Cavendish's Empress is interpreted as a warrior queen, "Elizabeth *redivivas*," who effectively suppresses both domestic and foreign uprisings throughout the story (119). Cavendish's role as Empress is further highlighted by this reference to Elizabeth I.

Cavendish makes references to successful individuals from various fields like scientists, philosophers, and leaders throughout her utopia. Her portrayal of Elizabeth I is among those representations. This practise not only underlines Cavendish's knowledge and enthusiasm, but also serves as a symbolic means through which she conveys her ambitions in numerous fields. One of the highest points that Cavendish's imagination has ever reached is that the Empress "was born or supported above the water, upon the fish-men's heads and backs, so that she seemed to walk upon the face of the water" (*BW* 210). When she appears as a figure reminiscent of a war goddess or a female Christ, the power and authority that she holds even surpasses those of a female monarch. After giving advice to her countrymen for the pursuit of peace and harmony, the Empress returns to her tranquil and bright realm, the Blazing World,

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that Parma or any prince of Europe should dare to invade the borders of my realm. To which rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will venter my royal blood; I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of your virtues in the field. I know that already for your forwardness you have deserved rewards and crowns, and I assure you in the word of a prince you shall not fail of them" (Elizabeth I 326).

symbolising Cavendish's notion of "esteeming peace before war, wit before policy, honesty before beauty" (*BW* 224).

At the very end of her utopian fiction, Cavendish develops the ideas and perspectives she has presented in the first part through the use of traditional utopian journey motif. At the very end of *The Blazing World*, the last characteristic of the journey motif described by Vieira as "the return of the utopian traveller to his or her own country, in order to be able to take back the message that there are alternative and better ways of organizing society" ("The Concept of Utopia" 7) is embodied in the return of the Duchess's spirit to her country in the real world. In this part, the spirit of the Duchess takes up the role of the utopian traveller. The Duchess recounts her observations in the Blazing World of the Empress, emphasising the various roles that the Empress, as a woman, has been able to assume. Cavendish presents her ideas and thoughts about various subjects through using a few personas as her mouthpieces. The Duchess acknowledges that the Empress not only freely expresses her opinions on various topics such as science, art, life, marriage, war, natural philosophy, monarchy, and politics, but also highlights her achievements in attaining freedom, power, and authority, albeit within her own idealistic and imaginative domains (Seber 87). Accordingly, the Duchess reveals the Empress's capacity to assume multiple roles as a strategy for liberating herself from social and educational constraints. In addition, the Duchess's portrayal of the Empress's world as being free from conflicts, disorders, and wars serves as evidence to the peacefulness, success and advantages of female leadership. She clarifies that the Empress's imaginary world is so safe that "[h]er guard for state (for she needs none

for security, there being no rebels or enemies) consists of giants, but they seldom wait on Their Majesties abroad, because their extraordinary height and bigness does hinder their prospect" (*BW* 222). Thus, the words uttered by the Duchess in her description of the Blazing World underscore the potential for an alternative utopian world governed by a female monarch although it exists solely in the imagination. It is such a peaceful and safe environment that it does not even require guardians for protection.

To conclude, Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* is a personal utopia where her fancy reigns along with her endless imagination, curiosity and interest in science and politics in particular. Fancy provides her with authority and liberty to establish a world of her own where she has infinite possibilities and opportunities as a woman, assuming the roles of a creatoress, authoress, empress, head of a scientific academy, political leader, and saviour. It reveals that she successfully achieves her objective in writing *The Blazing World*, as explicitly stated at the beginning of the work:

> [T]hough I cannot be *Henry* the Fifth, or *Charles* the Second, yet I endeavour to be *Margaret* the *First*; and although I have neither power, time nor occasion to conquer the world as *Alexander* and *Ceaser* did; yet rather than not to be mistress of one, since Fortune and the Fates would give me none, I have made a world of my own: for which no body, I hope, will blame me, since it is in every one's power to do the like. (*BW,* "To the Reader" 124)

Cavendish desires to be not solely "*Margaret* the *First*" but also the "Authoress of a whole world" (*BW* 224). *The Blazing World* is the reflection of her heartfelt desire to discover and refashion her female self in an imaginary and idealised world devoid of all sorts of restrictions,

limitations and oppressions imposed upon women in the seventeenth-century England. It portrays a universe in which all the previously discussed subjects in this study converge. The title of the work focuses on the primary themes of *The Blazing World*, including science, politics, and utopia. While Cavendish explores these themes in many contexts, she consistently highlights one particular concern: The capacity of a woman writer to employ her imagination in creating narratives where her perspectives are "blazing," and they are acknowledged and appreciated by everyone. Accordingly, in the Epilogue of *The Blazing World,* she recommends that "if any should like the world I have made, and be willing to be my subjects, they may imagine themselves such, and they are such, I mean, in their minds, fancies or imaginations; but if they cannot endure to be subjects, they may create worlds of their own, and govern themselves as they please" (224-25).

CONCLUSION

This book concentrates on Margaret Cavendish's accomplishments in the male-dominated literary world. To this end, the diverse and major contributions made by Margaret Cavendish to the fields of literature, science and politics during the seventeenth century are examined. Accordingly, this study sheds light on several strategies used by the writer to actively participate in areas, from which women are excluded, such as her unaccustomed integration of literary imagination with the topics like science, politics and philosophy on universal order. Along with her use of female protagonists and characters in all her works including her poems, drama and utopian narrative. The fact that Cavendish does not confine herself to certain genres, which were specifically attributed to women in the seventeenth century such as conduct and skill books, demonstrates that she is a versatile woman writer who manages to raise her voice in a variety of genres. Such strategies which enable her to express her ideas on women's capabilities and her progressive perspectives on women's social positions are also discussed and exemplified with reference to her notable works: "Atomic Poems," *Bell in Campo*, and *The Blazing World*.

In a socio-cultural environment that confines women to prescribed roles and duties, Margaret Cavendish chooses to pursue high recognition and fame by writing literary works rather than staying at home as a passive woman. Such determination finds its best expression in *The Blazing World* where she states: "I had rather die in the adventure of noble achievements, than live in obscure and sluggish security; since by the one, I may live in a glorious fame, and by the other I am buried in

oblivion" (185). As a natural consequence of her endeavour to delve into subjects that were not regarded as suitable for women to raise their voices, her appreciation and reception by critics had not been so promising during her lifetime; on the contrary, they were discouraging. During the seventeenth century, male writers made harsh critical remarks against her works, primarily targeting her "bad writing" in all literary forms (Dodds, "Bawds" 31). Her male critics seem to concur that her writing lacks literary depth and her scientific ideas are not based on formal education. For instance, Samuel Pepys describes her plays as "silly thing[s]" (197). In the twentieth century, her contribution to atomism, natural philosophy and utopian literature is briefly acknowledged but negative comments abound. Robert Kargon, for instance, in his book on physics and the development of atomism in the seventeenth century gives a slight reference to Margaret Cavendish. He states that with her ideas on atoms, Cavendish "embarrassed its [atomism's] friends" (73). In a similar vein, in their book on utopian studies, Manuel and Manuel briefly mention Cavendish's name among the writers of utopian works but they state that her utopian work is so personal that her personal utopia borders on "schizophrenia" (7). Moreover, Virginia Woolf, a prominent figure in women's writing, critically refers to Cavendish's place in the literary tradition by resembling her to a "giant cucumber" in a garden of flowers (59). As a result of these negative accusations, her literary achievements were long overlooked as a woman writer. Fortunately, during her lifetime, Cavendish did not seem to be affected by these unfavourable, at times vulgar, and harsh criticisms addressed to her work and even to her personality. On the contrary, she is further motivated to express her

opinions as a woman. She even sent the books she wrote on natural philosophy to Oxford and Cambridge to be kept in their libraries in order to encourage other women to write (Woods et al. 320). Despite the negative criticisms directed to her works, her contribution to women's writing is acknowledged by the critics in the recent years. The new editions of her works are published with extensive editorial notes, and the Margaret Cavendish Society is established to bring together the academics and the people who are interested in her works.

Despite her negative reception, Cavendish manages to become a noteworthy figure in terms of her contributions to literature as a woman, although she cannot be considered to represent the majority of seventeenth-century women. Her privileged background as the daughter of a wealthy Royalist family provides her with considerable educational opportunities. Nevertheless, her education is limited to traditional women's skills, which includes sewing, reading, writing, singing, and dancing, among many others. Albeit lacking formal education, Cavendish's intense curiosity in addition to the intellectual environment into which she was born inspires her to write. She desires to participate actively in this environment and express her opinions; yet she finds herself in a disapproving atmosphere. Sharing a common destiny with numerous women in the seventeenth century, she is restricted by the male-dominated social norms, which want to keep women obedient, chaste, and silent. Furthermore, due to their Royalist connections, her family has been forced into exile, causing a significant decline in their social position. As observed in her essays and prefaces, she believes that literature is the only possible way to express her scientific, literary,

philosophical and political views, and gain fame. The male-dominated literary tradition does not want to accommodate an uneducated woman. However, through her husband's support, Cavendish has had remarkable opportunities in her literary pursuits.

Under these circumstances, Cavendish recognises that she would not be able to draw attention if she is to write like most of the women writers of her time, merely dealing with the issues traditionally attributed to women. One of the strategies she uses to challenge the traditional gender hierarchies is her employment of the subjects and genres that have not previously been explored by a woman in the literary world. In her only poetry collection, *Poems and Fancies*, she explores an extensive array of subjects encompassing natural philosophy, political theory, mathematics, local history, folklore, and moral philosophy. It is remarkable that as a woman, she addresses a variety of issues thematically in a single piece of work. Most of the themes and the ideas presented in this poetry collection are further elaborated in her later works. The examination of her "Atomic Poems" show that these poems are the poetic expressions of her interest in science. Cavendish's closet drama *Bell in Campo* analysed in the second chapter explores the themes of warfare, virtue, and the political and social status of women in relation to war. The discussion of the play demonstrates that Cavendish's women have a range of active pursuits both in war and at home as opposed to women in the seventeenth century who did not have such opportunities. The analysis of *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* in the third chapter reveals that the work reflects her enthusiasm about governmental and political issues and the representation of such

issues in utopian fiction. In this work, she conveys her scientific views more comprehensively by creating a utopian world of her own imagination. Moreover, she offers various possibilities to change the condition of women not only in science but also in politics and life in general. Thus, she prefers to create different imaginary worlds and characters in a variety of genres to emphasise that women have the capacity to express their ideas by numerous means.

Analyses made in the chapters denote the fact that another strategy used by Margaret Cavendish while walking in an unconventional path in producing her literary works is to justify her writing through an emphasis that her ideas are based only on her own imagination. She is well-aware that due to her lack of education she cannot deal with these topics in the same way as philosophers and scientists do because her limited knowledge would prevent her from actively participating in these discussions. Through personal acquaintance with the esteemed literary and scientific intellectuals in the Cavendish Circle, she has the opportunity to engage in debates about atoms and mechanical philosophy. In the "Atomic Poems," she articulates her poetic portrayal of her profound interest in science. It is true that Cavendish produced works on science rather than scientific works as they lack any solid scientific foundation. In these works, she uses scientific terminology yet the context remains entirely imaginary. She employs the things she heard as a source of inspiration and as material for her poetry. As poetry is a genre that can easily accommodate imagination, she writes her poems about atoms, their motion and matter by merging what she knows about natural philosophy with her fancy that is her endless imagination,

curiosity and enthusiasm. As a consequence of the study of Cavendish's creation of an imaginary universe in her "Atomic Poems" in the first chapter, it is observed that Cavendish gives her own explanation concerning the creation of the universe, the formation of all matter, natural order, human understanding, and the fundamental principles of health, life, sickness, and death through atoms. In these poems by employing far-fetched metaphors, similes and personifications, she not only offers a different creation story and a variety of interpretations about everything related to human existence, but also presents her criticism and suggestions for a better society. Her emphasis on harmony and order among atoms is her solution to the social and political upheavals that she has witnessed at the time. She thinks that every living and non-living thing on earth is created, determined and governed by atoms and their motion. For her, harmony and order are disrupted when there is a lack of agreement between atoms and motion, and she suggests that sympathy is an influential force that regulates atoms, hence human relations. She believes that sympathy, like human life, puts atoms in order and provides their unity. Cavendish, therefore, by employing metaphors formed by scientific terminology aims at entering into the world of science and natural philosophy. Her use of elaborate and yet non-traditional metaphors shows her conviction to offer new perspectives to the ongoing scientific debates.

The fantastical worlds she depicts both *Bell in Campo* and *The Blazing World*, which are examined in the second and third chapters respectively, are shaped by her experiences, including her family life, her service in the Civil War, her life in exile, the political turmoil she

witnessed, her association with Queen Henrietta Maria as a supporter of the monarchy, and the significant events of her time. However, these ideal worlds envisioned by Cavendish and the opportunities offered to women mostly remain at a personal level. Cavendish's primary focus is on presenting ways for women to individually cope with these pressures rather than seeking to improve women's social status or initiate social change. Indeed, the use of excessive details related to her own life is the target of harsh criticisms directed to her works for being too personal in nature. But, it is quite ironic that, even though she approaches the issues so personally, she actually criticises the social order implicitly. The choice of a utopian setting is the projection of her ability for establishing a literary realm in which scientific inquisitiveness and political aspirations merge, enabling her to embody several roles, ranging from a creator to a political figure. Her assertion of dominance in this fictional domain is closely related to her determination to establish a position for herself in the scientific world, despite the cultural limitations of her era. In *The Blazing World*, she creates a utopian realm in which she establishes a scientific academy governed by a woman. Thereby, she demonstrates woman's capacity to get into a scientific institution where she can discuss her scientific thoughts without any restrictions. Her criticism of experimental philosophy is also clearly expressed. As opposed to the real world, where she is denied the right to explore scientific issues and hence referred to as "eccentric" for her interest in such issues, in her fictional fantastic world, Cavendish is free of all the restrictions of the male-dominated society. Cavendish's work offers an imaginative and ideal world, but it also functions as a critical work challenging the restrictive traditional gender norms of her era.

Similarly, the examination of *The Blazing World* in the third chapter illuminates Cavendish's construction of a utopian narrative that reflects her intellectual ambitions and her longing for a society where women can possess power and influence. In *The Blazing World*, as she does in her "Atomic Poems," she expresses her desire to produce literary works as a medium to criticise the practices of seventeenth-century society through various figures of speech and metaphors. Just like she does in her "Atomic Poems," she uses her imagination extensively in *The Blazing World* to discuss her scientific thoughts, this time in a vast fictional setting with many fictional characters. Moreover, her exploration of a fantastic world in the form of a utopian fiction is another indication of Cavendish's effort to enter into a male domain in her literary oeuvre. In reality, as a woman writer she is not able to create a perfect or ideal world which was better than she experienced during her lifetime. So, her use of a genre which is based mainly on imagination enabled her to discuss the possibility of a more egalitarian and just world. Thus, the analyses made in the three chapters demonstrate that employing imagination as one of her means and strategies has enabled her to write without any restrictions and to avoid the direct criticism of the male-dominated scientific circle.

Last but not the least, Cavendish has active female protagonists or characters in all her works. The analyses made in the chapters also lead to the conclusion that Cavendish, by depicting women as capable leaders and heroines, once again, challenges contemporary gender norms and celebrates female empowerment in politics. For instance, in both *Bell in Campo* and *The Blazing World*, Cavendish concentrates on warfare that

naturally excludes women because of their vulnerable nature. In these imaginary worlds, she presents women's ability to participate actively in political issues rather than assuming a passive position. In *Bell in Campo,* Cavendish employs the theme of war, notably the Civil War and its consequences, with a specific focus on women and their social and political positions. Although she supports peace, she presents the utmost limits of women's martial capabilities when their help is required. She demonstrates her profound trust in women's ability to be successful in fields that have traditionally been dominated by males. By portraying heroic women, she emphasises the capacity of women to move from an insignificant status to a prominent one. The female army in the play becomes the saviour of their male counterparts, successfully preventing the fatal consequences of war. Hence, the play becomes a celebration of female heroism and power, as women acquire domestic and social privileges in both personal and public domains. The women's victory on the battlefield not only proves their inherent courage but also inspires them for greater changes in society. The strong and authoritative female figures are used as the mouthpieces of Cavendish, particularly giving voice to her desire to live in a peaceful country. In addition, similarly, *The Blazing World*, in this respect, appears as a testimony of Cavendish's literary imagination as well as her capacity to surpass social conventions through the power of literature. Her statement, "though I cannot be *Henry* the Fifth, or *Charles* the Second, yet I endeavour to be *Margaret* the *First*," effectively expresses her wish to be acknowledged not only as a woman, but as an intellectual figure (*BW* 124). In this work, Cavendish envisions a new version of herself as a woman in a perfect world, liberated from the constraints imposed upon women in

seventeenth-century England. Both *Bell in Campo* and *The Blazing World*, therefore, serve as triumphant manifestations of female heroism, defying conventional norms and portraying women as catalysts for transformation in both personal and social fields.

In conclusion, Margaret Cavendish is a very prolific writer of the early modern era, distinguished not only with her use of various literary genres including poetry, fiction and drama, but also with her choice of extraordinary strategies such as using imagination as justification for writing, creating active women characters; and with her choice of topics like philosophy, science, and politics. Her works exemplify an unaccustomed combination of creativity and rigour, passing beyond the boundaries of the conventionally accepted norms of her era. She presents pictures of ideal societies where women can actively participate in science and politics. Therefore, in the works studied in this book, it is observed that Cavendish not only brings her identity as a woman writer to the fore but also the fact that women writers have the ability to voice their thoughts on science, politics, and all aspects of life on an equal basis with men. Almost all the characters she creates are the embodiments of her own identity as a woman writer. Thus, she puts herself at the centre of all her narratives to raise her voice and express her views as a woman writer.

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ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS BY MARGARET CAVENDISH

BC: Bell in Campo and The Sociable Companions

BW: The Description of a New World, called the Blazing World

Life: The Life of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle

OEP: *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*

PF: Poems, and Fancies

PhP: Philosophicall Fancies

PO: *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*

SL: *Sociable Letters*

TR: *A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life*

WO: *The Worlds Olio*

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