

The Sister of Telemachus: The Main Character of Margaret Cavendish's "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" as the Embodiment of Progress and Conventions

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Abstract

Margaret Cavendish's (1623–1673) "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" (1656) is one of the English writer's early prose works. However, the text already displays a kind of formal experimentation and playfulness, as well as many of the extraordinary and subversive ideas the Duchess' mature literary voice of the 1660s is characterized by. Accordingly, it deals with topics such as travelling, marriage, military conflicts, colonization, as well as the concept of virtue and the risks of virtuous behaviour. The protagonist of the story is often analyzed as an early manifestation or prototype of the active, resourceful, travelling female individual: Travellia's wit, determination, oratory and argumentation skills indeed seem to predict the lasting success of Cavendish's later heroines, and even the full potential of their writer's creative powers. In my paper, I intend to take a look at how the main character's progressive and, to a certain extent, even masculine traits and deeds are juxtaposed with her ultimate decision to adhere to the cultural conventions of femininity by getting married, focusing mainly on the various ways in which this kind of shift and the ensuing double perspective of the heroine might influence the reading and overall evaluation of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity."

Keywords: Margaret Cavendish, female protagonist, travel, power, gender roles, subversion

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Originally published and functioning as the Eighth Book of Margaret Cavendish's *Natures Pictures* (1656), "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" is one of the English writer's early prose works. Labelled as a "tale or discourse" by the author herself ("Chastity" 47), the text already displays a kind of formal experimentation and playfulness, as well as many of the progressive ideas the Duchess' mature literary voice of the 1660s is characterised by. Accordingly, it deals with topics as broad and complicated as, for example, the act (and perils) of travelling, the institution of marriage, the issues brought about by military conflicts, the concept of virtue and the risks of virtuous behaviour, as well as the theory and practice of colonization.

In other words, although less popular or widely discussed than its ideological and spiritual successor, “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” presents several of the literary idiosyncrasies that tend to underlie the scholarly debates surrounding *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* (1666) too.

While numerous convincing parallels between the two works—such as an eloquent female protagonist, the importance of travel and spoken words, as well as the combination of facts and fictitious “fancies”—seem to show that “Cavendish’s *Blazing World* [. . .] is clearly foreshadowed in ‘Assaulted and Pursued Chastity’” (Sarasohn 96), the latter (i.e., the earlier) text may be much more than just a prototype of and introduction to its better-known alter ego. The pioneering work achieved by the earlier piece might be captured and summarized through an element that—or rather *who*—happens to be the personification of the above-mentioned themes, namely the central character. Although critical comments and essays concentrating specifically on “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” appear to have been few and far between since its original publication,¹ the protagonist of the story is often analyzed as an early manifestation or prototype of the active, resourceful, travelling female individual. The young woman’s wit, determination, oratory and argumentation skills, accompanied by a somewhat bellicose and combative nature, seem to predict the lasting success of Cavendish’s later heroines, and even the full potential of their writer’s creative powers. However, arguably just as complex and controversial as her creator, Travellia’s² significance and multifaceted figure are also susceptible to criticism, aimed specifically at her seemingly paradoxical behaviour and the rather surprising or, to some readers, even shocking conclusion of her journey.

In this paper, I intend to take a look at how the main character’s progressive and, to an extent, even masculine traits and deeds are juxtaposed with her ultimate decision to adhere to the cultural conventions of femininity by getting married, focusing on the various ways in which this kind of shift and the ensuing double perspective of the heroine might influence the reading and overall evaluation of “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity.” In the analysis, I will focus on a selection of the motifs, themes, and mostly gender-based principles whose effective subversion appears in the story, potentially re-interpreting pre-Restoration English-language literature, publishing, and culture as the proper context for both the work and its author.

By citing the text as a “romance novella” (xi), one of Cavendish’s “notable experiments in short fiction” (xii), and also a representative of her “romance narratives” (xii) in her Introduction to the compilation titled *The Blazing World and Other Writings* (1992), Kate Lilley’s words singlehandedly reflect the ambiguous, multifaceted nature of “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” in the same critical summary.

1 For instance, despite its connections to utopian literature, “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” is not mentioned in Oddvar Holmesland’s otherwise comprehensive and detailed monograph, *Utopian Negotiation: Aphra Behn and Margaret Cavendish* (2013).

2 As we will see, the critics whose works I cite later in the essay use the two versions of the protagonist’s (most frequently applied) name—i.e., “Travelia” and “Travellia”—interchangeably. For consistency, in my own text I will stick to the form presented in Lilley’s Introduction and her edition of Cavendish’s original, spelt with a double “l” (see Lilley xx-xxiii and “Chastity” 62 and on), while I will retain the other version in all of the quotations where the name is spelt with a single “l.”

Furthermore, Lilley also adds a supplementary yet relevant layer to the interpretation of the plot and its protagonist. Establishing an organic connection between the texts and their author, she states that, both in “The Contract” (the other representative of the titular “Other Writings”) and in “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity,” “[c]learly Margaret Cavendish was rewriting the narrative of her own history as romance” (xvii; also qtd. in Hackett 189). Such a conspicuously autobiographical profile would certainly fit the adventurous half century the real-life Cavendish was given on Earth. In her doctoral thesis, Rebecca Dorman also highlights the suspicious potential an autobiographical approach may have in this case by observing that “[t]he first line of ‘Assaulted and Pursued Chastity’ [. . .] echoes Margaret’s situation in fairy-tale fashion” (11). The actual events that can be mentioned as milestones in Cavendish’s life (such as her marriage, exile, and return) needed little polishing or colouring in order to meet the typical standards of an almost unbelievable yet exciting fairy tale, in which both fortune and misfortune had equally important roles to play. Reflecting on the idea of a shared background, Douglas Grant remarks that “Margaret’s heroines are always short of at least one parent” (154). Since it is a biographical fact that “[h]er father died when she was two” (Lilley ix), Cavendish seems to have had a good reason to deprive her own characters “of at least one parent” in her writings. Furthermore, by identifying “the Lady Affectionata” (i.e., the later Travellia) as a “well-bred orphan” (154), Grant succeeds in capturing the double nature of the author’s own life story, too: “born [. . .] to a rich family” (ix), her exposure to *culture* in the traditional sense was pretty much guaranteed, while, as “the youngest of eight children” (Lilley ix), she must have taken advantage of the second-hand knowledge acquired from her siblings as well. Unfortunately, the similarities do not stop here, as they are not limited to the intellectual horn of plenty both Cavendish and Travellia evidently received gifts from. When, because of the raging Civil War, the writer had to leave England and follow her queen “into Parisian exile” (Lilley ix), she was eventually left not only without her parents but also without the protective embrace of her country, not unlike a certain native of the “Kingdom of Riches” stranded in the “Kingdom of Sensuality.” Based on how alien both Cavendish and her character must have felt among people with strange, uncomfortable habits, their respective (yet still eerily similar) situations might indeed be described as “tale[s] of ‘virtue in distress’” (Pohl 60). Consequently, such a scenario may be expanded to the notoriously elusive genre of *romance* as a potential source for “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity,” but strictly through the—virtually identical—lenses of Cavendish and Travellia.

Reflecting on the protagonists of Cavendish’s writings, Helen Hackett notes that the author’s “heroines have a spirit of enterprise which means that even when they find themselves in romance situations where convention dictates that they should suffer nobly, they may be more inclined to take action” (191). Hackett considers the main character in “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” an outstanding example of this tendency, citing the verbally elegant yet physically determined mode in which Affectionata shoots the Prince (191; see also “Chastity” 53). Episodes like this provide ample evidence that Cavendish indeed “awarded power to women even when they might have been powerless” (Sarasohn 79). The very concept of power might be one of the ingredients that connect two conventional and previously aggressively

separated categories (i.e., the powerful/dominant and the powerless/subjected), whose almost complete subversion Cavendish seems to have considered her sacred duty—and actually started with the ironic title of her work.

At first glance, the very title of “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” appears to completely deprive the text following it of even the slightest amount of power, rendering its heroine vulnerable on her own. The head of the phrase, “chastity,” refers to one of the most conventional feminine principles, standing for the plethora of expectations regarding the virtuous nature of a young lady. The other two main elements, “assaulted” and “pursued,” are given in the grammatically passive voice, underlining another historically feminine principle: *passivity*. Considering the fact that from early on in the story Travellia consistently goes against both physical and mental passivity, her subversive role quickly becomes an antithesis of the primary or assumed meaning of the title itself—or at least a part of it. By making her heroine defy the potential implications of such a title, the author indeed “challenges [. . .] early modern ideologies which suggested that silence, obedience and chastity were the primary virtues of women” (Walters, *Science* 195; see also Walters, “Gender” 239).³ Furthermore, Cavendish also seems to be concerned with the subversion of conventionally male or masculine principles in the same narrative.

Although they are used in their past participle forms, the two verbs in the title of “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” still contain and evoke their respective infinitive sources and, along with them, the activities they are associated with. Thus, the word “assault” might be reminiscent of the reason why the protagonist must leave her homeland at the beginning of the plot, the series of events she must engage in near the end, as well as the climactic moment that eventually, and in a somewhat paradoxical manner, brings the story to its happy conclusion: battles, military conflicts, i.e., *war*. Similarly, the term “pursue” is regularly linked to (fast) movement: being chased usually results in the emergence of a sudden urge to get away and, practically, *travel* a certain distance: yet another element that is present in the text from the very start. These two concepts, suggested through an otherwise passive voice yet permeating the entirety of the text, are closely connected to *active* behaviour, conventionally described as a masculine principle. War and travel, along with the wider spectrum of politics⁴ and the discourse of colonization,⁵ allude to experiences a lady like Miseria should never be exposed to in the first place—but a heroine like Travellia does not feel restricted or constrained by such nominal limitations. The literary devices enabling Cavendish to establish and manipulate the connection between the two sets of gender-

3 The idea of distinguishing between the two established sets of such sex- or gender-based attributes is prominently utilised at the start of Emma L. E. Rees’ closer analysis of “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” as well: in her argumentation, the merits of chastity and “feminine virtue” as opposed to (or rather combined with) the traditionally masculine value of “epic heroism and morality” are discussed (*Gender* 105–06).

4 For a detailed analysis of the overtly political aspects of “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity,” see Walters, *Science* 154 and 195–247, esp. 198–213.

5 For Travellia’s adventures and discoveries, as well as her personal status and political role as the conqueror/colonizer of the people populating the imaginary far-away land, see Iyengar 657–60 and Sarasohn 95–97.

based principles are cleverly used as pivotal tools of storytelling, which might lead to a re-evaluation of not only gender norms but also the aforementioned notion of *power*.

Analyzing the issue of power, and also the lack thereof, stemming from feminine virtue, Kathryn Schwarz notes that “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” “presents a *hero* whose chastity could hardly be less of a deception or more of an act” (277; emphasis mine). If Cavendish truly aimed to portray and personify chastity as an attribute based on deceitful masks and performance, that feature of the text might be considered both a problematic and a problem-solving treatment of femininity. In other words, if virtue can (or must) be both concealed and acted out, then Travellia is also given the opportunity to manipulate her identity in such ways. Consequently, as Emma L. E. Rees points out, “Cavendish’s tale, ostensibly about a woman as victim of assault and pursuit, becomes a text about a woman with *agency* who preserves her chastity through her own initiative” (“Yarn” 177; also in Rees, *Gender* 114; emphasis mine). That intentional elimination of powerlessness can only be the outcome of the heroine actively (yet only temporarily) hiding certain aspects of her traditionally feminine nature, while performing a type of unprecedented half-female role at the same time. Due to her adventurous and resourceful personality, she eventually becomes “the embodiment of heroic chastity” (Dorman 43). At first glance, such a status might seem to be an oxymoron, since, based on some established norms that still prevailed in the seventeenth century, the concept of *chastity* ought to be separated and stay far removed from even the most tentative step in the direction of heroic behaviour. However, as Marina Leslie explains, “‘Assaulted and Pursued Chastity’ resolves the perceived contradiction of the heroic woman by making chastity an active rather than passive virtue” (188). The event that truly triggers the process of virtue being activated is Travellia’s success in escaping rape and, in fact, letting her chastity protect itself against the potential aggressor.

Addressing the idea of chastity functioning as a shield or armour in physical and figurative terms alike, Schwarz suggests the existence of “a poetics of bodily articulation, in which chastity defends its propositions with its own weapons and gestures and limbs” (272). The double nature thus created for and by chastity is also alluded to in the title of her article: “Chastity, Militant and Married.” Travellia experiences both forms at different points in the narrative, but it is undoubtedly the former, i.e., active protection, that leads her arc towards the latter manifestation of chastity, i.e., personal happiness and fulfilment, in this particular cause-effect relationship. By elaborating on the concept and practice of active self-defence as both an individual and a political necessity against rape (*Science* 35 and 195),⁶ Elizabeth “Lisa” Walters also supports the idea that chastity can indeed take the form of what Schwarz calls the firm and effective physical “strategies of resistance” (272). Since Travellia’s virtue is put to the test almost immediately after the start of the plot, the conception of these “strategies” proves to be a rather urgent issue. Accordingly, the modes of escape applied or at least contemplated by her turn out to be just as versatile as her communicative and oratory skills displayed later in the story.

6 For a more detailed analysis of the act of self-defence as a crucial aspect of public and gender politics in “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity,” see Walters, “Gender” 214–18.

Travellia's attempts to escape the threats her presence in the Kingdom of Sensuality poses to her virtue represent the two extremes of an imaginary scale: one is the least favourable option to choose, while the other is a radically positive, as well as (especially for a lady in the seventeenth century) progressive decision to make, which turns out to have further benefits for her, not only as an actively travelling woman but also as an adventurous hero, along the way. Initially, seeing no other chance to save herself from the Prince, "Travelia plans to kill herself rather than be raped" (Boyle, "Fame" 276).⁷ Since, as the narrator explains, "[d]ishonour she hated, and death she feared" (51), the protagonist has to make up her mind and choose from this limited selection of events. Eventually she decides that her suffering can only be ended by "resolving to die; for in death, said she, there is no pain" ("Chastity" 51). Although, after she tricks a maidservant into providing her with a pistol, she ends up using the weapon against the Prince, instead of herself, her actual dedication to the act of suicide is emphasized later on.

Desperately trying to take advantage of any available mode of escaping her ensuing dire situation, the time she spends in custody is used by her to get "a subtle poison" ("Chastity" 57). Despite erroneously referring to her as "Deletia" (which is the main character's name in "The Contract"), James Fitzmaurice is right to point out that the protagonist "finds poison to attempt suicide as a means of avoiding rape" (90) for a second time. When, after a feast, the Prince is about to attack her again, she actually uses "the antidote of all evil" (59–60) on herself, but she is saved by the Prince's aunt, who gives "her something to make her vomit up the poison" ("Chastity" 60). After these failed suicide attempts, scarred by the experience of being "weakly revived to life again" ("Chastity" 60), Travellia makes the conscious choice that not only gives some newfound momentum to the plot but also pushes her narrative in a direction of adventure and, thus, activity. Identifying the means through which she succeeds in doing so, Sarasohn notes that, not unlike the titular heroine of "The She-Anchoret" (also published in *Natures Pictures*), the young lady manages to end up at the steering wheel of her own story "through the exercise of wit and intelligence" (79): two human merits that regularly prove to be indispensable both in literary endeavours and during geographical travels.⁸

While her journey leading Travellia from her native Kingdom of Riches to the Kingdom of Sensuality means nothing but loss and suffering to her, the voyage she embarks on after escaping from captivity, although not necessarily easier or less harrowing as a sea-faring adventure, provides her with a different concept of travel—along with all the benefits of that experience. Karen R. Lawrence summarises this procedure on two levels of storytelling here, highlighting both Travellia's fictitious movement and Cavendish's authorial endeavour at the same time, when she observes that "[t]his exilic voyage, with its romance wanderings through space, engenders for

7 For a detailed analysis of the connection (and opposition) of religion to suicide in early modern English literature, see Fitzmaurice 87–91.

8 Based on similar shared features, Brandie R. Siegfried draws the same analogy between "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity" and *The Blazing World* when she refers to them as two works "where female protagonists are seen as prey yet exercise agency and independence of mind despite their difficult circumstances" (356).

its protagonist and its author alike both mastery and surprise, imaginative projection and response to contingency” (33). Indeed, as the actual masters of their eerily similar yet separate journeys, both women are rightfully expected to stay alert, resourceful, prepared to take action, and ready to use their intellect or “imagination” whenever necessary.

The first overt sign of Travellia gaining the kind of agency she has previously, and out of utter despair, experimented with by shooting the Prince and drinking the poison is provided when she evaluates her situation after sneaking onto the ship leaving the Kingdom of Sensuality. Being informed by the captain that they are discoverers of uncharted lands, the young lady, for the first time in the story, is completely content with the premise of an adventure and concludes to join the crew by confirming that “I being young, travel [. . .] may better my knowledge; and I shall not neglect any service I am able to do” (“Chastity” 61). Even though it is not a physical but rather a verbal action to take and perform, that conscious declaration is the core of her determination and the primary element of the ensuing series of her successes. Reaffirming the ubiquity of agency from this moment on and also pointing towards the climax of the plot, Nicole Pohl remarks that Travellia’s “voyage of self-discovery and self-empowerment culminates in the heroine’s intervention as a commander of the Queen’s army in the Land of Amity” (60). Underlining the fact that the protagonist discovers not only far-away lands but also herself as a person, as well as subverts the system of *power* for both, Pohl suggests that the end of Travellia’s journey, on both a physical and a more self-centred level, is her becoming a leader of troops and also of her own.⁹

As a person in charge of themselves and later also of others, the protagonist of “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” undergoes a character development whose positive effects extend to her self-esteem, oratory and communication skills, as well as her overall sense of responsibility and belonging. Furthermore, on a more official or practical level, as Lawrence points out, “Travelia [. . .] displays a craftiness that is not only an aspect of romance inventiveness—the traveler as Hermes the trickster—but also a more distinctly modern improvisational ability that allows her to respond to circumstances on the road and to capitalize on what fortune throws her way” (34). In short, to borrow the author’s own phrasing, she is not “protected from violence and scandal” but rather protects herself from what, and especially whom, she encounters on her journey, “in a wandering life” of hers (“Chastity” 47). The ensuing shift from a young damsel in distress to a skilful and formidable fighter-traveller is further accentuated by the transformation whose contextual significance is captured by Hero Chalmers when she notes that “the figure of the martial heroic woman allows Cavendish to reject a biologically deterministic notion of gendered identity which

9 Analyzing seventeenth-century property rights in England, Walters reminds the reader that during her first (near-fatal) conversation with the Prince, Travellia, “who is owned by no man, asserts that her body and chastity are her own” (“Gender” 237; see also “Chastity” 52). Subsequently, the protagonist declares herself to be a sovereign woman on the two relevant (and interconnected) levels of ownership in this particular case: on the one hand, there is no superior person she would have to be accountable to, whereas, on the other hand, she does possess and claim unquestioned ownership of certain rights, which are, by nature, inalienable.

emerges as an externally imposed construct” (44). This kind of rejection of norms materialises in an act that opens up a whole new dimension of Travellia’s agency: cross-dressing.

Emphasizing the pervasive and decisive role it plays in the narrative, Hackett observes that “[c]ross-dressing is a significant element [. . .] in ‘Assaulted and Pursued Chastity’ [. . .]. Like previous romance heroines dressed as men, Affectionata, calling her/himself Travellia, inconveniently inspires the love of a woman, is revealed to her beloved on the battlefield and is obliged to defend the propriety of her disguise” (186).¹⁰ Functioning as a crucial vehicle for the majority of the plot, cross-dressing is indeed the source of some serious misunderstandings and also certain surprisingly pleasant reunions.¹¹ However, the fact that, on the one hand, the Queen of Amity undeniably does take quite “a liking to him [i.e., Travellia]” (86), while, on the other hand, the Prince only sees “a resemblance of his mistress appearing in the face of the youth [i.e., again, Travellia]” (81), might imply that the protagonist has multiple good reasons to keep up appearances and continue her performance in order to stay alive, exploit the circumstances, and defend herself in a way as efficient as possible. As Deborah Boyle deduces, “Travelia is only able to preserve her chastity by disguising herself as a boy, so no one even knows her true identity” (“Fame” 277). What is more, not only is she protecting one of her conventionally feminine principles by wearing clothes associated with men but that way she also enables herself to actively participate in a series of events generally symbolising and often even preserved for masculinity: war.

Highlighting the eventual role of a disguised Travellia as a crucial factor, Catie Gill remarks that “‘Assaulted and Pursued Chastity’ goes further than the previous war writing because it is the first extended prose narrative written by Cavendish that follows a soldier” (260).¹² While the protagonist does not start her journey as a full-fledged warrior, it is indeed her rite of passage that ultimately makes her a distinguished individual both inside and outside her narrative. However, according to Boyle, that reputation might pose a different kind of threat to the balance of her established identity, since “[w]hen she is ultimately famous and honored, it is for her success as a general, not for her chastity” (“Fame” 277). Such a one-sided public image of *him* could easily eliminate the hard-fought complexity Travellia would presumably want or

10 For a detailed analysis of the sexual-political importance and symbolism of cross-dressing in “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity,” see Leslie 189–94.

11 Cross-dressing as an essential plot device had been an established feature of English literature long before Cavendish’s time. For example, works written in the late sixteenth century, such as Sir Philip Sidney’s *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* and William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, also rely on the somewhat risqué and often smile-inducing shenanigans caused by either a young man dressed as a lady or a young, adventurous woman disguised as (and, as such, mistaken for) a man. The extent to which Cavendish may have been influenced by early English romances and comedies utilising the element and formula of cross-dressing might be a topic for further academic research and discussion. I am indebted to the anonymous reviewer of my paper for highlighting these literary connections and suggesting this potential interpretive path.

12 The practice of “war writing” went on to occupy even more room in Cavendish’s writings, underlying the plot of *Bell in Campo*, a play first printed in 1662. For this addition to the analysis I am grateful to Csaba Maczelka.

consider suitable for *herself*. Her goal is evidently not to be looked at as the opposite side of the coin but rather to be acknowledged for the same sort of multi-faceted individuality that her creator must have wished to be famous and remembered for, mainly in the eyes of those who became familiar with her not necessarily in person but through her achievements as an intellectual and a literary general wielding her own arms.

Focusing on the outside perspective of the troops led by Travellia during the climactic battle episode near the end, Boyle observes that the protagonist's "skills as a general are honored *before* her feminine identity is revealed" ("Fame" 278; emphasis mine). Although it is true that all of her heroic deeds are carried out while she is thought by everyone, without exception, to be a man, what happens *after* the above-mentioned revelation is also a crucial aspect of Travellia's conditions as a military and political official, as well as an individual: a general of personal value and a person of general value. Her lasting impact and exceptional reputation are immediately confirmed, since the soldiers listening to her confessional speech react with a single sentence: "Heaven bless you, of what sex soever you be" ("Chastity" 115). Such a response regarding the irrelevance of their hero's biologically determined identity should convincingly prove that a valiant person's sex is marginal compared to the name they establish for themselves. However, Boyle cites the ultimate conclusion of the plot as an issue that could still make that statement problematic when she notes that "once the other characters know she [i.e., Travellia] is a woman, she immediately marries, thus fulfilling the traditional expectations of women" ("Fame" 278; later paraphrased in Boyle, "Gender" 521 and 529). The same sentiment is echoed by Pohl, who also concludes that, "[i]n the end, the heroine gives in and marries the Prince—the generic conventions of romance are fulfilled but clash strangely with [the] rest of the text" (60). This particular "clash" between "traditional expectations" and "generic conventions" on the one hand, and Travellia's celebrated personal merits as a successful leader on the other, is resolved by an event that some critics are reluctant to interpret as an actual resolution: the highly conventional institution of *marriage*.

According to Pohl, "the tale *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* has its paradoxical finale in marriage and the subsequent silencing of the heroine" (60). Considering what a notable victory her now outstanding figure is associated with, the concept of abrupt "silencing" may be considered a somewhat harsh verdict regarding the conclusion of Travellia's story. As for the literal meaning of the term, as it is connected to one's actual voice, the main character is a remarkably eloquent person and she remains an active and talkative figure throughout and perhaps even after the story. If a more figurative connotation of "silencing" is concerned, the claim that Travellia will have no other choice but to accept a subject position as a married woman might be refuted by the idea that the other half or party of this alliance is a male individual she is not likely to be inferior to in the long run. In other words, a potentially compelling counter-argument to the idea of "silencing" seems to be provided by the ensuing establishment of the unique power structure consisting of Travellia and the Prince as "Viceregency" and "Viceroy in the Kingdom of Amity" ("Chastity" 116), respectively.

Supporting the concept of *active chastity*, as well as the various manifestations thereof, Leslie points out that "the initially powerless Travellia gains a power more

effective than firearms by assuming a masculine identity, but, in the end, power is not located in her external masculine armor—through which she can be and is wounded—but in her unassailable chastity in which her rhetorical, military, and political strengths reside” (195). Thus, the lasting rewards and benefits of Travellia protecting her virtuous standing, or rather those of her virtue defending itself from all the threats it is exposed to, prevent the protagonist from losing a type of power that surpasses the physical reality of a warrior’s armour(y) and, thus, war. Furthermore, adding the theme of travel to the discourse of chaste agency through the character of the mythical Ulysses’ wife, Rees observes that “Travellia employs her intellectual resources in order to preserve her chastity, but significantly unlike Penelope, marriage does not mean powerlessness, as Travellia resists coming home to the loom” (“Yarn” 178; also in Rees, *Gender* 115). Not only does this conclusion present a counter-argument to Pohl’s idea of eventual “silencing” (an aspect made even more intriguing by the fact that the two essays concerned were published in the same collection of scholarly papers) but it also sheds light on the underlying principles of Travellia’s ultimate complexity as both traveller as fighter and woman as (soon-to-be) wife.

The idea that “the fluid relations between gender and genre” are exploited in “all of Cavendish’s writing” (Lilley xi) might be exemplified by the roles Travellia as the central character of a romance-like narrative takes and succeeds in playing throughout the plot: reader, intellectual, polemicist, public speaker, traveller, military commander, as well as, and at this point most importantly, man and woman. Comparing “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” to another one of the author’s works and also identifying the core issue originating from their versatility, Chalmers notes that “[t]he gender fluidity [. . .] is reinforced by the fact that Cavendish refers to her heroine, like Lady Orphant in *Loves Adventures*, as ‘he’ while they are in their masculine disguises” (44). It is indeed a relevant observation that, along with (or rather as a result of) the change of her names (i.e., Miseria, Affectionata, and Travellia), the protagonist’s own personal pronouns also undergo certain conspicuous alterations. That phenomenon, an instance of “pronominal ambiguity” (Iyengar 657), becomes particularly significant once the name “Travellia” is confirmed as her chosen tag of identity (“Chastity” 62). From that point on, words (and their inherent dichotomies) like “he” and “she” or “his” and “her” start and then keep fluctuating almost until the very end of the plot.¹³

By embarking on a journey from young maid through skilful soldier to married woman and making it back without losing either her virtue or the core of her identity (or even her life to begin with), Travellia is indeed the only character in the text who “can transcend the constraints of gender because of her rank and superior knowledge” (Iyengar 658).¹⁴ When she arrives to the end of her voyage, she does not erase or abandon any of her previously acquired roles and principles. Despite essentially marginalizing or, to a certain extent, reducing the sides of her that guided her through

13 For more detailed analyses of how and to what degree the changeability of Travellia’s pronouns affects the reading and interpretation of “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity,” see Iyengar 657, Lilley xxii–xxiii, and Schwarz 280.

14 Walters extends the list of the concepts whose boundaries Travellia successfully and spectacularly transgresses, noting that “[t]he protagonist exists in a liminal, fluid state where her identity is not determined by gender, kinship structures, nation, rank, and subjecthood” (“Gender” 235).

the perilous voyage, Miseria, Affectionata, and, especially, Travellia, bringing along their manifold expertise regarding the various fields the protagonist excels in, stay with the Princess even after her adventures are over.¹⁵ Consequently, the “narrative uncloseting” (Lilley xxii) of an exceptionally multi-faceted individual is conducted throughout the plot. An expressive summary of this process is presented by Leslie when she notes that “Travellia represents not an inversion of ‘proper’ gender roles so much as a hermaphroditic combination of female and male, defensive and aggressive, vulnerable and powerful” (192; also qtd. in Schwarz 280). The skilful juxtaposition of these attributes leads to the emergence of a concept and device Cavendish herself seems to have been especially fascinated by hybridity. Not only is “the subversive potential of generic and intellectual hybridization” (Lilley xiv) capable of overwriting any dichotomy of sex- and gender-based principles in the text but it also provides a level of reading that makes the activity of travelling even more relevant than before.

Evoking the mythical epic story of the forefather of all tormented—or, in other words, oftentimes assaulted and pursued—travellers and his wife as a woman of limitless patience, endurance, and, at this point most importantly, virtue, Rees extends the human merits represented by Ulysses and Penelope, respectively, to the protagonist of “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity”—all at once. When she remarks that “Travellia is at once Ulysses and Penelope, active and chaste” (*Gender* 114),¹⁶ Rees provides a compelling argument for the idea that the main character happens to be just as much of a hybrid as Cavendish’s texts themselves. Moreover, since she “is at once Penelope, in her fierce preservation of her chastity, and, simultaneously, Ulysses, in her own eventual homecoming and concomitant assertion of rule” (Rees, “Yarn” 177), Travellia is also considered the Homeric hero(ine) of her own epic journey at the same time: an interpretation already reflected by the mere title of Chapter 4 in Rees’ *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile*, namely “Travellia’s travails: Homeric motifs in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*.”¹⁷ The only important aspect, or “topos,” as Rees refers to it (*Gender* 114), that can function as the source of some major dissimilarities between Homer’s characters and Travellia would be the literal form of the above-mentioned act of *homecoming*.

Whereas Ulysses does eventually return to Ithaca, Travellia seems to be destined never to go back to the war-torn Kingdom of Riches. Shedding light on an immense

15 Emphasizing the idea that Travellia’s identities represented by her various names are truly her own, Walters observes that “these names derive from her individual emotions and activities rather than from other typical early modern markers of identity such as blood line, marital status, or kingdom” (“Gender” 235).

16 In her essay titled “A Well-Spun Yarn: Margaret Cavendish and Homer’s Penelope,” Rees introduces the text by summarising the same interpretive aspect in the following way: “In *Natures Pictures*, another of Cavendish’s exilic works of the 1650s, [. . .] the protagonist’s defence of her chastity in ‘Assaulted and Pursued Chastity’ entails a [. . .] permanent self-determination, a fact which is legitimised by the author’s construction of her heroine as not only part-Penelope, but, significantly, part-Ulysses too” (“Yarn” 177).

17 In the fourth chapter of her monograph, Rees provides a comprehensive analysis of three important Homeric topoi of the epic, namely shipwreck, storytelling/mendacity, and homecoming, examining the various ways in which they are utilised in *The Odyssey* and “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” (see *Gender* 104–33, esp. 113–14).

silver lining in the seemingly unpleasant scenario of the latter, Rees reminds her readers that “Cavendish’s failure to stage a traditional homecoming for her heroine signifies her reluctance to have her subsumed back into an orthodox domestic setting where her considerable powers would have to be given up” (“Yarn” 177; also in Rees, *Gender* 114). Indeed, it is the Kingdom of Amity whose natives she is hailed and celebrated by: it is only in this country that she can stay the distinguished hybrid that she is. Therefore, by becoming a leader who is new to the people inhabiting a country that is new to her, the protagonist is enabled to reach and enjoy her new-found status and, in turn, the happy ending of her journey, without having her previous achievements undermined and the benefits thereof eliminated.

Rees emphasizes her conclusion regarding Travellia’s Homeric hybridity by reiterating that “[b]y not returning to her native land of the Kingdom of Riches, the heroine [...] does not have to yield the Ulysses part of herself and become all Penelope. Cavendish instead stages a bold compromise, settling her heroine in *a new position*” (“Yarn” 177; also, with slight alterations, in Rees, *Gender* 114; emphasis mine). However, since the author herself did return to her homeland right after the Stuart Restoration in 1660, this could be a point from where a form of divergence would be noticed in the respective fates of the two women. That aspect of the contextual-historical facts surrounding the work might render a potential autobiographical reading of the piece somewhat problematic, but the changes characterising Cavendish’s real-life career during the 1650s might provide enough proof that a strong connection between author and main character may still be maintained even after the apparent break brought about by the concept and act of homecoming. Although Cavendish herself returned to the old country of England, there were some alterations to take into consideration upon arrival on those shores. Regardless of the aftermath of the Civil War and the Protectorate, England was essentially the same place as before: neither a whimsical world of fantasy nor some exotic far-away terrain. It was rather the returning traveller who had changed a lot since her departure: in exile, during the decade prior to the Restoration, Margaret Cavendish had turned *herself* into an established, actively publishing author (see Lilley x), courageously rejecting the anonymity of a woman of letters and incessantly venturing into the fanciful yet perilous universe of her own writerly mind: indeed “a new position” not unlike Travellia’s.

Establishing an author-character connection that draws various parallels between Cavendish and Travellia in a sense broader than the boundaries set by and surrounding the figure of the rebellious, self-made traveller, Lilley notes that in her romances, Cavendish was “focusing her main attention and admiration on the advantageous production of *woman* as spectacle” (xvii; emphasis mine). However, based on the fact that in “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” the resolution of conflict takes the form of marriage (or, to be more precise, that of a double marriage) between equals, the finale is rather about a royal *couple* as spectacle. If anything, the end of the story is reminiscent, from a more personal point of view, of those the Restoration escorted back to their homeland, namely Margaret and William Cavendish.¹⁸ At the same time, on the level

18 Drawing a strong and convincing parallel between the Prince in “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” and the author’s real-life husband, Lilley mentions that “William Cavendish was just such a dissolute and

of politics, it can also remind one of what the Glorious Revolution managed to give to England over thirty years after the publication of “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity:” a better-organized system of constitutional, as well as consensual, power and the then-future co-monarchs, Mary II and William III of late Stuart England—the type of power couple Cavendish herself would have probably been very proud of.

Underlining what Travellia gains and keeps, instead of focusing on what she loses, by revealing her sex and eventually getting married, Chalmers draws attention to the fact that, “[a]lthough she ultimately dons women’s clothes once more in order to marry a prince, their union is triggered by her military victory over him which allows her to negotiate an amicable nuptial settlement whereby she retains political power over the kingdom even though he has marital control” (44). The suggested and presumably successful power structure within this “nuptial settlement” is summarised through the protagonist’s recommendation that “he [i.e., the Prince] should govern her [i.e., Travellia], and she [i.e., the Princess] would govern the kingdom” (“Chastity” 116). Considering what they did to each other and have been through by that point, it is understandable that both parties seem to accept the conditions as elements of a particularly fair deal without any issue. However, if one insists on finding the superior half in a relationship based on equality, one might take heed of Rees’ conclusion, namely that “her [i.e., Travellia’s] husband’s government of her is purely nominal, since she possesses the real power, which resides in the support she enjoys from the populace and militia” (“Yarn” 178; also in Rees, *Gender* 115). In other words, *power* in the (by this time deconstructed) conventional sense of the term would be given to and kept by the lady here. Thus, Cavendish’s “extraordinarily ambivalent position with respect to the discourses of power” (Lilley xv) undeniably shines through the epilogue of “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity.” Again, as the amalgam of Ulysses and Penelope, i.e., an imaginary yet ideal sister for Telemachus, Travellia, “[l]ike Ulysses, [. . .] seizes power; like Penelope, she remains chaste. However, she is significantly unlike Penelope, in that her version of the homecoming does not necessitate a relinquishment of autonomy” (Rees, *Gender* 122; see also Rees, “Yarn” 177).¹⁹ Undoubtedly, she does not seem likely to ever be deprived of her power and autonomy, thus her public influence remains unquestioned. In addition, the personal alliance that technically functions as Travellia’s new home within the Kingdom of Amity presents an exemplary manifestation of the above-mentioned distribution of power as well. The highly conventional nature of marriage in general does not decrease her potential as a leader, who is and remains in charge of her narrative on both an official and a private level. Subsequently, the stability of her, or rather her author’s, married life is destined to raise some critical questions too.

successful younger brother [as the Prince], whom Margaret Cavendish married after the death of his first wife, a rich widow” (xvii).

19 Based on the interpretation of the protagonist as a unique and subversive mixture of the two mythological parents, Travellia’s legacy as a possible influence on some of the later literary versions of her “brother” as a male traveller might be worth examining as well. Again, I am grateful to the aforementioned anonymous reviewer for pointing out these potential connections and calling attention to François Fénelon’s (1651–1715) late seventeenth-century prose work, *Les Aventures de Télémaque, fils d’Ulysse*, a promising subject for further analysis.

Throughout her story, Travellia manages to prove herself as a brave, earnest, and skilful person, but her marriage at the end of the plot still, even after multiple occasions on which she acts as anything but a conventional seventeenth-century lady, appears to be a highly controversial conclusion of her journey. Dorman, for instance, directly addresses the core problem that underlies the ending of “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” when she observes that Travellia “determines her own fate, but [. . .] also ultimately upholds female conduct codes, resisting while simultaneously accepting the limitations placed on women” (38). If the (semi-)autobiographical nature of the text and, therefore, the parallels between the protagonist and her creator are deemed plausible and compelling enough, then such a status and final narrative destination might very well characterize the life and opinions of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle too. After all, among their shared feat(ure)s we find Cavendish’s vocal assaults on male-dominated social standards, her indefatigable pursuits as a woman of considerable importance, her role as a flesh-and-blood materialization of “the outspoken, disobedient, and public woman [who] is ironically aligned with chastity” (Walters, “Gender” 239), as well as the unique interpretation of the very notion of chastity represented by her in the first place.

At the end of his brief overview of Cavendish’s life and work as a person of letters, Thomas N. Corns sums up the author’s literary and public persona as paradoxical: noticeably progressive on the level of women’s participation in “philosophical and scientific discourses that were contemporaneously perceived as wholly male preserves” and essentially cited as a fierce critic of the norms of patriarchy and conventions of femininity, yet “deeply conservative” as a wife and royalist political subject (408). Judging by such a conclusion, the main controversy surrounding Cavendish’s legacy originates from a deceptively minuscule-looking yet particularly significant element: the conjunction between her two popular portraits. However, if the author herself was not afraid to use and cherish paradoxical imagery, mixed entities, and hybrid forms in texts such as “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity,” then what exactly prevents the reader from applying an and, instead of a but or a yet, between the two different (or rather only two of the many different) personalities the name “Margaret Cavendish” seems to have stood—and still stand—for? Based on what she had to say and write about the world she perceived as a place full of wondrous fancies, the kind of re-interpretation of her character that Cavendish herself would probably approve of shows a delicate mixture including a forward-looking, sensational phenomenon of a woman *and* a royalist²⁰ lady who married in a conventional, “socially and intellectually advantageous” (Lilley ix) way and, through the support she received from her husband, even relied on male help to have each and every piece of her oeuvre published.

20 Offering a nuanced interpretation of certain aspects of the text (such as the concepts of rape, cannibalism, and sovereignty), Walters points out that “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” “explores republican political theory in the context of women, and a careful reading of it can demonstrate how Cavendish did not merely echo her husband’s royalism since the ‘royalist’ label cannot adequately characterize her political leanings” (“Gender” 211; emphasis mine). While Walters’ arguments for the republican vein of the narrative are convincing, they indeed mainly focus on and describe Cavendish’s literary and, especially, political theory. However, the more practical side of the author’s “political leanings” shows that her “life [was] closely governed by the political fortunes of the Royalists” (Lilley ix), and I apply the term to her in the latter sense here.

In conclusion, Cavendish's most notable achievement is not to have gone completely against the rules of her time *but* to have pushed the boundaries of the literary conventions of that period as far as possible *and* to have adhered to the traditions that needed to be respected and maintained in both her real life and the fanciful universes she created for herself and her readers. In other words, within the cultural context provided by the 1650s, and evidently even beyond, Margaret Cavendish went, or rather *travelled*, just far enough in both realms to be considered as worthy a sister for Telemachus as the protagonist of "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity."

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