

T.C. İSTANBUL KÜLTÜR UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

**ALTERNATIVE FEMALE COMMUNITIES AND THE POLITICS OF SEPARATISM
IN MARGARET CAVENDISH'S *THE FEMALE ACADEMY*, *THE CONVENT OF
PLEASURE* AND *BELL IN CAMPO***

Master of Arts Thesis by

BEYZA NUR KRECHATI
1600001377

Department: English Language and Literature
Program: English Language and Literature

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Işıl Baş De Oliveira

JUNE 2025

T.C. İSTANBUL KÜLTÜR UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

**ALTERNATIVE FEMALE COMMUNITIES AND THE POLITICS OF SEPARATISM
IN MARGARET CAVENDISH'S *THE FEMALE ACADEMY*, *THE CONVENT OF
PLEASURE* AND *BELL IN CAMPO***

Master of Arts Thesis by

BEYZA NUR KRECHATI
1600001377

Department: English Language and Literature
Program: English Language and Literature

Supervisor : Prof. Dr. Işıl Baş De Oliveira

Members of Examining Committee: Prof. Dr. Işıl Baş De Oliveira
Assist. Prof. Dr. İpek Kotan Yiğit
Assoc. Prof. Dr. İnci Bilgin Tekin
(İstanbul Bilgi University)

JUNE 2025

PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Beyza Nur Krechatı

19.06.2025

University : İstanbul Kültür University
Institute : Institute of Graduate Studies
Department : English Language and Literature
Program : English Language and Literature
Supervisor : Prof. Dr. Işıl Baş De Oliveira
Degree Awarded and Date : MA- June 2025

ABSTRACT

Alternative Female Communities and The Politics of Separatism in Margaret Cavendish's *The Female Academy, The Convent of Pleasure and Bell in Campo*

Beyza Nur Krechatı

This thesis aims to explore feasibility and sustainability of alternative female communities in Margaret Cavendish's *The Female Academy* (1662), *Bell in Campo* (1662), and *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668) through the themes of retreat and separatism. To escape from the phallocentric oppression, the female characters in the aforementioned plays build alternative women-only communities within the space of academy, convent and army, where they explore unique female experiences contrary to the patriarchal realities of the seventeenth century. As opposed to these realities, the female characters in each play take refuge in women-only spaces to explore more than what they are traditionally allowed to within the context of education, politics and marriage. Although these communities seem to be autonomous and nurturing throughout the plays, they are returned back to patriarchal order as a result of male intrusion in the end of the plays. This thesis argues that Margaret Cavendish provides two alternative models regarding the feasibility and sustainability of alternative women-only communities in *The Female Academy*, *Bell in Campo* and *The Convent of Pleasure* by revealing that such communities cannot be sustained unless aligned with certain patriarchal conditions. *The Female Academy* (1662), and *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668), the first alternative model, portray the failed attempts of separatism and a return to the patriarchal order by way of marriage. *Bell in Campo* (1662), the second alternative model, portrays a conditional and temporary allowance to women's separatism and a supportive attitude by men.

The second alternative model of *Bell in Campo* reveals that women's separatism can be temporarily allowed and supported in times of war when aligned with the patriarchal needs. However, when the threat of war disappears and pre-war patriarchal order returns, women are expected to return to the patriarchal society and their subordinate positions to men. To this end, I am going to employ both Historicist and Feminist approaches to the concept of alternative female community and separatism. In this way, this study aims to fill a gap in the existing scholarship with its focus on two alternative models of separatist female communities in seventeenth century English drama.

Key Words : Feminism, Margaret Cavendish, Separatism, Alternative Female Community, *The Female Academy*, *Bell in Campo*, *The Convent of Pleasure*

Üniversite : İstanbul Kültür Üniversitesi
Enstitüsü : Lisansüstü Eğitim Enstitüsü
Dalı : İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı
Programı : İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı
Tez Danışmanı : Prof. Dr. Işıl Baş De Oliveira
Tez Türü ve Tarihi : Yüksek Lisans - Haziran 2025

ÖZET

Margaret Cavendish'ın *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* ve *Bell in Campo* Adlı Oyunlarında Alternatif Kadın Toplulukları ve Ayrılmaklık Politikaları

Beyza Nur Krechatı

Bu tez alternatif kadın topluluklarının gerçekleştirilebilirliğini ve sürdürülebilirliğini Margaret Cavendish'ın *The Female Academy* (1662), *Bell in Campo* (1662), and *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668) adlı eserlerinde geri çekilme ve ayrılmaklık temaları üzerinden incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Margaret Cavendish, sözü edilen oyunlarda, alternatif kadın topluluklarının eğitim, siyaset ve evlilik bağlamlarında kurmuş oldukları ayrılmaklı topluluklarda kendilerine özgün özgürlükçü deneyimler ve alternatif kimlikler yaratma mücadelesini incelerken bu topluluklarının ne ölçüde uygulanabilir ve sürdürülebilir olduğunu sorgular. Oyunlarda kadınların oluşturduğu alternatif topluluklar başarılı ve destekleyici yapılar olarak sunulsa da, oyunların sonunda erkeklerin patriyarkal müdahaleleri nedeniyle kadın karakterler ataerki düzene ve topluma dönmek zorunda kalırlar. Bu tez, Margaret Cavendish'ın sözü edilen oyunlarda kadın ayrılmaklılığına iki alternatif model sunduğunu ileri sürer ve kadın ayrılmaklı toplulukların ancak belirli fallosantrik koşullar altında geçici olarak varlık gösterebileceğini vurgular. İlk alternatif model olan, *The Female Academy* (1662) ve *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668) başlıklı oyunlar alternatif kadın topluluklarının ayrılmaklı politikalarını erkek müdahalesi sonucunda sürdürmekte başarısız olduklarını ve bu toplulukların evlilik yoluyla yeniden fallosantrik düzene entegre edildiğini gözler önüne serer. İkinci alternatif model, *Bell in Campo* (1662) adlı oyunda kadın ayrılmaklı topluluğa erkek egemen sistem tarafından yalnızca savaş dönemlerinde, ordunun desteklenmesi koşuluyla

izin verilir, olağanüstü hal ortadan kalktığında kadınların ayrılıkçı topluluklarının feshedilerek ataerkil topluma geri dönüşü sağlanır. Bu doğrultuda çalışmada, alternatif kadın topluluğu ve ayrılıkçılığı temaları hem tarihselci hem feminist kuramsal yaklaşımlar ışığında incelenecektir. Böylece, 17. yüzyıl tiyatrosundaki ayrılıkçı kadın toplulukları, iki alternatif model temsili üzerinden incelenerek, mevcut akademik literatürde bu alandaki sınırlı çalışmalara yeni bir perspektif kazandırılması amaçlanmaktadır.

Anahtar kelimeler: Feminizm, Margaret Cavendish, Ayrılıkçılık, Alternatif Kadın Toplulukları, *The Female Academy*, *Bell in Campo*, *The Convent of Pleasure*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Prof. Dr. Işıl Baş de Oliveira, for all her support throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies, and for her invaluable guidance during my thesis. Being her student has always been an honor. Her academic knowledge, graceful character and attitude towards her students have always inspired me. I am also grateful to Dr. Ayşegül Turan and Dr. Ayşem Seval for their inspiring lectures during my undergraduate studies. Dr. Ayşegül Turan holds a special place to my heart as being my first academic advisor, and her lectures remain unforgettable memories from my undergraduate years. Having continued my studies at İstanbul Kültür University from undergraduate through graduate levels, I have always felt at home in our lovely department. I owe special thanks to Research Assistant Murat Kabak for his patience and support through my academic journey.

I am also deeply grateful for the support and encouragement I received from my family, especially my dear husband, Muaz Krechatı. He always believed in me and helped me to believe in myself and in my passion for academia, especially when I began to doubt myself. My mother, father and dear sister were always there to support me throughout the writing process. Finally, I would like to mention the biggest surprise and blessing that accompanied me during the writing of this thesis — my dear daughter. While writing this thesis, she was also with me. I am grateful to her for bearing with me and giving me strength to continue. She reminded me that I must achieve my dreams, so that one day I can be an inspiration to her — just as she was an inspiration to me in completing this thesis.

To my dear husband and daughter,
Thank you for accompanying me through this challenging journey.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ÖZET	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Alternative Female Communities in Early History	11
1.2. Women-Only Communities and Separatism in the 20th Century	22
CHAPTER I: GENDERED SPACES AND LITERARY RESISTANCE: VISIONS OF FEMALE SEPARATISM IN WOMEN’S WRITING FROM MEDIEVAL TO MODERN	28
1.1. Alternative Women-Only Communities in Early Modern Literature.....	35
1.2. Feminist Utopian Literature on Separatism.....	41
CHAPTER II: THE WORLD CAVENDISH LIVED IN: WOMEN’S LIMITATIONS AND ACTS OF RESISTANCE IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND.....	46
2.1. A critique of women’s education.....	47
2.2. A critique of marriage.....	54
2.3. A critique of politics.....	57
CHAPTER III: CONTEXTUALIZING THE RADICAL VOICE OF MARGARET CAVENDISH.....	64
3.1. Margaret Cavendish.....	64

3.2. Literary Review on Selected Plays	74
CHAPTER IV: ALTERNATIVE FEMALE COMMUNITIES AND THE POLITICS OF SEPARATISM IN MARGARET CAVENDISH'S <i>THE FEMALE ACADEMY</i> , <i>THE</i> <i>CONVENT OF PLEASURE</i> AND <i>BELL IN CAMPO</i>	89
4.2. <i>The Female Academy</i> and <i>The Convent of Pleasure</i>	89
4.3. <i>Bell in Campo</i>	112
CONCLUSION	131
BIBLIOGRAPHY	134

INTRODUCTION

Phallogocentrism and phallogocentrism¹, centering the masculine sex in linguistic meaning-making process and social regulations, functions as the historical continuation of systemic control and oppression toward women by way of limiting access to intellectual, political, and sexual autonomy. From the lenses of feminist theory, phallogocentrism is not a modern invention. On the contrary, it is a long-standing form of ideological oppression against women rooted in religious and scholastic teachings that center masculinity as representation of divine order, truth, knowledge, rationality, consistency, and the patriarch. Although phallogocentrism and phallogocentrism were conceptualized by the twentieth century thinkers, it is not a modern invention; its roots and mechanisms date back to religious teachings and biblical accounts, which position women as secondary next to men in the gender hierarchy. Born into a patriarchal world, women have been systematically excluded from centers of power and public affairs. As a response to this exclusion, women have imagined alternative worlds, roles, experiences, identities and communities— spaces in which they could explore their authentic selves, free from constraints and influences of male-dominated systems. The impulse to envision and create alternative realities outside the patriarchal norm has led to the formation of women-only separatist communities both in historical contexts and literary as acts of resistance and self-discovery, offering escape from patriarchal confinement and oppression. Therefore, to fully understand women's need for women-only separatist structures— providing freedom to explore what is beyond the patriarchal world— it is essential to first understand patriarchal mechanisms at work.

The workings of phallogocentric ideology within early history are closely intertwined with biblical accounts of gender, which gradually contributed to the construction of a male-centered worldview through its influence on medieval thought and scholastic philosophy. Through this gradual influence and with Christianity as the shaping force of medieval thought, the belief emerged that masculine sex is the representation of the divine solidity and serves as the source of knowledge. As a result, forms of knowledge circulated around and through male-centered

¹ In his *Dissemination*, Derrida has coined the term phallogocentrism and provided a detailed analysis of the theory within Western language and culture, referring to Plato and the origins of *logos*.

worldview, which disregarded women's presence by placing them under the male authority through their prescribed roles as obedient wives and devoted mothers. Throughout the Bible, women are instructed to be submissive and obedient to their husbands and to seek redemption for the original sin, associated with Eve, through reproduction and giving birth. Since their purification is claimed to be achieved through their role of submissive wife and devoted motherhood, women are initially confined to the domestic sphere as early as the biblical teachings. Starting from the story of creation, the Bible provides a male-centered account on the reason behind women's creation and their subordinate position to the masculine sex. Genesis narrates details of women's creation from man's rib, highlighting the physical subordination of women to men:

Then the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." 19 ... but for the man[j] there was not found a helper as his partner. 21 So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. 22 And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (Gen. 2.18-22 NRSV)

As stated in Genesis, women are initially created to cure men's solitude. Created by men's ribs, women are described to be physically and morally weaker than men. Therefore, they are advised to follow the divine resemblance of men through submitting men's orders. This description of women, created from man's ribs and brought into the presence of man as a gift, has contributed to a belief system that prioritizes men over women, confining women to a secondary and subordinate role. Man is at the center and the representation of God's authority on earth as well as in the domestic sphere as the ruler of the household. Ephesians highlights the representative status of man as the figure of religious authority and reinforces hierarchical gender roles by privileging male over female. The religious teaching in Ephesians is on the importance of submission to the husband: "22 Wives, be subject[a] to your husbands as to the Lord, 23 for the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands" (Eph. 5.22-24 NRSV). With this biblical account on women's subjection to their husbands, the representation of men as the physical presence of divine order is highlighted, which underlines the centrality of masculine sex for Christian thought.

Biblical accounts point out that women's weakness not only resulted from their physical incapacity in relation to men but also their moral weakness to temptation and sin. The story of the original sin and the narrative of the fall of humanity emphasize women's moral weakness and places the guilt of the original sin onto women. Following Eve's original sin, all womanhood are held responsible and punished with the anguish and pain of giving birth. This belief that women are prone to temptation and sin, stemming from a biblical story, persisted through the following centuries and shaped medieval perceptions towards womanhood. As a consequence of the mark of the original sin, women are instructed to be submissive and obedient to their husbands. Since women are considered the guilty sex for the fall of humankind, it is claimed that they must be controlled by men in order to learn self-control:

11 Let a woman[a] learn in silence with full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman[b] to teach or to have authority over a man;[c] she is to keep silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve, 14 and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. 15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. (1Tim. 2.11-15 NRSV)

As described above, women are not allowed to speak against their husbands and they have no authority over men, which confines them to a subordinate position and subjects them to male authority. Since they are women, from the same sex of Eve, they are as sinful as her and can only be purified through their submissive role of a wife. As seen in the biblical passages of Genesis, Timothy, and Ephesians, the Bible centers men as the divine representation and authority, putting women under the authority of men. This division between sexes continued in medieval and early modern thought through the writings of early religious figures, church fathers and medieval teachings on sexes. Tertullian's "On the Apparel of Women" provides a historical perspective for early Christian conceptualization of gender. In this text, women are held responsible for the fall of mankind from paradise and they are criticized for their innate weakness as the female sex:

Do you not believe that you are (each) an Eve? (2) The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives on even in our times and so it is necessary that the guilt should live on, also. You are the one who opened the door to the Devil, you are the one who first plucked the fruit of the forbidden tree, you are the first who deserted the divine law; you are the one who persuaded

him whom the Devil was not strong enough to attack. All too easily you destroyed the image of God, man. Because of your desert, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die.
(4)

Tertullian's accusative tone against women reflects the early Christian perception against women, which regards them as the original sinner, the weaker sex, temptress and easily beguiled. Following the biblical accounts on women, early religious figures continued their critique against women and they gradually constructed a narrative around women for being morally, physically and intellectually weak. By stressing an image of the female sex as being the only responsible figure for the fall of mankind and their following punishment, early religious figures and medieval thinkers followed the belief that women should be controlled by men and their salvation lies in their commitment to their husbands. Following Tertullian, Thomas Aquinas extends on the secondary and subordination position of women under men and highlights the religious logic behind women's innate weakness in *Summa Theologica* (1274):

Objection 1: It would seem that the woman should not have been made in the first production of things. For the Philosopher says (De Gener. ii, 3), that "the female is a misbegotten male." But nothing misbegotten or defective should have been in the first production of things. Therefore woman should not have been made at that first production.

Objection 2: Further, subjection and limitation were a result of sin, for to the woman was it said after sin (Gn. 3:16): "Thou shalt be under the man's power"; and Gregory says that, "Where there is no sin, there is no inequality." But woman is naturally of less strength and dignity than man; "for the agent is always more honorable than the patient," as Augustine says (Gen. ad lit. xii, 16). Therefore woman should not have been made in the first production of things before sin. (Aquinas)

Thomas Aquinas positions men as the first production of things and centralizes their position in the order of beings. By referencing Aristotelian biology and theological readings, Thomas Aquinas highlights women's natural inferiority and men's privileged status in the gender hierarchy. Following Tertullian, Thomas Aquinas reinforces a phallogocentric view, which associates authority, truth, knowledge, power and divinity with maleness by attaching the opposite qualities to the feminine. In the rest of his objection, women's secondary position is explained as follows: "... It was necessary for woman to be made, as the Scripture says, as a "helper" to man; not, indeed, as a

helpmate in other works, as some say, since man can be more efficiently helped by another man in other works; but as a helper in the work of generation” (Aquinas). Adhering to the biblical account of women’s secondary position in the story of creation, where women’s creation is directly related to men, Thomas Aquinas positions masculine sex in the first production of beings and explains why women are secondary next to men. Claiming that women can be helpers to men only in terms of their role in procreation, Aquinas attributes to the early phallogentric narrative of defining women through their womb and confining them into the domestic sphere. Biblical narratives and early religious teachings establish gender hierarchy as divine ordinance and divine truth. This perception of divine truth, centering around the subordination of women, is a systemic oppression and limitation against women as a result of the workings of phallogentrism by prioritizing maleness over femaleness. Although phallogentrism as a concept was not coined in early history, its oppressive mechanisms were at work through the male-centered biblical and medieval teachings. With the lens of feminist theory and an understanding of oppressive patriarchal mechanisms, the privileging of maleness and the subordination of women can be identified even in early intellectual and theological teachings. Following the biblical teachings, Aristotelian theories were primal resources for the medieval thought on gender. In his theories, Aristotle adopts a binary approach to evaluation of gender. He associates maleness with superior qualities by attaching inferior qualities to the female sex. Emphasizing the biblical narrative of women’s physical inferiority, as being created by man’s ribs, Aristotle regards women as an imperfect creation and a lacking version of male:

In the Aristotelian view, the male principle sought always to reproduce itself. The creation of a female was always a mistake, therefore, resulting from an imperfect act of generation. Every female born was considered a “defective” or “mutilated” male ..., a “monstrosity” of nature. For Greek theorists, the biology of males and females was the key to their psychology. The female was softer and more docile, more apt to be despondent, querulous, and deceitful. (King and Rabil Jr. xi)

This binary relation between male and female, rooted in male-centered worldview, gave rise to a patriarchal narrative that centers on women’s supposed incapacity, inferiority and moral weakness, which aimed to confine women in the domestic sphere while reserving power and public roles exclusively for men. Aristotelian theories of sex proposed a view that links female sexuality to female psychology on the basis of four elements, which favoured the male sex by highlighting

women's tendency to hysteria and mental imbalances. This theory starting from the Ancient Greeks continued to dominate social, political and medical thought during the Middle Ages. The theories on four humors influenced medieval thought and attributed to early phallogentric narratives on women:

These psychological polarities derived from the theory that the universe consisted of four elements (earth, fire, air, and water), expressed in human bodies as four "humors" (black bile, yellow bile, blood, and phlegm) considered, respectively, dry, hot, damp, and cold and corresponding to mental states ("melancholic," "choleric," "sanguine," "phlegmatic"). In this scheme the male, sharing the principles of earth and fire, was dry and hot; the female, sharing the principles of air and water, was cold and damp. Female psychology was further affected by her dominant organ, the uterus (womb), *hystera* in Greek. The passions generated by the womb made women lustful, deceitful, talkative, irrational, ... (King and Rabil Jr. xi)

Associating the womb with hysteria and other negative aspects such as irrationality and lustfulness, medieval theories contributed to patriarchal narratives on women's supposed inferiority. Through these medical and biblical theories about women, the patriarchal framework systematically devalued the female body and mind, reinforcing women's exclusion from intellectual, political and public life. Consequently, it is undeniable that women have been historically oppressed and excluded from power structures as a result of early phallogentric mechanisms. Therefore, when referring to phallogentrism and patriarchy, we invoke historically embedded systems that have shaped social structures since antiquity. Confined in phallogentric rules and oppression, the sphere of education, politics, public offices, and intellectual institutions were closed to women. The only path, which patriarchy opened to them, was marriage and motherhood. Within this strictly male-centered structure, women must have felt the need to escape the phallogentric society to explore alternative spaces and women-only communities, where they can invent new systems, new roles and experiences outside and against the phallogentric norm. Born out of their desperate need to be outside of patriarchal structure, separate women-only spaces and communities become safe and nurturing spaces in which women can imagine and construct alternative subjectivities, realities and roles for themselves without the male involvement. These women-only spaces provide freedom for women to explore themselves without the force of conforming patriarchal expectations.

The notion of women establishing separatist women-only communities throughout history – born out of their desperate need to escape the phallocentric oppression– is highlighted by Adrienne Rich, a twentieth- century Feminist critique. Rich coins the term woman-identified-experience and lesbian continuum to suggest the historical continuation of phallocentric oppression against women and women's shared experience as a response to this oppression. According to Rich, lesbian continuum does not refer to a sexual orientation, instead, it implies the existence of a feminine medium in which women have developed women-only communities and alliances to escape the phallocentric oppression. Women's search for an alternative female space in historical reality is explained through the lesbian continuum as follows:

If we consider the possibility that all women... exist on a lesbian continuum, we can see ourselves as moving in and out of this continuum, whether we identify ourselves as lesbian or not. It allows us to connect aspects of woman-identification as diverse as the impudent, intimate girl-friendships of eight- or nine-year olds and the banding together of those women of the twelfth and fifteenth centuries known as Beguines who "shared houses, rented to one another, bequeathed houses to their room-mates ... in cheap subdivided houses in the artisans' area of town," who "practiced Christian virtue on their own, dressing and living simply and not associating with men," who earned their livings as spinners, bakers, nurses, or ran schools for young girls, and who managed-until the Church forced them to disperse- to live independent both of marriage and of conventual restrictions. It allows us to connect these women with the more celebrated "Lesbians" of the women's school around Sappho of the seventh century B.C.; with the secret sororities and economic networks reported among African women; and with the Chinese marriage resistance sisterhoods-communities of women who refused marriage, or who if married often refused to consummate their marriages and soon left their husbands... (651)

As suggested by Rich, women have been forming alternative separatist spaces throughout history to collectively escape from patriarchal oppression. The fact that this collaborative movement occurs in different times and places highlights how patriarchal ideology continues to exist and oppresses women throughout history, subjecting women into a collective and shared experience of being oppressed, which is echoed in Rich's woman-identified-experience. This historical continuation of phallocentric oppression results in a collective woman-identified-experience and

oppression, which demands exploration of early feminist impulses in women's historical reality and literary imagination. Rich encourages feminists to approach women's writings critically through "re-vision", which involves analyzing a text through a feminist lens to uncover a feminist impulse and a form of woman-identified-experience under phallocentric oppression. In "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision", Rich urges feminists to be able to read women's historical realities and struggles - and to recognize a feminist impulse even in older texts:

Re-vision-the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering a text from a new critical direction-is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society. A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see-and therefore live-afresh. A change in the concept of sexual identity is essential if we are not going to see the old political order re-assert itself in every new revolution. We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (19)

Adrienne Rich's conceptualization of re-vision and woman-identified experience within the lesbian continuum encourages an exploration of how women have used themes such as alternative female societies and women-only spaces in literature to uncover the feminist impulse within earlier works. Motivated by Rich's "re-vision", my research interest lies on the feminist impulses of Margaret Cavendish and her employment of separatism and women-only communities. Living in the seventeenth century, a period that is shaped by biblical and medieval teachings on gendered hierarchy, Margaret Cavendish explores alternative women-only communities and the politics of separatism that arises from her female characters' need to escape from the patriarchal oppression. Writing from a space of exclusion as a woman herself, Cavendish imagines alternative realities and roles for women in which they are free and assertive, and not subordinate to men. Her plays portray women-only separatist communities that are outside of the phallocentric structure and male control where women explore female autonomy in the context of education, politics and pleasure. Cavendish's plays are a part of early feminist tradition, recognizing phallocentrism as an

oppressive system that confines women into domestic sphere by preventing women to explore their potentials and asserting themselves. She advocates for women to form alternative women-only alliances to escape the attacks of the phallocentric order. What makes Cavendish unique in her employment of separatism is that she was the first English female playwright, who explored the feasibility of alternative women-only communities in her plays as early as the seventeenth century. Her position as the first female playwright exploring women's alternative and separatist societies in the context of seventeenth century England is crucial for us to observe the development of separatist women-only communities in the English literary tradition. Therefore, in the present study, I examine feasibility and sustainability of alternative, women-only communities in Cavendish's *The Female Academy* (1662), *Bell in Campo* (1662), and *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668).

This thesis offers a new theoretical model to Margaret Cavendish's representation of female separatism by proposing a two-model framework on the question of feasibility and sustainability of separatist women-only communities in *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* and *Bell in Campo*. Unlike existing scholarship, which often regards Cavendish's employment of separatism as either utopian or as a part of political exile narrative, my approach demonstrates that Cavendish presents two alternative modes on separatism: one that is only temporarily tolerated and supported by men when aligned with the needs of the phallocentric order- such as wartime necessity as in *Bell in Campo*- and another that is easily dissolved by male interference when opposed the patriarchal conditions, as in the case of *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure*. To this end, I am going to employ both Historicist and Feminist approaches to the concept of alternative female community and separatism. By emphasizing Cavendish's duality in her politics of separatism, my work aims to fill a critical gap in the existing scholarship offering a two-model framework on female separatism and women-only communities in the early modern drama.

The first alternative model, *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure*, portrays the failed attempts of women's separatist society and their return to the patriarchal society by way of marriage. Since women's separatism was in conflict with patriarchal needs in *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure* as a result of their choice of education and female pleasure over their traditionally assigned roles, men forcefully – and deceitfully as in the case of *The Convent of Pleasure* under the disguise of a princess– enter the women-only spaces and

reincorporate women into the phallogentric order. The second alternative model, *Bell in Campo* portrays a temporary male allowance and support toward women's separatist communities in times of war. Cavendish suggests that when extraordinary circumstances of war disappear, women are expected to return back to their assigned roles. Although *Bell in Campo* signals women's return back to the society, they are rewarded for their support to the army and supported by the men. It has a more positive attitude towards women in the army than the silenced married women of *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure*.

To introduce my reading of Cavendish's separatist plays with an intention of re-vision and woman-identified-experience, it is essential to show how women have been forming separatist women-only communities both in historical reality and literary imagination to highlight women's continuous need for separatist spaces to escape from phallogentric oppression throughout history. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the historical examples of women-only communities and their separatist approaches whereas the following chapter will provide a female literary tradition on the theme of separatist communities. The rest of this chapter will focus on the early formation of women-only circles in Ancient Greeks and will extend to the twentieth century with radical feminists' separatist practices being extensively analyzed. Following the historical analysis of such communities, the historical context of the twentieth century will be discussed to highlight the gradual development of feminist critique on the concepts of separatism, retreat and alternative community.

Cavendish was not the earliest or the first woman writer, who created a fictional women-only separatist community. What makes her and her writings special is the fact that she is the earliest female dramatist writing on female separatism in English literature. Other than Cavendish, there had been many women writers, thinkers and historical characters, who imagined and participated in women-only separatist communities both in historical reality and by way of literature. Sapphic Greek Island of Lesbos is the earliest known space that is attached to female separatism and early formation of women-only communities in early history. Similarly, in the context of literature, Christine de Pizan is the earliest woman writer, who established a women-only separatist community in her work, *The Book of The City of Ladies*. These female figures and their exploration of separatism both in historical reality and literary sphere are crucial for the feminist theory to

underline women's need for women-only separatist spaces without men to escape the limitations, oppressions and attacks of the phallogocentric order. Early formations of such communities show us how women have been oppressed and searched for alternative spaces, roles and communities throughout history in different forms. Although theoretical conceptualization of feminism highlighted and developed immensely in the twentieth century, as early as Ancient Greeks, women have been forming alternative women-only communities and alliances by way of separatism.

1.1. Alternative Female Communities in Early History

The earliest known historical record on female separatism and women-only community dates back to Ancient Greeks, to the island of Lesbos. Although the subject is controversial and still being discussed, it is claimed that Sappho and the island of Lesbos, her place of inhabitation, are related with the concept of lesbianism, and homosexual love. In "Lesbian Sappho and Sappho of Lesbos", the relationship between lesbianism and the island is highlighted as follows:

The meaning of the word 'lesbian' {lesbis, lesbia) underwent a similar change. The word was used in the first place for a female inhabitant of the isle of Lesbos, but from classical times onwards erotic connotations became attached to it. What influence Sappho's poetry played in this is hard to assess, but that it did have influence is not unlikely. In antiquity Sappho was already by far the most famous female inhabitant of the island. Her poetry was very popular and Lesbos minted coins bearing an image of the poet for several centuries... The first overt association of Lesbos with female homosexuality is found in Roman times. The Greek writer Lucian {c. AD 120-80) states: 'They say there are women in Lesbos with faces like men, and unwilling to consort with men, but only with women, as though they themselves were men' (*italics added*). (Lardinois 24)

Sappho's connection to the island of Lesbos, women-only practices in the island and her poetry, which highlight homosexual and homosocial bonds among women, may have led to the formation of a conceptual attachment between Sappho and lesbianism of Lesbos. Whether a myth or a real story, Sapphic Island of Lesbos stands as the earliest known example in history, where women formed separatist spaces and communities without men. Eva Stehle discusses forms of women-only communities and ceremonies in "Sappho's Circle" and highlights how there are certain

records and materials, which demonstrates female formations of separate organizations during the time of Sappho:

Women met together apart from men in larger or smaller groups. All the women of a community might celebrate religious festivals like the Thesmophoria, which honored Demeter... Women, especially parthenoi, must have met to rehearse for choral performance, and older women were no doubt often in charge of training them; some see a period of segregation and initiation for parthenoi in these choral activities, ... In addition to these opportunities, women met in small groups also, where they might sing for one another: Athenian vasepainting shows women gathered together and listening as one plays and sings...In these all-female settings a woman should be (relatively) free of pressure to express alienation from herself as a speaking or a sexual being. (262)

As highlighted by Stehle, through religious festivals or private gatherings, women come together and form women-only communities, where they could distance themselves from men and enjoy the nurturing and free environment among their same sex. Singing, dancing and music were an important part of those women's culture; it provided an outlet for women to escape from the patriarchal world. Their women-only circles and homosocial bonds as empowering outlets merged the image of Lesbos with the nurturing space of female homosociality and homosexuality. Although the claims on the island of Lesbos as associated with female homosexuality or lesbianism are not scientifically grounded yet, historical records on women-only circles and their separatist practices provides one of the earliest examples of female separatism.

A few centuries later, with the rise of religious communities, religious laywomen communities started to be formed under the name of Beguines in the late twelfth century. Later, women collaborated to establish alternative communities within the guild system as a means of securing financial independence. While lower class women formed alternative communities through religious and economic mediums with the hope of collaborating and uniting with other women burdened by the constraints of the phallogentric society, upper-class women created their own communities through art, literature, science or friendship, often gathering in salons or private spaces. The Précieuses, the French salons of the seventeenth century, the Bluestocking Society, Katherine Philips' Society of Friendship, the Women's Literary Community in 18th Century Bath,

and the New Female Coterie in the late 18th Century are among historical examples of upper-class women's alternative communities formed in response to the harsh realities of the early modern era. In *Debate Of The Romance Of The Rose*, Hult draws attention to women's attempts of forming alternative communities in response to the society's limitations against women:

... following the example of holy women who had escaped the requirements of family and sought the religious life, some women began to conceive of female communities as alternatives both to family and to the cloister. Christine de Pizan's city of ladies was such a community. Moderata Fonte and Mary Astell envisioned others. The luxurious salons of the French précieuses of the seventeenth century, or the comfortable English drawing rooms of the next, may have been born of the same impulse. Here women not only might escape, if briefly, the subordinate position that life in the family entailed but might also make claims to power, exercise their capacity for speech, and display their knowledge. (xxv)

Tine De Moor defines Beguines as "female forms of "corporate" organization, as in the guilds, providing protection to individual women active in the urban economies of the Low Countries" (4). About their population, Moor states the following: "Exceptionally large beguinages such as those in Ghent or Malines would have hundreds, and at times even thousands of inhabitants" (4). In *Cities of Ladies*, Simons divides Beguine communities in two periods to point out how these communities transformed through time:

In a first period, dating from about 1190 until 1230 ,beguines gathered informally in loose communities without institutional attachments. This changed around 1230, when beguine groups began to acquire property, adopted sets of regulations to govern their life as a community, and presented themselves to the outside world as religious institutions, either in the form of small "convents," or as larger architectural complexes segregated in some manner from the surrounding urban community, the so-called court beguinages. (36)

Since Beguine communities depended on women working outside as caretakers or nurses, certain amounts of their time were spared only for work instead of religious activities. Thus, Tine De Moor likens Beguines to guild structures: "... the beguine movement should be seen yet another institution for collective action, having more in common with other institutions such as guilds than with conventional convents" (7). *Devout Laywomen* touches upon early modern concept of choosing between marriage and convent life: "Aut maritus aut murus. Until relatively recently,

historians of the post-Tridentine Catholic world were inclined to take this maxim at face value, accepting that women were obliged to choose between marriage or the convent” (Weber). This statement also stresses women’s historical realities, which push them to seek alternative ways of life through alternative communities of women. In *Cities of Ladies*, Simons reports a historical instance took place in the town of Nivelles and points out how Begiunes stands for an alternative for girls fleeing from marriage:

The Life relates how Ida ran away from home at the age of nine because her family had decided to give her in marriage to the son of a Nivelles townsman. “Taking nothing with her but the psalter which she had just started. to memorize,” the Life notes, “she slipped out at night through the window of her father’s house” and sought shelter with a group of “[seven] poor virgins who dwelled next to the church of St.Sépulchre ,’ in the aid of the Lord... (40)

As in the case of Ida, who fled from marriage, some women sought refuge with Beguines, turning to alternative forms of community and support. Similarly, between 1602–1659, Eleonora Ramirez di Montalvo provided shelter to girls in need under the guise of lay conservatories. At the age of eighteen, as a Florentine noblewoman Eleonora Ramirez di Montalvo was forced to marry a nobleman against her will. A couple of years later, leaving her husband Eleonora Ramirez di Montalvo started to live with her brother and established a lay conservatory called Il Conventino. Jennifer Haraguchi brings up Montalvo’s female communities in “The Lay Conservatories” as follows:

As a married woman, Montalvo was not permitted to govern a convent, so she formed a small school in her brother’s home, eventually founding a lay conservatory for underprivileged girls called Il Conventino. Twenty-four years later, in 1650, with the support of the Grand Duchess Vittoria della Rovere (1622–1694), wife of Ferdinando II de’ Medici, Montalvo established another lay conservatory—this time for elite women—at Villa La Quiete in the northeast environs of the city. Il Conventino and La Quiete functioned like convents in administrative matters, except that the women who resided there were called ancille (handmaidens) instead of monache (nuns) and they made simple promises of obedience to a superiora (superior) instead of professing solemn vows before a priest. (347)

As a woman who was forced into marriage without her consent, Montalvo was aware of the social pressures faced by women. Thus, she established conservatories to provide alternative communities, where women could receive education. Haraguchi highlights Montalvo's role as the provider of an alternative space for women, emphasizing her efforts to create educational opportunities outside the constraints of the phallocentric society:

A pioneer in women's education, Montalvo challenged the societal expectation that young women should prepare themselves either for marriage or for the convent. Montalvo offered a respectable "third path" where women, affluent or not, did not have to be nuns to increase their knowledge of spiritual concepts and to have intense spiritual experiences, where they could become teachers of a wide range of religious and secular subjects, and where they could remain for life in a semi-enclosed setting with a measured amount of freedom that allowed them to work to sustain themselves and their community of women. (362)

Since Montalvo's conservatories were examples of non-religious, alternative women-only communities, they had to present themselves as religious conservatories in regulatory matters to avoid any phallocentric censorship. Haraguchi, however, emphasizes that Montalvo's conservatories functioned as religious institutions only in appearance:

In the wake of sanctions placed on congregations, Montalvo was careful to make her lay conservatories appear like convents in administrative matters... However, both Montalvo's *Costituzioni* and firsthand accounts of life in these conservatories, written by the women who resided there, reveal Montalvo's deviations from post-Tridentine regulations... An examination of archival documents regarding both administrative theory and actual practice in Montalvo's alternative communities demonstrates Montalvo's innovative approach to the education of women and suggests ways in which she successfully avoided church censorship. (349)

Montalvo's conservatories were rare examples from history, which provided alternative educational communities for rich and underprivileged girls. Another form of women's alternative communities emerged through guild networks. However, as the guild system came under male control, women's roles within the guilds were gradually diminished, which forced them to seek alternative communities to protect their financial independence. Crowston points out the restriction on women's involvement within the guilds in "Women, Gender, and Guilds in Early Modern Europe": "As guilds acquired more power over the urban economy, they tightened control over

the labor market, closing ranks to aspiring journeymen and restricting the existing privileges of wives, daughters, widows, and female wagedworkers” (21). In response to this restriction, women sought alternative, women-only communities within the guild networks to maintain their works. Even though women managed to form their own guilds, they were always subjected to the supervision of male officials under the guild system. In “Crafts, Gilds, and Women in the Middle Ages”, various female guilds in France and their position under the male supervision is discussed:

In late medieval Cologne, three gilds- silkmakers, linen yarn finishers, and gold thread spinners-were women's gilds. Like the women's gilds of Rouen and Paris, these Cologne gilds specialized in luxury goods and textiles. And like the women's gilds of Paris, these Cologne gilds were subordinated to the male power structure-men were appointed to administer gild affairs, and the women's gilds were the only ones excluded from participation in civic government. (483)

In “Women and Guilds” Schmidt discusses the existence of female guilds in Gouda. Schmidt emphasizes the evolution of guild’s membership regulations, which gradually transformed these organizations into more women-exclusive communities:

Gouda happens to be one of the cities where one of these very rare corporations was established. The female hacklers, who combed hemp and flax for the rope-making industry, had a guild of their own. Although the hacklers’ guild has come to be known as an all-women’s guild, membership was not officially restricted to women. The guild letter of 1655 stipulated that everyone performing the craft of hackling, both ‘masters and women’, had to become a guild member. However, the alteration of the regulations made in 1661 only uses the feminine form, ‘the Female Hacklers’ guild’ (Heeckelsters Gilde), which reflects that the members were female. The administration of this nearly all-female guild, however, was in the hands of male officials. (173)

As the male control and dominance within the guild system grew, women sought other alternatives to continue their work through secret organizations. Schmidt emphasizes women’s secret organizations as: “... the fact that women were excluded from guilds did not make them or their work necessarily marginal. In eighteenth-century Lyons, a small but significant number of non-guild female workers learnt the techniques from guild masters, secured control of raw materials and successfully ran their own companies in an underground economy” (184).

Women's struggle to create alternative communities and safe spaces has persisted throughout history. Although class differences may have led them into different forms of alternative communities, all were united by their exclusion from patriarchal structures on the basis of their sex. For that reason, while lower-class women were exploring alternative women-only communities through semi-religious communities and guild networks, upper-class women were forming their alternative communities through their elite networks within the space of salons or private clubs. In the seventeenth century France, upper-class women formed an alternative female space through salons. Even though men also attended these salons, women were taking an active role as the organizers of these events as *salonnières*. As a result of these gatherings, a group of women formed a femicentric space within these events, named as the *Précieuses*. In "The Salon and The Stage", the *Précieuses* and their shared motivation is underlined as follows:

... the movement known as 'preciosite' was initiated by women themselves and born of their own demands for education and emancipation. By participating in social and intellectual activities of their own choosing, they sought an independent identity beyond the domestic role. Instead of the respect and admiration shown to the fictional 'femme forte', these real challengers of the status quo were sometimes greeted with hostility and ridicule. (162)

The *Précieuses* became the object of ridicule and satire for the men. The *Précieuses'* interest in literature, politics and their eagerness to play with the natural attachments of linguistic terminology irritated the male culture of French salons. These women played with language and created their own feminine poetic language. Vanessa Herold explores the *Précieuses'* perception of language and the unique characteristic of their invention in "In the Shadow of the Sun King: The *Précieuse*": "The *précieuse's* words appeared obscure because she used the non-material, abstract realm to describe material things ... Through poetic style in everyday conversation, the *précieuse* transformed language into a complicated puzzle. By playfully twisting into knots her discourse, she invented more elegant ways of avoiding the unpleasant realities beyond words" (37).

Herold emphasizes the *Précieuses'* perception of the bond between language and signification: "Her substitution of concrete, material phrases for abstract periphrases showed that words did not have a natural attachment to the idea they signified. Through the altering of signs, she created her own unique perception of life and unveiled the artifice of "universal" signs ..." (37). In her paper, Herold analyzes the effects of the *Précieuses* on the growing male anxiety. To Herold, satirical

literature on the *Précieuses* was the result of the male anxiety: “The outpouring of satirical literature about the *précieuse* represented a response to a perceived threat. Writers did not trivialize the *précieuse*’s character solely on the basis of her sex, but rather on the fear of her challenge to the established political and social order... [Their] discourse constructed new meanings between words and things, signs and referents” (31).

The *Précieuses* emerged from the seventeenth century French salons, a period often regarded as the golden age of these gatherings. During this time, salons were vibrant spaces where women actively participated in art, literature, and science. By the eighteenth century, however, women’s roles were reduced to that of hostesses, limiting their influences within these intellectual circles. The marquise de Rambouillet’s salon gatherings were quite popular during the seventeenth century. Her organizations- likened to academies or lectures- were praised by many of her contemporaries. Saint Simon describes the marquise de Rambouillet’s *chambre bleue*:

(The hôtel de Rambouillet ... was a kind of academy of cultivated minds, of gallantry, virtue, and knowledge in Paris ... it was the meeting place of the most distinguished in merit and condition, a court that one had to contend with and whose decision carried great weight and [affected] the behavior and reputation of court figures and society at large, as much as [it affected] the works that were judged.)” (qtd. in Beasley)

In *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France*, Saint Simon’s description of the marquise de Rambouillet’s social gathering is pointed out to highlight women’s engagement in education, art, literature and science in an alternative space:

This verbal slippage between the words *ruelle*, *académie*, and *tribunal* appears relatively frequently in contemporaries’ references to the salons and illustrates the conflation of the various worlds embodied by the habitués of the *ruelles*: writers, academicians, courtesans, intellectuals, and learned worldly figures were all drawn to certain salons and combined to create an alternative space to traditional academies or to the purely social space of the court. (Beasley)

Another contemporary of the marquise de Rambouillet describes his discontent against women’s active role and participation in the salon culture. Daniel Huet expresses his uneasiness as:

(Among us, gallantry has made women the arbiters of the merit of things which depend, not simply upon the senses, but also on the mind, they abuse the right that they are allowed to usurp; and from the lowest genre of poetry, which is within their capacities, they elevate

themselves to the most sublime, which demands, along with natural talent, the help of education and meditation, which they do not possess at all.)” (Beasley)

Although French salons were not women-only spaces, they opened an alternative space for women to engage in philosophy, art, literature and science. Emerging from French salons, The *Précieuses* challenged phallogocentric concepts of language and literature. Similarly, in the eighteenth century, Bluestocking Society in England emerged as a high-class exclusive circle. Although, like the French salons, Bluestocking Society was not a women-only community, it provided an alternative space for women writers/thinkers to collaborate and engage with arts. Some of the known members of the society were Sarah Pennington, Hester Chapone, Elizabeth Montagu, Sarah Scott, Elizabeth Carter. In “Women's Provi(de)nce: Religion and Bluestocking Feminism”, Gary Kelly emphasizes the group’s motivation as collaborating women: “... the immediate motive of the Bluestocking assemblies was to construct a respectable and intellectual (semi-)public identity for women (of certain classes), distinct from and opposed to the historic identities of women in gentry and courtly culture” (166). Kelly stresses Bluestocking women’s aspiration for establishing a new identity as follows: “This was a group of women, led by Scott's sister, Elizabeth Montagu, and including a number of women of independent means, who set about establishing a new, uncourtly and intellectualized form of upper-class social intercourse in London in the 1750s’ ”(166). This shared motivation to build an intellectual identity for upper-class women among Bluestocking society’s members illustrates how they collaborated to form an alternative community within the broader context of upper-class society.

Similar to Bluestocking Society, two other artistic communities of women emerged in England: Katherine Philips’ Society of Friendship and Women’s Literary Community in Bath. D'Monte notes the society of friendship that was founded around 1651 in “Mirroring Female Power”. Although limited information survives about Katherine Philips’ society, D'Monte mentions that Margaret Cavendish attended one of its gatherings. For D'Monte, Philips’ society represents an alternative community: “... the picture of a group of women working together for mutual benefit conjured up the attractive vision of an alternative way of living” (93). The society is further praised for the network it provided to women writers : “Moira Ferguson describes the latter as a coterie dedicated to solidifying: emotional and cultural bonds among the writers as much as the classical names with which she rebaptized them as participants in the Society of Friendship. This conscious connectiveness among women is a feminist landmark” (93). The other artistic female community

is the women's literary community in eighteenth century Bath. Elizabeth Child explores the artistic female communities in Bath around the eighteenth century. According to Child, Sarah Scott, Lady Barbara Montagu, Sarah Fielding, Catharine Macaulay, Harriet and Sophia Lee, and Lady Anna Miller were the group of writers, who live closely in Bath and formed an artistic female circle:

A remarkable group of literary women gravitated to Bath in the mid- to late-eighteenth century. Sarah Scott, Lady Barbara Montagu, Sarah Fielding, Catharine Macaulay, Harriet and Sophia Lee, and Lady Anna Miller, to name but a few, all made their homes in and around Bath between the 1750s and 1780s, there anchoring a fluid literary circle that came to include less well-known local women as well as celebrated 'bluestocking' visitors such as Catherine Talbot, Elizabeth Montagu, Elizabeth Carter and Frances Sheridan. (219)

Without a doubt, there have been more societies, clubs and circles of women in history. However, in the absence of documentation, their existence has been lost to history and to us. One such community that has been preserved in the historical record is The New Female Coterie, a female-led circle that emerged in the late eighteenth century England. The New Female Coterie's name comes from a previous club known for its "male forms of associational sociability" (Boddy 6). Boddy describes The New Female Coterie as:

The New Female Coterie was a group of disgraced eighteenth-century upper-class British women. The group consisted of Lady Seymour Worsley; the Honourable Mrs. Catherine Newton; Lady Henrietta Grosvenor, the Countess Grosvenor; Lady Elizabeth Smith-Stanley, Countess of Derby; Viscountess Penelope Ligonier; and Lady Caroline Stanhope, the Countess of Harrington. (1)

The members of The New Female Coterie were seen as scandalous because of their explicit display of sexual relationship with men outside of marriage. Boddy discusses the reason behind The New Female Coterie's explicit display of adultery: "... the women of the New Female Coterie worked to choose their own paths within the confines of upper-class society" (3). Since these women cannot divorce their husbands and cannot be freed from the marital limitations, they forced their husbands to divorce them by publicizing their adultery. Within the space of their alternative community, these women resisted and challenged the constraints of the upper-class English society. Boddy touches upon their choice of meeting place as a representation of their defiance to upper-class societal norms:

By entering a brothel in the company of other notorious women, the group implied that their reputations amongst high society no longer carried the same weight as they had before. Utilising their collective agency to meet at a brothel, as opposed to another location like a private residence, meant that these women could live their lives with some dignity as well as signalling to society that they had little interest in their strictures. (57)

Due to the New Female Coterie's open displays of adultery, the affairs of its members were taken to the court and recorded in legal documents. As a result, their stories have survived, allowing us to understand the New Female Coterie as a female community that rebelled against the constraints of marital life. Emphasizing the excessiveness of these actions for the eighteenth century, Bobby highlights the incidents that lead to legal consequences: "Lady Henrietta Grosvenor made her adultery too obvious to ignore by travelling the length of the country with her lover in tow whilst Lady Seymour Worsley took the further step of eloping with her lover" (38).

Being confined in marriage, members of the New Female Coterie collaborated to escape from their marital obligations and established a society for pleasure. As in the case of these high-born ladies, there have been many other women, who choose to be a part of such women-only communities to explore alternative lives and realities. Some participated in women-only religious orders and guild structures whereas more privileged ones formed artistic and intellectual circles or pleasure-oriented societies. We have been exploring how starting from Sapphic Island of Lesbos, women had been actively forming women-only societies in historical reality. Although examples of such communities appear both in literature and history, the concept of women-only community and separatism were mostly brought to the foreground in the twentieth century, particularly through the work of feminist thinkers. It was during this period that the possibility, practicality, advantages and disadvantages of women-only communities were critically examined and emphasized. The following sub-chapter will provide a historical focus on the twentieth century feminists and their separatist practices.

1.2. Women-Only Communities and Separatism in the 20th Century

Women-only community and separatism was a widely discussed concept of the twentieth century feminist movement. Echols defines the radical feminists' view of class system in *Daring to Be Bad*: "Radical feminists argued that women constituted a sex-class, that relations between women and men needed to be recast in political terms, and that gender rather than class was the primary contradiction" (3). Radical feminists' perception of a universal shared experience of womanhood gradually shattered and led to the birth of cultural feminism. Echols draws attention to radical feminists' emphasis on a shared womanhood: "... radical feminists' emphasis upon women's commonality masked a fear of difference, one which had serious consequences for the movement. Differences-either those rooted in class, race, and sexual preference, or those of skill and expertise-were seen as undermining the movement" (11).

Since radical feminists saw male domination as the root of all oppression, above race and class, they idealized a separatist way of life and sought to distance themselves from the patriarchal society. They formed alternative women-only communities and created new spaces. Enke touches upon the radical feminists' new female spaces in "Smuggling Sex through the Gates":

Creating new "women's spaces" was one extremely widespread strategy of the "Second Wave" of feminism: from New York City to Iowa City to Seattle, in large and small towns, women created women's coffeehouses, women's communes "on the land," women's schools, and women's health clinics; women forcefully took over bars and ball-fields, formed emergency shelters, and claimed the streets with guerilla theater actions. These new women's spaces at once became sites of protest against the gendered exclusions of public geographies, and also meeting grounds in which multiple cultures of feminist and lesbian activism emerged. (635)

These feminists developed separatism and woman-only groups as strategies to challenge the patriarchal power and to create new spaces for themselves. Frye stresses the political implication of woman-only meetings in *Feminist Social Thought*:

The woman-only meeting is a fundamental challenge to the structure of power. It is always the privilege of the master to enter the slave's hut. The slave who decides to exclude the master from her hut is declaring herself not a slave. The exclusion of men from the meeting

not only deprives them of certain benefits (which they might survive without); it is also a controlling of access, hence an assumption of power. (411)

Radical feminists aimed to fight patriarchal oppression by uniting women through a shared experience of womanhood. They challenged the patriarchy by creating new female spaces and separating from men. For them, this strategy of controlling male access was a manifestation of female power. Although nearly all radical feminist groups held women-only meetings, only some adopted separatism as a strategy. Among those who embraced separatism, there were two approaches: separatism as a political strategy versus lesbian separatism as ideological and sexual commitment.

Redstockings was one of the earliest radical feminist groups. It was founded by Ellen Willis and Shulamith Firestone in February 1969. Echols points out the story behind the group's name: "They chose the name Redstockings to represent a synthesis of two traditions: that of the earlier feminist theoreticians and writers who were insultingly called 'Bluestockings' in the 19th century, and the militant political tradition of radicals-the red of revolution" (140). The group was one of the first examples of an alternative female community within the movement. Women shared their experiences through consciousness-raising and speaking-out.

Another radical feminist group was NYRF (New York Radical Feminists). It was founded by Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt in late 1969. Echols defines the working strategy of NYRF as:

Firestone designed NYRF as an umbrella group which would consist of geographically based, "nuclear leaderless/structureless" cell groups, or brigades. Each brigade would be named after a different radical feminist or, if possible, a "team of radical feminists," like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, the Grimke sisters or the Pankhursts. The brigades would consist of no more than fifteen women to achieve "a working internal democracy" and to engender intimacy and a common political consciousness. (189)

For NYRF, members need to be educated during a six-month period. They were expected to spend three months doing consciousness-raising and another three months educating themselves through reading literary pieces of the first and the second wave of feminism.

The rest of the radical feminist groups adopted separatism as their main strategy. However, their intentions and commitments were different from one another. Cell 16 was founded by Roxanne Dunbar in 1968. It was the first known group, which suggests separatism from men as a

strategy. The group was one of the most well-known radical feminist groups by the public thanks to their magazine, *No More Fun and Games*. Even though Cell 16 adopted separatism, the group never advocated for lesbianism. Moreover, homosexual relationships were criticized by the group. Echols touches upon this aspect in her book as follows: "For Cell 16, the fundamental problem with homosexuality was that 'like heterosexuality it suffers from being sexuality.'"... Dunbar and Leghorn advised women to separate "from men who are not consciously working for female liberation," but warned them against seeking refuge in lesbian relationships" (165). For Cell 16, separation from men was only a political strategy to confront patriarchy. Echols extends on the group's political separatism:

For Cell 16 the problem was women's diffidence and their dependence upon men, and the solution lay in women "un-conditioning" themselves by taking off the accumulated emotional and physical flab that kept them enthralled to men. They exhorted women to swear off sex and relationships with men, to learn karate, and to live in communes-in all-female communes for those who were smart enough to still be single. With karate and celibacy, women, if not completely invulnerable and im-penetrable, could at least achieve a degree of self-sufficiency and control over their lives. (160)

The Feminists was another group founded by Ti-Grace Atkinson and adopted separatism only as a political strategy. The group advised for women's sexual liberation. The Feminists brought a membership criteria, which is to exclude married women from the membership. Echols draws attention to this criterion of the group by presenting the group's ideology on marriage:

In their view, feminism was synonymous with separatism and marriage with collaboration. In fact, Kearon argued that "men are able to exert a powerful and constant pressure on their wives which can be dangerous to the movement. " ... In rejecting marriage and fidelity to the male, we are cutting off our retreat from radical feminism and creating the necessity for female unity and trust [her emphasis]. (177)

The group was radical with the extent of their separatism for the 1970s. They attempted to form a female religion and explored the concept of matriarchy. In *Daring to be Bad*, Echols stresses the group's exploration of a separatist female religion:

The group succumbed to essentialism as it explored matriarchy and developed a "female religion." Kearon and Mary Lutz developed a religious rite in which wine and marijuana were the sacraments and the chant was "Momma." They constructed an enormous and

anatomically correct, papier-mache man which they tore apart during the ritual. In 1973, The Feminists maintained that "a female religion could provide the same 'faith' that Marxism, humanism, and liberalism provide: a sense that we are not doomed to failure. Someday women will rule the world.' (183)

Even though The Feminists did not advocate lesbian separation, their advocacy on separation inspired lesbian radical feminists. Radicalesbians was the first lesbian group adopting separatist lifestyle. For them, lesbianism was not only a sexual choice but a political stance against heterosexuality, which they viewed as women being dependent on male culture. Echols discusses Radicalesbians' critique of heterosexuality in *Daring to be Bad*:

Only women can give to each other a new sense of self. That identity we have to develop with reference to ourselves, and not in relation to men...Our energies must flow toward our sisters, not backward toward our oppressors. As long as women's liberation tries to free women without facing the basic hetero- sexual structure that binds us in one-to-one relationship with our oppressors, tremendous energies will continue to flow into trying to straighten up each particular relationship with a man... This obviously splits our energies and commitments, leaving us unable to be committed to the construction of the new patterns which will liberate us. (216)

Echols draws attention to Radicalfeminists' assumption, which centers on the premise that feminism requires lesbianism. In 1971, the first separatist lesbian house, named Amazing Grace, was established in D.C. While the founders, Biren and Deevey, were hoping to be the beginning of a lesbian movement, Amazing Grace fell apart after one week. Echols highlights the end of Amazing Grace as follows: "... they discovered that many problems remained, especially the problem of class. Amazing Grace, which had been painstakingly planned over a two-month period, ended "brutally and abruptly" after only one week. The experiment collapsed when some of the working-class women balked at the communal organization of the household" (225).

Another living collective of lesbian separatists was known as Those Women. Rita Mae Brown and Charlotte Bunch started this collective in 1971. Those Women was named after heterosexual lesbians' reference to lesbians, which is stated by Echols as: "...because heterosexual feminists were forever referring to them as "those women" apparently because they could not yet bring themselves to say the word "lesbian. "" (228). In 1972, the group started to publish a magazine, The Furies, and changed its name. The Furies attract more attention than Amazing Grace. To

Echols', "Approximately 100 feminists attended" to The Furies retreat (228). Echols discusses The Furies critique of heterosexuality as a patriarchal oppression against women: "The Furies forced heterosexual feminists to acknowledge that sexuality is socially rather than biologically constructed, and to understand the centrality of institutionalized heterosexuality to women's oppression" (238). By making reference to Ti-Grace Atkinson, Echols emphasizes the Furies' emphasis on lesbian practice: "Ti-Grace Atkinson, who had earlier declared that "feminism is a theory, lesbianism is a practice," now contended that "feminism is the theory, lesbianism the practice" " (238).

Even though the radical feminists adopted separatist strategies and established women-only groups, their separatist experiments did not last long. Nevertheless, the twentieth century witnessed radical feminists' exploration of alternative female communities, women-only spaces and separatist communal houses. These women questioned the possibility, practicality, advantages and disadvantages of women-only and separatist communities without men. Shugar investigates the twentieth century and women's separatist theory in *Separatism and Women's Community* where she points out the reason behind the failing of separatism during 1970s:

... while most separatists agreed that separation from men and 'male values' was crucial to their definition of separatism, many quickly pointed out that complete separation was impossible, impractical, and sometimes undesirable. Many early separatists would have agreed with Bev Jo's analysis: 'Separatism is not having no contact with the patriarchy. Even the richest lesbians can't afford to do that, and most separatists I know are not rich. We have to work, deal with county, state and federal agencies, go to the grocery stores, deal with landlords, etc. We do not relate to males when we don't have to'. (39)

Echols points out the failing of radical feminists' myth on a shared womanhood and sameness: "When lesbians and working-class women finally pierced the myth of women's commonality, the movement was temporarily paralyzed, thus proving to some that differences were inevitably crippling. Indeed, cultural feminism's ascendance within the movement is in part attributable to the turmoil created by the issues of lesbianism and class" (11). Women's differences within the movement resulted in the dissolution of the radical feminists' myth of sameness.

Although radical feminists failed to sustain their separatist practices as a result of class struggles and their problematic belief on a shared womanhood and sameness, they managed to bring the issue of separatism and women-only community to the foreground collectively and

radically for the first time in history. Their collective approach to separatism and women-only space was a radical step for the history of feminism. What makes radical feminists' separatist collectives special for the course of history is that the issue of separatism was openly used as a medium of protesting and fighting with the patriarchal system; those women worked on making separatism not only a theory for the feminist thought but also a living practice. Their main motivation was to eliminate all the effects of the patriarchal oppression and mechanism in women's lives.

As this chapter has shown, women have been forming separatist women-only communities throughout history in different forms and contexts. Although there had been structural and class-related differences among those separatist communities, their intention was to escape from the phallocentric oppression by forming an alternative space, community and reality for themselves. Starting from Ancient Greece to twentieth century radical feminists, we have seen women's shared struggles and oppression under the patriarchal rule and their diverse responses and range of radical approaches to the concept of separatism. Following Rich's theory on lesbian continuum, woman-identified-experience and re-vision, my intention is to present a historical framework on women's engagement with separatism throughout history as a result of their collectively shared oppression under the patriarchy. To this end, this chapter has addressed women-only separatist societies in historical reality. The following chapter will concentrate on the concept of separatism in women's literary imagination and women writers' employment of separatism as a critique of phallocentric oppression. Similar to the structure of this chapter, the following chapter will provide a chronological order of literary pieces to show the literary evolution of women's separatist literature.

CHAPTER I

GENDERED SPACES AND LITERARY RESISTANCE: VISIONS OF FEMALE

SEPARATISM IN WOMEN'S WRITING FROM MEDIEVAL TO MODERN

Women writers, being oppressed by the phallogentric mechanisms, have been using the literary medium as a way to escape and respond to the patriarchal limitations against women by creating fictional alternative worlds, where women-only communities are established to explore alternative realities, roles and experiences for women through separatist practices. Literature, serving as an artistic medium, paved a way for women writers to express their personal sufferings under patriarchal oppression and opened a creative path to imagine alternative worlds where women are free from phallogentric limitations and gender inequalities. Although the radicalism and feminist impulse within such fictional communities and their utopian tendencies grew by the twentieth century, the writings of early women writers also employed themes of retreat and separatism within women-only communities. However, these portrayals were not always utopian in their portrayals, as seen in the example of Cavendish's plays, where she offers a two-model approach to women's separatism with a critical analysis of patriarchal interference in alternative female communities. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that some early women writers portrayed separatist communities as dream-like, Edenic and heavenly in their fictional pieces, highlighting the celestial and religious aspect of nurturing women's alliances.

As early as the fifteenth century, women-only separatist communities were represented in literature with Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Pizan's work holds a special place in women's literary canon as being the earliest known literary piece on the theme of separatism. Written during the course of *querelle des femme* as a response to a misogynist text of the time, Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* became an inspiring work and a model for the early feminists, offering a supportive perspective on women. Her work not only provided an initial literary example of women-only separatism but also sparked a literary debate tradition, which emerged by women writers responding to contemporary misogynist works through defenses of women. This literary debate tradition on *querelle des femme*, the woman question, marked by Pizan's involvement, continued throughout the early modern era and became a prominent subject in the field of literature. Since early women writers found *querelle des femme* as a convenient

medium to pen their works, it is important to look at the birth of *querelle des femme* and Pizan's leading role both in the *querelle* and women's literary imagination.

As biblical accounts and medieval thought were shaped by beliefs in women's supposed inferiority, medieval literature also reflected these views, portraying women through contrasting figures: the demonic and transgressive, and the submissive and obedient figure. This phallocentric view of women in medieval literature is pointed out in *Debate Of The Romance Of The Rose*: "Medieval stories, poems, and epics also portrayed women negatively—as lustful and deceitful—while praising good house-keepers and loyal wives as replicas of the Virgin Mary or the female saints and martyrs (King and Rabil Jr. xv)". Through these portrayals of angelic and demonic women, women were confined into rigid categories and expected to live according to them. This binary portrayal of women as temptresses or angelic and celestial figures mostly depicted in courtly love poems, which often relied on objectification of female sexuality. Around the thirteenth century, courtly love poetry, narrating the romantic relationship between a lady and a gentleman, contained erotic symbols and remained popular in Europe. Around 1235 and 1265, two French poets, Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun composed *The Romance of the Rose*. It is a long poem, consisting of two parts, which represents a misogynist view of women. The poem not only objectifies the female body with the image of plucking a rose, but also generalizes and criticizes women as being dangerous, greedy and manipulative. To understand the workings of phallocentric mechanism within medieval literature and Pizan's following critique of her contemporaries' phallocentric views in *The Book of the City of Ladies*, the content of *The Romance of the Rose* plays a crucial role. The details of the poem highlight patriarchal view of women as follows:

Here the poet, in a dream, is admitted into a walled garden where he finds a magic fountain in which a rosebush is reflected. He longs to pick one rose, but the thorns prevent his doing so, even as he is wounded by arrows from the god of love, whose commands he agrees to obey. The rest of this part of the poem recounts the poet's unsuccessful efforts to pluck the rose. The longer part of the *Romance* by Jean de Meun also describes a dream. But here allegorical characters give long didactic speeches, providing a social satire on a variety of themes, some pertaining to women. Love is an anxious and tormented state, the poem explains: women are greedy and manipulative, marriage is miserable, beautiful women are

lustful, ugly ones cease to please, and a chaste woman is as rare as a black swan. (King and Rabil Jr. xv)

The erotic symbols and critique of women portrays the literary inclinations of the age and reveals the misogynist tone in such works. Shaped by the phallogocentric views of the biblical account on women, medieval literature was dominated by male criticism against women. *The Romance of the Rose* was not the only male-centered contemporary work for Pizan, after *The Romance of the Rose*'s publication, Mathéolus published his *Lamentations*, a Latin diatribe against marriage, leading Pizan to come up with her separatist utopia. In this phallogocentric context, Pizan composed *The Book of City of Ladies* to debunk the patriarchal critiques against women and to lead women to imagine alternative realities and communities. Following Pizan's response, a literary genre on the debate of woman dominated the literary field from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century. In *Debate Of The Romance Of The Rose*, Pizan's role in the start of a new literary tradition is highlighted: "The whole literary genre has been called the *querelle des femmes*, the "woman question." " (King and Rabil Jr. xx). Pizan is seen as the precursor of the *querelle des femmes*: "The opening volley of this battle occurred in the first years of the fifteenth century, in a literary debate sparked by Christine de Pizan" (King and Rabil Jr. xx).

Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* is the first known literary work in which women build an alternative society without men to escape from the pressures of patriarchy and to improve their lives. Realizing that they cannot claim agency and autonomy within the limits of patriarchy, women free themselves by building an alternative women-only space. It is a utopian and dream-like place, protected by three Ladies. *The Book of the City of Ladies* starts with a critique on Mathéolus' *Lamentations*: "But just the sight of this book, even though it was of no authority, made me wonder how it happened that so many different men— and learned men among them— have been and are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises and writings so many wicked insults about women and their behavior" (3). For Pizan, men see women in this negative way: "... it seems that they all speak from one and the same mouth. They all concur in one conclusion: that the behavior of women is inclined to and full of every vice" (4). Puzzled by the opposition between what she witnesses in reality and male narratives on women, Pizan expresses her confusion: "To the best of my knowledge, no matter how long I confronted or dissected the problem, I could not see or realize how their claims could be true when compared to the natural behavior and character of women" (4). When she looks at this long tradition of male

writings on women, Pizan almost decides to believe men instead of herself: “Yet I still argued vehemently against women, saying that it would be impossible that so many famous men— such solemn scholars, possessed of such deep and great understanding, so clear-sighted in all things, as it seemed— could have spoken falsely on so many occasions ... And so, I relied more on the judgment of others than on what I myself felt and knew” (4). At this moment of despair, three ladies appear to her, Lady Reason, Lady Justice, and Lady Rectitude. The first lady starts the conversation:

Dear daughter, do not be afraid, ... we have come to bring you out of the ignorance which so blinds your own intellect that you shun what you know for a certainty ... Fair daughter, have you lost all sense? Have you forgotten that when fine gold is tested in the furnace, it does not change or vary in strength but becomes purer the more it is hammered and handled in different ways? Do you not know that the best things are the most debated and the most discussed? (6)

Underlying the male anxiety, the lady gives an important lesson to the female reader: “It also seems that you think that all the words of the philosophers are articles of faith, that they could never be wrong. As far as the poets of whom you speak are concerned, do you not know that they spoke on many subjects in a fictional way and that often they mean the *contrary* of what their words openly say?” (7; emphasis added). After pointing out how men come up with fictitious accounts on women, the lady mentions the reason behind their visit, which is to build a city only for women:

... we three ladies whom you see here, moved by pity, have come to you to announce a particular edifice built like a city wall, strongly constructed and well founded, which has been predestined and established by our aid and counsel for you to build, where no one will reside except all ladies of fame and women worthy of praise, for the walls of the city will be closed to those women who lack virtue. (11)

The city symbolizes security and protection for virtuous ladies, and is promised to be always guarded: “I prophesy to you, as a true sybil, that this City, which you will found with our help, will never be destroyed, nor will it ever fall, jealous enemies. Although it will be stormed by numerous but will remain prosperous forever, regardless of all its assaults, it will never be taken or conquered” (11). With this promise of permanence, the city stands as a utopian hope for women.

However, the city is governed by a class-based system that controls who is allowed to live in this separatist space:

Then I will populate the City for you with worthy ladies and the mighty Queen whom I will bring to you. Hers will be the honor and prerogative among all other women, as well as among the most excellent women. And in this condition I will turn the City over to you... (14)

To describe the city, the lady highlights virtuousness of its inhabitants: "... seeing this new City completed, which can be not only the refuge for you all, that is, for virtuous women, ... " (254). After this announcement, Pizan informs the reader about the inhabitants of this city and their achievements. Here, Pizan provides a historical catalogue of successful and virtuous women.

Following Pizan's contribution to *querelle des femme*, women started to produce works, which debated against certain misogynistic works of male writers throughout the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries. In England, similar to Pizan's debate with Mathéolus, Joseph Swetnam's *The Arraignment of Leuud, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* sparked the pamphlet debates on women's nature in 1615. Swetnam criticizes women's nature in Book 1:

The Lion being bitten with hunger, the Beare being robbed of her young ones, the Viper being trod on, all these are nothing so terrible as the fury of a woman. A Bucke may be inclosed in a Parke, a bridle rules a horse, a Woolfe may be tied, a Tyger may be tamed: but a fro|ward woman will neuer be tamed, no spur will make her goe, nor no bridle will hold her backe; for if a woman hold an opinion, no man can draw her from it: tell her of her fault, she will not beleue that she is in any fault: giue her good counsell, but she will not take it; if you doe but looke after another woman, then she will be iealous, the more thou louest her, the more she will disdaine thee; and if thou threaten her, then she wil be angry; flatter her, and then she will be proud; and if thou forbear her, it maketh her bold, and if thou chasten her, then she will turne to a Serpent;... (Swetnam)

Rachel Speght penned *A mouzell for Melastomus* (1617) as an answer to deny Swetnam's accusations and to debunk his claims:

IT was the simlie of that wise and learned *Lactantius*, that if fire, though but with a small sparke kindled, bee not at the first quenched, it may worke great mischiefe and dammage: So likewise may the scandals and defamations of the malevolent in time proue pernicious, if they bee not nipt in the head at their first appearence. The consideration of this (right

Honou|rable and Worshipfull Ladies) hath incited me (though yong, and the vnworthiest of thou|sands) to encounter with a furious enemy to our sexe, least if his vniust imputations should con|tinue without answere, he might insult and ac|count himselfe a victor; and by such a conceit deale, as Historiographers report the viper to doe, who in the Winter time doth vomit forth her poyson, and in the spring time sucketh the same vp againe, which becommeth twice as deadly as the former: And this our pestiferous enemy, by thinking to provide a more deadly poyson for women, then already he hath foa|med forth, may euaporate, by an addition vnto his former illeterate Pamphlet (intituled *The Arraignement of Women*) a more contagious ob|trection then he hath already done, and in|deed hath threatned to doe... (Speght)

Speght's *A mouzell for Melastomus* resembles Pizan's *The Book of City of Ladies* with Speght's motivation to use Swetnam's pamphlet as a medium to write against the male narrative to defend women. Mihoko Suzuki draws attention to Speght's use of Pizan's strategies for *querelle des femme*. For Suzuki, Speght mirrors Pizan's *The Book of City of Ladies* by employing three ladies to defend women that are attacked by the phallogentric order in *Mortalities Memorandum* (1621). In *Subordinate Subjects*, Suzuki touches upon this thematic similarity:

... Like Pizan, who describes her "great unhappiness and sadness" and self-hatred as a woman upon encountering misogynous texts (5), Speght expresses her "griefe" over her "Ignorance" (43). To both discouraged women appear allegorical women who offer inspiration and comfort: to Pizan Reason, Rectitude, and Justice; to Speght Thought, Experience, Desire, Industrie, and Truth. While the three ladies offer aid to Pizan in building her "city of ladies" as a "refuge and defense against the various assailants " (10) , Speght's Truth similarly offers historical examples of learned women from classical antiquity as evidence that both men and women are equipped with equal faculties: "then wherefore shall / A woman have her intellect in vaine, / Or not endeavour Knowledge to attaine. " " (123)

Another pamphlet debate takes place in 1640 between Mary Tattlewell, Joan Hit-him-home and a pamphleteer, who is referred as Sir Seldome Sober. *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* targets Sir Seldome Sober's critique of women as:

... And as there have beene formerly, by your meanes, Sir *Seldome Sober*, many railing, bitter, invective Pasquills, and Scurrilous Libels, some written, some printed, and all disperst

and scattered abroad, all of them made and forg'd on purpose to callumniate, revile, despight, jeere, and flout women: and now lately one or two of the sonnes of Ignorance have pen'd three severall,* [1.3](#)sweet, filthy, fine ill-favoured Pamphlets, which are Printed, and (out of the most deepe shallownesse of the Authors abundant want of Wisedome) they are called *Lectures*,* [1.4](#) as the *Juniper Lecture*, the *Crab-tree Lecture*, & the *Worm-wood Lecture*, wherein they have laid most false asper[sions upon all women ge]nerally... (Tattlewell and Hit-him-home)

Mary Tattlewell and Joan Hit-him-home makes a reference to Long Meg of Westminster in their pamphlet and reminds the reader that women are not deceitful and passive as men claim. Disturbed by the cries of the wronged women, Long Meg of Westminster rises from her grave and speaks:

WHy raise you quiet soules out of the grave? To trouble their long sleep? what peevish Knave Hath wakned my dead ashes? and breath'd fire Into colde embers? never to re|spire, Till a new resurrection? so forc't now: (Through innocent Womens cla|mours) that I vow, Th'earth could not hold mee, but I was compeld To look on what ('tis long since I be|held) The Sun and Day; what have wee wo|men done,... (Tattlewell and Hit-him-home)

Following Pizan's example, Mary Tattlewell and Joan Hit-him-home refer to historical women to demonstrate women's potential in their pamphlet. As exemplified in Rachel Speght, Mary Tattlewell and Joan Hit-him-home, women's defense of female sex against male attacks are the early examples of women's writing under the realm of *querelle des femme*. Pizan's *The Book of City of Ladies* plays an important role for women's writing not only because it sparked the debate on *querelle des femme*, but also because it served as a precursor to the idea of a separatist women-only community. Aside from Pizan's *The Book of City of Ladies*, this idea of a separatist alternative female community can be found in Amelia Lanyer, Mary Astell and Moderata Fonte's literary writings. Even though these women writers come from different national, social, historical, economic backgrounds, they experience similar difficulties and limitations because of their sex in phallogentric societies. For that reason, these women explore the theme of separatism and women-only communities in their writings to demonstrate women's capacity and agency in the absence of men.

1.1. Alternative Women-Only Communities in Early Modern Literature

Amelia Lanyer published *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* in 1611. In this work, there is a section called “The Description of Cooke-Ham”, which is penned in the form of poetry portraying an idyllic space for women. The poem starts with a farewell with a nostalgic tone over the loss of a female utopian space:

Farewell (sweet *Cooke-ham*) where I first obtain'd
Grace from that Grace where perfit Grace remain'd;
And where the Muses gaue their full consent,
.....
Where princely Palace will'd me to indite,
The sacred Storie of the Soules delight.
Farewell (sweet Place) where Virtue then did rest,
And all delights did harbour in her breast:
Neuer shall my sad eies againe behold
Those pleasures which my thoughts did then vnfold:
Yet you (great Lady) Mistris of that Place,
From whose desires did spring this worke of Grace;
Vouchsafe to thinke vpon those pleasures past,
As fleeting worldly Ioyes that could not last: (1-14)

Lanyer portrays an idyllic garden that resembles Garden of Eden with the description of vivid colours and fruits:

Or, as dimme shadowes of celestiall pleasures,
Which are desir'd aboue all earthly treasures.

Oh how (me thought) against you thither came,
Each part did seeme some new delight to frame!
The House receiu'd all ornaments to grace it,
And would indure no foulennesse to deface it. ...
The Trees with leaues, with fruits, with flowers clad,
Embrac'd each other, seeming to be glad,
Turning themselues to beauteous Canopies,
To shade the bright Sunne from your brighter eies: (15-26)

Lanyer expresses her despair and heartbreak over the loss of paradise-like space, which is inhabited by virtuous women:

And you sweet Cooke-ham, whom these Ladies leaue,
I now must tell the grieffe you did conceaue
At their departure; when they went away, (127- 9)

.....

Seeming to grieue they could no longer last.
And with a chaste, yet louing kisse tooke leaue,
Of which sweet kisse I did it soone bereaue: (164- 6)

.....

To shew that nothing's free from Fortunes scorne,
While all the rest with this most beauteous tree,
Made their sad consort Sorrowes harmony. (176- 8)

.....

Lanyer's country house poetry exploring the themes of alternative female community, and women-only space centers around the nostalgia and grief over the loss of a safe space. Even though there is no direct utterance to any female character, there is a sense of women's collective living in harmony and peace freed from phallogentric constraints. In "Utopia of Desire", Furey suggests that Lanyer's choice of situating Cooke-Ham in the past is political to guard herself from the possible criticism towards her: "It would not be surprising if Lanyer's work were suffused with nostalgia and illusion. It is much less threatening to describe a world of women (an implicit challenge to heteronormativity and patriarchy) as safely past rather than to present it as an alternative present" (565).

Following Lanyer's nostalgia for the lost women-only space, Mary Astell's *A Serious Proposal* (1694) centers on women's separatism as a necessary step for women's education. *A Serious Proposal* is a non-fictional prose work, which centers on women's education. Astell criticizes insufficient opportunities for women's education and the patriarchal expectations that women's education should only be confined to raise young girls as wives. By making religious references, Astell aims to highlight religious implications of intellectual education for spiritual fulfillment. In her prose writing, Astell advises a women-only community and a form of intellectual retreat from the patriarchal society, where women engage in intellectual subjects and cultivate their morality away from the patriarchal constraints. Astell portrays women's separatism as an essential step for women's education. This intellectual retreat is depicted as a heaven-like spiritual space as follows:

Happy Re|treat! which will be the in|troducing you into such a *Paradise* as your Mother *Eve* forfeited, where you shall feast on Pleasures, that do not, like those of the World, disappoint your ex|pectations, pall your Appe|tites, and by the disgust they give you, put you on the fruitless search after new Delights, which when obtain'd are as empty as the former; but such as will make you truly happy *now*, and prepare you to be *per|fectly* so hereafter. Here are no Serpents to deceive you, whilst you entertain your selves in these delicious Gar|dens. (68)

The connection between women's education and women-only separatist communities highlights Astell's awareness of patriarchal oppression against women as a blocking force for women's education. Therefore, she believes that women can engage in intellectual subjects when they are free from male interference and pressure. *A Serious Proposal* reflects women's engagement with

the themes of retreat, separation and alternative female societies within literary space. Nicole Pohl refers to Astell's personal motivation behind her use of separatism as a strategy: "Astell tries to consolidate the contemporary debate around women and education with her own conviction that a separatist space is the ultimate solution to women's worldly and spiritual happiness" (112).

The theme of retreat and separatism was also used by the Italian writer Moderata Fonte around the 1600s. Fonte's *The Worth of Women* explores the theme of women's retreat and separatism where women, free from phallogentric constraints, engage in conversations about their shared experiences and men's hostility towards their sex. It is written in dialogue form and consists of two sections: Day 1 and Day 2. Virginia Cox, the editor and translator of *The Worth of Women*, points out the dividing line between Day 1 and Day 2: ... the first and second days of *The Worth of Women* signals a sharp thematic and structural dividing line in the dialogue, between the tightly unified feminist discussions of Day 1 and the encyclopedic meanderings of Day 2 (9). Cox summarizes the plot-line as follows:

Written in dialogue form, the work purportedly records a conversation among seven Venetian noblewomen of widely varying age and experience, whose discussions, though loosely unified around the theme of men's unjustifiable hostility to women and possible cures for it, range over almost every aspect of their lives, from their wayward husbands' vices to their views on education, from their literary tastes and aspirations to their favorite recipes for fish. (1)

Fonte describes how a group of noble Venetian women formed an alternative women-only community for themselves to spend quality time together: "These women would often steal time together for a quiet conversation, - and on these occasions, safe from any fear of being spied on by men or constrained by their presence, they would speak freely on whatever subject they pleased sometimes, their womanly labors, - sometimes, their seemingly diversions" (45). Fonte mentions how young widow Leonora inherits a house with a lovely garden and these Venetian women meet at her house. In this safe space, the Venetian women start to talk about freedom of speech in the absence of male influence:

"Praise God that we are free to do just as we please, even tell jokes like that to make each other laugh, with no one here to criticize us or put us down."

"Exactly," said Leonora. "If a man could hear us now, joking together like this, how he would scoff! There'd be no end to it!" "To tell the truth," said Lucretia, "we are only ever really happy when we are alone with other women,- and the best thing that can happen to any woman is to be able to live alone, without the company of men." (47)

They discuss how men create a narrative portraying women as inferior and weak in order to oppress them and maintain power as the privileged sex:

... For if a man steals (to take an example), he must be called a thief. If men usurp our rights, should we not complain and declare that they have wronged us? For if we are their inferiors in status, but not in worth, this is an abuse that has been introduced into the world and that men have then, over time, gradually translated into law and custom,- and it has become so entrenched that they claim (and even actually believe) that the status they have gained through their bullying is theirs by right. And we women, who, among our other good qualities, are eminently mild, peaceable, and benign by nature, are prepared to put up even with an offense of this magnitude for the sake of a peaceful life. And we would suffer it still more willingly if they would just be reasonable and allow things to be equal and there to be some parity,- if they did not insist on exerting such absolute control over us and in such an arrogant manner, treating us like slaves who cannot take a step without asking their permission or say a word without their jumping down our throats. Does this seem a matter of such little interest to us that we should be quiet and let things pass in silence? (61)

Their emphasis on men usurping women's rights - and gradual establishment of law and custom based on that power- reveals how these Venetian women are aware of the men's role in shaping women's social position. Cornelia's speech invokes Pizan's lady, who warns Pizan about male philosophers and writers' fictitious accounts on female nature. Similar to Lady Reason, Cornelia questions the accountability of historians' views on the nature of sexes:

Do you really believe,' Cornelia replied, 'that everything historians tell us about men—or about women—is actually true? You ought to consider the fact that these histories have been written by men, who never tell the truth except by accident. And if you consider, in addition, the envy and ill will they bear us women, it is hardly surprising that they rarely have a good

word to say for us, and concentrate instead on praising their own sex in general and particular members of it, as a way of praising themselves. (77)

Cornelia's speech reveals women's awareness of men's fictitious accounts on female sex and their supposed deficiency. Venetian women's discussions in *The Worth of Women* highlights their awareness and critique of the inequality between sexes and the male agenda behind it. Leonora's house as a safe women-only space provides the opportunity to freely express their opinions and experiences without the fear of men. Not only *The Worth of Women* but also Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* and Pizan's *The Book of City of Ladies* highlight the potential of women and the nurturing environment of the women-only spaces freed from the phallocentric constraints.

As in the examples of Christine de Pizan, Amelia Lanyer and Moderata Fonte, early women writers have been using literature as a creative medium to express their dreams of women-only separatist communities. Through fictional accounts and artistic production, those women managed to escape from the phallocentric oppression by inspiring one another to imagine alternative realities and worlds. Although their writings centered on the nurturing aspect of women-only communities and peacefulness of women's separatist way of living instead of a radical elimination of men as a result of some internal conflict as in the case of the twentieth century utopian novels, those early women writers introduced separatist female communities into the literary sphere and highlighted the nurturing aspect of such communities. In the early examples of women-only communities in literature, the emphasis remains on the nurturing aspect of women's community with an emphasis on presenting alternatives for women. However, with the twentieth century, feminist literature on separatist novels starts to emphasize radicalism and collaborative action to eliminate phallocentric mechanisms in women's lives. With that motivation, those feminist writers directed their energies to bring up theories and fostering women's literary imagination with utopian literature, where a nurturing women-only society successfully functions after a complete elimination of men.

As the following sub-chapter will show, the feminist utopian literature of the twentieth century focuses on the utopian ideal of complete elimination of men and a happy ending to a women-only fictional world. In these stories, women manage to build their matriarchal women-only communities and the emphasis remains on the possibility, achievability and feasibility of separatism through the depiction of a happy ending to their ideal separatist world. The following sub-chapter on feminist utopian literature will provide a special perspective to this thesis regarding

how Margaret Cavendish's *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* and *Bell in Campo*, cannot be seen as utopian plays because the plays end with women's lost hopes and their return to the patriarchal order and their subordinate position in the gendered hierarchy. It is crucial to draw a line between what is utopian for women's separatist communities and what is not. With this line drawn, we can see how feminist utopian writers of the twentieth century portrayed ideal worlds with utopian endings and how Margaret Cavendish emphasizes women's failed attempts at separatism when opposed to patriarchal structure and interest through her two-model framework to separatism—showing that women can only temporarily sustain their separatist practices only during the course of their alignment to the patriarchal interest. To this end, the following subchapter aims to show utopian literature on separatism, emphasizing happy endings, and with an intention to show how Cavendish's selected plays are not utopian because they do not portray ideal worlds with happy endings. On the contrary, they show how patriarchal ideology is so deeply embedded in practical life that women cannot completely escape from its oppression and are always subjected to return.

1.2. Feminist Utopian Literature on Separatism

In parallel with the historical realities of the twentieth century, feminist writers channeled their creative energy into the exploration of women-only separatist societies within the realm of the literary imagination. This exploration of women-only spaces manifested utopian imaginings and ideal separatist spaces in their writings based on female-centered social organization free from phallocentric influences. The relation between women-only communities in literary representation and utopianism mostly brought to foreground by the twentieth century feminist writers. “On feminist utopias”, Mellor draws attention to feminist utopias of twentieth century literature as follows: “[It] provides alternative models of sexually egalitarian societies and thereby defines the sources and directions of contemporary feminist desire... it further offers potentially viable blueprints for social organization. In these cases, feminist utopias both critique the present world and attempt to prophesy or determine the future” (243). Mellor's attention to sexually egalitarian society, feminist desire and social organization are the key themes that dominate feminist utopian literature. The critique of patriarchal society and depiction of women's administration are highlighted in these fictitious worlds: “These fictions typically depict men or a male-dominated

society as power-obsessed, authoritarian, violent, and inherently self-destructive. These fictions first level a blistering attack on such a personality and social structure and then consummate this attack in a fantasized elimination of all men” (245). In these utopian worlds, women establish a separatist utopian world for themselves by eliminating all men and the patriarchal mechanisms. They establish an opposingly matriarchal world against their previous patriarchal reality by embracing their maternal side through the employment of matriarchal structures in social regulations. This elimination of men mostly occurs as a result of a virus or a war between the two sexes. Nonetheless, feminist utopian literature of the twentieth century always portrays a sustaining and nurturing women-only society and a happy utopian ending to women’s separatist practices in which women successfully manage to put an end to patriarchal influences and its oppressive mechanisms. To compare this utopian attitude of twentieth century feminist writings with earlier women writers’ texts, it can be concluded that a similar radical approach to separatism with a complete elimination of men resulting from a virus or a war between the sexes cannot be found. The analysis of utopian novels below with an emphasis on their employment of utopia will be used to highlight how Cavendish’s *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* and *Bell in Campo* are not utopian plays because they do offer a happy, utopian ending to women’s separatist communities. Instead, Cavendish proposes a two- model framework to the concept of separatism, showing that women’s separatism cannot be sustained unless aligned with patriarchal interest and even aligned with the patriarchal interest it cannot be allowed to function for long. Therefore, Cavendish’s plays do not conform to the utopian genre due to their lack of an ideal, utopian and a happy ending.

Utopian attitude of the twentieth century feminist literature is found in Alice Sheldon’s *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* (1976), Joanna Russ’ *The Female Man* (1975) and Sally Miller Gearhart’ *The Wanderground* (1978). Alice Sheldon’s *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* (1976) is a well-known utopian novel from the twentieth century, which portrays a feminist separatism. In the story, men were wiped out from the Earth because an epidemic wiped out y-chromosomes and women reproduce through cloning. Three men come back to the Earth through a time warp - after 300 years later- and they realize that they are the only men left on Earth. Bud Geirr acts out violent sexual fantasies. His leader Major Dave Davis starts to act like the messiah and wants to discipline women. Lorimer, the last man of the three, realizes that these women have improved society and

men have nothing to offer them. In the end, Bud Geirr and Major Dave Davis were violently killed by women and Lorimer accepts a painless death by women.

Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975) is another feminist utopian novel. The novel depicts reaching a utopian society where women managed to separate themselves from men. Women gain their independence after a vicious war against men. After some time, these women find a way to reproduce through parthenogenesis and get rid of all men. For Mellor, Russ depicts the radical feminist's struggles against men and their motivation towards separatism: "This battle of the sexes was initiated, Russ' portraits of female experience in the 1920's and 1970's suggest, by the refusal of men to take women seriously, by consistent sex-discrimination at home and in the labor force, and by women's growing conviction that they could never attain genuine equality or dignity in the company of men" (246).

Following Houston, *Houston, Do You Read?* (1976) and *The Female Man* (1975), Sally Miller Gearhart' *The Wanderground* (1978) presents another separatist utopia, which depicts an ideal world for women outside of the male order. In the story, men live in cities whereas women live in hills and they are represented as a separated group. Men in the cities are brutal and violent against women in the cities and they commit various crimes against women. Those women separated from men are named as hill-women and they reproduce through parthenogenesis. Their mission is to help the women, who are oppressed by men in the cities. They believe that everyone should align with mother nature.

As seen in these utopian novels, the complete elimination of men and women's continuation of procreation by way of originating different methods of reproduction are highlighted in twentieth century literature. They are unique examples of utopian novels with their happy endings for the female community where women reach their dreams and manage to sustain these separatist women-only communities. With the earlier examples of separatist literature of the medieval and early modern period, women writers were attempting to imagine separatist worlds with the intention of escaping from phallocentric oppression. Since they were initial attempts of women's separatist imagination, their separatist fictions were mainly emphasizing how women feel safe and nurtured in such communities, emphasizing personal relaxation and self-discovery. Therefore, medieval and early modern literary perspectives on separatism were mostly limited to a historical

past or an Edenic and heavenly space, placed in another world. For that reason, even if the stories ended with a happy ending, they were not as radical and planned according to the ideals of sustaining a matriarchal world without male involvement as the twentieth century literary examples. These early examples of separatist utopian writings presented female separatism as merely fictional and mythical, sustained in a heavenly other world. On the one hand, early women writers tended to explore utopian tendencies and themes rather than presenting fully realized utopian endings. On the other hand, they often emphasized the impossibility of actualizing such separatist female communities within their fictional works. Cavendish was on the side of the second camp. She chose to portray the unbreakable and undissolvable workings of phallocentrism with her two-model framework to the concept of separatism. With this model, Cavendish presented how women cannot sustain their separatist communities because of patriarchal involvement. For Cavendish, such communities can only temporarily be allowed and supported during extraordinary conditions when the patriarchal needs align with women's separatist communities as in the case of the Civil War.

In its entirety, this chapter aimed to address women writers' interest in separatist women-only communities throughout history. Starting from Christine de Pizan to twentieth century feminist writers, women writers have been imagining and creating alternative fictional societies without men to show women's internal capacities and alternative roles when freed from phallocentric limitations and involvement. By providing a literary development of separatism, this chapter pointed out how early women writers employed themes of separatism, emphasizing women's capacities, nurturing environment, and heavenly atmosphere of a separatist world. Gradually, women writers became more critical in their creations of separatist societies. Especially, in the twentieth century, we have seen how women writers depicted separatist women-only worlds by portraying methods of reproduction without men and sustaining their female-only communities without male interference. Having pictured a historical context to women-only communities and separatism in the previous chapter, and women writers' literary interest in separatism in this chapter, it is shown that separatism and women-only communities both in historical reality and literature did not first appear in the twentieth century. Thus, we can acknowledge a historical and literary development of separatism that predates the emergence of formal feminist theory. Equally important is the positioning of Cavendish in this literary tradition of separatism with her two-

model framework to the concept of separatism. Cavendish is the earliest English female playwright, who penned women-only separatist communities that are unable to be sustained as a result of male interference and disappearance of the war condition. Her plays are not early examples of utopian worlds; they do not portray a happy utopian ending, where women achieve their dreams and sustain their separatist practices. On the contrary, *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* and *Bell in Campo* end with women's return to phallogentric society and their separatist communities are dissolved. Having provided a literary framework for separatism in this chapter, the following chapter will address the themes of education, marriage and politics that is employed by Cavendish in her aforementioned plays. The themes will be analyzed in its historical context, seventeenth century, to provide a historicist lens to Cavendish's perception and critique of phallogentrism in relation to themes of education, marriage and politics. It will be shown why Cavendish carefully employs each theme in her selected plays with an intention to underline the phallogentric mechanisms as limiting forces on women. In Cavendish's plays, *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure*, women escape from confinements of marriage and establish an academy and a pleasure convent as an alternative to their patriarchal realities whereas in *Bell in Campo*, married women escape from the limitation of being only a wife status to free agents and soldiers, who dream of participating in public offices.

CHAPTER II

THE WORLD CAVENDISH LIVED IN: WOMEN'S LIMITATIONS AND ACTS OF RESISTANCE IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND

Seventeenth century England, shaped by medieval theories on gender and marked by a political instability with the Civil Wars, was a prolific period in English history, characterized by paradoxical and opposing schools of thought. During this period, patriarchal male-centered worldview was still intact, subordinating women under the male rule. Although the outbreak of the Civil War and political upheaval of the period allowed some women to take active roles in politics, their intellectual, social and political status did not significantly improve or change. Nonetheless, seventeenth century women sought to establish women-only communities as a means of escaping phallogentric oppression and creating alternative spaces exclusively for women. This creation of women-only communities was not always a part of collective action. It took different forms: a literary contribution to women's separatist imaginings, a literary advocacy for women's education, criticizing the institution of marriage through ballads or women preaching for the cause of war might be regarded as women's attempts of opposing the patriarchal norms and engaging with alternatives outside of the traditions.

Women's efforts of creating alternative female roles emerged as a response to the phallogentric thinking and its oppressive mechanisms of seventeenth-century society. Confining women into the domestic sphere and traditional role of a wife and mother, influential male figures of the period instructed women to be submissive and silent by reminding the religious and medical theories that position women as deficit, weak and unreliable figures, unfit for intellectual, political and public affairs. Subjected to this phallogentric ideology and its oppressive mechanisms against women, Cavendish portrayed her female characters establishing separatist women-only communities without men as a result of their need to explore alternative roles against their prescribed realities in patriarchal women. In Cavendish's *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure*, single women establish a women-only separatist community to explore an alternative reality that is outside of the constraints of marriage. While *The Female Academy* employs the theme of education as the motivational force behind women's need for the separatist retreat, *The Convent of Pleasure* employs the theme of marriage as the motivational force behind women's separatist retreat to

escape the constraints of marriage. *Bell in Campo* also portrays an alternative role for women with its employment of politics as a theme where women claim an alternative public role for themselves to get rid of their confinements into the domestic sphere. To understand Cavendish's critique of phallocentric mechanisms and her creation of alternative communities as a response to patriarchy, it is crucial to analyze the historical context of seventeenth century in regards to education, marriage and politics.

2.1. A critique of women's education

Early feminists placed great value on women's education and constantly emphasized the need for proper educational opportunities for women. For them, accessing and participating in the circulation of knowledge required actively resisting the phallocentric structures. Knowledge and institutions of education depended on and controlled by the patriarchal power; these mediums of knowledge strengthen the absolute power of male-dominated structures. Therefore, women were not only excluded from the centers of power but also the medium of knowledge. Knowledge was male exclusive and a closed path for the female. This male exclusive approach to education and knowledge gradually pushed women to the margins of history and confined them to their subordinate roles of wifehood and motherhood. Acknowledging the importance of education and its relation to power structures, early feminists advocated for women's right for education with an intention to free women from domestic confinement and to open alternative spaces to them. Early feminists believed that through education they could escape from phallocentric attacks and prove that women are born with intellectual capacities that need to be cultivated and nurtured. Some believed that through this cultivation, they could prove the equality between the sexes. Although many early feminists advocated for equality with men, some adopted a more cautious tone in their writings to avoid attracting criticism from the male public. Therefore, they made use of traditional debates – of an educated mother and educated children– to persuade the public for women's right for education, instead of demanding equality between the sexes.

Early feminists claimed that women can excel in intellectual and public affairs when their innate capacities were nurtured. To prove the truthfulness of their claim, they referred to historical female figures, who were known for their great accomplishments. Pizan's *The Book of City of Ladies*, for example, provides a historical catalogue of famous learned women to show how historically there were influential female figures with great accomplishments, who were successful

outside of the domestic affairs when received proper education and instructions. Following Pizan, in the seventeenth century, Marie de Gournay and Anna Maria van Schurman advocated for women's education by drawing attention to cultivating women's innate capacities and the contemporary lack of institutionalized female education. In *The Equality of Men and Women* (1641), Gournay advocates for the equality between the sexes by claiming that patriarchal claim against women's intellectual inferiority and inability do not represent the truth about the female sex. Gournay highlights the fact that the belief in women's supposed inferiority was the direct result of male narratives on women. *The Equality of Men and Women* starts with Gournay's claim for equality: "I am content to make them equal to men, given that nature, too, is as greatly opposed, in this respect, to superiority as to inferiority. But what am I saying? It is not enough for certain persons to prefer the masculine to the feminine sex; they must also confine women, by an absolute and obligatory rule, ..." (75). Gournay refers to inequality within phallogocentric structures and its oppressive effects on women. Her emphasis on women's confinement highlights Gournay's awareness of the relation between knowledge and power. By controlling knowledge production, men established and sustained male-centered power and excluded women not only from mediums of knowledge but also centers of power. Believing that women's reach to educational institutions could dissolve the inequalities between the sexes and patriarchal claims on women's innate inferiority and incapability, Gournay defends women's need for education. In her work, Gournay claims that with sufficient training the gap between men and women can be closed:

If, therefore, women attain less often than men to the heights of excellence, it is a marvel that the lack of good education—indeed, the abundance of outright and blatantly bad education—does not do worse and prevent them from doing so entirely. If proof is needed, is there more difference between them and men than among themselves—according to the training they receive, according to whether they are brought up in a city or a village, or according to nationality? Therefore, why should not their training in public matters and in letters, of a kind equal to men's, fill up the gap that commonly appears between their minds and those of men... (81)

As Gournay emphasizes the need for women's education, she also highlights phallogocentric mechanisms that confine women into the domestic sphere as a consequence of women's supposed inferiority. This advocacy of equality between the sexes with an emphasis on women's education was a common attitude of early feminists because they believed that through education and

entering the mediums of knowledge, women could escape from their domestic confinement and open alternative spaces for themselves.

Anna Maria van Schurman was another influential figure of her time with her advocacy for women's education. In her writings, Schurmann defended women's right for education and supported her arguments using theological perspective. "A Practical Problem: Whether the Study of Letters is Fitting for a Christian Woman" discusses whether women should receive education and whether the study of letters is fitting for the female sex. In her analysis, Schurman provides a detailed account of subjects, which is suitable for women. Schurman highlights the need for multi-disciplinary approach in women's education:

I think all honorable disciplines, or the whole circle of liberal arts as it is called, is entirely fitting to a Christian woman (just as it is a proper and universal good or adornment of humanity); ... We consider grammar, logic, and rhetoric to be of this sort... Then come physics, metaphysics, history, etc., and also knowledge of languages, especially Hebrew and Greek... Other subjects, namely mathematics (to which music is also assigned), poetry, painting, and similar things, may be pursued as liberal arts, as an excellent adornment or pastime. Finally, we do not especially urge those studies that pertain to the practice of trial law and the military or to the arts of speaking in church, court, and school, as they are less fitting or necessary. (27)

This detailed account of multi-disciplinary subjects for women's education represents the need for reform on women's education. For early feminists, such as Gournay and Schurman, education was an important medium for women to show that the reason behind women's supposed inferiority was the lack of education instead of a supposed natural deformity or inferiority. Other than Gournay and Makin, Mary Astell, Margaret Cavendish and Batshua Makin were among the leading advocates for female education. In the historical context of England, both Astell and Makin defended women's right for education cautiously as they represented educated mothers' crucial role in educating children. In *An essay to revive the antient education of gentlewomen*, Makin defends the need for women's education by highlighting that an educated wife and mother will serve better to her family: "Married Persons, by vertue of this Education, may be very useful to their Husbands in their Trades, as the Women are in *Holland*; and to their Children, by timely instructing them, before they are fit to be sent to School" (27). Although they aimed to persuade

the male public using traditional claims for an institutionalized education for women, their contribution to defending women's education stands as early attempts of women's advocacy for education. Those early feminists listed here drew attention to the importance of education and its reforming agenda with an intention of opening alternative paths to women other than – and along with– their role of wife and mother. Astell, for example, was cautious in her claim for women's education when she associated the importance of women's education with advantages within marriage. For Astell, since women are responsible with the duty of raising children, it is important to provide a quality education to them so that they can raise the following generation properly in line with Christian teachings. Similarly, Makin paid attention to how useful an educated wife and mother can be in a household to gain support of the male public for women's education. Cavendish also paid attention to the importance of women's education and the lack of institutionalized female education in her fictional and non-fictional writings. In her writings, Cavendish argues that men deliberately usurp women's right to education in order to confine them to domestic space, as she believes that male control over knowledge reinforces their dominance within the social and gendered hierarchy. Since her emphasis on women's right to education is one of the concerns of this thesis, Cavendish's critiques on education will be extensively analyzed in the following chapter. Having addressed early feminists' concern of education about the lack of an institutionalized female education, it is critical to examine the historical patriarchal views on women's education and the seventeenth century contemporary contexts, sites, and mediums through which women are educated. In the light of analysis presented in this chapter, Cavendish's employment of education as a medium of alternative spaces will be further examined in following chapters through an analysis of plays.

In early modern history, there were not any major regulations on the subject of female education. Starting from Ancient Greeks and extending to the early modern period, there was the belief that women constitute the weaker sex and they should stay at home raising children. Plato assigns the task of raising and educating children to women, and suggests that girls should be educated for their role as future mothers and wives. In *A History of Western Educational Ideas*, women's natural capacity for domestic duties is emphasized: "...Plato expressed reservations about women, that they had an 'inherent weakness of the soul' and were mischief makers. He assumed that boys would become soldiers and girls in due course were destined to become mothers and take up domestic duties. For that reason, girls should learn the arts and knowledge that would

be useful in running a home” (Lawton and Gordon 215). Early Christian views on girls’ education and its influence on the following centuries are discussed by Lawton and Gordon as follows: “Jerome, who was renowned for his learning, propounded a philosophy which was to remain important in planning the curriculum of girls until as late as the eighteenth century...” (216). According to St. Jerome’s philosophy, “The child should be taught to read and write, be adept at handicraft, especially needlework, and become immersed in the Holy Scriptures, both in Latin and Greek... Modesty in dress, deportment and behaviour was essential and the virtues of virginity were emphasised” (216).

The female education continued to be disregarded during the Renaissance except rare instances for ladies of gentry and nobility. In the sixteenth century, even a bright scholar like Juan Luis Vives, a Renaissance humanist, who encouraged gentlewomen to receive education, believed that there are certain boundaries that women should not surpass. In his “On The Instruction of Young Girls”, Vives suggested that: “... let her learn for herself alone... for it is not fitting that a woman be in charge of schools or have dealings with or speak to men...” (72). He believed that it is dangerous for women to transmit their knowledge and to form an educational community because he perceived women are deficit beings: “... since woman is a weak creature and of uncertain judgment and is easily deceived ... she should not teach, lest when she has convinced herself of some false opinion, she transmit it to her listeners in her role as a teacher and easily drag others into her error....” (72). Similar to Vives, Richard Mulcaster, headmaster of Merchant Taylors’ and St Paul’s Schools, criticized women’s supposed natural weakness for education in his book, *Positions* (1581): “there was a difference in the mental capacity of boys and girls: ... [t]heir natural weakness ... delivers very soon. Besides, their brains be not so much charged, neither with weight nor with multitude of matters, as boys’ heads be, and therefore like empty casks, they make the greater noise” (217).

Through these narratives on women as naturally inferior sex, these men denied any right to women’s education. Instead, they advised women to be good wives. Books were written on the ideal of good wives by men, and young girls were educated to fulfill their roles as future wives. Richard Brathwaite’s *The English Gentlewoman*, a manual for the gentlewomen (1631) voices patriarchal ideals for women. The text advises women to be submissive and meek as follows:

If opportunity giue your sexe argument of discourse; let it neither taste of affectati•n, for that were seruile; nor touch vpon any wanton relation, for that were vnciuill; nor any State-politicall action, for the height of such a subiect, compar'd with your weakenesse, were vnequall. If you affect Rhetoricke, let it be with that familiarity expressed, as your p•ain|nesse may wnesse for you, that you doe not affect it. This will make your Speech seeme gracious to the Hearer, conferre a natiue modesty on the Speaker, and free you of all preiudicate censure. (91)

He advises women not to engage in political or intellectual conversation and he continues to describe the ideal characteristics of a woman: “She desires not to haue the esteeme of any She-clarke; shee had rather be approu'd by her liuing, than lear|•ing: And hath euer preferr'd a sound professant belfore a profound disputant” (Brathwaite, Page Unnumbered).

Following Brathwaite, in *The Holy State and the Profane State* (1642), Thomas Fuller discusses the patriarchal teachings on women's behavior. Fuller claims that a woman's main duty is “to sub|mit themselves to their husbands...”(1). Fuller stresses the importance of silence as an ideal trait for women:

She counts her self better lost in a modest silence then found in a bold discourse. Divinity permits not women to speak in the Church; morality forbids maids to talk in the House, where their betters are present...so our Virgin is afraid to heare her own tongue runne in the presence of graver persons. She conceives the bold maintain|ing of any argument concludes against her own civil behaviour... (37)

This notion that women should remain humble and silent is rooted in the belief that women are prone to speaking nonsense and they are incapable of reasoning like men. As noted in the aforementioned sources, the patriarchal expectation for women was to remain silent and to be good wives. In *Willingly to School*, Mary Cathcart Borer provides a historical analysis on the girls' education. “Early Stuarts and Commonwealth” chapter explores the grammar schools and petty/dame schools around 1603. Borer highlights poor conditions for girls' education during the seventeenth century within dame schools and boarding schools. In dame schools, girls and boys could learn to read for a few pence a week (1642). Also, there were “[b]oardng schools for girls, being places where girls of different families come together for their board and education, were

called ‘public’ schools” (1646). Dame schools were for the lower classes, whereas the boarding schools were affordable for the higher classes. The first example of boarding schools for girls is the Ladies Hall at Deptford, which was only open to gentry and nobility. These high-born ladies could bring their maids with them and lived in a considerable style (1646). Following this example, similar boarding schools opened and “many of them staffed with refugees who taught the usual subjects of music, and dancing, French and sometimes Italian and always plenty of needlework and handicrafts” (1646). These few examples of boarding schools followed a simple tenet: it was secluded for upper-class ladies, and it followed the traditional courtly attitude to women’s learning, where music, dancing, and needlework valued and were dominated subjects. Even though there were few boarding schools for ladies, their curriculums were based on raising good wives for the gentry.

Boarding schools’ ideal to raise good wives did not prevent male disapproval and critique against these educational institutions. In “Early Stuarts and Commonwealth” chapter, Borer emphasizes the male disapproval of women’s interest in education and boarding schools, stating: “... men during the early Stuart and Commonwealth years did not like their women to be learned and did their best to discourage any intellectual learnings they may have shown” (1652). As a result of this male discontent, Borer suggests that there was little improvement in girls’ education: “[d]uring the first part of the seventeenth century, ... there was very little progress in the cause of girls’ education. Daughters of the wealthy still had their private tutors and governesses or went to one of the few expensive boarding schools. The rest picked up education where they could, in dame schools, from their parents or by their own wits” (1652). Based on the information provided in *Willingly to School*, it can be concluded that women’s education during the early modern period was largely neglected and any attempt for its development was discouraged by men. Women’s access to education was especially dependent on social class. While upper-class girls could receive an education through private lessons or boarding schools, girls from less privileged social classes had access only to dame schools or through parental instruction- if they were fortunate enough. This reflects societal neglect of systematic education for girls, highlighting the belief that intellectual development was considered unfit for women, even among the upper-classes, with a few exceptions. Reflecting the contemporary views on women’s education in the context of the seventeenth century– the phallogentric norms opposing women’s right for education and early feminists’ advocacy for education– two camps of women’s education are extensively analyzed.

In the light of this contextual analysis, Cavendish's employment of education as an alternative medium and motivational force behind the establishment of *The Female Academy* will be contextually and historically situated within an early feminist writing in the fourth chapter.

2.2. A critique of marriage

Marriage is a central theme that is employed by Cavendish in her play, *The Convent of Pleasure*. As the theme of education is analyzed through the historical context of the seventeenth century in the previous section, the theme of marriage will be analyzed within the historical context to understand Cavendish's critique of the age and her early feminist impulses within her plays. Marriage plays a key role within the play; Lady Happy decides not to marry for she fears of being confined to phallogentric constructions of womanhood, wifehood and motherhood. Therefore, escaping from the institution of marriage becomes the motivational force behind the establishment of the convent. To remind themselves of their promise of escaping marriage, the female characters act play-within-the play on the themes of miseries within married life and the play constantly provides a critique of marriage by highlighting its oppressive and confining aspects. Contextualized in the seventeenth century, the play addresses contemporary women's lives and their patriarchal realities under the institution of marriage. In this regard, detecting contemporary women's voices and experiences within marriage is crucial to understand Cavendish's critique of marriage within the play.

In the seventeenth century, women's lives were predominantly shaped by their roles as obedient daughters and, later, wives. Similar to education, marriage was another institution controlled by men. Women were expected to behave modestly and submissively, adhering to their husbands' authority. However, many women found ways to express their concerns and critiques about marriage through literature. In the seventeenth century, marriage ballads became a popular genre-accessible to a wider part of the society, especially among women. In "The Broadside Ballad and the Woman's Voice", Sandra Clark draws attention to a female tradition of domestic ballads: "The traditional, or folk ballad, was commonly transmitted through women's singing; there are many references in the seventeenth century to women in domestic situations singing ballads of all kinds, and there is a strong tradition of female transmission from early times up to the nineteenth century"

(103). Clark emphasizes women's engagement of ballad singing and attributes a distinctly feminine characteristic to the genre: "Singing, like storytelling, was very much a woman's act in the early modern period, and the ballad, though produced as a printed object available to be read, was sold to an audience by a singer and circulated as much by singing as by reading" (104). On the accessibility of the ballads, Clark draws attention to the common physical places where these ballads were sung: "Like many cultural productions of the "small" tradition, it was consumed at all levels of society. Because it was delivered to its first audiences in public spaces such as marketplaces, alehouses, and playhouse entrances, the ballad was equally available to women and to men listeners" (104).

The accessibility of ballads across all-levels of society was crucial for women in establishing an alternative female space where they could express their shared experiences. The *querelle des femme* was a prominent theme for the seventeenth century literary stage. Debates on this theme appeared not only in contemporary pamphlet literature but also in ballads. Clark stresses the cross-genre dialogue surrounding the debates on *querelle des femmes*: "...there are in fact connections which can be made between these ballads and the Swetnam debate, where analogies for the kinds of proto-feminist position taken by Sovernam and Speght can be easily found in ballads..." (105). Regarding the details of their contents, Clarks states the following:

Generally, their overall view of marriage is much less idealized and more negative,... The ballads constitute an interesting forum for debating marriage; the range of viewpoints is wider than might be allowed by those who think the genre dominated by the interests of the patriarchy, and the dramatic potential of the ballads' presentation in the public forum creates the chance for comic performers to challenge or subvert their texts as well as to express them directly. (107)

"A Fairing for Maids" is a ballad where a woman contemplates on marriage. Clark discusses this ballad's critique of marriage and its appreciation of a single life for women:

In a simple proverbial style, the presenter makes caveats about hasty marriage and fortune-seeking husbands. Marriage is viewed as a risky undertaking for a woman; the refrain goes, "For when you are bound, then you needs must obey." The single life is praised, in terms that challenge the notion that the early modern unmarried woman's identity was constructed through patriarchal constraint. Marriage is seen as a condition that a woman (and in the equivalent ballads, a man) is free to choose or reject. Even if this did not correspond with the

economic reality of most women's lives, it was clearly a vision of a life that many imagined living:

‘Whilst you are single, there’s none to curb you:
Go to bed quietly and take your ease.
Early or late there’s none to disturb you
Walk abroad where you [will], and when you please.’ (108)

“The Broadside Ballad and the Woman’s Voice” centers on women's criticism of marriage and refers to the disadvantages of marriage in ballads of the seventeenth century. Clark defines marriage ballads as a mode of female self-revelation and touches upon its supposed appeal to the female audience:

... the marriage ballads present marriage as a condition that is not necessarily beneficial to either sex. Those that depict the disadvantages it holds for women may be read from a twentieth-century standpoint as exposing the oppressive nature of early modern patriarchal society, but it is important to recognize that in most of them this is done in a mode of female self-revelation, a mode that, in dramatic delivery, could make a strong appeal to women in the audience with similar experience. (113)

“The Cunning Age, OR A re-married Woman, repenting her marriage” illustrates this female self-revelation through a remarried woman’s self-questionings. The ballad is sung as an answer to Martin Parker’s “The Wiving Age” where a remarried woman, a widow and a young wife contemplate on marriage. The remarried woman being angry with herself wishes she had remained single being a widow utters the following lines: “ ‘ I marry’d a Boy, that now holds me in scorne,/ He comes among Whoores both euening and morne,/ While I sit at home like a creature forlorne’ ” (qtd. in Clark 113). After the remarried woman’s warning, the widow decides to distance herself from remarriage: “ ‘ With no Skipjack boy a match I will make; / Two ‘Sutors I haue, but I both will forsake.’ ” (qtd. in Clark 114).

“The married wives Complaint of her unkind husband” and “The Married wives complaint, OR, The Hasty Bride repents her bargain” are marriage ballads on domestic violence. In “The married wives Complaint of her unkind husband”, the wife misses her single life with the following lines: “ ‘When I did lead a single life/I had my pleasure euery day,/ I neuer knew what belong’d to strife/

But now I am bound I must obey' ” (qtd. in Clark 116). The wife in “The Married wives complaint, OR, The Hasty Bride repents her bargain” criticizes her husband and warns the women against marriage: ““Trust not a Man Maids if you be wife/ though neuer so well you do know him/ And euery Damsell I will advize/ no farther then she can throw him””(qtd in Clark 116). Clark points out the function of marriage ballads as advice manuals for women and highlights the importance of their messages for the women’s community: “These ballads are explicitly addressed as advice to the unmarried (“all young Maids that are to wed”), but their appeal is to all women concerned with the state of matrimony. The viewpoint is gender specific: marriage is likely to bring women more pain than pleasure, and it is not economically advantageous” (116).

As these marriage ballads point out, many contemporary women contemplated marriage and suffered by the hands of their oppressive husbands. The institution of marriage depended on the dedication and subordination of women. The seventeenth century society valued its religious teachings, which advised women to be submissive and silent towards their husbands and to follow their domestic duties. Therefore, women were expected to remain in the domestic domain and be virtuous. Disregarding women’s pleasures and desires other than the role of a wife and mother, the patriarchal expectations from a married woman were confining and limiting. For that reason, early feminists criticized the patriarchal expectations from married women and the institution of marriage that serves only for the pleasures of the men. In Cavendish’s *The Convent of Pleasure*, early feminist impulses will be extensively analyzed with the critique of marriage as an oppressive patriarchal mechanism.

2.3. A critique of politics

Compared to education and marriage, women’s advocacy for their right in politics was seen as a radical challenge to the patriarchy. Therefore, compared to education and marriage, it was less addressed by early feminists as a result of its demand for equality between the sexes. Early feminists addressed the fact that knowledge was the main medium for the circulation of male-centered power and confining women into the domestic sphere through marriage, the patriarchy dominated all sorts of power. Having addressed this, those women directed their attention to inequalities between the distribution of power. Therefore, they wrote about acquiring political power as equals to men in the public sphere. In a similar manner, Cavendish's female army was

established to demand their equal share of political power within the public sphere in *Bell in Campo*. Claiming that men confine women into the domestic sphere by usurping all the power to the male sex, the female army establishes its women-only separatist space. Since the play is written after the Civil Wars, the historical context of the war and women's involvement in politics offers a rich source to understand patriarchal mechanisms during the time of war and Cavendish's critique of the seventeenth century politics.

The English Civil wars led to a societal chaos, disorder, the questioning of authority, and ongoing political debate during the seventeenth century. It was a pivotal period in English history when women were increasingly seen as active agents and defenders of their country. During this time, women - serving as preachers, networkers, group leaders, spies and agents- alongside Henrietta Maria, who embodied the figure of the warrior queen, were involved in politics for the first time in English history. While Parliamentary women supported the Parliament - through their writings, speeches, and spy networks, Royalists women defended their land and castles against the attacks of the Parliamentarians. Women's first activities became visible within some radical sects. In "The Englishwoman's Sexual Civil War", Nadelhaft draws attention to the activities of these Protestant sects:

Women first became visibly active in Protestant sects, debating, voting, sometimes preaching; usually, even as wives, they were accepted as the spiritual equals of men. They sought political power, recognizing that participation in government was necessary to protect their religious equality. And power was due them, women sometimes argued, because of their Civil War activities: they had acted as spies, had built fortifications, and had raised money for the war effort. (558)

Around the 1640s and 50s, women saw the opportunity to claim their citizenship and societal duties. Romack refers to this mass mobilization of female citizens in "Monstrous Births and the Body Politic":

... the mass collectivization of women in the protests of the 1640s and 1650s, the midcentury petitions by women that declare their "equal share" with men in the commonwealth, and the activities of sectarian women in preaching, missionary work, and issuing prophetic warnings to the nation indicate that the explosion of information networks opened up a window of

opportunity for the mass mobilization of women and their reenvisioning of themselves as citizens with specific political rights and obligations. (211)

One of the reasons behind women's active roles in the seventeenth century English politics was the patriarchal assumption about women's nature, which portrayed them as incapable of political engagement. Ironically, this patriarchal perception made women perfect candidates for agency and espionage since they were less likely to arouse suspicion. Ann Hughes illustrates this paradox through the example of Philippa Coryton in *Gender and The English Revolution*:

Women made good spies and intermediaries, in war and peace. In Cornwall as the royalist cause faltered, Philippa Coryton, the daughter of a leading royalist, went in disguise to Plymouth to coordinate the surrender of her father and other royalists to Sir Thomas Fairfax. In the midst of the war, the parliamentary commander Sir William Brereton sent a woman to royalist Worcester to gather intelligence; she survived a grilling from the royalist leader Prince Maurice and reported back. (36)

Another she-spy was from the Parliamentarians. Ann Hughes informs us about her spy network: "Sometimes we know a little more about the women involved: Elizabeth Alkin, also known as 'Parliament Joan', spied for the armies of the Earl of Essex, Sir William Waller and Sir Thomas Fairfax; after the war she turned to news-book production" (36). Women's political activities were not limited to espionage; the Royalist women also helped raise supporters for the King in times of need. Katherine Stuart, Lady Aubigny, was one of these Royalist women:

The most notorious royalist female conspirator was Katherine Stuart, Lady Aubigny, who in May 1643 was granted leave by parliament to travel to London to deal with the affairs of her husband who had been killed at Edgehill. She came instead with a royal commission to raise supporters in the city, prompting an abortive plot named after one of its likely leaders, the poet Edmund Waller. (Hughes 36)

She attempted to rescue the King from his execution:

With her second husband, the Scots peer Viscount Newburgh, she made an attempt— again abortive— to rescue Charles I as he was brought to London for his trial and execution. In exile she worked hard as an intermediary between quarrelling Scots and English royalists and on her premature death she was remembered affectionately by Edward Hyde: 'a woman of a very

great wit, and most trusted and conversant in those intrigues which at that time could be best managed and carried on by ladies. (Hughes 36)

Women played an active role in defending the army they supported. While the Royalist women were fighting within the border of their castles and lands against the Parliamentarians, the female supporters of the Parliamentarians were straightening the city's defences and sometimes fighting alongside men. In 1643, Lady Mary Bankes, a Royalist supporter, repelled the Parliamentarians, which is highlighted by Hughes as: "Some aristocratic women took responsibility for their households in the most extreme circumstances. At Corfe Castle in Dorset, Lady Mary Bankes, with five men and the help of her daughters and servants, repelled initial parliamentary assaults in the summer of 1643, giving time for a garrison to be established which held out until the later stages of the war" (38).

Similar to Lady Mary Bankes, other Royalist women also faced attacks to their estates by the Parliamentarians and were compelled to defend their properties. Hughes draws attention to these women's courageous political acts, depicting them as defying the Parliamentarians in an effort to sustain their political agency and position:

Lady Brilliana refused demands for her surrender, appealing variously to parliamentary principles that 'the laws and liberties of this kingdom' protected her property, and to her obedience as a wife: 'my dear husband hath entrusted me with his house and children, and therefore I cannot dispose of his house but according to his pleasure'. She encouraged the garrison 'with such a masculine bravery, both for religion, resolution, wisdom and warlike policy, that her equal I never yet saw', and died a few weeks after the siege was raised. As the grand-daughter of William the Silent, Charlotte de la Tremouille, Countess of Derby, was part of an international Calvinist elite, but she was a staunch royalist, and held off parliamentary troops besieging her family home at Lathom House in Lancashire from February to May 1644: 'though a woman and a stranger, divorced from her friends, and robbed of her state, she was ready to receive their utmost violence, trusting in God both for her protection and deliverance'. Her determination helped sustain a royalist presence in a hostile area, as Prince Rupert marched north. (38)

Just as Royalist women defended their estates from Parliamentary assaults, the female supporters of the Parliamentarians also provided physical support to their army: “In parliamentary Hull, Bristol and Coventry, as in royalist Hereford, Worcester or Chester, women helped to strengthen the city defences and sometimes joined in the fighting” (Hughes 37). Stressing the female supporters’ active presence, Hughes states that:

As the king’s army marched towards London after Edgehill, women and girls marched two by two with baskets of earth and stones to bolster the city fortifications. In Portsmouth, according to a derisive royalist account Lady Norton, mother of the parliamentary commander, was in effect ‘Governess for the present... for the Committee dare do nothing without her advice’. She oversaw the construction of the defences, and, as in London, thirty or forty women and maids came each day to work with the men digging the trenches. (37)

One witness shares her/his observations on women fighting alongside men during the siege of Chester:

‘By this time, our women are all on fire, striving through a gallant emulation to outdo our men and will make good our yielding walls or lose their lives. Seven are shot and three slain, yet they scorn to leave their undertaking and thus they continue for 10 days space. Our ladies likewise like so many exemplary goddesses create a matchless forwardness in the meantime by their dirty undertakings.’ (qtd. in Hughes 37)

In this chaotic atmosphere, some women - who wanted to support the army- were killed horribly by their opponent. After the battle of Naseby in 1645, the Royalist camp’s women followers were killed horrifically:

After the battle of Naseby in June 1645, the parliamentary cavalry fell on royalist women camp followers. At least one hundred were killed and many more were mutilated, especially by slitting their noses, a standard punishment for a whore. This was, writes Mark Stoye, the ‘single worst atrocity’ of the civil war in England; it came not as a bolt from the blue, but as a catastrophe with long-standing roots in gendered, cultural hostilities. (Hughes 41)

Previously, in 1642, after the battle of Brentford three Royalist women were also killed, which is discussed by Hughes as a gender-based perception of the enemy:

Male vulnerability in war could be projected onto female deviance explained as witchcraft. Parliamentary soldiers were all too conscious that they were fighting God's war, so unnatural female opponents might well be the devil's creatures. Three women who had, allegedly, cut the throats of parliamentary soldiers after the battle of Brentford in December 1642 were seized and thrown in the river in the traditional 'swimming' test for witchcraft; two drowned but the other, horrifyingly, would not sink and was battered to death. Other royalist women were lynched as witches in Wiltshire and at Newbury. Conversely, it was logical that women accused of witchcraft were also suspected of royalism. (42)

Although women took an active role in the Civil Wars as agents, spies, defenders and fighters, the patriarchal behavior towards women did not change during this time. Women were able to work as spies because men believed that no one would suspect a woman of having a political agenda. Consequently, they did not arouse suspicion. Women also fought alongside men, but only because additional physical force was needed to defeat the enemy. On both sides- the Parliamentarians and the Royalists- men criticized women from the opposing group by labelling them as whores or witches. However, they remained silent when it came to women who raised their voices in support of their own side. Nonetheless, the Civil Wars offered women an outlet to raise their voices and to advocate for their chosen cause. During this period, women could establish groups and networks for their political cause with the encouragement of their male-counterparts. However, their political freedom and activism were permitted only under extraordinary circumstances of war. Once the urgent need for women's involvement ended, they were expected to return to their traditional roles under the authority of their fathers, husbands, and their political leaders. The Parliamentarians' anxiety over the challenge posed by the Royalist women- and their eventual executions- reflects how the women's situation did not improve or reformed during the Civil Wars. Hughes highlights this paradoxical outcome of the Civil Wars as follows: "The effects were paradoxical. Women's civil war activism had been valued and permitted in some specific contexts, even as more general anxieties about women's public roles hardened into exclusionary positions" (148).

Although the Civil Wars enabled women to raise their political voices and allowed them to form communities and circles, their overall situation did not significantly improve during this period.

Once the extraordinary circumstances of war ended, women were expected to return to their traditional roles. Similarly, in *Bell in Campo*, Cavendish's female army returns to their subordinate but slightly improved positions within the gender hierarchy when the war ends and patriarchy is restored. Therefore, it can be concluded that the historical context of seventeenth century English politics is mirrored in the play by Cavendish's new model of female separatism with women's search for an alternative space within politics. Overall, this chapter provided a historical overview of women's situation in seventeenth century England in the context of education, marriage and politics with an aim to provide a deeper context for Cavendish's critique of aforementioned themes in her plays. In the light of women's situation in the seventeenth century, the following chapter will concentrate on Cavendish's literary persona and her criticism of the age. Cavendish's personal politics and her advocacy of women in her selected writings will be extensively analyzed.

CHAPTER III

CONTEXTUALIZING THE RADICAL VOICE OF MARGARET CAVENDISH

Margaret Cavendish (1623- 1673) was one of the most well-known and notorious English writers of seventeenth century England. Some of her contemporaries defined her as a scandalous, distracted and ridiculous woman. Her popularity was the result of her transgressive writings, which centers on representations of women challenging the patriarchal teachings. Cavendish was aware of the harsh criticisms against her and she knew the reasons behind them, which was her transgressive writings on women. Grant draws attention to Cavendish's opinion against criticisms towards her: "Of course she sometimes suspected that others did not see in her the image she had created of herself, but she was capable of defying their hostile opinion: 'I matter not the censures of this age,' she wrote, 'but am rather proud of them; for it shows that my actions are more than ordinary, and according to the old proverb, it is better to be envied than pitied'" (18).

In *Mad Madge*, Katie Whitaker stresses Cavendish's awareness of the societal judgements against unconventional female figures:

In 1653 the *Poems and Fancies* was the first book of English poetry to be deliberately published by a woman under her own name, and Margaret knew she was heading for trouble. 'I imagine I shall be censured by my own sex; and men will cast a smile of scorn upon my book, because they think thereby women encroach too much upon their prerogatives; for they hold books as their crown, and the sword as their sceptre, by which they rule and govern' (xiii).

She was one of the most criticized women writers of the period because of her publicity and representation of herself as the explorer of various genres and literary identities. While many male contemporaries of Cavendish could not produce works in various genres and artistic fields, Cavendish not only explored various genres during her literary career but also attempted to be involved in science as the first English writer. Katie Whitaker illustrates Cavendish's multiple literary explorations as follows:

In a literary career of almost twenty years, she produced a total of twenty-three volumes, spanning pretty much every genre of contemporary literature. In an age of polymaths, when

philosophers wrote poetry and playwrights studied the sciences, Margaret ranged even more widely than most — two dozen plays, a large collection of short fiction (both realistic and fantastic, in prose and verse), a book of orations, a volume of letters and another of essays, an autobiography and a biography, six philosophical treatises and a Utopia. (xiv)

The biggest reason behind criticisms against Cavendish was her transgression of traditional roles assigned to women. She was not only interested in literature but also in science, which drew the public's attention to Cavendish. In "The Duchess of Newcastle's Visit to The Royal Society", Cavendish's interest in science is stated as:

In 1664 Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle, astonished the scientific world with a prolix volume of Philosophicall Letters, in which she fearlessly claimed to have "confuted" Hobbes, Descartes, Henry More, and Van Helmont. Two years later she published her Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy, which, despite numerous references to telescopes, lodestones, seeds, and magnifying glasses, was essentially a plea for more contemplation and less experimentation in science. And in the next year, 1667, the Duchess climaxed her interest in natural philosophy with a notable visit to the Royal Society. That visit was a landmark of virtuoso science in England. (168)

Cavendish's visit to The Royal Society was an extraordinary event for the seventeenth century. For the first time in English history, a woman was invited to the society's meeting. This event was narrated by one of her contemporaries as follows: "At its meeting on 23 May 1667, the minutes record that:

'Lord Berkeley mentioned, that the duchess of Newcastle had expressed a great desire to come to the society, and to see some of their experiments; but that she desired to be invited. This was seconded by the earl of Carlisle and Dr. Charleton, who pressing, that it might be put to the vote accordingly, whether the duchess of Newcastle should at her desire be invited to be present at the meeting on the Thursday following; it was carried in the affirmative. The ceremonies and the subjects for her entertainment were referred to the council. '(Battigelli)

Regarding her visit and the reactions of the society's members, *Margaret Cavendish and The Exiles of The Mind* provides the details from her contemporaries:

Cavendish arrived at the meeting late, and with what John Evelyn described as “greate pomp,” she took her seat at the president’s right hand, and watched as the entertainments were presented. The only record of what she said comes from Samuel Pepys, who reported disappointment at not “hear[ing] her say anything that was worth hearing, but that she was full of admiration, all admiration.” He continues, “After they had shown her many experiments, and she cried still she was ‘full of admiration,’ she departed, being led out and in by several Lords that were there. (Battigelli)

Battigelli refers to Cavendish’s *Blazing World* where Cavendish criticizes the scientific approach of The Royal society and states that the male members of the society were already aware of Cavendish’s critique of their form of science. For that reason, Samuel Pepys description of Cavendish reflects more than Cavendish’s silence; it reveals her deliberate choice of debating through the medium of writing.² Despite the public criticism against her, Cavendish continued her explorations through the medium of writing.

Most of her writing journey took place during her exile period. In *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind*, the historical records of Cavendish’s exile are provided. When Henrietta Maria fled into France in 1644, Cavendish accompanied the Queen and she remained in exile until the restoration in 1660 (Battigelli). When Cavendish fled into France, she was accompanying Henrietta Maria as her lady-in-waiting; during the earlier time of her exile, she was a part of Henrietta Maria’s household and mostly accompanied the Queen. Later, she married William Cavendish and they remained in France, where they built a prominent intellectual network of the day. The reader is informed regarding the fame of William Cavendish during his time in France, which refers to the gradual fame of Margaret Cavendish as the wife of William Cavendish: “Outside of the royal family itself, he was the most notorious exile in Paris” (Battigelli). This suggestion indicates that Cavendish was a popular exile in Paris along with the Queen and her

² In *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of The Mind*, a detailed analysis of Samuel Pepys’ account of Cavendish’s visit is provided:

“In many ways Cavendish’s apparently admiring silence during this visit was emblematic of her life: unable to negotiate public conversations, let alone debates, outside the small circle of her family, she channeled her energies into her writing, where she explored her ideas boldly and freely. We might, however, conclude something of the true nature of her reaction to the Society’s “entertainments” from the fact that the following year, she reissued *Observations and Blazing World*. Her debate with the Royal Society was, characteristically, entirely confined to textual space” (Battigelli).

position as the royalist exile of Henriette Maria's lady enabled her to enter French aristocratic and royal circles: "By attending the queen, Lucas was exposed to one of the most well-connected and intellectually driven women of her day" (Battigelli). Thus, Cavendish had the chance to observe the cultural milieu of French salons and the contemporary debate on whether women have intellectual capacity and reasoning.

Elsewhere, the dates of Cavendish's writings and its relation to her time in exile is highlighted: "Cavendish composed her plays earlier than their publication dates suggest ... She tells us that she began writing them only after reading her husband's plays ... the date of the completion of her first volume of plays somewhere between 1656 and 1660" (Battigelli). Thereby, it can be concluded that Cavendish wrote *The Female Academy* (1662), and *Bell in Campo* (1662) while she was in her exile period.³ Consequently, her observations and experiences in Paris, Rotterdam and Antwerp might have had affected her writings⁴. By her relation to Queen and William Cavendish, she may have met with well-known female figures of the day, and been inspired by alternative female communities around her.

In 1660s France, while Cavendish was still residing there, "the issue of women and learning... was ... taken up in public debates between men, and it was addressed in a practical way by public lecturers who catered to a mixed audience of women and men" (Stuurman 381). There were two opposing camps of men, "a mixed company comprising traditional figures as well as typical representatives of the 'new philosophy'". While one side was satirizing female learning on the stage such figures as Moliere and Chappuzeau, the other side was encouraging female learning (Stuurman 381). In *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*, Stuurman extends on women's participation to these public discussions as the audience and warns the reader about the ongoing limitations against women throughout the seventeenth century: "... [W]e must be careful not to overstate the gains women made. In the first place, their role was largely confined to listening: speaking in public remained the exclusive privilege of men" (383). Amidst the public debates on

³ Cavendish composed her first volume of plays during her period of exile, which coincided with the ban on the theatres. Intended as closet dramas, her plays were written to be read rather than performed. Although Cavendish hoped her plays would be performed one day, none were staged during her lifetime. Her plays did not begin to be staged until the 20th century.

⁴ In *Margaret Cavendish And The Exiles of The Mind*, the reader is informed about Cavendish's places of exile in sixteen years period: "For sixteen years she lived in exile, first in Paris, then in Rotterdam, and finally in Antwerp, together with her husband, William Cavendish, marquess and later duke of Newcastle" (Battigelli)

women and female salonnières, Cavendish might have observed that the French salon is the only alternative space for the female intellectual community to follow their intellectual pursuits. Cavendish witnessed an alternative female space within French salons during her exile period in France; with *The Précieuses*, Cavendish could see and appreciate women's efforts to invent a female language and to establish an alternative space for women.

The Circle of Learned Women, a literary network of Bathsua Makin, Marie de Gournay and Anna Maria van Schurman, was another group of women connected to Cavendish. Makin and Cavendish's connection dates back to Makin's private tutoring to "the ten-year-old Princess Elizabeth Stuart, the daughter of Charles I" (Pal 197). Makin and Cavendish, as members of the royal household serving the Queen and the Princess, could have been acquainted. In *An essay to revive the antient education of gentlewomen*, Makin reveals her acquaintance of Cavendish as follows: "The present Dutchess of New-Castle, by her own Genius, rather than any timely Instruction, over-tops many grave Gown-Men" (10). Cavendish's connection to the well-known female figures of the day, who defended women's rights for education, reflects Cavendish's interest in the women's literary engagements of the *querelle des femme*. In *Mad Madge*, Katie Whitaker highlights Cavendish's connection to Anna Maria van Schurmann, one of the leading female enthusiasts of education:

Margaret was also finding inspiration outside the home. Flemish and Dutch culture actively encouraged the work of intelligent and artistic women. In Utrecht, Anna Maria van Schurmann was probably the most learned woman of her century. A source of Dutch national pride as "the incomparable heroine" and "our famous Sibyl,"* she was also the author of *Amica Dissertatio De Capacitate Ingenii Muliebris ad Scientias*, a powerful argument for the improvement of women's education, which was published in English translation at Leyden in 1639 as *The Learned Maid, Or, Whether a Maid May be a Scholar?* (The Cavendish family was connected to this wider world through a distant cousin of William's. Utricia Swann, ... had grown up in the Netherlands, the daughter and granddaughter of English officers serving in the Dutch army... By the time the Cavendishes arrived in Antwerp in 1648 Utricia was known in all the best circles of Dutch society. In Utrecht she discussed the latest books with her friend Anna Maria van Schurmann, while at the Hague she was well

connected at the court of the English princess royal, Charles I's daughter, Mary, who had married the stadtholder, William II of Orange. (118)

Through her relation to Utricia Swann, Cavendish might have met with Anna Maria van Schurman in person and found inspiration in Schurman's thoughts on women's education, which is a central subject of Cavendish's writings. Katie Whitaker brings up another female figure, which might have influenced Cavendish regarding an alternative female community, Katherine Philips. Cavendish's supposed attendance to Philips' society were aforementioned in the introductory chapter. However, Katie Whitaker draws attention to the meeting of Philips and Cavendish at Lawes's house, a famous musician:

Here Margaret could also have met England's foremost female poet. Katherine Philips was the center of an informal society of literary friends, largely women, who took pen names from classical and pastoral tradition — Philips herself was "the Matchless Orinda." Her poetry was already celebrated within this circle and, despite her reluctance to publish, a few verses were now beginning to appear in print. (136)

Throughout her life, Cavendish might have the opportunity to see alternative female communities and their efforts to establish an alternative space for women. Her observations of such communities might have started with Henrietta Maria's femicentric court culture where women were able to take part in the court masques. Then, following the Queen in exile, she had the chance to observe the salon culture and the *Précieuse* movement in France. Through her relation to Utricia Swann, she might have connected to Anna Maria van Schurman, her circle of learned ladies and their ideas on women's education. In the light of these examples of women's groups, networks and circles, which functioned as women-only spaces offering alternatives against the patriarchal limitations, Cavendish may have seen in them the real-life manifestations of Christine de Pizan's *The Book of City of Ladies*. In "Christine de Pizan's City of Ladies in Early Modern England", Cristina Malcolmson stresses Cavendish's knowledge of Pizan's text: "There is strong evidence that William Cavendish acquired the Harley manuscript of Christine's works, including the *Livre de la cité des dames*, during the months that he and Margaret spent in Paris and the Netherlands... At the beginning of the Harley manuscript, along with the signatures of other owners, the phrase "Henry Duke of Newcastle his booke 1676" is written" (24). Malcolmson adds the following: "The compilers of the Catalogue of the Harleian Manuscripts note that the Harley

manuscript of Christine's works "was once in the collection of the Duke of Newcastle," ... William and Margaret Cavendish acquired the manuscript when they were on the Continent, and that they brought it to England at the Restoration" (24). By looking at Malcolmson's claim, it can be said that Cavendish might have had the chance to analyze Pizan's *City of Ladies* and could be influenced by Pizan's establishment of a women-only community as an alternative society.

Just as Pizan and women writers of the *querelle des femme* tradition, Cavendish critically analyzes women's situation in her works. Her works center around women's struggles in the face of phallogocentric oppression, women's defiance to the patriarchal gender roles, and a social analysis of the society through depictions of the conventional and unconventional figures. Education, marriage, women's rights, gender roles and politics are the most discussed themes of her works. Cavendish portrays both traditional and enlightened women to demonstrate the various reactions to the patriarchy, aiming to mirror the society.

In *Female Orations*, Cavendish provides different perspectives on women's situation by seven women. Each woman addresses female listeners and discusses her opinion on gender roles and women's situation. It is a series of political writings as a part of *Orations of divers sorts accommodated to divers places*. In the first oration, the speaker urges women to unite and defend their rights so that they can live as free and happy as men. The speaker highlights the unjust inequality between men and women throughout her speech. The importance of women's alliances is highlighted, while men's prohibition of alternative female societies is criticized as follows:

LAdies, Gentlewomen, and other In|feriours, but not Less Worthy, I have been Industrious to Assemble you together, and wish I were so Fortunate, as to perswade you to make a Frequentation, Association, and Com|bination amongst our Sex, that we may Unite in Prudent Counsels, to make our Selves as Free, Happy, and Famous as Men, whereas now we Live and Dye, as if we were Produced from Beast rather than from Men; for Men are Hap|py, and we Women are Miserable, they Possess all the Ease, Rest, Pleasure, VVealth, Power, and Fame, whereas VVomen are Restless with Labour, Easeless with Pain, Melancholy for want of Pleasures, Helpless for want of Power, and Dye in Oblivion for want of Fame; Never|theless, Men are so Unconscionable and Cruel against us, as they Indeavour to Barr us of all Sorts or Kinds of Liberty, as not to Suffer us Freely to Associate amongst our Own

Sex, but would fain Bury us in their Houses or Beds, as in a Grave; the truth is, we Live like Bats or Owls, Labour like Beasts, and Dye like VVorms. (226)

The second orator highlights the ineffectiveness of women's speech against male oppression. Women's situation under the patriarchy is described as a labyrinth by the speaker. Although men are portrayed as the source of women's oppression, the speaker argues that any attempt by women to resist or defy male oppression will simply be ignored by men. The speaker highlights women's desperate situation against men as follows:

LAdies, Gentlewomen, and other Inferiour Women, The Lady that Spoke to you, hath spoken Wisely and Eloquently in Expres|sing our Unhappiness, but she hath not Declared a Remedy, or Shew'd us a way to come Out of our Miseries; but if she could or would be our Guide, to lead us out of the Labyrinth Men have put us into, we should not only Praise and Admire her, but Adore and Worship her as our Goddess; but Alas, Men, that are not only our Tyrants, but our Devils, keep us in the Hell of Subjection, from whence I cannot Perceive any Redemption or Getting out; we may Com|plain, and Bewail our Condition, yet that will not Free us; we may Murmur and Rail against Men, yet they Regard not what we say: In short, our VVords to Men are as Empty Sounds, our Sighs as Puffs of VVind, and our Tears as Fruitless Showres, and our Power is so In|considerable,as Men Laugh at our VVeak|ness. (227)

Cavendish provides different opinions of women in her writings. One can find two opposing representations of women in one text: the representation of the traditional woman, who embodies patriarchal thinking, and the enlightened woman, who opposes the phallocentric thinking and advocates for women's capacity. The third orator is the representation of the traditional woman. She supports the patriarchal gender roles and defines men as the protectors and defenders of women:

LAdies, Gentlewomen, and other more Infe|riours, The former *Orations* were Excla|inations against Men, Repining at Their Condi|tion, and Mourning for our Own; but we have no Reason to Speak against Men, who are our Admirers, and Lovers; they are our Protectors, Defenders, and Maintainers; they Admire our Beauties, and Love our Persons; they Protect us from Injuries, Defend us from Dangers, are Industrious for our Subsistence, and Provide

for our Children; they Swim great Voyages by Sea, Travel long Journies by Land, to Get us Rarities and Curiosities; they Dig to the Centre of the Earth for Gold for us; they Dive to the Bottom of the Sea for Jewels for us; they Build to the Skies Houses for us; they Hunt, Foul, Fish, Plant, and Reap for Food for us; all which we could not do our Selves, and yet we Com|plain of Men, as if they were our Enemies, when as we could not possibly Live without them: which shews, we are as Ungratefull, as Incon|stant; But we have more Reason to Murmur against Nature than against Men, who hath made Men more Ingenious, VVitty, and Wife than VVomen, more Strong, Industrious, and Laborious than Women, for Women are Wit|less, and Strengthless, and Unprofitable Crea|tures, did they not Bear Children. Where|fore, let us Love men, Praise men, and Pray for men, for without Men we should be the most Miserable Creatures that Nature Hath, or Could make. (228)

The fourth orator is the representation of an enlightened woman, who is more radical and defiant. In her speech, she suggests that women are not aware of their potential because of the patriarchal gender roles. If they have a chance to discover their potential, they could do the tasks that men do. The orator urges women to challenge the patriarchal gender roles by engaging in certain acts that are attributed to the male:

NOble Ladies, Gentlewomen, and other In|feriour Women, The former Oratoress sayes, we are Witless, and Strengthless; if so, it is that we Neglect the One, and make no Use of the Other, for Strength is Increased by Ex|ercise, and Wit is Lost for want of Conversa|tion; but to shew Men we are not so Weak and Foolish, as the former Oratoress doth Ex|press us to be, let us Hawk, Hunt, Race, and do the like Exercises as Men have, and let us Con|verse in Camps, Courts, and Cities, in Schools, Colleges, and Courts of Judicature, in Taverns, Brothels, and Gaming Houses, all which will make our Strength and Wit known, both to Men, and to our own Selves, for we are as Ignol|rant of our Selves, as Men are of us. And how should we Know our Selves, when as we never made a Trial of our Selves? or how should Men know us, when as they never Put us to the Proof? Wherefore, my Advice is, we should Imitate Men, so will our Bodies and Minds ap|pear more Masculine, and our Power will In|crease by our Actions. (228)

In the fourth oration, the speaker urges women to establish an alternative society for women in which they can be free and active in all aspects of life. By engaging in both traditionally male and

female gender roles, these women can explore their potential and demonstrate their power to both themselves and to society. In her *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, Cavendish addresses “To The Two Universities” and portrays herself as the enlightened lady of her orations. In her letter, male limitations against women and women’s unjust position as a caged bird are underlined:

... we are become like worms that onely live in the dull earth of ignorance, winding our selves sometimes out, by the help of some refreshing rain of good educations which seldom is given us; for we are kept like birds in cages to hop up and down in our houses, not suffered to fly abroad to see the several changes of fortune, and the various humors, ordained and created by nature; thus wanting the experiences of nature, we must needs want the understanding and knowledge and so consequently prudence, and invention of men: thus by an opinion, which I hope is but an erroneous one in men, we are shut out of all power, and Authority by reason we are never employed either in civil nor marshall affaires, our counsels are despised, and laught at, the best of our actions are troden down with scorn, by the over-weaning conceit men have of themselves and through a dispisement of us. (Cavendish)

Highlighting the unjust suppression of women, Cavendish criticizes men for scorning women’s attempts at cultivation and knowledge. In her attempt to be accepted by the two universities, Cavendish praises universities as places of knowledge, understanding, and civility. She suggests that her work should be appreciated as a significant contribution by a woman, despite the societal and gendered challenges she faces:

But I considering with my self, that if a right judgement, and a true understanding, & a respectful civility live any where, it must be in learned Universities, where nature is best known, where truth is oftenest found, where civility is most practised, and if I finde not a resentment here, I am very confident I shall finde it no where, neither shall I think I deserve it, if you approve not of me, but if I deserve not Praise, I am sure to receive so much Courtship from this sage society, as to bury me in silence; thus I may have a quiet grave, since not worthy a famous memory; but to lie intombed under the dust of an University will be honour enough for me, and more then if I were worshipped by the vulgar as a Deity. Wherefore if your wisdoms cannot give me the Bayes, let your charity strow me with Cylpres; and who knows but after my honourable burial, I may have a glorious resurrection in following ages, since time brings strange and unusual things to passe, I mean unusual to

men, though not in nature: and I hope this action of mine, is not unnatural, though unusual for a woman to present a Book to the University, nor impudence, for the action is honest, although it seem vain-glorious, but if it be, I am to be pardoned, since there is little difference between man and beast, but what ambition and glory makes. (Cavendish)

As discussed in this chapter, Cavendish was an enlightened woman ahead of her time. She explored different genres and fields, and observed women's situation in seventeenth century Europe. Through her exile and aristocratic title, she had the opportunity to meet with the most influential figures of her time. As a result of her observations, Cavendish recognized the impact of alternative women-only spaces on the patriarchal society, which caused male anxiety and aggression. When her writings are analyzed alongside the contemporary perceptions of women's education, and role in the society, Cavendish's enlightened thinking and advocacy for women become clearer. In her non-fictional writings, such as *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* and *Orations of divers sorts accommodated to divers places*, Cavendish analyzes the power imbalance between men and women, highlighting how men maintain power by controlling and suppressing women. In her fictional works and her plays, Cavendish reflects these gendered inequalities between sexes through her characterization of male aggression, traditional woman, and enlightened woman figures. Following the historical context of Cavendish's themes of education, marriage and politics within the scope of the seventeenth century, this chapter has discussed Cavendish's personal politics and her advocacy for rights of women in her writings. In the light of the seventeenth century historical realities of women and Cavendish's early feminist politics, the following sub-chapter will be providing a brief introduction to my theory on Cavendish's two-model framework of female separatism along with the literary review of the previous scholarship on Cavendish's *The Female Academy* (1662), *Bell in Campo* (1662), and *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668).

3.1. Literary Review on The Plays

The Female Academy, *The Convent of Pleasure* and *Bell in Campo* are known to be the earliest examples of English separatist drama written by a female playwright. The plays are centered on the establishment of an alternative community for women, serving as a counter-space to the patriarchal realities of seventeenth century England. Cavendish's aforementioned plays have been

analyzed by numerous scholars for its significant status as the earliest examples of separatism and retreat in drama by an English female playwright. Hence, concepts of female retreat, female community, separatism, and spatial aspects of the academy and convent have been addressed by various scholars, contextualizing these plays as representations of utopian drama, Cavendish's political ambivalences, her royalist nostalgia, and her manifestation of self-fashioning. Although the previous scholarship on Cavendish has approached her plays in different angles, a gap remains in the scholarly discourse regarding Cavendish's two modelled framework of female separatism. Therefore, this sub-chapter aims to introduce the theoretical framework of two modelled approaches to female separatism by highlighting the gaps in existing scholarship on Cavendish. To this end, the literary review on Cavendish's *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* and *Bell in Campo* will first be provided. Following this review, a brief introduction to the theoretical framework of Cavendish's two-modelled approach to female separatism will be presented.

The existing scholarship on Cavendish's plays have been mostly read as a form of utopia and representations of utopian hope. To name a few, Oddvar Holmesland, Nicole Pohl, Erin Lang Bonin are among the critics, who highlight the elements of utopian drama in Cavendish's plays. In their readings, they come to the conclusion that female retreat and separation from male society within the plays suggests Cavendish's vision for utopianism. Oddvar Holmesland, in *Utopian Negotiation*, discusses a common pattern of utopian negotiation in the three plays of Cavendish: "What I call "utopian negotiation" forms the most interesting patterns in the following works: *Bell in Campo*, *The Female Academy*, *The Blazing World*, *The Convent of Pleasure*..." (43). By pointing out the utopian negotiation of Cavendish's Civil War politics, Holmesland states: "... Cavendish tentatively contribute to a feminist utopian revisionism, but not so as to promote clannish interests. Rather than take a firm political stand, [she] explore[s] transcendent solutions that may blur division" (30). For Holmesland, women's retreat is not a semi-radical form of separatism but rather an expression of Cavendish's exploration of political negotiation and ambivalence. Holmesland discusses this further: "It has particular relevance in deciding how far their female protagonists dissociate themselves through negotiating with traditional assumptions, or stress agreement with men instead of separatism" (25).

Moving away from Holmesland's utopian negotiation, Nicole Pohl highlights the utopian potential of the reformed female community and women-only spaces for the seventeenth century women. In *Gender and Utopia in the Eighteenth Century Essays in English and French Utopian Writing*, Nicole Pohl discusses Cavendish's academy as an example of female utopia and an alternative to marriage:

Margaret Cavendish is representative of a much older tradition that understands the convent and the female academy as possible intentional communities providing a viable alternative to marriage, enforced vocation or single life. The focus here is not only on the female community *per se* but on education as the basis for personal and political reform. These and other modes of female utopias also experiment—if in different ways—with a wide range of political and economic models that redraw contemporary models of political economy and government. (2)

Similarly, in *Women, Space and Utopia, 1600-1800*, Pohl explores utopian potential of female community for the early modern reader:

The female community represents a powerful and consistent social vision of utopian potential that engages with contemporary discourses of gendered domesticity. We have seen that these communities were imagined in a rich diversity of spaces ranging from convents and nunneries, through boarding schools and academies, to palaces and harems. (99)

Pohl's claim on the utopian potential in Cavendish's plays depends on the spatial elements of seclusion and retreat from the male space, which leads women to explore alternatives and potentials for themselves beyond patriarchal interference. Although Pohl stresses the importance of separatism, retreat, and women's gained alternative roles within these women-only spaces, the male interference and the dissolution of women's alternative community are not discussed. Instead, Pohl concentrates on the utopian potential and impulse in Cavendish's plays. This perspective of female utopia interrelated to the female community and seeking alternatives is expanded by Erin Lang Bonin, who highlights the demonstration of the utopian project but suggests a transition from utopian start to dystopian end with patriarchal norms. In "Margaret Cavendish's Dramatic Utopias and the Politics of Gender," Bonin states that: "*The Female Academy, Bell in Campo, and The Convent of Pleasure* wrest female characters from patriarchal economies to envision female political agency. The three plays feature separatist institutions that temporarily but explicitly reject marriage and family in order to accomplish their utopian projects.

Because Cavendish positions all three institutions in opposition to patriarchal economies, she transforms her female characters from objects of exchange into utopian subject” (340). For Bonin, Cavendish’s plays start as a utopian project with a separatist vision then fails its mission showing that the patriarchal discourse of women is dystopian, in her words:

The Female Academy, Bell in Campo, and The Convent of Pleasure explore the utopian potential of figures often satirized in early modern England—the educated lady, the mannish woman, and the sensual nun. Because these types embody worlds turned upside down, they accommodate visions of societies in which women wield economic, political, and intellectual power. Within these satirical traditions, Cavendish constructs makeshift, ambiguous utopias that simultaneously challenge masculinist assumptions and imagine feminist possibilities. These utopias dissolve as the plays end, as if to demonstrate that culturally dominant modes of thought are dystopian for women. Succumbing to patriarchal pressures, Cavendish’s utopian heroines eventually rejoin worlds turned right side up, worlds in which women are men’s political inferiors. (340)

Although Holmesland, Pohl and Bonin approach Cavendish’s plays through various utopian interpretations, her works cannot be classified as utopian drama for the following reasons. Firstly, the plays do not provide happy endings in which the female characters sustain their utopian attempts of separatism. Secondly, they cannot be read as dystopian dramas either, as the female characters do not transition into a new world but instead return to their previous subordinate conditions under the patriarchal order. Thirdly, three plays do not offer unified conclusions; rather they present two distinct alternatives to women’s separatism. Therefore, assigning them the characteristics of either utopian or dystopian drama does not align with the genre or the plays’ endings.

Apart from interpretations of the plays in the scope of female utopianism and utopian negotiations, there are other scholars, who interpret the play as Cavendish’s political ambivalence. In *Subordinate Subjects*, Mihoko Suzuki, invites the reader to explore Cavendish’s republican political tendencies through her emphasis on limitations against women:

The explicit statements of her "Tory" positions as well as the use of multi-voiced genres such as orations and plays allowed Cavendish to publish oppositional views sympathetic to the plight of women less fortunate than herself, as well as to those who posed alternatives to

absolute monarchy . The fact that her oppositional views have been largely neglected in favor of her espousal of the dominant discourse indicates the success of her strategy of drawing attention away from her more radical idea in order to avoid "Publick Censures "of her feminist and republican views - if not of her act of writing itself. (202)

For Suzuki, Cavendish's play suggests her political ambivalence and controversiality, which is proved by Cavendish's Royalist persona in the public displays and her opposing Tory sentiments in her plays. Cavendish's political views and her projection of Civil War politics in her plays are heavily discussed and resulted in different interpretations.

Hero Chalmers recontextualizes Cavendish's royalist sentiments and draws different aspects from Suzuki's reading of Cavendish's Tory sentiments. Chalmers locates *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure* in the royalist retreat and exile narrative. In "The Politics of Feminine Retreat in Margaret Cavendish's *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure*", Chalmers contextualizes the plays as: "The experiences of enforced exile or dispossession fostered the royalist need to produce representations of voluntary retreat from the traditional public sphere as contented and self-sufficient as those offered by *The Female Academy* or *The Convent of Pleasure*" (87). Chalmers interprets the female retreat and the portrayal of empowered women in the academy as the need of "Interregnum royalist" "to promulgate the notion that the feminised space of retreat is in some sense the centre of power. The existence of a stateless King in exile lends credibility to such an idea, with the nexus of power residing beyond its state apparatus" (88). Reading *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure* alongside with Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley's, stepdaughters of Cavendish, dramatic writing in early 1640 at Welbeck Abbey, Chalmers concludes that both Cavendish and her stepdaughters' dramatic writings share "the female retirement and confinement" but Cavendish's play provides a positive portrayal of female retirement through its emphasis on freedom and empowerment (89).

The likely importance of the Interregnum context in understanding *The Female Academy* ... is reinforced ... with the approach to female retirement and enclosure taken by the manuscript plays of Cavendish's stepdaughters ... On one level, the dramatic writing of Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley is clearly influenced by their experiences of living in their father's home, ... during his absence at the time of its capture by Parliamentary forces The subplot of their play, ... features three female royalist cousins under siege in a manor house. However, ... their plays associate female retirement with ... loss rather than freedom

and empowerment as their stepmother's do may also be ascribed to the fact that their writing pre-dates the establishment of a King and court in exile, which more readily lends itself to a positive representation of the feminised space of retreat. For Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley, the realm of female seclusion is marginal to an absent patriarchal centre, lacking the confident sense of its own centrality apparent in *The Female Academy* ... (89)

The plays' interpretations as utopian narrative, and Cavendish's political ambivalence aside, some scholars criticize Cavendish's ambivalence in terms of gender. Deborah Boyle differs from Suzuki and Chalmers in her analysis of Cavendish's ambivalence; whereas Suzuki and Chalmers draw attention to political ambivalences in Cavendish's plays, Boyle illustrates that Cavendish's natural philosophy and her perception of gender oppose her literary portrayals, resulting in ambivalence. In "Margaret Cavendish on Gender, Nature, and Freedom", Boyle examines Cavendish's approach to women's social roles and limits of their freedom; through intertextual analysis of Cavendish's "Female Orations", Boyle comes to the conclusion of the following:

... a cursory reading of "Female Orations" suggests that Cavendish is merely describing an unsettled contemporary debate about male and female natures and social roles... Cavendish's own views are close to those of the third, fifth, and possibly the seventh speaker: women are by nature different from, and inferior to, men; seeking to imitate men will not benefit women; women should cultivate the virtues appropriate to them. (526)

Thereby, Boyle demonstrates Cavendish as voicing various opinions on women, which ranges from unconventional to traditional, then embracing their inferior status in the world, which opposes her personifications of female characters in the plays and results in ambivalence. While Boyle suggests the influence of Cavendish's natural philosophy as a result of ambivalence in her literary works, Jacqueline Pearson, in *The Prostituted Muse*, readdresses ambivalence of Cavendish and relates it to Cavendish's personification of herself in her literary characters. Pearson suggests that Cavendish reflects her internal debate and deep anxieties, regarding limitation of women, in her plays as the central character (127). Since "Cavendish's internal debate about the nature of women produces some plays torn by contradictions", her ambivalence dominates the plays and results in conflicts between main plots and subplots (127). Pearson elucidates this conflict as: "... the main plot dramatizes the woman who takes control of her own life ... The subplots, however, reveal the vulnerability of women and the impossibility of their independent action... (126). Pearson touches

upon ambivalence in *The Female Academy* stating the motivation behind women's education: "Even *The Female Academy*, which apparently sets out to dramatize her concern about women's education, recommends learning for women because it will teach them 'Duty and Obedience' and make them more tractable to the demands of family and society" (126).

As illustrated here, Cavendish's plays have been contextualized as utopia and Cavendish's political and gender ambivalence. Holmesland, Pohl and Bonin interpret the play as examples of utopia and highlight Cavendish's female community and retreat as utopian elements in the context of the seventeenth century drama. Whereas Holmesland does not agree on a separatist strategy in the play, Bonin stresses separatism and its dissolvment by the male interference. Holmesland refers to Cavendish's negotiations between the contemporary norms and her explorations of autonomous women. Pohl pictures a utopian vision from the eyes of Cavendish's contemporaries and stresses female communities' reforming attitudes by transforming the domestic space. Bonin regards the play as a challenge to patriarchal structures and highlights the transition of the play from utopian ideals to dystopian realities of women under the patriarchal suppression. Moreover, scholars such as Mihoko Suzuki and Hero Chalmers analyze Cavendish's political inclinations in the play, interpreting it as a reflection of Cavendish's political ambivalence and her metaphorical retreat of royalist exile. Meanwhile, Deborah Boyle and Jacqueline Pearson focus on Cavendish's ambivalence in terms of her portrayal of women's autonomy; while Boyle claims that her natural philosophy determines her acknowledgement of women as the inferior and this acknowledgement opposes her fictional characterizations, which results in ambivalence in her works, Pearson presents a different view on Cavendish's ambivalence. For Pearson, Cavendish's internal anxieties are reflected in her characterizations.

Other scholars highlight Cavendish's desire for fame and her strategies of self-fashioning as crucial elements that shape the theme of her plays, particularly through the portrayal of women as intellectual, autonomous and powerful figures. Mora Narain, Dolores Paloma and Guyonne Leduc discuss different aspects of Cavendish's strategies for self-fashioning and fame in her plays. In "Women's Education in Margaret Cavendish's Plays", Leduc focuses on the theme of education in Cavendish's works, as well as her self-fashioning strategies through character development. In the beginning of the article, Leduc claims that "Cavendish cannot be deemed a prefeminist: ... the solidarity she felt was only with women as exceptional as herself and, in any case, she clearly felt class before gender solidarity" (17). Following this claim, Leduc argues ambivalent thoughts of

Cavendish regarding women's education: "The question of women's education results in an internal debate for Cavendish, who holds contradictory positions" (18). Leduc lists various fictional and non-fictional works of Cavendish on the theme of education and discusses the contradictory arguments that emerge across these texts, including the two plays of Cavendish: "Adult education is evinced in two plays where Cavendish imagines communities of women: *The Female Academy*— for educational purpose— and *The Convent of Pleasure* — for retirement" (18). Following his observation of Cavendish's ambivalent views on education, Leduc argues that instead of a prefeminist support of education in her works, Cavendish employs the theme to construct a specific public image of herself. Highlighting Cavendish's self-fashioning, Leduc states the following: "Cavendish's heroines are modelled on herself... If the issues of representation and *mimesis* cannot be dissociated from her drama, great heed must be paid to truth and distortion in all her works for she constantly wants to presents an image of herself and create a *persona* in a process of self-fashioning" (18).

Mona Narain discusses Cavendish characterization of extraordinary female characters and her intention of self-fashioning through her plays in "Notorious Celebrity: Margaret Cavendish and the Spectacle of Fame". The article opens with Cavendish's desire for fame: "Margaret Cavendish... the Duchess of Newcastle, perhaps more than any other woman writer of her age, wrote extensively about fame and infamy. Her keen interest in this topic stemmed from her desire to establish a public and literary fame that would extend beyond her lifetime and secure her place in history" (69). *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* and *Bell in Campo* are analyzed as the plays in which the female figures "who define themselves against the reigning gender ideology of seventeenth-century England" (80). Narain highlights Cavendish's characterization of female characters in the aforementioned plays: "Margaret Cavendish creates strong female characters who achieve fame through their extravagant exploits subverting prescribed norms for feminine behavior" (82).

Following Leduc and Narain, Paloma also examines the representation of fame in Cavendish's plays. "Defining the female self" discusses how Cavendish aims to achieve fame through her literary works, in which the female characters transcend the limitations imposed on them. Paloma opens her argument as follows: "The ideals and ambitions Cavendish sought to realize in her own life were appropriated from and expressed in terms borrowed from the heroic ethic of the

masculine world” (56). Since she wanted to be part of the heroic ethic of the masculine world, Cavendish channeled her energies into writing:

Perhaps more than she wanted to be a writer, Margaret Cavendish really wanted to be a hero (not, God forbid, a heroine), but literature was the only "Heroick Action" not totally forbidden her. Heroes, however, are not only victorious conquerors; they are also rulers, another Cavendish ambition, which again she realized through writing, for she could exercise absolute dominion over this world of her own creation. Masculine professions—whether scholarship, architecture, medicine, or law—she regarded as productive modes of action, forms of heroism which shape and benefit society. Thus the heroic life as defined in Cavendish's writing involves activity, productiveness, and dominance whereas the accepted definition of feminine life prescribed passivity, submissiveness, and only biological productivity. (56)

Paloma analyzes Cavendish's strategies for achieving fame and her engagement with the heroic ethic of the masculine world through the characterization of female figures in *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure*, and *Bell in Campo*. In each play, female characters challenge and defy patriarchal expectations: the women of the academy in *The Female Academy*, the female soldiers in *Bell in Campo*, and the women who separate themselves from the patriarchal world in *The Convent of Pleasure*. According to Paloma, through these unconventional female figures, Cavendish seeks to attain fame and become a part of the heroic ethic of the masculine world.

Several scholars, including Vimala C. Pasupathi, J.P. Vander Motten, Katrien Daemen-de Gelder, Kamille Stone Stanton, and Julie Crawford, examine certain historical connections between Cavendish, her close associates and the political context of Civil War England. Pasupathi analysis *Bell in Campo* claiming that the female army in the play represents Parliament's New Model Army:

The play is less an assertion of uncritical royalism or Caroline revisionism than a pragmatic and pointed acknowledgment of the increasingly revolutionary role that military collectives played in the civil wars and interregnum. Parliament's New Model Army was at the center of this shifting role, and, I will argue, a significant context for Cavendish's all-female army in *Bell in Campo*. (658)

Pasupathi analyses the play through his close-reading of Cavendish's employment of the female army. Claiming that the army is a representation of the Parliament's New Model Army and symbolizes a potential of reformation in post-war England. This claim is stated as follows:

Scholars who read Victoria's army strictly through the lens of its quest for gender equality necessarily must read its eventual demobilization as indicative of its creator's limited proto-feminism. I understand the cashiered army in somewhat different terms; contextualized in a period in which "all Laws chang'd according to the Power of the Sword" Cavendish's women warriors are the realization- and moderate revision- of the extreme and revolutionary potential of unified armed bodies in post-regicide England. (659)

Kamille Stone Stanton provides a different historical analysis for *Bell in Campo* in " 'An Amazonian Heroickess': The Military Leadership of Queen Henrietta Maria in Margaret Cavendish's *Bell in Campo*". Stanton opens the article claiming the following: "In *Bell in Campo* (1662) Margaret Cavendish's concerns for women and her constant re-working of women's roles were channelled into her creation of a particular type of heroine who stands as a model charismatic female leader" (72). This charismatic female leader is stated as the Queen, Henrietta Maria. Reading the play through a close-analysis of Henrietta Maria's representation, Stanton puts forward the following:

... this essay endeavors to broaden our understanding of the queen's participation in the civil war and the public's reception of those efforts through the literary representation of the queen in the writings of Margaret Cavendish. First, the essay will examine the queen's correspondence to find what I argue is the queen's energetic presentation of herself as a true and willing cavalier woman, and second, this study will discuss how that public image and the fundamental royalist political philosophy of divine patriarchalism are endorsed, rehearsed and revised in Margaret Cavendish's *Bell in Campo*. (73)

The article provides historical connections between events, which suggests the influence of the King and Queen on Cavendish's play. To highlight Cavendish's acceptance of royalist political perception of divine patriarchalism and her attendance to a royal ceremony after the war, Stanton claims that:

Explicit tribute is paid to the ceremonial spectacle of the queen upon her entrance with Charles I into Oxford, a procession deemed magnificent' in the news. Lady Victoria's

fantastical entry after a course of proving herself in battle not only emblemizes many of the plays concerns, but also grandly rewrites Henrietta Maria's own triumphal entry into Oxford following her extended period as an ad-venturess. On the heels of royalist victories at Adwalton Moor, Lansdown, and Roundway Down, Henrietta Maria's long procession into Oxford on 13 July 1643 encountered crowds of spectators, accompanied by the ringing of church and college bells and the blaring of trumpets; the days significance was celebrated with the striking of a silver commemorative medal, the publication of a book of poems from the students of Oxford, and a sack of gold from the town clerk. (77)

Stanton argues that the play, infused with royalist hope, ends with an optimistic spirit reflective of post-war England: "Working from within royalist political philosophy of the day, what *Bell in Campo* offers its women characters by its end is immediate elevation within the private sphere and a limitless potential for power in the public, and in doing so, the page-play captures the optimistic spirit of England's limitless potential at the restoration of the Stuarts in 1660" (83).

This reading situates Cavendish within the Royalist literary culture by using drama to imagine political restoration and order. A different historical perspective emerges in *The Convent of Pleasure* where J.P. Vander Motten and Katrien Daemen-de Gelder explore the connection between the English Carmelite convent in Antwerp and Cavendish. "Margaret Cavendish, the Antwerp Carmel and *The Convent of Pleasure*" discusses the historical existence of an English convent in Antwerp around 1619s:

Preserved in the Antwerp city archives is a chronicle history, entitled 'Short Colections of the Beginings of Our English Monastery of Teresians in Antwerp with some few perticulars of our Dear Deceased Religious'. Commissioned by prioress Mary Frances of St Teresa (Mary Birkbeck, 1674-1733) and begun around 1730 by Mary Joseph of St Teresa (Mary Howard, 1688-1756), it comprises foundational documents as well as the lives of ninety-five nuns and lay sisters who professed in the English Carmelite convent in Antwerp between 1619 and 1721. (1)

The article draws attention to the connection between Cavendish and Mary Cotton, a real-life figure associated with a convent:

One of these, the Life of Mary Cotton (1629-94), Sister Mary of the Blessed Trinity, daughter of Edward Cotton and Mary Brett, concludes with the following statement: "when she [i.e. Mary] came to be Religious the Dutchess of New Castle being then here was much taken

with her as being extream pretty, entertained her at her own house dressed her with her own hands for her Entery like a Nimph and lead her in her self' (509-15; 515). Although this is the only evidence we have connecting the Duchess of Newcastle with the Antwerp Carmelite community, there is no reason to doubt the accuracy of the chronology. Margaret and William Cavendish took up their residence in the Rubens House in September 1648. Except for Margaret's stay in England from November 1651 until February 1653, the couple remained in the city until the Restoration. (2)

The article draws attention to how this relationship between Cavendish and Mary Cotton may have inspired the representation of female community and retreat in *The Convent of Pleasure*, suggesting that Cavendish's literary imagination might have been shaped by personal and social networks. Similar to J.P. Vander Motten and Katrien Daemen-de Gelder, Julie Crawford focuses on the influence of symbolic convents on Cavendish's play *The Convent of Pleasure* in "Convents and Pleasures: Margaret Cavendish and the Drama of Property". For Crawford, Cavendish creates her convent in the shadow of three symbolic convents, which draw attention to personal and political influences on Cavendish:

Margaret Cavendish wrote her play about a fantasy convent, I argue, in the shadow of three other convents: her Lucas family home, St. John's Abbey, her home with her husband, William Cavendish, Welbeck Abbey; and, in a slightly different register, the convent that Henrietta Maria, the former queen of England, founded in Chaillot, France, in the 1650s. This trilogy of convents provides the nexus through which to understand the political and cultural valences of *The Convent of Pleasure* and the material and theatrical fantasies it enacts (178).

In her extensive historical analysis on the play, Crawford highlights the influence of three symbolic convents on her creative process of *The Convent of Pleasure*. It is claimed that St. John Abbey and Welbeck Abbey were attacked by the parliamentary army and Cavendish was forced to petition for the restoration of her husband's rights to the estate, which was reflected in the play among other historical details:

Margaret was denied any property rights to Welbeck Abbey or to William's other properties. In that same year, Henrietta Maria, with whom Margaret Cavendish had gone into exile in France from 1643 to 1645, established her own convent at Chaillot and largely forgot about her English royalists and the losses they had incurred in the service of the monarchy.

For Margaret Cavendish, the subsequent restoration of the monarchy, and of the property and status of those who had remained loyal during the interregnum, did not go as planned. In what follows, I will show how the convent that Lady Happy plans in *The Convent of Pleasure* restores royalists' losses of property and privilege to their former glory. Her convent is a royalist retreat that celebrates the values of an exiled court culture, but it is also fantastically restored and safe royalist property... Yet while her celebration of royalist culture is an attestation of loyalty to the monarchy, it also contains a plea for reparation and a desire for parity in the post-Restoration allocation of material privilege and pleasure. *The Convent of Pleasure* is not just a fantasy; it is a political intervention aimed at a politically astute royal audience. (179)

As Crawford argues, *The Convent of Pleasure* is shaped by three symbolic convents: St. John's Abbey, Welbeck Abbey, and Queen Henrietta Maria's convent in Chaillot. Through these symbolic convents, Cavendish reflects both her personal losses and the political context of seventeenth century England, contextualizing the play as a royalist fantasy of restored property and privilege, and as a political plea to the monarchy.

As valuable as these perspectives are for understanding Cavendish's *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* and *Bell in Campo*, existing scholarship has not addressed two-modelled framework of female separatism or Cavendish's critique of female separatism within the seventeenth century context of phallocentric involvement. Therefore, I argue that Cavendish presents two alternative models on the feasibility and sustainability of women's separatist communities in the aforementioned plays, using the themes of retreat and alternative female community within the contexts of education, pleasure, and politics.

Cavendish offers two alternative models for separatist women-only communities in *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* and *Bell in Campo*. Cavendish presents the first alternative model in *The Female Academy*, and *The Convent of Pleasure* where alternative women-only society is destroyed when men draw women back to the patriarchal order by way of marriage. In the second alternative model, *Bell in Campo*, a women's separate community emerges in response to the war, where the absence of men enables women to gain power and organize in the form of a female army to defend their country. Although the female army is supported by the army of Reformation and rewarded with reformed rights within the social and domestic space after the victorious war, their political agency and pursuit of equal power with men are denied upon their

return to the phallogentric order. Once the war ends and the pre-war patriarchal power restored, women are once again expected to return to the phallogentric structure and to their subordinate position under their husbands. By presenting these two alternative models, Cavendish suggests that, women's attempts at separatism and establishment of women-only community are only temporarily tolerated when aligned with the needs and conditions of the phallogentric order- such as wartime necessity- and that, under the prevailing patriarchal conditions, any attempt to establish women-only societies is ultimately destined to be interrupted and dismantled by the prevailing patriarchal order.

Cavendish's first alternative model of women's separatist society in *The Female Academy*, and *The Convent of Pleasure* are temporarily allowed by men. Their separation is temporary, and the plays end with male intrusion and the promise of marriage. In both plays, men observe women's alternative society before taking any action to gather information as much as possible. In this phase of the plays, Cavendish presents the traditional patriarchal view of men against women's separatist communities. The femicentric atmosphere within the alternative communities of *The Female Academy*, and *The Convent of Pleasure* are destroyed when the male characters draw the female characters into the patriarchal economy of marriage. Within the context of the aforementioned plays, women's separation and establishment of an alternative society - for educational purposes in *The Female Academy*, and for female pleasure and escaping from marriage in *The Convent of Pleasure*- are perceived by men as outrageous attempts of rebellion. Consequently, after a period of observing and criticizing women's activities within these communities, the male characters attempt to intrude and reassert control, ultimately compelling the women to return to the phallogentric order. Cavendish highlights the compulsion imposed on women through a theatrical device: the silence of female characters. As the men reassert control, the women become silent, and their presence is gradually erased from the scene.

Cavendish presents the second alternative model for women's separatism in *Bell in Campo*. Although women return back to the phallogentric order as in *The Female Academy*, and *The Convent of Pleasure*, their separatist community, the female army, are temporarily supported by men and allowed to function by the patriarchal power. The conditions of war allow women to assert control and establish a female army. Although the women are rewarded by the King with reformed rights in the play's end, they are still expected to return to their traditional role as wives, subordinate to the male order, thereby losing their political and military agency. At the end of the

play, in spite of the King's reward, women could not achieve their aim of equal power with men in public affairs or to free themselves from the subordinate position within the social hierarchy; the King's rewards for the women of the female army are mere improvements within the ranks of women in the social hierarchy without the aim of elevating their social status in relation to the men. Through this second alternative model, Cavendish demonstrates that, unless aligned with patriarchal needs and conditions, women's alternative separatist communities cannot be sustained in the phallogentric context of the seventeenth century. The ending of *Bell in Campo* signals women's eventual return to the pre-war patriarchal conditions. *Bell in Campo* differs from *The Female Academy*, and *The Convent of Pleasure* in that it lacks male intrusion and aggression toward the separatist female community. Instead, the male characters express support and gratitude to the female characters for their contribution. However, because women's separatism emerges as a response to the exceptional circumstances of war, the end of war leads to the gradual dissolution of women's separatism. Regardless of the loss of women's political agency, *Bell in Campo* presents a more positive model and supportive attitude towards women's separatism.

By analyzing Cavendish and the intellectual and political influences that shape her plays, this chapter has discussed Cavendish's early feminist impulses in both her fictional and non-fictional writings and has also provided a brief introduction to the theoretical framework of two-modelled approaches to female separatism. The following chapter will provide a detailed analysis on Cavendish's representation of the two alternative models for women's separatist communities in *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* and *Bell in Campo*, and the patriarchal reactions to such separatist communities. To this end, the plays will be analyzed in two subsequent sub-chapters: *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure* will be examined comparatively, as they portray the first alternative model of women's separatism, which highlights male intrusion and ending with marriage. Following that sub-chapter, *Bell in Campo* will be examined as the second alternative model, highlighting the temporary male allowance and support to women's separatism within the extraordinary circumstances of the Civil War.

CHAPTER IV

ALTERNATIVE FEMALE COMMUNITIES AND THE POLITICS OF SEPARATISM IN MARGARET CAVENDISH'S *THE FEMALE ACADEMY*, *THE CONVENT OF PLEASURE* AND *BELL IN CAMPO*

4.1. *The Female Academy and The Convent of Pleasure*

The Female Academy and The Convent of Pleasure as closet dramas offer a model of separatism that ultimately fails under the pressure of patriarchal pressure, with both narratives ending in the women's return to the phallogentric order by way of marriage. Through these portrayals, Cavendish explores feasibility and sustainability of alternative female communities and women's separatism when it lacks alignment with male interests, revealing how such separatist spaces, though nurturing and empowering for women, are portrayed as unachievable in the long term. Cavendish critiques women's situation under the oppression of the patriarchy in the context of seventeenth century society by dramatizing the phallogentric constraints that ultimately destroy women's separatist attempts.

The Female Academy (1662) tells the story of a group of gentlewomen's separation from the patriarchal society to build an alternative, women-only community in the form of an academy. With the presence of matrons and lady speakers, the gentlewomen of the academy engage with intellectual debates which are based on philosophy, literature, nature, human behaviour and psychology. A group of gentlemen, hearing the news of the female academy, get anxious and obsessed with the female academy. Believing that the prospects of finding eligible wives are halted with women's retreat, men grow aggressive. Their anxiety and aggression continue to grow when they hear the ladies' intellectual discussions through the grate of the female academy. As a result, men decide to open up an academy to discuss how to dissolve the female academy. Parallel discussions between the female and the male academies highlights the oppositional discourses between them: while the men are obsessed with dissolving the female academy, the ladies continue their intellectual debates undisturbed. The play ends with an agreement between the female academy's Matron and the men, promising marriages between the female academy's women and

the male members of the opposing academy. Following marriage agreement, the men symbolically dissolve the female academy with the sound of their trumpets. The play ends with the disappearance of voiceless ladies following the male attack on their academy.

As *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668) dramatizes separation and retreat from the phallogentric society to build an alternative, women-only community. The play starts with a dialogue about the news of the funeral of Lord Fortunate and her rich daughter, Lady Happy. A group of gentlemen, learning that Lady Happy inherited great fortune, decides to persuade Lady Happy for her hand in marriage. However, Lady Happy, afraid of losing her freedom in marriage, decides to establish a convent where women can live together harmoniously in peace, pleasure, and free from the male control. A prince, under the disguise of a Princess, manages to enter the convent. In time, the Princess and Lady Happy start to feel affection toward one another. Throughout their time in the convent, ladies take part in acting plays, which demonstrate women's situations in the patriarchal world. In the final act, the Prince's identity is revealed and he marries Lady Happy. Through the satirical exchange between the Prince and Mimick, the fool, in the final scene of the play, highlights the dissolution of the convent and women's return to the phallogentric society.

The Female Academy and *The Convent of Pleasure* raise similar questions, share common themes and both conclude with marriage, signaling a return to the male control. Among the shared themes are women's intellectual engagements, female solidarity, critique of patriarchy, gender roles and the institution of marriage. Aiming to address the following question - Why do the female characters feel the need to establish alternative, women-only communities, and how does the patriarchal structure respond to these attempts? - this analysis of *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure* as the first alternative model of women's separatism will center on the reason behind the establishment of women's alternative communities and their dissolution through male intrusion and violence. With their endings, the plays represent how women's separatism and establishment of alternative communities cannot survive without the alignment of male interests in the context of the seventeenth century.

In *The Female Academy*, women establish their own academy - open only for upper-class women- as a response to their exclusion from the intellectual production. This patriarchal exclusion of women creates the need for an alternative women-only space where they can engage in intellectual discourse. Similarly, in *The Convent of Pleasure*, women establish an alternative

women-only community within the space of a convent as a means of escaping the institution of marriage and discovering female pleasure. Through play within the play structure, the institution of marriage is criticized by women, revealing the ideological motivations behind the establishment of their separatist community. Cavendish draws attention to the phallogentric restrictions on women as the underlying cause of their search for an alternative community free of male control, where women can explore intellectual engagement, pleasure, and freedom, and assert control over their own lives. Both plays open with the news that signals the establishment of women's alternative communities. In *The Female Academy*, the play opens with a dialogue between two ladies about the news of ladies' academy:

1 Lady.

IF you would have your Daughter virtuously and wisely educated, you must put her into the Female Academy.

2 Lady.

The Female Academy, what is that?

1 Lady.

Why a House, wherein a company of young Ladies are instructed by old Matrons; as to speak wittily and rationally, and to behave themselves handsomly, and to live Virtuously. (1.1.1-3)

The opening of the play situates the academy as a secluded educational institution exclusively for women. By emphasizing the physical setting of the house, the lady draws attention to its separatist nature. She then goes on to describe the physical structure of the academy and its class-based admission requirements:

2 Lady.

Do any men come amongst them?

1 Lady.

O no; only there is a large open Grate, where on the out-side men stand, which come to hear and see them; but no men enter into the Academy, nor women, but those that are put in for Education; •• they have another large open Grate at the other end of the Room they discourse in; where on the out-side of that Grate stand women that come to hear them discourse.

2 Lady.

I will put my Daughter therein to be instructed.

1 Lady.

If your Daughter were not of honourable Birth, they would not receive her, for they take in none but those of antient Descent, as also rich, for it is a place of charges.

2 Lady.

VVhy then they will not refuse my Daughter, for she is both ho|nourably born, and also rich. (1.1. 4-8)

As stated above, the academy is a separatist space and it has a class-based admission. Therefore, men and lower-class women were not allowed entry. However, through the grate, people could watch and listen to the ladies' scholarly debates, highlighting the performative aspect through which women demonstrated their intellectual capacity, challenging the phallocentric perception of women as incapable of intellectual thought. Throughout the play, women are depicted as being so absorbed in their debates that they remain undisturbed by the men's cries outside the female academy until the very end of the play. Their discussions only cease when the men attack the academy with the sound of their trumpets.

The nurturing environment of the female academy – as a safe space for women's education and female solidarity– serves as the motivating force behind the establishment of an alternative female community. Since women have historically been denied opportunities to cultivate their intellectuality within the phallocentric society, they seek an alternative space and community– an all-female space free from male control. This pursuit is reflected in the play through the intellectual debates within the academy and the depiction of lady speakers' agency and self-assertion.

In act two, scene four, the stage direction sets the scene for an academic discussion in the Female Academy: "*Enter the Academy Ladies, and their Grave Matrons; another of the young Ladies sits as Lady Speaker in an Armed Chair, the rest on stools about her*" (2.4.1). The Matron introduces the subject of the debate: "Lady, at this time let the Theam of your discourse be of dis|coursing (2.4.2). The Lady Speaker initiates the discussion on the subject of discourse, explaining the types and genres of discourse:

[T]here are two sorts of discourses, or manner of wayes of discoursings, as there is a discoursing within the mind, and a discourse with words; as for the inward discourse in the mind, it is to discourse to a mans self, as if they were discoursing to others, making Questions or Propositions, Syllogisms and Conclusions to himself ... Also there are discourses that are

sensible discourses, rational dis|courses, and witty discourses: also there are other discourses, that have nei|ther Sense, Reason, Wit, nor Fancy in them: Also there are Clownish dis|courses and Courtly discourses: Also there is a general discoursing, and par|ticular discoursing, also Scholastical discourses and Poetical discourses... (2.4.3)

The discussion portrayed in this scene illustrates the women's approach to education and the structure of their academy, led by the Matron and the Lady Speaker with young ladies as listeners. Once the subject of discussion is introduced by the Matron, the Lady Speaker shares her knowledge through examples to a group of young ladies. Through this portrayal of the female academy, the play represents an early fictional example of a women's educational institution. Given that upper-class women of the seventeenth century often received a limited education – consisting of needlework, piano lessons and occasionally Latin– this academy presents an alternative model to the seventeenth century women's education, in which young girls learn a wide range of subjects including philosophy, art, literature, and rhetoric and cultivate their intellectuality through intellectual debate.

Another debate takes place in act four, where the Matron sets the subject of discourse as: "Lady, let the Theam of your discourse to day be of a Theatre" (4.22.1). The Lady Speaker starts the discussion by dividing the theatre into two main categories and highlights the teaching aspect of plays:

A Theatre is a publick place for publick Actions, Orations, Disputations, Presentations, whereunto is a publick resort; but there are only two Theatres, which are the chief, and the most frequented; the one is of War, the other of Peace; the Theatre of Warr is the Field; and the Battels they sight, are the Plays they Act, and the Souldiers are the Trage|dan• s, and the Theatre of Peace is the stage, and the Plays there Acted are the Humours, Manners, Dispositions, Natures, Customes of men thereon descri|bed and acted, whereby the Theatres are as Schools to teach Youth good Principles, and instruct them in the Nature and Customes of the World and Mankind, and learn men to know themselves better than by any other way of instruction... (4.22.2)

The Lady Speaker extends her discussion into a detailed analysis of several genres within the theatre and discusses the attitude of the contemporary playwrights. While discussing contemporary playwrights' inspirations from ancient Greek and Roman writers and their reinterpretation of

classical stories and myths, the Matron also takes part in the discussion and contributing her perspective through an intellectual lens:

Matron.

Lady, give me leave a little while to instruct you, as to tell you, that all Romances should be so; for the ground of a right Romance is a true story, only falshood is intermixt therein, so that a Romance is a compound of Truth and Falshood.

Lady Speaker.

Give me leave to answer you, that in my opinion, a right Romance is Poetical Fictions put into a Historical Stile; but for Plays, the true Comedy is pure Love and Humours, also the Customes, Manners, and the Habits, and inbred qualities of mankind; And right Tragi-Comedies are the descriptions of the Passions which are created in the Soul; And a right Tragedy is intermixt with the Passions, Appetites, and Humours of men, with the influence of outward actions, accidents, and misfortunes: but as I said, some Poets take the Plots out of true History, others out of feigned Historie, which are Romances, so as their Plots (for the most part) are meer Translations, and oft times the VVit is also but a translated VVit, only metamorphosed after their own way... (4.22.4-5)

As portrayed in this scene, the discussion occasionally shifts direction with the Matron's involvement to broaden the scope of the debate. This suggests that the academy values intellectual depth and fosters critical thinking through meaningful intellectual contributions. The nurturing environment within the academy demonstrates how women are capable of intellectual reasoning when liberated from patriarchal constraints. Listening to women's intellectual debates through the grate, men get anxious in response to women's undisturbed intellectual pursuits. Rather than appreciating women's intellectual capacities, the men's anxiety intensifies and ultimately leads them to scheme to dismantle the academy. A similar thematic pattern of male reaction appears in *The Convent of Pleasure*, where the play opens with the news of women's retreat and ends with men's dissolution of this separatist community.

As in *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* opens with news of the Funeral of the Lord Fortunate and his heiress Lady Happy:

FIRST GENTLEMAN. Jom, Where have you been, you look so sadly of it?

2 GENT. I have been at the Funeral of the Lord Fortunate, who has left his Daughter, the Lady Happy, very rich, having no other Daughter but her.

1 GENT. If she be so rich, it will make us all Young Men, spend all our Wealth in fine Clothes, Coaches, and Lackies, to set out our Wooing hopes. (1.1. 1-3)

While men decide to woo Lady Happy for her hand in marriage, in the following scene, Lady Happy discusses her decision to retreat from the public with Madam Mediator. First, Lady Happy discusses her thoughts on marriage:

L. HAPPY. Put the case I should Marry the best of Men, if any best there be; yet would a Marry'd life have more crosses and sorrows then pleasure, freedom, or hapiness: nay Marriage to those that are virtuous is a greater restraint then a Monastery. Or, should I take delight in Admirers? they might gaze on my Beauty, and praise my Wit, and I receive nothing from their eyes, nor lips; for Words vanish as soon as spoken, and Sights are not substantial. Besides, I should lose more of my Reputation by their Visits, then gain by their Praises. Or, should I quit Reputation and turn Courtizan, there would be more lost in my Health, then gained by my Lovers, I should find more pain then Pleasure; ... And since there is so much folly, vanity and falshood in Men, why should Women trouble and vex themselves for their sake; for retiredness bars the life from nothing else but Men. (1.2.10)

Lady Happy criticizes marriage believing that marriage confines women and brings more pain than pleasure; instead, she advocates for a life of female retreat, bringing freedom to women. As a result of her critical view of marriage, Lady Happy chooses to pursue a life of freedom and pleasure by establishing a women-only convent devoted exclusively to pleasure. Her rejection of the institution of marriage becomes the driving force behind the creation of a separatist space. In her following dialogue with Madam Mediator, Lady Happy informs the reader about her decision to pursue a life of freedom and pleasure through retreating the society:

MEDIAT. You intend to live incloister'd and retired from the World.

L. HAPPY. Tis true, but not from pleasures; for, I intend to incloister my self from the World, to enjoy pleasure, and not to bury my self from it; but to incloister my self from the incumbred cares and vexations, troubles and perturbation of the World.

MEDIAT. But if you incloister your self, How will you enjoy the company of Men, whose conversation is thought the greatest Pleasure?

L. HAPPY. Men are the only troublers of Women; for they only cross and oppose their sweet delights, and peaceable life; they cause their pains, but not their pleasures. Wherefore those Women that are poor, and have not means to buy delights, and maintain pleasures, are only fit for Men; for having not means to please themselves, they must serve only to please others; but those Women, where Fortune, Nature, and the gods are joined to make them happy, were made to live with Men, who make the Female sex their slaves; but I will not be so enslaved, but will live retired from their Company. Wherefore, in order thereto, I will take so many Noble Persons of my own Sex, as my Estate will plentifully maintain, such whose Births are greater than their Fortunes, and are resolved to live a single life, and vow Virginity: with these I mean to live incloister'd with all the delights and pleasures that are allowable and lawful; My Cloister shall not be a Cloister of restraint, but a place for freedom, not to vex the Senses but to please them. (1.2.21-24)

Madam Mediator's traditional views mirror the patriarchal perception of the importance of man and marriage in a woman's life. However, Lady Happy portrays an unconventional woman, who is aware of the restrictions in marriage and chooses separatism and retreat over marriage. Lady Happy regards marriage as enslavement and perceives married women as slaves to men, who are burdened with pain and oppression. She declares that her retreat will not be a retreat of constraint but freedom and pleasure. Although Lady Happy's views on marriage offer a critique of patriarchy and the institution of marriage, she is a classist in her view that women of poor economic status are more suited for men and they can serve their husbands rather than themselves. This classist attitude parallels the one found in *The Female Academy*, particularly regarding the admission rules to the academy. In act two, two ladies and Madam Mediator talk about the convent where the rule of admission is emphasized by Lady Vertue as follows: "But, Madam Mediator, Do they live in such Pleasure as you say? For they'll admit you, a Widow, although not us, by reason we are Wives" (2.3.9). Apart from the convent's rule for admission -based on a woman's marital status- there is also a class-based hierarchy within the convent. As the owner of the convent, Lady Happy establishes a social hierarchy within it based on social status, dividing its members into servants, physicians, and other ladies of noble birth:

MEDIAT. ... the Lady Happy is Lady-Prioress her self, and will admit none of the Masculine Sex, ... for she will suffer no grates about the Cloister; she has also Women-Physicians, Surgeons and Apothecaries, and she is the chief Confessor her self, and gives what Indulgences or Absolutions she pleaseth: Also, her House, where she hath made her Convent, is so big and convenient, and so strong, as it needs no addition or repair: ... but also conveniency for much Provision, and hath Women for every Office and Employment: for though she hath not above twenty Ladies with her, yet she hath a numerous Company of Female Servants, so as there is no occasion for Men (2.1.34).

In addition to the social hierarchy within the convent, Lady Happy's description of the sensual experiences and excessive pleasure within this separatist space highlights the high standards and luxurious lifestyle the convent offers its high-born inhabitants:

L. HAPPY. Now give me leave to inform you, how I have order'd this our Convent of Pleasure; first, I have such things as are for our Ease and Conveniency; next for Pleasure, and Delight; as I have change of Furniture, for my house; according to the four Seasons of the year, especially our Chambers: ... I have all the Floor strewd with sweet Flowers: ... As for our Galleries, Stair-Cases, and Passages, they shall be hung with various Pictures; and, all along the Wall of our Gallery, ... and my Gardens to be kept curiously, and flourish, in every Season of all sorts of Flowers, sweet Herbs and Fruits,... Also, we will have the choisest Meats every Season doth afford, ... Change of Garments are also provided, of the newest fashions for every Season, and rich Trimming; so as we may be accoutred properly, and according to our several pastimes... (2.2.5)

Just as in *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* portrays an alternative female community reserved for upper-class women, rather than offering an inclusive space for all women. While both plays reflect a classist attitude in this regard, they nonetheless underline women's need to separate themselves from the phallogentric society by establishing alternative communities. In *The Convent of Pleasure*, women establish a women-only, alternative community within the space of the convent to escape the phallogentric society, and through play within the play technique,

Cavendish portrays women's critique of the institution of marriage. This critique reveals the underlying motivation behind the establishment of *The Convent of Pleasure*.

Since the convent is established in response to Lady Happy's rejection of oppressive phallogentric nature of marriage, the use of play within the play - where the painful experiences of women in the patriarchal society are enacted - offers a valuable perspective through which to analyze women's perception and critique of marriage. In act three, scene two, the stage direction indicates the use of play within the play: "*The Scene is opened, the PRINCESS and L. HAPPY sit down, and the Play is Acted within the Scene; the PRINCESS and the L. HAPPY being Spectators. Enter one drest like a Man that speaks the Prologue*" (3.2.14). There are nine different episodes presented within the play, each depicting painful experiences of married women and mothers. In the first episode, two women lament the hardships of being married to drunkard and abusive husbands:

1 WOMAN. ... for he lies all day drinking in an Ale-house, like a drunken Rogue as he is, and when he comes home, he beats me all black and blew, when I and my Children are almost starved for want.

2 WOMAN. Truly Neighbour, so doth my Husband; and spends not only what he gets, but what I earn with the sweat of my brows, and whilst my Children cry for bread, and he drinks that away, that should feed my small Children, which are too young to work for themselves.

1 WOMAN. But I will go, and pull my Husband out of the Ale-house, or I'll break their Lattice-windows down.

2 WOMAN. Come, Ile go and help; for my Husband is there too: but we shall be both beaten by them.

1 WOMAN. I care not: for I will not suffer him to be drunk, and I and my Children starve; I had better be dead. (3.2.3-8)

These women, suffering at the hands of abusive husbands, live through the constant risks of physical violence and even express a wish for death as a means to escape their suffering, which stresses the extent of misery within marriage. In another episode, two ladies share their marital problems with one another. One's husband is a gambler, and the other one's is a womanizer:

2 LADY. Have I not cause to weep when my Husband hath playd all his Estate away at Dice and Cards, even to the Clothes on his back?

1 LADY. I have as much cause to weep then as you; for, though my Husband hath not lost his Estate at play, yet he hath spent it amongst his Whores; and is not content to keep Whores abroad, but in my house, under my roof, and they must rule as chief Mistresses.

2 LADY. But my Husband hath not only lost his own Estate, but also my Portion; and hath forced me with threats, to yield up my Jointure,* so that I must beg for my living, for any thing I know as yet.

1 LADY. If all Married Women were as unhappy as I, Marriage were a curse. (3.4.3-6)

As stated by the lady, these women face marriage as a curse – an unending torment without escape. Although the women in the episode are upper-class and their lives are supposed to be more tolerable and comfortable than those of many others, they still face the oppressing and confining nature of marriage. This is the result of the unequal power dynamics between men and women in the patriarchal structure. The play within the play illustrates women's critique of marriage as a restrictive institution, highlighting the motivation behind the establishment of the convent. Through these performances, the women not only engage in artistic production but also empower themselves to assert control over their lives through separatist living. This withdrawal from the patriarchal structures, however, is seen as a disruption to the marriage market by the men. Therefore, male characters are obsessed to dissolve the convent to regain women both into the patriarchal society and the marriage market. A similar reaction of male opposition to the women's retreat is also portrayed in *The Female Academy*. While *The Convent of Pleasure* depicts a man disguising himself as a woman in an attempt to regain Lady Happy into the marriage market, *The Female Academy* presents the establishment of a male academy to develop strategies for dissolving the academy.

The Female Academy and *The Convent of Pleasure* narrate how women's alternative communities, which oppose patriarchal demands, are ultimately destroyed by men. Although the plays highlight the women's motivation for establishing these communities and depict female solidarity and freedom within all-female spaces, they also portray men's strategies behind the women to destroy these spaces and their eventual victory. In *The Female Academy*, women's retreat into the female academy results in men's establishment of a male academy. In act two, scene three, two gentlemen talk about the news of male academy:

1 *Gentleman.*

I suppose you have heard that a company of young Gentlemen have set up an Academy, next to the Ladies A|cademy.

2 *Gentleman.*

VVe heard nothing of it.

1 *Gentleman.*

VVhy then I will tell you, the men are very angry that the women should speak so much, and they so little, I think: for they have made that Room which they stood in to see and hear the Ladies speak in, so a place for themselves to speak in, that the Ladies may hear what they can say.

2 *Gentleman.*

Faith if you will have my opinion, it is, that the men do it out of a mockery to the Ladies.

1 *Gent.*

'Tis likely so, for they rail extremely that so many fair young Ladies are so strictly inclosed, as not to suffer men to visit them in the A|cademy. (2.3.2-6)

The play shows the growing aggression and obsession of men in response to women's retreat into the female academy, as seen in the male academy's discussions which focus entirely on the women and how to respond to their retreat. In act two, scene six, a gentleman speaker criticizes women's retreat and claims that women belong to men:

Gentleman Speaker.

Gentlemen, ... for our minds are so full of thoughts of the Female Sex, as we have no room for any other Subject or Object; wherefore let the Theam be what it will, our discourses will soon run on them: but if we could bring women as easily into our arms, as into our brains; and had we as many Mistresses in our possessions, as we have in our imaginations, we should be much more happy than we are; ... but Na|ture had made Beauty in vain, if not for the use of the Masculine Sex, wherfore Nature forbids restraint, and 'tis a sin against Nature for women to be In•loy|stred, Retired, or restrained: Nay, it is not only a sin against Nature, but a grie|vous sin against the Gods, for women to live single lives, or to vow Virgi|nity: for if women live Virgins, there will be no Saints for Heaven, nor wor|ship nor Adoration offred

to the Gods from Earth: for if all women live Vir|lings, the Race of Mankind will be utterly extinguished; and if it be a general sin to live Virgins, no particular can be exempted; and if it be lawfull for one to live a Virgin, it is lawfull for all; so if it be unlawfull for one, it is unlaw|full for all; ... But to conclude, those women which restrain them|selves from the company and use of men, are damned, being accused by Men, judged by Nature, and condemned by the Gods. (2.6.2)

As expressed in the speaker's discourse, the male characters in the play believe that women's separatism and retreat are sinful and oppose the natural order of the society, potentially leading to greater problems related to marriage. The men grow anxious, believing that the women's separatist community will disrupt the marriage market, which, for upper-class families, relies on the economic bonds between husband and wife. As a result of their growing paranoia, the discourse within the male academy centers entirely on women's supposed need for men, the perceived sinfulness of women's separatism and strategies for dissolving the female academy. In act three, scene fourteen, a gentleman speaker highlights women's supposed need for men and their natural incapacity for maintaining their lives. The speaker stresses women's mistake with their act of retreat and claims that women must be punished for their mistake in his speech:

Gentleman Speaker.

Those women that retire themselves from the Com|pany of men, are very ungratefull; as, first to Nature, because she made them only for breed; next to men who are their Defenders, Protectors, their Nourishers, their Maintainers; their Instructors, ... ; as men defend them ... Also men protect them from wild ravenous and cruel Beasts, that otherwise would devour them; for as women have not natural strength to build, so have they not natural courage to sight, being for the most part as fearfull as weak: Likewise men nourish them, for men Fish Fowl, and hunt to get them Food to feed them, for which women would neither take the pains, nor indure the labour, nor have the heart to kill their food; for women by nature are so pittifull, and have such tender dispositions, as they would rather suffer death themselves, than destroy life in other Crea|tures; Also men maintain them by composing themselves into Common|wealths, ... Also Laws to keep them in peace, to rule them in order, to defend them with Arms, which women could never do, by reason they know not what Government to settle in or to, nor what Laws to make, or how to execute those Laws that were made;

neither could they plead Sutes, decide Causes, Judge Controversies, deal out right, or punish Injuries, or condemn Criminals: Also men are the Instructors to inform them of Arts and Sciences, which women would nere have had the patience to study, for they would ne\ver have allowed so much time and solitary musing, ... wherefore it is a great ingratitude, nay a horid ingratitude in those wolmen, that denye men their Company, Conversation, and Communication•wherefore men have not only Reason to take it ill, but to be angry with those women that shun or restrain their Company from them; but good Counsel ought to go before Anger, for the difference betwixt good Counsel and Anger, is, that good Counsel goes before a fault is committed, and Anger followeth when a fault is committed, for as good Counsel or Admonishment is to prevent a fault, so Anger is a Punishment for a fault past. (3.14.2)

As indicated in the speech above, the speaker stresses women's supposed incapacity to sustain themselves and their supposed need for a male spouse. Believing that women defy the natural order by establishing their alternative, women-only society within the space of the female academy, the speaker urges men to punish women and regain them to the patriarchal order. In act three, a gentleman foreshadows the men's impending aggression and threat toward the female academy with the line, "THe young Gallants methinks begin to be whetted with An|ger" (3.19.1). Women's indifference to the male academy's aggression and along with their uninterrupted engagement in intellectual discussions, further intensify the men's anger, which ultimately results in men's planning of raiding the female academy with their trumpets. In act four, two gentlemen discuss men's anger towards the women's indifference and mentions the male academy's plan on raiding the female academy:

1 *GEnt.*

The Academy of Ladies take no notice of the Academy of Men, nor seem to consider what the men say, for they go on thier own serious way, and edifying discourses.

2 *Gent.*

At which the men are so angry, as they have sworn to leave off talking, and instead thereof, they will sound Trumpets so loud, when the La|dys are in their discoursings, as they shall not hear themselves speak; by which means they hope to draw them out of their Cloyster, as they swarm Bees; for as Bees gather together at the sound of a Basin, Kettle, or such like

met|led thing: so they will disperse that swarm of Academical Ladies, with the sound of brazen Trumpets. (4.13. 2-3)

Following their plan, the male academy gathers once more before their attack on the female academy and they discuss how there is no alternative but to proceed, as the women's retreat has disrupted the marriage market. They exchange ideas in their last meeting as follows:

1. *Gent.*

THis is not to be suffered: for if we should let these Ladies rest in peace and quiet, in their inclosed Habitation, we shall have none but Old Women; for all those young Ladies, that are not in the Aca|demy, talk of nothing but of going into a Female Academy.

2 *Gent.*

You say true, insomuch as it begins to be a Mode, and a Fashion,for all the Youngest, Fairest, Richest, and Noblest Ladies, to inclose them|selves into an Academy.

3. *Gent.*

Nay, we must seek some way, and devise some means to unroost them.

4. *Gent.*

There is nothing can do it, but noise; for they take such plea|sure in the exercise of their Tongues, that unless we can put them to silence, there is no hopes to get them out.

1. *Gent.*

Trumpets, I doubt, will not be loud enough.

6. *Gent.*

Let us try.

All the Gentlemen.

Content, Content, &c. (5.25.2-8)

As a result of their paranoia about women's separatism and their anxiety over the loss of a profitable marriage prospect, the members of the male academy carry out their plan as if they are assembling a male army to invade the female academy, with the aim of restoring women as subjects under the phallogentric order. The rhetoric of war and patriarchal militarism is symbolized in act five with the following line, "The Gentlemen will turn Trumpeters, for a Regiment of Gentle|men have bought every one of them a Trumpet, to sound a March to the Academy of Ladies" (5.27.1).

In the final act, following the male academy's planned attack, the ladies of the female academy send the Matron to speak with the men and learn the reason behind their violent attacks against them. When the Matron asks the reason behind their violent attack, a dialogue between a gentleman and the Matron takes place as follows:

1 *Gent.*

The cause is, that they will not permit us to come into their Company, but have barricadoed their Gats against us, and have incloystred themselves from us; besides, it is a dangerous example for all the rest of their Sex; for if all women should take a toy in their heads to incloyster themselves, there would be none left out to breed on.

Matron.

Surely it is very fit and proper that young Virgins should live a retired life, both for their Education and Reputation.

2 *Gent.*

As for their Education, it is but to learn to talk, and women can do that without teaching, for on my Conscience, a woman was the first in|venter of Speech; and as for their Retirement, Nature did never make them for that purpose, but to associate themselves with men: and since men are the chief Head of their kind, it were a sign they had but very little Brain, if they would suffer the youngest and fairest women to incloyster themselves. (5.Scene the last.10-12)

The Matron, learning that men's aggression resulted from the women's retreat, tries to persuade men of the value of women's education in the female academy by promising that women will eventually marry after completing their studies in the academy:

Matron.

Gentlemen pray give me leave to inform you, for I perceive you are in great Error of mistake, for these Ladies have not vowed Virginitie, or are they incloystred; for an Academy is not a Cloyster, but a School, where|in are taught how to be good Wives when they are married.

3 *Gent.*

But no man can come to woo them to be Wives.

Matron.

No, but if they can win their Parents, or those they are left in trust with, and get their good liking and consent, the young Ladies have learn'd so much Duty and Obedience, as to obey to what they shall think fit. (5.Scene the last.13-15)

Following her dialogues with the men - and under the threat of a further attack- the Matron loses her role as a mediator of intellectual discourse and turns into a marriage negotiator, who promises the men to secure wives among the academy's members:

All the Gentlemen.

Well, if you will be our Mediator, we will surcease our Clamour, otherwise we will increase our noise.

Matron.

If you can get leave of their Parents, and Friends, I will endeavour to serve you, and shall be proud of the imployment that you shall be pleased to impose to my trust and management.

Gentlemen.

And we shall be your Servants, for your favours.

They all go out, with the Gentlemen waiting on her, with their Hats in their hands, Scraping and Congying to her. (5. Scene the last. 18-20)

After the threat of another attack on the female academy, the Matron submits to the male authority and accepts to be a marriage negotiator between the ladies and the men. The play ends abruptly following the Matron's promise to the men along with the striking silence of the ladies in the academy. It offers no portrayal of the ladies' reactions to the men's offer or of what ultimately befalls them. After the stark contrast between the portrayal of ladies as asserting female autonomy through their long academic discussions in the beginning of the play and the play's voiceless and silenced women in the end, Cavendish ultimately suggests that the only possible outcome for a separatist female community that challenges the patriarchal structure is the reassertion of the male control and the dissolution of the female academy. Since the ideal of women's education opposes the patriarchal expectations of womanhood, women cannot sustain women-only, separatist communities, and eventually the male aggression dissolves these communities.

Similarly, *The Convent of Pleasure* portrays the disruptive effect of the male aggression and intrusion into a women-only space. As in *The Female Academy*, men criticize women's retreat and become increasingly obsessed with the dissolution of the convent, a tension that gradually intensifies throughout the play. At first, men express their displeasure with the news of women's retreat in their dialogue:

COURT. O Gentlemen, Gentlemen, we are all utterly undone.

ADVISER. Why, what's the matter?

COURT. Why, the Lady Happy hath incloister'd her self, with twenty Ladies more. (2.1.23-25)

Following the news of retreat, men speak to Madam Mediator to persuade Lady Happy to end her retreat. In their dialogue, men criticize Lady Happy's thoughts regarding marriage as being heretical and decides to take further action:

TAKEPL. If there be so many Women, there will be the more use for Men: But pray Madam Mediator, give me leave, rightly to understand you, by being more clearly informed: you say,

The Lady Happy is become a Votress to Nature; and if she be a Votress to Nature, she must be a Mistress to Men.

MEDIAT. By your favour, Sir, she declares, That she hath avoided the company of Men, by retirement, meerly, because she would enjoy the variety of Pleasures, which are in Nature; of which, she says, Men are Obstructers; for, instead of increasing Pleasure, they produce Pain, and instead of giving Content, they increase Trouble; instead of making the Femal-Sex Happy, they make them Miserable; for which, she hath banished the Masculine Company for ever.

ADVISER. Her Heretical Opinions ought not to be suffer'd, nor her Doctrine allow'd; and she ought to be examined by a Masculine Synod, and punish'd with a severe Husband, or tortured with a deboist Husband.

MEDIAT. The best way, Gentlemen, is to make your Complaints, and put up a Petition to the State, with your desires for a Redress. (2.1.39-42)

As in *The Female Academy*, male anxiety and paranoia grows in the face of women's separatist retreat. The men's reactions take a violent different turn as their desperation intensifies. In act two, scene four, they decide to burn the convent:

MONSIEUR COURTLY. Is there no hopes to get those Ladies out of their Convent?

ADVISER. No faith, unless we could set the Convent on fire.

TAKEPL. For Jupiter's* sake, let us do it, let's every one carry a Fire-brand to fire it.

court. Yes, and smoak them out, as they do a Swarm of Bees.

FACIL. Let's go presently about it. (2.4.2-6)

Their violent plan is put on hold when they learn from Monsieur Adviser that there is a great Princess residing in the convent. However, they decide to proceed with their plan when the Princess departs: "'Tis true, but when that Princess is gone, we will surely do it" (2.4.7).-

226 Although they decide to postpone their plan to burn the convent, their impatience and unease persists. They discuss start to discuss about sneaking into the convent:

COURT. But is there no place where we may peak into the Convent?

ADVISER. No, there are no Grates, but Brick and Stone-walls.

FACIL. Let us get out some of the Bricks or Stones.

ADVISER. Alas! the Walls are a Yard-thick.

FACIL. But nothings is difficult to Willing-minds.

ADVISER. My Mind is willing, but my Reason tells me, It is impossible; wherefore, Ple never go about it.

TAKEPL. Faith, let us resolve to put our selves in Womens apparel, and so by that means get into the *Convent*.

ADVISER. We shall be discover'd. (2.4.20-29)

After the discussion, they decide against proceeding with the plan to disguise themselves. However, their anxiety grows over the convent's potential effect on the marriage market. Fearing the gradual loss of prospective marriage candidates, the men decide marry hastily:

1 GENT. There is no hopes of dissolving this *Convent of Pleasure*.

2 GENT. Faith, not as I can perceive.

3 GENT. We may be sure, this *Convent* will never be dissolved, by reason it is ennobled with the company of great Princesses, and glorified with a great Fame; but the fear is, that all the rich Heirs will make Convents, and all the Young Beauties associate themselves in such *Convents*.

1 GENT. You speak reason; wherefore, let us endeavor to get Wives, before they are Incloister'd. (3.10.23-27)

Although the men criticize Lady Happy's retreat and fantasize about violently attacking the convent, the convent is ultimately dissolved not by these aggressive men, but by the disguised Prince, who sneaks into the convent under the disguise of a Princess and gradually wins Lady Happy's love. The Princess' actual sex is never revealed until the end of the play. However, the play foreshadows Princess' disguise when Madam Mediator touches upon her masculine character: "She is a Princely brave Woman truly, of a Masculine Presence"(2.3.8)-226. This technique of hiding the Prince's real identity highlights homosocial and homosexual bonds among the women in the convent. Although the potential of a romantic relationship between the Princess and Lady Happy offers an alternative for women to the patriarchal institution of marriage, when the Princess' gender is revealed, the hope of a romantic same-sex relationship collapses and the patriarchal control is restored through the promise of a traditional marriage.

The potential of a romantic relationship between Lady Happy and the Princess is deliberately emphasized to raise the dramatic effect of Lady Happy's transformation and eventual loss of her voice. The play represents a stark contrast in Lady Happy's character before and after her decision

to marry the Prince. Before the revelation of the Princess' disguise, Lady Happy is depicted as a figure, who claims her autonomy and agency. She is involved in a romantic relationship with the Princess and questions the nature of heterosexual love. Within her separatist convent, she commits herself to pleasure, encourages other women to embrace freedom and discover the alternative forms of pleasures outside the confines of the patriarchal world. In act four, scene one, Lady Happy speaks to herself, contemplating on her love for the Princess: "My Name is Happy, and so was my Condition, before I saw this Princess; but now I am like to be the most unhappy Maid alive: But why may not I love a Woman with the same affection I could a Man? No, no, Nature is Nature, and still will be The same she was from all Eternity" (4.1.1)

The Princess, seeing Lady Happy's preoccupied, professes her love to Lady Happy and they start a conversation on the nature of love, which highlights homosexual love since the reader/audience has not informed about the Prince under the disguise:

PRIN. My dearest Mistress, do you shun my Company? is your Servant become an offence to your sight?

L. HAPPY. No, Servant! your Presence is more acceptable to me then the Presence of our Goddess Nature, for which she, I fear will punish me, for loving you more then I ought to love you.

PRIN. Can Lovers love too much?

L. HAPPY. Yes, if they love not well.

PRIN. Can any Love be more vertuous, innocent and harmless then ours?

L. HAPPY. I hope not.

PRIN. Then let us please our selves, as harmless Lovers use to do.

L. HAPPY. How can harmless Lovers please themselves?

PRIN. Why very well, as, to discourse, imbrace and kiss, so mingle souls together.

L. HAPPY. But innocent Lovers do not use to kiss.

PRIN. Not any act more frequent amongst us Women-kind; nay, it were a sin in friendship, should not we kiss: then let us not prove our selves Reprobates.

They imbrace and kiss, and hold each other in their Arms.

PRIN. These my Imbraces though of Femal kind,

May be as fervent as a Masculine mind. (4.1.4-16)

The dramatic effect of the scene, offering an alternative form of female love and pleasure, is immediately dissolved in the following act. Act five opens with Madam Mediator's cries warning of a disguised man in the convent: "O Ladies, Ladies! you're all betrayed, undone, undone; for there is a man disguised in the Convent, search and you'll find it" (5.1.1). Immediately after Madam Mediator's claim, the ambassador kneels before the Prince and informs him about growing discontent in his kingdom during his absence. After the Prince's identity is revealed, Lady Happy disappears from the scene. Her reaction to this revelation is dismissed, and instead, we learn from Monsieur Advisor that Lady Happy and Prince decided to marry: "... for it is said, the Prince and she agreed to Marry; and the State is so willing, as they account it an honour, and hope shall reap much advantage by the Match" (5.2.23).

As in *The Female Academy*, following the promise of marriage, Lady Happy loses her voice and her portrayal undergoes a drastic change, implying an almost complete disappearance. When she once paralyzed the men with her powerful presence - leaving them incapable of acting against the convent and even driving them to seek wives elsewhere outside of despair- Lady Happy is later reduced to a comic figure, serving as a subject for entertainment for Mimick, the fool. Her first speech after the revelation of the Prince's identity takes place in her wedding with Mimick, the fool.

L. HAPPY to MIMICK. *Mimick*, will you leave your Lady and go with me?

MIMICK. I am a Married Man, and have Married my Ladies Maid *Nan*, and she will keep me at home do what I can; but you've now a *Mimick* of your own, for the *Prince* has imitated a Woman.

L. HAPPY. What you Rogue, do you call me a Fool?

MIMICK. Not I, please your Highness, unless all Women be Fools. (5.3.6-9)

Lady Happy's Convent of Pleasure, which initially represents an autonomous and alternative female space for exploring pleasure and freedom, is ultimately turns into a comic element in the playful dialogue between Mimick and The Prince:

MIMICK. I have an humble Petition to your Highness.

PRINC. Rise; What Petition is that?

MIMICK. That your Highness would be pleased to divide the Convent in two equal parts; one for Fools, and th' other for Married Men, as mad Men.

PRINC. I'll divide it for Virgins and Widows.

MIMICK. That will prove a Convent of Pleasure indeed; but they will never agree, especially if there be some disguised Prince amongst them; but you had better bestow it on old decrepit and bed-ridden Matrons, and then it may be call'd the Convent of Charity, if it cannot possibly be named the Convent of Chastity.

PRINC. Well, to shew my Charity, and to keep your Wife's Chastity, Ple bestow my bounty in a Present, on the Condition you speak the Epilogue. Come, Noble Friends, let us feast before we part. (5.3.12-17)

The playful exchange between Mimick and the Prince reduces the convent to a nostalgic, entertaining memory rather than an institutional challenge to the patriarchal norms. Lady Happy's self-assertive speeches in the beginning of the play fades and she is reduced to a source of entertainment for Mimick, leaving the play without a voice. The play ends with the restoration of patriarchal power, which is symbolized by the Prince's revealed identity and restored manhood. This ending highlights the dissolution of women's separatist communities and their return to the phallogocentric order.

In conclusion, the comparative analysis of *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure* reflects Cavendish's representation of the first alternative model to women's separatist communities, which draws attention to the dissolution of these communities when it lacks alignment with patriarchal interest. In *The Female Academy*, Cavendish reflects how women's need for education urges them to explore an alternative community, which leads them to establish a women-only academy, separated from the patriarchal society to cultivate their intellectual capacities. Throughout the play, Cavendish depicts women's intellectual debates and the female solidarity within the academy, which nurtures women and helps them to assert their agency. However, the men's fear and anxiety in the face of women's retreat heightened through each act, leading them to establish an opposite academy to develop strategies with the aim of dissolving their retreat. At the end, the men dissolved the academy and forced women back to the phallogocentric order through their forceful negotiations of marriage. Likewise, *The Convent of Pleasure* is established by Lady Happy to avoid marriage for she believes that marriage is confining for women. As a result, Lady Happy decides to establish a separatist convent that is solely based on female pleasure and invites a group of ladies. In her separatist convent, everyone including the servants and physicians are female for she believes that men are the troublemakers of

women. The ladies in the convent act in plays that criticize women's oppressed situation under the patriarchy and these plays reflect the motivation behind the establishment of the convent: an alternative to married life, enjoying pleasures of the world. Although the play depicts a nurturing and free environment for women, the disguised Prince in the convent lures Lady Happy back to the patriarchal society by way of marriage. From that moment onwards, her voice is lost and she is reduced to an entertaining subject for the fool, Mimick. Women's alternative communities within the plays ultimately collapse with their return to the phallogentric order by way of marriage. Through these portrayals, Cavendish explores the impracticality of women's alternative communities when it lacks alignment with male interests, revealing how such separatist spaces, though momentarily nurturing and self-sustaining, are portrayed as unachievable in the long term.

4.2. *Bell in Campo*

This sub-chapter focuses on *Bell in Campo* as Cavendish's second alternative model of female separatism, one that emerges not as a retreat from marriage or as an intellectual retreat, but from the context of war. In contrast to the earlier plays, *Bell in Campo* presents a more positive and supportive attitude of men to the women's separatist community. As a result of the extraordinary circumstances of war along with the need for additional military support to the army of Reformation, the establishment of the women-only army is supported and allowed by the men until the united forces of the male and female army defeat the enemy and they bring the news of victory to the kingdom. In the play, this separatist structure of the female army is ultimately shown to be conditional and temporary, sustained only as long as it serves the phallogentric needs of the wartime state. Although the women are rewarded by the King in the end, once the war ends, women's political and military autonomy is quietly dissolved, and they are reintegrated into the unequal social hierarchy, situated below the men. Through this wartime context of female separatism, Cavendish illustrates the conditional situation of alternative women-only communities, suggesting that female separatism can only exist under exceptional circumstances with the disappearance of the patriarchal structure and is unlikely to persist within the patriarchal order. This analysis highlights how *Bell in Campo* critiques the gender politics of its time by staging the radical potential of women-only separatist communities and the underlying patriarchal obstacles that ultimately dissolve them.

Bell in Campo (1662) tells the story of a war between the Kingdom of Reformation and the Kingdom of Faction and the events surrounding the war. Once the news of the war reaches, Lady

Victoria tries to persuade her husband, Lord General, to accompany him. Upon his approval, Lady Victoria and the wives of the King's army, are placed at a garrison town by the men, who want to secure their wives away from the bloody fights of the war. However, Lady Victoria addresses the women, inviting them to establish a female army and fight for their kingdom. These women believe that women are perceived as weak and insufficient by the men and that traditional perception is the reason behind women's subordination in the society where women's role is only to reproduce and obey their husbands. Therefore, the women decide to educate themselves in martial arts and form a female army to show the men that women have potential to cooperate, govern and engage in public affairs as men when they are educated accordingly. Believing that they will free themselves from the subordination of men, these women establish their separatist army and gradually become known to the King's army through their victorious attacks on enemy forces. Following the fame and victory of the women, the King's army offers their submission to the leadership of Lady Victoria's Amazons. Through the end of the play, both armies return to the kingdom where a public display of the King's reward to the female army takes place and the reformed rights of women are announced. The play ends with a celebratory portrayal of the victorious war, Lady Victoria and her female soldiers. In spite of the celebratory tone in the play's end, the women's separatist army dissolves along with their political and military agency and the hope of equal power with men in the public space.

Bell in Campo, consisting of two parts, narrates the events occurring both at the battle garrisons/fields and at the kingdom. The scenes of the battle portray the power dynamic between the political and military agency of the army of Reformation and the female army, illustrating the female force's supremacy over the male army and the men's gradual submission. Subsequently, the scenes portraying the situation at the kingdom revolve around Lady Jantil, the wife of Seigneur Valerosso, and Madam Passionate, the wife of Monsieur La Hardy. These women, sending their husbands to the war, suffer in the absence of their partners and through the portrayal of their experiences during the war, the play offers a critique of marriage and conventional women. The play opens with the news of war: "You hear how this Kingdom of Reformation is preparing for war against the Kingdom of Faction."/ "Yea, for I hear the Kingdom of Faction resolves to war with this Kingdom of Reformation" (1.1.1-2). Following this announcement, Lord General brings the news of his upcoming departure to his wife, Lady Victoria: "My dear heart, you know I am commanded to the wars, ... to leave you is such a cross as my nature sinks under; ... I shall only

carry a body which may fight, but my soul and all the powers thereof will remain with thee" (1.2.2).

Lady Victoria insists on accompanying Lord General to the war:

LADY VICTORIA Then I must partake of your actions, and go along with you.

LORD GENERAL What to the wars?

LADY VICTORIA To any place where you are.

LORD GENERAL But wife you consider not, as that long marches, ill lodgings, much watching, cold nights, scorching days, hunger and danger are ill companions for ladies...

LADY VICTORIA 'Tis said, that love overcomes all things: in your company long marches will be but as a breathing walk, the hard ground feel as a feather-bed, and the starry sky a spangled canopy, hot days a stove to cure cold agues, hunger as fasting days or an eve to devotion, and danger is honour's triumphant chariot (1.2.7-11)

Lord General cannot resist his wife's insistence and accepts her offer, utters the following line: "Well, you have used so much rhetoric to persuade, as you have left me none to deny you, wherefore I am resolved you shall try what your tender sex can endure..." (1.2.14). When the news of Lady Victoria's company, three gentlemen criticize Lord General's decision. Their critique is a conventional representation of male contempt against women's nature. The first gentleman believes that Lord General is mistaken about his decision because Lady Victoria will be a burden to him: "...[H]e 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..." (1.4.2). The second gentlemen criticizes Lord General for limiting his debauchery: "The truth is, I wonder the General will trouble himself with his wife, when it is the only time a married man hath to enjoy a mistress without jealousy, a spritely sound wench, that may go along without trouble ..." (1.4.3). The other gentleman expresses his astonishment against Lord General's love for his wife:

3 GENT For my part I wonder as much that any man should be so fond of his wife as to carry her with him; for I am only glad of the wars, because I have a good pretence to leave my wife behind me; besides an army is a quiet, solitary place, and yields a man a peaceable life compared to that at home... the noise the women make, for their tongues like as an alarum

beat up quarters in every corner of the house, that a man can take no rest; besides every day he hath a set battle with his wife, and from the army of her angry thoughts... (1.4.4)

The fourth speaker subverts the conventional male critique of women and highlights the positive aspects about their company in times of war by providing historical examples:

4 GENT ...'tis no crime nor wonder, for a man to let his wife go along with him when he goes to the wars, for there hath been examples; for Pompey had a wife with him, and so had Germanicus, and so had many great and worthy heroicks, and as for Alexander the great he had a wife or two with him;¹ besides, in many nations men are not only desired, but commanded by the chiefs to let their wives go with them, ... besides, there have been many women that have not only been spectators, but actors, leading armies, and directing battles with good success, and there have been so many of these heroicks, as it would be tedious at this time to recount; besides the examples of women's courage in death, as also their wise conduct, and valiant actions in wars are many... (1.4.5)

Following this supportive representation of women, the other gentlemen express the error in their judgements against the women, who are volunteered to accompany their husbands to the battlefield as follows: "In truth, sir, you have instructed us so well, and have chided us so handsomely, as we are sorry for our error, and ask pardon for our fault, and our repentance shall be known by that we will never censure so again" (1.4.6). Contrary to *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure*, *Bell in Campo* portrays a more positive response to women; despite their initial criticism, these men realize the flaws in their critique against women, who willingly volunteer to stand with their kingdom.

As in *The Convent of Pleasure*, *Bell in Campo* offers a critique of the institution of marriage through the portrayal of the conventional versus unconventional women. Lady Jantil and Madam Passionate represent the conventional women figure, illustrating the portrayal of the traditional married women whereas Lady Victoria and her Amazon army embody the figure of unconventional women by surpassing the traditional boundaries imposed on their sex. Cavendish reflects the types of women within society, illustrating the contrast between conventional and unconventional female approaches through the subsequent scenes set in war garrisons and the kingdom. While in act two, scene nine, Lady Victoria establishes the female army, in the subsequent scene, Lady Jantil and Madam Passionate lament the absence of their husbands. In act two, scene ten, the ladies express their longing:

MADAM PASSIONATE What, all times walking by yourself alone? when your lord returns I will complain, and tell him what dull company you are.

MADAM JANTIL I hope I shall not be from him so long, for he promised to send for me.

MADAM PASSIONATE Nay faith, when you go, as old as I am, I will travel with you to see my husband too. (2.10.4-6)

As Lady Victoria announces the rules of the female army in act three, scene eleven, the following scene portrays the sick and frail Lady Jantil where her maid, Nell Careless and Doctor Educature discuss the poor health condition of Lady Jantil:

NELL CARELESS Faith she seems neither sick nor well, for though her body seems in health, her mind seems to be full of trouble, for she will rise in the midst of the night, and walk about her chamber only with her mantle about her.

DOCTOR EDUCATURE Why doth she so?

NELL CARELESS I ask'd her why she broke her sleep so as to walk about, and she answered me, that it was frightful dreams that broke her sleep, and would not let her rest in quiet.

DOCTOR EDUCATURE Alas she is melancholic in the absence of my lord. (3.12.3-6)

Upon the attack of the female army, Seigneur Valerosso and Monsieur La Hardy are killed. When news of their death arrives, Lady Jantil and Madam Passionate begin mourning their lost husbands. However, the news of death also encourages bachelor gentlemen to pursue a profitable marriage with the now- widowed Lady Jantil and Madam Passionate. This haste for profitable marriage is described as follows:

1 GENT All the young gallants in the town are preparing themselves with fine clothes and feathers to go a-wooing to the two rich widows, the Lady Jantil, and the Lady Passionate

2 GENT Riches are the lodestone of affection, or at least professions.

1 GENT The truth is, riches draw more suitors, than youth, beauty, or virtue. (5.23.2-4)

As highlighted above with the expression of men's intentions regarding marriage, the critique of patriarchal institutionalization of marriage is further emphasized through the characterization of Monsieur la Gravity, Monsieur Compagnion, and Monsieur Comerade. Learning that upon the news of her husband's death Lady Jantil enclosed herself, Monsieur la Gravity decides to woo

Madam Passionate for marriage. In act five, Monsieur la Gravity, Monsieur Compagnion, and Monsieur Comerade discusses the subject further:

MONSIEUR COMPAGNION That's all one unto us, but the noblest, youngest, richest, and fairest widow is gone; for though she is not promised or married, yet she is encloistered, and that is worse than marriage; ...

.....

MONSIEUR LA GRAVITY Well, since she is gone, let us assault the other.

MONSIEUR COMPAGNION What, the old woman that hath never a tooth in her head?

MONSIEUR COMERADE Why, she is rich, and she will kiss the softer for having no bones in her mouth.

.....

MONSIEUR LA GRAVITY Grant it be so, yet it is better to marry an old doting fool, than a wanton young filly. (3.9.4-17)

Motivated to marry Madam Passionate for her wealth, Monsieur La Gravity expresses his interest in marrying her; however, she sends a message to Monsieur Compagnion requesting a private meeting. In act three, scene twelve, Monsieur Comerade tries to persuade his friend for this profitable marriage:

Why, let her keep her age to herself, whilst you keep a young mistress to yourself, and it is better to have an old wife that will look after your family, and be careful and watchful therein, and a young mistress, than a young wife, which will be a tyrannical mistress, which will look after nothing but vanities, and love servants, whilst you poor wretch look like a contented cuckold, and so out of countenance as you dare not show your face ... (3.12.64)

In parallel with the female army's victorious return, the play portrays the unfortunate endings for Lady Jantil and Madam Passionate: Lady Jantil dies beside her husband's tomb, meanwhile Madam Passionate laments on her marriage with Monsieur Compagnion. Madam Passionate expresses her sorrow, highlighting the negative aspects of marriage:

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, ... did I live luxuriously, but now I am made a slave, and in my old age which requires rest and peace, ... he is not only contented to live riotously with my estate, but sits amongst his wenches and rails on me, ... for this idle young fellow whom I have married first seized on all my goods, then let leases for many lives out of my lands, for which he had great fines, and now he cuts down all my woods, and sells all my lands of inheritance, which I foolishly and fondly delivered by deed of gift, the first day I married, divesting myself of all power, which power had I kept in my own hands I might have been used better, whereas now when he comes home drunk, he swears and storms, and kicks me out of my warm bed, and makes me sit shivering and shaking in the cold, whilst my maid takes my place;... (4.17.2)

The play provides the portrayal of conventional women and the misfortunes of married life for women through Lady Jantil and Madam Passionate. On the other hand, the portrayal of Lady Victoria and her Amazon army represents the figure of unconventional women, surpassing the patriarchal boundaries and exploring the potentials of female agency through their separatist military campaign. This opposition between the two representative female groups reflects the existing divide between conventional and unconventional women within a patriarchal society, where some women conform to societal expectations whereas some other women are willing to expand the societal boundaries and to explore alternatives to their prescribed reality. Lady Victoria and the female army embody women's pursuit of alternatives and their exploration of a new female identity that is empowered, autonomous and self-governed.

The figure of a conventional woman is used to emphasize the unconventionality of the female army. Whereas the conventional woman cannot sustain herself and assert her identity without a male partner, the unconventional woman seeks to establish her agency and actualize herself outside of marriage, independent of a partner. The theme of marriage plays a critical role within the play, serving both as the cause of Lady Jantil and Madam Passionate's unfortunate ends and as the motivating force for the formation of the female army to set themselves free of male control. Lady Victoria addresses the women and encourages for the formation of a female army. The stage direction depicts the military atmosphere: *Enter the Lady Victoria and a number of women of all sorts with her, she takes her stand upon a heap of green turfs, as being in the fields before the*

garrison town, and then speaks to those women (2.9.1). She reveals the motivation behind their accompany of men, which is to take part in the war:

LADY VICTORIA 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, ... wherefore if you will take my advice, let us return, and force those that sent us away to consent that we shall be partakers with them, and either win them by persuasions, or lose ourselves by breaking their decrees; for it were better we should die by their angry frown, than by the tongue of infamy.

ALL THE WOMEN Let us return, let us return. (2.9.3)

Following the revelations of their intentions, the women decide to establish a women-only military camp to train in martial arts and to prepare themselves for the war. Lady Victoria addresses women, highlighting the inequalities between the sexes. She claims that men perceive women as incapable and weak, expecting them only to reproduce and obey. This traditional perception, she claims, is the reason behind women's subordination in the society. Therefore, if women can demonstrate their capability in traditionally masculine roles through proper education, they can achieve equal power with men in public affairs. The scene is depicted as follows:

LADY VICTORIA Then thus, we have a body of about five or six thousand women, which came along with some thirty thousand men, but since we came, we are not only thought unuseful, but troublesome, which is the reason we were sent away, for the masculine sex is of an opinion we are only fit to breed and bring forth children, but otherwise a trouble in a commonwealth, ... as they think, as by our incapacities, as having no ingenuity for inventions, nor subtle wit for politicians...nor judgement for counselors, nor secrecy for trust; nor method to keep peace, nor courage to make war, nor strength to defend our selves or country, or to assault an enemy; also that we have not the wisdom to govern a commonwealth, and that we are too partial to sit in the seat of justice, and too pitiful to

execute rigorous authority when it is needful, ...wherefore 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 I say, and make these fields as schools of martial arts and sciences, so shall we become learned in their disciplines of war, and if you please to make me your tutoress, and so your generalless, I shall take the power and command from your election and authority, otherwise I shall most willingly, humbly, and obediently submit to those whom you shall choose.

ALL THE WOMEN You shall be our generalless, our instructress, ruler and commanderess, and we will everyone in particular, swear to obey all your commands, to submit and yield to your punishments, to strive and endeavour to merit your rewards. (2.9.8-9)

Lady Victoria points out the societal inequalities between the sexes, and the subordination of women as the motivating force for the formation of their women-only army. Men's separation from women and their decision to confine them to the safety of the garrison town provide women the necessary freedom to establish their separatist army. Lady Victoria, as the generalless, announces the rules for their separatist army. The first rule is about the military uniform: "...First, be it known, observed, and practiced, that no woman that is able to bear arms, shall go unarmed, having arms to wear, but shall wear them at all times, but when they put them off to change their linen; they shall sleep, eat and rest, and march with them on their bodies (3.2.2). The second rule is about the protection of the female army: "Secondly, be it known, observed and practiced, that every company must watch by turns, whether they have enemies near or no, and at all times, and whosoever drinks any thing but water, or eats any thing but bread, all the time they are on the watch shall be punished with fasting" (3.2.4). Following the emphasis on the military uniform and the protection of the female army from external threats, Lady Victoria emphasizes the separatism of the female army and warns the female soldiers:

READER Fourteenthly, be it known, observed and practiced, that none of this effeminate army admits of 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.

LADY VICTORIA The reason of this is, that men are apt to corrupt the noble minds of women, ... 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; yet there shall be chosen some of the most inferior of this female army, to go into the masculine army, to learn their designs, and give us intelligence of their removals, that we may order our encampings and removings according as we shall think best; ... (3.2.23-24)

The female army's separatism is highlighted with this rule; however, unlike in *The Convent of Pleasure*, this time women aim to sneak into the male space in the disguise of a male soldier as a spy to bring intelligence to the female army. The Amazon soldiers decide to plunder a military camp in order to obtain the necessary military equipment. Since the camp belongs to the King's army, the army they accompanied into the war, they initially hesitate. However, they ultimately comply following Lady Victoria's address:

...I make no question but that our army will increase numerously by those women that will adhere to our party, either out of private and home discontents, or for honour and fame, or for the love of change, and as it were a new course of life; wherefore let us march to the town and also to our design, but first I must have you all swear secrecy. (3.13.2)

This attack reveals the existence of the female army to the army of Reformation. Shocked by the attack, the army of Reformation believes that the female army would not be able to bear the weight of their actions and would ultimately give up their cause:

1 GENT Sir I suppose you are come newly from the army, pray report the battle?

3 GENT Truly I came not now from the army, but from the town the General's heroic lady and the rest of the heroicks did surprise, sieze and plunder.

...

1 GENT And doth their number increase?

3 GENT O very much, for after the surprising¹ of the town the women in that town did so approve of their gallant actions, as every one desired to be enlisted in the roll, and number of the Amazonian² army, ... but that the loss was greater on the reformed army, by reason there were so many of their gallant men slain, but this news made many a sad heart and

weeping eyes in the female army; for some have lost their husbands, some their fathers, others their brothers, lovers and friends

1 GENT Certainly this will fright them out of the field of war, and cause them to lay by their heroic designs. (3.15.7-13)

Lady Victoria motivates the female army by reminding the upcoming battle between the Kingdom of Reformation and the Kingdom of Faction and promises to provide military support to the King's army in the war. In the *Second Part of Bell in Campo*, Lady Victoria addresses "her Heroickesses" before the war begins (1.3.1):

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 divine¹ height, to get an everlasting renown, and infinite praises, ... 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...

ALL THE WOMEN Fear us not, fear us not, we dare and will follow you wheresoever and to what you dare or will lead us, be it through the jaws of Death. (1.3.2-3)

The Second Part of Bell in Campo portrays how the female army holds a superior military position over the army of Reformation and they save the country by providing additional military force to the army of Reformation when they are about to lose the battle. In act two, the bloody battle between the two opposing forces and the victorious arrival of the female army is told as follows:

2 GENT ...at last began a cruel fight, ... at last the army of Faction broke the ranks and files of the army of Reformation, whereupon every squadron began to fall into a confusion, no order was kept; no charge was heard, no command obey'd, terror and fear ran masked about, which helped to rout our army, whereupon the enemy kill'd many of our men, and wounded

many more, and took numbers of prisoners; but upon this defeat came in the female army, in the time that some of the enemy was busy in gathering up the conquered spoils, others in pursuit of the remainders of our men, others were binding up the prisoners, ... but when as the commanders perceived a fresh army coming towards them, their General commanded the trumpets to sound a retreat to gather them together, and also made haste to order and settle his men in battle array, ... but the female army came up so fast and so close to prevent that mischief, as they had not time to execute that design; ...when the female army came to encounter them, ... they did not only rout this army of Faction, killing and wounding many, and set their own countrymen at liberty, and recovered their losses, and gained many spoils, and took numbers of prisoners of their enemies with bag and baggage... (2.5.3)

After this victory, in spite of their shame for being doubly defeated by the female army, the army of Reformation decides to lay siege to the next towns of the enemy. When the female army hears the exclusion of the female army in their plan, Lady Victoria sends a messenger to the army of Reformation, criticizing their insufficient military and praising their own army:

... [T]hey sent a messenger like as an ambassador to tell the masculine army they did wonder at their ingratitude, that they should forget so much their relievers as to go upon any warlike design without making them acquainted therewith, striving as it were to steal the victory out of their hands, but said they, since we are become victorious over our enemies, and masters, and mistresses of the field, by our own valiant actions and prudent conducts, we will maintain our power by our own strengths, for our army is become now numerous, full and flourishing, formed, and conformable by our discipline, skillful by our practice, valiant by our resolutions, powerful by our victory, terrible to our enemies, honourable to our friends, and a subject of envy to the masculine sex; but your army is weak and decrepit, fitter for an hospital than for a field of war, your power is lost, your courage is cold, your discipline disordered,¹ and your command slighted, despised by your enemies, pitied by your friends, forsaken of good fortune, and made subject unto our effeminate sex, which we will use by our power like slaves. (3.5.3)

The female army's harsh criticism of the army of Reformation is received lightly by men. In contrast to the men's negative criticism against the women-only communities, *Bell in Campo*

portrays a positive male response to the women-only community. In act three, men's positive attitude towards the female academy's critique is depicted as follows:

... [T]he men could not choose but smile at the women's high and mighty words, knowing they had all sweet and gentle dispositions and complying natures, ... every man was proud that had but a female acquaintance in the female army...when they were to advise what to do in the affairs of war, and the warring women, the General told them he made no question but that most men knew by experience that women were won by gentle persuasions and fair promises, and not by rigid actions or angry frowns, besides said he, all noble natures strive to assist the weakest in all lawful actions, and that he was no gallant man that submits not to a woman in all things that are honourable, and when he doth dissent it must be in a courtly manner, and a complimentary¹ behaviour and expression, for that women were creatures made by nature, for men to love and admire, to protect and defend, to cherish and maintain, to seek and to sue to, and especially such women which have out-done all their sex, which nature ever made before them; wherefore said he, 'tis fit to these women above all others we should yield ourselves prisoners, not only in love but in arms; wherefore let us treat fairly with them, and give them their own conditions... (3.5.3)

The men's reaction to the female army's message remains traditional, which illustrates men's ignorance of women's actual potential. Instead, they romanticize the female army and read the political critique of the female army as a heartbroken lover's contempt. Although the men's reaction is not aggressive, their unconcerned attitude reflects how they continue to perceive women in a traditional lens despite women's extraordinary military achievements. In act three, stage direction informs the reader about the arrival of news: *Enter the Lady Victoria, and many of her Amazons, then enters a messenger from the masculine army* (3.8.1). In the letter, the King's army accepts the superiority of the female army and requests for the union of their forces:

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, ...but we confess our errors, and do humbly beg our pardons, for if you had accompanied us in our battles, you had kept us safe, for had we fought in your presence, our enemies had never overcome us, since

we take courage from your eyes, life from your smiles, and victory from your good wishes, and had become conquerors by your encouragements, and so we might have triumphed in your favours, but hereafter your rules shall be our methods ...we are not so ambitious as to desire to be commanders, but to join our forces to yours, and to be your assistants, and as your common soldiers; but leaving all these affairs of war to your discretion, offering ourselves to your service, We kiss your hands, and take our leaves for this time. (3.8.5)

This apparent acknowledgement of the female army's superiority is expressed as a romantic praise and tribute to a romantic partner. The women are depicted almost like the goddesses and mythical characters. This emphasis on sensual and physical contact, combined with the image of men sacrificing themselves for their women, highlights the romantic symbolism within their letter. This letter foreshadows the ending of the play where women are not given equal rights with men but experience improved rights within the domestic sphere as wives. However, unaware of their eventual fate, the female army rejoices upon receiving the letter, believing that they have convinced the men of their potential and capacity and that they are free from their traditional social status. The stage direction stresses women's amusement upon receiving the letter: *All the women fall into a great laughter, ha, ha, ha, ha* (3.8.6). Lady Victoria celebrates women's achievement:

LADY VICTORIA Noble Heroickesses, by your valours, and constant, and resolute proceedings, you have brought your tyrants to be your slaves; those that commanded your absence, now humbly sue your presence,...now nothing to be done in that army without our advice, with an humble desire they may join their forces with ours: but gallant 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; for what we want of strength, we have supplied by industry, and had we not done what we have done, we should have lived in ignorance and slavery. (3.8.7)

Reading the men's reaction in act three, scene five and men's romanticizing of the female army in parallel to the female army's reaction to the men's letter reveals the fact that how women are mistaken to believe that men perceive women as their equals. In act three, scene five, when the female army sends a messenger to them, men express their traditional views on the nature of

women claiming that they need to ignore women's harsh words since "all noble natures strive to assist the weakest in all lawful actions" (3.5.3).

In act five, the armies return to the kingdom with victory, highlighting the restoration of the monarchy. The scene depicts the public celebration and the King's reward for the armies. The stage direction sets the scene as: "*Enter many prisoners which march by two and two, then enter many that carry the conquered spoils, then enters the Lady Victoria in a gilt chariot drawn with eight white horses, four on abreast, the horses covered with cloth of gold, and great plumes of feathers on their heads*" (5.20.17). In recognition of their services to the crown, Lady Victoria and her female soldiers are rewarded by the King. First, the public announcements are made regarding the reformed rights of women as a reward for the services of the female army:

[RECORDER] Victorious lady, you have brought peace safety and conquest to this kingdom by your prudent conduct and valiant actions, ... Wherefore our gracious King is pleased to give you that which was never granted nor given to any before, ... our gracious King hath caused an act to be made and granted to all your sex, which act I have order to declare, as

First, that all women shall hereafter in this kingdom be mistress in their own houses and families.

Secondly, they shall sit at the upper end of the table above their husbands.

Thirdly, that they shall keep the purse.

Fourthly, they shall order their servants, turning from, or taking into their service what number they will, placing them how they will, and ordering how they will, and giving them what wages they will or think fit.

Fifthly, they shall buy in what provisions they will.

Sixthly, all the jewels, plate, and household furniture they shall claim as their own, and order them as they think good.

Seventhly, they shall wear what fashioned clothes they will.

Eighthly, they shall go abroad when they will, without control, or giving of any account thereof. Ninthly, they shall eat when they will, and of what they will, and as much as they will, and as often as they will.

Tenthly, they shall go to plays, masques, balls, churchings, christenings, preachings, whensoever they will, and as fine and bravely attired as they will. Lastly, that they shall be of their husbands' counsel. (5.20.19)

Although the announcement has a celebratory tone and highlights improvements in women's rights in the announcement, women are still awarded only within the domestic space. The first rule declares the women as the mistresses of their houses, emphasizing the traditional focus on confining them within the domestic space of the house. The rest of the other improvements – such as controlling the household finances, having authority over the hiring/firing the servants and leaving the house freely – are again related to the domestic rather than the public roles. The announcement regarding women's right to take part in their husband's decision-making implies the upper position of men in the final judgement. Therefore, the King's reward can be claimed to be improved as opposed to women's prior situation but their subordinate position to men within social hierarchy are not changed. Similarly, Lady Victoria is praised for her services to the kingdom and rewarded with fame and respect but she is not granted with a political, military or public position:

[RECORDER] As for you most gallant lady, the King hath caused to be enacted that

First, all poets shall strive to set forth your praise.

Secondly, that all your gallant acts shall be recorded in story, and put in the chief library of the kingdom.

Thirdly, that your arms you fought in, shall be set in the King's armoury.

Fourthly, that you shall always wear a laurel garland.

Fifthly, you shall have place next to the King's children.

Sixthly, that all those women that have committed such faults as are a dishonour to the female sex, shall be more severely punished than heretofore, in not following your exemplary

virtues, and all those who have followed your example shall have respective honour done to them by the state.

Seventhly and lastly, your figure shall be cast in brass, and then set in the midst of the city armed as it was in the day of battle. (5.20.22)

Lady Victoria is rewarded with fame and title. However, when the scene of reward and her address to the female army regarding the rights of women are compared, it can be said that Lady Victoria attains fame and title but cannot achieve her dreams of “...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 our- selves free...” (2.9.8). Similarly, the King’s reward to the female army is limited only to a change in the ranks among the wives of aristocratic men and the ladies of the female army:

Our gracious King hath caused to be enacted, as First, all the chief female commanders shall have place, as every lord’s wife shall take place of an earl’s wife that hath not been a soldier in the army; every knight’s wife before a baron’s wife that hath not been a soldier in the army; an esquire’s wife before a knight’s wife; a doctor’s wife before an esquire’s wife that hath not been [a] soldier in the army; a citizen’s wife before a doctor’s wife; a yeoman’s wife before a citizen’s wife that hath not been a soldier in the army; ... (5.20.26)

The play ends with the celebratory tone and the announcements of the women’s rewards, portraying a positive atmosphere and support for the female army. Yet, when the female army’s aim for equal rights with men and the play’s ending are critically examined, it can be concluded that the play ends with the restoration of patriarchy and women’s return to their traditional position as wives. *Bell in Campo* presenting the second alternative model of women’s separatism portrays the temporary male allowance and support to women’s separatism during times of war. Once the war ends and pre-war patriarchal conditions are restored, the female army dissolves and they lose their political and military agency. Cavendish’s *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* and *Bell in Campo* portray how women’s separatist communities cannot be sustained when opposed to the patriarchal structures. Through the depiction of women-only, separatist communities in her aforementioned plays, Cavendish provides two alternative models to the

question of feasibility and sustainability of alternative women-only communities and separatism in the context of seventeenth century England.



CONCLUSION

Margaret Cavendish's *The Female Academy*, *The Convent of Pleasure* and *Bell in Campo* written in the context of the seventeenth century, narrate the events around women's establishment of alternative separatist communities and their gradual dissolution by the male involvement. Cavendish is unique in her approach to the early formations of alternative women-only communities as being the earliest female playwright in England highlighting the phallogentric oppression that drives women to establish alternative women-only societies, free from the patriarchal influences. Cavendish not only highlights the need for women-only communities but also presents the female solidarity, agency, and support among women in their successful ventures. Her two alternative models of women's separatist communities reveal that although women establish alternative communities to escape the patriarchal influences, their separatist cannot be sustained under phallogentric pressures.

Women's search for an alternative women-only community starts earlier than Cavendish's plays. Starting from Sapphic Island of Lesbos, women have been establishing women-only communities as an alternative way of life to the patriarchal society. Around the Middle Ages, early formations of women-only societies were religious or semi-religious depending on each distinctive community. Later, women formed women-only guilds and other artistic and intellectual societies – including the The *Précieuses*, the *Bluestocking Society*, the *New Female Coterie* and various artistic female communities– to open a women-only space where they can operate freely without the male interference. Women's interest in women-only spaces was not limited to historical reality, gradually this interest has been reflected in literature. As early as the fifteenth century, women started to explore and imagine women-only separatist communities in their literary writings. Christine de Pizan's *The Book of The City of Ladies* is the earliest literary work on women's separatism, where a women-only city is built by three allegorical figures.

Following Pizan and her defense of women, *querelle des femmes* debates became a medium for women to voice their critique for injustices of men. With the literary developments within *querelle des femmes* debates, women started to follow Pizan's example and produce literary works centered on women-only communities – among these figures are Amelia Lanyer, Mary Astell and Moderata Fonte. Although the establishment of alternative women-only societies and their literary

counterparts appeared as early as the Middle Ages, these concepts were mostly brought to the foreground in the twentieth century by the feminist thinkers. It was during this period, not only reasons behind the establishments of women-only separatist communities but also their practicality, advantages and disadvantages were discussed. In the twentieth century, women explored the concept of separatism and women-only communities along with its practicality and advantages/disadvantages not only in feminist utopian literature but also in historical reality. Redstockings, NYRF (New York Radical Feminists), Cell 16, The Feminists, Radicalesbians and The Furies are among the historical examples of women-only societies. During the twentieth century, themes of separatism and women-only communities were among the most discussed topics for the feminist theory. Women engaged with separatism not only through aforementioned feminist separatist groups but also within the literary imagination through utopian novels. Alice Sheldon's *Houston, Houston, Do You Read?* (1976), Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975), and Sally Miller Gearhart' *The Wanderground* (1978) are among the utopian novels that center on separatism and women-only communities.

For the feminist theory, Adrienne Rich is an influential figure with her concepts of woman-identified experience, lesbian continuum and re-vision. Rich points out a historical feminist tradition starting from as early as Middle Ages and continues till the contemporary era; she claims that women have been experiencing similar challenges and oppressions by the patriarchy and their experiences have been shaped around woman-identified experience and lesbian continuum. Through woman-identified experience, which symbolizes women's continued oppression under the patriarchy, women exist in a lesbian continuum throughout history and they strive to voice their experiences of patriarchal oppression through the safe and nurturing space of women-only communities and the medium of literature. Pointing out a feminist impulse even in the earlier works, Rich encourages us to approach women's writings through the concept of re-vision by highlighting the continued patriarchal oppression against women and women's shared experiences throughout history. Rich's standpoint is crucial to understand and appreciate women writers' portrayal of women's experiences and critique of patriarchy in early history so that we can reveal the continued oppression of women and their various experiences in patriarchal structures.

Motivated by this perspective, this thesis examined Cavendish's two alternative models on the feasibility and sustainability of separatist women-only communities in *The Female Academy* *The Convent of Pleasure* and *Bell in Campo* through the theme of retreat and separatism in the context

of education, marriage and politics. I claimed that Cavendish portrays a two-modelled approach of women's separatism in her abovementioned plays, where women's separatist communities can only temporarily be allowed to sustain if aligned with the patriarchal needs and conditions. To this end, in the introductory chapter, I provided a historical context to female separatism where a detailed analysis of alternative female communities in early history such as Beguines, women's guilds, the *Précieuses*, and Bluestocking society and the radical feminists' separatist living collectives in the twentieth century have been addressed. Following the introductory chapter, Chapter II aimed to provide the literary context of women writers' employment of separatism in their literary works with references to medieval, early modern and twentieth century feminist writers being extensively discussed.

In Chapter III, Cavendish's themes on women's situation of the seventeenth century in the context of education, marriage, and politics is examined to highlight the historical contexts in regards to patriarchal oppression against women and Cavendish's critique of marriage, education and politics in *The Female Academy*, *Bell in Campo*, and *The Convent of Pleasure*. In this chapter, early feminists' interest in women's education, the lack of an institutionalized women's education, marriage ballads, and women's political engagements during the Civil Wars are examined so that the reasons behind women's establishment of separatist spaces and male anxiety towards these spaces in *The Female Academy*, *Bell in Campo*, and *The Convent of Pleasure* could be clearly understood. Following the historical context of Cavendish's themes of education, marriage and politics, Chapter III focused on Margaret Cavendish and her literary persona along with an introduction to two-modelled framework of female separatism in Cavendish's plays following a detailed analysis of literary review on *The Female Academy*, *Bell in Campo*, and *The Convent of Pleasure*.

Chapter IV provided an extensive analysis on Cavendish's two alternative models on the feasibility and sustainability of separatist women-only communities in *The Female Academy*, and *The Convent of Pleasure*. In this chapter, Cavendish's first alternative model in *The Female Academy*, and *The Convent of Pleasure*, where women's success of establishing alternative women-only society are destroyed when men draw them back to the patriarchal order by way of marriage, is discussed. Following the analysis of the first alternative model, a sub-chapter on *Bell in Campo* provided a detailed analysis on the play as the second alternative model of separatism. In the second alternative, *Bell in Campo*, a women's separate community emerges in response to

the war. Although women's separatism is portrayed in a positive light with the men's support, once the pre-war patriarchal power is restored, women are once again expected to return to the phallogentric structure and to their subordinate position under their husbands. By presenting these two alternative models, Cavendish suggests that, women's attempts at separatism and establishment of women-only communities are only temporarily tolerated when they aligned with the needs of the phallogentric order and that, under the prevailing patriarchal conditions, any attempt to establish women-only societies is ultimately destined to be interrupted and dismantled by the prevailing patriarchal order.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

"A mouzell for Melastomus, the cynicall bayter of, and foule mouthed barker against Euahs sex. Or an apologeticall answere to that irreligious and illiterate pamphlet made by Io. Sw. and by him intituled, The arraignment of women. By Rachel Speght." In the digital collection Early English Books Online. <https://name.umd.umich.edu/A12750.0001.001>. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Accessed 4 May 2025.

"An essay to revive the antient education of gentlewomen in religion, manners, arts & tongues with an answer to the objections against this way of education." In the digital collection Early English Books Online 2. <https://name.umd.umich.edu/A51611.0001.001>. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Accessed May 29, 2025.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Documenta Catholica Omnia, <https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/>. Accessed 5 July 2025.

Astell, Mary. *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, for the Advancement of Their True and Greatest Interest by a Lover of Her Sex*. Early English Books Online, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, <https://name.umd.umich.edu/A26092.0001.001>. Accessed 29 June 2025.

Beasley, Faith E. *Salons, History, and the Creation of Seventeenth-Century France*. Routledge, 2017.

Boddy, Rachel Eleanor. "I'm Quite Regardless What the World Can Say!": Marriage, Media, Agency and the New Female Coterie in the Late Eighteenth Century. *Master's thesis*, Victoria University of Wellington, 2019.

Borer, Mary Cathcart. "Early Stuarts and Commonwealth." *Willingly to School: A History of Women's Education*. Lutterworth Press, 2023.

Battigelli, Anna. *Margaret Cavendish and The Exiles of The Mind*. Kentucky, The University Press of, 1998.

Bonin, Erin Lang. "Margaret Cavendish's Dramatic Utopias and the Politics of Gender." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2000, pp. 339–54. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1556132>. Accessed 29 June 2024.

- Boyle, Deborah. "Margaret Cavendish on Gender, Nature, and Freedom." *Hypatia*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2013, pp. 516–32. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24542000>. Accessed 24 Nov. 2024.
- Crowston, Clare. "Women, Gender, and Guilds in Early Modern Europe: An Overview of Recent Research." *International Review of Social History*, vol. 53, 2008, pp. 19–44. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26405466>. Accessed 4 May 2025.
- Clark, Sandra. "The Broadside Ballad and the Woman's Voice." *Debating Gender in Early Modern England, 1500–1700*, edited by Cristina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 103–120.
- Cavendish, Margaret. *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays*. Edited by Anne Shaver, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999.
- . *Bell in Campo and The Sociable Companions*. Edited by Alexandra G. Bennett, Broadview Press, 2002.
- Chalmers, Hero. "The Politics of Feminine Retreat in Margaret Cavendish's The Female Academy and The Convent of Pleasure." *Women's Writing*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1999, pp. 81–94.
- Crawford, Julie. "Convents and Pleasures: Margaret Cavendish and the Drama of Property." *Renaissance Drama*, vol. 32, 2003, pp. 177–223. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41917380>. Accessed 29 May 2025.
- De Moor, Tine. "Single, Safe, and Sorry? Explaining the Early Modern Beguine Movement in the Low Countries." *Journal of Family History*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2014, pp. 3–21. *SAGE Journals*, doi:10.1177/0363199013515167.
- D'Monte, Rebecca, and Nicole Pohl, editors. *Female Communities 1600–1800: Literary Visions and Cultural Realities*. Macmillan Press, 2000.
- De Gournay, Marie. *Apology for the Woman Writing and Other Works*. Edited and translated by Richard Hillman and Colette Quesnel, University of Chicago Press, 2002.
- Echols, Alice. *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967–1975*. Foreword by Ellen Willis, University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

- Enke, Anne. "Smuggling Sex through the Gates: Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of Space in Second Wave Feminism." *American Quarterly*, vol. 55, no. 4, 2003, pp. 635–67. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30041999>. Accessed 4 May 2025.
- Furey, Constance M. "Utopia of Desire: The Real and Ideal in Æmilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, Fall 2006, pp. 421–442. Duke University Press, doi:10.1215/10829636-2006-005.
- Fonte, Moderata. *The Worth of Women: Wherein Is Clearly Revealed Their Nobility and Their Superiority to Men*. Edited and translated by Virginia Cox, The University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Grist, Elizabeth Rosalind. *The Salon and the Stage: Women and Theatre in Seventeenth-Century France*. PhD thesis, Queen Mary & Westfield College, University of London, 2001.
- Grant, Douglas. *Margaret the First: A Biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, 1623–1673*. University of Toronto Press, 1957.
- Hult, David F., et al. *Debate of the Romance of the Rose*. University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Haraguchi, Jennifer. "Convent Alternatives for Rich and Poor Girls in Seventeenth-Century Florence: The Lay Conservatories of Eleonora Ramirez di Montalvo (1602- 1659)." *Devout Laywomen in the Early Modern World*, edited by Alison Weber, Routledge, 2016.
- Herold, Vanessa. "In the Shadow of the Sun King: The *Précieuse*." *Paroles gelées*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1996, doi:10.5070/PG7141003033.
- Hughes, Ann. *Gender and the English Revolution*. Routledge, 2012.
- Holmesland, Oddvar. *Utopian Negotiation: Aphra Behn and Margaret Cavendish*. New York, Syracuse University Press, 2013.
- Kowaleski, Maryanne, and Judith M. Bennett. "Crafts, Gilds, and Women in the Middle Ages: Fifty Years after Marian K. Dale." *Signs*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1989, pp. 474–501. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174558>. Accessed 4 May 2025.
- Knott, Sarah and Barbara Taylor, editors. *Women, Gender and Enlightenment*. PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2005.
- Lawton, Denis and Peter Gordon. *A History of Western Educational Ideas*. London, Woburn Press, 2002.

- Leduc, Guyonne. "Women's Education in Margaret Cavendish's Plays." *Cercles*, vol. 4, 2002, pp. 16–38.
- Lardinois, André. "Lesbian Sappho and Sappho of Lesbos." *From Sappho to de Sade: Moments in the History of Sexuality*, edited by Jan Bremmer, Routledge, 1989, pp. 15–35.
- Meyers, Diana Tietjens, editor. *Feminist Social Thought: A Reader*. Routledge, 1997.
- Mellor, Anne K. "On Feminist Utopias." *Women's Studies*, vol. 9, 1982, pp. 241–262.
- Malcolmson, Cristina. "Christine de Pizan's *City of Ladies* in Early Modern England." *Debating Gender in Early Modern England, 1500–1700*, edited by Cristina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. 15–36.
- Mintz, Samuel I. "The Duchess of Newcastle's Visit to the Royal Society." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 51, no. 2, 1952, pp. 168–76. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27713402>. Accessed 5 May 2025.
- Makin, Batshua. *An Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen in Religion, Manners, Arts & Tongues with an Answer to the Objections Against This Way of Education*. *Early English Books Online*, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, <https://name.umd.umich.edu/A51611.0001.001>. Accessed 4 July 2025.
- New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE). *Bible Gateway*, <https://www.biblegateway.com>. Accessed 5 July 2025.
- Narain, Mona. "Notorious Celebrity: Margaret Cavendish and the Spectacle of Fame." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2009, pp. 69–95. JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25674377>. Accessed 29 May 2025.
- Nadelhaft, Jerome. "The Englishwoman's Sexual Civil War: Feminist Attitudes Towards Men, Women, and Marriage 1650-1740." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 43, no. 4, 1982, pp. 555–79. JSTOR, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2709343>. Accessed 5 May 2025.
- "Orations of divers sorts accommodated to divers places written by the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle." In the digital collection *Early English Books Online*. <https://name.umd.umich.edu/A53051.0001.001>. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Accessed May 29, 2025.

Pizan, Christine de. *The Book of the City of Ladies*. Translated by Earl Jeffrey Richards, Persea Books, 1982.

Phillippy, Patricia, editor. *A History of Early Modern Women's Writing*. Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Pohl, Nicole. *Women, Space and Utopia, 1600–1800*. Routledge, 2016.

"Positions vvherin those primitiue circumstances be examined, which are necessarie for the training vp of children, either for skill in their booke, or health in their bodie. VVritten by Richard Mulcaster, master of the schoole erected in London anno. 1561. in the parish of Sainct Laurence Povvntneie, by the vvorshipfull companie of the merchaunt tailers of the said citie." In the digital collection Early English Books Online.
<https://name.umd.umich.edu/A07883.0001.001>. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Accessed May 29, 2025.

Pal, Carol. *Republic of Women: Rethinking the Republic of Letters in the Seventeenth Century*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Paloma, Dolores. "Margaret Cavendish: Defining the Female Self." *Women's Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1–2, 1980, pp. 55–66. *Taylor & Francis Online*,
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00497878.1980.9978502>.

Pasupathi, Vimala C. "NEW MODEL ARMIES: RE-CONTEXTUALIZING THE CAMP IN MARGARET CAVENDISH'S 'BELL IN CAMPO.'" *ELH*, vol. 78, no. 3, 2011, pp. 657–85. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41236562>. Accessed 29 May 2025.

Pearson, Jacqueline. *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Women Dramatists 1642–1737*. New York, St. Martin's Press, 1988.

Pohl, Nicole and Brenda Tooley, editors. *Gender and Utopia in the Eighteenth Century: Essays in English and French Utopian Writing*. Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007.

"Playes written by the thrice noble, illustrious and excellent princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle." In the digital collection Early English Books Online.
<https://name.umd.umich.edu/A53060.0001.001>. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Accessed May 29, 2025.

- Romack, Katherine. "Monstrous Births and the Body Politic: Women's Political Writings and the Strange and Wonderful Travails of Mistris Parliament and Mrs. Rump." *Debating Gender in Early Modern England, 1500–1700*, edited by Christina Malcolmson and Mihoko Suzuki, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, pp. [209-230].
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs*, vol. 5, no. 4, 1980, pp. 631–60. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173834>. Accessed 4 May 2025.
- . "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." *College English*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1972, pp. 18–30. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/375215>. Accessed 4 May 2025.
- Reynolds, Myra. *The Learned Lady in England, 1650-1760*. The Riverside Press Cambridge, 1920.
- "Salve deus rex iudæorum containing, 1. The passion of Christ, 2. Eues apologie in defence of women, 3. The teares of the daughters of Ierusalem, 4. The salutation and sorrow of the Virgine Marie : with diuers other things not vnfit to be read / written by Mistris Æmilia Lanyer ..." In the digital collection Early English Books Online 2. <https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A05085.0001.001>. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Accessed May 29, 2025.
- Suzuki, Mihoko. *Subordinate Subjects: Gender, the Political Nation, and Literary Form in England, 1588-1688*. New York, Routledge, 2016.
- Simons, Walter. *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200–1565*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.
- Schmidt, Ariadne. "Women and Guilds: Corporations and Female Labour Market Participation in Early Modern Holland." *Gender & History*, vol. 21, no. 1, Apr. 2009, pp. 170–189.
- Shugar, Dana R. *Separatism and Women's Community*. University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Stanton, Kamille Stone. "'An Amazonian Heroickess': The Military Leadership of Queen Henrietta Maria in Margaret Cavendish's 'Bell in Campo' (1662)." *Early Theatre*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2007, pp. 71–86. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43499411>. Accessed 29 May 2025.
- Stehle, Eva. *Performance and Gender in Ancient Greece: Nondramatic Poetry in Its Setting*. Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. 262–318.

Tertullian. *The Apparel of Women*. Public Library, <http://public-library.uk/ebooks/95/29.pdf>. Accessed 5 July 2025.

The Araignment of Leuud, Idle, Froward, and Vnconstant Women; or, The Vanitie of Them, Choose You Whether: With a Commendation of Wise, Vertuous and Honest Women: Pleasant for Married Men, Profitable for Young Men, and Hurtfull to None. Early English Books Online, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, <https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A13240.0001.001>. Accessed 4 May 2025.

The Womens Sharpe Revenge: Or an Answer to Sir Seldome Sober That Writ Those Railing Pamphlets Called the Iuniper and Crabtree Lectures, &c. Being a Sound Reply and a Full Confutation of Those Bookes: With an Apology in This Case for the Defence of Us Women. Performed by Mary Tattle-Well, and Ioane Hit-Him-Home, Spinsters. Early English Books Online, University of Michigan Library Digital Collections, <https://name.umdl.umich.edu/a13395.0001.001>. Accessed 4 May 2025.

"The English gentlewoman, drawne out to the full body expressing, what habilliments doe best attire her, what ornaments doe best adorne her, what complements doe best accomplish her. By Richard Brathvwait Esq." In the digital collection Early English Books Online. <https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A16659.0001.001>. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Accessed November 24, 2024.

"The holy state by Thomas Fuller ..." In the digital collection Early English Books Online. <https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A40674.0001.001>. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Accessed May 29, 2025.

"The philosophical and physical opinions written by Her Excellency the Lady Marchionesse of Newcastle." In the digital collection Early English Books Online. <https://name.umdl.umich.edu/A53055.0001.001>. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Accessed May 29, 2025.

Vives, Juan Luis. *The Education of a Christian Woman: A Sixteenth-Century Manual*, edited by Charles Fantazzi. London, The University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Vander Motten, J.P., and Katrien Daemen-de Gelder. “Margaret Cavendish, the Antwerp Carmel and The Convent of Pleasure”. Ghent University Library, 2014, <https://lib.ugent.be/catalog/pug01:4417446>. Accessed 29 May 2025.

Van Schurman, Anna Maria. *Whether a Christian Woman Should Be Educated and Other Writings from Her Intellectual Circle*. Edited and translated by Joyce L. Irwin, University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Weber, Alison, editor. *Devout Laywomen in the Early Modern World*. Routledge, 2016.

Whitaker, Katie. *Mad Madge: The Extraordinary Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, the First Woman to Live by Her Pen*. Basic Books, 2002.