'TORMENT TO A RESTLESSE MIND': AN ANALYSIS OF MAJOR THEMES IN *Poems. and Fancies* (1653) BY MARGARET CAVENDISH

by

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SYNOPSIS

Margaret Cavendish's first publication is one of the least studied of her works, modern scholarly interest being focused largely on her plays. This thesis argues that *Poems, and Fancies* is as significant a piece of work as any material produced later in her prolific career.

Through the themes of writing, war, fairies and nature, Cavendish's poetry reveals a restless and frequently troubled mind as well as a highly individual imagination. Her desire to belong to the male worlds of the writer and the natural philosopher struggles with her desire to transcend those worlds by transforming perceived feminine weaknesses into strengths. The various manifestations of Cavendish's restlessness are examined through the chosen themes, which are considered also in the wider context of the complete work.

Cavendish's motivation is considered in the light of her relationship with William Cavendish, her longing for immortality and her knowledge that her writing would be harshly received by her contemporaries because she was female. The thesis concludes that the ultimate torment to her restless mind was the inability of the rest of the world to rise to her vision but that she successfully created a very individual literary space for herself that defies classification or received ideas of quality.

36,000 words.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

To seek about for that you cannot finde.
Shall be a torment to a restlesse Mind.
Poems, and Fancies p.153

While in recent years, scholarly interest in the work of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-73) has grown steadily, her first work *Poems, and Fancies,* has been largely overlooked in favour of her plays and Utopian writing. While modern anthologies frequently include poems taken from *Poems, and Fancies,* it is notable that the same small group of poems, taken largely from the prefatory and postscript sections of the work, tend to be used[1]. Therefore, while useful as an introduction to this less studied first work, these anthologies do not give any clear picture of the whole text, with its wide range of subject matter and individual, arguably eccentric, approach.

It may be that Cavendish's first work is considered unrepresentative, as her later publications show a greater development of her feminist ideas, in which there is much modern interest. Also the theory of atomism laid out in *Poems, and Fancies* was abandoned by Cavendish almost immediately after its publication, and does not demonstrate her informed interest in natural philosophy as developed through correspondence and study in later years, but rather her early thoughts on the new science. Neither can the work be considered with reference to received terms of what constitutes quality verse, in craft or content. Cavendish

frequently repeats herself, forces awkward lines to fit metrically, uses contradictory arguments and is effusive, it would seem, by her very nature. But the poems give an insight into a fascinating mind, full of potential and intelligence, even if hampered by a lack of education and victim of its own enthusiasm. There is also an enormous courage in the work, as Cavendish was fully aware of its weaknesses, and the reception likely from her contemporaries, but her longing for immortality as a writer was too great to let this daunt her. The contention of this thesis is that the poems of Cavendish's first work are as important as any material produced later in her prolific career.

The circumstances under which this first publication was produced are significant. At the time she wrote *Poems, and Fancies*, Cavendish was in London, parted from the husband she adored, due to the financial difficulties caused by his wartime losses and subsequent exile. She had returned to England hoping to claim funds from his sequestered estate, but was unsuccessful and unhappy at being parted from him. Therefore she began writing, so she says in one of the ten poems and addresses which preface her book, to divert herself from sad thoughts and sleeplessness:

> knowing him to be in great Wants and my selfe in the same Condition
> (*Poems, and Fancies*, sig.A7²)

By the time a heavily revised second edition was published in 1664 and a slightly revised version of the 1664 edition in

1668. the Cavendish fortunes had altered in many ways and the first edition remains the issue of a uniquely lonely and difficult period of Cavendish's life. Therefore, I have chosen the 1653 edition as the basis for this thesis, following the precedent set by George Parfitt in the Scolar Press Facsimile reprint of 1972 (Menston Press). As Cavendish's first published work, it was written with the expectation of criticism and the full awareness of her position as a woman writer, but without personal experience of what that meant to her contemporaries, which could only come after public response. It is my belief, therefore, that the later editions of the work, which show heavy revision and other forms of self-dignification in the style and presentation, are the result of concerns that come with retrospective knowledge. They lack the freshness of the original, without actually improving the poems in terms of poetic quality. While the three editions of this first work are each interesting in the changes they reflect in Cavendish's life and status, it is only the earliest that contains all the hopes and fears of the complete beginner. All the work which came after *Poems, and Fancies*, including the revised editions, must have been informed to some extent by the public and critical response to this first venture into print. Also, modern scholarly opinion is divided over the authority of the revisions in the later editions. In his biography of Cavendish, Douglas Grant declares it:

> impossible to believe that Margaret undertook the revisions herself,[3]

as the self-discipline and painstaking labour required for this were not in keeping with her avowed preference for the '..Free. and Noble Stile' (*PF*, p.110), and this opinion is supported by George Parfitt in his note to the Scolar Press Facsimile[4]. As her biographer, Grant could be expected to have more authority on Cavendish than more generalizing critics, but a later biographer, Sara Keller Mendelsohn asserts that Cavendish:

> paid an anonymous drudge to 'correct' the stylistic errors of her earliest works for second editions.[5]

Both these views, however, are based upon Cavendish's own words. It is known that Cavendish used a secretary, because her own handwriting was almost illegible and her orthography eccentric at the very least, but the extent to which she kept watch over that secretary's transcription of her work is not recorded. Both Grant and Mendelsohn reveal more about their own personal view of Cavendish, as delightfully unconventional or an arrogant egocentric respectively, than about the authority of the revision of the second and third editions. A more objective argument is used to claim that:

> Given the Duchess' personal involvement in the production of her books, many of the variants in the second edition must represent direct authorial interventions;[6]

but even this is based on supposition derived from the Duchess' own description of her character, and it is notable that while scholars appear to agree that Cavendish is

extremely unreliable when consistent illustrations of her character are required, it is nevertheless her autobiography which is cited as evidence time and again. Essentially it is not known to what extent Cavendish was involved in the revision of later editions of *Poems, and Fancies* or other works. From studies of the three editions, I would argue that Cavendish's 'Free, and Noble Stile' (*PF*, p.110) is not so much a habit of literary composition that cannot contemplate revision, as a characteristic of the writing itself that is marred by later revisions. Therefore, in my view, regardless of the identity of the editor, the later editions in attempting to polish the original, succeed only in stilting the work. Therefore both for reasons of chronology of publication and a belief in the loss of some of the essential qualities of the work in the later editions, I have chosen the 1653 edition as my text for analysis. To consider the whole work is beyond the limitations of this thesis; therefore I have chosen four themes I consider to be representative of Cavendish's concerns and writing style and through which an insight into her motivation may be gained. However, it is necessary to be aware of the form of the whole work to appreciate the contextual position of the poems analysed.

Poems, and Fancies was printed in a Folio Edition in 1653 by T.R. for J. Martin and J. Allestrye at the Bell in Saint Paul's Church Yard. While John Martin is known to have had a long career as a London bookseller, working on other occasions

also with Allestrye, the printer T.R. is not known, although some suggestions as to his identity are made by George Parfitt[7]. The printing contains many errors and suggests a hurried and inexpensive venture, which, considering Margaret Cavendish's straitened circumstances at the time, as well as her impulsive nature, is perhaps not surprising. It is regrettable, however, because her decision to have her work printed was guaranteed to attract a negative response, being by the young wife, already considered eccentric, of a famous Royalist exile. Both her gender and the political climate of the time made a positive reception unlikely. Cheap and hasty printing was unlikely to add to the credibility of the work. By the time *Poems, and Fancies* was reprinted in 1664 and 1668, the Cavendish fortunes had improved and this is reflected in the style of presentation.

Cavendish's first work was an ambitious project of considerable length and range of subjects, containing two hundred and seventy eight poems, essays and letters. It is divided into nineteen sections, beginning with ten introductory dedications and epistles and ending with seven untitled epilogues. Sandwiched between the dedication and epilogues are the poems and 'fancies', which at first glance appear to be in four groups each headed by 'The Claspe'[8]. The 'claspes', again at first glance, seem to set out the philosophy or motivation behind the poems which follow. For instance the first claspe describes the striving of

Cavendish's brain in writing and is followed by poems about the working of the brain from a mathematical viewpoint. However, before the first claspe, are one hundred and six poems which begin with Cavendish's own creation myth and go on to expound her atomic theory. These begin immediately after her introductory epistles without preamble, thus breaking up the pattern of the claspe sections before it has begun. Closer scrutiny soon reveals that other sections break up the claspes and some claspes have no explanatory verses either. The more *Poems, and Fancies* is analysed, the more it defies analysis. While an overall plan may be discerned, it neverthless appears to have been written quite randomly, as the plan is frequently distorted or ignored. Yet it may be that this itself is intentional and that the random nature of the work seeks to illustrate a point.

Cavendish celebrates the 'Free, and Noble Stile' in the second claspe, and the presentation of her poems throughout her first work supports her own ideal. While she does write largely, but loosely, in themed sections, the leaps between her subjects are huge, and the impression is given of the following of tangential thoughts by the author as she wrote. Her subjects may be loosely divided into the following: natural philosophy and nature; war; essays and fancies; dialogues and discourses; fairies; love and human nature and writing. The four themes to be examined closely in this thesis are writing, war, fairies, and nature with natural philosophy.

Natural philosophy, nature and writing are chosen because they were subjects which continued to fascinate Cavendish throughout her life and in *Poems. and Fancies* may be found her earliest recorded ideas; the theme of war provides an insight into Cavendish's reactions to the Civil war, her support of her husband and the graphic nature of her imagination; while in the fairy poems may be found another side to that imagination but also some ideas about her own influences as a writer.

As stated earlier. Cavendish's writing is undisciplined and frequently erratic but it would be a mistake to view her work as a reflection of an undisciplined and erratic mind. Despite her impulsive and unrestrained style, she is cautious enough to remember constantly that this book will not be well-received. Her dedicatory verses, epistles and epilogues aim to prepare the reading audience with votes of confidence from her loved ones and protestations of humility from herself. Throughout the book essays are interspersed, addressed to groups of people whose negativity may need undermining by the reminder that she is aware of her failings. She is clever enough to pander to the male ego, while seeking the support of women who may feel threatened by her audacity in entering the male preserve of the writer. Even the lack of discipline. the 'free and noble stile' and the formlessness of the overall work, may ultimately be the strategy of one who is wise enough to appear foolish, as the definitive defence against her

dangerous action of publishing her work.

This action was both controversial and hazardous as Cavendish was risking her honour in its contemporary sense of virtue and reputation as laid down for the respectable woman. Honour for females, was largely concerned with being silent and unremarkable in any public sense, except as a dutiful wife, mother or daughter. It certainly did not encompass any display of wit or opinion or the desire for fame. Sylvia Brown quotes an early conduct book of 1639 by Francesco Barbaro, which sees control of women's speech and sexuality as an essential part of the maintenance of the boundaries of respectable life:

> It is proper...that not only the arms but indeed the speech of women never be made public; for the speech of a noblewoman can be no less dangerous than the nakedness of her limbs.[9]

The clear links here between outspokenness and immoral behaviour suggest a deep fear of the loss of control both of and to women; undoubtedly felt by men, but perhaps by some women also. A woman's speech was to be guided and owned by her husband or father, in the same way as her body was, and it is notable that Cavendish, strongly aware of her dangerous behaviour in taking such a public role, constantly refers to her husband's support and permission, presumably hoping this will in some way legitimise her action. It would surely be noted however, that despite his support, William Cavendish was in fact not physically present to restrain or encourage his wife when she took this decision to go publicly into

print. The chapter on writing will discuss more fully Cavendish's strategies for dealing with the risks of dishonour involved in publishing her work.

"Honour" though, was also a defining term of aristocracy and for Cavendish greatly at odds with the honour she knew she compromised in publishing, because it brought for her the need to be famous, to live up to the responsibility of the social position to which she had risen. She continually wrestles with the conflicting definitions of this concept throughout *Poems, and Fancies*, as well as in later works, and again this will be considered more fully in the chapter on writing.

There is, thirdly, the honour of the heroic romance or the classical hero, and this clearly attracts Cavendish greatly[10]. Her husband was a man of great panache and old-fashioned gallantry, even by seventeenth century standards. His modern biography by Geoffry Trease, *Portrait of a Cavalier*[11], as well as his wife's own more partial one[12] is full of incidents of loyalty, courtesy, charm and generosity that recall a knight-errant, and even his failures are grand and sweeping beside the petty strugglings of less romantic figures. Cavendish's concept of honour is closely linked to the example set by her husband's chosen way of life and the romanticised view of her father, both of which will be examined further in Chapter 2. Unfortunately, her attempts at heroic endeavour and her offhand attitude towards many standards of behaviour and poetic creativity frequently make her appear arrogant, even

though Cavendish herself clearly believes she is showing humility.

Due to the variable quality of Cavendish's poetry, which never achieves greatness, and her concern for the freedom for women, or at least herself, to publish, there is a danger that she may be seen only as what Brown describes as:

> an interesting artifact for feminist archaeology (Brown, 'Strategies', p.20).

Cavendish undoubtedly takes a pro-female stance in *Poems, and Fancies* and develops it further in her later work. But she also derides women with petty minds and flatters the male egocentricity that she knows will make success almost impossible for her as a writer. Her feelings towards women are frequently ambivalent and the strong female characters in her plays and stories, as well as in her ambitious science-fantasy *The Description of a New World called The Blazing World* (1666) are all to a greater or lesser extent manifestations of herself. As Brown points out, Cavendish is less interested in overturning the established hierarchical order, which as a Royalist she supports, than in:

> trying to recuperate a place for women - really for herself only, insofar as she finds she is constrained by the fact she is a woman - within this order through learning. (Brown, 'Strategies', p.27).

Cavendish, while frequently bemoaning the treatment of women, was not in fact treated restrictively herself, at least within marriage. She claims many times that William Cavendish not only supported her, but expected little from her in terms of

the usual housewifely skills or occupations. Yet she faces the restrictions imposed on other women once she attempts to step outside the comfortable sphere of her husband's broad-minded indulgence. Thus she is primarily interested in freeing women, so that she may be free, rather than from a sense of sisterhood. The education women were denied, while accessible to her insofar as she could understand it, through the intellectual circle of her husband's friends, is responsible for much of her frustration in *Poems, and Fancies*. She knows her handwriting, her spelling, her knowledge of grammar and her experience of other authors is woefully poor so in self-defence, she produces her own individualistic view of poetic form as restrictive. Her influences are hard to identify precisely but will be dealt with where possible in the later chapters, especially the chapter on fairies. However, her chosen style is deeply rooted in the iambic rhyming couplet, which is the dominant form of all the poems in her first work and a somewhat primitive choice, perhaps reflecting her lack of confidence in this area. Her choice of writing poetry, she claims with a certain naivety, was made because she thought it easier to hide her errors in verse than prose (*PF*, sig.A6), although 'A Circle Squar'd in Prose' is written, she adds in a margin note:

> Because my lines are too long for my Rhimes, therefore I put them in Prose. (*PF*, p.48)

In this way her poetry has a childlike quality of artlessness and it is necessary to look beyond the limitations of her

chosen form to reach the more interesting aspects of *Poems, and Fancies*.

Despite Cavendish's apparent naivety, she also has a subtlety that can be overlooked. Cavendish allows herself to be thought unskilled, she encourages the critical reader to see her as foolish. Thus she presents herself as almost unworthy of attack, too little in her endeavour to attract criticism, so that those who would attack must stoop to give their attention to someone who claims to think herself beneath them. Within her humble defence of her work and the counterpoint of bravado are also hidden political agendas, reminding the reading public to whom she is married and that her husband has been mistreated and forgotten by his friends.

In the exploration of the four chosen themes which follows, it will be seen that Cavendish's poetry serves many purposes for her, but she is never as transparent as she may at first appear to be. The subtleties in her writing are often in the sub-text, and it is not surprising that she later turned to drama, as the foundations for this interest are laid in her first work. This thesis will conclude with an attempt to identify the motivating forces behind Cavendish's work, which lie beyond her avowed desire for fame and lead her today, with the renewed interest in her work, as they did in her own time, both to the possibility of respect and ridicule.

Notes to pages 1-13:

1 For example Germaine Greer and others (eds.), *Kissing the Rod* (London: Virago Press,1988); Alistair Fowler (ed.), *The New Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991, paperback rpt. 1992); H. R. Woudhuysen (ed.), *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse* (London:Penguin Books, 1993).

2 All references to *Poems, and Fancies* are to the 1653 edition, unless stated otherwise, and are subsequently abbreviated *PF*, followed by the page number.

3 *Margaret the First: A Biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle* (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1957), p.227; subsequently referred to as 'Grant, *Biog.*'

4 Unnumbered introductory page in *Poems, and Fancies* facsimile reprint (Menston: Scolar Press, 1972)

5 *The Mental World of Stuart Women: Three Studies* (Brighton: Harvester, 1987), p.42; subsequently referred to as Mendelson, *Studies*.

6 *Kissing the Rod*, p.166.

7 As note 4 above

8 Cavendish's use of the word seems multi-layered, as it could refer to the clasp of a book in the figurative sense of dividing the work into sections, or the embracing of an idea .

9 Sylvia Brown, 'Margaret Cavendish: Strategies Rhetorical and Philosophical Against the Charge of Wantonness, Or Her Excuses for Writing so Much' *Critical Matrix*, 6, no.1 (1991), 20-45, p.22; subsequently referred to as Brown, 'Strategies'.

10 Although she claims in later works to despise the romance, all her stories could be classified thus.

11 *Portrait of a Cavalier: William Cavendish, First Duke of Newcastle* (London: Macmillan, 1979)

12 *The Life of the Thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince William Cavendishe*, ed. Eric Ravilious (London: J. M. Dent, 1915). First published 1667; subsequently referred to as *Life*.

CHAPTER 2

THE WRITER AND THE WRITING

> Condemne me not for making such a coyle
> About my Book
> *Poems, and Fancies* sig.A8v

The act of writing forms an important theme in *Poems, and Fancies* but may be seen in three different ways. Firstly, there is Cavendish's awareness that writing to publish is not acceptable for a woman and therefore will bring censure upon her work regardless of its quality. She is aware of the dichotomy and paradox of a woman writing and she seeks to create a space in which she can fulfil her creative longings, while demonstrating her awareness that she may have to fight for and defend that space. She will not compromise, however, upon her claim to it. Therefore much of her material, especially in the prefatory and postcript sections, argues in defence of her writing. Secondly, there is the display of the author's different selves through her writing. She presents the author-as-hermit and the author-as-celebrity, seeming to find each attractive, although she claims to decry the latter. Her longing for fame is complex and complicated by extreme ambivalence towards contemporary society, and the restrictions it places upon her. Thus she attacks mercilessly the work of contemporary poets and argues her own methodology, which is based not upon convention or fashion but on natural abilities. Thirdly there are the joys and frustration of writing. Through her use of prose or verse, epistles, addresses, dialogues and

discourses, she displays the need to release her active mind but also the irritations that her lack of education causes her. Her solipsism leads her to what may be seen as opinionated arrogance yet there is also a naivety and wonder in the exploration of her thoughts. She says in 'Of the Head' (*PF* p.153) that Reason is like a preacher in the head, continually arguing in favour of a peaceful, rational approach to life, to avoid the turmoil of mind that comes from 'fruitlesse Contemplation Riot' (*PF* p.153). While Cavendish rarely shows any interest in traditional religion, she clearly understands the role of the preacher in guiding human life down the straight and narrow way, and the difficulty for most humans in keeping to that path. The image of the hell-fire warnings of Reason illustrates clearly that Cavendish knows the 'Torment of a restlesse Mind' (Ibid.) intimately:

> For why, saies Reason, you shall damned be
> From all Content, for your Curiosity.
> (Ibid.)

Thus it would seem she writes largely because she must, for the sake of her restless mind, yet that mind cannot help but be further disturbed by the very act that eases its need for expression.

Therefore, fully aware of the reactions her work will provoke, Cavendish carefully prepares her reader in the prefatory material, using a familiar technique of the time. The reliance on patronage meant that thanks and dedications were necessary, also adding the weight of the patron's name to

the work. Similarly a note or verse from a well-known name congratulating the author on the work which followed could help to raise it in the eyes of the potential reader. Prefatory material might then be a verse or epistle by the author or to the author, pointing out particular qualities of the work, as well as the overall achievement. Addresses to the reader by the author were also common, introducing the work and asking for an unbiased reading. In *Poems, and Fancies* Margaret Cavendish adopts all aspects of this convention, using them in a variety of ways and somewhat to excess. She not only prefaces the work with ten epistles and dedications, but also follows the final poem of the text with a short prose address, five verse postscripts and a final note to the reader. Her concern to evoke a positive receptive reading of her work leads her to betray her insecurity and doubt and may well invoke instead the wry response that 'the lady doth protest too much'[1].

It is not surprising that *Poems, and Fancies* opens with a short poem, by not Margaret but William Cavendish. Despite his exile, he was a well-known as a lover and patron of the arts and an enthusiastic amateur scientist and writer. His very first line:

> I Saw your Poems, and then wished them mine,
> (*PF* sig.A1^{v})

supports her not merely as an indulgent husband, but as a fellow poet and one who has great admiration for her work. He does not refer to the fact that she is female, reducing to

irrelevance perhaps the most scandalous aspect of her enterprise, but instead sets her firmly within the male, literary tradition alongside the acknowledged masters of literature. With her work in print, he believes their ghosts will be grieving and shamed, because her 'fancies' are 'new-borne' and 'sublime' (*PF* sig.A1^{v}), and thus she rises immediately above the petty world of those who may criticise her. His hyperbolic praise could be suspected of teasing her a little, but his affection and support cannot be doubted and makes criticism of her dangerous for anyone who wishes to keep Newcastle's good opinion.

Cavendish's own first words are to her husband's brother, Sir Charles Cavendish, in 'The Epistle Dedicatory'(*PF* sig.A2-A2^{v}). There are occasional further glimpses of her relationship with her brother-in-law in her poems and her memoirs, and it is clear that there was a great affection between them. In a blend of genuine gratitude and shrewd name-dropping, Cavendish addresses him as her patron, brother-in-law and friend. Like Newcastle, he is an ideal connection for the aspiring writer, being a man of undisputed reputation as a gentleman, an intelligent enquirer into the new science, and a brave and loyal soldier.

A pattern begins to develop through the prefatory material which continues throughout the text, whereby Cavendish seeks the support of those whose good opinion is of most value to her in this particular enterprise. Thus the text moves on to

the address 'To All Noble and Worthy Ladies' (*PF* sig.A3). Cavendish knows that women could be her harshest critics, as she is likely be seen as bringing her sex into disrepute, so she seeks to gain the support of her female peers. She turns the points men may use as criticisms into strengths shared by women, mentioning imagination and creativity as particularly praiseworthy, and is emphatic that her way of using them is 'honest' (*PF* sig.A3ᵛ), meaning respectable and home-based. This is another important point, stressing that she does not parade herself about the town in an unseemly way, and as she perceives other women to do. To support this view of herself as respectable, she addresses her next epistle to her personal maid and friend, Elizabeth Toppe, asking, in effect, for a character reference. The logic behind this choice is clear as 'Mistris Toppe' had known her for many years and could vouch for her family background and genteel upbringing. However, this slightly desperate move of approaching a servant is a questionable one when Cavendish is attempting to establish her credibility. It may be that gender alliance is of greater importance to her than social difference in this instance, but more likely she values Mistress Toppe for qualities of mind rather than rank[2]. Elizabeth Toppe responds as desired, assuring Cavendish that she knows well that her work is original and honourable, and establishing her good character:

> But truely, Madam, this Book is not the onely occasion to Admire you; for having been brought up from my Childhood in your Honourable Family, and alwayes in your Ladyships company, I have admired Nature more in your Ladyship, then

> in any other Works besides.
> (*PF* sig.A5ᵛ)

While much of Mistress Toppe's reply is in the vein of the expected gentle flattery, there is one remark which is particularly interesting, and gives an insight both into Cavendish, and the astute nature of Mistress Toppe herself:

> ..your Ladyship is naturally bashful, & apt to be out of Countenance. that your Ladyship could not oblige all the World. (*PF* sig.A5ᵛ).

Aware that obliging all the world is a difficult task, Cavendish continues with another two epistles 'To Naturall Philosophers' and ' To the Reader' (*PF* sig.A6-A7ᵛ), which cover, it would seem, every possible direction from which criticism may come. Her combination of humility and arrogance is ingenuous, perhaps ingenious, and a little childlike. as she fully expects the most learned of natural philosophers to read her work:

> Pray do not censure all you do not know,
> But let my atomes to the Learned go.
> (*PF* sig.A6ᵛ).

Although she expects their criticism, 'If you dislike.....Pray do not scoff' (*PF* sig.A6ᵛ), the possibility that her work may be ignored, does not seem to occur to her. The three verses which complete the prefatory section, as well as the five verses and two notes that act as a postscript are all aimed at pre-empting criticism:

> Be just, let Fancy have the upper place,
> And then my Verses may perchance finde grace.
> (*PF* p.213).

Yet despite her concern about the reception her book will

receive, she still has the optimism to add a short footnote:

> Reader, I have a little Tract of Philosophicall Fancies in Prose, which will not be long before it appear in the world. (*PF* p.214),

which anticipates an interested reading public.

The organisation of the prefaces and postscripts clearly separates them from the main body of the work with purposes of their own: they are about the writing which follows, and not a part of it. Notably it is verses from these sections that tend to appear most frequently in modern anthologies[3]. As will be seen in Chapter 2 of this thesis on the poems of war, it is in moments of personal anguish or concern that Cavendish can be most accessible, rather than in her flights of fancy, which may often leave the reader floundering.

While from the point of view of accessibility, the prefatory material is clearly an overstating of her case, a great deal may be learned from this attempt to prepare the reader - there is a sense that Cavendish is putting off the dread moment of inevitable judgement by keeping the reader away from her book for as long as possible. Similarly the concluding verses deny the reader a chance to reflect upon her work unhindered, as she immediately begins to explain and defend it. Her greatest concern is inspired by a crisis in confidence - is the work good enough? Her letter to Charles Cavendish claims her work is a 'Course piece,' (*PF* sig.A2v) and to Natural Philosophers she explains that ' I never read, nor heard of any English Booke to instruct me'(*PF* sig.A6). She

knows that 'those that are strict and nice about Phrase...will carp at my Book...' (*PF* p.212), and worse that those that read a new book, do so 'to finde Faults, that they may censure it'(*PF* p.213). Newcastle's poem mentions how good her metaphors, allegories and imagination are, covering her greatest concerns so thoroughly that he must be admired for his tender care of her sensitivities.

Cavendish suggests that her aim is so harmless that it outweighs her weaknesses. Her guileless admission that all she desires is fame, though she recognises that it may be worthless, suggests that she does not fully understand that she cannot possibly be allowed honourable fame, only notoriety or the respectable notice given the good wife. With disarming frankness, she says that anyone who is bored can miss a few pages and that if they do not like the book:

> there is no harm done, nor time lost. For I had nothing to do when I wrot it,
> (*PF* sig.A6).

Yet despite her artlessness, Cavendish is also capable of shrewd subversion in her writing and this is seen especially in her addresses to ladies and the reader. In flattering the 'noble ladies' (*PF* sig.A3) whose criticism she fears, she attempts to make them rethink qualities scorned by men as feminine frivolity and view them as evidence of wonderful creativity which they channel into the homemaker's arts. Thus her own imagination is no different to theirs. but is simply used in a different way, because she lacks their skills with

the needle. By undermining her own talent, but likening it to theirs, she attempts to create a feeling of sisterhood with those whose tongues 'are as Sharp as two-edged Swords, and wound as much' (*PF* sig.A3ᵛ). She is well aware that those sharp tongues can either defend or attack her.

She forces another view of traditional female roles when she calls the bounty of Charles Cavendish the distaff 'from whence Fate hath Spun the thread of this part of my life' (*PF* sig.A2ᵛ), as the distaff is an image closely associated with the female as far back as the Middle Ages. Patricia Higgins quotes a newspaper attack on contemporary female petitioners as saying:

> It is fitter for you to be washing your dishes, and meddle with the wheele and distaffe,[4]

and the distaff-line is traditionally the line of female succession. But Cavendish claims Charles, her brother-in-law as part of her line of succession, through whose widely acknowledged intellectual ability, she has inherited ideas and beliefs, thus interposing herself into a male line, and elevating the creative worth of the distaff also. Images of spinning emerge throughout not only *Poems, and Fancies*, but much of Cavendish's later work also, and she sees this activity as very symbolic of her writing[5]. It may be that in some ways, she passes some of the responsibility for her writing to Charles Cavendish. But she also shows that he, like Newcastle, although male, can play a positive role in encouraging a woman to write without losing his traditional

male position as leader. This creates a line of succession from one thinker to another that can be passed through the female as well as the male, in a similar way to Newcastle in his poem to Cavendish, setting her deliberately as descending through the lineage of great male poets. It may well be coincidental, but Newcastle's own forward-thinking attitude could have been shaped by his own position as master of a great estate, inherited in three parts at least through the distaff-line of his paternal grandmother, his mother and his first wife.

To undermine the objections of less enlightened men, Cavendish points out that writing need not interfere with the home-based existence men prefer for their women and aims to argue her case without threatening the role they hold so dear, although she experiences moments of fierce irritation that:

> they hold Books as their Crowne, and the Sword as their Scepter, by which they rule and governe.
> (*PF* sig.A3ᵛ).

The shrewdness in this phrase which summarises men as defined by education and force, raises the question as to whether or not her innocence at other points is an affectation. Clearly there are instances where she deliberately plays the helpless and ill-educated woman to take away the threat her writing poses, but she is frustrated by her lack of education, and the combination of naivety and shrewdness seems genuine also.

She is always shrewd in her sense of politics and misses

no opportunity to remind her readers that her husband has been badly treated. The very use of Newcastle's commendatory verse is a way of bringing into the country a man proscribed by Parliament as one of the worst of their enemies. Through his wife's book, his presence may be felt and his voice may be heard, stating a clear opinion on an enterprise that subverts accepted behaviour. Her address to Charles Cavendish refers to the reduced circumstances in which she and her husband have found themselves, and how Charles Cavendish has been their help and support:

> you dare not onley look Misfortunes in the Face, but grapple with them in the defence of your Freind. (*PF* sig.A2ᵛ)

She recalls St. Paul's suffering on behalf of his 'Brethren in Christ', (*PF* sig.A2ᵛ) in a rare mention of Christian religion, and points out in the address 'To the Reader' (*PF* sig.A7), that she wrote because she was alone and parted from the husband she loved, because of the 'great Wants' (*PF* sig.A7) imposed on them by his exile. Her hidden agenda of drawing attention to Newcastle's plight hints at the indignation she will show in years to come when she writes his biography and suggests a far stronger character than she claims in the humble defences of her book.

She continues to choose her allies shrewdly by aligning herself with Lady Mary Wroth saying:

> And very like they will say to me, as to the Lady that wrote the Romancy,
>
> Work Lady, work, let writing Books alone,

> For surely wiser Women nere wrote one.
> (PFsig.A3ᵛ),

with an anticipation which seems almost pleasurable. The verse, misquoted by Cavendish, is Lord Denny's, whose attack on Lady Mary Wroth after the publication of her *Urania*, echoed long-held male fears of the 'man-woman', who usurps male preserves[6]. Cavendish appears to envisage a martyrdom of sorts in this possibility, but is willing, or eager, to accept it to prove writing is a far less dangerous activity than gossiping or 'loose carriage' (*PF* sig.A4), common activities of lesser women in her eyes. It may be also that to be castigated as a member of the famous literary Sidney family had been, would be preferable to being ignored as a foolish woman. She declares, not to all ladies, but only all 'Noble and Worthy Ladies' (*PF* sig.A3), 'if I burn, I desire to die your Martyr' (*PF* sig.A3ᵛ) and understanding that the best form of defence is attack, offers herself as sacrifice if women will only take her part. The need for women to stand together is expressed also in 'To all Writing Ladies' (*PF* sig.Aa-Aa1) which, while it acknowledges that 'we be inferiour to Men' is nevertheless a rallying call which has interesting similarities with the stance of women petitioners. Patricia Higgins points out that, while admitting their inferiority to men repeatedly, women:

> formed part of the London 'mob' and took a leading role in demonstrations...Indeed they intervened *as women* in politics. (Higgins, 'Reactions', p.183)

Higgins suggests that women took matters into their own hands

when they were unhappy with the results of men in attempting improvements of conditions that affected them and their children. While their motivation was very different to that of Cavendish, it is notable that Leveller women were visibly active in London during 1651 and 1653 when Cavendish was there. Her defence in 'An Epistle to Mistris Toppe' that she does not:

> busie my selfe out of the Spher of our Sex, as in Politicks of State, or to Preach false Doctrine in a Tub (*PF* sig.A4-A5),

suggests that she was at least aware of female agitators. Higgins points out that:

> There appears to a contradiction between the female petitioners' admissions of the inferiority of their sex and the intellectual case they made out for the equality of the sexes. ('Reactions', p.222)

and this applies to Cavendish's approach also. Like Cavendish on education and the right to write, the women petitioners, with careful acknowledgement of the male ego, put forward justifications for the involvement they desired in politics. While Cavendish would not in any way ally herself with women of inferior social status, she has an awareness of an upsurge in the female spirit, caused by the vagaries of the Civil War:

> But this Age hath produced many effeminate Writers, as well as Preachers, and many effeminate Rulers, as well as Actors. (*PF* sig.Aa1).

Despite her declaration to Mistris Toppe, she finds a cause for real excitement as she sees the possibilities of this upsurge:

> And if it be an Age when the effeminate spirits rule, as

> most visible they doe in every Kingdom, let us take the advantage, and make the best of our time, for feare their reigne should not be long. (*PF* sig.Aa1)

Unlike the women petitioners concerned for their children's hunger, Cavendish wants a more glorious involvement:

> whether it be in the Amazonian Government, or in the Politick Common-Wealth, or in flourishing Monarchy, or in Schooles of Divinity, or in Lectures of Philosophy, or in witty Poetry, or any thing that may bring honour to our Sex: for they are poore, dejected spirits, that are not ambitious for Fame. (*PF* sig.Aa1).

Sadly, this crusading spirit becomes victim of the realism that inevitably reminds Cavendish how unlikely her ambitions are, as she ends this address 'To All Writing Ladies' by hoping that women may strive to be remembered for actions noble, honourable or 'at least harmlesse' (*PF* sig.Aa1)[7].

Harmlessness may also be important to Cavendish in a more direct sense. Elaine Hobby points out that as a staunch royalist, Cavendish cannot condone any overturning of the established order, yet unless that order is overturned she will never have leave to write [8]. Many of the stories and plays she wrote after *Poems, and Fancies* have heroines who escape from a suitor or renounce the world, yet end up by marrying - often the suitor from whom they fled initially. It is notable also that those heroines who do not marry but achieve greatness through learning, such as Sanspareille in *Youth's Glory and Death's Banquet* (1662), eventually die. It would seem that Cavendish realises in an instinctive way that the established order may be challenged, even changed a little, but it can never be overcome without

causing outcomes too dangerous to contemplate. From this point of view, her repeated reminder to men that she knows women are less than they are, becomes not only a manipulation of their ego, but also a reminder to herself there is safety in accepting that view.

While, as Annette Cramer argues:

> To both sexes, access to a male education is imperative because it enables an understanding of fluctuations of meaning in a male linguistic economy. Only after such an education can characters read and control the world around them[9],

I would suggest that the issue has another aspect also. Cavendish is uplifted by the idea that female natural creativity means women should write, and be allowed to write, and thus is moved by evidence of that spirit. Yet she is also threatened by it: women who meddle in politics, or preach, are alarming to her, moving away from the sphere of womanly behaviour which she approves. While her heroine in *Bell in Campo* (1662) leads a female army, the women fight only sufficiently long to convince the men on their own side that women are worthy to do so. The act is one of heroic action and honour, to prove a point and Lady Victoria crowns her triumph by an oration to her soldiers, demanding changes in women's peace-time role. The changes she orders though are domestic ones, allowing women more say in the ordering of their everyday lives, dress, choice of food and hiring of servants (p.631). The actions of women who involve themselves in aggressive petitioning and politics appear to fulfil the fear

of the 'man-woman' in Cavendish herself. Thus in defence of her writing, she is emphatic that the act is female and non-threatening, at least to some degree for her own comfort. While she is happy to die as a graceful martyr for her writing's sake, she has no intention of being classified with any unruly mob of women. Thus as Sylvia Bowerbank says:

> Cavendish is best understood..as a defender not of her sex, but of self and self-expression. (Bowerbank, 'Spider's Delight', p.396).

However, very little is straightforward in Cavendish's view of the world and the self is not a simple idea. Cavendish presents a variety of selves throughout her writing, many of which are in direct conflict with one another. In *Poems, and Fancies* two opposing selves may be seen - the author-as-hermit and the author-as-celebrity - with Cavendish herself seeming unaware or untroubled by the contradiction. The reclusive melancholic was part of the contemporary fashionable concept of the solitary genius and one which Cavendish embraces with enthusiasm. Throughout her memoirs she depicts herself as living an ascetic life of study, unless her husband persuades her outside for the sake of her health. Certainly she lived a life of extraordinary isolation while being surrounded for the most part by people she loved dearly. Her early life was protected from the outside world by a large and loving family. Her period as a matron of honour to Queen Henrietta Maria saw her isolated firstly by her natural shyness, secondly by her lack of French and thirdly by her secret courtship with

William Cavendish. Once married, she and Newcastle lived in exile until the Restoration. with only her two-year stay in London to restore her briefly to her family, before she returned to the Continent. It was the loneliness of being away from Newcastle that caused her to begin writing, as discussed in the Introduction (see p.2). After the Restoration, she lived with him in quiet retirement for most of the time. Only during her period as matron-of-honour was she without a small number of dearly loved family members around her, so managed to combine the image of studious isolation with being part of closely knit relationships. Many of the books which followed *Poems, and Fancies* include illustrations of the author as solitary genius, working alone at her desk. Yet other illustrations place her upon a pedestal or throne, crowned with laurels, and her great longing for fame is expressed as clearly as her delight in solitary contemplation[10]. After the Restoration, her rare visits to London always caused great excitement. Her dress and entourage were consistently fantastic, often combining male and female costume in her clothes, or requiring a number of women simply to carry her train. James Fitzmaurice believes that her choice of elaborate dress and eccentric behaviour was part of an elaborate conceit of semi-madness to excuse her decision to print[11]. However, it may also be argued that Cavendish seems unaware of the contradiction between shyness and public display:

> Psychologically speaking, the duchess seems shy and eager

> to be noticed but has no wish to converse or interact with people. Her writings and dress enable her to express her talent and the extroverted side of her personality, which seems in continual conflict with an introverted nature and an eagerness to withdraw. [12]

It may also be that the role of solitary, eccentric genius suited Cavendish because of the inevitable fame of sorts it would bring in itself. Thus when she made her forays into public life, she could hardly help but be noticed. Yet the strange clothes and elaborate equipage she chose, may have acted as ways to distance herself from the gawping onlookers she desired to attract. While she desires fame, she has no illusions about it. In her poem 'I language want to dresse my fancies in' she despises fame for 'silver lace' (*PF* p.212), frivolous fashionable writing and acknowledges in 'To All Noble, and Worthy Ladies' that fame is nothing but a 'great noise'(*PF* sig.A3). She states repeatedly, not only in *Poems, and Fancies*, but in later works such as *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1664), that for her fame is a part of honour. Honour is discussed fully in the Introduction (see pp.9-11) and it may be that the reclusive author is in part a recognition of that part of honour that says a woman should stay quietly at home. Cavendish sees this as appropriate if the woman is staying at home to write, and sets her studious example. One of the heroines of her plays, Sanspareille, experiences positive gain, in her father's opinion, through confinement away from the world:

> doth not she play when she reads books of Poetry, and can there be nobler amiabler, finer, usefuller, and wiser companions than the Sciences, or pleasanter playfellows than the Muses;....? [13]

Jean Gagen feels that:

> ..her feverish search for fame plunged her into deep and pervasive conflict with herself and with the society of her time.[14]

and it may be that this conflict is expressed at least partly in *Poems, and Fancies*, through the recurring image of glass.

The interest of Cavendish and her husband in optics is well documented and she says of him in her biography that he had as fine a collection of optic glass as any. In the first poem of *Poems, and Fancies*, in which Nature discusses the creation of the world with her Council, Cavendish displays her knowledge of the eye and its workings:

> Figure must draw a Circle, round, and small,
> Where in the midst must stand a Glassy Ball,
> Without convexe, the inside a Concave,
> And in the midst a round small hole must have,
> That Species may passe, and repasse through,
> Life the Prospective every thing to view.
> (*PF* p.1)

Her interest in microscopes is shown in 'It is hard to believe, that there are other Worlds in this World' (*PF* p.43), 'Of many Worlds in this World' (*PF* p.44-45), 'A World in an Eare-Ring' (*PF* p.45-46, and 'Severall Worlds in severall Circles' (*PF* p.46), which will be discussed in Chapter 4, and in some of her fairy poems, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. While she does not refer directly to using a microscope in any of these poems, nevertheless it is clear from where the idea of seeing the unseen originates. Considering then, her

interest in optics, in looking, viewing and being viewed, the glass which appears in three of the poems in *Poems, and Fancies* is especially interesting. 'The Temple of Honour':

> Whose walls are of clear glasse on every side,
> Where actions of all sorts are perfect seen,
> (*PF* p.145)

naturally for Cavendish is designed so that honour may be viewed, studied and analysed. Honour's Temple is 'both high and wide' for maximum visibility and the following poem, 'Fame', stresses that:

> ...those that would to Fame's high Temple go,
> Must first great Honour's Temple quite passe through.
> (*PF* p.147)

The glass walls of Honour's Temple stress Cavendish's insistence that the desire for fame is a heroic and honourable action. Thus her display of herself through her writing is a necessary meritorious honesty, linked with her status as Lady Newcastle. 'The Temple of Fame' illustrates fully the dichotomy of fame and Cavendish's entire awareness of its dangers. Fame's tendency to be all worthless noise is demonstrated by the rooms:

> Wherin the Ecchoes do like balls rebound,
> From every corner, making a great sound
> (*PF* p.146)

while the news worth hearing is given by five bells, each representing an aspect of information-giving of which Cavendish approves, such as poetry and oration. Unlike the Temple of Honour, the walls are solid, but the windows are faceted, to give bewildering reflections and recall the design

of Islamic temples, where the surfaces of reality are deliberately broken up by shimmering light and water to remind humans of the uncertainties of life and knowledge. Cavendish's idea in her temple appears to be very similar to this, as Fame can be confusion and rumour as well as the more desirable aspects. The temple door, unsurprisingly is 'of prospective Glasse,' and through it 'a small beame of our eye can passe':

> That makes truth there so difficult to know,
> As for the bright Moon, a new world to show.
> (*PF* p.147)

The temple door, far from offering a clear view as do the walls of Honour's Temple, offers a view far more like a microscope, being relatively difficult to use accurately and requiring a level of understanding perhaps beyond many who may view fame through it. Yet it is made of glass, it offers a view, for those who can see, as Cavendish in her writing offers a view of the world and female creativity which will not be visible except to the perceptive. For those who can see and understand, the Altar of Fame has offered upon it 'hearts without blame' (*PF* p.147), as well as wisdom, wit, courage, love and strength. Within the sacred areas of the temple, Fame is both good and honourable. It is those who do not understand it who make it 'vulgar' (*PF* sig.A2ᵛ). The display of the famous to the vulgar is typified in the relationship between monarch and commoner, and this is recalled in 'Her Descending Downe' (*PF* p.155), a poem of the fairy queen.

The fairy queen's palace is richly wrought of beautiful materials suitable to her status but significantly:

> The large doores are cut of transparent Glasse,
> Where the Queen may be seen. as she doth passe.
> (*PF* p.155)

As in the Temple of Honour, she is made visible, but like the Temple of Fame that visibility is partially restricted. The queen is like Cavendish herself: she is separate from the world, and yet the world may view her from a distance, admiring her fame. She is not always in view, only 'as she doth passe' and her glass doors 'are locked fast with silver pins' (*PF* p.155), keeping her both safe and isolated.

I believe that this image of the woman caged behind glass, along with the other references to glass walls, doors, and the workings of the eye give a great insight into Cavendish's longing for fame. To be viewed is important, but to be viewed destroys privacy. The glass wall or door, the small aperture of the eye all give a view that may become partial, through lack of vision, either literal or figurative. The famous person, especially the famous woman, is caged by her fame, and open to misinterpretation that the distance of fame means she cannot refute. Jean Gagen says:

> There is not the slightest doubt that the Duchess of Newcastle hoped in her most idealistic moments to win a true fame based on merit.
> ('Honour', p.527)

and for her that 'true fame' would lead to immortality and was therefore most desirable. However, there is little doubt also that she was fully and instinctively aware of the isolating

nature of that most desired state, therefore in choosing the role of author-as-hermit, she can enjoy the idea of author-of-celebrity because the choice of distance is her own.

Cavendish presents herself as motivated by an honourable desire for fame, but inspired and ruled by an free spirit of fancy. This fancy, which she describes as wit in 'The Purchase of Poets' (*PF* p.54) is something more than imagination, taking her mind into realms of her own creation and images she often feels the necessity to explain in margin notes. To introduce the section of her book which follows the address 'To Poets', Cavendish offers the reader her advice:

> I must intreat my Noble Reader, to read this part of my Book. very slow, and to observe very strictly every word they read; because in most of these Poems, every word is a Fancy. Wherefore, if they loose, by not marking, or skip by too hasty reading, they will intangle the Sense of the whole Copy. (*PF* p.123)

This is undoubtedly good advice, as her fancies are extremely fanciful. In her 'similizings' navigation on the sea is like a man riding a horse across a desert, the sea is like a meadow, mariners are like shepherds, the mast is like a may-pole, fishes are like beasts. In his opening verse, Newcastle says:

> By similizing to the Life so like,
> Your Fancies Pencil's far beyond Vandike;
> (*PF* sig.A1ᵛ)

and this idea of imaginative comparisons is certainly not unusual during the seventeenth century. Newcastle's own favourite castle, Bolsover, begun by his father had been finished to his own design during his first marriage, and the

Little Castle at the heart of the castle buildings is entirely decorated around an elaborate conceit of the passage of the human spirit through earthly to heavenly concerns[15]. His second wife's poetic fancies though, do not have the sustained through-line of his own visual fancy at Bolsover. They leap hugely from one subject to the other and while often drawing highly original and intriguing likenesses or quirky ways of approaching the world, rarely lead to any conclusion or insight. They are whimsical musings for the most part and demonstrate indeed a wit 'whose Fancy's not confined' (*PF* 154). Whether or not Cavendish's love of fancy may have served her better if she had confined it a little is debateable. As James Fitzmaurice says,

> The efforts of Cavendish to depict herself as given over to fancy were successful: no-one has ever accused her of slavish attention to meter or limpness of emotion. ('Fancy', p.200)

Either in defiance of the risk of unrestraint undermining her work, or regardless of it, fancy drives Cavendish to write, often with feverish struggle and anguish:

> My thoughts run out of breath, then downe would lye,
> And panting with short wind, like those that dye.
> (*PF* p.47)

but the struggle is creative, like childbirth:

> ...by this course new Fancies they could breed.
> (Ibid.)

with the author ministering to her thoughts so their strength is kept up for the delivery. She uses also the image of insects, gnats, buzzing the poet's brain to distraction until

the creative act of writing lets them out (*PF* p.151). These three images suggest that writing to her is both a torment and a pleasure and that her free and noble style, while arguably a conceit in itself, is also a release to her that an ordered and measured approach to writing could not be. She is quite able to laugh at herself too and points out ironically that the irritated poetic mind can be eased quite simply:

> But take the Oile of Fame and 'noint the Mind,
> And this will be a perfect Cure you'll finde.
> (*PF* p.151)

She is never so wild and unconcerned that she forgets what she desires from this unrestrained act of writing or that she may be harshly criticised. In her address 'To Poets' (*PF* p.121-123), she admits her fears of the 'subtle, airey, and nimble' wits of the satirists who will seek out and find every mistake and find flaws in every fancy in her work. As in the prefatory section, she anticipates and undermines criticism by pointing out the flaws herself. Cleverly, she asks those who cannot understand her fancies to ask a poet for help before judging, therefore crediting poets with a subtle understanding not always held by others. She believes that to curb the free spirit of her fancy would be to destroy the work, and it is always difficult to decide how much this is all a conceit to defend the lack of polish in her work, or a true belief that what is natural should not be interfered with. It is quite possible that it becomes her true belief but still does so to defend the lack of polish.

The care with which she defends her work, makes Cavendish seem shrewd and worldly wise. However, she is frequently naively childlike, as when she asks poets for their indulgence and then goes on very shortly after to attack them as plagiarists, trivialisers and fools. She believes that 'Poets have most Pleasure in this Life' (*PF* p.152) because they have the type of mind that is stimulated by every sense into a fancy, achieving a god-like creativity. But she is irritated by the abuse of this natural ability, as she sees it, into a worn out way of attracting attention that is not the genuine deserved fame she desires, but a superficial sycophantic reaction:

> The world in bravery doth take delight,
> And glistering Shews doe more attract the sight;'
> (*PF* p.212).

She sympathises with love:

> Thou art a Tree whereon all Poets climbe
> (*PF* p.141)

and takes issue in her anti-pastoral poems with a picturesque view of life, undermining it with a slightly vicious humour in 'A Description of Shepherds and Shepherdesses':

> Milking their Ewes, their hands doe dirty make;
> For being wet, dirt from their Duggs doe take.'
> (*PF* p.142)

Not for her the dainty rosy cheeks or tawny outdoor tan,

> The Sun doth scorch the skin, it yellow growes,
> Their eys are red, lips dry with wind that blowes.'
> (*PF* p.142)

and she is greatly annoyed by poetic images of 'beauteous Ladies driving flocks of sheep' (*PF* p.143). This irritation is

at first surprising in one so devoted to fantasy, but Cavendish's fancy is not based upon a picturesque view of reality, as is the pastoral idiom. Cavendish knows that 'A Shepherds imployment is too meane an Allegory for Noble Ladies' (*PF* p.143-144), so her noble ladies transcend reality into pure fantasy through her conceits :

> Strings of threaded tears about her Neck she wore,
> Dropt from her Lovers Eyes, whose Image bore.
> (*PF* p.157)

It would seem that to Cavendish the nobility of soul she believes linked with honour and fame is something that should only aspire upward to a region where sighs take shape and cloaks are made of merit. Thirty years later Aphra Behn would look back to a mythical Golden Age where pastoral lovers could sport without shame in a permissive society that anticipated the 'free love' of the 1960s, without the cynicism of Restoration immortality:

> Then was it glory to pursue delight,
> And that was lawful all, that pleasure did invite,
> Then 'twas the amorous world enjoyed its reign;
> And tyrant Honour strove t'usurp in vain.[16]

This, however, was not for Cavendish. To her, honour was no tyrant but a concept that would liberate women with her enlargement of it. That liberation would not lead to a field surrounded by sheep, but to some heavenly place beyond such earthiness. Cavendish is interested only in 'Noble Lovers' who have a beauty which may 'give the Gods delight' (*PF* p.143). Untouched by earthly passions, these 'Men, Champions, Knights, which Honour high doe prize' can seek to ennoble the world

'Destroying monstrous vices' (*PF* p.143-144). She is clearly averse to what she sees as base passions, saying in her memoirs that her mother made sure she never saw the 'rude love-making'[17] of servants as a child, and that her love for her future husband was 'not an amorous love, I never was infected therewith, it is a disease or a passion' (*Memoirs*, p.195). Her interest is in nobler emotions: her husband was 'the onely person I ever was in love with' (*Memoirs*, p.195), this love being based on honour and merit. Medieval courtly love, aspiring after the Holy grail of honour is clearly more attractive to Cavendish than the 'spurned shepherds', 'tortured by love, by jealously and fear'[18] which were popular throughout her own time and beyond. Her undermining of the pastoral idyll is reminiscent of Rosalind's attack on Pheobe in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (III. 5,35-63), but also prefigures Rochester's more distasteful focus on the realities that underpin the pastoral in, for example 'Fair Chloris in a pigsty lay'[19]. Cavendish appears to feel that contemporary poets, other than herself, do not do justice to their skills. They use hackneyed verse forms to labour worn-out themes and inappropriate images so they may achieve a frivolous and brief ignoble fame. Yet she hopes nevertheless that they will speak well of her, seeming not to see the irony in this.

Cavendish does not, however, reject classical imagery, merely its use in what she sees as the inappropriate pastoral form, although she uses pastoral scenes herself in plays such

as *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668). In her poems, classical imagery is used to achieve the elevation of her noble characters and emotions to higher realms. She sees herself as like 'chaste Penelope' in her address 'To Poets' (*PF* p.121-123), spinning her verses while separated from her husband, and many of her poems describe classical temples to fame, fortune and other abstract concepts. Many of her uses of the classical idiom are to personify abstractions, such as fame, honour, and heroic endeavour, which she seems unable to locate in a realistic setting, being, it would seem, generally disappointed in the behaviour of men and women around her, aside from a few exceptions such as her husband and his brother. By raising her work above the base passions she perhaps reveals further the concerns hinted at in her anxiety over women preachers and petitioners, as discussed above, and shows, after all, a certain similarity of thought with Aphra Behn. Both perceive amorous love as a weapon against women, but which women can use by becoming like men. While for Cavendish aggression in men is not especially attractive, it is manly, and passion is the same. She claims in her memoirs that her brothers led blameless lives, 'unless to love a mistress were a crime' (*Memoirs*, p.191) , and in her life of Newcastle:

> ..I know him not addicted to any manner of vice, except that he has been a great lover and admirer of the female sex; which whether it be so great a crime as to condemn him for it; I'le leave to the judgement of young gallants and beautiful ladies. (*Life*, p.195)

suggesting an indulgent approval of boyish misbehaviour. But women who have the same love of men are Lady Wagtail or Lady Inconstancy[17], whereas the women who gain power over men in her plays and stories, are the women who resist their sexual advances until they win their honest love and marriage - as she did against the determined and practised persuasion of a lover thirty years her elder in her own courtship, as evidenced in the poems and letters that passed between them[18]. The dalliance of the pastoral is demeaning in Cavendish's eyes and suggests that women can have power over men through sexuality, but that it is a dishonest power. This in essence is what Aphra Behn is saying: women have to play at being coy to keep men's respect yet eventually give what men desire in order to have power over them. Behn desires a time where men and women can be honest and equal in sensual desire; Cavendish prefers a time when they can transcend it, but both are disturbed by the inequality and the way in which women can use it to a demeaning advantage. Thus the classical imagery, suggesting a time of temples, gods and goddesses, noble passions and heroic deeds is attractive to Cavendish; it is only when Elysium becomes Arcadia that she becomes irritated.

Her poems on writing reveal both the joys and frustrations Cavendish experiences in this act. The joys may be simple: the pleasure of freedom of thought, the following of natural creativity, or more complex such as the anticipation of fame with all its vagaries. Freedom of thought is clearly very

important to her but, while escape from the bonds of convention is often a part of that freedom, another aspect is revealed. In her poem 'Give me that Wit, whose Fancy's not confin'd' (*PF* p.154), she appears to be rejoicing in the freedom from a bond which seems most likely to be marriage, as she refers to 'two Braines joyn'd'. While she did, during her stay in London, more than likely enjoy a greater level of independence under the respectable title of 'married woman' than ever before, this poem is not, in fact, an undermining of her devotion to Newcastle. She desires, not release from this bond which can be like 'Oxen yoak'd, and forc'd to draw' but rather the wit to live in mutual independence within the bond:

> Good Wits are Parallels that run in length.
> (*PF* p.154)

That way she gains a sense of freedom but also of contribution to the other brain, presumably Newcastle's:

> Thus true Born Wits to others strength may give,
> Yet by its owne, and not by others live.
> (Ibid.)

Considering that in defence of her book she says:

> Condemn me not for making such a coyle
> About my book, alas it is my childe,
> (*PF* sig.A8ᵛ)

and that she sees Newcastle as her guide and mentor:

> There oft I leane my Head, and list'ning harke,
> To heare his words, and all his Fancies mark,
> (*PF* p.214)

I believe that to a large extent this book for her is their child, not only hers. In learning from him in such a way that

she may be independent but still deeply supportive of him. her book is the offspring of their life together. Newcastle may well be in some part the model for Father Love in *Youth's Glory and Death's Banquet,* who sees his name living on, not through his daughter's children, but her scholarly fame,

> ....Besides, there is no certainty of a continued line, nor doth many children give an assurance their Father at the day of his death...therefore I had rather live in thy fame, than live or dye in an infamous and foolish succession.[19]

Cavendish's inability to conceive had caused them both disappointment, though she says in her memoirs that he never blamed her for it, even though he was very concerned to keep his line alive. Her work is an outcome of their union which is not dependent upon her as simply a vessel that does or does not function efficiently. Unlike a human child which would need to be male to maintain the line, Cavendish's book, explicitly female in her address 'To the Reader' can bring the same sort of academic immortality that Sanspareille can offer Father Love. Thus the child-book could in theory at least, ensure a far longer-lasting fame to Cavendish and Newcastle, its intellectual father, than a real child, which may be born the wrong gender, or die young, or prove a disappointment to them both. Indeed, this is precisely what occurred, and Newcastle's property had passed out of the direct male line of inheritance within twenty years of his death. But in this creative act of writing for posterity, Cavendish can take an active and independent role, yet her

references to Newcastle throughout her work constantly link him with it, either through his teaching, his active mind or his absence.

Newcastle himself was without reason and focus when the royalist cause could or would not use him, and it may well be that his desire for more children was part of a need for a sense of future he had lost in the Civil War. Cavendish is sufficient unto herself through her writing to the extent that when he is absent, she becomes absolute in a way that glorifies him and the role he plays in her life. Catherine Gallagher says of Cavendish's relationship to the monarch:

> He is the cynosure, the guiding star, that directs her to her own selfhood. But the very completeness of her selfhood, modelled on him, then makes the monarch irrelevant.[23]

While I would agree with this, I would also add that this description applies equally, and perhaps more so, to her relationship with Newcastle. The delight of realising she need not be 'two Braines joyn'd', does not release Cavendish from bondage to her personal and chosen monarch, but raises her to the delighted knowledge that she can be a monarch too. The decision, expressed in *The Blazing World* (1666), to become Margaret the First[24] is first played with in *Poems, and Fancies*, and is responsible for the great sense of joy and delight that emerges repeatedly throughout the work, despite all Cavendish's doubts and insecurities.

This delightfully autonomous act is not without its frustrations though. There are the technical difficulties such

as making her verses rhyme, which are made daunting by her lack of education. This causes the need to cover defects with a show of bravado or disarming honesty. For example, 'A Circle Squar'd in Prose' (*PF* p.48-49) has the margin note 'Because my Lines are too long for my Rhimes, therefore I put them in prose' and the address 'To Naturall Philosophers' (*PF* sig.A6-A6v) explains 'the Reason why I write it in Verse is, because I thought Errors might better passe there, then in Prose'. Her longing for a platform to speak becomes clear in her numerous 'Dialogues and Discourses', in references to orations and her frequent addresses. Yet while the joy of writing is in the chance to express herself and ease her restless mind, one of its frustrations is in the necessarily notional nature of the audience. More troubling still is the frustrating knowledge that once that elusive notional audience becomes real, it is likely to criticise her work, regardless of its quality, because she is female. Yet, she has discovered a self through this act of writing that she has perhaps never quite experienced before. The close and loving family relationships that have cushioned her from the outside world, may have stifled her a little, though her intense loyalty would not permit any recognition of that. In her writing the confident side of her nature has a chance to flower, although in very difficult ground. and it is undoubtedly the case, as evidenced by the great outpouring of writing in *Poems, and Fancies* and the body of work which came later, that Cavendish gains a

sense of liberation that is worth every frustration and risk involved in the role of author.

Notes to pages 15-49:

1 *Hamlet*, III, 2, 242 , *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Alexander (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1994). All subsequent references to works by Shakespeare are from this edition, unless stated otherwise.

2 It is interesting to note that Cavendish uses this strategy again in 1667 in her biography of her husband, when his secretary John Rolleston vouches for the Duke's character.

3 See page 14, Note 1.

4 Patricia Higgins: 'The Reactions of Women' in *Politics, Religion and the English Civil War* ed. Brian Manning (London: Edward Arnold: 1973), pp.179-222 (p.213); subsequently referred to as Higgins, 'Reactions'.

5 See Sylvia Bowerbank 'The Spider's Delight: Margaret Cavendish and the "Female" Imagination' *English Literary Renaissance* 14, 1984, pp.392-408; subsequently referred to as Bowerbank,'Spider's Delight'.

6 See Paul Salzman's introduction to *Urania* in *An Anthology of Seventeenth Century Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.xiv.

7 It may be significant that this letter is omitted in the later editions.

8 Elaine Hobby, 'Discourse so Unsavoury' in *Women, Writing, History 1640-1740*, ed. Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (eds), (London: Batsford, 1992) pp.16-32 (p.19-21)

9 Annette Kramer, '"Thus by the Musick of a Ladyes Tongue": Margaret Cavendish's Dramatic Innovations in Women's Education' p.58-59, *Women's History Review* page 57-79, 2:1 (1993), pp.57-70 (pp.58-59)

10 See the second and third editions of *Poems, and Fancies* (1664 and 1668) for examples of both these images.

11 James Fitzmaurice, 'Fancy and the Family: Self-characterisations of Margaret Cavendish' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 53:3 (1990) pp.199-209 (p.200); subsequently referred to as Fitzmaurice, 'Fancy'.

12 Moira Ferguson 'A "Wise, Wittie and Learned Lady": Margaret Lucas Cavendish'in *Women Writers of the Seventeenth Century* ed. Katharina M. Wilson and Frank J. Warnke (Athens:University of Georgia Press: 1989) pp.305-336 (p.309); subsequently referred to as Ferguson,'MLC'.

13 *Youth's Glory and Death's Banquet* in *Playes* (London:J. Martin, J. Allestreye, & T. Dicas,1662) p.123

14 Jean Gagen, 'Honour and Fame in the Works of the Duchess of Newcastle' *Studies in Philology* 56 (1959),pp. 519-538 (p.521); Subsequently referred to as Gagen,' Honour'

15 See P.A. Faulkner, *Bolsover Castle* (England: English Heritage, 1991), pp.24-29 for a full description of the Little Castle.

16 *Aphra Behn: Selected Poems*, ed. Malcolm Hicks (Manchester: Carcanet Press; 1993) pp.1-6

17 'A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life' *The Life of ....William Cavendish...'* (London: J. M. Dent; 1915) p.189 This autobiography first appeared in *Nature's Pictures* (1656). Subsequently referred to as *Memoirs*.

18 *Aphra Behn : Selected Poems*. p.1.

19 *The New Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse* ed. Alistair Fowler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) p.756.

20 *Playes* 1662 (see note 11 above).

21 See Douglas Grant's edition of *The Phanseys of William Cavendish...Addressed to Margaret Lucas and Her Letters in Reply* (London: Nonesuch; 1956).

22 *Youth's Glory and Death's Banquet* in *Playes* 1662, p.23.

23 Catherine Gallagher, 'Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England' *Genders*, 1 (1988), pp.24-29 (p.28).

24 *The Blazing World and other Writings* ed. Kate Lilley (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1994) p.124.

CHAPTER THREE

THE CONFLICTS OF THE WAR POEMS

O War, thou cruel Enemy to Life
Poems, and Fancies p.91

In *Poems, and Fancies* the subject of war is approached from numerous directions. The war poems touch also on many of the author's other concerns, such as the role of nature and honour, her fascination with fairies and even to a small degree her interest in natural philosophy. This combination illustrates the conflict between her idealistic and imaginative notions, and the real experience of war. While she feels war should defend and uphold ideals, producing heroic soldiers, Cavendish is aware that it is more to do with betrayed moral values and mangled bodies. The motivation for war in her poems is equally tormenting, the outcomes questionable, the battles horrifying: men fight in futility 'to make their names to live (*PF* p.177), Honour and Dishonour fight in a poem with no outcome, perhaps because that battle can never have a lasting outcome, fairies and pygmees fight over land with a shocking viciousness. Throughout the poems is a sense of a troubled mind seeking for reasons and answers which Cavendish knows in advance she will not find. While she attempts to lighten the burden of imagination with thoughts of heroism, she returns to graphic images of death repeatedly.

The most striking aspect of the war poems is Cavendish's use of strong visual imagery, especially in 'A Description of the

the Battel in Fight' and 'A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees'. The first of these two is especially interesting in the earliest edition. as it is written in the present tense and has a journalistic feel to it. While there are lines where the speaker expresses grief or sympathy:

> When horses dye, they know no reason why,
> Where men do venture life , for vain-glory.
> (*PF* p.177)

most of the poem is an objective description of appalling scenes:

> Here heads are cleft in two parts, braines lye masht,
> And all their faces into slices hasht.
> (*PF* p.173)

By the second edition, the description is in the past tense and loses the immediacy. perhaps because some of the pain of the Civil War had receded also by that time. ' A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees' is also strongly visual, and contains a juxtaposition of fairy-tale descriptions:

> Of small Cockle-shels their Targets were made,
> And for their long Swords a Rosemary blade.
> (*PF* p.180)

with the tragic images of real war:

> Some lay upon the ground, without a Head,
> Others that gasping lay, but not quite dead
> (*PF* p.184)

H. M. Cocking feels this to be a grave flaw in Cavendish's work:

> This is totally unfitting in a delicate poem about fairy armies. A comparison with Drayton, where the mock-heroic tone distances the battle successfully, emphasises the unsuitability of Margaret's material, and also her inability to see a poem as a whole.[1]

However, I would not agree with this as I believe Cavendish is deliberately mixing fantasy and reality, and unlike Drayton is not attempting a mock-heroic stance. Despite her love of the world of imagination, I feel that Cavendish cannot escape the uncomfortable knowledge that when a heroic soldier rides out into battle, with 'A Plume of valiant Thoughts' and 'His Spurs rowell'd with Hope', as does her 'Soldier arm'd by Mars' (*PF* pp.157-158), he is likely to end up:

> Finding his soul from's body soon would flye:
> (*PF* p.185).

While she delights in her fairy soldiers with rosemary swords, she nevertheless plunges them into the brutality of a war most realistic and surprisingly graphic from a woman who claims in her 'Epistle to Souldiers', which precedes the war poems:

> I never saw an Army together, nor any Incounters...neither have I the courage to look on ... cruell assaults...I shall start at the noyse of a Potgun, and shut my eyes at the sight of a bloudy Sword.(*PF* p.167),

While no direct link can be drawn, Cavendish did live in the house of Rubens in Antwerp after her marriage, where cathedrals and churches were full of his work. Van Dyck, who is mentioned in William Cavendish's dedicatory poem which opens *Poems and Fancies*, and presumably, therefore, was familiar to them both, was Rubens' pupil and also spent time working in Antwerp. As both painters had worked extensively in England also, it is likely that Cavendish had already some familiarity with their style, even without this

additional contact. It is not impossible that her imagination was fired by their work. Rubens' *The Battle of the Amazons*, for example, is full of the crowded images found in 'A Description of the Battel in Fight' (*PF* pp.173-177) . Also, despite her lack of actual experience of real war, she was aware of its dangers and pressures, both as a lady of Queen Henrietta Maria, a sister with brothers in the thick of battles and later as the wife of an exiled Royalist leader. She states also in *Philosophicall and Physical Opinions*, published in 1655, that her imagination is such that:

> ..if they should tell me all the parts of an animal body...I conceive it as perfectly to my understanding as if I had seen it dissected...for truly I have gathered more by piece-meals than from a full relation, or a methodical education for knowledge; but my fancy will build thereupon and make discourse therefrom...[2]

Her imagination is also inspired by ideals though, and these are found in 'A Souldier Arm'd by Mars' (*PF* pp.157-158) and 'A Battel between Honour and Dishonour'(*PF* pp.178-179). While these are both descriptive, the soldiers are literally dressed in abstract concepts, such as courage, skill and fidelity, which remove us a little from the blood and bones these attributes cover. 'The Soldier arm'd by Mars', who is described as part of a masque in the mind, is reminiscent of an Arthurian errant fighting for renown:

> Thus he was arm'd, and for great Fame did fight,
> She was his Mistresse, he her Champion Knight.
> (*PF* p.158),

while the armies in 'A Battel between Honour and Dishonour' go out to fight solely to defend the name of Honour, a concept

which appears and re-appears throughout Cavendish's work. As discussed in the introduction Cavendish sought to enlarge the contemporary synonymity of a woman's honour with her reputation for chastity to include the concept of noble achievement and heroic striving which were male territory. It is through the war poems that she makes clear what she means by the term 'honour', but its close relationship with martial exploits means that her reconstruction of the concept so it may be applied to female achievement is not without difficulty.

The need to reconcile violence with heroism is a great conflict in the war poems, as Cavendish struggles to justify the spilling of blood which would appear to undermine honour, but by the time she came to write her memoirs she had simplified the matter:

> my father did not esteem titles, unless they were gained by heroick actions; and the kingdome being in a happy peace...there was no employments for heroick spirits. (*Memoirs*, p.187)

Thus she can easily explain her father's killing of another man in a duel:

> for my father by the laws of honour could do no less than call him to the field, (Ibid.)

Between writing *Poems, and Fancies* when the blood of the Civil War was still relatively fresh, and a cool backwards look at death and honour only three years later, she appears to have exorcised the disturbing images that inspired her war poems. However, it could be that as her father died when she

was two years old, she idealises his 'heroick spirit' so that his call of the enemy to the field becomes more the action of a 'champion knight' and the distance between her actual experience and tales of her father's youth is wide enough to uphold this image. This romantic ideal though, lacks the appalled sense of fascination that gives the vivid images of the war poems their power.

The detachment of the memoirs is strongly at variance with the pictures which come clearly into the mind's eye in 'Of a Funerall' (*PF* pp.197-198)[3] through the effect of a deep sympathy by the author for the subject. The speaker is the spirit of Cavendish's brother, Sir Charles Lucas, although he is not identified precisely in the first edition. By the second this poem has been retitled 'Upon the Funeral of my Dear Brother, Kill'd in these Unhappy Warres,', while the 'Elegy on my Brother, kill'd in these unhappy Warres.' which follows it in the first edition, becomes simply 'An Elegy on the Death of my Brother.' Charles Lucas was shot after a court-martial by the Parliamentary forces in 1647, having held the city of Colchester against them for over two months. The idea of him dying alone with no family around him clearly disturbs Cavendish, who describes her brothers and sisters in her memoirs 'agreeing so well, that there seemed but one minde amongst them' and 'delighting in each other's company',, and describes the war as 'like a whirlwind,' sweeping the family apart (*Memoirs*. pp.192;209;192). It is interesting that she

chooses to speak in her brothers voice:

> For here's no mourner to lament my fall,
> (*PF* p.197)

as though by empathising with him, she somehow joins in his lonely death, which she clearly feels was more tragic for the lack of the traditional rituals of family grief. It is a departure for Cavendish to adopt a persona outside her dialogue poems, where she often takes on the voices of two opposing ideas. More usually, she speaks in a voice recognisably that of the person she wishes to be in its self-consciousness. In this poem to her brother, her own self is subsumed in her grief for him. Not surprisingly, he is idealised, with blood 'pure', thus negating the charge of treason for which he died with nature supplying the ceremony that the circumstances of his death denied him:

> Rough stones, as Scutchions, shall adorne my Tombe,
> And Glow-worm burning Tapers stand thereby;
> (*PF* p.197).

The clear image of this natural shrine is a comfort to his grieving sister, who says in her elegy to him:

> Deare Brother, thy Idea in my minde doth lye,
> And is intomb'd in my sad memory;
> Where every day I to thy Shrine doe goe;
> (*PF* p.198)[4].

As in her battle poems, her active imagination supplies images she cannot have experienced in reality, and the last verse may refer to the desecration of her mother's and sister's tombs by the Parliamentary army, which also took place when she was abroad (see Grant, *Biog*. p.101). The speaker's warning against

disturbance of his grave, comes close to images of disinterment, 'Then let no Spade, nor Pick-Axe dig me up,' (*PF* p.198) and the poem closes with what could be seen as a prophecy or a curse:

> For who the dead dislodges from their grave,
> Shall neither blessednesse, nor honour have.
> (Ibid.)

A tomb was erected to Charles Lucas in St. Giles Churchyard at the Restoration and the verse describing Nature's tomb is omitted in the later editions.

There is the constant reminder of the background of real war in these poems, and the attention to technical detail recalls also that Cavendish was married to a famous soldier. She is aware of the formation of an army, though as stated earlier, she claims in her 'Epistle to Souldiers' never to have seen anything but 'a Troop, or a Regiment march on the Highway by chance.' (*PF* p.167). She can name the soldiers' weapons and understands the way in which battle tactics are used, bringing all this knowledge into her poems, especially 'A Battel between Honour and Dishonour' (*PF* pp.178-179).

This poem, is partly a list of battle-lines:

> Courage the Van did lead, Fidelity the Rear,
> The Left-Wing, and the Right, Wisdom and Wit they were,
> The Artillery, Invention doth command,
> Constancy and Patience, Sentinels stand.

and in 'A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees' (*PF* pp.179-186), she describes the use of tactics:

> The files, and formes, the Pygmees plac'd themselves
> Was like in figure, unto Muscle-shels.

> To peirce through enemies, give way to friends,
> The midst being broad, and sharp at the two ends.

This sort of knowledge could well have come from Newcastle, or his brother Charles Cavendish, who lived with them, both of whom she regarded as sources of wisdom and education:

> whose discourses are lively descriptions. I cannot forget anything they say, such deep impressions their words print in my brain. (*Phys.Op.* sig.B1)

Her purpose in using this knowledge is debatable. Details of actual practise are often unintelligible to the uninitiated, so they do not necessarily enhance the understanding of the poem. However, they do display esoteric knowledge, which may have pleased the author, as she is aware of her own educational shortcomings, saying, for example, in her 'Epistle to Naturall Philosophers':

> I never read, nor heard of any English Booke to Instruct me....and truly I understand no other Language..Neither do I understand my owne Native Language very well...(which) makes me ignorant of the Opinions, and Discourses of former times; wherefore I may be absurd and erre grossely. (*PF* sig.A6)

Also, as stated earlier, they recall Newcastle to the reader, even though he is not mentioned, and imply an interested and supportive wife, following not only the impulses of her heart, but the requirements of due honour, as she explains in her memoirs:

> I am so proud, or rather just to My Lord, as to abate nothing of the quality of his wife, for if honour be the mark of merit...it were a baseness for me to neglect the ceremony thereof. (*Memoirs*, p.212)

The inclusion of the word 'just' in this passage is especially significant as Cavendish is very interested

in the idea of deservedness. where honour is concerned. As discussed in Chapter 1, Cavendish makes many subtle references to her husband's sufferings in *Poems. and Fancies* and his loyalty and nobility of spirit despite poor treatment are constantly asserted in her biography of him. A first reading of her poems of war, may suggest strange and inexpicable digressions on the author's part. However, with the knowledge of this sense of the injustice towards Newcastle and the lack of honour in his treatment by friend and foe alike, possible references to him throughout the war poems emerge.

While his name is not mentioned, Newcastle's primary interest and area of expertise is referred to in 'A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees'. In the section upon the use of horses in battle, which takes up lines 115-168. a sizeable portion of the whole 278 lines, Cavendish defends accusations the modern reader cannot identify, but which may have been aimed at a specific detraction of her husband. While in poetic terms. the poem seems flawed by this section, which appears to be an unconscious and total digression from the narrative line, I would suggest that Cavendish is willing to allow the reader to see the work as flawed, in order to include this defence of her husband. Whether it is written in fact with calculated intent, or is actually a digression to which the author was blinded by indignation on her husband's behalf, is impossible to say for certain, but it is however. one of the most interesting parts of *Poems. and Fancies* as a

whole.

While Cavendish begins line 117 talking of grasshoppers, the 'fairy-horses', performing athletic leaps called caprioles, she swiftly moves on to a defence of the use of skilled horsemanship in battle. She does not name Newcastle, but her elaborate defence of the criticism levelled against the use of the 'Horses of manage' (*PF* p.183) can only be intended to refute those who have dared to speak against him. As soon as she says 'Some think for War, it is an Aire unfit' (*PF* p.182), she is moving away from the fairies. The question the reader cannot help asking is who it is that says this? Cavendish does not supply the answer, but 'they' have clearly offended her on Newcastle's behalf. The slight seems to be that 'they' have belittled the use of the highly schooled horses to which Newcastle devoted himself from early boyhood, and which had been the focus of his life during his exile, despite the worrying lack of funds. Douglas Grant in his biography of Margaret Cavendish, gives in one short sentence a summary of Newcastle's exile that tells a great deal about the man, when he says his time was spent in:

> the constant search for credit and, once it was found, the immediate purchase of horses. (Grant, *Biog.*, p.69).

The suggestion seems also to have been that the only use of these horses in battle, is cowardly:

> Unlesse by leaping high themselves can save. (*PF* p.182)

or frivolous:

> Many doe think are only fit for pleasure.
> (*PF* p.183)

But Cavendish is not content simply to defend the use of the trained horse. She goes on to show her knowledge of the training methods and why particular airs-above-the-ground, which are complicated and athletic leaps based upon the natural behaviour of stallions, are suitable at particular times on the battle-field. Newcastle was not a man who took kindly to being slighted, as his relationship with Prince Rupert demonstrated, and in his second book on horsemanship which was not published until 1667, he has a section headed 'That it is a very Impertinent Error, and of great Prejudice, to think the Mannage Useless', which includes the astute comment 'They cannot do it, and therefore it is Naught...'[5]. The similarity between his defence of his work, and his wife's poem, written fourteen years earlier, suggests the ongoing rankling that criticism causes him when he is sure of his own expertise.

The role of William Cavendish in the development of classical horsemanship cannot be overestimated. He built some of the first indoor schooling arenas in Britain at his family homes, converted part of Rubens' house for the same purpose and was required to demonstrate his skills by, amongst others, the Duke of Oldenburg, the Prince of East Friesland and the Marquis of Caracena. He is still referred to in modern manuals of horsemanship and is credited by the Spanish Riding School of Vienna as one of its primary early mentors[6]. According to

Christopher Hibbert[7], there were endless arguments over the use of cavalry tactics amongst army leaders, so it is very likely that Newcastle's name and methods would be widely discussed. He himself says in his book, discussing the choice of war-horses 'There are great disputes amongst Cavaliers about this Business...' (*New Method*, p.77). Therefore, oblique reference to him would hardly go unrecognised by Cavendish's anticipated audience and again, as in his introductory verse, there is a certain political defiance in transporting him through her writing into this country against the proscription of his exile. perhaps even more so in a discussion of war-tactics.

She also reminds the reader that untrained horses are highly-strung 'cowardly' (*PF* p.183) creatures, who without faith in their riders, will ignore commands and go where they please, or refuse to move at all. Her further description of the control of the soldier, to match the skills of his horse, looks forward to her 'I have heard my lord say....' sections in her biography of the Duke. It is interesting that she would seem to be accurate in her argument here, as cases of horses bolting in battle were not uncommon with or without the permission of the soldier, though accounts of the battles suggest he may frequently have been as eager to desert as the horse. Newcastle's Whitecoats or'Lambs' with their undyed white uniforms however, were known for their loyalty and steadfastness, and it was said of them at the battle of

Marston Moor, that:

> they would have no quarter, but fought it out till there were not thirty of them living ..(and) though they could not get rise from their wounds, yet were so desperate as to get a sword or pike..to gore the (Roundhead) troopers' horses as they came over them or passed them by.[8]

A possible sub-text to this section of the poems of war then, is that a man who commands loyalty in the highly-strung horse, is bound to inspire loyalty in the hearts of men and those who have exiled Newcastle, cannot hope to be so easily rid of his influence.

It is perhaps the recollections of a soldier-husband that inform another area wherein Cavendish shows unexpected knowledge - that of physical injury. Her soldiers in 'A Desciption of the Battel in Fight' are described in the most disturbing detail, with mashed brains, hanging eyeballs and spongy lungs struggling for dying breath. Compared with the whimsical nature of much of her work, the brutal realism displayed, especially in this poem, is genuinely shocking and reveals a darker side to her imagination that is unexpected. The most appalling example of this is in 'A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees', where the blood of the dead becomes a bouillon for Nature's table. This, like the dead and dying in 'A Description of the Battel in Fight', is described with cool objectivity that is more disturbing than any emotional description could be. While it would be easy to dismiss this as an example of repulsively bad taste on the poet's part, I would argue that it is more than that. When

Cavendish goes on to talk of Nature 'transforming things ' (*PF* p.185), she is touching on an area she covers later in this poem, and in others. The dead bodies of the Pygmees are 'transmigrated' (*PF* p.186), and absorbed by Nature into rain-clouds, rubies and marble and her graphic descriptions of death all end with an assimilation into Nature of the dead or of their blood and groans. Therefore, it could be argued that these descriptions are not a gratuitous or morbid catharsis for Cavendish herself, although a cathartic element is quite possible, but an attempt to create a pantheistic or monistic mythology of her own, which explains and gives some purpose to the deaths of the Civil War. This may well explain Cavendish's decision to displace what is essentially the description of a Civil War battle, with its discourse on horsemanship and references to Oberon's soldiers as 'Cavaliers' (*PF* p.184), into the realm of fairy-land. While Nature and Fame appear at the end of 'A Description of the Battel in Fight', there is not the same element of mystic intervention as at the end of 'A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees'. By transferring this battle to a fantasy land, Cavendish is not bound by either reality or Christian ideas of an after-life and can experiment more freely. This poem then, cannot easily be classed with her fairy-poems, which set out to explore the nature of fairies and fairy-land, rather than using them as a vehicle for a different exploration altogether.

Alongside this need to reconcile death with purpose, lies her offended sense of honour. As has been seen in Chapter 1, Cavendish consistently makes use of classical imagery, and personifications of Honour and Fame are common throughout *Poems, and Fancies*. However, in her war poems, these sit somewhat uneasily alongside her realism, and create a certain tension. She cannot abandon her instinct that conflict should be motivated by honour and attempts to find a sense of honour somewhere in most of her war poems. It is the loss of honour provoking shameful acts such as pillaging the dead, as in 'Of a Funerall' or the deception of enemies, as in 'A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees', that disturb her most. 'The Soldier armed by Mars' represents the heroic aspect of war that has little to do with severed limbs, but much to do with fame and glory.

However, in 'A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees' and 'A Description of the Battel in Fight', honour is harder to find. Her attitude to the Pygmee King seems troubled in trying to ascribe honourable intentions to him, even though he is the invader. Oberon is honourable throughout - he musters his army, leads his men in bright armour, and suggests hand-to-hand combat with his enemy:

> To save their Men, and much bloud to prevent;
> (*PF* p.181)

The Pygmee King however, is at first entirely villainous. He invades simply because Fairy Land is a pleasant place, and refuses combat with Oberon. so that he may be glorified by the

strength of his army:

> I prouder am, my subjects strength to show,
> Where by direction they my skill may know.
> (*PF* p.181)

However, Cavendish cannot allow a creature of her imagination to die unshriven, and the reader learns later that:

> ...we by famine were with meagre face,
> Here sent about to seek a fertile place.
> (*PF* p.182)

The Pygmee King dies begging Oberon to treat his dead soldiers with honour, and those left living later die of broken hearts while entombing his body with their own.

There are similarities with this in 'A Battle between Honour and Dishonour', when after the long list of evils ascribed to Dishonour's army, Cavendish ends the poems by saying they are at heart ignorant, obstinate, rude and wilful. She seems to make allowance for those who fail to live up to honour and rather than seeing them as entirely evil, she suggests that they are driven rather by folly. This is in keeping with her philosophy of everything coming from and being part of Nature and she is perhaps attempting to deal with theological conundrums about good and evil existing in a world created by a benign deity.

It may also be said that if dishonour comes less from evil than from folly, then those who are honourable have avoided the most common and foolish of human weakness - and to Cavendish her husband is honourable above all others. It could

be argued that her adoration of Newcastle and her indignation at the way he is treated by those who should honour him creates a hidden agenda in 'A Battel between Honour and Dishonour', 'A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees' and 'A Description of the Battle in Fight'. In 'A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees', as discussed earlier, the section on the use of 'airs above the ground' supports the use of battle tactics at which her husband excelled, and may have served as a reminder to those who had forgotten his successes. She, of course, chooses to forget his failures. While 'A Description of the Battel in Fight' has no references as specific, there is near the end a description of horses finding courage in the skill of their riders, and dying in that faith with 'stout hearts' *(PF* p.177), without understanding the reasons behind their sacrifice. However, both clearest and most obscure possible references to Newcastle's situation can be found in 'A Battel between Honour and Dishonour' *(PF* pp.178-179).

This conflict is motivated by Honour's despair over the lack of respect shown her in 'this Age'. She raises an army to defend herself, and this army has all the attributes ascribed to Newcastle by Cavendish in the biography she was later to write of him, and also those for which his own force 'Newcastle's Lambs' were famous. Unfortunately, the inclusion of Arts and Sciences in the battle lines, which were Newcastle's other great interests, may have been unwittingly

pointing out his weaknesses as well as his strengths, as he was criticised by Clarendon for taking too much pleasure in 'delightful company'[9] when he should have been ordering battles. However, the general of Honour's army is Generosity, and few could argue that Newcastle was not generous. He funded his command of King's army out of his own pocket, paid his men regularly and had their loyalty in return. But he was not thanked or appreciated by the King, and he was badly insulted by Prince Rupert on more than one occasion. Only his sense of honour made him swallow his pride and fight under the young man who had offended him. With this in mind, the picture of Dishonour's army, lead by partiality, treachery, perjury and unthankfulness, with suspicion and envy close behind, could be inspired by Prince Rupert and his followers, especially when Rupert was known for being obstinate, rude to those who expected respect as their due, and wilful. Because of the political implications of casting aspersions upon her own side, Cavendish cannot openly say her husband was ill-treated, as she can say of her brother in 'Of a Funerall', being slain by the common enemy of Royalists. But I would argue that Newcastle is never far from her thoughts when she writes, especially in her war poems.

In *Women, Writing, History,* Susan Wiseman comments:

> Cavendish does not write with any consistent attitude or programme about war...the question of war splits her texts[10]

and while this split may be seen throughout the war poems, it

is illustrated most clearly in 'A Dialogue betwixt Peace, and War'(*PF* pp.90-91). This poem is the last in a section headed 'Dialogues' (*PF* p.53), in which the majority of the poems have two opposing voices and reach no conclusive outcome to their argument. As in 'A Battle between Honour and Dishonour' this could be seen as Cavendish's inability to manipulate her poem to a neat ending, or her acknowledgement that many issues can be argued back and forth eternally without a definitive result being achieved. The dialogue in which Peace and War argue, reveals not only the received moral stance of a Christian nation, which is to be expected, but more complex conflicts. It is hardly surprising that Peace should declare:

> O War, thou cruell enemy to Life,
> Unquieted Neighbour, breeding alwaies strife.
> Tyrant thou art, to Rest will give no time,
> And Blessed Peace thou punishest as a Crime.
> (*PF* p.91),

but perhaps more so that War's response seeks to undermine the class-structure which Cavendish believed in:

> Thou Flattering Peace, and most unjust, which drawes
> The Vulgar by they Rhet'rick to hard Lawes:
> Which makes them silly ones, content to be,
> To take up Voluntary Slavery.
> And mak'st great Inequalitites beside,
> Some like to Asses beare, others on Horsback ride.
> (Ibid.)

This illustrates Cavendish's ability to see both sides of a situation, such as social hierarchy, even though she has a clear position herself in the argument. Peace represents the traditional Christian view of war as being essentially an evil which destroys the structure of society:

> On Naturall Affections thou dost make
> A Massacre, that hardly one can 'scape.
> The Root of All Religion thou pull'st up,
> And every Branch of Ceremony cut.
> Civill Society is turn'd to Manners base.
> No Lawes, or Customes can by thee get place
> (Ibid.)

but blames the power of War on the weakness of the 'Vulgar Multitude' who listen to 'Factious Tales':

> ..the cleare sight of Truth they do not know.
> And reeling stand, not know which way to take,
> But when they chuse, 'tis wrong, so a War make.
> (*PF* p.90)

In her memoirs, Cavendish makes her attitude towards the lower classes quite plain:

> Neither were we suffered to have any familiaritie with the vulgar servants, or conversation: yet caused us to demean our selves with an humble civility towards them
> (*Memoirs*, p.190)

yet she can feel sympathy for the 'great Inequalities' they suffer, without having any desire for change. Similarly, while she sees the great evils of war, she also sees its potential for human growth,

> I a great Schoole am, where all may grow wise:
> For Prudent Wisdome in Experience lyes.
> (*PF* p.91)

War argues that Peace encourages thoughts to grow slovenly, and fame to be buried by sloth so that 'all great Actions dye' (Ibid.), and it would seem that Cavendish feels that the upsurge of patriotism and honourable actions that War inspires have a value that the complacency of Peace may have no place for. War has the final word in this argument:

> I am a large Feild, where doth Ambition run,

> Courage still seekes me, though Cowards me shun
> (Ibid.)

but still the matter is unresolved and the poem feels unfinished. War's final lines do not in any way offer a definitive counter to Peace and suggest that Cavendish does not take any consistent stand on the morality of war, because as with so many of her concerns, the accepted view does not satisfy her. yet the alternative is disturbing.

While Cavendish's wild imagination frequently makes her work seem undisciplined and erratic, in the poems of war it becomes possible to see that unbridled range of thought serving her poetry. The tension between her idealistic notions of honour, and the war as experienced by her family and herself show clearly, as does her concern for Newcastle's reputation and the respect she feels is his due. While she supports the Royalist cause wholeheartedly, she is too much of an individual to accept every action with patience and deeply reluctant to hold her peace and suffer in silence, unlike her husband. Yet neither will she sit in judgement upon the good and evil in war, realising that the simplest faults and errors can cause as much damage as malicious intent. Some of her most alarming verses are included in Cavendish's war poems, but also some of her most heartfelt and unselfconscious. While her verse is often uneven and her most effective images used more than once, the poems of war are nevertheless examples of her work at its most thoughtful and disturbing, displaying far more than a wild imagination or the sole desire of fame.

Notes to pages 52-73:

1 'Originality and influence in the work of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle', Unpublished M.Phil. thesis, University of Reading, 1972, p.5.

2 *The Philosophical And Physical Opinions,* (London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655), sig. B3ᵛ; subsequently referred to as *Phys.Op.*

3 Misnumbered 193-194 in text

4 Misnumbered 196 in text

5 *A New Method and Extraordinary Invention to Dress Horses.....by the Thrice Noble....William Cavendish,* (London: Thomas Milburn, 1667) pp.5;9; subsequently referred to as *New Method.*

6 Newcastle describes his demonstrations of horsemanship while in Antwerp in his *New Method* (sig.(b) - (c)2ᵛ). One example of a modern acknowledgement of his importance in the development of equestrianism is Elwyn Hartley-Edwards, *The Encyclopedia of the Horse,* pp.98 and 315 (London: Dorling Kindersley Ltd., 1994).

7 Christopher Hibbert, *Cavaliers and Roundheads.* (London: Harper Collins; 1993), pp.77-78

8 Anonymous contemporary source, quoted in Hibbert, *Cavaliers and Roundheads,* p.177

9 Edward Hyde, First Duke of Clarendon, *The True Historical Narrative of the Rebellion and Wars in England,* ed. W. D. Macray (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1888), III,382-3

10 Susan Wiseman, 'Gender and Status in Dramatic Discourse: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle' in *Women, Writing, History,* ed. Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman, (London: Batsford; 1992) p.228.n.26

CHAPTER 4

FOLKLORE, FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Of small Creatures, such as we call Fairies
Poems, and Fancies p.162

While the poems of war represent Cavendish's need to explore the conflicting tensions of life during and after the Civil War, her fairy poems display the delight she finds in the idea of unseen worlds that offer an escape from such reality, and challenge attempts at definitive knowledge. The poems may be seen in two groups which approach the existence of fairies in very different ways, and a third consisting of two poems, 'A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees' (*PF* p.179), and 'Sir Charles into my chamber coming in' (*PF* p.213) and an address 'To Poets' (*PF* p.121) which use fairies as a vehicle to consider other areas, namely war, imagination and criticism. These are not grouped with other fairy poems, although 'Sir Charles into my chamber coming in' is moved to do so in the later editions[1].

Of the two groups of poems which directly consider the nature and life of fairies the first is concerned with the topography and activities of fairy-land which is located at the centre of the earth. Here Queen Mab rules at Nature's behest, without any mention of Oberon. The second group takes an entirely different viewpoint, where the fairies dwell within the human brain and Oberon is mentioned as dwelling with his queen, who is not named. While the first group has the familiarity of the folklore of shared consciousness.

including two poems on giants and witches, the second anticipates modern science fiction both in the treatment of fairies, and in five verses which further explore the idea of sentient microscopic humanoid creatures living in the human body, described as 'Animal Spirits' (*PF* p.164). These verses are positioned immediately after the second group of fairy poems.

Katherine Briggs states that:

> True oral tradition is a great stimulus to creative imagination...The rise of tradition into literature and the descent of literature into tradition is a fascinating study[2],

and it will be seen that Cavendish's fairy poems follow both of these paths to the extent that it is difficult to trace her sources except to a broad literary tradition rooted in folklore, which will be considered in greater detail below. Her witches and giants however are largely her own and bear little relation to tradition or the fears of the supernatural which sent many old women to the stake in her own time. In 'The Windy Giants', her many-headed monsters are allegorical personifications of each wind's character:

> .....the cold North Wind, his Nerves dry, and strong,
> Pulling up Oakes, then layes them all along....
> The Southern Wind, who is as fierce as he,
> And to the Sun as great an enemy...
> The Western Wind.....
> .....is of a nature sweet, and milde....
> But, O, the Eastern Wind is full of spight...
> (*PF* pp.155-156)

but the images she creates are nature spirits of sorts, and little resemble the giants of traditional folk tales, who all

have large but human-like form and reality. The only link is the way in which Cavendish's giants cast rocks about in their fury. A number of unusual natural rock formations around the British Isles, such as the Giant's Causeway in Scotland and the Gog Magog hills near Cambridge were traditionally held to have been created in similar ways through the great strength of giants and Briggs suggests:

> It seems as if these giants were ...invented to account for scattered boulders or other natural features. (Briggs, *Fairies*, p.188).

Cavendish invents her giants to explain the nature of the four winds but then contradicts her own explanation in her description of witches. Having stated in 'The Windy Giants' that:

> The foure Chiefe Winds are Gyants, long in length,
> As broad are set, and wondrous great in strength.,
> (*PF* p.155)

'Witches of Lapland' then claims:

> Lapland is the place from whence all Winds come,
> From Witches, not from Caves, as doe think some.
> (*PF* p.157).

The giants are not mentioned and the witches both create and distribute winds:

> For they the Aire do draw into high Hills,
> And beat them out againe by certain Mills:
> Then sack it up, and sell it out for gaine
> To Mariners, which traffick on the maine.
> (Ibid.)

This is very reminiscent of the witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* plotting revenge on a sailor's wife by offering winds so that his ship '..shall be tempest-tost' (I.3.25), although

Cavendish's witches seemed motivated more by a keen sense of business. They are unlike Shakespeare's in any other way and bear no relation to the windy giants, or the seventeenth century perception of a witch, as described by Antonia Fraser:

> The bodies of old women, twisted and gnarled by time like tree trunks, marred perhaps by protuberances and growths of different sorts ... might the dissolving eye of fantasy not see in these ugly excrescences and bumps strange teats which the devil could suck?.....cursing, even muttering gibberish .....a friendless old woman imperilled her own safety...a crone without protection was a potential witch.[3]

It is interesting that Katherine Briggs mentions witches only in passing in her authoritative studies of fairy folklore, which suggests that she does not view them as part of this tradition. However, the fear of witches as described by Fraser was rife in the seventeenth century, although the rational-minded were frequently sceptical[4], with many superstitions surrounding them undoubtedly existing, as referred to by Cavendish in her essay 'I wonder any should laugh at the mention of fairies' (*PF* sig.Aa2).

However, it is in Cavendish's fairies, that we see most recognisable influences from folklore and literary traditions of her time. Briggs identifies fashions in the use of folklore by writers saying:

> Even the most flaccid and degenerate of the literary fairies have some point of contact with the fairies in folk tradition, but as a rule, poets and story-tellers pick out one aspect of the the varied and intricate world of fairy tradition, and the aspect chosen differs not only from poet to poet but from one period to another.
> (Briggs, *Fairies*, p.166)

Cavendish like her immediate predecessors and contemporaries,

chooses the aspects of littleness and playful mischief-making, and Briggs sees her as taking this aspect to its farthest degree:

> The diminutive fairies in Drayton, Herrick et. al., made an extravaganza of Shakespeare's little fairies until, with the Duchess of Newcastle, they became a miracle of littleness. (Ibid.)

Cavendish's brain is never one to play with an idea as she finds it. She always expands the boundaries, both to exercise the imagination she finds such delight in, and also to resist restrictive definitions. That she should take the idea of diminutive fairies and link it with her interest in the unseen, not in a magical but scientific sense is not surprising to the reader who knows her work. However, Briggs is unhappy about this, feeling that Cavendish destroys some vital spark of the fairy tradition:

> The eccentric but engaging Duchess of Newcastle pursued the theme of the littleness of fairies with her usual enthusiasm. Her theory was that the fairies were natural phenomena, much less spiritual than witches or ghosts. By the time she has finished with them they have no more spiritual qualities than microbes; The diminishes have done their worst; no numinosity is left to these fairies anymore. (Ibid.)

While it is possible to understand the folklorist's distress in Cavendish's attempts to link magical creatures to scientific reasoning in this way, Briggs is not accurate in stating that the fairies are not spiritual. They are certainly not magical, as Cavendish suggests they exist in the brain quite naturally rather than having chosen their abode by way of intrusive spell-making or deception of their human hosts.

However, they are spiritual in the same sense as humans and Cavendish suggests that our pious thoughts may be entirely due to their religious spirituality:

> When we have pious thoughts, and thinke of heaven,
> Yet goe about, not ask to be forgiven,
> Perchance their preaching, or a Chapter saying,
> Or on their knees devoutly they are praying.
> (*PF* p.163)

Sylvia Brown sees Cavendish's fairies in the brain as synonymous with atoms:

> In a series of poems, she speculates that atoms may even be small, rational creatures with souls, fairies who live in our brain and beget fancies there.(Brown,'Strategies',p.31)

but I would not agree that this is Cavendish's argument. I believe from Cavendish's discussion of atoms and the possibilities of worlds within this world (which will be examined further in Chapter 4), that the fairies are not individual atoms but, like us, made up of atoms. Cavendish does not link atoms and fairies in any synonymous way and her atoms, while self-motivated, do not display the attributes of thought, emotion and activity as do the fairies in the brain. I would argue rather, that her fascination with and scepticism towards optics and microscopes, leads Cavendish to speculate on the possibility of forms of minuscule life as invisible as atoms, as in her poem 'Of many Worlds in this World':

> For Creatures, small as Atomes, may be there.
> (*PF* p.44)

but that these and the fairies are quite different. Her fascination with atoms, leads her to ponder upon 'A World in an Eare-Ring' (*PF* p.45), and 'Severall Worlds in severall

Circles' (*PF* p.46), but the creatures she envisages in these inner worlds live a life entirely independent of ours. 'A World in an Ear-Ring', she argues may experience winter, without the lady wearing the ear-ring having any awareness of this:

> There nipping Frosts may be, and Winter cold,
> Yet never on the Ladies Eare take Hold.
> (*PF* p.45)

Likewise, an important council may be taking place within the miniature world:

> And yet the Eare not one wise word may get,
> (Ibid.)

or:

> There may be dancing all Night at a Ball,
> And yet the Eare be not disturb'd at all.
> (Ibid.)

This is entirely different to her concept of fairies in the brain, who exist very much in this world, and whose actions affect us directly:

> And as storms use, their houses down may blow,
> Which, by their fall, the Head may dizzy grow.
> And when those houses they build up againe,
> With knocking hard they put the Head to paine.
> When they dig deep, perchance the Tooth may ake,
> And from a Tooth a Quarry-bone may take;.
> (*PF* p.162).

I feel that it is Cavendish's interest in atoms marrying with her ponderings over the nature of imagination which produce the fairies who:

> ...by their severall actions they may make
> Those forms and figures, we for fancy take.
> (*PF* p.162)

Although Christopher Hill says that:

> Most men and women in seventeenth Britain still lived in a world of magic, in which God and the Devil intervened daily, a world of witches, fairies and charms.

and that:

> We cannot separate the early history of science from the history of magic.[5]

the conflict between imaginative fantasy and the rational concerns of the natural philosopher are fully apparent to Cavendish when she chooses to write of fairies.

Therefore in her essay (*PF* sig.Aa2) beginning 'I wonder any should laugh..'. she sets forward a philosophical rationale arguing their existence and positions it nine pages before the fairy poems begin. The issues she raises have a subtext that, as so often in her work, offers the reader a glimpse of a restless and questioning mind which is only partly satisfied with the flights of fancy that spring from it. Similarly, when she writes in 'The Fairy-Queen' of the realm at the centre of the Earth, she must explain how the earth turns and the elements operate in a quasi-scientific description:

> Yet the Earth is not the cause of turning,
> But the fiery spoak; not for fear of burning
> The Axle-tree, for that grows hard with heat,
> And by its quicknesse turns the wheel, though great;
> Unlesse by outward weight itselfe presse down,
> Raising the bottome, bowing downe the Crown.
> (*PF* p.149)

because, it would seem, her imagination desires a fantasy world, but her logical mind requires the knowledge of how the fantasy would function were it real:

> Yet why this while am I so long of Proving,
> But to shew how this Earth still is moving.
> (*PF* p.149)

In this she may be compared to Tolkien, who provided a full mythology and language for his fantasy world and frequently corresponded at length with readers who wanted to understand the workings of Middle-Earth[6]. Cavendish appears to be attempting this type of dialogue with her reader when she raises philosophical questions of belief that cannot be answered in a definitive sense, thus leaving open all possibilities. She dismisses the strangeness of fairies when she says they are:

> onely small bodies, not subject to our sense...For Nature can make small bodies, as great...(*PF* sig.Aa2),

and despite their pagan relationship with the Classical pantheon, she suggests they could equally as well be loved by God, thus bringing them into the realm of his created world. This moves sharply away from tradition as fairies may be driven away by symbols such as the Cross and were always considered averse to Christian religion. Chaucer's 'Wife of Bath's Tale', considered by Briggs to be 'an early and excellent example of a fairy-tale' (Briggs, *Fairies*, p.432) declares that:

> But now kan no man se none elves mo,
> For now the grete charitee and prayeres
> Of limitours and othere hooly freres,
> That serchen every lond and every streem.....
> This maketh that ther ben no faieries,[7]

making religion specifically responsible for their decline. But Cavendish ventures further into the realm of the

theologian when she asks:

> Shall we say Dwarves have lesse soules, because lesse, or thinner bodies? And if rational souls, why not saving souls?
> (*PF* sig.Aa2ᵛ)

and again seems to be asking questions that go far further than a whimsical pondering about fairy existence. It should be remembered that the term 'dwarf' has no supernatural connotations in British folklore, so her meaning appears to be one about general human prejudice. As she is acutely aware of the prejudice which will draw criticism against her as a female writer, it is likely that she either intends an irony here, or seriously asks her readers to consider the irrationality of their prejudgments.

It is unclear whether Cavendish deliberately sets out to create two unrelated fairy worlds at the centre of the world and within the human brain, or if they are the simply differing residences of one fairy-court. The fairies in the brain do have a king and queen, while the fairies at the centre of the earth appear only to have a queen, but as the fairy queen does come out of the centre realm into the world of humans, it may be that she then moves into her second realm, and that Oberon simply does not come into the poems about the centre, rather than being entirely absent from that concept in Cavendish's imagination. Another possibility is that the fun-filled and fantastical court of Queen Mab. while having male inhabitants, is not an appropriate place for Oberon, who chooses rather to wield his authority in the realm

of the mind. The behaviour of Queen Mab has similarities to those attributes listed in the prefatory epistle 'To All Noble and Worthy Ladies' (*PF* sig.A3) regarding the creativity of women that Cavendish praises so highly and men, she feels, treat with contempt or amused scorn:

> for they hold Books as their Crowne, and the Sword as their Scepter, by which they rule and governe.

From this point of view, Oberon may well have scant regard for the frivolity of the court at the Centre of the Earth, and regard the court of the human mind to be his proper sphere. That his queen is 'beauteous', but unnamed in 'The City of the Fairies' (*PF* p.163), reduces her role considerably and elevates his. The City of the Fairies, is a highly martial place, again in keeping with Cavendish's assessment of male concerns. While Queen Mab, at the Centre of the Earth has guards, there is no other reference to defence, but Oberon's court has a magazine, city gates, sentinels, double-walls, entrenchments and a high fort (all of which correspond to parts of the human head). Cavendish points out the inequalities between men and women throughout *Poems, and Fancies*, vacillating in both the attitude and method of her response, between anger and acceptance. However, if the fairy-courts in her poems are divided along lines of male and female differences, she does not make a feature of this, perhaps because, as is seen elsewhere, she frequently seems unaware that she is contradicting herself. Certainly, as Sylvia Brown says:

> ...learned women....Cavendish reassures her readers, may rule their appetites and employ their words..... Thoughts, both in spite of and because they dwell in the mind, are able to overcome the gender-related restrictions on space, the partitioned male and female spheres. (Brown,'Strategies', p.144)

Fairies however, seem unable to do this. Bearing in mind the controversy throughout the seventeenth century about women's nature and role, it seems highly likely that received ideas play their part in her creation of the fairy worlds and that she is, perhaps unconsciously, perpetuating them in the fairy worlds by describing Mab as frivolous and inconstant and Oberon as martial and noble. However, Cavendish frequently undermines even as she supports, and the fairy queen, while perhaps embodying the contemporary view of the mutability of women:

> ...that inconstant are by kind,
> (*PF* p.153),

nevertheless leads a fine and queenly existence. She is sole ruler at the centre of the earth, which she has 'got by birth' (*PF* p.148), itself an interesting recollection perhaps of Queen Elizabeth I, and the focus of all her life is amusement:

> Her time in pleasure passes thus away,
> (*PF* p.155)

Yet the responsibilities of royalty are distancing and her subjects view her through glass doors[e]. She is both caged and reverenced in her sacred queenly space, with undoubtedly the loneliness and rarefied sense of self that this favourite personal state of Cavendish herself must create. As in the prefatory material, Cavendish turns the isolation and

negative aspects of both fame and womanhood into something esoteric through Mab, into which outsiders can only peer without full understanding.

Both these fairy worlds may be described as concentric, rather than parallel, to the human world, as everything that takes place in our world, has a fairy version, but in miniature. Therefore the fairies' world does not exist alongside ours, so much as within it, in a scaled down existence, especially as both the centre-court and the brain-court are physically inside either the earth, or the human head. This is in keeping both with Cavendish's fascination with the unseen and the microscopic, and also with the Ptolemic theory of the universe which Briggs suggests in *The Anatomy of Puck*, was still instinctively accepted in the seventeenth century, although it had been challenged by the new Copernican theory[9]. While Cavendish does not look out beyond the earth but rather into its depths, the pattern of the concentric model is nevertheless followed.

Cavendish does not specify whether or not the fairy-queen may be seen by human eyes, or whether any invisibility she may have is based upon magic. Oberon clearly could not be seen because of the microscopic nature of his existence, regardless of any magical abilities, though Cavendish ascribes none to him. More may be learned about Oberon, from one of the poems which use fairies more as vehicle than subject. Queen Mab in her groups of poems, is described as immortal:

> Her time in pleasure passes thus away,
> And shall doe so. untill the worlds last day.
> (*PF* p.155),

and eternally youthful:

> For young she's alwayes, being in this place.
> (*PF* p.148),

whereas death figures in all the poems where Oberon is mentioned, even if only indirectly, as in 'The City of the Fairies' (*PF* p.163) where the double walls are ever ready for war and destruction:

> The Fore-head is the fort, that's builded high,
> And for the Sentinels is either Eye.
> (Ibid.).

This is a feature of 'A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees' where his own life is clearly at stake. as are those of his fairy-soldiers:

> In War, said they, 'tis better that we dye,
> Than to be slaves unto our enemy.
> (*PF* p.180).

While. as already stated, Cavendish does not explain any relationship between her fairy worlds, 'A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees' does not directly relate to either of them, but has certain similarities to both.

The Pygmees are described as invading 'the Fairy Land' (*PF* p.179), which is a 'fertile place', where 'pleasure flows' and 'delight grows'. Oberon has a court and a Queen and wise counsellors but there are no other similarities to the court in the brain described elsewhere. The grasshopper horses, peach-skin saddles and spider's web bridles used by Oberon's soldiers are more akin to descriptions of Queen Mab's court at

the centre of the earth than Oberon's brain-court. The Queen herself has a grasshopper horse, on which she goes hunting lizards:

> But if she will a hunting go,
> Then she the Lizzard makes the Doe.
> .....
> Then on Grasshopper doth she ride,
> Who gallops far in forrest wide.
> (*PF* p.152),

her coach is made of a nutshell, lined with 'glistering Adders skin' (*PF* p.152) and drawn by six crickets. Other similar devices include the use of a rosemary leaf, as an arrow by Queen Mab:

> Her arrow sharp, much like a blade
> Of a Rosemary leaf is made.
> (Ibid.),

and a long sword by Oberon's soldiers:

> Of small Cockle-shells their Targets were made,
> And for their long swords a Rosemary blade.
> (*PF* p.180).

'A Battel between King Oberon and the Pygmees', therefore, while being primarily concerned with war, does in some ways act as a link between the two groups of fairy poems, even though it is not included with them in the text. The character of Oberon is not enlarged upon in the fairy poems, but in the war-poems. he is strong, noble, and just and presumably considerably larger than when he rules in the human brain. While the pygmees are described as 'tall and stout'(*PF* p.179), meaning brave-hearted, the term in Cavendish's time could mean a dwarf, elf or pixy. In her *Dictionary of Fairies* (p.118-119), Katherine Briggs includes a translation of *Elidor and*

The Golden Ball, from Giraldus Cambrensis' account of his Welsh journey in 1188, *Itinerarium Cambriae*, which includes a reference to 'two little men of pygmy stature', who have a king reached by a subterranean pathway to a world with no moon or stars, who in every way fulfil traditional descriptions of fairies, rather than pixies, who are usually noticeable by their red hair, pointed ears, turned up noses, short faces and tendency to squint (Briggs, *Fairies*, p.328). They could also change size at will, frequently appearing equal in stature to humans. Therefore, Cavendish's pygmees seem to have have more in common with Cambrensis than with traditional pixies, as it may be reasonably assumed that she wanted an adversary of a comparative diminutive size to Oberon, describing the Pygmee King as:

> ....two handfuls tall,
> (*PF* p.185)

but besides whom:

> Oberon king, was low, and very small
> (Ibid.)

being able to ride on a grasshopper. Oberon is still then, at a disadvantage, thus displaying both his bravery and eventual military prowess in defeating his enemy.

Cavendish is rarely consistent in her use of images or reasoning, thus Oberon's seeming dislocation from either of the established fairy realms in the war poem is not surprising. While she states that Mab's realm has no birds or animals except worms:

> Tis true, there are no Birds to sing sweet notes,
> But there are winds that whistle like birds throats:
> .....
> Nor any beasts are there of cruel nature,
> But a slow, soft worm, a gentle creature,
> (*PF* p.148),

the queen and her fairies. nevertheless dance on molehills, and have a bat as master to a choir of gnats (*PF* p.151). Similarly, when all the pygmees are dead. Cavendish relates that:

> Their bodies moist to Vapour rarefied
> And now in Clouds do neer the Sun reside.
> (*PF* p.186)

but also that:

> Nature pittying to see their Fortune sad,
> Who by her favour a remembrance had;
> For she their bones did turn to Marble white,
> Of which are Statues carved for Mans delight;
> (Ibid.).

All her fairy worlds are royalist worlds, despite other differences in concept, as this is the system Cavendish approves. Even the invading pygmees are loyal to their king. Thus Mab is the focus of her court's existence, and Oberon dwells only in a royal brain, as suitable to his own status.

The site of Oberon's battle aside, the two fairy worlds experience life in a very different way. The fairies at the centre of the earth, indulge in the fairy activities of folklore, such as dancing in rings, and teasing humans:

> So doth the Glow-worm all day hide her head,
> But lights her taper-tail, when hee's a bed,
> To wait upon the fairest Fairy Queen,
> Whilst she is sporting on the meady green.
> Her pastime onely is when she's on earth,

> To pinch the Sluts, which makes Hobgoblin mirth.
> (*PF* p.154).

The fairies in the brain, however, are far more industrious. They are merchants, traders, builders, miners, they have markets, city conduits, aldermen and mayors and spend their time praying, drawing and declaiming philosophy (*PF* pp.162-164). It is their activity which causes humans both imagination and emotion, as Cavendish argues a slightly alarming form of possession as responsible for all human activity:

> Our fancies, which in verse, or prose we put,
> Are Pictures which they draw, or Figures cut,
> .....
> When we have crosse opinions in the minde,
> They in the Schooles disputing we shall finde.
> (*PF* p.164).

It is not clear if we have an independent existence at all, influenced by the fairies living within us, or if we are merely puppet vehicles for them.

Some of her ideas on the subject are fascinating, such as inexplicable depression being caused perhaps by a fairy death. The image of '..some place in the Head' being 'hung with blacke' (*PF* p.163) is a most evocative one, especially from someone who was considered melancholic, and may have pondered over the cause of such low spirits more than most. It is hardly surprising then that she arrives at such an imaginative reason for melancholy, as it seems that a dull but true answer to any question would interest her less than a fantastic but interesting one. It is possible also, that the

explanation of fairies as the cause of our feelings, helps to disown the responsibility for them. In the same way that Cavendish disclaims responsibility for her writing if it is ridiculous, because she had no education and as a woman is fantastical by nature, it may be that this idea appeals to her similarly. The image she creates is akin to the folk tales where humans have fairy glamour over their eyes, which affects all they see and do. Can they then be held responsible? Her need for a world beyond the mundane ordinariness of everyday life is clear and anticipates later fantasy and science fiction writing, of which her own *The Description of a New World called the Blazing World* (1666), is a forerunner.

The imagery and language Cavendish uses in her fairy poems is highly imaginative, and at times comic. The description of the gnat choir with the harassed bat attempting to keep order is amusing (*PF* p.151) while the banquet served for the queen has a wealth of detail, even if the proportions are not always to scale. For example, a fairy-queen who feasts on:

Flyes of all sorts both fat, and good,

and:

Amlelets made of ants-egs new,

may find her guards somewhat over-faced by their stall-fed dormice (*PF* p.152). Such images of miniature worlds and fairy activity are shared by other writers, including some of the most famous poets writing in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. While these may well have influenced Cavendish's own

ideas, they are all closely linked to various folk traditions and there is undoubtedly an element of shared consciousness between them. While the seventeenth century saw the writing of Robert Kirk's important treatise on fairy-lore and the French publication of Charles Perrault's *Histoires et Contes du Temps Passe avec des Moralites* (which contains the earliest version of the story of Cinderella), neither of these were published when Cavendish wrote *Poems, and Fancies*. Both authors, however, were close contemporaries of Cavendish, as was John Aubrey who kept alive many fairy stories in his *Natural History of Surrey*, which suggests that she not unusual in her fascination with fairies. A volume called *A Description of the King and Queen of the Fayries, their Habit, Fare, their Abode, Pompe and State* was published in 1635, which was an anthology of many pieces, some anonymous, but including one by Herrick[10]. Yet while Shakespeare may have popularised an interest in fairies, through Mercutio's Queen Mab speech in *Romeo and Juliet*, and that interest had become very fashionable a generation later in the 1620s, H. M. Cocking feels that the form was long past its best by the time Cavendish came to write:

> Even in 1635 the form must have seemed old-fashioned; the publication of Herrick's verse in 1648 did nothing to resuscitate the form, and five years later when Margaret wrote it must have seemed dead indeed. (p.20)

The treatment of fairies as diminutive became fashionable in Elizabethan poetry, as we find in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, although the earliest record of fairies as small is in

Gervase of Tilbury's *Otia Imperialia* (completed in 1211). However, aside from this, fairies in the medieval romances are of human size and heroic temperament, rather than small and mischievous. Such characters are today probably only familiar to readers of Tolkien as by the time Cavendish was writing, John Lyly (*Endymion*), Shakespeare (*A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, Cymbeline, The Tempest*), Spenser (*The Faerie Queene*), Drayton (*Nymphidia*) and others had established a tradition of small fairies, which persists today.

Other characteristics which Cavendish adopts are familiar also, such as riding on creatures as though they were horses, fairy banquets of strange dishes, dancing in circles, the fairy-court, and the names Oberon, Mab, and Tom Thumb. Most of these can be traced to folk-lore, and different authors picked and chose freely from various traditions, which makes it difficult to identify specific literary influences in Cavendish's work. This becomes more difficult as in *Poems, and Fancies*, Cavendish herself does not mention any writer whose work she admires and the writers who chose fairies as their subject may all be assumed to have been influenced by Shakespeare and Spenser. As Cavendish claims to read so little, her own knowledge of other writers could come largely, as her knowledge of natural philosophy did, via retelling by her husband. However, there are strong common themes in wider fairy literature which appear in Cavendish's work and are worth consideration.

Cavendish's Queen Mab is related to Diana and the gods of night, but has argued with Apollo, in circumstances that recall Oberon and Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream:*

> As for Apollo, she disclaims him quite,
> And swears she nere will come within his light.
> For they fell out about some foolish toy,
> Where ever since in him she takes no joy.
> (*PF* p.153)

These lines are very reminiscent of Shakespeare, both in form and content:

> But she perforce witholds the loved boy,
> Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy.
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, II.2.27)

Queen Mab is set in opposition to Apollo and we see the antithetical relationship between day and night, whereas Shakespeare's fairy king and queen are both night-creatures. However, Queen Mab only rises at night and seems linked in some way to our experience of daytime:

> The Queen's asleep, and now our day begins,
> (*PF* p.155),

whereas Shakespeare's Oberon tells Puck not to fear the approaching dawn:

> But we are spirits of another sort
> (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, III.2,388)

which Peter Holland feels is 'an extremely unusual and powerful claim for the extent of his power and influence' [11]. Therefore, Cavendish's queen's falling out with Apollo seems linked with her essential nature as a night-creature, rather than being a lover's quarrel, such as that between Shakespeare's Oberon and Titania, who are essentially

complementary to one another.

However, in Spenser's character 'Mutabilitie' whose story is appended to *The Faerie Queen*, there is a similar conflict to that in Cavendish's poems. Mutabilitie is through fairy lineage descended from the Titans and is closely linked to the moon and night-time. Like Cavendish's Queen Mab, she sets herself up against the gods of Classical tradition, and although she is described as a 'Titanesse'[12], her fairy blood, her behaviour and her name make comparisons inevitable. Queen Mab is given the changeable nature implied by mutability and so frequently ascribed to women, 'that inconstant are by kind' (*PF* p.153).

Cavendish's Queen Mab is throughout linked to the classical pantheon, despite her diminutive size, but is also like the pinching, tormenting, dairy-robbing (but not royal) 'Mab, the mistris-Faerie' in Ben Jonson's *Entertainment at Althorpe*[13], both being thieves of human children:

> Her pastime onely is when she's on earth,
> To pinch the sluts, which makes Hobgoblin mirth:
> Or changes children while the nurses sleep,
> (*PF* p.154).

This behaviour, which amuses and is similar to that of her hobgoblin and Shakespeare's Puck, as well as Oberon and Mab in Drayton's *Nymphidia*, is very traditional. Fairies were frequent tormentors of humans, either for their own amusement or to point out idle behaviour and sluttish housekeeping.

Queen Mab as a type of fairy-godmother is found twice in Cavendish's poems. Tom-Thumb, a human but diminutive figure

from folklore is her page, and the son of Venus as a Foot-boy, but it is not suggested that they are stolen. This is, of course, reminiscent of the Indian prince in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* who is the contentious issue between Oberon and Titania. While Puck describes this child as a changeling 'stol'n from an Indian king' (II.1,22), Titania regards him as a sacred trust, following the death of his mother 'a votress of my order' (II.1,124):

> And for her sake do I rear up her boy
> (II.1,137).

However, the changeling child and the fairy-godmother figure frequently in traditional folk tales, where a human child may be stolen and replaced with a fairy-child or a disguised adult goblin, and in tales such as Sleeping Beauty where a fairy is chosen as godmother to offer supernatural benefits to the human child.

Cavendish seems innovative in her linking of Tom Thumb with 'Hob the Faire' in *The Pastime of the Queen of Fairies when she comes upon the Earth out of the Centre* (*PF* pp.153-155). Hob is clearly influenced by Shakespeare's Puck. Puck's true name, Robin Goodfellow, identifies him with a hobgoblin who was well-known in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and even the subject of a pamphlet, written in 1628 called *Robin Goodfellow; his Mad Prankes, and Merry Jests, full of Honest Mirth, and is a fit Medicine for Melancholy*. Cavendish follows Shakespeare in keeping the tradition of the playful brownie who is full of mischief, yet alters his role slightly, by

assigning him to the fairy-queen, not Oberon, but with the same duties as her 'fool', the court-jester. The list of his playful tricks is so similar to those described by the fairy and Puck himself in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as to seem close to plagiarism:

> This Hobgoblin is the Queen of Fairies fool,
> Turning himself to Horse, Cow, Tree or Stool;
> Or anything to crosse by harmless play,
> As leading Travellers out of their way,
> Or kick down Payls of Milk, cause Cheese not turn,
> Or hinder Butter's coming in the Churne:
> Which makes the Farmers wife to scold and fret,
> That the Cheese and Butter cannot get.
> .....
> The good Wife sad, squats down upon a chaire,
> Not at all thinking it was Hob the Faire:
> Where frowning sits; then Hob gives her the slip,
> And downe she falls, whereby she hurts her hip.
> (*PF* p.154)

However, Shakespeare's choice of tricks that Puck plays is not original either, corresponding closely with the folk traditions for brownies, hobs, hobgoblins and Robin Goodfellow himself, as described by Katherine Briggs in *A Dictionary of Fairies* and *The Anatomy of Puck*. Cavendish could equally have been influenced by Drayton, who also has a very similar list of misdemeanours by Puck, and follows Shakespeare's use of this name for Robin Goodfellow:

> He meeteth Puck, which most men call
> Hobgoblin.....
> This Puck seems but a dreaming dolt,
> Still walking like a ragged colt,
> And oft out of a bush doth bolt,
> Of purpose to decieve us;
> And leading us makes us to stray
> Long winter nights out of our way,
> And when we stroll in mire and clay,
> He doth with laughter leave us.[14].

An anonymous poem called *Robin Goodfellow*, which may have been part of a masque, further confounds attempts to separate tradition and literary innovation, as in thirteen verses it includes almost all the activities of hobgoblins found in folklore and written texts. Some of the most familiar are 'More swift than lightning can I flye', 'to a horse I turn me can', 'I pinch the maidens black and blue' and 'babes new borne steal as we go' [15]. Both Cavendish and Drayton appear to adopt the precedent set by Shakespeare of making Hob/Puck/Robin part of the fairy-court, as in folk tradition he is what is defined by Katharine Briggs as a solitary fairy (Briggs, *Fairies*, p.375).

Tom Thumb and Puck both appear in *Nymphidia* (published 1627) but they are not allies, as are Hob and Tom Thumb, in Cavendish's 'The Pastime of the Queen of Fairies, when she comes upon the Earth out of the Center'. On opposing sides in Drayton's Arthur/Guinevere/Lanceleot tale of the knight Pigwidden, they do not meet at all. For Cavendish, they are companions in mischief, and while Tom Thumb keeps his traditional habit of being swallowed and causing digestive unrest, he has become, like Hob, a shape-changer, and now his adventures are not accidental, but to amuse the fairy queen:

> And many prankes, which Hob playes on our stage,
> With his companion Tom Thumb, the Queenes Page;
> Who doth like piece of fat in pudding lye,
> That almost chokes the Eater, going awry.
> .....
> In this this the Queen of Fairies takes delight
> (*PF* p.154).

Cavendish uses this mischief making character in one address in *Poems, and Fancies*, as well as her fairy poems. 'To Poets' (*PF* p.121) is one of the third group where fairies are mentioned, namely that which uses them as a vehicle to explore other issues, in this case writing and criticism. The imagery Cavendish uses in the first thirteen lines of this address is all to do with fairy tormentors:

> There is no spirit frights me so much, as Poets Satyrs, and their Faiery Wits: which are so subtle, aiery and nimble, as they passe through every small Crevise, and Cranie of Errours, and Mistakes....which ..they pinch..black, and blew, with Robin-hood Jests.

The reference to Robin-hood might at first seem to be a misprint for Robin Goodfellow, but is not amended in the later editions. Lord Raglan suggests however, in discussing Robin Hood:

> As regards the tricky stories , they may be due to a confusion between Robin Hood and Robin Goodfellow. Perhaps the two were never very clearly distinguished.[16]

If this is the case with Cavendish's use of the name Robin-hood, when she clearly describes Robin Goodfellow, it is interesting that those poets who appear to have been her influence, or at least shared in similar influences, do not at any point use the same synonymy. Whether or not this suggests that Cavendish has a strong influence of folk tales from a source impossible to identify, as well as whatever literature with which she may been familiar is debateable.

Other common themes among writers upon fairies, are food and clothing and the way in which they live what amounts to a

human lifestyle adapted to their small size. For instance, Cavendish, Shakespeare, Drayton, Herrick, and Steward all describe a world whose social hierarchy is a miniature version of the royalist world of the time. Mushroom tables, snail shell or hazel nut coaches, cloth of spider's web and cricket mounts appear repeatedly, as do strange meals (by human tastes). All these stress the otherness of fairy-land, but also recognisable concerns and behaviour.

The reasons for the popularity of fairies as a subject for literature for an adult reader or audience varies greatly. The delight in such little people no doubt plays a part in choosing them as entertainment, but satire and political awareness are frequently present also. Cavendish appears to differ significantly, although sharing much common material, in that her use of the fairy motif primarily broadens the boundaries of possibility, one of her major concerns, due to both her reluctance to accept any fact as unarguable and her love of the imagination. Peter Holland discusses the conflict adults feel when asked to believe in fairies, even in the theatrical setting of *Peter Pan:*

> For adults in the audience it is a moment of nostalgia and embarrassed sadness, nostalgia for a time when they could believe in fairies and clap their hands in a desperate need to participate in the magic of the fairy's resurrection, embarrassed sadness because they no longer believe and cannot easily pretend to any longer for the sake of a theatrical trick.[17]

If Cavendish displays this embarrassment at all, it is perhaps in the careful tone of her opening line 'I wonder any should

laugh... (*PF* sig.Aa2), but she swiftly transcends it. She seems to be asking for the suspension of disbelief required for adults to clap for Tinkerbell's sake and if she is embarrassed at all, it is not because she could not join her hands wholeheartedly, but because she knows how much she is asking of those who lack her ability to enjoy doing so. The magic 'if' of Stanislavksy's theatre is prefigured in her imagination of a human life enhanced by the unseen and her continual striving against the boundaries of common sense and rationality. The undoubted escapism of much of Cavendish's writing is typified in the fairy poems, and in the setting down of her fantasies on paper, she gives them a certain reality. The extent to which her argument on the possible existence of fairy folk, with 'saving soules' convinces Cavendish herself is hardly worth consideration. The important factor is more that she does not want to be convinced, or to convince her reader. She desires only that the possibility is considered.

Notes to pages 75-103

1 I would consider this change as evidence in favour of the theory that an editor other than Cavendish was involved in revisions for the later editions, as the original position is more appropriate.

2 Katherine Briggs *A Dictionary of Fairies* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books; 1979), p.xvi-xvii. Subsequently referred to as Briggs, *Fairies*.

3 Antonia Fraser *The Weaker Vessel: A Women's Lot in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Mandarin; 1984), p.113-115.

4 Ibid. p.130

5 Christopher Hill *The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Penguin: 1991), p.87 & 88

6 *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter (London: George, Allen and Unwin; 1981)

7 *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale from The Canterbury Tales*, rev. ed. James Winny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; first published 1965), p.63

8 See Chapter 2 for discussion of the imagery of glass in *Poems. and Fancies*

9 Katherine Briggs *The Anatomy of Puck*, (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul; 1959) p.4

10 See Briggs, *The Anatomy of Puck* pp.25-43.

11 Peter Holland (ed.) *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, The Oxford Shakespeare, (Oxford: Clarendon Press; 1994), p.31

12 *Spenser's Faerie Queen*, ed. J. C. Smith (London: Clarendon Press; 1972), p.455

13 *Ben Jonson: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. Ian Donaldson (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1985), p.485

14 *Nymphidia* by Michael Drayton, in *Elfin Music*, ed. A. E. Waite (London: Walter Scott; 1888), p.64

15 *Elfin Music*, pp.22-26

16 Lord Raglan, *The Hero*. (London: Methuen; 1936), p.54

17 Peter Holland, p. 21

CHAPTER 5

CAVENDISH AND THE NATURAL WORLD

Saies Nature, I am of another minde
Poems, and Fancies p.2

In her book *The History Of God,* Karen Armstrong states:

> One of the reasons why religion seems irrelevant today is that many of us no longer have the sense that we are surrounded by the unseen. Our scientific culture educates us to focus our attention on the physical and material world around us.[1]

The seventeenth century was the time during which the foundations for this scientific culture were laid, along with the idea that the unseen accepted or unknown by earlier generations could in fact be explored or understood through scientific methodology. By the latter half of the century, the Royal Society was in operation, as well as the first university courses in the new knowledge. During the first half though, the troubling work of separating science from magic was undertaken while the great discoveries of the microscope and the telescope were still being marvelled at and explored[2].

For Margaret Cavendish, living after her marriage with two 'virtuosi' in the new science. her brother-in-law Charles Cavendish, and her husband William, the engagement with natural philosophy meant not a movement away from the sense of the unseen, but a chance to ponder its possibilities even further. The workings of the microscope and telescope provided not answers but more questions for Cavendish: what if there is still more to be seen? Her scepticism came not from an

unwillingness to believe, or the desire for proof, but from an unwillingness to accept complete answers or definitive explanations. For Cavendish the delight of natural philosophy is in its uncovering of uncertainties, because this gives her the freedom to be a part of the speculative process, regardless of her lack of education and her gender. While in later years she did apply herself to the study of Hobbes, Descartes, and Van Helmont among others, and had, not surprisingly, sufficient confidence to argue with their findings, she never considered herself bound by their methods and continued in the belief summed up by William Cavendish in one of his contributions to her work *Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, published ten years later in 1663:

> ..no body Knows what is the Cause of any thing, and since they are all but guessers, not knowing, it gives every Man room to think what he lists.[3]

Thus, as Sylvia Brown states:

> Such skepticism enables her to avoid a clash with a competing authority by dispensing with the necessity of deciding upon an infallible truth.(Brown, *Strategies*, p.30)

In *Poems, and Fancies*, alongside the explanation of Cavendish's atomic theory, and the subsequent exploration of unseen worlds, are her observations of the natural world around her. These display a feeling for animals and birds, for the land damaged in the Civil War and the place of man in his relationship to the world of nature. Therefore her poems of nature cover three areas : natural philosophy, fantasies of nature personified as a goddess, and empathetic responses to

the natural world of animals, birds and landscape. As in all Cavendish's work, these areas often overlap and are confused by her attempts to reconcile fact and fantasy, or perhaps rather to make fantasy become possibility by a leap of faith in the imagination.

Following the lengthy prefatory section to *Poems, and Fancies,* Cavendish sets out her creation myth in the first poem of the text. This places Nature securely in the role of Creator:

> When Nature first this World she did create,
> She cal'ld a Counsell how the same might make;.
> (*PF* p.1)

Unlike the self-communing of God in Genesis, Nature gathers around her a female committee of Motion, Figure, Matter and Life to advise her. The reason for this creation is to enable Nature and her fellows to be worshipped and, as she adds:

> Besides it is my nature things to make,
> To give out work, and you directions take.
> (Ibid.)

Immediately then, Cavendish's goddess establishes that it is she, a female, who gives the commands, but the similarity between her creation of the world, and the creation in Genesis is so close as to be confrontational. It could easily be imagined that Cavendish would find like-minds in the modern Christians who substitute 'she' for 'he' when referring to God in revisionist versions of traditional services of worship. In this first poem, 'Nature calls a Councell, which was Motion, Figure, matter, and Life, to advise about making the

World' (Ibid.), Nature is the sole authority and creates Beauty, her only child, 'my Love, my Joy, and deare delight,' (*PF* p.2), to inspire the World she then directs her councillors to create. These, being of a somewhat negative attitude, all argue that Nature's idea is not viable:

> Alas, said Motion, all paines I can take,
> Will do not good.....
> Alas, said Life, what ever we do make,
> Death, my great enemy, will from us take:
> .....
> Figures opinion did agree with Life,
> For Death, said she, will fill the World with strife;
> .....
> 'Tis best to let alone this worke, I thinke.
> Saies Matter, Death corrupts, and makes me stinke.
> (*PF* p.2).

Death, who seems to be preexistent and not made by Nature, thus threatens the idyll of this yet uncreated world by having, it seems, a greater power to demoralise than Nature does to inspire. However, Nature asserts herself: 'I am of another minde' (Ibid.) and while agreeing that Death is highly dangerous, insists they go ahead to make this new world, lest he turn against Nature and her council themselves for want of occupation. Like Satan in Milton's *Paradise Lost*[4], Death is envious of Nature's works and ambitious for her status but rather than confront him in battle, Nature devises a displacement activity for him through her new world. Beauty, despite her clear initial likeness to the preexistent Christ, is not mentioned again, and certainly plays no redemptive role in the new world to counter the damage of Death. This is a very ambivalent and self-centred Creator that Cavendish

offers her reader, being willing to divert violence against herself by allowing it to focus on her 'fine Work' (*PF* p.1). However, Cavendish only aspires towards idealism and her creation myth perhaps says much about her acceptance of the realities of human existence. To the extent that Nature and her councillors represent female creativity, and Death, male hostility, Nature's ploy of avoiding her own total destruction by allowing an element of destruction of her creation, is an extremely sensible act of damage limitation. It may also be likened to Cavendish's own strategy of accepting destructive criticism of her book as inevitable, while nevertheless forging ahead with her next publication.

Unlike the creative Word of God, Nature's creative allies set to work as artisans, drawing, measuring and plotting out the new world, and neatly reflecting Cavendish's dual interests in the inspirational and the mathematical approaches to life:

> First Matter she brought the Materialls in,
> And Motion cut and carv'd out everything.
> And Figure she did draw the Formes and Plots,
> And Life divided all out into Lots.
> And Nature she survey'd, directed all,
> With the four Elements built the Worlds Ball.
> (*PF* p.3).

Man proves to be the most difficult creation and the one undertaken personally by Nature and given both autonomy and immortal intelligence:

> What though this Body dye, this Minde shall live,
> And a free-will we must it give.
> (*PF* p.4)

Nature decides to differentiate Man from other creatures by having him 'go upright' (Ibid.) and uniting 'severall Motions' (Ibid.) to give him a wider range of activities than his fellow creatures. She also anticipates a resurrection of the body, as expected on the Day of Judgement by Christians:

> But when the thread is broke, then downe shall fall,
> And for a time no Motion have at all.
> But yet the Minde shall live, and never dye;
> We'll raise the body too for company.
> (Ibid.)

but does not specify a time for this, or mention any element of reckoning or judgement, and the body is to join the living mind: it is notable that she does not use the term 'soul'. The existence of the soul is a concept she struggles with elsewhere in *Poems, and Fancies*, in 'A Dialogue between two Supernaturall Opinions', where she does not question its continuance, but rather its nature:

> Op. 1 If we allow the Soule shall live, not dye,
> Although the Body in the Grave doth lie;
> And that some knowledge still It doth retaine,
> Why may not then some love of Fame remaine?
> .....
> Op. 2 Soules of the World remember nought at all,
> All that is past into Oblivion fall.
> (*PF* p.53).

If 'the Minde shall live' (*PF* p.4), then this fear of the loss of memory and knowledge can be abandoned, so it appears that Cavendish designs her own form of immortality where sense of self is retained, and as has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, her sense of self is of paramount importance to her.

The images of spinning Cavendish's uses in her references to female creativity (see Bowerbank, 'Spider's Delight',

pp.392-408), recur as Nature orders form to be spun by the Fates to clothe the mind she has created. The thread of life they are to use shall remain in one piece, weaving the pattern of life, until it is severed by Death:

> You, Life, command the Fates a thread to spin,
> From which small thread the Body shall begin.
> (*PF* p.4)

Following this first poem, is a short verse of sixteen lines describing Death's attempts to thwart Nature:

> When Death did heare what Nature did intend,
> To hinder her he all his force did bend.
> But finding all his forces were too weake,
> He always strives the Thread of life to breake:
> (*PF* p.5),

then Cavendish moves on to her poems of atomic theory where Nature is scarcely mentioned. Life, figure, form and motion become scientific abstractions rather than distinct personalities, although at times they display human characteristics. For example, at times they 'fall out'(*PF* p.16) or split into factions (Ibid.), and at these disagreements man suffers illness (*PF* p.15) and the weather is disturbed (*PF* p.16).

These appear to bear little relation to her creation myth, which, both in its position in the work and its content, sets out Cavendish's hidden agenda throughout *Poems, and Fancies*. While she mentions God and traditional religion with respect in her work, she does so infrequently and uses natural philosophy as a foundation to build her own version of both science and religion. She suggests humbly in *To the Reader*.

that she considers it improper to consider God in great detail:

> For it were too great a Presumption to venture to Discourse that in my Fancy, which is not describeable. For God, and his Heavenly Mansions, are to be admired, wondred, and astonished at, and not disputed on.
> (*PF* sig.A7ᵛ)

but Cavendish's humility is always slightly suspect and this instance is no exception. By claiming herself too overawed to speak of God, she cleverly allows herself freedom from the restraints of a religious approach to her natural philosophy. If the male God of the Bible is behind the knowledge about to be uncovered through natural philosophy, she has the difficulties of male patriarchy to contend with. But once she has claimed her ideas are 'not to be counted Authentick' (*PF* sig.A6), she has gained a liberty from male claims of authority. Yet she does not move any distance away from the Old Testament idea of God and creation, which is perhaps her most dangerous mistake. Her fairy worlds may be dismissed as foolish by those who dislike them, but her alternative nature-goddess is very close to a challenge to the accepted view of God. For example in 'A Dialogue betwixt Man, and Nature', Nature's cry against Man's complaint:

> Why doth Man-kind complaine and make such Moane?
> May not I work my will with what's my owne?
> (*PF* p.58)

echoes the Old Testament Book of Job (41.10-11):

> Who then is he that can stand before me?
> Who has given to me, that I should repay him?
> Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.

The discussion throughout the poem recalls biblical and theological questions about man's autonomy and responsibility to the Creator and the created world. Yet as Gerald Dennis Meyer points out in *The Scientific Lady in England 1650-1760,* the new science existed alongside:

> ..the attendant conviction that the wisdom of God could best be appreciated through an understanding of his works in the firmament and on earth....; it was thought that a familiarity with these sciences would fill a person with love and esteem for God.[5]

But Cavendish does not display this in any way. For her the new science becomes a way of circumventing God's patriarchal tradition to demonstrate her belief, as described by Lisa T. Sarasohn:

> that the social order could expand to accommodate the intellectual equality of women, without its structure fragmenting from this innovation.[6]

If, as Sarasohn goes on to say:

> .. the Scientific Revolution can be considered an attack on the authority of Aristotle and the medieval world-view, the natural philosophy of Margaret Cavendish was a further attack on the authority of a male-dominated science, and, by implication, an attack on all male authoritarianism (p.294),

then there was no place for a male Creator, as Cavendish would be starting her attack under the flag of the role-model for all male authoritarianism. In her later works, especially after she had abandoned atomism, Cavendish devotes more discussion to the place of God in metaphysics, but never accepts that he can be approached or known. In *Poems, and Fancies* her need to strike out alone means that God can only be an encumbrance. Thus she takes the dangerous schismatic

step of creating her own Creator. However, being shrewd as well as daring, she stresses that her ideas, as quoted above, are not to be considered authentic. What is there in them then to cause alarm? She does not go so far as to have Nature create Woman first, although she may be using 'Man' as a generic term for all humanity. If not, the idea of male primacy may have been too deeply ingrained in Cavendish herself to be contested. Alternatively, she may have considered that as men in general would be offended by her publishing, she dared not appall them further by suggesting they were created as the afterthought of a female god.

As stated above, Cavendish does not continue her story of the conflict between Nature and Death, but goes on to expound her atomic theory. While this may sound very strange to the modern reader, with the world made up of the combination of four differently shaped atoms,

> And they dance about, fit places finde,
> Some Formes as best agree, make every kinde,
> (*PF* p.5)

it is not significantly different from the corpuscular philosophies of other natural philosophers, including Descartes, Hobbes and Gassendi, all of whom were known to the Cavendish brothers. She is clearly influenced by the Continental approach to atomism, which is unsurprising given the time she spent in Europe, but the lack of a theological component which was more common in English atomism must have made her work even more alarming. Meyer believes that she was

'immoderately devoted to Cartesian rationalism' (Meyer, *Lady*, p.2) which meant that she could indulge her intellectual approach to the new science, rather than being thwarted by the need for experimentation which following the empirical method of Bacon would have required. Her reason leads her to believe that atoms have life and will, moving her away from her husband and brothers' mentors, who carefully avoided this view, because of the dangerous questions it raised about God's role. There were also political dangers in arguing for self-motivation and Sylvia Brown explains:

> Self-moving matter had been associated with the radical sectaries and the....disorder (epistemological and political) of the Civil War. (Brown, 'Strategies', p.31).

Despite Cavendish's undoubted royalism, it may be noted how frequently her instincts are revolutionary. Self-motivation could not help but be an attractive idea to a woman so eager for independence in every sense. It may well be that her female creator is a comfort to her own royalism, while allowing her to experiment freely outside the boundaries of Christianity.

While to the scientist, contemporary or modern, Cavendish's atomism was fanciful, extravagant, ridiculous or quaint, depending upon their personal response, to the non-scientist her scientific poems are among her least enjoyable. The titles are sufficient to discourage, including 'The foure principall Figur'd Atomes make the foure Elements, as Square, Round, Long, and Sharpe' (*PF* pp.6-7); 'All things last, or dissolve,

according to the Composure of Atomes' (*PF* p.9;) 'Change is made by several figur'd Atomes, and Motion' (*PF* p.10); 'What Atomes make Vegetables, Minerals, and Animals (*PF* p.12);'What Atomes make a Palsey, or Apoplexy (*PF* p.15) and 'Quenching, and Smothering out of Heat, and Light, doth not change the Property, nor Shape of sharpe Atomes' (*PF* p.25), among a great many others, which account for one hundred and fourteen of the two hundred and sixty one poems and addresses that make up *Poems, and Fancies*. It is clear at times that Cavendish herself is struggling with her decision to write scientific theory in verse 'because I thought Errours might better passe there' (*PF* sig.A6-A6ᵛ) as the margin notes become longer and more detailed. In the poem 'Of the Motion of the Sea' (*PF* 19-20), the last two lines:

> If Breadth and Depth were full, leaving no *space,
> Nothing can stir out of the selfe same space.

are glossed as follows:

> *A crosse Motion stops the Circular, if there be no space between. The world turns upon two imaginary Poles, the Earth, upon one, the Heavens upon another; yet the Earth. nor the Heavens could not stir, having no vacuum. For example, A wheel could not turne round, if the circumference were prest upon close, and the center on either side.
> (Ibid.)

Hilda M. Smith feels that:

> Many of her poems...prove the extreme difficulty of maintaining a poetic tone while describing the various sorts of atoms....(and) make clear the truth of her claim that she did not really desire to write poetry at all.[7]

and while I would not agree that Cavendish claims a lack of desire for poetry in her decision to write in verse to hide

her errors, I do agree that it is her choice of subject matter which confounds her in this section of her book. I believe that with confidence in her knowledge, as well as her imagination, Cavendish may have chosen to write her atomic theory in prose, but feel that to say she did not desire to write poetry 'at all' is to misunderstand her. In the prefatory section and in the poems on poets and poetry (as discussed in Chapter 1), Cavendish focuses a considerable amount of attention on the writing of poetry and the contemporary response to it. She also believes that 'Poets have most Pleasure in this Life' (*PF* p.152) because of their delight and skill in 'fancy' and the imagination, two attributes she believes herself to have in abundance. Whether she can claim the title 'Poet' on merit is debateable, but she certainly has the poetic inclinations of her own definition. It is, though, not surprising that Cavendish herself advises:

> I desire all those that are not quick in apprehending, or will not trouble themselves with such small things as Atomes, to skip this part of my Book, and view the other, for feare these may seem tedious.....
> (*PF* sig.A6-A6ᵛ).

Yet to skip the section entirely, would be to miss some of her most fascinating verses. Once she leaves her descriptions of atoms and begins to ponder upon the possibilities of her theories, her ideas cannot help but capture the attention. She begins 'It is hard to believe, that there are other Worlds in this World', with the lines:

> Nothing so hard in Nature, as Faith is,
> For to believe Impossibilities

As doth impossible to us appear
(*PF* p.43)

but she means rather that it is hard not to believe there are other worlds in this world, because it would be so much more interesting if there were:

Then probably may Men and Women small,
Live in the World which wee know not at all;
May build them Houses, severall things may make.
Have Orchards, Gardens, where they pleasures take;
(*PF* p.44)

Alongside unseen tiny people, the idea of round journeys and infinite circles intrigues her deeply:

If we into each Circle can but slip.
By Art of Navigation in a Ship;
This World compar'd to some, may be but small,
No doubt but Nature made degrees of all.
(*PF* p.46)

and she seems to anticipate the ideas of writers as diverse as Jonathan Swift, Jules Verne and Mary Norton in her speculations. These poems of speculation upon unseen life-forms number only four and as swiftly as they emerge from her atom poems they are followed by her mathematical poems, which attempt to apply mathematical abstractions to concepts such as honesty and wisdom. They are infinitely more satisfying than either the atom or the mathematic poems, and far more illustrative of the whimsical imagination of Cavendish displayed elsewhere in her book. This of, course, may be the very reason she restricts them, as her aim is to be taken seriously, even if not to be 'counted authentick' (*PF* sig.A6).

The character of Nature appears again as goddess in the war poems, where she is mentioned briefly in 'A Description of the

Battle in Fight':

> All in death lay, by Fortune they were cast,
> And Nature to new formes goes on in hast;
> (*PF* p.177)

and showing more sympathy for the fallen in 'A Battle between King Oberon, and the Pygmees':

> Nature pittying to see their Fortune sad,
> Who by her favour a remembrance had.
> (*PF* p.186)

Her more active role in the latter, may be because it is set in Oberon's dislocated Fairy Land (as discussed in Chapter 3), so that her supernatural intervention is more appropriate. She is also mentioned in 'The Fairy Queen' where she appears to initiate activity from the centre of the earth:

> Here Nature nurses, and sends them season,
> All things abroad, as she seeth reason.
> (*PF* p.150)

and hands over the reins of power to the fairy queen:

> There Mab is Queen of all, by Natures will,
> And by her favour she doth govern still.
> (Ibid.)

This slightly confusing reference is perhaps illuminated a little by a further mention in 'The Pastime of the Queen of Fairies, when she comes upon the Earth out of the Center'. In this poem, the centre of the earth where Mab is queen, is

> ...the Store-house rich of Nature sweet,
> (*PF* p.155)

and the idea of the centre of the earth as a dark storing place has a certain logic.

In these poems. Nature is not dissimilar to the goddess in the creation poem, as she operates from outside the world,

delegating to Mab or intervening in a godlike way. In none of these poems does Cavendish describe Nature's appearance. However, in the section of *Poems, and Fancies* sub-titled 'FANCIES: The severall Keys of Nature, which unlock her severall Cabinets' (*PF* p.126), she appears in a very different guise from that of invisible deity. These poems present Nature as a chatelaine, with keys at her side to unlock the five senses:

> A bunch of Keyes which hung by Nature's Side,
> Nature to unlock these her* Boxes try'd.
>
> * The five Senses are Nature's Boxes, Cabinets: The Braine her chiefe Cabinet.
> (Ibid.)

Her dwelling place does not seem to be in an otherworldly region, suitable to a goddess, but rather some unspecified place which is very much in and of this world, though built of abstractions:

> The Ground, whereon this House was built upon,
> Was Honesty that hates to do a Wrong.
> (*PF* p.133)

She is clothed with natural features:

> The Sun crownes Nature's Head, Beames splendent are,
> And in her Haire, as Jewels, hang each star.
> Her garments made of pure Bright watchet skie,
> The Zodiack round her Wast those Garments tye.
> (*PF* p.127),

her bracelets are the polar circles, her shoes gold and silver mines, while her stockings are made of grass. Only the necklace of planets recalls her role in the creation of the world from without. Cavendish's presentation of her is reminiscent of a nature spirit rather than a deity and while

somewhat strange, these poems are highly imaginative and recall folk images of household fairies. Allegories personifying nature and describing her dress in a similar way were not uncommon towards the end of the sixteenth century and examples may be found in Drayton's *Endymion and Pheobe* and *The Man in the Moon*. However, Cavendish's Nature shows a more disturbing side, which is quite shocking after such evocative and charming descriptions of her dress. Cavendish informs her reader that Death is Nature's Cook and that this delightful creature, clad in rainbow ribbons, has a somewhat macabre taste in food. To please Nature, Death prepares:

> Some meates shee rosts with Feavers, burning hot,
> And some shee boils with Dropsies in a Pot.
> Some for Gelly consuming by degrees,
> And some with Ulcers, Gravie out to squeese.
> (*PF* p.127)

Cavendish lets her imagination run riot with stomach-turning effect and the reader learns, no doubt with some alarm that:

> ...Death cuts throats, for Blood-puddings to make,
> And puts them in the Guts, which Collicks rack.
> Some hunted are by Death, for Deere that's red,
> Or stal-fed Oxen, knocked on the Head.
> Some for Bacon by Death are sing'd or seal'd,
> Then powdered up with Flegme, and Rhume that's salt.
> (*PF* p.128)

In the same way that Rochester can render sexuality disgusting, Cavendish turns human life into a helplessly revolting condition of being farmed or hunted to feed a cannibalistic earth-deity. Yet she seems unaware of the shocking images she is creating and goes on blithely to describe 'A Posset for Nature's Breakfast' made of the cream

of beauty with the claret wine of blushes and the eggs of 'fair and bashfull eyes' (*PF* p.128). While marginally less unpleasant, these are equally strange. Cavendish progresses through the disturbing images of food preparation, to the synaesthetic description of nature's sweet-meats in 'A Dissert' (*PF* p.132), which include 'Sweet marmalade of kisses', 'sugar Plum-words', and, 'wafer promises', but unfortunately also 'Preserv'd children that are not Fathered'. She creates a whole realm for Nature, as she does for the Fairy-Queen (see Chapter 3). Death is her Cook, but her retinue also includes:

> Eternity, as Usher, goeth before,
> Destiny, as Porter, keepes the Doore
> Of the great World, who lets Life out and in;
> The Fates, her Maides, this Thread of Life do spin.
> (*PF* p.132)

as well as her foot-boy, Motion and Time, her page. It is especially interesting that 'Mutability orders with great Care' (*PF* p.132). Traditionally considered a female characteristic and a weakness, even by Cavendish herself (*PF* sig. A3; p.108; p.153; p.161), Mutability is careful and valuable in this context. The role seems to be that of steward and it may be that Cavendish sees the value of a steward whose ideas are flexible. Nature's house is described in detail, with allegorical representations of the emotions, her wardrobe has garments made of 'Beauties Stuff', laced with smiles, damaged by sickness, mended by good diet (*PF* p.134). Nature's grim side is suggested again in the description of:

> ...severall Mantles, Nature made, were there,
> To keep her Creatures warm from the Cold Aire.
> As Sables, Martin, and the Fox that's black
> .....
> The out-side of all things Nature keeps here,
> Severall Creatures that She makes to weare.
> (*PF* p.135)

revealing that as we are farmed for food, so animals are for clothing. As in her description of the fairy queen, and following the pattern set by Drayton and Herrick, Cavendish furnishes all details of this realm for Nature as earth-goddess. This is not precisely the same Nature as the one who made the world, being less god-like and more fairy-like, but Cavendish is rarely consistent, as has already been seen in the fairy poems (Chapter 3). In the creation poems, Death is the enemy who may overthrow Nature and her Council; now Death is simply a gruesome cook. Motion, a female member of Nature's Council, has become a male servant of low status and the Fates, whose sinister influence haunts many a mythology besides Cavendish's, are reduced to maids. Yet in the midst of this alternative view of Nature, Cavendish refers back to her initial creation story:

> Great Nature she doth cloath the soule within,
> A Fleshly Garment which the Fates do spin.
> And when these Garments are growne old, and bare,
> With Sicknesse torne, Death takes them off with care.
> And folds them up in Peace, and quiet Rest,
> So laies them safe within an Earthly Chest.
> Then scoures them, and makes them sweet, and cleane,
> Fit for the Soule to wear those cloaths agen.
> (*PF* p.135)

In this, it may be noticed, she includes reference to the soul, which was the 'living-mind' in her creation poem. The

presentation of Nature thus becomes similar to the presentation of the two fairy courts. While the reader may feel they are two entirely separate concepts, Cavendish links them here and there; yet when the attempt is made to integrate them to one linear description, they are too much at variance. The same unanswerable question arises as in the fairy poems and in her differing attitudes to women - is Cavendish unaware of the discrepancies in her writing, or does she think them unimportant?

However, Cavendish's Nature is closely bound to the world she has created. But in creating the elaborate conceit to illustrate this, Cavendish's fancy may well be too disturbing for the comfort of the reader. While the allegorical descriptions of Nature's house, retinue and wardrobe are very delightful, the gleeful massacres of her chef are nightmarish. The descriptions of the dead served up like food prepared by a French cook in the war poems are very similar and point out a possible uneasiness or ambivalence in Cavendish regarding the natural process of eating.

This idea is supported in her poems of the natural world where, it is notable that God is the creator of Man, the tormentor and eater of animal flesh. In 'The Hunting of the Hare', Cavendish decries man's arrogance towards animals:

> As if that God made Creatures for Mans meat,
> To give them Life, and Sense, for Man to eat
> .....
> And that all Creatures for his sake alone,
> Was made for him, to Tyrannise upon.
> (*PF* p.112-113).

In his study of *Man and the Natural World,* Keith Thomas sees Cavendish's concerns as part of a steady growth of feeling towards animal suffering, but adds:

> No doubt these sentiments did not prevent the duchess from enjoying roast beef...[8]

However, Cavendish's attitude towards roast beef is by no means certain. Her descriptions of meat in both the battle and nature poems are linked with gratuitous death and slaughter which treats humans like prey-animals. In *Bell in Campo* (1662), one of the improvements in women's lives negotiated by Lady Victoria is that women should be allowed to eat what they chose and in her autobiography Cavendish describes her eating habits as very simple,

> As for feasting, it would neither agree with my humour or constitution, for my diet is for the most part sparing, as a little boiled chickin, or the like, my drink most commonly water. For though I have an indifferent good appetite, yet I do often fast...(*Memoirs*, p. 207)

There is a marked difference between this ascetic simplicity and the luxurious, frequently unpleasant, images of feasting in 'Meat drest for Nature's Dinner; an Ollio for Nature':

> Then doth she presse, and squeeze the Juice of Youth,
> And cast therein some Sugar of Sweet Truth,
> (*PF* p.129)

or 'A Tart':

> Then did she take some Cherry Lips that's red,
> And Sloe-black Eyes from a Faire Virgin's Head.
> And Strawberry Teats from High Banks of white breast,
> And Juice from Raspes Fingers ends did presse.
> (*PF* p.129-130)

or 'A Dissert':

> Marchpane of Youth, and Childish Macaroon.
> Sugar Plum-words most sweet on the Lips.
> And wafer promises, which wast into Chips.
> Bisket of Love, which crumbles all away,
> Gelly of Feare, that quaking, quivering lay.
> Then came in a fresh Green-sicknesse Cheese....
> (*PF* p.132)

While in her prefatory address 'To Naturall Philosophers' (*PF* sig.A6-A6ᵛ), Cavendish longs to feast her readers on 'Ambrosia, and Nectar', this is clearly in an intellectual sense and her description of the feasting fairies is simply imaginative. Keith Thomas, discussing a famous seventeenth century vegetarian, Thomas Tryon, suggests that there were possible subconscious resistances to the eating of meat:

> What is notable about his arguments is that they reveal that the long established habit of praising red meat because it supposedly made men virile and courageous had produced the inevitable reaction. For Tryon, the adoption of animal food after the Fall was associated with the beginning of fighting and quarrelling among men...Vegetarianism was for him a means of curbing aggression...This argument would have a long currency since it was generally accepted that food affected the character. (Thomas, *NW*, p.291)

While it is not suggested that Cavendish advocated vegetarianism, it is quite possible that her choice of boiled chicken and her morbid fascination with cooked human flesh, reveals some similar subconscious resistance to red meat as symbolic of death, violence and male aggression. The desire for control and choice implied in negotiations involving food in *Bell in Campo*, is also revealing. The humans feasted upon by Nature have no such control, nor do the animals feasted upon by Man, yet Cavendish seems to delight in Nature's feasting, even as she is appalled by Man's. The difference

may well be that she describes us as being specifically made for Nature's food, while questioning that animals were created as food for us. Moira Ferguson feels that Cavendish's 'lack of even veiled reference to her sexuality' suggests a 'certain sexual reluctance on her part'(Ferguson, *MLC*, p.308). However, I would suggest that the two poems 'A Tart' and 'A Dissert' are touched with a certain morbid eroticism. This does not in any way counter Ferguson's theory of reluctance, but may reveal a sense of being devoured in the sexual act that could be linked with an ambivalence towards eating. If this is true, then the idea of female voracity may be psychologically strengthening to Cavendish. Her complex and disturbing treatment of eating in her poems, along with the evidence from her plays and memoirs. would seem to support Moira Ferguson's further contention that:

> In light of contemporary knowledge of these symptoms and habits (of fasting and purging herself), we might well wonder if the Duchess of Newcastle had an early undiagnosed case of anorexia and bulemia.
> (Ferguson, *MLC*, p.308)

The attraction and revulsion towards food, the desire to hide outward signs of womanhood and the use of self-starvation as a means of control which all form part of the psychological background to such illness, in the light of Cavendish's anxieties and concerns as displayed throughout her work, seem to make this a reasonable possibility.

A rejection of the anthropocentric tradition, as found in her poems on the natural world, thus becomes unsurprising.

Cavendish presents a far more recognisable picture of nature and the natural world, in which all the poems are concerned with the arrogance and selfishness of man in his side of the relationship. She does not attempt to draw together the world she sees in everyday life and the fantastic realm of nature described in her 'Severall Keyes of Nature...'. Her poems on hunting, as well as 'Of an Island' (*PF* p.116), 'The Ruine of the Island' (*PF* p.118), and a number of her dialogue poems display a real sensitivity for the natural world and a concern for the feelings of animals, trees and birds. 'The Hunting of the Hare' (*PF* p.110) and 'The Hunting of the Stag' (*PF* p.113) both follow the chase and death of the two prey animals. The description of the hare, given the traditional name 'Wat' which Shakespeare also uses in *Venus and Adonis*, shows a knowledge and understanding of the natural behaviour of the animal:

> His Nose upon his two Fore-feet close lies,
> .....
> His Head he alwaies sets against the Wind;
> (*PF* p.110)

and a moving empathy with his plight:

> Then Wat was struck with terrour, and with Feare,
> Thinks every Shadow still the Dogs they were.
> (Ibid.)

She attributes human emotion to the hare:

> That he no hopes hath left, nor help espies
> (*PF* p.111)

and also to the stag in the following poem:

> Then walking to some cleare, and Christall Brook,
> Not for to Drink, but on his Hornes to look:

> Taking much Pleasure in his Stately Crowne,
> (*PF* p.113)

and both die in great violence after a long and distressing chase. Keith Thomas says that:

> In the seventeenth century the most common view held by intellectuals was that beasts had a kind of reason, but an inferior one....(but) there was an increasing tendency to credit animals with reason, intelligence, language and almost every other human quality. (Thomas, *NW*, pp.125 & 129)

Cavendish appears to show the influence of Montaigne in her adoption of these ideas and her description of the stag-hunt, is very close to his, including a reference to the traditional belief that deer wept in the face of death:

> ..I have not even been able to witness without displeasure an innocent defenceless beast...being hunted to the kill. And when as commonly happens, the stag, realizing that it has exhausted its breath and its strength, can find no other remedy but to surrender to us who are hunting it, throwing itself on our mercy which it implores with its tears.[9]

Despite his distress, Montaigne makes it clear that he is one of the hunters, but Cavendish takes the point of view of the stag:

> Must yeild himself to them, or dye no doubt.
> Turning his head, as if he dar'd their spight,
> .....
> But Fate his thread had spun, so downe did fall,
> Shedding some tears at his owne Funerall.
> (*PF* p.116)

Thomas feels that Cavendish applies:

> a sort of cultural relativism to the differences between the species ...arguing that men had no monopoly of sense or reason (Thomas, *NW*, p.128)

and indeed, she frequently puts this argument into the mouths of animals and birds themselves:

> No Creature doth usurp so much as Man,
> Who thinks himselfe like God, because he can
> Rule other Creatures, makes them obey:
> We Soules have, Nature never made, say they.
> (*PF* p.73).

Even trees can argue rationally, feeling some sympathy for man's weaknesses. The unfortunate oak in 'A Dialogue between an Oake, and a Man cutting him downe', can still declare:

> Yet I am happier, said the Oake, than Man;
> With my condition I contented am,
> He nothing loves, but what he cannot get
> (*PF* p.69-70).

Trees provide a link with eternity and were often seen as symbolic of society, as in Shakespeare's *Richard II*:

> .....Superfluous branches
> We lop away that bearing boughs may live.
> Had he done so, himself had borne the crown
> Which waste of idle hours hath quite thrown down.
> (III. 4, 63-6)

The Greendale Oak at the Cavendish home of Welbeck Abbey was around six hundred years old even in the seventeenth century and such permanence became very important during an era of great social upheaval, when:

> the desire to preserve such visible symbols of continuity grew stronger; and passions became especially intense if the tree in question was identified with the fortunes of a particular family. (Thomas: *NW* p.217)

In her biography of her husband, Cavendish relates his distress over the felling of his trees during his exile:

> I never perceived him sad or discontented for his own losses and misfortunes, yet when he beheld the ruines of that park, I observed him troubled, though he did little express it, onely saying, he had been in hopes it would not have been so much defaced as he found it, there being not one timber tree in it left for shelter. (*Life*, p.93)

and includes a depressing list of his lost woodlands:

1. Clipston-Park and woods cut down...
2. Kirkby-Woods...
3. Woods cut down in Derbyshire...
4. Red-lodge Wood, Rome-wood and others near Welbeck...
5. Woods cut down in Staffordshire...
6. Woods cut down in Yorkshire....
7. Woods cut down in Northumberland...
(*Life*, p.103).

The value of these losses was forty five thousand pounds, but the loss of the past and the future remembrance of his family presence symbolised in the trees was undoubtedly of greater importance to Newcastle. At the time she wrote *Poems, and Fancies* Cavendish and her husband had not fully assessed their losses, but she knew of the destruction of Bolsover, his favourite castle, which Sir Charles Cavendish had bought back for him as a ruin. Her observations of the natural world are clearly affected by the destruction she saw caused by the Civil War and that she chooses to give animals, trees and castles more sense than man is revealing. 'A Dialogue between a Bountifull Knight, and a Castle ruin'd in War' becomes a nature poem by her anthropomorphic treatment of the castle as a living creature. Bolsover suffers as much as an ill-treated animal:

> My Windoes all are broke, the wind blowes in.
> With Cold I shake, with Agues shivering,
> (*PF* p.90)[10]

longing for release or death:

> O pity me, deare Sir, release my Band,
> Or let me dye by your most Noble hand.
> (Ibid.)

pathetically grateful to its master's brother for attempting a rescue:

> Most Noble Sir, you that me Freedome give,
> May your great Name in after Ages live
> .....
> And may great Fame your Praises sound aloud:
> Gods give me life to shew my Gratitude.
> (Ibid.)

Cavendish's concern for the natural world is demonstrated in deeply sensitive descriptions which belie her need to escape into a world of imagination so frequently. It is perhaps her love of the natural world though, and her distress at the imperfect way in which mankind uses it, that leads to her alternative view of violence and destruction at the hands of Nature herself. There is a sense of death and rebirth in the idea of Nature farming human and animal kind for her own use that Cavendish cannot conceive in the view of the natural world as for man's abuse alone.

As has been seen throughout this thesis, Cavendish does not approach any subject from a clear and uncomplicated point of view and nature is no exception. Her conflicting longings for rational scientific thought and imaginative excess, her fantasy earth-mother devouring her children and her accurate view of natural history all combine to produce a multi-faceted vision of nature. This reflects the natural complexity of the human mind as typified in Cavendish herself, and also the philosophical questioning of mankind's place and role in the world that is an essential part of human existence.

Notes to pages 105-132:

1 *The History of God* (London: Mandarin; 1995; first published 1993), p.10

2 See David M. Knight. *Natural Science Books in English 1600-1900* (London: Batsford. 1972; second edition 1989), Chapters 1-4 for an overview of scientific developments in the seventeenth century, with lists of significant publications. Knight includes Cavendish's *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655) and its revised version *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (1668).

3 *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London: William Wilson, 1655), p.459

4 *Paradise Lost* was not published until after *Poems, and Fancies*.

5 *The Scientific Lady in England* (California: University of California Press. 1955; London: Oxford University Press. 1955), p.1: subsequently referred to as Meyer, *Lady*

6 'A Science Turned Upside Down: Feminism and the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 47 (1984). 289-307, (P.259). Subsequently referred to as 'Sarasohn,'Science'.

7 *Reason's Disciples* (Urbana:University of Illinois Press, 1982), p.77

8 *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin Books, 1983), p.294; subsequently referred to as Thomas. *NW*.

9 *The Complete Essays*, translated by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin Books, 1991). p.484-485

10 While the Knight and the Castle are not precisely identified as Charles Cavendish and Bolsover Castle until the later editions, the references to the family's past and their contemporary situation in 1653 are unmistakable.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

'Nought can take out the burning heat, and paine,
But Pen, and Ink, to write on Paper plaine.'
Poems, and Fancies p.151

The four major themes in *Poems, and Fancies* analysed in this thesis are in many ways only a small part of the overall work. While they cover Cavendish's dominant concerns, both serious and fanciful, they are only the beginning of a full exploration of the depths of her text. As Cavendish herself discovers when considering her atoms, there may be many worlds in this world, there is always more to learn, to discover and to imagine. Her first publication is entirely of this nature. While a more accomplished writer would have turned this into a quality of the work, Cavendish knows from the outset that she lacks such skill. It is impossible to argue that her work is the result of careful planning or even inspired genius, and yet she has qualities that can only be discovered through a thorough engagement with her text. The great length of *Poems, and Fancies* means that the casual reader or even the scholar attempting an overview of her work, is unlikely to uncover the fascinating intricacies of her imagination. Despite Cavendish's willingness to display her thoughts and fears to her reader, she remains elusive in her contradictions and inconsistencies. Her prefatory and postscript material shows that she knew full well the reception she could expect for her book, which is typified in the comments of her contemporary,

Dorothy Osborne, made before she had even seen the book;

> Sure the poore woman is a litle distracted, she could never bee soe ridiculous else as to venture at writeing book's and in verse too. If I should not sleep this fortnight I should not come to that. [1]

At this time, *Poems, and Fancies* had been in print for only a few weeks, yet Osborne reflects the interest, albeit negative, that its publication had aroused. The final comment appears to refer to Cavendish's claim that she wrote the book at night due to 'my rest being broke with discontented Thoughts' (*PF* sigA7), which again suggests it had been discussed in some detail. Upon reading it, Osborne believes her suspicions to be confirmed:

> I..am sattisfyed that there are many soberer People in Bedlam.[2]

Sadly, Osborne shows none of the female solidarity Cavendish appeals for, nor even a little sympathy for the loneliness of her position. She sees only a ridiculous enterprise, inexpertly executed by a woman with more ambition than sense. Yet it is the confusing oppositions and inconsistencies in her writing, which can only have helped to confirm Osborne's opinion, that provide the key to uncovering Cavendish's motivation and bring a closer understanding of her work. A woman of her social standing, in a delicate political position, would surely not expose herself to ridicule and calumny lightly, despite her great longing for fame. The need for that fame comes from more than a highly developed ego, and, as always, with Cavendish, answers to the puzzles she

poses may be found in her subtext.

In her epistle 'To Naturall Philosophers' Margaret Cavendish apologises to her readers for her lack of education and her presumption in writing of matters she knows she cannot fully understand. Painfully aware that 'I may be absurd. and erre grossely' (*PF* sig.A6), her humble address goes on to add that 'those that are poore, have nothing but their labour to bestow' and to hope that:

> though I cannot serve you on Agget Tables, and Persian Carpets...nor feast you with Ambrosia, and Nectar, yet perchance my Rye Loafe, and new Butter may tast more savoury, then those that are sweet. and delicious. (*PF* sig.A6ᵛ)

The glimpse of the world she would like to offer her reader is one of exceptional luxury and fantasy, with its agate tables, persian carpets, golden dishes and crystal glasses carrying ambrosia and nectar. While it makes her point by contrasting sharply with the simplicity of her rye loaf and new butter, it is somewhat at odds with the rational scientific world towards which she claims to aspire. Throughout *Poems, & Fancies* the conflict encapsulated in this image surfaces repeatedly. Cavendish's stated claim is the longing to be taken seriously as a writer and a thinker. As has been demonstrated, she writes copiously on natural philosophy, war, writing and man's relationship with his world. Yet, as also discussed in previous chapters, she writes equally fully on fairies, and talking birds, trees and castles, creates her own mythology with Nature personified as a deity and indulges in whimsical

pondering, seeming unaware of the unease with which these two approaches to life sit side by side.

The key to her disparate views of the world, alternately based on reason and fantasy, may be found in her epistle to Mistress Toppe, when she says, 'I have an Opinion, which troubles me like a conscience, that tis a part of Honour to aspire towards a Fame' (*PF* sig.A4). Having risen from a family of the lesser gentry through marriage into the highest aristocracy, Cavendish feels a sense of *noblesse oblige*, which she expresses further in *Sociable Letters* (1664):

> Title should be but to have it known there is a worthy Person, who is full of Noble Qualities...Moral Virtues,...Learned Sciences...Wise Councels, and the like, which ought to be commerced and traffick'd within the world, for their own and others good, benefit and pleasure.[3]

In both these statements she expresses the urges of the the restless troubling mind that will not be satisfied with the women's role of her time but also the desire for a fame which is beyond the concept of that time, even for the majority of men and therefore entirely unattainable. As seen through her war poems, fame for Cavendish is associated with classical imagery and great deeds which are not a part of everyday human existence, but more the stuff of stories and legends. Many of the female characters in the plays she wrote after *Poems, & Fancies*, achieve this sort of fame, leading armies (*Bell in Campo* 1662), orating publicly to great acclaim (*Youths Glory and Deaths Banquet* 1662) and living in idyllic arcadian worlds (*The Convent of Pleasure* 1668). However, the

closest Cavendish herself can come to this is with the realisation in *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* (1666), that she can make a world in her own mind and be queen thereof, and none can challenge her right to do so 'since it is in every one's power to do the like'[4]. As seen in Chapter 2, Cavendish is aware that fame can be worthless gossip, or vicious rumour, or alienating stares and that no matter how she prepares and primes her reader, she cannot be sure they will respond as she wishes; indeed, she can be almost certain that they will not. Whether or not she became truly satisfied with being queen of her own mind by 1666, in 1653 she displays a great restlessness and idealistic longing to be the wise, titled, lady writer, by whom others are not only impressed but improved. This longing can only have caused her frustration, except in the imagining of her own mind.

By the time she came to write *The Blazing World*, Cavendish had realised also that:

> The end of reason, is truth; the end of fancy, is fiction;..by reason I understand a rational search..that is a .. profitable and useful study..so it is also ... laborious and difficult, and requires sometimes the help of fancy to recreate the mind, and withdraw it from its more serious contemplations. (p.123)

However, in her first work, she has yet to rationalise any balance between the academic and imaginative workings of the mind. She does not see any reason to attempt a separation between the two and there is a hint that when she makes this attempt in later years, she finds a 'rational search' somewhat

tedious. In *Poems, and Fancies* while she attempts to convince her reader, and it would seem, herself, of the ascetic and wholesome value of the rye loaf, she cannot help longing for the fantastic indulgence of ambrosia. As she vacillates between the appreciation of reason and the wildest expression of imagination, it may be questioned whether she actually believes her work to be so plain at all. It is possible that she intends a pun on the word 'wry', which in the seventeenth century had connotations of swerving from the correct course, contrariness or perversity. Her book is undoubtedly wry in this sense, as it deviates from every accepted female norm of behaviour. She could be presenting not the simplicity of the rye loaf, but the subversion of the wry act, secretly offering her readers ambrosian richness, if only they have the cast of mind and intellectual appetite to enjoy it. Ambrosia and nectar are the food and drink of the gods, to consume them gives immortality of the sort Cavendish desires. But her knowledge that it may well be too rich for contemporary tastes, especially amongst the rational minds of the new scientists she hopes to impress then leads her constantly to undermine and apologise for her work. The way in which Cavendish's restless mind develops from the early hope of fame to the realisation that her own mind is the best place to enjoy it, may be traced through her plays. In them the conflict she feels over the longing for public display and the synonymity between actress/whore in the minds of herself

and her contemporaries is approached from many sides[5]. *Poems, and Fancies* being her first work, demonstrates all her early longings, hopes and worries, without the retrospective knowledge found in her later work.

As discussed in detail in Chapter 1, Cavendish frequently sets out the image of herself as a contemplative ascetic:

> a solitary genius who depended on the power of fancy to conjure up original compositions (Fitzmaurice, 'Fancy', p.199).

However, she intermingles other images that constantly undermine it. That she longs for agate tables and other luxuries makes the quiet poet-self suspect to begin with, especially considered alongside her desire for 'a Vulgar Fame', even though she is aware that 'Fame is nothing but a great Noise, and noise lives most in a multitude' (*PF* sigA3). Throughout the previous chapters, it has been demonstrated that the hearty, earthy aspects of life seem both repellent and attractive to her. She claims a love of solitude, yet longs for 'a Vulgar fame'; she abhors the destruction of war, yet admires the puissance of the noble warrior; she prefers a sparse diet, yet imagines fairy feasts; she seeks a transcendent form of love inspired by heroic romance, yet offers up an erotic meal of a young girl for a female nature goddess. Her ambivalence reveals her conflict and the oppositional nature of her longings are aptly represented by ambrosia and rye bread - one is a luxury so fantastic it belongs to mythology and one is as plain and earth-bound as a

meal can be. One offers intellectual food for the imagination, the other will sustain human life. Her conflict appears to be over which has the greatest value to her, especially as, being female, she is not considered by the majority of her contemporaries to require intellectual food at all.

The conflict is not easily solved, but Cavendish accepts that the feminine mind is regarded as frivolous and uses this as the excuse if her attempts at poetry fail, yet she aims to be a part of the rational, reasoning world of the new natural philosophy. As also discussed in Chapter 4, her poems on natural philosophy take up the first fifty pages of *Poems, and Fancies* and she lays out her theory of atomism both carefully and seriously. The majority of these poems are short, most less than a page long, some only a few lines, and many having margin notes to explain points she feels may be unclear. It is obvious to her that she must master the reasoning world of the Natural Philosopher, if she is to achieve the fame she claims to want, the fame of being a serious writer, not simply the fame of being a 'mad, conceited, ridiculous woman'[6]. But she knows this world is harshly critical, so makes the disclaimer for her work that :

> My intention was, not to teach Arts, nor Sciences, nor to instruct in Divinity, but to passe away idle Time; (*PF* p.212)

However, her casual dismissal of her book cannot be accepted as genuine when she takes so much care in the prefatory and postscript material to cushion it from the blows of the

critics. Neither is it possible to accept her claim for ascetic simplicity when her imagination so frequently whirls away from the rational reasoning she aims for to a wildness which is clearly far more attractive to her. She says in her memoirs that, even as a child:

> I took great delight in attiring, fine dressing, and fashions, especially such fashions as I did invent myself, not taking pleasure in such fashions as was invented by others (*Memoirs*, p.209)

and later in life, she became famous, or notorious for her eccentric mode of dress, sometimes incorporating male styles and at others indulging in gorgeous displays, such as on her visit to the Royal Society in 1667, when her train took six maids to carry it, and her dress was a combination of male and female fashions. This suggests again the restless mind that aims to be part of the unassailable male world of the literary and scientific intellectual, yet needs also to transcend and dazzle that world, all in the face of a shyness that brings with it a longing to fade quietly into the background. Cavendish suggests the paradox often described in the personality of the actor who to hide personal shyness, takes to the stage, perhaps in bravado, perhaps to bluff both the world and the self.

Cavendish also shows repeatedly a fascination for multi-layered activities, which reflects her multi-layered personality. She frequently criticises those whose interest in writing is influenced by superficial decorative factors:

The world in Bravery doth take delight,

> And glistering Shews doe more attract the sight;
> (*PF* p.212),

when she knows that content is far more important:

> Should we not believe those to be Fools, that would rather have foul water out of a Golden Vessel, than pure Wine out of Earthen or Wooden Pots?[7]

What is hidden from sight fascinates her, the secrets that may lie beneath the outward form, or be created by the overlayering of ideas, of colours, of truth and fantasy. Throughout *Poems. and Fancies.* images of spinning and weaving occur, the building up of one form upon another. As she fuses these images, speaking of spinning a garment, she also fuses the images of human spinner and spider in describing her writing:

> I cannot say the Web is strong, fine, or evenly spun,
> (*PF* sig.A2v)

The wasted time enforced by women's lives is like spinning gone awry, resulting in not only:

> unprofitable, but indiscreet Actions, winding up the thread of our lives in snarles (*PF* sig.A5).

As Sylvia Bowerbank points out:

> With a curious aptness she favours the imagery of silkworm, spider, and spinning for depicting literary creativity, particularly hers. (Bowerbank, 'Spider's Delight', p.397)

The image is apt, not only for its associations with creativity, but for its sense of the continual building and shaping of the creative act, which is especially relevant to the particular workings of Cavendish's own mind. Few images are for her clear and settled. She continually looks through, beyond and into what she perceives, seeking out the layers of

its meaning. She is fascinated by the female arts:

> ..their curious shadowing, and mixing of Colours, in their wrought works and divers sorts of Stitches..and many curious things they make, as Flowers, Boxes. Baskets with Beads...their thoughts are continually imployed with Fancies.(*PF* sig.A3)

and of her scientific poems, those where she moves beyond the restrictions of reason and allows herself to speculate are the most interesting, such as 'The World in an Ear-ring' (*PF* p.45). As discussed in Chapter 3, even her fairies live either within the human brain, or in a world concentric to ours, within the centre of the earth. For Cavendish everything must have something hidden, layered beneath the obvious superficial view presented to the eye.

Her favourite activity, of thinking alone in her room, while suggesting idleness, reveals more perhaps a mind not content with this world, but which must find more to occupy itself. She claims that the rush of her thoughts overwhelms her:

> ..my letters seem rather as a ragged rout...for the brain being quicker in creating than the hand in writing...many fancies are lost, by reason they oft-times outrun the pen..

and her only fear is that:

> ..my brain should grow barren, or that the root of my fancies should become insipid..for want of maturing subjects to write on (*Memoirs*, p.206).

Hence her delight in finding subjects which stimulate her mind, and her need to explore them to their depths, despite her conflicting need to establish herself as rational and wise. So even when she is attempting to be a natural

philosopher, she cannot resist using the new science to explain the world in a more fantastic, not more rational, way. Dr. Claire Jowitt has suggested that the famous Ditchley portrait in which Queen Elizabeth I wears an armillary sphere as an ear-ring, could have inspired Cavendish's poem 'The World in an Eare-Ring' (*PF* p.45)[8]. While, as Dr. Jowitt pointed out, this could not be proved, it is likely that such an image would have fascinated Cavendish, given her interest in the multi-layered and fantastic worlds. The armillary sphere, with its rings representing both the outward shape of the world, then its unseen lines, such as the equator and polar circles, even at its most simple demonstrates aspects of the world that can only be represented. The empty spaces between the rings require imagination to clothe and people them. The step for a mind such as Cavendish's to a miniature world existing as truly as she did herself, would be only a small one. If Dr. Jowitt's conjecture is correct, this image may have been the starting point for Cavendish's imagination, later heightened by her interest in her husband's use of the microscope. Her love of this fantasy of other worlds may be seen in her descriptions of Nature's realm and the fairy regions (See Chapters 3 and 4) in *Poems, and Fancies*, but also in the many worlds experienced in her plays and novels, especially by the unnamed heroine of *The Blazing World*. Her love of display, in spite of her shyness, suggests also the need to make this world more exotic, yet she shows awareness,

perhaps subconscious awareness, that anything on display is distanced, perhaps even imprisoned by the attention drawn towards. as discussed in Chapter 1. Pepys' diary account of Cavendish's visit to London in 1667 creates a similar picture, to that of the fairy queen behind her glass doors (*PF* p.155):

> The whole story of this lady is a romance, and all she does is romantic.....(Pepys, April 11, 1667)
>
> That which we, and almost all went for, was to see my Lady Newcastle; which we could not, she being followed and crowded upon by coaches.....(Ibid. May 1, 1667)
>
> Drove hard towards Clerkenwell, thinking to have overtaken my Lady Newcastle..in her coach, with 100 boys and girls running looking upon her. (Ibid. May 10, 1667)

While in the quiet of her room, contemplating the self she wished to become. Cavendish had a privacy she abandoned when she decided to publish. Having made that decision, she appears to have decided to overwhelm the world by presenting herself as uncontained by its rules and customs, marginalising herself before others have the chance to humiliate her by doing so. By living out her fantasy world through her actions in real life, it is unsurprising that she amused, dismayed and amazed her contemporaries. Her behaviour demands a response and thus it may also be that she seeks to use the world which looks upon her in the sense of metaxis. to learn more about her true self. By presenting herself as both quiet and contemplative and wildly imaginative, retiring from the public eye and courting attention by extravagant display, her desire for self-actualisation follows very different courses. Moira Ferguson believes that:

> Her intelligence and wilfulness enable her to harmonize these apparently dissonant aspects of her personality (Ferguson, 'MLC', p.309)

whereas I would argue that she makes no attempt at harmonization and the lack of conflict, as mentioned above, is because she does not acknowledge the dissonance at all. A fantasy world cannot be acknowledged as such without its destruction - the protagonists in its life must believe it to be real, in the same way that actor and audience accept the drama as real for the short life of the play. I believe that Cavendish's choice of a secluded life with brief moments of carefully orchestrated fame enabled her to keep her fantasy of the celebrated poet-self alive. However, it was clearly no small feat to achieve this as she reveals an active and frequently troubled mind, saying in her letter to Charles Cavendish that 'all braines work naturally, and incessantly,' (*PF* sig.A2), presumably a solipsism meaning that her brain does and she assumes other to be alike. In *Sociable Letters* (1664), she describes a strange female performer seen during her stay in Antwerp as disturbing:

> she troubled my Mind a Long time, but at last my Mind kick'd her figure out, bidding it be gone, (p.405)

She also describes how, when a theatre troupe was banished from the city by the local magistrate, she contented herself by recreating the pleasure she had experienced watching them, in her own mind, 'to please me, my Fancy set up a Stage in my Brain...' until her more rational side, 'the Magistrates of

the Mind Commanded the Fancy-Stage be taken down'(*SL*, p.408). Sophie Tomlinson sees this creation of a stage in the brain as 'A characteristic gesture of interior withdrawal' (Tomlinson, 'Stage', p.135), and the ejection of the freak from her mind as psychological repression. Her decision to eject her brain-stage also suggests that part of her looked darkly upon her tendency towards frivolous thought, perhaps repressing it as Tomlinson suggests she does with matters which disturb her, and once more it may be seen that her different longings and standards of behaviour come into conflict. It is interesting that the ejection of her fantasy stage is undertaken by 'magistrates' of the mind, corresponding to the male figure who banished the players she enjoyed from Antwerp, thus disparaging the 'female' enjoyment of the play.

Margaret Cavendish was in the unusual position of having many of her fantasies about life come true. Her longing for the chance for the shy girl of her youth to stun the world was realised when William Cavendish married her. Her status as his wife, gave her great opportunities to satisfy both her social and literary aspirations, as well as her girlish longing for a fairytale life. As Gloria Italiano Anzilotti points out, in accounts of their lives 'the qualifier "fantastic" is almost never absent' and they formed a 'life-long mutual admiration society'[9]. Newcastle's affectionate support is evident throughout Cavendish's work, both in his own words, and in her references to him. She says in her

memoirs that one of his reasons for choosing her as his wife was that he:

> ..would choose such a wife as he might bring to his own humours and not such a one as was wedded to self-conceit, or one that been tempered to the humours of another. (*Memoirs*, p.195)

It would seem that in an entirely benign way he did this, as Cavendish reflects his interests throughout her work. The cast of her mind is deeply moulded by his influence, and she appears to be gratified by this, seeing it as evidence of her love for him. The image of her happily listening to him speak suggests a willing acolyte,

> There oft I lean my Head, and list'ning harke,
> To heare his words, and all his Fancies mark;
> (*PF* p.214)

and she delights in the freedom of thought that his teaching has brought her, as discussed in Chapter 1, so that she feels she has a contribution to make to the world through her writing. Yet the social elevation of her marriage which put her in the direct view of those she wished to impress, could not ensure her their approval, and may, conversely have ensured her a certain amount of negativity. This could only have been heightened by Newcastle's exile and his position as *persona non grata*, not only to his enemies, but also to some of his former friends, owing to the circumstances of his absence. Thus, her restless longing for fame, while seeming satisfied, was to some extent thwarted also by her social standing as his wife. On the odd occasions when she had the

chance to speak out publicly, she was baffled either by shyness or eccentricity. Her experience as a petitioner to the parliamentary committee was humiliating and far from impressing them with her powers of articulation, Cavendish could not bring herself to speak at all, simply whispering to her brother to take her away. At her visit to the Royal Society in 1667, Pepys noted her eccentric dress and arrival, but commented also:

> nor do I hear her say anything that was worth hearing, but she was full of admiration, all admiration.
> (Pepys, May 30, 1667)

In her writing however, she can create a notional listening reader, or indeed a select audience of philosophers and noble ladies, not all of whom she imagines will be uncritical of her work, but who she has in a position to listen while she defends and explains it. While she apologises for her rye loaf and longs for ambrosia to feast her readers. she can also indulge her hopes that what she has written is, in fact, of ambrosian quality. She has a chance to rehearse and perfect her presentation of herself as Writer. while the guise of spontaneous creativity excuses any rough edges, so that

> In her poems and prose her mind is on display, theatrically presented in abstractions, so that psychology becomes..a dramatic performance..her writing like her public presentation fulfils the desire for attention..and is delivered in terms of gratifying and fantastic scenarios.[10]

But to what extent this satisfies her is debateable. While her attitude is often arrogant in *Poems, and Fancies*, her self-presentation suggests high ego but low self-esteem and it is

the conflict between these two aspects of her character which creates the unease her restless mind causes her. As Janet Todd says 'She accepts her own mind as a distinct and definite place' (Todd, *Angellica*, p.56), but as Ferguson, mentioned earlier, feels that Cavendish has harmonized the two conflicting sides of her character. Todd agrees 'she has no worry about identity.' (Todd, *Angellica*, p.56). However, I do not believe harmony is evident and would argue that Cavendish's work is preoccupied with worries about identity. The way in which she does not attempt to merge her two selves, or refer to them as separate, letting them rather exist without reference to one another suggests an inability to reconcile them so complete that reconciliation is not even attempted. Cavendish seems unaware that to argue for women's right to speak on one page, while condemning them as addle-headed on another is inconsistent; or that a bitter assessment of men's rule by superior education does not lie easily beside an ingratiating acceptance of their mental superiority. Similarly, she seems to feel no discrepancy between the fame-seeking woman writer and the melancholic isolated poet, but this does not suggest harmony or a solidly constructed sense of identity. It seems rather that Cavendish's mind is so overwhelmed by her longing for ambrosia that she finds it less tormenting to allow her conflicting ideas to exist alongside one another, without assaying a compromise of either. It may be that the assessment of *The Blazing World* as 'so private

that (it) border(s) on schizophrenia' [11] while extreme, is not far from the truth. However, rather than seeing Cavendish's mind as one so tormented by itself, that it withdraws to a private world, I would argue the torment for Cavendish is the inability of the rest of the world to rise to her vision. With the exception of her husband, Cavendish does not especially desire human interaction, as few people interest her sufficiently. Her experience of the world suggests that it is full of small and petty minds who will criticise her work on the grounds of her gender or trivialities of form, yet she needs the approval of the world if she is to achieve fame and thus immortality. Two years after *Poems, and Fancies* was printed, she wrote in *The World's Olio* that 'The desire of Fame proceedes from a doubt of an after being'[12] and again, in 1664:

> ...there is nothing I Dread more than Death, I do not mean the Strokes of Death, nor the Pains, but the Oblivion of Death (*SL*, p.177)

If her work is left only to the petty minds, then oblivion is all she can hope for and she declares 'if I am condemn'd, I shall be Annihilated to nothing' (*PF* sig.A5). Thus, she attempts to address the greater minds, who will show a genuine interest in her work, but is too aware that she will more than likely be ridiculed. Throughout the four themes considered and those beyond the limitations of a thesis of this length, she strives continually to engage with material and ideas that will prove her worthy of greater consideration. Moulded by

people she adores, she nevertheless desires autonomy and to be remembered as more than Master Lucas's daughter or the Lord Newcastle's second wife. Her fear of oblivion, her longing for fame and her restless tormenting mind know that the ambrosian heights she aspires to will bring her immortality. To that end she is willing to risk ridicule but constructs elaborate preparation for it by offering her dish of ambrosia in the simple guise of the rye loaf. It is perhaps the disguise that confounds her ultimately, as *Poems, and Fancies* is not in any sense plain and simple. It is a remarkable flight of fancy from a unique restless imagination, full of aspiration, ambition, doubt and hope. While Cavendish may never achieve the full glory of immortality she desired alongside the literary greats, she nevertheless inhabits a space entirely her own, defying classification, maintaining the distance of the fairy queen and attracting continued fascinated attention:

> Then shee shall live in Heavens of high praise:
> And for her glory, Garlands of fresh Bayes.
> (*PF* sig.A8ᵛ)

Notes to pages 134-153:

1 *Letters to Sir William Temple*, ed. Kenneth Parker, (London:Penguin, 1987), Letter 17 (14 April 1653)

2 Ibid. Letter 20 (7 or 8 May 1653)

3 *CCXI Sociable Letters*, (London: William Wilson, 1664), p.14; subsequently referred to as *SL*.

4 *The Blazing World and other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (First published by Pickering and Chatto 1992; London: Penguin, 1994), p.124; subsequently referred to as *BW*.

5 See Sophie Tomlinson "My Brain the Stage": Margaret Cavendish and the Fantasy of Female Performance' in *Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760*, ed. Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.134-163; subsequently referred to as 'Tomlinson, 'Stage'.

6 *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*. ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (London: Bell, 1970-83), 18 March 1667; subsequently referred to as Pepys.

7 *Orations of Diverse Sorts*, (London: n.p., 1662), unnumbered page 'To the Reader of my works'.

8 Dr. Jowitt's paper 'The Queen's Two Bodies: Self-Representation, Female Absolutism and the Cult of Representation in Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*' was given at the Northern Renaissance Seminar on 4th. March 1995 at the University College of Ripon and York St. John. A revised version was given at the International Margaret Cavendish Conference at the University of East Anglia on March 31st. 1996.

9 *An English 'Prince': Newcastle's Machiavellian Political Guide to Charles II* (Biblioteca Di Letteratura e Arte' 3 Pisa: Giardini Editore e Stampatori, 1988), p.26

10 *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction 1660-1800* (London: Virago.1989), p.56; subsequently referred to as Todd: *Angellica*.

11 Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel, *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (Cambridge: Belknap-Harvard University Press, 1979), p.7.

12 *The World's Olio* (London: J. Martin and J. Allestrye, 1655), p.53.

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- *Orations of Diverse Sorts* (London: n.p.,1662)

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