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The One-Sex Model in
Margaret Cavendish's
Assaulted and Pursued Chastity

Martin Labisch

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I. Introduction

Cross-dressing is a topic that occurs in various literary works. The phenomenon is spread across numerous genres and eras of writing. Usually it is about a person that disguises oneself in order to hide one's real personality. The British author Margaret Cavendish takes cross-dressing a step further in her novel *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* that was first published in the book *Nature's Pictures* in 1656 (Cavendish x). Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle (1623-73), was one of the first female authors to publish her writings under her own name (Cavendish x). She was known as an aristocrat, a writer and a scientist (Cavendish i). In her literary work she combined her passion for science with her ambitions as a writer, which is why she published speculative fiction, scientific treatises but also closet dramas and poetry (Cavendish i). *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* is an example for genre crossing literature. Cavendish combines travel literature, normally a male genre, with a love story and war elements. This makes *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* an utopian novel.

The main character Travellia, who is called Miseria in the beginning of the novel, flees from the Kingdom of Riches after her mother dies of grief about Miseria's father being killed in war. The Prince, who is unwillingly married to a much older woman, falls in love with the beautiful Miseria. But the heroine of the novel decides to leave her home because she suspects treachery against herself and fears that it might be dangerous to continue living in the Kingdom of Riches. Miseria disguises herself by dressing in a page's clothes and cutting her hair. Then she goes on a ship that leaves the harbour, calling herself Travellia. The shipmaster takes her under his wing, not recognising that she is a woman and even adopting Travellia as his son. After the ship suffers shipwreck Travellia and the shipmaster live on an unknown island with a native tribe. They are rejoined by the Prince

who exposes Travellia as a woman, not even arousing bewilderment in the shipmaster who accepts Travellia the way she is. But out of fear of her real sex being revealed to everyone, Travellia leaves the island on a merchants' ship to the Kingdom of Amity where the Queen, who of course thinks that Travellia is a man, welcomes her into her family. The Prince searches the whole island for his admired Travellia and leaves, in the sadness of discovering her not being there any more, for the Kingdom of Amour. The King of Amour is currently at war with the Queen of Amity, whom he loves, because she refuses to marry him, thinking that he only wants to gain her kingdom by marrying. The Prince leads the King of Amour's army into the warfare and after imprisoning the Queen seems to have won the war. But Travellia, encouraged by the Queen's imprisonment, forms a new army and goes on to win the war between the two Kingdoms. After it is revealed that the Prince's wife has died, Travellia makes her earlier promise come true by marrying the Prince. The Queen, who up to this point was in love with Travellia, does not want to love a woman and, now welcoming the state of being in love, marries the King of Amour. Travellia and the Prince are installed as the rulers of the Kingdom of Amity with the Prince declaring the will to be ruled by Travellia. The two Kingdoms continue to exist peacefully next to each other.

In order to understand Travellia's actions and their success in the novel, one has to look beyond her disguise. Using Thomas Laqueur's thoughts from his book *Making Sex* on the character of Travellia, plus comparing her to another disguised heroine like Rosalind from William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and also considering another cross-dressing themed writing by Margaret Cavendish, namely *The Convent of Pleasure*, shows that Travellia is an example for a literary figure embodying the one-sex model.

II. Thomas Laqueur's One-Sex Theory

Bringing Laqueur's one-sex theory to terms with the character of Travellia in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* strengthens the assumption of the novel's heroine portraying a form of the one-sex model.

But what is the one-sex model? It is based on the one-sex and the two-sex theory that Thomas Laqueur describes in his book *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. According to Laqueur, who is a sexologist, writer and professor of history, there are two theories how sex and gender can be defined. The one-sex theory was pretty common until around the 18th century when the attitude towards human sex and gender changed (Laqueur 10). During the 18th and the 19th century the two-sex theory was slowly developed. Until this change took place, it was a common belief that men and women were basically the same. So the one-sex model refers to the theory of only one existing sex. Detailed analysis of anatomical pictures show that anatomists believed in men and women sharing the same genitals, the vagina being a penis turned to the inside of the body. The uterus resembling the scrotum, the labia equal to the foreskin and the ovaries being the same as the man's testicles (Laqueur 4). Laqueur states that it was not important for the people of this time to find differences between men and women (Laqueur 10). Women were looked at as less perfect men because they had the same organs but in the wrong places of the body (Laqueur 26). That is also the reason why women had a subordinated role compared to men in the society of the time before the 18th century. Further on in *Making Sex*, Laqueur explains how women were thought of having a cold body temperature and men having a warm temperature. In theory, this means that women could develop all strong characteristics of a man when getting in a rage. Their inner penis would pop out and they could become men for the time they have a hot body temperature (Laqueur 92). It is

important to remind oneself that Laqueur is talking about sex and not about gender. Up to the 18th century, sex was defined by a social rank or a place in society and not by belonging biologically to one or the other of two sexes (Wallraven 175). This changed with the course of time in the 18th century with the development of the two-sex theory (Laqueur 152). The sexual organs of men and women were identified as not being the same. "Men" and "women" became two completely different theories. Anatomists' new thoughts about the unequal biology of men and women built a new basis for theories about social and psychological gender distinctions (Laqueur 157). Gender was basically constructed by the new beliefs of actually two sexes existing.

Cavendish's novel, being written in the 17th century, falls in a period of time where the one-sex theory was still very common in Europe. And Laqueur's one-sex model functioning as a form of blueprint for Travellia's character in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* can be seen at several points in the novel.

Travellia's disguise begins with her simply cross-dressing as a boy. She cuts off her hair and puts on the clothes of a page (Cavendish 60). This disguise is working, as Travellia is able to enter the ship without being noticed as a woman. The shipmaster even walks up to her and sees a "handsome youth stand there in page's clothes" (Cavendish 61). After exchanging a few words with Travellia, he tells her that she can stay on the ship and is "supposing her a boy" (Cavendish 61). The heroine manages to convince a well-experienced man like the shipmaster that she is boy which shows that she can hide her feminine characteristics by disguising. This is the first step of cross-dressing in the novel that brings Travellia towards the one-sex model.

On a ship full of men it is a necessity for Travellia to stay disguised and imitate the actings of men as good as possible. The urgency of the situation brings out these qualities in her. One could compare that to the heat Thomas Laqueur is talking about in *Making Sex*.

Travellia's mimicry of a man is so good that the shipmaster, who has become "her . . . new father" (Cavendish 62), sees "his beloved and supposed boy" (Cavendish 62) in her.

Later, when they land on an unknown island after suffering from shipwreck, Travellia proves once more that she can develop manly characteristics. Her father, referring to her as "his son" (Cavendish 69), tells Travellia that they can only survive on this island when learning the language of the tribe living there and making them believe they are sent from god, otherwise they would be sacrificed by the people living on the island (Cavendish 69). So it is up to Travellia to use her intelligence in order to adapt the natives' language. The time *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* was written, it was common for women to be socially ranked under men - just as in the tribe on the island Travellia and the shipmaster are on - and not getting such a good education as men would (Laqueur 201). But Travellia, spurred on by the necessity of learning the natives's language and the will of positioning herself socially above the women on this island, learns the language in twelve months, being able to understand and to speak it (Cavendish 70). This is another case of her developing the qualities of a man when it is necessary. She, so to speak, heated up and showed that a man is in her that can rise up in certain situations which is a typical characteristic of the one-sex model. In the end, Travellia is talking to the King of the island and all the people of the tribe convincing them of being sent from the gods. From then on, the shipmaster and his alleged son were highly respected by the natives and even regarded as "examples, which . . . the people followed" (Cavendish 75).

And there is another striking situation in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* where Travellia's actions can be explained by her resembling Thomas Laqueur's one-sex model. It becomes pretty apparent that Travellia is more than a disguised woman when the two Kingdoms, the Kingdom of Amity and the Kingdom of Amour, are at war and she comes to the rescue of the Queen of Amity. But what urges Travellia to act in the resolute manner

she does? Cavendish's heroine is not in love with the Queen, as "she could not have those affections in her for the Queen as a man, yet she admired her heroic virtues, and loved her as a kind and gracious princess to her, which obligations made her impatient of revenge" (Cavendish 95). This is the motivation behind the main character showing once more that the potential of a man is in her, which becomes obvious for the reader when "Travellia, hearing the Queen was taken prisoner, was high enraged, which choler begot a masculine and courageous spirit in her" (Cavendish 95). She goes on to set up and command a new army. An army of men that obeys a disguised woman. But because of Travellia being in a rage, she developed the body temperature to act like a man and does it so well that the army does not question her (Cavendish 100). The Kingdom of Amity eventually wins the war under their young general who only once shows a weakness when fainting after being wounded in a sword duel with the Prince who is the general of the Kingdom of Amour's army (Cavendish 102). This stresses the theory of the one-sex model being expressed by Travellia's character as she can handle everything a man should but fails at sword fighting, a thing even a man first has to learn. The quality of Travellia's disguise should be out of question anyway, verified by the fact of the Queen being in love with the manly Travellia at one point in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* (Cavendish 102). The novel's heroine being a woman becomes completely irrelevant when she reveals her disguise to everyone, including the army she commanded, and no one questions her previous actions but accepts her for who she is, the army declaring "Heaven [sic] bless you, of what sex soever you be" (Cavendish 115). The irrelevance of Travellia's sex gets stressed even more when the Prince, who marries her, tells "his mistress, she should also govern him" (Cavendish 116) in addition to the Kingdom of Amity that she shall rule as "Viceregency [sic]" (Cavendish 116).

After now having examined Travellia's character throughout *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* and using Thomas Laqueur's one-sex theory from *Making Sex* to explain the background for her actions and character development, it becomes clear that Travellia is an ideal example for the one-sex model.

III. Travellia compared to Rosalind

In order to distinguish between a female that resembles the one-sex model and a woman who is only cross-dressed, one has to consult another literary work that gives an example for a normally disguised character. Comparing Rosalind from William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* to Travellia indicates Margaret Cavendish's character illustrating a type of the one-sex model.

In *As You Like It*, Rosalind disguises herself as Ganymede when fleeing the royal court for the Forest of Arden where the exiled Orlando lives after a row with his older brother Oliver. This is a similarity between Travellia and Rosalind. They both flee from their homes. The necessity to disguise herself might be given for both heroines but it is vital for Travellia being able to leave the Kingdom of Riches on a ship full of men. Rosalind chooses to disguise herself in order to be safe and gain social status in the forest. But normally this situation would not require her to disguise herself because her cousin Celia changes her personality to the shepherdess Aliena but does not hide her sex and is safe as well. So Rosalind wants to disguise herself while it is a necessity for Travellia (Lawrence 42). Now what are the objectives for both heroines to hide their feminine characteristics? Shakespeare's Rosalind wants to stay close to Orlando and make a man she could love out of him. She literally teaches him how to be a better lover and has to stay

unrecognised by him. One could state that Rosalind is disguised because she is "focused on a male love object" (Jankowski 181). On the contrary, Travellia has no real objective but to survive. For example, when she strands on the unknown island and has to quickly learn the natives' language. Cavendish's heroine in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* always reaches her best form as a man when she is in danger or in a rage. That is the main difference between Rosalind and Travellia. Obvious proof that Rosalind is only a cross-dressed woman and not an example for the one-sex model like Travellia is given when the character from *As You Like It* faints after learning about Orlando's injury. This is a typical reaction for a woman. Comparing this to a similar situation Travellia is in shows that Travellia is more manly than the simply cross-dressed Rosalind, as she only faints when being hurt herself. Setting Travellia in a likewise circumstance of shock as Rosalind is in when she hears of Orlando being bodily harmed, shows once again the masculine qualities of an one-sex model type of character that Travellia develops. One could compare the bad news Rosalind gets about Orlando to Travellia getting to know about the Queen's imprisonment. Otherwise than Rosalind, who shows a weak feminine reaction, Travellia reacts in a perfectly manly, even heroic manner and is spurred on to accomplish something very difficult that no one would expect a woman to be able to cope with, namely winning the war between the two kingdoms (Lawrence 40).

Contrasting the two heroines against each other in similar situations shows the differences between a cross-dressed woman and a woman that resembles the one-sex theory. In conclusion, the comparison of Shakespeare's Rosalind and Cavendish's Travellia gives further evidence on the possibility of Travellia being an example for the one-sex model.

IV. Two Cavendish Cross-Dressers

Assaulted and Pursued Chastity is not Margaret Cavendish's sole cross-dressing themed literary work. In *The Convent of Pleasure*, published in 1668, Cavendish gives the reader a slightly different perspective on cross-dressing. Juxtaposing the Prince who cross-dresses in *The Convent of Pleasure* and the play's Lady Happy to Travellia, highlights the *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* heroine personifying the one-sex model.

In *The Convent of Pleasure*, the beautiful heiress Lady Happy wants to hide away from the manly world. She enters the convent of pleasure, where only women are allowed to enter, that means widows and virgins. Married women are not allowed to enter the cloister. In this play, Cavendish presents a diverse form of cross-dressing as a man is cross-dressing as a woman. The Prince has to disguise himself as Princess in order to enter the convent. What can the convent and the disguised Prince point out that helps recognising Travellia as an example for the one-sex model? Well, Lady Happy creates an alternate world for women by forbidding men to enter the convent. Hence, the two sexes are separated, women exercising "their own autonomy" (Jankowski 177). In *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*, Travellia regularly enters the world of men, not caring about borders between sexes. The cloister might be a place of freedom for the women living there, yet it is strictly feminine as the food, clothing, the gardens and furnishings are chosen by women, for women (Jankowski 178). The females living in the convent do everything to resist the masculine notions of pleasure. They don't want to be like men and draw a line between the two sexes (Jankowski 178). This is already a big difference to Travellia who shows her masculine behaviour on various occasions. Of course the convent's women are not disguised like Travellia is, but the Prince who is entering the convent as the Princess, can be compared to Travellia. He might be disguised and tricks the incloistered women in

believing he is a princess, but still shows masculine behaviour and habits. The Prince only looks like a woman but does not perfectly act like one (Jankowski 181). On the contrary, Travellia has the handsome looks of a youth (Cavendish 61), something one would rather expect from a woman, but manages to overcome all these adventures that are not even completely common for men to survive (Lawrence 40). Also, Lady Happy being in love with the Prince in the end of *The Convent of Pleasure* shows how gender roles and the distinction between sexes is upheld in the play (Jankowski 193). The Prince in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* marries Travellia although she features masculine characteristics and actually wants to be governed by her while she does not even dress in a traditionally feminine manner but is only "dressed in a white silk garment, which hung loosely about her" on their wedding day (Cavendish 116).

So while *The Convent of Pleasure* presents a model of cross-dressing where the look of the Prince convinces the convent's women of his sex (Siegfried 79), it is Travellia's characteristics and behaviour that assure everyone of her being a man. This is typical for Thomas Laqueur's one-sex theory, where the looks, the biological features of a person, are not important to define sex because the organs are considered to be the same anyway. The comparison of Travellia with the Prince as an additional cross-dressed character by Margaret Cavendish, thus highlights Travellia following the concept of the one-sex model.

V. Conclusion

There are various forms of cross-dressing one can specify. Yet after bringing the character of *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* heroine Travellia to terms with Thomas Laqueur's one-sex theory and also comparing her to Rosalind, the cross-dressed heroine from William Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, and further on differentiating between Travellia and the characters from *The Convent of Pleasure*, proves that Travellia can be thought of as a character typifying the one-sex model.

Of course this is a thesis that can be viewed from different perspectives. But *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*, being written not a long time before the change of mindset towards the two-sex theory in the 18th century, gives a very clear depiction of a one-sex model represented in a literary work. Later writings, also by Margaret Cavendish, feature rather blurry ideas in terms of sex and gender definition, literally showing how the construction of both sex and gender changed with the course of time. Thus, varying theories about the one-sex model and its use in literature might be looked on as well, since there is no exclusive explanation for the phenomenon of cross-dressing.

I hereby certify that I have acknowledged and identified all borrowings from other sources.

VI. Works Cited

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