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## Feminism, Imperialism, Utopianism, and Science Fiction in Margaret Cavendish's "Blazing World"

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FEMINISM, IMPERIALISM, UTOPIANISM, AND SCIENCE FICTION IN MARGARET  
CAVENDISH'S *BLAZING WORLD*

A Thesis

by

TERINA GARZA VAZQUEZ

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Texas-Pan American  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2010

Major Subject: Literature and Cultural Studies



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August 2010



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## ABSTRACT

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Margaret Lucas Cavendish (1623-1673), the Duchess of Newcastle, was a woman writer in seventeenth-century England who was the first woman in history to be allowed within the halls of the Royal Society. She was also the first woman to write what should be considered the first work of science fiction by a woman titled *The Description of a New World Called, The Blazing World*, or simply *The Blazing World*. This thesis focuses on *The Blazing World* which offers a proto-feminist critique of imperialism and of gender relations in seventeenth-century England and of England's emergent imperialist culture and points to a more egalitarian and utopian future.





## DEDICATION

I can only dedicate my thesis and all my love to one person, my husband, Carlos.  
Without you none of this would have been possible.  
I am the luckiest person in the world!



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of my Master's degree would not have been possible if I had not had my committee chair, and savior, Dr. Matthew J. Christensen, who went above and beyond to help me with this thesis. Thank you for the tremendous amount of patience, revisions, and words of advice from you and from my committee, Dr. Linda Belau and Dr. Gary Schneider. All of you are incredible mentors and I am indebted to all of you for all your guidance and the headaches I have caused you over the last two years!

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I dedicate the last of my Acknowledgments page to my two students, Jimmy Leal and Roger Estrada, for one of the funniest barbs I have ever heard thrown in my direction....

Jimmy: Hey Collins! Wanna hear a joke? (slight pause)

Jimmy and Roger (in unison): Women's Right!



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION: “MAD MADGE”, MONSTER OF THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY.....	1
CHAPTER II. FEMINISM AND ITS ROLE IN SCIENCE-FICTION:  THE EMPRESS MEETS THE AUTHOR .....	17
CHAPTER III. IMPERIALISM IN SCIENCE-FICTION:  THE EMPRESS AND HER HYBRIDS .....	34
CHAPTER IV. <i>THE BLAZING WORLD</i> AS UTOPIAN FICTION .....	48
CHAPTER V. CAVENDISH’S POSITION IN THE TRADITION OF FEMINIST  SCIENCE-FICTION AND SCIENCE-FICTION WRITERS .....	62
WORKS CITED .....	70
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .....	74



## CHAPTER I

### “MAD MADGE”, MONSTER OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

A woman promoted to sit in the seat of God, that is, to teach, to judge or to reign above man, is a monster in nature, contumely to God, and a thing most repugnant to his will and ordinance.

John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (Geneva, 1558) fol. 16r. (qtd. in Wiesner 288)

Wherefore, since glory, delight and pleasure lives but in other men's opinions, and can neither add tranquility to your mind, nor give ease to your body, why should you desire to be Empress of a material world, and be troubled with the cares that attend your government? whenas by creating a world yourself, you may enjoy all both in whole parts, without control or opposition, and may make what world you please, and alter it when you please, and enjoy much pleasure and delight as a world can afford you?

*The Description of the New World Called, The Blazing World* (Cavendish 186).

The sexist sentiments expressed by John Knox in 1558 are as important to the formation of science fiction as the invention of all things technological that give humans the power to reinvent the natural environment or to explore strange new lands. In her efforts to challenge thinkers like Knox, indeed the European scientific community as a whole, Margaret Lucas Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-73) imagined an alternate universe where intellectual women, like Cavendish herself, were as free as men to pursue philosophical inquiry. Cavendish's critiques of the patriarchal ideas expressed by Knox and her male contemporaries made her the subject of vicious attack, but they also gave birth to women's science fiction writing. Cavendish can be found at the forefront of female writers who responded to science fiction's bias towards patriarchal beliefs towards women. She highlights the conflicts of society's view of women as



the Other (inferior and powerless) to her own self-consciousness of women searching for their own identity (representation and control). This proto-feminist discourse is the central focus of her book *The Description of a New World Called, The Blazing World* (1666). *The Blazing World*, as it is better known, is one of the earliest examples of science fiction writing in Europe and certainly the first by a woman. In her narrative, Cavendish creates a dialogue between the different perspectives held by women and their interaction with the patriarchal belief system. For this, many viewed her work as “disproportionate and monstrously masculine texts” (Lilley xiii). Cavendish’s perspective in *The Blazing World* offers a feminist critique of gender relations in seventeenth-century England and of England’s emergent imperialist culture and points to the possibility of a more feminist-centered egalitarian and utopian future. My thesis explores the ideology found in relationships between gender and imperialism and between feminism and patriarchal authority. Cavendish’s work challenges gender inequalities in the form of an anti-imperialist, science-fiction narrative.

Cavendish’s *Blazing World* begins with the incredible adventure of Lady, one of the narratives two female protagonists. Her journey into an alternate universe starts when the Lady’s innocence and beauty captures the eye of a merchant whose poverty and stature would never allow him to marry her. He is left with only the use of force and has his men kidnap her. Fate and the gods intervene and steer everyone into a new, fantastical utopian world accessed only from the North Pole. The freezing temperatures kill everyone aboard except for the Lady. In this new world she is crowned the Empress because of her beauty and is given the sovereign power to make changes to her society as she sees fit. Her royal subjects are made up entirely of intellectually advanced half-man, half-animal hybrids. They experiment on new scientific discoveries and hold many discussions with the Empress about every aspect of natural

philosophy, religion, and government. Out of these discussions, the Empress quickly transforms their culture into what she views as a more progressive society. Her newfound power easily allows her to approve or dismiss any of the hybrid's ideas or philosophies that she deems are too weak or biased for her liking while maintaining those that continue to create a more peaceful kingdom. She then decides to create a religious cabala, and consults the spirits of Paradise to see if they can advise her with choosing a scribe to help her write the cabala she desires.

She contemplates the many works of famous philosophers and writers but the spirits of the *Blazing World* point out that each of these men's views conflict with the Empress's and thus are "so self-conceited, that they would scorn to be scribes to a woman" (181). In lieu of the great philosophers Cavendish casts herself into the narrative as the Lady's intellectual interlocutor. As the Empress comments on how the Duchess is compatible with her because "she being one of my own sex" they consult and discuss different ideas that each proposes about natural philosophy to other's theories and become advisors to one another (181). During the Empress and the Duchess Newcastle's discussions over Pythagoras and Plato, comes word from the spirits that EFSI (Cavendish's short version for England, France, Scotland, and Ireland), the Empress's homeland, has been threatened with attack from its enemies. The Empress gathers her hybrid men and travels back to the home-universe where they launch several displays of their power for these enemies to witness. Upon seeing the Empress's hybrids burn ships and villages that belong to the invaders of EFSI, who do not believe in the power of a woman, the intimidation forces these groups to finally back down. Once it is understood that the Empress will forever guard EFSI no one dares to attack again. She is able to return to the city of Paradise and continue her days living amongst the Emperor, their children, the Duchess, and her hybrids.

There is an evident injustice in how Cavendish and her prolific contributions to women's writing and science fiction during the seventeenth century have been addressed. Although her work has not been ignored it has been ridiculed, scorned, and dismissed. Some even went as far to say that Cavendish's "unfeminine works" could be "interpreted as monstrous" (Lilley xiii). These attitudes stem from the western social order, a class hierarchy that is aligned with religious authority and patriarchal control, which has continually undermined the rights of women. As Deborah Boyle explains,

At the time she was writing, surely only men could have performed the actions she describes as "good service" to one's country. Cavendish was certainly aware of this, often commenting on women's absence from public life. For example, in a preface to *Nature's Pictures*, Cavendish writes that "all heroick Actions, publick Employments, powerfull Governments, and eloquent Pleadings are denied our Sex in this age." (275)

Then there are those whose patriarchal point of view saw women as inferior by nature and believed as Jacques Cujas, writing in 1606, who stated that, "A woman, properly speaking, is not a human being" (qtd. in Weisner 13). Though it may seem that scholars are indeed creating dialogues over Cavendish's work, it should be noted that most analyses are negative and contribute to her work being ignored. Instead of the accolades Cavendish deserves for writing what should be considered the first feminist work of science fiction, she has only been ignored or dismissed. A prime example would be her obvious omission from analyses of science fiction. Was it that she challenged the established norms of the seventeenth century with her eccentric behavior? (Sarasohn, "A Science Turned" 292). Dorothy Osborne responded harshly to the publishing of Cavendish's work by saying that "there are many soberer people in Bedlam" (qtd. in Cavendish xiii). Samuel Pepys, member of British Parliament and famous diary writer, remarked that, "The whole story of this Lady is a romance, and all she doth is romantic" which seems to also imply that all of Cavendish's work was impractical or unrealistic completely

disregarding the elements of proto-feminism within her works (qtd. in Lilley xii). Most of the largely misogynistic literature at the time created a façade that women who were in a perpetual state of inconstancy, both mentally and physically, could not maintain the position of author because of this weakness. This weak perspective of women, which entails women being seen as only wife and mother, created greater bias against Cavendish and her attempts at gender equality. It was these intentions that provoked Pepys to also claim that she was “a mad, conceited, ridiculous woman” (qtd. in Trubowitz 229). Any praise Cavendish did receive was often backhanded as Virginia Woolf’s comment reveals, “though her philosophies are futile, and her plays intolerable and her verses mainly dull, the vast bulk of the Duchess is leavened by a vein of authentic fire” (Woolf 1). Regardless of public opinion there is no denying that she was the first female in history to write about utopia, opting to venture into another universe, more far-flung than even Thomas More’s island<sup>1</sup>.

The negative views of Cavendish’s work are due to the fact that Cavendish’s feminist utopia did not fit within the typical, male protagonist driven plotlines at the time. As Boyle states, “It is true that several of Cavendish’s fictional works display women honored for behavior more typically associated with men” (278). This specifically occurs when Cavendish writes herself into her own narrative and creates a plotline that mixes the fiction of an Empress with the reality of the Duchess of Newcastle, and forces the reader to acknowledge that these two aspects of real and fictional worlds could exist. The reader is suddenly given the character of the Duchess who serves as a bridge between fiction and reality. It is this unconventional subject of female empowerment that may have drawn such intense criticism for her work. As Sarah Hutton observes,

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<sup>1</sup> More coined the word utopia - a name he gave to the ideal, imaginary island nation whose political system he described in *Utopia*, published in 1516.

Her reputation for eccentricity has meant that her claims to be taken seriously as a *femme savant* have, until recently, been ignored. She has been dismissed as an intellectual lightweight and her writings in natural philosophy treated as if they confirmed Pepys's opinion. (161)

Cavendish does bring together within the *Blazing World* a seemingly contradictory relationship between women, government, and power in an effort to challenge patriarchal authority. As Boyle maintains, "One possibility was that Cavendish thought women should enter into public life and try to win honorable fame for exemplifying the masculine virtues" (277). To recognize Cavendish's views of women in public life is integral to understanding the role of imperialism within the emerging feminist, and consequently, science fiction genre at a time when women authors were almost nonexistent. As the desire to see women maintain a more intricate role within society is also mirrored within *The Blazing World*.

In most historical contexts, imperialism relies heavily on the relationship between the politics that govern the connection between the Self and Other, of a dominant and inferior group. This is most evident when the actions taken by the imperialist country are deemed as necessary and are a reflection of an elitist European perspective of a native people they did not understand and still tried to control. The European slave trade began in the late fifteenth century and, along with it, empire and colonization. As Jaganath Pathy states,

Thus in a stroke, the piratical plunder of the third world resources from 16th to 19th century, which deformed and sometimes destroyed thriving civilisations while consistently augmenting the affluence and opulence of Europe is rationalised. "What Man's Burden" was propagated in the face of deportations, forced labour, slavery and massacres leading to a high rate of extinction of the local population. (623)

This aspect, part of European imperialism, centered on the enslavement of people, can be witnessed through the individual narratives that serve as testament of such an undertaking. Many authors — ambassadors, missionaries, and travelers — detail the intensity of European conquest

from its beginnings, to its height in the eighteenth century. In her essay, Susan L. Blake clarifies the impact of these authors' roles,

In relation to Africa they are like imperial powers. They undertake to conquer, grasp, or assimilate challenging lands and alien peoples. They exercise the power they have (wealth, stamina, ingenuity, flexibility) to gain more (knowledge of land, people, flora, fauna; knowledge of self; sense of achievement). (21)

In these authors' detailing their experience the differences between imperialism and the Other become evident. This impact becomes even more crucial to comprehending how the relationship between patriarchal and imperialist dominance are integral to the plotlines of the science-fiction genre. John Rieder explains this dichotomy in his book,

Europeans mapped the non-European world, settled colonies in it, mined it and farmed it, bought and sold some of its inhabitants, and ruled over many others. In the process of all of this, they developed a scientific discourse about culture and mankind. Its understanding of human evolution and the relation between culture and technology played a strong part in the works of [H.G.] Wells and his contemporaries that later came to be called science fiction. (2)

The implementation of these changes within *The Blazing World* is a reflection of a sweeping European slave trade that would soon engulf the people and economies of entire nations. Rieder's viewpoint helps identify the different actions taken within an imperialist agenda which includes actions that can be seen as a form of economic progress. The end result, Rieder implies, is the culture that is created between dominant and inferior groups, which yields relationships that are grounded in technology. This technology is often used to subjugate those that are inferior. Cavendish contrasts this relationship when she uses the advances made by her subjects, such as the fire-stone, in her kingdom to defend EFSI, rather than conquer (206-207). To further contradict imperialist actions, Cavendish also opposes the gender inequalities of the seventeenth century and instead allows her protagonist to voice both a feminist and anti-imperialist

perspective. The main difference is that Cavendish's anti-imperialist storyline values the power of education and scientific study rather than violence and the use of slavery.

On first examination *The Blazing World* may lead many to believe that Cavendish supports the use of imperialist actions. These actions would then conflict with the proto-feminist concepts that Cavendish is advocating. There is an underlying motivation behind introducing a female protagonist who resists abusing the power of absolute rule and displays only fair and just qualities and then, specifically, contrasts and reflects upon how her rule differs from that of men. This is made apparent when Cavendish's protagonist utilizes her capabilities to return to her home world. Instead of putting herself in the position of absolute power, she faithfully pledges her allegiance to EFSI (England France Scotland Ireland). This is most notable when the Cavendish states the following about the Empress:

Whereupon she immediately commanded her fish-men to destroy all strangers' ships that trafficked on the seas; which they according to the Empress's command; and when the neighboring nations and kingdoms perceived her power, they were so discomposd in their affairs and designs, that they knew not what to do: at last they sent to the Empress, and desired to treat with her, but could get no other conditions than submit and pay tribute to the said King and sovereign of her native country. (212)

As much as this plotline delves into what could be seen as a woman at the helm of an absolutist empire, Cavendish is not advocating imperialism in the same fashion as it has been historically recorded by male imperialists. Instead, she offers a feminist critique of imperialism and displays the negative aspects that define a patriarchal imperialist system. Cavendish purposely shows how power can be managed under the control of a strong woman such as the Empress.

Comprehending the relation between gender and absolutism has been the greatest obstacle in conceptualizing this thesis. On the one hand, the fact that the Empress addresses and makes changes to pivotal areas of the hybrid's kingdom, like religion and women, to better the hybrid's kingdom can label her as imperialistic. Whether it was a male monarch or an all male

parliament issuing an order one would still need to follow the demands of a patriarchal based system. Any attempt to reject such a decree would have been seen as a form of rebellion against the crown or government. In contrast, the Empress makes changes only after listening to the hybrids debate the matter at hand, thus Cavendish reveals her own views of the extreme differences between men in women in the position of monarchical power. Her writing was focused on presenting, “ambiguous utopias that simultaneously challenge masculinist assumptions and imagine feminist possibilities” (Bonin 340). Cavendish is the best witness of her country’s discriminatory practices towards women. Her experience as being viewed as an inferior in society comes to represent the central basis of all of her rationalizations on culture, education, and religion as presented within *Blazing World*.

Cavendish makes clear that a society’s patriarchal belief system can only be dismantled by a female governing power that has the ability to also understand and rationalize society’s unfair perceptions of female concepts and ideas. It is understandable that in Cavendish’s science-fiction perspective women would need to take on the power of the crown; a role normally associated with asserting patriarchal dominance. Holmesland observes how Cavendish uses real elements to explain something as fantastical as women’s equality:

In her artistic vision, she explores a more natural Restoration world, expanded and complemented through the individual creative imagination. Her idea of an organic balance is what combines the singularity of the author and the sovereignty of the Empress in *The Blazing World* with a more communal form of feminism. (458-459)

Her protagonist then cannot be a typical female found in society who can act as a force of change. Instead Cavendish’s protagonist must be introduced as an “Empress” where her power, like that of Queen Elizabeth, has the ability to enact change and withstand being challenged.

Thus, *The Blazing World* typifies what would reemerge centuries later as feminist science fiction. Feminist science fiction poses as its central question, “What if women were suddenly



able to be in a position of power?” Cavendish attempted to do the impossible and created an imaginary world where her Empress is free to rule without the intrusion of patriarchal presence. Her form of change for the society of Paradise was not through brutal force. Instead, the Empress keeps her kingdom as is, strives to make peace her most imperative of goals and keeps the status quo as is. She does not demand changes to current concepts that exist for her hybrid subjects. Instead, she makes changes to education and religion, by juxtaposing these ideas with Paradise’s already existing complexities. Sarasohn indicates “This strong statement of radical feminism arose from Cavendish’s despair at her own position and that of her sex” (“A Science Turned” 298). It is these negative opinions of women held by society that influenced Cavendish to write *The Blazing World*, the first work of feminist science-fiction that had its protagonist utilize absolutism to object, protest, and demand for women the same rights as men in a patriarchal society.

While *The Blazing World* has not traditionally been analyzed as a science fiction text, nor has Cavendish been credited as the first European woman science fiction writer—an honor typically given to Mary Shelley —*The Blazing World* displays all the hallmarks of a genre that “encompasses such a wide variety of works that many have claimed that it defies definition” (Murfin 431). Ursula K. Le Guin, author of contemporary science fiction, determines “the non-definability of science fiction [is] perhaps an essential element of it” (qtd. in Murfin 431). *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* defines science fiction as “a type of narrative fiction that is grounded in scientific or pseudoscientific concepts and that, whether set on Earth or in an alternate or parallel world, employs both realistic and fantastic elements in exploring the question ‘What if?’” (430). Indeed the “What if?” can be found throughout the genre in themes ranging from utopia/dystopia, alien invasions that lead to questions concerning identity and

otherness, technological threats, a strengthening or weakening of mankind, and the questioning of the relationship between the genders — several of which are themes included in *Blazing World*.

Many present-day timelines and chronologies of the science-fiction genre like those of Adam Robert's *Science Fiction*, Paul Alkon's *Science Fiction Before 1900: Imagination Discovers Technology*, or the few words of reference to her within David Seed's *A Companion to Science Fiction*, completely disregard Cavendish's contributions to the canon. Consequently, Rachel Trubowitz states, "Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel devote only one sentence of their nine-hundred-page study of *Utopian Thought in the Western World* to the Duchess's *Blazing World*" (229). These are not the only wrongs dealt to Cavendish. Many of Cavendish's contemporaries also criticized her and her writings. To further add insult to injury, Virginia Woolf characterized Cavendish as "a vision of loneliness and riot...as if some giant cucumber has spread itself all the roses and carnations in the garden and choked them to death" (qtd. in Lilley xiii).

Beverly Friend crystallizes the discussion about females in science fiction when she poses the crucial question of, "*What if* women were treated realistically in SF?" (149). Unlike typical science-fiction that is "for young men [and] filled with muscle-bound macho heroes - swaggering and bullying their way through the galaxy" (Westfahl qtd. in Roberts 29), Cavendish's writing challenges science fiction's genre assumptions to create a heroine, the Empress, who takes on the stereotypical dystopias of masculine science fiction. She does so by creating similar societies with similar outcomes without the use of what science fiction author Joanna Russ calls "Flasher Stories" (233)<sup>2</sup>. This is why the genre is mistakenly described as a fiction wholly based on the desires and fantasies of male authors. One must realize that since

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<sup>2</sup> Simply put, "Flasher Stories" entail the arrival of a male protagonist who deals with a strong, exclusively female civilization of warrior women. For years this race of Amazonian-type women has survived without men. Yet, in an ironic turn of events this one male, a symbol of phallogocentric power, is suddenly capable of harnessing this civilization through what can only be described as amazing sexual prowess.

historically only males were allowed to be educated and had the patron support to publish, a masculine monopoly was created over most genres. All that most women authors could do is to stay close to the coterie tradition of epistolary writing. For those female authors who were able to break this mold, specifically those women writers of science-fiction from Cavendish to the present, have found, ironically, that the genre provides a stage to challenge the lack of powerful female roles in leadership positions. This challenge is evidenced when Cavendish's heroine reaches her new kingdom and immediately assumes a position of authority and begins to make changes to the hybrids' interests and goals on a scientific and religious level. She dismisses that which seems irrational and wasteful and issues out her expectations for each alien race and expresses her version of how a tranquil civilization should exist. While creating a specific definition for such a broad genre is close to impossible, science fiction's "emphasis on *being* suits it for discussion of gender, a fundamental feature of every human being" (Roberts 137).

Other critiques of Cavendish's writing claim that along with the relationship between the proto-feminism and anti-imperialism found in her work her narrative also brings focus to other issues. Nicole Pohl argues that Cavendish introduces "the concept of transgressive hermaphroditism" (52). The explanation of what hermaphroditism is a concept of gender that goes beyond the "plain biological character of the sexes" and includes three elements: the male, the female, and the individual within its discourse (55). It was this jumbling of hermaphroditism that confuses and "challenged rigid stereotypes" and eventually would trickle down to the "exclusive system of division of labor" (54). Other literary critiques such as those of Londa Schiebinger and Deborah Taylor Bazely have looked at Cavendish's work and the discussions of natural philosophy as attempting "to reclaim this territory for women" as there was a sense of "slow elimination of the general public and traditional professionals, including women, from the

scientific discourse of the mid-seventeenth century” (56). For Cavendish to have been able to write and publish her theories and narratives she “challenged the monopoly of male authorship in general but its dominion of scientific knowledge and truth” (57). By publishing *The Blazing World*, Cavendish was essentially subverting “the binary opposition of male/science and female/nature, reclaiming a lost access to scientific knowledge” and was also attempting to break through the barrier set up by “new science” that “consciously barred women” (56). It is apparent then that Cavendish’s work should be seen as not only a treatise on the importance of natural science, but as the first steps that a proto-feminist had ever taken to acknowledge the conflicts of gender inequalities.

Regardless, even with this vindication of the rights of women, many critics felt that there was an “anarchic formlessness of Cavendish’s writing” and that Cavendish went out of her way to set herself apart from other women by constantly emphasizing that she belongs to the higher rank of the aristocracy of her birth. Moreover, Cavendish also sees herself, ironically, also depicted as the actual form of Nature, “as a goddess with absolute control over her subjects” (Fletcher 125). Although this particular perspective dictates that one see Cavendish and her Empress as also being abusive of the power that comes with absolute monarchy, Cavendish gives us sound evidence that the intentions behind the motivations of her characters were to create equality between the genders and not employ the same characteristics found under patriarchal authority. *The Blazing World* serves as Cavendish’s personal text in which she advocates feminist ideals to construct the best argument against the societal beliefs that women are inferior. It is a construct that defends women, and herself, against those that only viewed and believed Cavendish as “the crazy Duchess [who] became a bogey to frighten away clever girls with” (Virginia Woolf qtd. in Pohl 51).

Critical discussions about *The Blazing World* address ideas about natural science and religion, the eccentricities that became a part of Cavendish's reputation, and the gender inequalities that she dealt with in the seventeenth century. Sarasohn explains how Cavendish views women as being in "a hell of subjection" because of the suppression of their natural faculties and intelligence by men" ("A Science Turned" 290). Cavendish's writing does more than just clarify the problems of gender inequality. Along with the protagonist of the Empress, she also introduces a second protagonist, the Duchess of Newcastle. She does this to exemplify how the relationship between women differs than those between men. Their relationship can be seen as defending women against the stereotypical ideas that society holds of women being vain and jealous of each other. This makes my argument distinct from the other discussions on Cavendish. Throughout the following I offer explanations for the proto-feminist reasons that Cavendish strategically created an anti-imperialist agenda to justify women's role in society and amongst each other. There is no prevailing criticism that Cavendish believed herself to be above other women, that she was looking to clarify her position as a woman in power by confusing male and female constructs, or that she was simply attempting to satisfy her own ego. As Oddvar Holmesland explains, "To Cavendish, greatness involves having the power of self-liberation and self-management; yet her pursuit of singularity is not confined to the self, but extends to a free, self-ordering course in nature" (458). In essence, this thesis explains Cavendish's attempt to show woman in her own version of matriarchal authority and her continual enforcement of a society through peace and education. This is further demonstrated when Cavendish displays the ability of a non-patriarchal power when both the Empress and the Duchess return to our universe and, with the help of the hybrids, defend their respective mother countries against their enemies. As this conflict continues, the Empress relies on her new world's scientific discoveries to display

the power of feminine authority over the old patriarchal one. *The Blazing World's* narrative, filled with a new and uniquely envisioned feminine perspective, accomplishes a contrast between her peaceful agenda and a tyrannical, masculine imperialism.

Cavendish was one of very few women literary figures published during the seventeenth century. Perhaps her greatest accomplishment was actually publishing *The Blazing World* in 1666 at a time when very few women were able to do so. Cavendish's life was filled with a bravado that led to the many instances of eccentric behavior, especially for women at the time. This ranged from wearing men's clothing to being the only woman ever allowed inside the doors of the Royal London Society. Nevertheless, a woman breaking the established norms of society came with its consequences. Consequences that are included Kate Lilley's introduction to *The Blazing World* that refers to Cavendish as "her singularity has also, and perhaps more commonly, been interpreted as monstrous, and her texts similarly characterized as deformed in various ways: chaotic, old-fashioned, uneven, contradictory and insane" and also sees "Cavendish as producing disproportionate and monstrously masculine texts" (xiii). Deborah Taylor Bazeley indicates, "I decided that it must have been the *boldness* of Margaret's public voice — not only in her choice and range of genre, but also in her privileging of a complicated woman's subjectivity — that led to contemporary revisionings of Margaret as Mad Madge" (1). Cavendish's husband best explains the origin of these consequences when he wrote in the preface of Cavendish's book, "but here's the crime, a lady wrote them, and to entrench so much on the male prerogative is not to be forgiven" (qtd. in Sarasohn, "A Science Turned" 290).

My thesis then focuses on Cavendish's attempts to deal with the relationship between power, gender, and science. The narrative is an attestation to Europe's emergent imperialist worldview and confirmation of the subjugation of women. Her vision of utopia offers many

reasons as to why she deserves accolades instead of criticism for her achievements. It is a science-fiction piece that explores the intersections of imperialism and its contradictory relationship with feminism in the hands of the protagonist – a woman with absolute power.

## CHAPTER II

### FEMINISM AND ITS ROLE IN SCIENCE FICTION: THE EMPRESS MEETS THE AUTHOR

If you will but direct me, said the Duchess to the spirits, which world is easiest to be conquered, her Majesty will assist me with means, and I will trust to fate and fortune; for I had rather die in the adventure of noble achievements, than live in obscure and sluggish security; since by the one, I may live in glorious fame, and by the other I am buried in oblivion.

*The Description of the New World Called, The Blazing World* (Cavendish 185).

The Duchess and the Empress experience the triumph of sovereignty in their fanciful worlds, as does the author herself in creating the textual empire of *The Blazing World*. Fancy and imagination provide compensation for their lack of power in England – and especially for being women.

“Margaret Cavendish’s ‘The Blazing World’: Natural Art and the Body Politic” (Holmesland 469).

Over many centuries England’s patriarchal authority has influenced the religious, political, and social standards that have defined women’s roles. Margaret Cavendish associated the exclusion of women from society as being responsible for the expected submissiveness of women. These standards govern how women continue as inferiors in society and not given the opportunity to receive an education, participate in government, or even allow a voice to object. This is the explanation for the role of the Duchess in Cavendish’s narrative. She is a voiceless character and serves as a reminder of what life was like for women in the seventeenth century. As Deborah Boyle explains, “the Duchess's position is that of a behind-the-scenes advisor. Her good deeds are invisible to society; indeed, the Duchess herself is invisible, appearing in the story as a disembodied soul. No matter how honorable her deeds, she will never actually acquire



honor” (278-279). In contrast, the Empress is an example of what the role of women could be if ever given the chance to break away from what is deemed their natural role as wife and mother and be in a position of absolute power. The Empress represents Cavendish’s proto-feminist aspirations, refusing to be seen as inferior because of the masculine hierarchal order that deems her as such. Cavendish utilized this view of women to place herself in a position “to offer a form of social critique” and at the end of the seventeenth century she was making her mark in a society unaccustomed to seeing women who were not just simply the stereotypical mothers or nurturers (Fletcher 124). However, Cavendish cannot forego the fact that there will always be some form of patriarchal authority. This fact is always present in both her narrative and in her reality, exemplified when she states, “there was but one language in all that world, nor no more but one Emperor, to whom they all submitted with the greatest of duty and obedience” (Cavendish 130). Even in a feminist-based narrative, Cavendish grants the power of absolute rule to her Empress only after it has been given to her by the Emperor of Paradise. This concept is difficult to comprehend as even in her own work of fiction Cavendish realized how difficult it would be to have her readers accept a female protagonist who gains authority unless this power is granted to her through patriarchal approval. It is Cavendish’s proto-feminist sentiments and the anti-feminist view held by patriarchal dominance that provides the conflicting backdrop to the societal beliefs held during the seventeenth century.

*The Blazing World* similarly reflects Cavendish’s engagement with the entwined – and gendered - monarchy and religious debates at the time. Twice in her lifetime she was affected by the political affairs at the time. Cavendish was an eyewitness to the rule of Charles I who was engaged in a struggle for power with the Parliament of England. As head of the English Church he pursued religious policies that generated anger amongst the Puritans as his actions grew to be

seen by society as those of a tyrannical absolute monarch. Her family was directly impacted due to her family's associations and "At the outbreak of the Civil War of 1642, the Lucas family moved to the Royalist stronghold of Oxford where Margaret became a Maid of Honour to Queen Henrietta Maria" (Lilley ix). The second incident took place during the reign of Charles II as Cavendish and her husband sought exile in France as, "marriage to a Newcastle was socially and intellectually advantageous, it also committed Margaret to a life closely governed by the political fortunes of the Royalists" (Lilley ix). These historical events at the time did not go unnoticed by Cavendish in her narratives. According to Lilley, it was the inspiration for why, "In her writings, Margaret Cavendish campaigned for the restoration of what had been taken from her and hers, as Royalists, and for the supply of what, as a woman, had never been available to her" (xv). She was personally affected by her experience in exile Cavendish fashioned the Empress as a gentler and more compromising monarch:

But to be instilled into their minds by gentle persuasions; and after this manner she encouraged them also in all other duties and employments, for fear, though it makes people obey, yet does it not last so long, nor is it so sure a means to keep them to their duties, as love. (164)

Rather than experience the fate of Charles I and II, she created a protagonist that listens to her subjects and takes into consideration what they had to say. Her Empress pursues a much more amiable monarchy and proves that although a woman can be more benevolent toward her subjects this by no means can be seen as a sign of a weak monarch. As Holmesland emphasizes,

The Cavendishes' exile during the Civil War would induce this metaphoric equivalence. Banished and deprived of their high standing in the real kingdom, Margaret is seen to fall back on an imaginary state governed by her sovereign self. Like Charles II in real life, she rules without a country, but exploits this freedom to dissolve traditional categories and reassemble them into a private utopia. (459)

There are many difficulties in clarifying what the term *feminist* is to a work of feminist science fiction like *The Blazing World*. Feminism was a movement that came into its own during

the eighteenth-century women's suffrage movement long after the publication of Cavendish's book. Serving as a proto-feminist, Cavendish sought to create a believable protagonist in a monarchical position in an effort to voice, through the Empress's agenda, the extreme changes she wanted to enact upon her own version of utopian society. She did so at a time when feminist ideas hardly existed and were not yet well organized under any feminist philosophy. As Fletcher explains the only prevailing depiction of women at the time supported "the argument that women were naturally inconstant" and this "became a mainstay of misogynist literature" (126). Without available feminist guidelines to follow, Cavendish conceived of the Empress's authority as a way to fight the portrayal of "women as bad influences" (126). Supposedly, women were never able to remain constant in mood, attitude, and behavior in a society that advocated they "be held in check by the firm governance of men" (126). This belief of inconstancy of women strengthened the viewpoint held by society that all women should be under the authority of the patriarchal order because they are incapable of fending for themselves. This is why Cavendish's action of giving her protagonist the "absolute power to rule and govern all that world as she pleased" is critical to the feminist views she presents (Cavendish 132).

Cavendish realized that due to society's views of women as weak and inferior, she would never be able to reach the masculine ideal of the virtuous and brave label of hero during her time. Jean Gagen sees Cavendish's fictional works as showing "women achieving in the great arena of the world those very honors which spurred many a Renaissance gentleman to heroic endeavor" (536). Therefore, her intent behind writing *The Blazing World* is, without a doubt, seen as having proto-feminist motivations. As Jean Gagen illustrates, "When she was in this frame of mind, the Duchess argued that if women were given opportunities for development and self-expression equal to those given to men, they could quickly prove that they were 'as wise as men' and, by

implication, as capable of winning a glorious renown” (527). This distinguishes Cavendish’s writing as uniquely different from any other woman in literature in that while many other women remained silent on the treatment of their gender, Cavendish was outspoken about the issues making sure that both male and females were admonished for not acting on these issues.

At times, Cavendish’s position as a proto-feminist wavers between supporting the advancement of women and seemingly blaming women for contributing to their lowly position in society. As Sarasohn explains

This strong statement of radical feminism arose from Cavendish’s despair at her own position and that of her sex. In fact, this despair paradoxically often resulted in long diatribes against women interspersed with her work, perhaps reflecting her own insecurity. Although the Duchess realized the condition of her sex was due to historical circumstances, she sometimes lost sight of this perception and blamed women for their own innate inferiority. (“A Science Turned” 298)

As confusing as Cavendish’s behavior may seem, one can see where such diatribes may have originated. In essence, without an actual feminist movement with a clear set of principles to follow, all Cavendish could do is point out the shortcomings of her sex to identify the source from where female inferiority stems. In identifying these she was able to identify different aspects of proto-feminism. The first was to establish a need in society for such a movement. Still, the common belief during the seventeenth century was that only men should have any access to education “and on several occasions [Cavendish] complained that university education was denied to women, and their minds consequently were underdeveloped” (Sarasohn, “A Science Turned” 292). In order to address reforms for women’s progress in society someone would have to evaluate and place into context how patriarchal society was encouraging the subjugation of women as “Like most women in the Stuart period, she was relatively uneducated” (292). With her proto-feminist ideals Cavendish recognized the demand for education to be made available for women and is constantly referenced as being very vocal about this issue and as Erin Lang

Bonin clarifies, “Cavendish then associates women’s exclusion from universities with their negligible influence in all public contexts” (339). Another aspect sees Cavendish establishing herself as the headlong leader for such a movement. This is accomplished within *The Blazing World* where Cavendish is able to illustrate the transition of the Lady into the Empress thereby providing a proto-feminist model within narrative from which both male and female could follow. The Empress seemingly comes to represent women as capable of engaging males in educated debates about women’s capability in all aspects of society and brazenly face men not only in an academic but physical level on the battlefield:

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

Some feminist writings, like those found in the science-fiction genre, attempt to make radical changes to the literary landscape by creating arguments that explore the issues that women have to face as a whole. The plotlines of such narratives, much like Cavendish’s, present protagonists that delve into issues that affect all women as a whole. As Kate Lilley emphasizes in her introduction to *The Blazing World*, “The prose fiction included here represents a powerful negotiation of gender and genre, and sexual ideology, privileging the hermaphroditic as an arena of mobility and supplementarity, particularly enabling toward women” (Lilley xxix). Cavendish goes against type and the belief that women in the position of power “are novelty seekers who abuse power in order to satisfy their own egocentric impulses” (Fletcher 127). Her proto-feminist actions happen at a time when this movement did not exist and are uniquely conveyed through

Cavendish's characterization of her two protagonists. Cavendish appears both in cameo as herself, the Lady Newcastle, and, allegorically, as the Empress. These two distinct characters in this plotline are both representations of "Mad Madge"; as allusions to Cavendish's own reality of female inferiority and of matriarchal authority in seventeenth-century patriarchal society. Both the Duchess Newcastle and the Empress are women who find self-empowerment through absolute rule, controlling themselves and seeking the safety and security of others.

Cavendish's need to represent herself allegorically in the form of the Empress and bring herself in the narrative as the Duchess within her work moves her into the quintessential role of a proto-feminist. In the role of monarch, she encourages that her personal views of natural philosophy be debated and embraced. Moreover, she introduces a variety of hybrids that represent different schools of thought. Each of these schools is really a representation of each of her philosophies. To present each one, and dismiss whichever she pleases, replicates how her ideas were similarly dismissed by the educational community. This is an ideology also suggested by Lisa T. Sarasohn:

It is no wonder that Cavendish, when she decided to write her own philosophical letters, wrote them to an anonymous Lady, rather than one of the natural philosophers she knew. It was, perhaps, the only way she could receive the hearing she desired from a masculine community that refused to take her seriously. ("Leviathan and the Lady" 54)

This explains the motivation behind the Empress's changes to the hybrid's way of life which translates into her *own* day-to-day frustrations with society as depicted within her writing. She changes her fictional creation of the "imperial city, named Paradise," to suit the needs of women in both Paradise and in England (Cavendish 131). It just so happens that within *The Blazing World* Cavendish's motives, such as organizing the female hybrids so that they too can participate in worship, can be interpreted as a step towards women's equality. As Eve Keller suggests Cavendish "was occasionally even a mouthpiece for what are deemed to be feminist

complaints about the lack of education offered to gentlewomen and their compulsory life in unproductive leisure” (449-450). Therefore, Cavendish’s proto-feminist characterizations of women not only help her contribute to the beginnings of a feminist movement but as a woman at the helm of such change.

Rachel Trubowitz contends that Cavendish’s work “is neither a self-indulgent ‘retreat into fantasy’ nor a ‘ponderous tome,’ but rather a canny revision of the utopian social paradigm, driven by the competing demands of the Duchess’s radical feminism and social conservatism” (229). Cavendish fulfills this feminist role when she enters her own fictional world as a newly crowned queen “with absolute rule” and then as herself as the Duchess Newcastle, the trusted advisor the Empress (Cavendish 132). These two characters help each other in re-shaping the hybrids’ society and culture but also inform and shape each other as women as authority figures in society. Like the majority of female science fiction authors to follow, Cavendish structures her plotline to feature feminist ideals that challenge the societal expectations of women. According to Robin Roberts, “Indeed, one could argue that since realism by definition is grounded in the actual, patriarchal world, only SF, with its embrace of fantasizing and the impossible, can fully sustain a feminist vision of the future” (137). This reinforces the fact that the Empress is indeed an outlet for the author’s need for equality and the freedom to be the governing power over her own body and soul.

In *The Blazing World* one might expect to find a *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* scenario with the introduction of two female protagonists that represent diverse aspects of Margaret Cavendish. These two characters, the Empress and the Duchess Newcastle, do not represent the typical archetypes of good and evil; their presence in the narrative does not have them constantly battling each other for control. Instead, their relationship is more representative of the two

different extremes of seventeenth-century aristocratic woman. At one extreme is the Duchess, a woman who represents the inferior position within male patriarchal order. At the other is the Empress, a character who understands that she is a product of male authority but uses this experience to reinvent a society in such a way as to extend a level of equality to both genders. As foils to one another, the Empress seeks guidance from Newcastle when it comes to ruling over her newfound, male-based universe so as not to rule with an iron fist and fall prey to the abuses found in absolute rule. Later, the Duchess seeks guidance from the Empress to create her own imaginary kingdom and both become a true experiment of female empowerment without the need to resort to the men for mentorship or guidance. The Emperor who grants the Empress her power immediately disappears altogether from the narrative. His immediate disappearance allows for Cavendish to bring into sharp focus an all-female ruling body. There is a platonic relationship where the Empress and the Duchess give Cavendish the freedom to question everything in her own society, from science to religion, without consequence for her “inappropriate” female inquisitiveness.

In Cavendish’s narrative, the Empress initially assumes what appears to be a position of patriarchal authority. Each hybrid species, for instance, must justify its contribution to society. The Empress and her hybrids go from subject to subject as their existence must now be validated by her standards. In essence, the Empress is now acting as a man would in the position of power but without the force and violence the position carries. She assumes the male role of power and now sees these hybrids and the society that they live in as a reflection of herself. As Peter Le Moyne states, “By downplaying traditional male anxieties about female authority while not disregarding the benefits of feminine sweetness, the queen could establish herself as a kind and sociable monarch” (qtd. in Fletcher 127). This understanding explains the goddess-like



protagonist who later comes to find herself as the empowered, yet kind Empress on the other side of the universe.

In the *Blazing World*, Cavendish presents a true instance of the female embodiment of authority without the need for male mentorship or guidance. She makes the case that women would rise above the negative aspects often seen with masculine power. Cavendish overcomes this negativity when she chooses “esteeming peace before war” and contrasts her Empress’s leadership to the rule of Alexander and Caesar, opting instead to avoid replicating their perspective of tyrannical leadership and choosing to not exercise imperial expansion (224). By avoiding these negative perspectives she simultaneously rewrites the events in Genesis. The Empress’s arrival in Paradise is cast as both an allusion to Eden and to her protagonist as Eve and alludes to Biblical history as a starting point in which Cavendish aims to correct the sexist perspectives that have shaped the lives of women. As Bronwen Price explains,

The opening of *The Blazing World* thus presents two types of narrative which change direction and alter shape through crossing boundaries with each other. As we travel from one type of narrative into another overlaying one, so our perspective is disoriented and repositioned. (129)

With this narrative she sets out to correct the wrong committed when patriarchal paradigms portray Eve as the reason for man’s fall from grace. This changes her fall into recovery, even redemption, and is the basis for a feminist retelling of a non-patriarchal society.

*The Blazing World* rewrites history when the Empress assumes male power and actually disrupts male hierarchical order as exemplified by patriarchal society. Because she decides to go against the patriarchal order typical of absolute monarchy - yet still decides to maintain the position of monarch - she, in essence, is participating in a form of imitation of the masculine. This resemblance characterizes the Empress’s actions and can also be seen as women taking over the masculine power position. To reach such a level of patriarchal power a woman would need to

go from subject to ruler while still maintaining a feminine perspective. This is where the patriarchal position, which has been historically aligned with tyranny and violence, is now seen under Cavendish's more amicable monarch. As Carrie Hintz comments, "During her tenure as ruler of *The Blazing World*, the female protagonist feels compelled to foreshorten many of the debates which enliven the text in order to ensure political unity" (25). Thus with the Empress's new-found power of absolute rule the narrative becomes a feminist envisioning of patriarchal power. By resignifying monarchical power the Empress will find a way to thwart the patriarchal dominance that viewed her as inferior and subjected her and uses the patriarchal system against itself to counter it.

In contrast to classic science-fiction heroes and storylines that seemed to emphasize these protagonist's physical strengths, Cavendish creates a heroine who does not rely on force. Instead the Empress seeks to change the mindset of the alien universe that she has been empowered in through peaceful means. The transformations she seeks revolve around the social, economic, scientific, and religious. The Empress is more concerned with the well being of the kingdom as she instructs the different groups of hybrids "that their disputes and quarrels should remain within their schools, and cause no factions or disturbances of state, or government" (142). For Cavendish, advocating peace over war is the significant difference between male and female leaders. For a woman to be in an authoritative leadership position is, in a sense, to wrest control of the historical and societal discourse that has at its core a masculine agenda that allows itself to be shared but does not allow women to actively shape it.

Several writers assert that much of what Cavendish attempted to do with *The Blazing World* was to place woman in the authoritative role of governance without being labeled as "disruptive" and "destructive" (Hintz 27). We see this when the Empress arrives and is told by

this new universe's inhabitants that "women and children most commonly make disturbance both in church and state" and are therefore kept away from religious proceedings (Cavendish 135). As noted earlier in this thesis, this attitude references the inconstant woman as Cavendish attempted to bring attention to her own difficulties as a woman of the seventeenth century both in society and with the church. Merry E. Wiesner illustrates this point when she suggests that during Cavendish's time, "Authors discussing political rights and obligations, whether monarchical or republican, rarely mentioned women at all, setting up the male experience as universal and subsuming women's rights under those of the male heads of their household or family" (Wiesner 288). Through her narrative, Cavendish ends up exemplifying a woman given absolute rule in a monarchical position by making changes to religion and education, offering a more nurturing aspect to the crown and displaying a woman changing the society around her without the backlash from her kingdom's subjects. This sense of compromise between the Empress and her kingdom is best exemplified when she responds to the bear-men by consenting "to their request, but upon condition, that their disputes and quarrels should remain within their schools, and cause no factions or disturbances in state, or government" (142).

In Cavendish's society there were very few ways that women could present themselves "as monarch and as subject" (Iyengar 659). Women were not allowed to be "citizens" or to be given "full subjecthood" (659). As Sujata Iyengar speculates, "the ideology of absolute monarchy provides, in particular historical situations, a transition to an ideology of the absolute self" (659). Monarchical self offers the freedom to express oneself in a fashion that allows the individual to translate his/her personal feelings and perspectives without having to censor themselves. In essence, by converging both feminism and the rules of absolute monarchy, in specific situations, can "help to transition to an ideology of the absolute self" (Suzuki 483).

Cavendish, then, can be found at the forefront of female writers who include the struggles of gender differences, transforming the Empress from fixture of the absolute monarchical position to the absolute self. Critical to this transition is how she is not advocating that her own personal needs be met but instead is requesting changes for her gender as a whole as her needs are representative of the needs of all women. As Kate Lilley explains in her introduction, “*The Blazing World* combines a narrative of the effortless rise of woman to absolute power, with a narrative of the liberty of the female soul and the emancipatory possibilities of utopian speculation” (xxv).

Through the Empress’ monarchical power, Cavendish is able to critique the hybrids’ form of religion and allow women the right to worship, altering their religious viewpoints not to conform to hers but to develop a stable unified society. As Rachel Trubowitz states, “For Cavendish, every woman is capable of being an absolute sovereign, at least over her inward state, where she can literally subject herself and both rule and author the domain of her own person” (26). In essence, Cavendish enables her female characters to separate from patriarchal economies to envision a feminine religious and political system unseen prior to her narrative. With these new changes to Paradise Cavendish transforms her female protagonists into a society that respects the feminine perspective. She creates this fictional world using her own experience and her needs and desires as guidelines to construct it. The narrative creates for women roles originally reserved for men that allow for the participation of women in positions of political and religious leadership. Thus, she challenges the patriarchal assumptions about women in power and imagines a universe filled with feminist possibilities.

Cavendish’s own personal demands for gender equality are met through what the Empress gains. Although Cavendish does not have the power that comes with the position of

royalty in her own life, she does use this narrative to create powerful females within her fictional work. In contrast to patriarchal dominance, her protagonist would not need to incorporate tyrannical aspects that plagued male figures of authority by using a monarchical agenda that represents women in power. Instead of resorting to holy war, for example, Cavendish envisions changes to her own reality by challenging the fictional universe's religious beliefs and has women participate in worship. She appoints herself as the head of her own religion and through religious uniformity Cavendish's uses the Empress to make changes specifically to the abstract idea of religion in an effort to modify the patriarchal-based hybrid society that still sees its own females as too inferior to attend worship. She sought equality as a form of change and designs a "utopian" world that contrasts More's.

The Duchess, who represents feminine oppression under patriarchal authority, also wants to experience authority and control and to recreate society on her own terms, and do so with total power over its land and people within an absolute monarchy. The Empress responds with a comment meant to be more a form of irony than anything else when she answers the Duchess by telling her to create an imaginary world for herself if she wants one so badly. The Duchess takes up the challenge and together they collaborate to do so through the perspectives of famous philosophers ranging from Aristotle to Hobbes; still, none of the philosophies they believe in seem to work for the women. This perhaps was Cavendish's commentary on philosophers, like Hobbes, who once stated that, "women are less fit for labor and danger than men; they are more timorous than men" (qtd. in Martinich 1). When the predominant philosophical ideas of the time leave them without a gender equal model, they consult the "spirits" of the Empress's planet as to how they should select a famous "scribe" for her imaginary world (Cavendish 181). The Empress comments that she will "have the soul of one of the most famous modern writers, as

either Galileo, Gassendus, Descartes, Hellmont, Hobbes, H. More, etc.” (Cavendish 181). The fact that none of these famous male philosophers meet the standards that the Empress needs inclines Cavendish, in a surprising turn, to bring herself into the narrative, as the Duchess Newcastle.

The purpose of this second protagonist is to contrast the differences found in the lives of these two women who now symbolically represent object and subject. Authors Wolfgang Hofkirchner and Günther Ellersdorfer define the object and subject relation as “...the difference between subject and object may be seen in that a subject is capable of determining itself while an object is not. An object is something that is determined by something that is not itself. Being a subject supersedes being merely an object” (1). The character of Lady clarifies Cavendish’s explanation of the inferiority that women are subjected to by having the “subject”, or male antagonist, assert himself through masculine force. Thus, by kidnapping the Lady to fulfill his desires, he sees her only as an object. This storyline allows for the character of Lady to enter the narrative and disrupt the boundaries between the genders. This is further crystallized when the men who kidnap her are punished and she is rewarded with the power of absolute monarch and reshapes this new-found universe. With the introduction of the Empress she explores the possibilities that are contrary to European societal norms. She characterizes the Empress as a woman breaking from the stereotypical damsel in distress to a woman with authority, reversing the feminine position of “object” into the “subject”. When the Duchess Newcastle makes her appearance in *Blazing World*, she is symbolic of the old world order, of “object”, in the position of subjugation.

In an effort to remove the label of “object,” the two protagonists seek to create a cabala, with their own views of religion at its crux and consult with the spirits of Paradise to find

someone worthy enough to be their scribe. Unfortunately, all the famous writers and philosophers they mention were also sexist. The spirits tells the women “that they were fine ingenious writers, but yet were so self-conceited, that they would scorn to be scribes to a woman” (Cavendish 181). This may be the essential point behind Cavendish’s intentions in creating these two female characters. The Empress would be Cavendish’s embodiment of subject, as this character’s main purpose is to carry out her agenda to identify the higher purpose of each of her hybrids:

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

These hybrids then also take the role of object. The character of the Duchess of Newcastle would also fall under the category of object as she is still seen as such in her own society. As Trubowitz explains, “ In *Blazing World*, the silent and carefully circumscribed subjective space mapped out in her autobiography is reshaped into a boundless, discursive arena in which the female subject can demonstrate its unqualified singularity and verbal power as mistress over itself” (239). Cavendish writes the narrative through the different perspectives of two women to show how the Empress interprets herself as subject. As a feminist, she has the ability to acknowledge her hybrids as objects when she chooses. She goes through the process of choosing each race’s goals in her kingdom, recognizing what their purposes are within the constructs of the kingdom. The purpose for the Duchess Newcastle is to remind readers that this work of science fiction still has its valid connection to reality. For women, specifically, this means that like the hybrids who are being subjugated to the absolute ruler’s value system, so too are women subjugated into the constructs of seventeenth-century society. This move is highly unusual for the time. In essence,

Cavendish highlights the subconscious needs for a fictional life for herself, where she is ruler and a woman in power and contrasts this to the reality that is symbolized by the Duchess. As Trubowitz clarifies, “Her [Cavendish] mind is a realm complete unto itself, self-directed, self-governing, and self-begot” (238).

Throughout *The Blazing World*, Cavendish puts her protagonists through adventures that present how the feminist perspective can overcome both religious and gender impediments. More importantly, she does so in a way that encompasses feminist view in a narrative written during a period hostile to women’s intellectual endeavors. Indeed, Cavendish was bringing attention to issues that needed to be voiced. As Bronwen Price clarifies, “The voyage into the Blazing World enables us to see such conditions of sexual exchange differently, allowing for an alternative set of possibilities to those we might expect” (129). There was nothing that Cavendish stated in her narrative that was not echoed by other feminist writers centuries later. Her questions on the authority of church and state, the rights of women, the wrongs of men, and her search for equal sociopolitical control could only be truly depicted in a work that was fictional. Thus, Cavendish was forced to create an entirely new universe accessible only through the North Pole, as even through the use of the imagination a woman would still have to go through great lengths to gain absolute rule and self. Therefore, in the end, *The Blazing World* is a response to Cavendish’s life, of being a proto-feminist in a society that viewed her as inferior and object, and of the oppression of women in patriarchal society that has been ingrained into her psyche.



## CHAPTER III

### IMPERIALISM IN SCIENCE FICTION: THE EMPRESS AND HER HYBRIDS

I have made a world of my own: for which no body, I hope, will blame me, since it is in every one's power to do the like.

*The Description of the New World Called, The Blazing World* (Cavendish 124).

Science-fiction routinely follows plotlines about conquering new worlds and imposing cultural and social logics. Margaret Cavendish rejects this form of imperialism within *The Blazing World*. Classic science fiction contains the lessons of power, politics, and alienation central to imperialist projects. Any definition of imperialism is dependent from which perspective the definition is being presented. Ronald J. Horvath contends that, "Every major and minor civilization has sought to extend its borders and its influence" (46). As Palestinian-American theorist and author Edward Said indicates "imperialism is a system. Life in one subordinate realm of experience is imprinted by the fictions and follies of the dominant realm" (xix). The limitation with this clarification is that, generally, it fails to include the role women played within the issues that surrounded imperialism. Specifically that woman, as a gender, could not be seen in control of its own realm. Chaudhuri explains that "New insights about colonialism have opened up unexplored historiographical vistas, and women's history and imperial history have found they share common territory" (4). Cavendish's *Blazing World* identifies how this "common territory" is crucial to understanding her version of utopia. Her narrative's impact on anti-imperialism is an even greater contribution to the beginnings of proto-feminism. As Deborah Boyle indicates, "At the time she [Cavendish] was writing, surely only

men could have performed the actions she describes as "good service" to one's country. Cavendish was certainly aware of this, often commenting on women's absence from public life" (275). *The Blazing World* presents the position of women as having the ability to defend their interests amongst changing social factors and be equally recognized and deserving of a part in society. The significant difference is that Cavendish's proto-feminist concepts are indeed anti-imperialist as she is in opposition of using tactics found in colonialism or imperialism to establish these changes.

This chapter focuses on the role of Western women in the historical perspective of imperialism. Although women were not seen as slaves in seventeenth-century society, the fact they were denied a social voice and an education, and deemed inferior to men, assured that a woman's position in society would always be like that of those colonized. The treatment of women, from object to "the Other," takes us to Cavendish's science-fiction which details a paradoxical account of gender equality, feminine dominance, and its role in her pacifist revision of imperialism.

Indeed, Cavendish's Empress prides herself on contrasting on what she does with her rule compared to "Alexander and Caesar" who are intent on domination through conquest (224). The Empress in no way uses any acts of violence or tyranny as part of maintaining her monarchy or as part of her pacifist revisionings of imperialism. In truth, the fact that a protagonist can arrive in a new universe and have the power to implement her own views on religion and politics can be interpreted as a form of imperialism. Moreover, there is a distinct difference between Cavendish's Empress and infamous literary characters like Conrad's Kurtz in that she does not arrive to Paradise demanding that she be worshipped as a god. Nor does the Empress see her position of authority as a way to use and abuse her subjects to attack others for her own financial

gain. This is unlike Kurtz's character, who ruthlessly enjoys his god-like worship, drives himself mad with power, and goes to his grave shocked by his own actions.

For the Empress, however, it is not until the end of the narrative, when she returns to EFSI and defends England from attack, that she uses intimidation as a form of defense and not aggression. This intimidation is not a factor that applies to the subjects in her kingdom. Instead, it is against those that would attack her home country, so that no one would ever attack EFSI, and possibly herself, ever again. She decides to enact the power that she has acquired from her position as monarch to show that she is not issuing out empty threats. The end result of such display of defensive power is that she gains the respect of the people of her home world and displays her power as a monarch for her subjects.

In contrast to Cavendish and her Empress, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and his portrayal of his character Kurtz presents a patriarchal opposite. Upon his arrival to the African Congo, Kurtz's superior status goes unchallenged by the natives he encounters. This happens to such a large extent that even all the other characters in Conrad's narrative seem to be in awe of Kurtz's power. The following excerpt from *Heart of Darkness* helps explain:

'Kurtz got the tribe to following him, did he?' I suggested. He fidgeted a little. 'They adored him,' he said. The tone of these words was so extraordinary that I looked at him searchingly. It was curious to see his mingled eagerness and reluctance to speak of Kurtz. The man filled his life, occupied his thoughts, swayed his emotions. 'What can you expect?' he burst out; 'he came to them with thunder and lightning, you know – and they had never seen anything like it – and very terrible. He could be very terrible. (Conrad 570)

Unlike Conrad's Kurtz who came upon the natives of Africa with the power of an imperial and colonial presence, Cavendish's Empress arrives at the city of Paradise and is offered the position of Empress by the hybrid society who is taken aback with her innocence and radiant beauty, which is not the same force used by Kurtz as his "thunder" (interpreted as guns, violence and

intimidation) and the Empress's "innocence" (beauty) in no way carries the same display of power:

No sooner was the Lady brought before the Emperor, but he conceived her to be some goddess, and offered to worship her; *which she refused*, telling him, (for by that she had pretty well learned their language) that although she came out of another world, *yet was she but a mortal*; at which the Emperor rejoicing, made her his wife, gave her an absolute power to rule and govern all that world as she pleased. (Cavendish 132)

In Marlowe's eyes, Kurtz proves that he is out to gain what he can only for himself when he uses the natives he befriends and has them steal ivory from other tribes. Cavendish, on the other hand, does not exploit the natives. Her Empress takes more of an interest in the hybrid's culture even going as far as "learn[ing] their language" (130).

Another contrasting point is the fact that Kurtz takes and expects the position of power upon his arrival and proceeds to terrorize everyone around him to do his bidding. The Empress expects nothing from her entrance into this other universe. Once she is given the title, even after refusing it, the Empress's foremost undertaking is to create unity and peace amongst her hybrid subjects and their different schools of thought. This is best exemplified when the Empress implores, "that their disputes and quarrels should remain within their schools, and cause no factions or disturbances in state, or government" (142). In contrast to the European conquerors who were already laying violent claim to vast expanses of the globe, she instead accepts and utilizes her absolute power for good as she tries to reshape Paradise by creating a better way of life for its citizens. Boyle notes in one of Cavendish's other works, "Despite the many contradictory positions taken in Cavendish's *Oration*s, those orations which address social issues and government share a theme which Cavendish stresses again and again: the need for peace and stability (254).

Many fail to see the greater implications that *The Blazing World* is Cavendish's feminist critique of imperialism, and as such is ultimately anti-imperialist in nature. In her introduction to *The Blazing World*, Lilly describes the relationship created between the two female protagonists as, "the female's author's creation and description of an obscure imperial heroine as unnamed stand-in" (xxvii). Any reading of *The Blazing World* would definitely prove that Cavendish was not supporting an imperialist agenda, but rather attempting to offer an alternative vision of nation, power, and rule for "...she saw that both church and state was now in a well-ordered and settled condition" (165). As Boyle's analysis of Cavendish's *Oration*s asserts:

even when orators disagree about what course of action to take, the desirability of safety and social stability is never questioned. Cavendish's orators make dire predictions of destruction, confusion, and ruin if their own advice is ignored. What constitutes destruction, confusion, and ruin? Cavendish refers to various features: widespread loss of life; loss of privately-owned goods and estates; destruction of cities by fire; destruction of cemeteries; enslavement of people... (258)

The last portion of Boyle's analysis specifically states that the "enslavement of people" is what would be the cause of demise of "social stability" (258). Cavendish is not attempting to write and advocate a pro-imperialist agenda. The Empress never forces her subjects to do her bidding like slaves but instead utilizes her power to strengthen its members by having schools erected and founding several societies (134). It is this measure of peace that is also noted by Boyle, "In other texts, when Cavendish praises or blames individuals for their actions, she typically appeals to how their actions have increased or decreased peace" (254). The Empress, still in the middle of trying to stabilize her new universe, asks "I never perceived any women in your congregations; but what is the reason, you bar them from your religious assemblies?" (135). The Empress shows concern for the status of her kingdom immediately drawing attention to the gender inequality the hybrids seem to advocate.

Yet, in trying to find the similarities between male and females Cavendish does pose an important question that draws its answer from contrasting the genders. It is through her Empress that Cavendish points to a significant difference between a society under the rule of male and female authority. Proof of this lies within the steps the Duchess takes once she is instructed by the spirits of Paradise on how she has the power to create her own world. The Duchess goes through several male figures and philosophers' concepts like that of Pythagoras, Epicurus, Aristotle, Descartes, and Hobbes, and still cannot find one from which she can base her world on (254). Eventually, the Duchess decides to base her imaginary world upon her own ideas "composed of rational self-moving matter" but not before finding fault and weakness in male ideologies (188). The Empress further elaborates upon differences found between female and male authority when she states how she cannot make any changes to Paradise

...because it was so well ordered that it could not be mended; for it was governed without secret and deceiving policy; neither was there any ambition, factions, malicious detractions, civil dissensions, or home-bred quarrels, divisions in religion, foreign wars, etc. but all the people lived in a peaceful society, united tranquility, and religious conformity (189).

Immediately after this observation is spoken, the Duchess responds to the Empress's remarks by stating that, "It is strange to me, answered the Duchess, that you should say thus, being yourself, an Empress of a world, and not only of a world, but of a peaceable, and obedient world" (190). Cavendish advocates peace and is opposed to fulfilling her own self-indulgences, as Kurtz did, that comes with the position of authority.

It is important to note that, in the history of science-fiction, other authors have attempted to clarify the motives of their protagonists by waving the anti-imperialistic flag against the domination of others. The intent behind such actions has been to criticize an imperialist agenda that seeks domination. As Cavendish presents her champion, the Empress, so too does Jules

Verne present his Captain Nemo as his champion of “all the world’s victims” and heading their rebellion against imperialist control (Alkon 69). In *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, Nemo’s character is alluded to being a prince of India, and is similar to the Empress in that he is “a romantic outcast” whose actual birthplace may be India yet sees himself not of that country but from “a universal community of the dispossessed” which Nemo is determined to defend (69). Instances of his country’s suffering at the hands of the British Empire are a continuous reminder of Nemo’s reason for action as he plants his flag on the Antarctic. The flag itself does not have in any nation’s banner, but as Paul K. Alkon explains,

If the golden “N” against a black background on Nemo’s personal flag evokes memories of Napoleon, it is only to dispel them as irrelevant except by way of contrast. “Nemo,” which is Latin for “no one,” “no man,” “nobody,” is only a pseudonym by which the captain chooses to be known, echoing the choice by Homer’s Ulysses of “Nobody” as a name to deceive the Cyclops. It is not imperial ambitions of Napoleon but the mythical wanderings of Ulysses to which the name “Nemo” invites comparison. It is not the tricolor that Verne’s wily sailor plants at the South Pole but his black banner with a golden “N,” which ironically claims the Antarctic not for France but for Nobody. That Verne implies, is as it should be. (68)

Like Verne, Cavendish waves a feminist flag in an anti-imperialist charge against gender inequalities. The Empress, who is an outcast like Nemo, carries with her an anti-imperialist agenda by displaying that a woman can rule in a leadership position, can bring changes to her subjects without causing havoc within her kingdom, and can wage war against male-dominated societies in an effort to prove that women are more capable than men. In the midst of all these changes, Cavendish not only criticizes imperialism, she addresses the conflict of female subjugation throughout. In essence, the plotlines of such narratives offer to explore an aspect that affects all women, not just the single individual. She does so to pinpoint not only how men are responsible for advocating such an idea, but also their use of political power to do so. The Empress uses feminine authority to mimic the masculine but subverts it and disciplines it to a

version that is more nurturing and gentler in its matriarchal revisionings. This is most notable when Cavendish has the Empress address all the enemies of the King of EFSI:

Heaven was as much displeased; and for the injuries her received from his enemies, rewarded him with an absolute power...Wherefore my advice to you all is, to pay him tribute justly and truly, that you may live peaceably and happily, and be rewarded with the blessings of Heaven, which I wish you from my soul. (216)

Cavendish then contrasts the patriarchal dominance experienced by both of her empowered female protagonists and their anti-imperialistic actions. Once the Lady accepts the title of Empress, she quickly uses her position of power to begin making changes and transforms Paradise into a kingdom that offers men and women alike the ability to worship and educate themselves. In essence, since the Empress does not use her power to subject her hybrids to a dystopian vision of Paradise shows Cavendish's opposition to imperialism. Instead, Cavendish uses the Empress to direct her narrative's attention to her radical ideas about women's rights, religion, and natural philosophy. *The Blazing World*, then, was a way for Cavendish to express her criticism of imperialism and how it does not require the dominance of a people's culture and belief by the use of force, violence and tyranny. Paradise becomes Cavendish's vision for a new type of society that looks at seventeenth-century perspectives and goes beyond male and female relationships to explore the broader aspects of society and culture

Cavendish's protagonist, the Empress, unleashes her own personal value system, a version of Cavendish's proto-feminist agenda of religious, social, political, and educational views, upon the imperial city of "Paradise". The Empress's subjects graciously offer her their reasons to prove why their lives merit Paradise and help move it forward as a society. This plotline highlights how Cavendish's feminist intervention aims to create new social relationships and not have women replicate male sexist behavior. She does not immediately demand that her way of thinking be imposed and made into martial law and that the hybrid rationale be



dismissed. Instead, she allows for there to be further discussion amongst the hybrids over the matter rather than just relying on absolute rule to settle disputes. In truth, her actions point to the continual criticism of imperialism and are the example needed to prove how Cavendish contrasts her feminist power which is dramatically different from that of masculine absolute monarchy that would have seen any opposition to such decisions as a form of retaliation. There is a logical progression of ideas being voiced - instead of force - to initiate change. Since this marketplace of ideas is allowed to exist under feminine rule, there is no need for the patriarchal authority's use of such tyrannical and imperialistic tactics.

One of the more compelling examples in *The Blazing World* comes during an argument when the bird-men and bear-men disagree over the size of stars. The Empress is angered over the fact that they disagree and commands the bear-men to destroy their telescopes, or "artificial glasses", commenting that these are "mere deluders, and will never lead you to the knowledge of truth" (142). The bear-men kneel and "in the humblest manner petitioned that they might not be broken" (142). Finally, the Empress is able to compromise and "at last consented to their request, but upon condition, that their disputes and quarrels should remain within their schools, and cause no factions or disturbances in state, or government" (142). The Empress's decision, made in dialogue with those affected, exemplifies a more collaborative and non-hierarchical process than, for example, the violent rule of the Roman emperors to whom Cavendish compares herself (Cavendish 224).

To further understand the character of the Empress, one would need to look at her actions when she involves herself with the issues of gender and the church. In many, if not all, instances of Empire, masculine domination aims to control by manipulating how the subjugated view and practice their religion in order to maintain power. For example, if a sacred religious text states

that one must follow its king over his woman, wife, or daughter, then no resistance should arise. The Empress is made aware that the women are not allowed to worship alongside the male population because women “make disturbance both in church and state” and that they “stay at home, and say their prayers by themselves in their closets” otherwise the men, “instead of praying to God, direct their devotion to their mistresses” (Cavendish 135). In her discussions with the male-hybrids the Empress does not resort to imperialistic action as she does not tear down their churches or recreate their religious practices so that it will now include the hybrid women. Instead, she chooses to build two new chapels so that women may finally have a place of worship (164). Cavendish seemed to be channeling her own frustration with society and religion, as she too struggled to voice her convictions in seventeenth-century England. It was society’s perception that viewed her only as “the Other”. The Empress counters this ideology by creating her own religion for women, enacting a form of change without the use of force as she places herself at the head of the church and enables the hybrid women of *The Blazing World* the ability to finally join in worship. To revise it with any use of force or violence would define her actions as imperialistic, a concept that her actions contradict entirely. Thus, the Empress understood that she had to keep these hybrids “in constant belief, without enforcement of bloodshed; was not to be forced or pressed upon the people, but to be instilled into their minds by gentle persuasions” (Cavendish 164). This role-reversal allowed for Cavendish to put forth the idea that she too could dictate what religious contentions were viable without the consequences of animosity and revolt normally connected to patriarchal authority. To a woman like Cavendish, who had been repressed all her life, being in control must have led to a sense of catharsis.

Which is why Cavendish makes great strides in having her Empress make changes to improve society for both genders. She allows for the female population to finally achieve gender

equality in everything from religion to politics. Judith Lowder Newton clarifies how Cavendish characterizes a female protagonist in the seat of power with fair and just presence of authority; choosing the “heroine” side of the “woman question” (882):

Her subversion of traditional power relations, her substitution of ability for influence, her refusal, for the most part, totally to relinquish the heroine’s ability at the end of the story –were surely intensified by the fact that each novel had an unusually direct origin in the author’s own experience. (885)

Her own experience with the issues of politics and religion was intense enough to carry itself into the pages of her narrative. Through the Empress, Cavendish finds a solution to the barriers she encounters in her own life. She chooses to change the way of life that this civilization maintains in an effort to impose her own value system and all the different areas of society are all subject to this system of transition. She clarifies why this newly implemented value-system is entirely fair.

The Empress then dissolves the split between object and “the Other”, a struggle commonly found in imperialism. She has created a new perspective that contrasts her power of authority as being greater than those who view her as inferior. As foils to one another, the Empress and the Duchess’s relationship exists to contrast a woman who has been given monarchical power to a woman who still lives under patriarchal authority. The Duchess’s purpose within the narrative serves as a reminder of what it is like to be the governed and subjected within seventeenth-century society. The Empress is at the pinnacle of reaching a feminist identity and differs from the Duchess Newcastle’s predicament as a woman of the seventeenth century who is still seen as a second-class citizen because of gender. Towards the latter part of the narrative, these characters go on to construct other imaginary worlds that would be “framed” within their own minds (188). As the Empress goes on to shape imaginary universes in the same likeness as Paradise, the Duchess makes several statements that detail and criticize patriarchal society. As the Duchess explains, “...that the world she came from, was very much

disturbed with factions, divisions and wars” (189). Yet, a world such as this under feminine rule would not fall prey to the constant prevailing methods of men to battle one another as “her native country, was like to be destroyed by numerous enemies that made war against it” (203). As a way of contrasting the two different universes and display her strong regard for pacifism, Cavendish has the Empress explain that she cannot use the spirits of Paradise to help defend EFSI because, “...spirits could not arm themselves, nor make any use of artificial arms or weapons; for their vehicles were natural bodies, not artificial; besides, said she, the violent and strong actions of war, will never agree with immaterial spirits” (204). Once again the Duchess’s purpose is to show, in great detail, the contrast between feminine creation and that of a masculine-based reality by explaining how a woman would want to find a peaceful resolution as opposed to confrontation.

The fact that Cavendish depicts EFSI as refusing to acknowledge that it needs the assistance from a woman is not surprising. When the Empress addresses her fellow “Countrymen” she states that she will help them against attack, “for although I am now a great and absolute princess and empress of a whole world, yet I acknowledge that once I was a subject of this kingdom” (Cavendish 210) she demands that all know how unfair she may have been treated as a woman but still has a sense of strong loyalty to her home world.. The Empress is angered when she sends a letter that offers her help and that of her subjects to fend off EFSI’s enemies. EFSI takes too long with its response. As it turns out they had called their council of men together for discussions and the Duchess explains their delay to the Empress when she states,

great councils are most commonly slow, because many men have several opinions; besides, every councillor striving to be the wisest, makes long speeches, and raises many doubts, which cause retardments. (Cavendish 209)

This is the expected behavior from a society that has at its basis patriarchal power. Because men have always seen women as too inferior to accept help from them, accepting the Empress's assistance would be admitting that they too are inferior. This is also Cavendish's way of showing how men are unwilling to admit that they require assistance even in the midst of war or attack. If the Empress's help had perhaps originated from a male-based source, there would not have been a need for England's patriarchy to go to council for discussion and cause such a delay. The Empress then uses pacifism as a weapon. She makes a stunning entrance back into her home world and astonishes both friend and foe who witness this event as, "The appointed hour being come, the Empress appeared with garments made of star-stone, and was born or supported above the water, upon the fish-men's heads and backs, so that she seemed to walk upon the face of the water" (Cavendish 210). This is as far as the Empress will go as she waits for her assistance to be acknowledged as opposed to immediately attacking EFSI's enemies. Her pacifism, a refusal to participate in war, is displayed in the fact that she only uses her grand appearance as a form of intimidation as and uses force as a last resort. This is best exemplified when upon,

Which sight, when her countrymen perceived at a distance, their hearts began to tremble; but coming something nearer, she left her torches, and appeared only in her garments of light like an angel, or some deity, and all kneeled down before her, and worshipped her with all submission and reverence. (210)

For Cavendish, this meant that she had finally found a way to deal with the constant labeling of object and "the Other". She was able to reinvent herself as a paradigm, as an antidote to the imperialistic agenda, and able to personify woman in the role of feminist authority by creating a narrative that supported the feminist ideals she so desperately wanted to voice in her own society. She had shown that not only can a woman be in the seat of power, but could also defend herself when threatened by other powerful males without the need to show excessive force. The Empress also does not punish the invaders of EFSI but rather allows them the option

to resolve their conflict. She concludes her novel by stating that all the nations of the world unite and cease all petty squabbles over ownership of land. Since all nations belonged to one flag, she would then have effectively eradicated the need for further war and therefore display the ultimate example of pacifism. Without the chaos and disorder surrounding the world, the people would be free to pursue true happiness and perhaps also achieve the breakthroughs of unity and equality that the hybrids' society had successfully reached.

## CHAPTER IV:

### *THE BLAZING WORLD AS UTOPIAN SCIENCE-FICTION*

Even its special distinction as the first utopia written by a woman in England has not encouraged historians of utopian thought to give *Blazing World* sustained, serious scrutiny.

Rachel Trubowitz, "The Reenchantment of Utopia and the Female Monarchical Self: Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*"

Science-fiction visions of the future have always existed in conjunction with utopian frameworks. In striving for this perfection, Sir Thomas More (1478-1535) placed his now famous storyline's setting somewhere on an island in the Atlantic Ocean in 1516. Since then there have been many versions of More's *Utopia* that have structured themselves upon creating a distinct, but much too often, patriarchal-based new world. There are, however, two examples of utopia that redefine what striving for perfection means on a level that addresses reforms to class and gender differences in society. One example is presented by James Harrington (1611-1677), who envisioned his homeland of England as a new commonwealth and renamed it *Oceana* (1656). Like Margaret Cavendish who bases her writing on personal experience, James Harrington wrote *Oceana* as an answer to what he believed was the form of government that was best and should be set into place in his native England after the execution of Charles I. And like Cavendish, who demands that women and men be treated as equals, Harrington hypothesizes that men and women should have equal monetary value within his democratic system. However, Harrington and Cavendish differ greatly when it comes to who should have the power of authority. Although Harrington proposes massive reforms, he still believes that a man should be

in the position of power thereby advocating a patriarchal-based system. Cavendish, of course, explores what a woman in power can accomplish. With her with narrative Cavendish challenges biased patriarchal standards and proves that a woman as a figure of authority can exist outside the expected roles of wife and mother and hold a monarchical position that aspires to reestablish the idealized vision of utopia to include and respect a feminist perspective.

According to Phillip E. Wegner, utopia's relationship with science fiction can be seen through two different levels of understanding, "the specific genre of Utopian literature and what we can describe as a more general Utopian impulse" (79). The Utopian impulse is a "desire for an utterly transformed, radically other, and/or redeemed existence, a desire that manifests itself into a wide range of cultural documents" (79). The Utopian impulse in *The Blazing World* represents the need for Cavendish to create a new existence that changes the way that socioeconomic, religious, and political arenas engage the gender constructs – male and female alike – and reconstruct these known areas of culture to equally include women. In addition to the Utopian impulse, a definition of utopian literature is:

The critical commonplace that holds that all classical Utopian fictions describe homogenous worlds without a place for the individual are thus the result of a basic category confusion, applying to the Utopian form the very different criteria of the novel. (Wegner 80)

This clarification of utopian literature also applies to Cavendish's work in that the Lady is unexpectedly given the title of Empress which is typically a male form of authority. Her power of authority is now dependent on being part of this world's masculine laws and customs. She instead chooses to begin making changes so that this world's homogenous masculine culture is peaceful and unified and gives females a space in their patriarchal-based world. Cavendish writes of the Empress when, as Lady, she is judged by her looks in her native world and kidnapped (125). In her native world, Lady served as object, her intelligence was completely disregarded,



and her life controlled by the patriarchal dominance that seemed to justify her kidnapper's actions. Her life is transformed once she enters the other universe and is given the title of Empress. In essence, she redeems her existence once she is given the "absolute power to rule and govern all the world as she pleased" and begins to make changes not just to her own life but to the academic, religious, and social aspects of the lives of the male and female hybrids of Paradise (132). In this new life the Empress is able to create a utopia, which fits the Utopian impulse, and is inclined to help women from being seen only as objects and instead be seen as equals.

Yet, even with these utopian ideologies of authority, gender, and monarchy within a utopian narrative, scholars of utopian thought still have reason to disregard *Blazing World*. In their now famous description of Cavendish, literary scholars Frank E. and Fritzie P. Manuel scrutinized not Cavendish's work but Cavendish herself by devoting, "only one sentence of their nine-hundred-page study of *Utopian Thought in the Western World* to the Duchess's *Blazing World*; it is for them a utopia 'so private that [it] border[s] on schizophrenia'" (qtd. in Trubowitz 229). Lyman T. Sargent seems to be able to offer an explanation as to why Cavendish's utopia has been so easily written off, even by the Manuels, when he writes,

The Manuels seem to be saying that they want to write about a certain group of thinkers, most of whom wrote works that are identifiable as utopias. The fact is that some of the writers the Manuels want to discuss wrote nothing that could possibly be called a utopia. While there is considerable controversy regarding the definition of a utopia, two authors discussed by the Manuels about whom there would be virtually unanimous agreement are Hobbes and Kant, who were not writers of utopias. ("Is There Only" 683)

The Manuels' definition of utopia then is not what is important. Sargent clarifies that the Manuels' list of utopian authors is biased and focused on presenting their version of significant utopian works which are based on the Manuels' own personal preferences. These misguided preferences focused on literature that had already been recognized and labeled by others as

utopian works, which explains how Cavendish is omitted from utopian writing. Cavendish wrote of feminist utopia and was ignored by critics for her work which included presenting concepts that were largely eccentric and uniquely ahead of the patriarchal time in which she lived.

Cavendish's vision of *The Blazing World* was her radical response and her "rejection of all kinds of intellectual authority" that forced her to place her utopia somewhere in another universe away from biased perspectives. This allowed her Empress the freedom to rule without the limitations and injustices set by seventeenth-century standards (Sarasohn, "A Science Turned" 291). Cavendish engages in a different type of monarchy, one that specifically has the Empress addressing the needs of her subjects based on social issues affecting both male and female genders. These were issues such as denying women equality in education. Cavendish was therefore engaging in the many theories of government reform much like those written by philosopher Hobbes and political leader Cromwell. During this time, writings reflected the conflicts that stemmed over politics and religion, and "were given to the world and were agitating the minds of their contemporaries" (Dwight 2). Unlike Cavendish, who foreshadows the coming changes to the role of women in society, Harrington promotes patriarchal beliefs by, as John Wettergreen explains, "offer[ing] a theoretical defense of democratically elected, representative government on the large scale of the modern republic as the best regime" which would continue to leave women without a voice in politics (666).

The main difference between these two authors was that although Cavendish and Harrington entangled themselves with the concept of authority and power, Harrington's utopian perspective ideally only supported a patriarchal balance of power by advocating that ownership of property was the sole basis for empire. If one were to analyze the ownership of property and those standards that support it, one would find a patriarchal-based system that allowed women

ownership, if any, based upon inheritance. Here, Harrington clarifies his views about women and property:

such women as, living in gallantry and view about the town, were of evil fame, and could not show that they were maintained by their own estates or industry, or such as, having estates of their own, were yet wasteful in 'their way of life, and of ill-example to others, should be obnoxious to the animadversion of the Council of Religion, or of the censors: in which the proceeding should be after this manner. Notice should be first given of the scandal to the party offending, in private: if there were no amendment within the space of six months, she should be summoned and rebuked before the said Council or censors. (Harrington 1)

This meant that privileged women could retain any money that they either earned or inherited and those that did not have their own means of income should not cavort in public. In other words, not all women were given the same freedoms and it was up to men to decide these laws as women were still expected to behave a certain way. Cavendish did not assign women monetary value or decree that they were the property of someone else. This is also why attempting to define utopia in the context of Cavendish's text is difficult for two entirely different reasons. The first seems to be summed up by the quality of Cavendish's narrative itself which Trubowitz believes "can be attributed to the generic transgressiveness of Cavendish's text" (230). As such, many critics of her writing constantly disregard *The Blazing World* as utopian for its attempts at mixing in proto-feminist and anti-imperialist ideologies amongst what Trubowitz calls, "Cavendish's complex engagement with the utopian paradigm" (230). The desire to implement changes to seventeenth-century society's approach towards women is where Cavendish's priorities are focused.

The element of utopia is secondary, as it is these proto-feminist priorities that needed to be implemented unto a utopian plane, which in this case, happens to be the Empress's kingdom of Paradise. This is also similar to what James Harrington addressed within *Oceana*. However, instead of seeking equality for women, Harrington attempts to rationalize that the form of

government that the best form of government is one that seeks equality through its class system with males at the head:

that the prerogative should jolt the heads of the Senate together because these have the better salaries, when it must be as evident to the people in a nation, as to the soldiery in an army, that it is no more possible their emoluments of this kind should be afforded by any commonwealth in the world to be made equal with those of the Senate, than that the common soldiers should be equal with the captains? It is enough for the common soldier that his virtue may bring him to be a captain, and more to the prerogative, that each of them is nearer to be a senator. (1)

Harrington maintains that power alone cannot be determinative of sovereignty, if only because one's power is never sufficient to preserve itself. A certain amount of reason, at least proportionate to one's authority, is necessary just to preserve control. Still greater virtue is necessary for progress as "A Man may be possess of a piece of ground by force, but to make use or profit of it, he must build upon it, and till it by reason" (Harrington 1).

The second difficulty in identifying a utopian definition that works for Cavendish's narrative is that scholarship on utopia seems to want to represent only utopian works that have been identified as such. Sargent is also just as guilty as the Manuels for choosing to present only utopian works of the seventeenth century that are generally well known ("Themes in Utopian" 276). Still, Sargent offers even more information as to the types of proto-feminist themes that were found in these utopian narratives during the seventeenth century when he indicates that, "during this period the belief in women's inferiority continued unabated" and that other narratives focused on justifying women's rights as long as it did not go as far as

alienating the men. The standard pattern is to have dominant women and submissive men; usually a strong man from the past of a different culture wins the most important woman and the "natural" order is reestablished. A third work of the period presents an account of an island completely and successfully ruled by women. Men are allowed on the island for only one month at a time and male children are sent away at an early age. ("Themes in Utopian" 276)

Sargent's explanation only reinforces the idea that Cavendish's unique perspective of utopia was the reason for her being ostracized. Unlike other works of utopia during this period her work attempted to include a rationale that involved the dichotomy between men and women and the conflicts in government and religion as a result of these changes. An example of this is found after trouble arises in the kingdom because of the Empress's reforms. She decides to change them again, even if "it would be an eternal disgrace to her, to alter her own decrees, acts and laws" (Cavendish 202). The utopian society Cavendish proposes in *The Blazing World* is one that cannot be described as a nightmarish dystopian world. Rather, it is a utopian work in progress because the protagonists of this world strive for a perfect utopian society for everyone, not just for the crown and nobility's personal gain. *The Blazing World* is a utopia, and according to Trubowitz,

Cavendish's paradigm of felicitous community "reenchants" the demystified locus of utopia by giving its rationalized physical and psychic topography magical, mythological, and transcendent qualities. In so doing, it dissociates the utopia from the repressive force of discipline and newly associates it with a suspension of rationally conceived laws and institutionally imposed order. (230)

Cavendish uses this fantastical setting placed in an alternate universe in order to do away with the norms and regulations she is oppressed with at home. This sense of literary escape is the only way to work out the frustrations of not being in control. She was very vocal about the subjugation of women and imagined a world where women were seen in a position of power, which led to the near complete dismissal of her work by the men tasked with crediting utopian fiction.

Unlike the science-fiction narratives of the present which have taken the direction of frightening dystopias, those of the seventeenth century allowed for changes that inspired men to imagine new social orders. Still, in order for the existing masculine-based utopias to function as

a society, as Erin Lang Bonin states, they “...depend upon carefully controlled heterosexual reproductive economies” (339). These societies still needed women to fit into the archetypal role as caregiver, nurturer, mother, and wife fulfilling some natural expectation of women, which is why even though most utopias could imagine an ideal society where crime and poverty do not exist, they seemed to address changes for men and not women. This is crystallized within More’s *Utopia* when he has the wives of his fictional society, “kneel down at home before their husbands, and children before their parents, to confess all their sins of omission and commission, and ask to be forgiven” (126). As Bonin explains, Cavendish counters this, “By rejecting the island utopia so prevalent in seventeenth-century culture, Cavendish implicitly criticizes the form’s nearly invisible foundation: women’s political inferiority” (340).

*The Blazing World* is Cavendish’s attempt at not only creating feminine heroines but creating a space far different than typical utopias where Cavendish’s protagonists can also step out from behind “these heterosexual reproductive economies” (Bonin 339). In one instance the heroines partake in the conflicts of men to stop this altercation from escalating into war (Cavendish 206). In another they engage in writing a religious cabala (Cavendish 182). This was truly a risqué move on Cavendish’s part as any attempt to radically change religion and government was seen as a punishable crime. Ten years earlier, James Harrington had been taken to trial for merely suggesting a drastic reformation of government in *Oceana*. Cavendish’s narrative is designed in a science-fiction setting, within a utopian based universe initializing an anti-imperialist agenda that identifies how religion, government, and equality impacts women. Most importantly, Cavendish is able to characterize the relationship between women using the Duchess and the Empress to convey gender unity. As Jacqueline Pearson indicates, “By nature

women have 'rational souls as well as men,' but environment and self-contempt do not allow them to develop their natural powers" (35).

It is Cavendish's portrayal of women's friendship that really sets her narrative apart from the others. By constructing such a model of honesty between women she was breaking from the negative archetypical examples of women, "Cavendish's imperial model of female self inspires her depiction in *Blazing World* of perfect friendship as the 'molecular coupling' of two independent female subjectivities" (Trubowitz 232). No longer are women's roles limited to just wife and mother, and Cavendish expanded upon the possibility that female friendship between women, if depicted on a much more realistic level, could empower women to support each other and govern themselves. One of the most interesting comments made by the Duchess comes toward the end of the first part of *Blazing World*, when the Duchess supports the Empress's decision to reverse some of the changes she has made to her kingdom and states,

...that is was so far from disgrace, as it would rather be for her Majesty's eternal honour, to return from a worse to better, and would express and declare her to be more than ordinary wise and good; so wise, as to perceive her own errors, and so good as not to persist in them, which few did (202).

Cavendish begins making these changes when she characterizes the Empress as a married woman with a husband and a son, but once her family is introduced these characters are hardly ever brought up again within the narrative. She is free to employ the full power of authority without upsetting the balance of society's expectations of a female and her role as mother and wife with power over men. By at least introducing the Empress in the role of wife and mother, Cavendish satisfies the natural expectations of a society that sees women solely in these two roles. The Empress still has a point of reference to expected masculine perspective. By grounding her female protagonists within patriarchal based standards that readers can relate to

the Empress is free to enact her plans of utopia over her city of Paradise, views that include major changes for the females of this society.

The Empress's first move is to redirect the development of Paradise's religious and educational institutions. As science-fiction author and literary critic Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. explains, "Utopia was the point of origin for this history. Utopias are distinguished from idylls by being not only good places, but fully rationalized ones that exist by virtue of their rational laws, institutions and customs" (85). As such, one must look at Cavendish's intent on creating changes for women as an outright challenge to seventeenth-century fixed policy and customs. Although the hybrids in her kingdom dictate what areas of education they intend to pursue, none of the different hybrid groups work together to unify and advance the city as a whole. They work and research only on the level of a unified species. Of greater importance is the fact that each hybrid group is its own society and yet still fails to include women in any aspect of their social, economic, and religious systems. And although every hybrid group is allowed to follow which ever educational pursuits they desire "each followed such a profession as was most proper for the nature of their species" (Cavendish 134). Indeed, as the Empress starts to dictate what each species will be designated to study, Cavendish makes it a point to continually emphasize the word "men" as seen in the following quote,

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

Cavendish also identifies how each of these "men" also belongs to "her". Yet, readers are distracted in paying attention to the repetition of the word "men" they fail to realize that all of this change is happening to Paradise as the Empress is laying claim to her new ownership of the



well-being of its citizens. Such actions further clarify that as the Empress, Cavendish is enacting *her* changes to *her* utopian society and does so under matriarchal rule. Paradise then becomes an ideal society that is more scientifically advanced and focuses on education and religious change for women and is “a discursive arena in which female subject can demonstrate its unqualified singularity and verbal power as mistress over itself” without conflict amongst the women of the kingdom or its protagonists (Trubowitz 239).

From Cavendish’s perspective everything in patriarchal society needed to be questioned as academic and religious institutions had always upheld biased beliefs against women. This is also where conflict begins, as Erin Lang Bonin contends: “...such utopian narratives valorize natural law and depend upon patriarchal paradigms for marriage, family, and the state, [and] they seldom question women’s nature and place” (339). Her intentions are to create within her utopian world a religion that would endeavor to treat women as respectfully as it treats its men. She becomes the reason that these women “which generally had quick wits, subtle conceptions, clear understandings, and solid judgments, became, in a short time, very devout and zealous sisters” (Cavendish 162). But by disclosing how women are often wrongly blamed for the shortcomings of men, Cavendish implies that men are irresponsible, and have designed societies that enable patriarchal authority to deem women inferior when ironically it is the patriarchy system of beliefs that are to blame. Yet, Cavendish also understands that this is not a statement that she can make directly. Instead, she has the character of her Empress make the reader understand that the women of any society should not be penalized for male behavior and deemed as the origin of such a problem. The Empress avoids upsetting the beliefs of Paradise by leaving the current belief system alone and instead “she resolved to build churches, and make also up a congregation of women, whereof she intended to be the head herself, and instruct them in several

points of her religion” (162). By creating yet another area where women are free to practice religion as they wish then she allows for women to stand outside society’s gender-biased practices. If Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. says that utopias are fully rationalized places that “exist by virtue of their rational laws, institutions and customs” then Cavendish designs a place within Paradise that strengthens the role of women in her fictional utopian world.

In *The Blazing World*, Cavendish spends the majority of the narrative making the reader believe that it is in her kingdom of Paradise that the protagonist, the Empress, finds the antagonist in the form of her hybrid’s gender-exclusionary belief system. For the Empress’s character, her goal is outlined from the start which is to create a better cultural belief system without upsetting the current status quo of the kingdom. Utopian scholar J.C. Davis states that, “...utopia expresses the desire for perfection in the face of imperfection. The utopian does not hope for change in human nature but chooses to control how that nature is expressed” (qtd. in Sargent, “Is There Only” 683). Although the Empress feels that the changes to utopia are not working and that she must now change them back, she has forever changed the way women in positions of authority are seen. In light of Davis’s comment, the Empress is still striving for perfection which is still part of the process of utopia. In essence, the Empress can make changes but must do so in a way that does not destroy the peace of the city. As the reader we see how she carefully introduces ways to change the focus of each hybrid’s educational study, their constant debates that lead to improvements about theoretical and philosophical concepts.

Cavendish enables women to move from being seen as just patriarchal object to a utopian subject. Her Empress plays a much more critical role than just empowering women. She is able to infiltrate the patriarchal nuances expected to become obstacles for women. By modifying the belief that women should only maintain a sense of silence and obedience, the Empress places

herself at the head of an engaged military force. Cavendish is able to characterize the Empress as a woman leading men in the battle to end the attack against EFSI towards the end of her narrative. Cavendish uses the power of her utopia, both literally and figuratively, to break the “natural law” that labels a woman as only wife and mother. Cavendish demonstrates her power when the Empress and the Duchess return to fight EFSI’s would-be attackers. Although she does not advocate the use of war, she outright uses her monarchical influence to defend her native country. She illustrates how the Empress wanted to not only protect her utopia, but also create a movement for peace in both universes by displaying what could be accomplished if masculine society chose to work with women in a unified way.

More’s *Utopia* has given way to another form of the Utopian genre. He was the first to establish a narrative that introduces the imagined community. According to Phillip A. Wegner, “More’s work, and the genre to which it gives birth, helps to establish the nation-state as the “natural” scale for imagining collective social and cultural belonging” (84). In comparison, Harrington’s *Oceana* designates different levels within his utopian work based on ownership and property. Yet, he fails to further the progress of the role of women within *Oceana*’s utopian world. Like More and Harrington who attempted to transform society, so too does Cavendish attempt to make changes to a community that has already been established with its laws and culture. However, Cavendish evokes a community that has its hybrid groups each look to its own dynamic to further progress as an individual group. What Cavendish does is have the Empress unite these groups under one authority. As Cavendish once stated, “By an opinion, which I hope is but erroneous one, in men [w]e are shut out of all power and authority; by reason we are never employed in either civil or martial affairs” (qtd. in Bonin 339). In allowing her hybrids to continue to function at their own level and implementing change in conjunction to their way of

life, she also makes her attempts to create a space for women to participate as citizens of this kingdom. The Empress insists that each hybrid group continue their focus of study as long as it does not interfere with the dynamic of peace that she wants to keep stabilized within her kingdom. By issuing out such a warning to these hybrid groups she also makes the decisions that deal with the matters of gender equality easier to transition within the city of Paradise.

The majority of utopias written in the science fiction genre came to influence the writings of those who later came to establish their works not as science fiction but rather as a way to survey the political and social landscape of the period. To understand the implications of such a statement means that one has to place Margaret Cavendish's work somewhere on the scale of importance as that of More's and Harrington's. Clearly, Cavendish has been highly overlooked as an author of the first utopia who wrote her own life story within the context of her own narrative. Unlike all utopian plotlines that have come before and after *The Blazing World*, Cavendish created a narrative that allowed for the existence of an enabled proto-feminist character to engage in an anti-imperialist agenda, that allowed for the continual drive for perfection if only in Cavendish's vision of utopia.

## CHAPTER V

### CAVENDISH'S POSITION IN THE TRADITION OF FEMINIST SCIENCE-FICTION AND SCIENCE-FICTION WRITERS

Science Fiction is popularly conceived as male territory, boys' own adventure stories with little to interest a female readership (Sarah Lefanu qtd. in A. Roberts 99).

As the celebrated story goes, author James Tiptree, Jr. wrote a short story in 1973 called "The Women Men Don't See." The story features Fenton and Ruth, two survivors of a plane crash in the Mexican jungle. There are several survivors, including Fenton and a woman named Ruth. In an unexpected turn, both Fenton and Ruth encounter space aliens in the jungle. The narrator fires his gun at them out of sheer terror. Ruth, on the other hand, chooses willingly to leave with them. "'For Christ's sake, Ruth, they're aliens,' yells Fenton. 'I'm used to it,' Ruth replies" (Tiptree qtd in A. Roberts 98). As Adam Roberts clarifies, "Ruth's point of view is that the aliens are just as men were on Earth, and that women are used to marginal existence: 'we survived by ones or twos in the chinks of your world machine'" (98). It is a "world machine" that comes to symbolically represent the patriarchal world all women live by (98). Of course, this story elicited the expected critical analyses found within the science-fiction genre: of women as the Other, woman as alien, and other arguments based on the context of male vs. female relationships.

Upon first reading, Tiptree's story appears to be typical science fiction with its archetypal characters and conflicts of humans versus aliens. However, there are many more reasons for this story to be controversial. The greatest of which is explained by Edward James:

Robert Silverberg commented that this [‘The Women Men Don’t See] was ‘a profoundly feminist story told in an entirely masculine manner,’ and a few pages earlier in his introduction to the collection which included this story he remarked: ‘It has been suggested that Tiptree is a female, a theory I find absurd, for there is to me something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree’s writing.’ It was not just the writing, but the lifestyle. Silverberg noted how Tiptree in a letter had admitted to having worked in a Pentagon basement during the war and to having subsequently ‘battled around the jungly parts of the globe.’ (qtd. in A. Roberts 98)

Of course in 1977, the truth finally emerged that the author of this short story was indeed a woman named Alice Sheldon. Besides the embarrassment suffered by Silverberg, the fallout of the incident cemented the argument that feminists had been trying to convey all along. Alice Sheldon had addressed the issue about how “ingrained sexism” still structured the genre (A. Roberts 99). Even by the 1970’s women’s roles had not yet fully evolved into the independent and equal subjects that Cavendish fantasized. This forced women writers to take on a “certain masculine identity” in order to become part of the genre (99). This was not something unique to the era as women had been trying to step out of gender boundaries for many generations. Centuries earlier the world had met the different perspectives of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, who was a naturalist, Royalist, pseudo-scientist, playwright, philosopher, poet, writer, publisher, anti-imperialist, and proto-feminist and also began taking steps to form and establish a feminist movement.

Cavendish then fits as the into the prestigious pantheon of women authors as the first woman who attempted to write in the science fiction genre. Since then, *The Blazing World* has had a small audience of scholars that have come to identify Cavendish as the first literary proto-feminist in the history of utopian science-fiction. She was able to set the standards that structured the genre, and as Alice Sheldon would later accomplish, contested the genre’s masculine boundaries. Even in an age which had proven itself against Cavendish and her sex, the impact that the author and her narrative has had on structuring current feminist ideals in the genre of

feminist science-fiction is becoming much clearer as more feminist and utopian scholarship continues analyzing her work. Cavendish points out the unfair dual standards women authors and protagonists in positions of power face. The example of Alice Sheldon further illustrates the discriminatory practices that still existed long after the seventeenth century.

One of the main differences in contemporary science fiction, when compared to previous centuries, is that women are now, for the most part, are now actually recognized for their contributions to feminist science-fiction. Like Cavendish, present feminist writers focus their plotlines on the current state of a culture and how it affects the different aspects of the lives of women. As Suzanne Damarin indicates, presently, “feminist science fiction brings the lives of women and all persons (human or otherwise!) into the foreground, and elaborates their problems and desires” (66-67). Women’s lives are at the forefront of a work, which plays out their conflicts amongst the typical masculine constructs of power over the universe, which includes technology, and war, etc.

It was not until recently that writers with much more of a complete understanding of the women’s movement have begun to reflect within their works a true representation of how society views women’s roles and how women view their roles within society. Just as Cavendish was considered “monstrous” for the way she represented women within her narrative, contemporary writers have evolved the role of women from non-engaging spectators into the position of adversaries (Lilley xiii). In turn the term monster has grown to incorporate the female figure symbolically represented as entities that no longer take on the physical embodiment of women. Furthermore, monster also represents the evolution of women’s’ roles and suggests that they are in a stronger position of power, thus able to terrorize men. The best example of this is found in the ever changing planet at the core of Stanislaw Lem’s (1921-2006) work, *Solaris* (1961). In

*Solaris*, we are given a plot with a cast of all male characters, one of which is Kelvin, the story's narrator who arrives to chaos aboard a research station on the planet. He serves as a guide to introduce us to the planet Solaris. It is a planet set up to "not menace them [the male characters] physically, their sense of legitimacy as scientists and human beings is threatened by the planet's apparent sabotage of their rationality" (Csicsery-Ronay 204). The planet's ocean-like surface is in a constant state of change and is increasingly given feminine attributes, reflective of the planet's personified form. The planet, in this context, sends out only female humanoid forms, recognizable only to the male crewmembers as the planet uses their memories against them. As Csicsery-Ronay explains, "Two of them certainly are female, Kelvin's Rheya and Gibarian's 'African Aphrodite,' while Sartorius's is quite possibly a female child. Snaut/Snow's is confined to a closet" (205). It is this new, abstract form of female as monster from which the patriarchal system must now play itself out. *Solaris* offers a new perspective where oppositional relationships still must be faced between the Self and Other, between Kelvin and Rheya, and between human male and female monster. Stanislaw Lem alludes to these forms as being reflective of possible females that these male characters have all somehow committed some wrongdoing against. It is later revealed that Kelvin's lover Rheya long ago committed suicide after he left her. His guilt is constantly torn between denying or accepting this the planet's version of Rheya. Kelvin and the other male characters all seem to be in the same situation. Once any of them decide to separate themselves from the planet's version of a female from their past, the planet reacts in ways that equal themselves out to an apocalyptic scenario. Albeit, these relationships must now run their course in a space that the masculine perspective may not ever be able to find its focus in. As a result, any attempt to comprehend the female constructs being presented by this omnipotent planet would be futile, and indeed, monstrous.



One of the first attempts by a woman author to reshape the gendered biases of the genre is Mary Shelley's (1797-1851) gothic science-fiction work *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Written 152 years after Cavendish's book, Shelley develops the idea of "The Double" (Levine 14). "The Double" consists of the idea that there are two perspectives of the same being presented in a work of literature. In Cavendish's case, she presents the relationship between her Empress and the Duchess as foils to themselves, and parallels to her own life in oppressive seventeenth century society. Cavendish's characterization of her protagonists' friendship specifically conveys her message of gender unity in light of her proto-feminist beliefs. In contrast, Shelley's representation of "The Double" can be seen in the relationship of the doubling of her two narrators, Victor Frankenstein and the Creature, which serves to present "a modern metaphor [and] implies a conception of the divided self, the creator and his work at odds" (Levine 15). Although Shelley's work was much darker in its premise, these women authors were the engineers of their own works. The female independence they lacked was due to society's failure to support their sex in these writing endeavors. These frustrations are justifiably represented within the two very different relationships they create within their main characters.

As the Tiptree example suggests, society was still basing itself upon patriarchal and masculine based views it had long held before and after Cavendish. During the seventeenth century the driving force behind such a poor perspective of women stemmed from the belief that women writers could not write. Even after more female science fiction writers emerged it was believed that because of their gender they still could not hold the attention of the genre's mostly male audience. Due to this adversity, women had to work twice as hard to get half of the recognition that any male author would have gained. While this was a difficult task, contemporary writers such as Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, and Octavia Butler, among others,

have taken their autobiographical, religious, socioeconomic, and political experience and used them to depict the challenges that these societal constructs still pose in today's science-fiction worlds. These are the same "problems and desires" that Damarin speaks of that are still impacting the outcomes of narratives within the genre (66-67).

The male dominated science-fiction genre offered story after story aimed at an audience that was mostly adolescent males. The reason for this was the fact that women science-fiction writers were, similar to Cavendish, not given the opportunity to write in the genre. This time it was not due to a lack of education that women were once again excluded. As Susan Gubar clarifies, it was the fact that they were "seriously hampered by images available to them for their female symbols or characters" (17). Women authors during this time were incapable of presenting their new feminist narratives, as Cavendish had also experienced, because society at the time was not capable of understanding the new perspectives of women they were trying to create.

In recent science fiction, female writers have transcended the typical relationships based on gender conflicts and instead have moved on to much more complicated themes. One of the most prominent of changes in the genre has been an unraveling of the preconception that power is masculine and that relationships are a sign of weakness, and therefore, female. This is more than likely the reason that Ursula Le Guin's book, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) is so often mentioned as a work that details society's fascination with questions of gender and why power through reproduction plays such an important role in contemporary science-fiction. In her book, Le Guin introduces a new concept of reproduction which affects both men and women. She calls this new concept "kemmer" and describes it as, "In the first phase of kemmer, the individual remains completely androgynous" (82). Le Guin characterizes the human life forms she calls

“Gethenians”, as being genderless during this monthly cycle of kemmer. Yet, once this cycle changes, the individual will either become female or male until their next monthly cycle of kemmer. For this reason, as Le Guin explains, “No physiological habit is established, and the mother of several children may be the father of several more” (Le Guin 83).

Le Guin does explain why she wrote about the subject of reproduction in her 1976 essay “Is Gender Necessary?” which is a continued discussion over *The Left Hand of Darkness*. She states that it was, “Not just so that the book could contain, halfway through it, the sentence: “the king was pregnant” – although I admit I am fond of that sentence” (A. Roberts 109). Rather, Le Guin wanted to test society’s pretensions about women and power. She understood that using the word *king* would immediately lead readers to the word being masculine. Kings are a symbol of masculinity and upon hearing the concept that a king is pregnant, men would not have the mental capacity to psychologically accept this new perspective of reproduction.

Le Guin goes into much more depth in engaging discussion on women’s roles. Cavendish only presents women as being wife and mother, but takes her Empress out of the reproduction phase and never really gives the reader her views on sex or childbirth. What we do come to understand is that the Empress and the Emperor do have children as, “...nor durst anyone wear jewels but the Emperor, the Empress, and their eldest son” (133). This revelation is said in passing and is never brought up again within the narrative. There is never a reason given to explain why this is the case. One can surmise that Cavendish, perhaps, still has her Empress maintain some masculine expectations of women so that the character can proceed with the proto-feminist implementations that she has planned.

Although these authors and characters are worlds apart from each other there is indeed a connection that is shared between Cavendish’s representations of women and the others that are

mentioned within this thesis. This connection recognizes all of these women's proto-feminist, feminist, and science-fiction accomplishments as creating new perspectives. These authors share the ability to recognize the invention of new cultural dichotomies between men and women. This is the responsibility that Cavendish was willing to accept as a forerunner to the science fiction genre in a world created by her own experience that inspired others to create utopias that correct the injustices that plague their world.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Terina Garza was born in McAllen, Texas, on October 13<sup>th</sup> in 1972. She is the first of four children and daughter of Emilio and Rosa L. Garza. She lived in Mission, Texas for most of her life until she graduated from Mission High School, the home of the fighting Eagles, in 1991.

She then attended Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas, up until her Junior year but had to return due to family concerns. She completed her education and received a Bachelor's Degree in English and a minor in Spanish at the University of Texas-Pan American in 1996.

She later married Carlos Eduardo Vazquez-Torres in December 2007 and became Terina Garza Vazquez. It was with his help and support that she returned to the University of Texas–Pan American and in the fall of 2008 and began pursuing her Master's degree in English Literature and Cultural Studies. She has been a proud Wolverine at PSJA Memorial High School for the past 10 years. She loves teaching and has taught all levels of English and currently teaches English IV-AP. She would like to continue her education with a Ph.D. in English but for now she will read Terry Pratchett novels, write her own science fiction epic, and enjoy whatever life has to offer!