

The 'Singular' Utopia in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*

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Singularity simultaneously intrigued, haggled, suppressed, and finally epitomized Margaret Cavendish's entire life. Through her strikingly indecorous costumes, similarly improper command of language, eagerness to participate in the public sphere, and audacious attempts to publish her own works in her lifetime, the Duchess of Newcastle craved for social recognition of her originality. Most of her attempts at self-fashioning, however, engendered manifold ridicules and foulmouthed criticisms.¹⁾ As a way to defend herself against such odium, Cavendish resorted to the class privilege bolstered by her marriage to William Cavendish and false modesty – a commonplace rhetoric that female writers adopted in proclaiming and protecting their authorship. Yet, what is 'singular' about Cavendish is that she created her own world within narratives; in so doing, I believe, she could gain a genuine sense of ownership/authorship.

This unfathomable extent of Cavendish's anxiety and ambition is disclosed

1) John Evelyn's ballad depicting "cavaliere"-like Cavendish is frequently referred, for it conveyed the degree of bewilderment that her contemporaries felt toward her. (See Sara Heller Mendelson's "Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of New Castle," *The Mental World of Stuart Women*, 46) Pepys's journal entry of 26 April 1667 also registered his misogynistic antipathy toward this seemingly presumptuous lady, a threat to gender distinction.

Met my Lady Newcastle going with her coaches and footmen all in velvet: herself, whom I never saw before, as I have heard for often described, for all the town-talk is now-a-days of her extravagances, with her velvet-cap, her hair about her ears; many black patches, because of pimples about her mouth; naked-necked, and a black just-au-corps. (my emphasis; Todd 56)

Pepys's description of Cavendish is marked by such mercilessly anatomical details that it seems to remind readers of a later version of Swift's likeminded approach in "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to the Bed."

in the title of her work and prefatory letters of *The Description of a New World, Called Blazing World* (1666). According to *OED*, the adjective blazing is marked by vehemence of flame, heat, or glare. A blazing thing is naturally seen as standing out within the group it belongs to, similar to what something singular does. The title of Cavendish's utopian romance, *The Blazing World* points toward her life-long desire to stand out among her literary contemporaries, male or female. Her peculiar ambition is also revealed in William Newcastle's dedication to Margaret and in the opening of *The Blazing World*, which serves as a letter to prospective readers. It should be noted that the dedication and Margaret Cavendish's letter to her readers function to distinguish Cavendish's interest in constructing original or alternative spaces, at least within narratives.

In his letter to Margaret, William Cavendish, the Duke of Newcastle, stresses that her work is the very creation of "pure Wit" by contrasting the New World, which was discovered by Columbus to Margaret Cavendish's fictional but 'created' world (121). Juxtaposing these two disparate places, William Cavendish seems to underscore that Margaret Cavendish's work outwits the discovery of Columbus for the Duchess of Newcastle literally founded her own new castle, building on her own imagination. Although brief, this indulgent husband or the figurative alter-ego of Margaret Cavendish herself, astutely brings two distinct places to the fore: a material world which had always been there and the fictional world penned by a woman writer. Despite the fact that this letter was designed to emphasize the originality of the Duchess's writings, which she had always hankered for through by employing her husband as the mouthpiece, the very spatial comparison suggested by the Duke/Duchess leads us to focus more on the way that geographical imagination and the relentless efforts that the Duchess had to pour into the narrative.

This paper will therefore explore the imaginary geography of Cavendish's utopia unfolded in *Blazing World*, in which Margaret Cavendish dismantles the distinction between gendered spaces by engaging with both theoretical and political discussions. Within this utopia, Cavendish wields her authorial authority as a scribe, an ironically humble role for a woman who pronounces to her readers that she attempts "to be Margaret the First" as well as the creator

of the utopia (124).²⁾ I will contend that by assuming this self-deprecating role, Cavendish takes a subtle detour to uphold her originality and ownership within the feminine utopia. Proclaiming herself the 'Empress' of the immaterial world, which envisions the ideal of absolute monarchy, Cavendish reveals her concerns with political systems as well as gender politics. Aligning Cavendish's fictive place, the *Blazing World*, within utopia discourses,³⁾ I will show that this

2) See Laura J. Rosenthal's "Authoress of a Whole World: The Duchess of Newcastle and Imaginary Property," *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England: Gender, Authorship, Literary Property*, 58-104. Rosenthal illustrates how Cavendish's emphasis on originality is predicated on the protection of intellectual property – authorship. Also, for a comprehensive understanding of Cavendish's life and her writerly ambition, see the classical work of Mendelson's *The Mental World of Stuart Women: Three Studies*. Lastly, see Janet Todd's *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction, 1660-1800* for understanding cultural, religious, political background of the Restoration period and Cavendish's predicament in the context of contemporary women writers.

3) For the general understanding of utopia, see J. C. Davis's *Utopia and Ideal Society*. Davis illuminates the historical dimension of utopia; on the other hand, Amy Boesky in *Founding Fictions: Utopias in Early Modern England* delves into the specific ways in which utopia narratives serve to be an ideological engine to propagate/subvert Englishness. In a chapter where she deals with *The Blazing World*, Boesky points out that Cavendish's utopia is "the struggle she represents between the power and the limits of the 'alter-nation'"(140). Nicole Pohl's comprehensive study of utopia, *Women, Space, and Utopia, 1600-1800* centers on the female agency and female community within utopian narratives. Pohl and Boesky assert in common that the female agency had been neglected in the utopian studies.

See "Margaret Cavendish's Dramatic Utopia and the Politics of Gender," in which Erin Lang Bonin observes that the reason island-utopias are problematic to female writers like Cavendish is because the overall economy as well as politics is based on heterosexual reproduction.

Alessa Johns's comprehensive study of feminist utopia in *Women's Utopias of the Eighteenth Century* is also noteworthy despite her deliberate omission of Christine de Pizan and Margaret Cavendish. Johns's main focus lies in the writings of later generation of feminists such as Mary Astell, Sarah Fielding, Sarah Scott, and Mary Hamilton; her thorough research on the critical history of utopists/utopianism is nonetheless helpful. Gregory Claeys's *Utopias of the British Enlightenment* also covers the tradition of utopian writing after 1700, ranging from Hume's "Ideas of a Perfect Commonwealth" to the works of Defoe and Swift. Claeys in tracing the eighteenth-century utopian writings contends that these utopian writers "were centrally concerned with how far civic and personal virtue could be institutionalized or sheltered

alternative space serves as a locus in which women writers disclose their writerly ambition and desire for social engagement, licensing their property right against the allegation of plagiarism.⁴⁾ Over the course of exploring the utopia, I shall also unravel that the inner dilemma of Cavendish's utopia, which results from the conjunction of feminist spaces and royalist conservatism, does not immediately undermine her endeavors to subvert "masculinist utopia," but rather indicates a common difficulty confronted by female writers and the limited options available for the proto-feminists in the early modern or the Restoration period.⁵⁾

I

Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of society. They present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces. (Foucault 4)

From Michel Foucault's sketchy definition to the classical study of J. C. Davis and to the recent studies of Nicole Pohl and Amy Boesky, utopia has drawn critical attentions in its geographical location and function as a social, political, economic criticism. As stated above, located in an unreal, celestial, "stateless," or unimaginable space, utopia serves to critique a society/state it mirrors by manifesting reversal images (Boesky 21). Yet, utopia sometimes serves to uphold the value of the society it reflects or attempts to reform. Since utopian literature is shrouded with all these contradictory ambiguities regarding its generic distinction or function, it is worth noting Boesky's argument:

against the ravages of time and the moral frailty of humanity" (x).

- 4) Rosenthal argues that although allegation of being a plagiarist was a common form of renouncing women writers, it would be more discouraging for Cavendish because such dismissal undermines the firm belief in her originality.
- 5) Sarah Apetrei's study of Tory feminism depicted in the works of Mary Astell, who belongs to the later generation of proto-feminists, also grapples with this contradiction. Despite apparent periodic gap between Cavendish and Astell, Apetrei's approach to draw out significance of Tory feminism is nevertheless helpful for understanding Cavendish's feminism.

Most studies of utopias begin with a system for separating this kind of literature from its generic neighbors. While the category of the utopia is itself rather narrow, the category of the utopian is broad, including travelogue, bucolic or pastoral, romance, as well as embedded bowers or ideal places, . . . (14)

Given this difficulty in determining the genre and characteristics of utopia literature, we are confronted with the manifold layers of Cavendish's *Blazing World*. It is such a hybrid narrative in its coverage of not only romantic elements alone, but also contemporary scientific discovery, Tory nostalgia for the absolute monarchy, and, furthermore, a utopian discourse based on science fiction as well. *The Blazing World* resonates not only with the excitement arising from the discovery of the New World, but also with the bleak reality after the Great Fire of London in 1666.

As the adjective 'blazing' in the title indicates, this early modern prose fiction lies in continuum with, or at least predates the post-Great-Fire narratives. Since this utopian romance is published after the Great Fire, it contains a sense of loss and the hope for restoration in conjunction with Cavendish's royalist concerns. After indirectly witnessing the absolute consumption and loss brought up by the Great Fire, Cavendish must have felt a horror arising from the complete destruction and, at the same time, equivalent necessity of regaining order through the hands of the absolute monarch, Charles II. The "destruction of recognized public buildings," Cynthia Wall observes, "meant that the large, normally implicit, institutional framework for daily life was itself abruptly destabilized, rendering institutionality itself more visible" (25). Once the entire foundation or framework of the state was seen to be disrupted, some of its citizens would become more astute about the artificial institution of the State. Yet, such recognition did not necessarily result in more radical social reforms. The contemporary royalists, just like Cavendish, seized the incident as an opportunity to demonstrate and laud the administrative skills of Charles II in reenacting new orders in the State. This is partly because Charles II handled the crisis skillfully, or partly because the "drastic change" that Londoners had to go through after the Fire forged a sense of nostalgia for "an 'ahistorical past' of topographical reliability and fixity," to quote Wall (96). Boesky also points to the

historical backdrop of the Great Fire in the conjuration of a utopian site:

Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing-world* is an imperial utopia built on the devastation of London's Great Fire and the English Civil War. . . . The ideal commonwealth is represented for the early modern utopist as a symbolic reconstruction, a new site with an ancient history, a place whose ideal terrain is shadowed by previous ruin. The construction of utopia entails both a geographical displacement and a partial repetition of its violent past. (21-22)

Harking back to the world of certainty seems naturally connected to the royalist desire for setting out a unitary world, which I shall later discuss in the characteristics of Cavendish's *Blazing World*. The sense of loss and regain begets a necessity of singular rule rooted in natural philosophy. When the Lady reaches the island of Paradise, she is told "there was but one language in all that world, nor no more but one emperor" (130). Over the course of conference with her animal-men, the Empress asks several questions about the legal, political systems of *the Blazing World*. In response to such questions, they consistently underscore the necessity of unitary/singular laws and monarchical government, saying "many laws made many divisions, which most commonly did breed factions, and at last break out into open wars" (134)

The Blazing World also borders on the travelogue.⁶ In the first part of the narrative, Cavendish initiates a story, introducing a damsel with extraordinary beauty and distress. Drawn on the convention of romance, the young beautiful lady is abducted by a merchant-traveler. Then, fortuitously salvaged from the extreme coldness of the Pole and the threat of rape, the lady becomes a traveler on her own. Here, Cavendish inadvertently indicates a generic proximity between travelogue and utopian literature by representing both her protagonist and her ravisher as a traveler and locating the woman in a wondrous island. The fact that the male initiator of this romance is a merchant-traveler and the Lady traveler is left alone to encounter all kinds of wonders in the exotic setting

6) Claeys observes generic hybridity of utopian writings, accounting for the sources of utopian and anti-utopian thought. For the primary factor of utopian thoughts, he refers to a boom of travel literature, which cannot be separable from the "increasing importance of science and technology" (xi).

suggests that Cavendish was probably familiar with the convention of travel narratives written by her contemporaries.

When the lady reaches the "imperial city," it is obvious that the site is very much an unreal 'Paradise' (131). The overall appearance or layout of the space is given in details, with some echoes of the New Heaven depicted in the Book of Revelation. The emphasis on the paved road indicates the technological advancement of the imperial city,⁷ which:

appeared in form like several islands; for river did run betwixt every street, which together with the bridges, whereof there was a great number, were all paved; the city itself was built of gold, and their architectures were noble, stately, and magnificent, not like our modern, but like those in the Roman's time. (131)

The Paradise is festooned with gold, reminiscent of Roman ideals of imperial majesty. It is also noteworthy that the utopia site is located in the 'urban' space, for the general setting of a utopia is placed in the city, not somewhere bucolic or pastoral. The ensuing description of the Emperor's palace is listed with thoroughness in order to convey its grandeur. Pohl detects in the visualization of the palace the Venetian ideals of the Early Modern society (39). Imitating More's utopia tradition, Cavendish also explicates the economy of the imperial city, which is based on a barter system.

Although drawing on traditional utopian narratives as discussed so far, Cavendish demonstrates her own variations within the genre. As is given, the traveler/narrator of this utopia is a female protagonist unlike "most utopias in this period are masculinist, visited by, ruled by, and explained by men" (Boesky 15). That the mortal lady of the narrative is elevated to the status of Empress also represents the feminist strand of this utopia penned by Cavendish herself. Pohl, in a similar vein, argues that this utopian society is noted for "female agency . . . at the heart of the matter" (36). Yet, it remains debatable whether the

7) If we recall the correspondences of travelers or fictional travelogues, a paved road almost always signifies the advanced state of the society. (See, for instance, Daniel Defoe's account of cities of China in *Farther Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, or the Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's depiction of Turkey in Letters).

sovereignty conferred on by the Emperor can be interpreted as feminist.⁸⁾

One of the most original devices of *The Blazing World* is that the Empress builds up a sort of Academia within the court for unobstructed discussion of natural science, remotely echoing and subverting the male-centered 'academe' in Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost*. As many critics observed, the setting of the court reflects and critiques the contemporary Royal Society where bourgeois men had privileged access to newly developed technologies and discoveries. Given that Cavendish herself was invited to this exclusively male domain, eventually becoming an object of spectacle as well as mockery, the Empress's authorial presence in the court subverts the male-centeredness in the realm of knowledge. Also, this Empress-driven court can be interpreted to prefigure not only the ensuing female friendship between the Empress and the Duchess, but also the feminine retreat depicted in *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668).

In her own court, the Empress enjoys the privilege of asking questions on manifold issues of natural philosophy ranging from astronomy, mathematics, and biology to physics. Especially the fact that this whole narrative is an appendix to Cavendish's *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* shows her deep-seated eagerness to be both a recipient and participant of scientific discourses. Although some critics like John Rogers, Oddavar Holmesland, and Elizabeth A. Spiller pay due attention to the vestigial notion of Cavendish's interest in atomic movement and speculation over astronomy in order to attest the viability of feminist scientific vision, what the Empress extends in the course of conference with ape-, worm-, and bird-men is not so plausible. The extent to which I remain convinced through this scientific discourse is that Margaret Cavendish, at least, showed her authenticity in her holistic spatialization at the risk of being a usual target of ridicule. It is worth listening to Virginia Woolf's commentary on Cavendish's relentless effort to be part of the discourse of natural philosophy:

8) At this dilemmatic nature of the sovereignty of the Empress, Claire Jowitt contends that this rather indicates Margaret Cavendish's "marginalisation within Restoration England" on the grounds that the only legitimate sovereignty is attained through 'inheritance,' not by marriage (394). Hence, as an attempt to justify the legitimacy of her writings as well as stature, Cavendish creates an absolute female ruler whose sovereignty is rather predicated on marriage.

There is something noble and Quixotic and high spirited, as well as crack-brained and bird-witted, about her. Her simplicity is so open; her intelligence so active; her sympathy with fairies and animals so true and tender. She has the freakishness of an elf, the irresponsibility of some non-human creature, its heartlessness, and its charm. And although they', those terrible critics who had sneered and jeered at her ever since, as a shy girl, she had not dared look her tormentors in the face at Court, continued to mock, few of her critics, after all had the wit to trouble about the nature of the universe, or cared a straw for the sufferings of the hunted hare. . . (77)

Unconvinced by this far-fetched version of experimental philosophy upheld by the Empress/Cavendish, I still see that Cavendish's vigor and tenderness mold the utopian site. It is almost impossible to dismiss the staunch faith Cavendish put on scientific knowledge; her firm belief indicates a utopian order based on scientific discovery.⁹⁾ Responding to common accusations about desultory logic or disorder found in her authentic philosophy, Cavendish tries to affirm that her utopian site is based on the combination of both reason and fancy, emphasizing that "art does not make reason, but reason makes art" (161).

II

I have often been inclined to think that a man had absolute property in his thoughts and inventions alone. My thoughts are *unalterably and unalienably mine*, and never can be another's. (John Dennis, my emphasis)¹⁰⁾

Cavendish's writerly ambition, which gestates this utopian narrative, surfaces in the text when the Empress claims to write a Cabbala. After dropping the topic

9) Boesky notes that the gestating power of utopias is predicated on the faith on scientific arrangement :

Like the evolving institutions in this period, utopias distinguish themselves from adjacent literary kinds by putting a new emphasis on system as the best means for reorganizing populations and ensuring their improvement. Utopias set forth a belief in reform through routine, through a bureaucratization of the ideal. No other world is ordered as scrupulously as the world of the utopia. (16)

10) Mckeon 61.

of natural philosophy, the Empress indicates that she wants to hire a scribe among ancient Greek philosophers or modern European writers/philosophers. In response to her wish, the Spirit answers that no male writers would be willing to become a scribe for a woman writer because of their self-conceitedness. Hence, Margaret Cavendish the Duchess of Newcastle is introduced to the Empress as the only candidate available for a scribe position, albeit with humble comments:

there's a lady, the Duchess of Newcastle, which although she is not one of the most learned, eloquent, witty and ingenious, yet is she a plain and rational writer, for the principle of her writings, is sense and reason, and she will without question, be ready to do you all the service she can. (181)

This short passage is rich with several points that I want to emphasize. First, Cavendish's intervention in the narrative reveals the extent to which she desires to envision her own space as well as claim full ownership of the world. Second, the rhetoric that the Spirit adopts in describing the stature of Cavendish exemplifies the rhetoric of the false modesty usually employed by most women writers when introducing themselves and their works. Third, the emphasis on Cavendish's style as "plain and rational" is marked by a self-conscious gesture toward the common allegation that women writers, or especially Cavendish, are irrational. Lastly, the unwillingness of male writers to be a scribe for a woman precisely reflects the indifference of male critics toward women writers, which finally makes possible the female collaboration and further the female community within Cavendish's utopian narrative. Here, the issue of feminine/feminist retreat is brought up once again. Both the physical and psychological collaboration between the Empress and the Duchess demonstrates female self-sufficiency and autonomy, at least in the realm of writing or ruling this fantastic kingdom.

Cavendish's unassuming role as a scribe is disrupted on encountering the Empress. At the first meeting with the Empress, Cavendish the scribe proudly proclaims that she desires to be a "great princess" (183) or "would fain be . . . an Empress of a World" (184). Given her personal life, this fictional wish reverberates with her unfulfilled desire in reality. Cavendish diagnoses the cause of her melancholy as having originated from her frustration of not being

able to be a great princess, which in this context, registers more than a class privilege she had enjoyed. Cavendish here argues that not until she attains full ownership of her world will she stop talking about the subject. Cavendish thus suggests that her verbosity or hypergraphia is deeply rooted in a desire to be acknowledged as a creator of her own world. In this narrative, the wish is in the first place suggested by the Spirit of *the Blazing World*, arguing that it would be better for Cavendish to be an Empress of the immaterial world rather than terrestrial. Finally, convinced after a long debate over the superiority of the immaterial world, unreal but nonetheless perfect, Cavendish determines to create an empire. This scene demonstrates how Cavendish toys with the concept of ownership and authorship. Creating one's own world within the narrative, Cavendish comes to realize that the singularity that she had long sought after can be attained by engendering a singular/blazing world within the text. In so doing, she grasps not only a full authorship, but also full ownership of the world, as John Dennis declares his inalienable right over his thoughts and writings at the advent of print culture (McKeon 61).

In order for Cavendish the scribe to create her own world, she needs a model for it. The Duchess speculates on various spatial models from Thales, Pythagoras, Plato, Epicurus, and Aristotle, finally reaching Descartes and Hobbes. In Cavendish's assessment, neither ancient nor modern spatial models of male philosophers are qualified for her new world due to their respective flaws. Bypassing these males also signifies that female authorship/sovereignty can function rather self-sufficiently. Finally, resolved to create the world of "her own invention," the Duchess envisions the world of pure reason (188). The Empress, on the other hand, who is unable to settle down a definite model of her own world, can finally finish engendering her own world with the assistance of the Duchess. With additions of reasons to *the Blazing World*, which the Empress exercises her authority, the Empress creates another world.

Here, we are not provided with the specifics about the world of their own invention, but the glimpse of Tory idealist forms:

. . . [i]t 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)

As mentioned earlier, the utopian vision of Cavendish is closely linked to the royalist ideals for unitary and thus monarchical sovereignty. Nonetheless, both the Duchess and Empress conjure up the political space, which does not necessarily countenance plurality of thought and government.¹¹ A similar statement is reiterated in the Duchess's advice to the Empress concerning the proper form of government of the *Blazing World*, with particular emphasis on "one sovereign, one religion, one law, and one language" (201). And the Duchess's ensuing dismissal of variegated human intelligences, which are associated with "an unquiet and disorderly government" (202), for the sake of political stability, along with the ongoing stress on the unified knowledge, rather hints at the anxiety of royalists as the division of knowledge eventually led to the "devolution of absolutism" (McKeon 3-48).

Such an absolutist monarchical vision is epitomized through the characterization of the Amazonian Empress and Duchess, which discomfits critics who were eager to find the alternative/innovative aspect of the utopia.¹² Especially when the Empress intervenes in the warfare of her native country, she discloses not only the potential for violence and terror, but imperial majesty by dint of her extravagant robes, scientific technologies to spy on its enemies, and finally

11) As for Tory idealism, Rachel Trubowitz also points toward unified sovereignty in the *Blazing World*:

Cavendish's reenactment of utopia aligns the form with her aristocratic nostalgia for what could be called a 'magical' past, for an idealized pre-Civil War England uprooted from actual history, in which the mystical sovereignty of monarchy prevailed over an undivided nation and when custom, tradition, and other rationally irreducible supports for social hierarchy were embraced by all classes. (231)

12) Trubowitz, for example, attempts to reveal the autonomy of two women characters while pointing to the nature of female sovereignty depicted in the text is nothing but the "prevailing ethos of male sovereignty" (237). She rather focuses on the fact that Cavendish's utopia is the "subjective kingdom," which brings up the vision of both an "inviolable and unitary focus of knowledge and power" and "equitable female friendship" (238).

and most importantly her capacity to create a spectacle. The spectacular fireworks that the Empress conducts before the entire subjects of her native country, in particular, disclose what this 'blazing' world is really about. Although the adjective 'blazing' is first associated with the Great Fire, then with the movement and radiance of celestial bodies within the Empress's court, here the Empress provides a display of luxurious fireworks – the very singular spectacle of the absolute monarchy:

the fire-stones were lighted, which made both air and seas appear of a bright shining insomuch that they put all spectators into an extreme fright, who verily believed, they should all be destroyed; which the Empress perceiving, caused all the lights of the fire-stones to be put out, and only showed herself in her garments of light: the bird-men carried her upon their backs into the air, and there she appeared as glorious as the sun. (215)

This passage decisively epitomizes that the nature of the utopia begot by the collaboration of the Empress and Duchess is indeed full-fledged absolutist propaganda, reflecting somehow both Queens Elizabeth I and Henrietta Maria. As for the possible accusation of Margaret Cavendish being simultaneously royalist and proto-feminist, Jowitt argues that such identification with absolute monarchs was the only alternative available for her, inadvertently suggesting that such an apparent conjunction with royalist and feminist notions is the ultimate extent of the restoration authoress.

Cavendish's central concern was to examine how she, and other women, could become absolute monarchs, since this seemed to be the only way in which women could achieve political subjecthood. (394)

Cavendish deliberately represents the elevated, the Sun-like image of Empress within this entertainment at the darkest time of night. Recalling that this narrative is written after the Great Fire, we can see that this Restoration era image, brimming with celestial light, serves to propagate the idea that Tory order will soon be reestablished. Lastly, the fact that the Empress's native country turns out to be ESFI, which respectively stands for England, Scotland,

France, and Island, indicates that the whole utopian imagination harbored by Cavendish cannot be separated from the national/imperial vision of the English after all.

At this point, we should go back to the seminal questions raised by Davis:

Why did some people or groups in society abandon reality in order to engage in utopian dreaming? What sorts of social frustration, blockage, aspiration and dysfunction did their work represent? What sort of function did their activities have for society as a whole? How did their blueprints balance between reflection and rejection of social realities around them and what in turn did this tell us about their social role? How did the evolution of these patterns correspond with social change? I wanted, in other words, to study early modern utopianism as an exercise in the sociology of knowledge. (6-7)

In light of these questions, we can clearly see that Margaret Cavendish created her signature fictive space out of frustration. She was not even the beneficiary of an education that her contemporary women on average would receive. As her biographers point out, her official education was offered by William Cavendish and his brother, the group we might call amateur natural philosophers.¹³⁾

Despite her lack of formal/informal education, she always aspired to be an authoress of her world, including her dress, writings, and even the realm she dwelt in. And her rambling curiosity always led her to the places where women were prohibited. In numerous attempts at transgressing boundaries, she did not receive due attention but social mockery. However, her relentless ambition finally forged the *Blazing World/Blazing World* brimming with royalist vision and female agency.¹⁴⁾ Despite this contradictory combination, Cavendish obscured the division of knowledge by envisaging an eccentrically (or subjectively) holistic kingdom, in which the distinction between animals and people, experimental and vital, women and men, imagination and nation becomes arcane. In this

13) See Anna Battigelli, Mendelson, and Rosenthal.

14) Although David Michael Robinson and Valerie Traub duly point to the lesbian relationship within the text, I did not include the strand of lesbianism argument in this paper for the purpose of focusing more on the interrelationship between writerly ambition and feminist/feminine spaces.

utopian vision, Margaret Cavendish wielded not only her authorial authority, but also full ownership by inscribing her signature all over the text, from the prefatory letters to the epilogue, against both life-long accusations of plagiarism and the division of knowledge initiated after the Civil War. However naïve, elfish, febrile, or royalist it appears, Cavendish's unflinching belief in female autonomy is firmly registered in this blazing world.

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ABSTRACT

The 'Singular' Utopia in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*

In Hye Ha

In this paper, I examine how Margaret Cavendish's life-long aspiration for authenticity eventually leads her to create a utopia within the textual space. In light of a number of utopia discourses, I also try to articulate that Cavendish's attempt to create an exclusively female community dismantles the gendered and hierarchical spaces. To define her writerly ambition in context of the gendered British society as well as in conjunction with the imagined community in *The Blazing World*, I draw on various critics, such as Laura Rosenthals, Sara Heller Mandelson, and Janet Todd. More importantly, my recourse to the utopia critics, such as J. C. Davis, Nicole Pohl, and Erin Lang Bonin enable me to point out the inner dilemma inherent in Cavendish's utopia. Although Cavendish's utopian vision is designed to subvert the so-called 'masculinist utopia,' it is intricately tied to the royalist conservatism which originates from Cavendish's own standing as Tory ideologue. Despite my own attempt at re-interpretation of such Tory-oriented spatialization, I cannot but acknowledge that *The Blazing World* is bound up with the same dilemma that Mary Astell is faced with when writing *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*: these Tory proto-feminists wind up supporting the established hierarchy while they pour their best to undermine the rigid distinction between public and private sphere or division of knowledge. Especially, the finding that these Astell and Cavendish share the same passion for natural science, from which most of the contemporary women are completely excluded, point toward their motivation for creating such quasi-Royal Academy within their texts. Cavendish's utopia is not entirely free of the allegation of Tory conservatism; it nonetheless merits our critical attention primarily because she obscures the division of knowledge by envisaging a holistic kingdom. Cavendish's staunch belief in female autonomy as well as her own craftsmanship is firmly

registered in this wondrous world.

Keywords authenticity, female authorship, female autonomy, imaginary community, spatial division, Tory feminism, utopia, writerly ambition