



**International
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Book of Abstracts**



Image Credit: Thomas Barwick



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“Cavendish, the Blazing-World, and the Context of the Future”

I am writing an introduction to Margaret Cavendish's fantastic voyage that sets it in the context, not of its Early Modern past or its immediate future only, but of its long, world-historical future as forerunner of the baggy monster, the novel, in the full length of its existing history. Her book is not only out now in plural modern editions in English but in French and Spanish; I have also heard rumours of an Italian translation, and as the MC Society is broadly international there are surely more to come. What generic motives appear in this work that have lasted into or re-emerged in our own time? What formal elements have taken new life in the departures of modernism and our “post-post-modern” moment from bourgeois realism? What kind of subjectivity did, and does, the narrative of the Blazing-World propose and permit its old and new readers to absorb? Why did it take so long to appreciate the deep relations of fiction to the metamorphic changes of the still-unfolding scientific traditions Cavendish watched with such interest?

I intend to take up these questions in an introduction to *The Blazing World* for an MCS collection in the works. At this conference I'd like to focus especially on the extraordinary resonance of *The Blazing-World* with contemporary fiction, aesthetics and literary criticism. Many long-neglected novels and plays by 17th and 18th-century women have been restored to us over the last 35+ years of feminist literary history and publication. But the success of *The Blazing-World* far outstrips the rest, including among contemporary writers. And there is more to learn from it yet, despite our author's unfashionable classism.

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“The Cavendishes and Medicine, Nottingham 'Pw V 90”

In the collections of the University of Nottingham there is a manuscript labelled ‘Pw V 90’ that contains “Rare Minerall Receipts” that William and Margaret Cavendish “Collected at Paris from those who hath had great Experience of them”. These pages, which were gathered between 1645 and 1655, include receipts and advice from eminent figures such as Theodore de Mayerne, Kenelm Digby, and the Duchess herself. Benjamin Goldberg and I have almost completed an edition of this manuscript. For our talk, we will survey our editorial principle and the topics that are broached in our introduction. We hope, in this way, to collect further input regarding the sort of material that Cavendish scholars (as potential users of this edition) will find most helpful. In the process of going over our introduction, we will also suggest some ways in which this manuscript casts fresh light on the activities of the Cavendishes and a number of the learned medics and courtiers in their circles. While Margaret sometimes made it out as if she had no hand in practical affairs, this manuscript indicates that she was concerned with the health of her household. But this, in its own right, entangled her in a world of medical learning that laid the groundwork for her own speculative philosophical pursuits.

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“Desgin’d Business”: Tracing Mediation as Sovereign Form in Margaret Cavendish”

This presentation explores theories of mediation in examining alternative models of political and sexual sovereignty in Margaret Cavendish’s oeuvre. Critical media studies provide insight into how moving and continuously mediated forms can themselves become motions of sovereign expression, across scales of meaning and within perceptible and imperceptible modes. My recent work on Cavendish examines the indirect commerce between mediated sovereignty and Cavendish’s seventeenth-century experiments with scales of meaning, conceptually and materially. The ‘world within a world’ motif, which appears in fictional-philosophical forays like *Blazing World* and within her conceptual poetics, serves as a device that remediates and reanimates ‘self-moving’ control and surveillance as a model for ‘hacking’ a system of fixed forms and static perceptions. In many senses, the more creative exploitations and digital environments in the present moment share a kind of animated material ‘sympathy’ (J. Bennett) with Cavendish’s experimentations with moving forms. This presentation drawn from a working draft of the last phase of a project which digitally reimagine an interactive reading of Cavendish, *Observations Upon a Blazing World*.

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“Margaret the First and Charles the First: *The Blazing World* and *Eikon Basilike*”

Eikon Basilike was the most widely read and consequential text to be published in Margaret Cavendish’s lifetime, a political and affective event so powerful that the master polemicist John Milton could not lay a glove on it in *Eikonoklastes*. This paper contends that in *The Blazing World* Margaret Cavendish appropriates for her own uses some of the key innovations of the King’s Book. She understood, for example, how the king (and his ghost writer, or, as many said then, secretary) used print to create a vivid persona and how *Eikon Basilike* fed on the pathos of a persecuted aristocracy. Yet Cavendish also saw how manipulative *Eikon Basilike* was in its use of the psalmic form for the pious use of humble confession and how religion could be a shell game. Most importantly, Cavendish saw in *Eikon Basilike* a new path to authorship: the complicated multi-faceted and self-presented self. She was not alone; Milton’s lessons from Charles I’s posthumous brilliance were realized in aspects of the Narrator of *Paradise Lost*. This paper will argue that Cavendish and Milton share *Eikon Basilike* as a foundational inspiration. Reading these three texts together is revelatory about each individually and about all of them together. Cavendish will be my main focus throughout.

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“Margaret Cavendish, Recycler: Waste and Reuse in *Plays Never Before Printed* (1668)”

In this paper I use the concepts of waste, conservation, and reuse as frameworks for an examination of Margaret Cavendish’s methods of dramatic composition. Cavendish is the author of two volumes of published plays. Her first volume, *Playes* (1662), was printed after the Restoration but it was largely composed in Antwerp, during the political exile of Cavendish and her family. The second volume, *Plays Never Before Printed* (1668), was composed and printed after the family returned to England and in the context of a revived theatre tradition. In addition to four new plays (“never before printed”)—*The Sociable Companions*, *The Presence*, *The Bridals*, and *The Convent of Pleasure*—the volume also includes two dramatic fragments: “Scenes from The Presence” and “A Piece of a Play,” each of which is “waste” from another of Cavendish’s works. *Plays Never Before Printed* also “conserves” material from Cavendish’s earlier volume: *The Sociable Companions* recycles and adapts characters and plots from *The Public Wooing*, specifically a plot focused on a character called Prudence and her search for a husband. In this paper offer a comparison of these two plays within the larger context of *Plays Never Before Printed* as volume that simultaneously defines dramatic composition as a process of waste and conservation. Cavendish, as a dramatist who straddles the divide between pre- and post-Restoration theatre, offers an important but often unacknowledged perspective on British theatrical history.

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“Love and Metaphysics in Anne Conway”

Sympathy is today typically regard as a mental, human capacity placed within the psychological domain, and it is strongly associated with feeling of compassion. In the philosophy of Anne Conway (1631-79), however, we find a far broader concept of sympathy. Like Margaret Cavendish, Conway uses sympathy when explaining certain natural phenomena, such as magnetism. But sympathy also plays a fundamental role in Conway’s unique metaphysical theory, which in part is inspired by ideas and theories belonging to the Neo-Platonic tradition. According to Conway, every entity (animal, fruit, grain of dust, etc.) in Creation is vital. Radically, in her theory, this implies that every entity has the capacity of sympathy. This sympathy, Conway argues, all Creation is connected to each other, and to Christ. In this presentation, I will discuss Conway’s concept of sympathy, arguing that it functions as glue in her metaphysical theory, and as a precondition for the union. But how does the unity of Creation function, and does it have a moral direction?

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“Escape the snares...’ Fortune in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*”

Originally a pagan deity, Fortune was regarded as a servant of God during the Middle Ages, whose vagaries could be avoided by a virtuous life. This changed dramatically during the Renaissance when Fortune was refashioned into an independent and erratic agent whose favour had to be won by tricks and cunning. In Margaret Cavendish’s ‘Assaulted and Pursued Chastity’, a prose romance that appeared in *Natures Pictures*, the protagonists are literally tossed and turned by blows of Fortune. Despite the fact that Fortune and the related concepts misfortune, chance, fates, and storms are introduced as a major theme of the tale in the preamble and play an important role within the narrative, they have so far been largely neglected by critics. In my paper I will undertake a close reading of the text focussing on the role of, and attitudes to, Fortune. In particular, I want to explore the relation of Fortune to other transcendental authorities such as nature and the gods and I also want to look at how the protagonists, Travellia and the Prince, deal with “the snares of spiteful fortune”. Their strategies differ considerably, shedding light on questions of gender, socio-economic attitudes and concepts of political rule.

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“Creatoress, Duchess, Empress – a Narratological Mess: Problems of Discourse and Implied Worldview in Cavendish’s *Description of the Blazing World*”

Margaret Cavendish’s *Description of the Blazing World* (1666) is a meta-utopian text – not a simple report from the ideal society, but the account of a desire to write and inhabit a utopia, and of the restrictions of utopian imagination. Overtly, it is dominated by the voices of Cavendish’s three avatars in the story: the Creatoress, the Duchess, and the Empress. But its polyphonous discourse harbours the ‘languages’ of various conflicting contemporary worldviews from religion, ethics, politics, literature, and science. Beyond the autobiographical significance of the ways in which Cavendish imagines herself in the narrative, the self-begetting and unreliable narration of *Blazing World* enables her to stage a creative and open-ended dialogue between her own ideas –some more fanciful, some more serious – and the opinions of other thinkers – some esteemed by her, some less so. The exact stance of the text as an utterance towards early-modern socio-cultural reality and towards the viability of its own inventions, is hard to pin down. Employing concepts from discourse-oriented narratology, Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of novelistic discourse, and theories of intertextuality and metareferentiality, this paper will shed light on the novelness and the novelty of Cavendish’s idiosyncratic literary technique.

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“Market Fetishes and Female Desire in Margaret Cavendish’s *Convent of Pleasure*.”

In this presentation, I suggest that Margaret Cavendish’s *The Convent of Pleasure* (1688) urges modern feminist critics of market economies to re-evaluate their commitment to the idea that, “‘capitalist society’ constitutes the critical frame for understanding women’s subordination.” The Epicurean philosophy that informs Cavendish’s play anticipates thing theorists such as Bill Brown and anthropologists such as Peter Pels and Grant McCracken in arguing that the “material, sensuous characteristics” of all objects enable distinctions to be expressed through the “assemblages” that consumers create by “selecting some goods and not others as expressive of their identity and sense of social location.” The market-place is not, as Marx holds, a “resting place” in which “consumers are passively seduced by things they mistakenly believe to be desirable” but rather a “scene of action” in which “consumers appropriate goods” through “their particular ways” of “making sense of them.” Women in the Restoration period were particularly susceptible to being found guilty of consumer “fetishism” and thus, it is true that, like a number of Restoration-era texts written by and about women, Cavendish’s conclusion reforms its female protagonist’s semiotic approach to pleasure by marrying her to the embodiment of the transcendental signifier — the aristocratic man as he stands for centralized, crown-directed mercantilism. But in the process of arriving at this conclusion, the play rationalizes and celebrates an alternative economy, one in which female desire is valorised not for upholding such patriarchal institutions as marriage, motherhood, the church, the state, and controlled economies as anti-capitalist feminists such as Judith Butler maintain, but rather for subverting them.

Nancy Fraser and Johanna Oksala, “Feminism, Capitalism and Social Transformation, Public Seminar: Capitalism, Letters, Sex and Gender (New School for Social Research: 2015).

Peter Pels, “The Spirit of matter: on fetish, rarity, fact and fancy in Patricia Spyer, ed. *Border fetishisms: material objects in unstable spaces* (Routledge, 1998), p. 224. See also Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Things. (Autumn, 2001), pp. 1-22, and Grant McCracken, *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities* (World, 1990).

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“Female Authorship and Retellings of Cavendish’s *The Blazing World*”

Siri Hustvedt’s *The Blazing World* (2014) borrows the title of the seventeenth-century prose fiction written by Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673). Hustvedt’s allusion to Cavendish’s *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (1666) is daring and deliberate. Tellingly, this twenty first-century retelling of Cavendish’s proto science fiction turns out to be a nuanced narrative interwoven with critical theory, art history, and postmodern literary techniques. In it, Hustvedt captures the rawness of a myriad of emotions the protagonist named Harry/Harriet Burden has been through as a result of her lifelong struggles to gain social recognitions. Compelling is the fact that Burden’s entire life decisions and sense of self-fulfilment are bound by her sex, gender, and

body. Hustvedt, through her careful juxtapositions of these two key figures—Cavendish (historical) and Burden (fictitious)—addresses systematic discriminations against women eager to participate in male-dominant spheres. At the same time, the author chronicles Burden’s manifold struggles to recognize, reclaim, and attain her own subjecthood. In doing so, Hustvedt poses a series of questions about female authorship, self-representation, and self-realization. What happens when all the heroic efforts to find one’s own voice fail? How to come to terms with repeated failures? What if all these failures are already predicated on her sex and gender? Who/What is accountable? What does it mean to soldier on for a female artist-to-be? Putting together such disparate modes of writing, Hustvedt successfully reveals how women’s body is placed under such rigorous scrutiny. My essay therefore argues that Hustvedt’s 2014 retelling of Cavendish’s *The Blazing World* exemplifies a superb ‘rereading.’ Hustvedt’s *The Blazing World* is made possible by the author’s meticulous rereadings and astute reinterpretations of Cavendish’s seventeenth-century prose fiction that resonates with an early modern woman’s struggle to achieve autonomy, social recognition, and ultimately public fame. Lastly, Hustvedt’s modern (or postmodern) literary mosaic nicely illuminates the multidimensional complexity of women’s desire.

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“A Place for Everyone and Everyone in Place: Structural Solutions to the Problem of The Poor in *Blazing World* and *Gulliver’s Travels*.”

The causes of poverty, and solutions for it, have been a central and inescapable theme in utopian literature, sometimes directly by description of policy and effect, but more usually, as in *Blazing World*, by implication. The surreal quality of the world Margaret Cavendish develops in her science romance may lead readers to feel the predicament of the poor is irrelevant to *Blazing World*, especially compared with the grittier surroundings in Jonathan Swift’s two worlds in *Gulliver’s Travels*. Because Swift contrasts two utopias with two dystopias, *Gulliver’s Travels* develops a more explicit comparison/contrast in potential remedies for, and treatment of, the poor. Yet Swift’s two utopian worlds address poverty by a logic similar to Cavendish’s *Blazing World*. This similarity of logic points to a problem in enlightenment assumptions about the causes and definitions of poverty, a problem that would become more frequently addressed by dystopian literature, and that Swift would confront in Dublin. As dean of St. Patrick’s cathedral, in his sermons and letters Swift addressed the general problem of the poor as well as the more complex issue of the working poor. He struggled with an enlightenment conception of poverty and social welfare that is ill-matched not just to Dublin but to a changing world with new social structures emerging. Swift and Cavendish share the sense that endemic poverty must be a problem of social structure, and while both bring the issue to public awareness via humorous yet sophisticated modes of utopia, each nevertheless comes to quite different conclusions. This paper compares and contrasts elements of Swift’s and Cavendish’s utopian strategies.

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“Gender and Otherness in Early Modern Performance Culture: Letter 195 of Margaret Cavendish’s *Sociable Letters*.”

The overwhelming majority of visual and textual documents on which we base our knowledge of early modern performers were produced by – and describe – men. The 195th of Margaret Cavendish’s *Sociable Letters* contains one of the 17th century’s vanishingly rare substantial descriptions of performers neither side lining the contribution of women, nor written by a man. During her mid-seventeenth-century years of royalist exile, Cavendish overcame the restrictions inhibiting those of her class and gender from joining spectators at public fairground stages by viewing acts in private, from hired rooms or at her own home. Drawing on eye-witness experiences of this time, her 195th letter summarizes typical Antwerp fairground acts as: “Dancers on the Ropes, Tumblers, Jugglers, Private Stage-Players, Mountebanks, Monsters, and several Beasts”, and focuses on two “Sights and Shews” featuring women. Informed by my ongoing archival and cultural researches into performing monsters, mountebanks, quacks and itinerant commedia dell’arte troupes, I consider and contextualize the outstanding significance of Cavendish’s essentially literary descriptions, in letter 195, for insights into gender and otherness in early modern performance culture.

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“Margaret Cavendish’s Melancholy Self”

This paper explores the authorial self-portrayal of Margaret Cavendish in *A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding, and Life* (in *Natures Pictures*, 1656), “A Dialogue between Melancholy and Mirth” (in *Poems and Fancies*, 1653), and the frontispiece image and epigram, “Studious and all alone” (*Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, 1655), contending that the Duchess’s numerous self-reflections centre on her contemporary society’s discourse of melancholia. By claiming a similar authorial self as contemporaries such as Burton, Donne and Milton, Cavendish effectively claims a position within a cultural tradition that has generally excluded women. Studies on the medical and cultural phenomenon of melancholia tend to present a gender-dichotomy where melancholy men are considered as exceptionally gifted. Women melancholics, on the other hand, have dominantly been reduced to sufferers of melancholia’s destructive nature. The case of Cavendish is thus an important contribution to the early modern discourse of melancholia, as it broadens our understanding of the medical and cultural phenomenon by challenging the gendered construction of the condition, ultimately opening for the possibility of rewriting the history of early modern melancholy. Several critics have commented upon the Duchess’s self-professed melancholy, connecting her melancholic disposition to the overactive imagination and creative genius portrayed in her literary works, while also associating the melancholy temperament with the feelings of loss and isolation prevalent in her works. Yet, no single paper has been dedicated solely to the multifaceted melancholy self-portraits scattered among her “paper bodies”.

This paper is based partly on my MA thesis (UiO, 2017) and partly on a yet unpublished chapter on “Margaret Cavendish’s Melancholy Identity” (co-written with Tina Skouen).

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“Women’s Exit: Gendering the State of Nature in Margaret Cavendish”

In this paper I propose to read Margaret Cavendish’s romance “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” (1656) and her closet drama *Bell in Campo* (1662) as complex responses to Hobbes’s theory of the state of nature. As is well known, Hobbes theorized the state of nature as a condition of war—specifically, “a warre, as is of every man, against every man.” Hobbes’s state of nature is both a logical postulate and a fictional idea, the use of which is to clarify “what manner of life there would be, where there were no common Power to feare.” In his description of the state of nature, however, women make few appearances. When they do, they appear primarily as sexual objects or as bearers of children. Women are grouped together with “other mens persons,” “children, and cattell” as objects of male violence (*Leviathan*, chapter 13), or as mothers who alienate their children (*Leviathan*, chapter 20). This paper proposes that Cavendish’s “Assaulted and Pursued Chastity” and *Bell in Campo* can be read as feminocentric rewritings of Hobbesian theory. These texts reimagine **women’s** strategies of exiting the brutal state of nature/state of war and demand that the sexual and political subjugation of women be thought together with the issue of perpetual war.

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“Does Cavendish Work in Print?”

Margaret Cavendish is not a print author. Her work is printed, but print is the constriction she’s working against as a public figure. Consider the following: Cavendish switches from larger commercial publishers to smaller print shops, she revises, edits, and republishes her work consistently while often including revision notes in her updated editions, *Sociable Letters* is meant to be read aloud, she’s wary of the stagnation of printed books on a bookshelf, her writing is interconnected across multiple genres, she circulates her work as one might circulate a manuscript, and she persistently asks readers to interject or consider her ideas in different ways and to judge her work outside of its temporal context. None of these descriptions fit what we expect of print authorship. Thus, the question asked in the title of this talk is, does Cavendish work in print? This talk will explore whether Cavendish’s authorship is inherently tied to its printed form and whether her work is suitable for print or does transforming her text somehow make the text more itself and better suited for her style of authorship.

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“The Witch and the Empress: Female Agency in Kepler’s and Cavendish’s Imagining of New Worlds”

Margaret Cavendish’s *A Description of a New World Called the Blazing World* belongs with early modern, new philosophical fictions of lunar new worlds, but as a critical exception and response to those by male philosophers. Francis Godwin’s was manifestly a narrative of the ‘man’ in the moon, a would-be philosopher and conquistador, thus parting with Johannes Kepler’s ‘dream’ (*Somnium*) to become a narrative forerunner of the ‘He’ philosophy of the Royal Society. Such a transformation erased female agency as it had constituted a significant part of *Somnium*, until it reappeared in *The Blazing World*. Fiolxhilde, an old Icelandic woman and single mother of Duracotus in *Somnium*, has been at best associated with unlettered witchcraft, but she is in fact conversant with ‘wise spirits’ and a wise and powerful woman herself, initiating their flight or ‘motion’ to the moon. *The Blazing World* is all about female ‘fancy’ creating, philosophizing, and ruling (many) a new world. The abductee-turned Empress is truly a ‘self-moving body’, speaking for not only Cavendish’s vitalistic materialist view of matter but also her anti-Aristotelian and anti-mechanist affirmation of the female.

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“The Pre-Neo-Liberal Education of Margaret Cavendish: University, Scientific Society, Convent and the Institutions of 17th-century Knowledge Production”

This paper proposes to put together the distinct settings of the university, the scientific society, school, and monastery/convent, to consider Margaret Cavendish’s exploration of knowledge production (as process and product) in the contexts of 17th-century institutions of learning. My thinking is inspired by current critiques of the neoliberal university and particularly the history of the university and “higher education” either implicit or explicit in that critique. As we wrestle with the economic, social, and political drivers of education in our own time it may be useful to reconsider what Cavendish saw in and fantasized about institutional learning in her own. What happens if instead of focusing on Cavendish’s interest in female education in particular as expressed by her frequent complaints about exclusion of women or her just as frequent fantasies of female intellectual accomplishment, we widen the frame to consider instead how her experience of the tremendous pressures on education produced by the political upheavals, technological paradigm shifts, and indeed new market forces of the 17th-century shaped her critique of—and imagination for— institutions of education. Cavendish had a front-seat view of political and physical vulnerability of the university when she took refuge with the displaced court at Oxford at the outset of the Civil Wars. Her experience of monastic spaces (St. John’s Abbey, Welbeck Abbey, and the convent of Chaillot established by Henrietta Maria) made her intimately familiar with their complex (and reversible) history of predation, appropriation, dispossession, reinvention, and creation. She was also, of course, famously, or infamously, a witness to the production (and productions) of knowledge at the Royal Society.

It is scarcely surprising, then, that Cavendish returns again and again to the question of education or that “schools” of various sorts recur in her philosophical writings, plays, and romances. Cavendish’s observations, fantasies, and critiques of institutional education, I will argue, can inform a longer history of the critique of the neo-liberal university while at the same time put under pressure our own fantasies of what the university freed from its neo-liberal chains could or should look like.

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“Margaret Cavendish’s Heterotopias”

In this paper we present an analysis of different works by Margaret Cavendish within the theoretical framework put forward by the “spatial turn” and the new paradigm of mobility (as formulated by such authors as Michel Foucault, Edward Soja and Doreen Massey). Thus, we will examine, among others, *The Convent of Pleasure*, *The Female Academy*, *The Travelling Spirits* or *The Speculators* as heterotopias *ante litteram* and, more concretely, as heterotopias a) of exile, b) scientific, c) queer and d) of resignification (placing particular emphasis on concepts proposed by, among others, Kelvin Knight, Angela Jones, Sylvia Bowerband, Sara Mendelson and Lisa Walters). “Of exiles”, since they collect experiences from an externality which is both a biopolitical and chronopolitical device, producer of subjectivities and power relations, and because it materializes places (such as theatre and convents) which, like the author, have been expelled from the English landscape. “Scientific”, because they contain characters who work as scientists and control space, time, nature and gender. “Queer”, for they are places of empowerment, eccentric timespans as compared to normative calendars and timetables, places of experiments with repressed desires through heterotopian spaces such as the mirror, the theatre, the metatheatre or the laboratory. “Of resignification”, for they are symbolic spaces built through a future-oriented gaze, whose objective is to resignify both public and private spaces of England and those places and times occupied in them by women.

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“Constant Belief, Without Inforcement or Blood-shed”: Engineering Conformity from *The Blazing-World* to *Robinson Crusoe*”

Among the various improvements implemented by the newly-installed empress in Margaret Cavendish’s *Description of a New World, Called the Blazing-World* (1668), few are more technologically-demanding than the bicameral chapel she has built—for the purpose of converting these foreign peoples to uniform belief “without enforcement or blood-shed.” As part of her larger endeavour to amend the “defect[s]” of policy and natural philosophy, the chapel—built of mined fire-stone and star-stone, actuated with “artificial pipes” and rotating chambers—is a feat of engineering genius, one that secures religious harmony by mechanizing her otherwise ephemeral rhetorical labors. Such a conception of religious harmony as a product of technological advances plays an important role in the political

discourse of the period, most notably in staging the “failure” of High Church intolerance, which is relegated to historical desuetude. In Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), “liberty of conscience” is situated, alongside his hand-crafted tents and canoes, within a trajectory that empowers him, through a technologically-enhanced performance of rule, to produce a uniquely indelible consent “without bloodshed.” This presentation examines how, in these narratives as much as in “Whiggish” historiography of the Enlightenment, situating liberty of conscience within a teleology of technological advancement often serves to justify the geopolitical privilege of England, whose political and economic superiority is imagined (ironically enough) as a reflection of their aversion to religious violence.

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“A Tale of Two Hermaphrodites: Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn”

In their careers as published authors, both Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn were openly labelled “hermaphrodites” by contemporaries, a term of abuse which asserted their failure to excel either as women or as men. For their coterie of admirers, in contrast, the literary combination of male and female traits had produced in them a praiseworthy blend of the best qualities of both sexes. This favourable view was directed to each writer’s literary productions, but not to her lifestyle: it was permissible to write in a blend of feminine and masculine styles, but not to behave in real life like a man trapped in a woman’s body. Yet literature and life were inextricably intertwined in many ways for both women, including the practice of transvestism and disguise, the use of bold or bawdy language, a preference for masculine subject matter (particularly science), the rejection of subordination in marriage, and the unfeminine urge for heroic fame and political power (whether vicarious or real). My aim in this paper will be to explore these practices of epicene behaviour in the two writers’ works and in their lives, in an effort to deepen our understanding of what it meant to be a public female author in seventeenth century England.

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“Victims or Victors? Presenting Early Modern Women to Modern Audiences”

[T]hinking it impossible we should have either learning or understanding, wit or judgement, as if we had not rational souls as well as men, and we out of a custom of dejectednesse think so too

- Margaret Cavendish, *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655)

This paper will consider the evolution of self-presentations by women authors from the Renaissance to the Restoration and how such representations compare with recent “costume dramas” on screen and on stage. In the above-quoted work, Cavendish argues that through a cycle of ignorance or “a custom of dejectednesse” women internalize a sense of inferiority and do not realize their intellectual and artistic capacities. Although modern society may applaud our comparatively more progressive attitudes towards women,

historical representations of early modern women in contemporary media suggest that only certain portrayals of historical womanhood are valued or considered marketable. In films, television series, and documentaries, many of which are inspired by or derived from historical novels, early modern women are frequently subject to sexual humiliation, rape, female rivalry, and victimization at the hands of powerful men. Disturbingly, many of these representations are not rooted in the historical record. While degrading representations of historical women are deemed to be “entertaining” by writers, producers, directors, and audiences alike, they provide to millions of viewers a skewed view of early modern women’s contribution to the production of culture and history. In doing so, contemporary media contribute to a “custom of dejectedness” in our own society, fuelling stereotypical notions that women’s oppression was so pervasive that they did not contribute to history and society in significant ways.

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“Between Hunting and Pursuing: Same-Sex Practices, Race, and Rank in Margaret Cavendish’s *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*”

Scholarship on Margaret Cavendish’s *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* has emphasized the female friendship between the Queen and Travellia and the racist depiction of purple and orange cannibals. The latter, however, have not yet been discussed in terms of their hunting practices, which work according to a gendered economy. Through a perspective that is historically-focused, lesbian-affirmative, and critical of Cavendish’s racist and elitist positions, I argue that the cannibals’ same-sex hunting functions as both the literalization of the Queen’s pursuit of Travellia as her Petrarchan beloved and the negative foil for their female friendship. Their relationship has a possible outcome: it can continue as long as the Queen marries the King and Travellia, the Prince. Conversely, the cannibals’ “uncivilized” practices are disavowed: while Travellia lives among them she puts an end to their gendered cannibalism. In *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*, same-sex practices are thus legitimized according to race and rank: a pursuit that leads to an aristocratic female friendship is established in the European-like kingdoms of Amity and Amour, whereas same-sex literal hunting, personified in the racialized figure of the “other,” is condemned.

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“What Nature would conceal”: Creativity and Performativity in the *Convent of Pleasure*”

The only thing, claims Lady Happy in Margaret Cavendish’s *Convent of Pleasure*, that frightens the soul “into active zeal” is imagination. In founding her curious Convent, this heroine, dissatisfied with gendered social roles, performs what Gilles Deleuze calls a “creative act as an act of resistance”, even though she ends up, as recognised by most critics, doomed to reiterate the heteronormative constraints she actively strove to avoid.

Her failure is, in a sense, a failure of translation: through rituals of performative utterances, she seeks to translate herself fully, but encounters the opposite push in her environment – akin to the strivings of many actual translators who heterosexualised Sappho – and (on the surface) lets herself down by failing to find expression for her imagined alternatives. Closely reading the *Convent of Pleasure* and examining Lady Happy’s effort to translate herself, this paper adds to the rich tradition of *Convent’s* critical interpretation by discussing creativity and performativity as interdependent agencies and argues that, in this text, Cavendish explores the capacity for creation through play and the role of desire as a disruptive force in attempts to give shape to an idea.

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“Space in the Poetry of Margaret Cavendish”

This presentation explores astronomy in Cavendish’s *Poems, and Fancies* and asks: how does Cavendish use space to write about the skies and the universe? It focuses on three key aspects of her work: the question of infinity, exploring Cavendish’s theories of multiple worlds; the centre of the universe, focusing on how Cavendish conceptualises the centre for both infinite worlds and the sun; and finally, physical matter, demonstrating how Cavendish’s universe is comprised of small matter, atoms, but also vacuums. Critical studies of her work are vast and varied in discipline, comprising of excellent scholarship in relation to rhetoric, publishing, politics, identity, and science, including some ground-breaking work on her *Poems, and Fancies*, from animals to the role of women, and mathematics. Although the scholarship of her *The Blazing World* has also focused on science, astronomy, and philosophy, her *Poems and Fancies*, have not been thoroughly explored through an astronomical viewpoint. Therefore, this paper takes a selection of poems from Cavendish’s *Poems, and Fancies* as its focus and couples them with Cavendish’s natural philosophy derived from her letters and works to suggest that her poetic work is scientific, whereby through writing Cavendish becomes a reader, experimenter, and theorist of the skies.

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“Utopian Fancies/ Dystopian Drama: Margaret Cavendish’s Lady Contemplation and *The Convent of Pleasure*”

Margaret Cavendish is clearly invested in creating strong female characters that in turn create fantastic worlds over which they can rule and simultaneously critique patriarchal structures of authority. We see this fantastical building explicitly in Cavendish’s utopian work of science fiction *The Blazing World*. Cavendish’s Empress rejects world framing patterns in favor of her own inventions. Such utopian fantasies or “fancies” as Cavendish would term them are also articulated in several of Cavendish’s plays through characters that Anna Battagelli labels contemplative cavaliers. The respective female cavaliers in Lady

Contemplation and *The Convent of Pleasure* mirror each other in their rejection of marriage and their desires to create alternative worlds. Lady Happy's material utopia, manifested in "Yard-thick" walls resemble a cabal of the mind in its enclosure of pleasures and entertainments devised by elite women. Lady Contemplation's opening musings about becoming an Empress and leaving a path of dead suitors in her wake resemble both the utopian ideals of Happy's convent and the Empress' storyline in *The Blazing World*. *Poor Virtue*, by comparison, moves us outside of enclosures in her cross-class-dressing as a farm maid and her trajectory engages with problems of exile perhaps more starkly if still fantastically than her fellow cavaliers'. I am particularly interested in how dramatic form in these two plays amplifies preoccupations with inner and outer worlds of contemplation and action and how this might map onto Cavendish's own experience of exile and her critical responses to her own dystopian landscape.

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"A Material Girl in an Immaterial World: Margaret Cavendish Imagines the Incorporal"

In her *Philosophical Letters*, Margaret Cavendish's epistolary persona succinctly explains: "Two bodies cannot be together in the same place, nor one body in two places at the same time." This insistence upon the unique manifestation of a body at any given time is consistent with the views Cavendish espouses throughout her philosophical explanations of bodies and motion: everything is matter; nothing is void; thus bodies cannot coexist in an interpenetrated state. Yet in *The Blazing World* Cavendish's dual avatars, the Empress and the scribe, simultaneously inhabit the (fictional) Duke's brain in a "Platonick Seraglio." Particularly when so much of *The Blazing World* repeats almost verbatim the philosophical theories that Cavendish has articulated elsewhere, how do we account for what seems to be a glaring contradiction of Cavendish's otherwise adamantly materialist philosophy when *The Blazing World* superimposes spirits within a single locus? I argue that turning to a fictional register in *The Blazing World* allows Cavendish to think beyond the bounds of her own philosophies, imaginatively exploring the immaterial elements that, in her less fanciful works, she insists do not exist or cannot behave in precisely the ways she then fictively illustrates. Indeed, fiction may even require precisely the immaterial multiplicity that Cavendish's real-world philosophy forbids: as the writer engenders multiple personae cohabitating within her mind (and later, within the reader's), Cavendish models precisely the phenomenon at work in the imagination that she disbars from the real world.

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“Margaret Cavendish and the Public”

This paper deals with the concept of the public in the work of Margaret Cavendish. How does it function? What does it enable? What expectations does it give rise to? What are its limits? How is it related to the notions of the private and the social in her texts? I will take Cavendish’s collection of speeches in *Orations of Divers Sorts, Accommodated to Divers Places* (1662) as a starting point. Here political, philosophical and existential matters are discussed from various perspectives. As a whole *Orations* could be described as Cavendish’s own creation of a public space in which a multiple voiced and hypothetical discussion could take place. The use of rhetoric and speeches from different genres made it possible for Cavendish to be sharp in opinions without taking sides. Still, she broke the rule of Classical rhetoric by introducing multiple voices. So, what were her public rhetorical strategies? It is well known that interventions of women in the republic of letters and the philosophical debate in early modern times were questioned. Those who dared were forced to reflect upon the public as a space and a place for action and reaction. In my paper I will compare Cavendish’s attitudes with other women thinkers of the age, such as her English compatriots Anne Conway and Mary Astell, and also the Swedish poets Sofia Elisabeth Brenner and Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht.

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“‘Not a flattering Parasite, but a true friend’: Margaret Cavendish and the Dynamics of Patronage”

In the last line of the first part of *The New Blazing World*, Margaret Cavendish’s avatar, the Empress, commends the soul of the Duchess for being a true friend and not a flattering parasite. Using the language of patronage, the system of societal relations which determined preference and hierarchy in the seventeenth century, Cavendish declared herself, through the praises bestowed by her own fictional persona, her own patron. In previous works, Cavendish had become adept at using the protocols of patronage – first through her family’s position, and then by claiming the support of the universities, and then by challenging the ideas of other more famous natural philosophers -- to insinuate herself into the honorific world of the seventeenth century. She had learned how to use her position as a learned lady to counterbalance the disrespect and disregard with which she and her works were regarded. But as she produced more serious philosophic treatises in the 1660s, her own self-regard and self-confidence increased: she could almost literally become her own favorite and integrate an imperial persona into her consciousness through the union of Empress and Duchess. Patronage gave Cavendish the tools she needed to push the impartial world into the recognition that she demanded. She became her own patron

and client, the writer and subject of her own work, and the giver and receiver of favors and fame, liberating herself from dependence on anybody else but herself.

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“Breeding Confusion: The Role of Opposite Motions in Cavendish's Metaphysics”

In the recent philosophical literature on Cavendish, Deborah Boyle and Karen Detlefsen have argued that God plays a role in establishing normative standards for order, natural kinds, and proper motions in nature, while Lisa Walters and David Cunning have advanced Cavendish interpretations on which God plays no such role. The debate is slightly complicated by Cavendish's claim that opposing actions (apparently including disorderly or at least disordering actions) are necessary to the overall harmony of nature. While all agree that Cavendish believes this claim, none have attempted to fully reconstruct her argument for it. Here I present such a reconstruction. As Cavendish puts her argument for the necessity of opposing actions, “opposition” ensures that nature does not “run into extremes” which would “breed a horrid confusion in nature” (*Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (henceforth OEP), 2.20; see also OEP, 1.27; 1.31; 1.37, Q6 and Q10; 2.6; and 3.4, as well as *Grounds of Natural Philosophy*, 1.14, 2.10 and 3.1). While she does not tell us explicitly why running into extremes would breed confusion, my reconstruction connects her thinking here with her argument against atomism in OEP. The reconstruction also points towards positive resources for accounting for normativity, without appealing to God.

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“Cavendish, Worldmaking, and the Unreliable Narrator”

While Cavendish's *Blazing World* may correctly be understood to model an early iteration of an enduring form of genre literature—in this case, science fiction—she was also moving in the direction of a new verisimilitude, one that relies more on a dramatization of human psychology than on believable “facts” or histories – a point that will provide a more nuanced sense of the rootedness of the later English novel in the narratives of its immediate seventeenth-century predecessors. With respect to Cavendish specifically, there is no particular need to limit this backward glance to *The Blazing World* (though I do so here) since her oeuvre is so generically diverse. For instance, we might wonder how our historical understanding of Samuel Richardson's epistolary novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747–48) might be enhanced, were we to read them in light of Cavendish's *Sociable Letters* (1664); or in relation to *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* (1656) and *The Blazing World*, where female protagonists are seen as prey yet exercise agency and independence of mind despite their difficult circumstances. Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) might take on interesting evolutionary hues in light of Cavendish's heroine-become-empress who, after successful

ventures in another land, returns to subdue her home world and its male authorities. What happens to our understanding of parody when the Houyhnhnms and Yahoos of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) gaze back at *The Blazing World's* coterie of animal-men philosophers? Does Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) borrow the strategy of the intrusive narrator from Cavendish's early models? Might Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) humorously take from Cavendish as well as Cervantes? Or consider Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where revivification—and the question of what defines a soul—echoes Cavendish's imagined possibilities for "soulification" in *Observations*. Would we appreciate Jane Austen's matchless dialogue even more were it set alongside Cavendish's epistolary fiction, *Sociable Letters*, where we encounter the same "paradoxical form of an impersonal intimacy" that is at once "a kind of perspective and simultaneously the way that perspective is developed within the text"? (60). These questions are the unexplored backdrop for what follows, which is a foray into one particular aspect of Cavendish's narrative fiction meant to aid in future, more thoroughgoing, considerations of *The Blazing World* in the history of the novel: her development of the unreliable narrator and the specific social critiques implied by its use.

-D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen or, The Secret of Style* (Princeton, NJ: 2003).

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"Cavendish's Philosophy of the Passions: Theory and Practice"

In her 'Epiloge to my Philosophical Opinions' of the *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), Margaret Cavendish denies any intimate acquaintance with the views of French philosopher René Descartes. But then, later in the same essay, she admits that she has read half of his 'book of passion'. Here it is likely that Cavendish refers to the 1650 English translation of Descartes' *Passions de l'âme* (1649), a work that addresses problems to do with mind-body interaction and the human capacity for rational self-control. In this paper, we trace the influence of this classic Cartesian text—the primary source of Descartes' physiological and ethical views about the emotions—on Cavendish's *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* of 1655 and 1663. In part six of her later work, a revised and expanded version of the earlier title, Cavendish espouses her theory of the passions, those disturbing emotional states of the mind, such as love, hatred, anger, joy, and hope. Our purpose will be to show that Cavendish does not simply adopt Descartes' theory of the passions, but also adapts it for her own purposes, more specifically by conforming it to a materialist metaphysics; accordingly, her writings demonstrate that the Cartesian theory makes better sense in a materialist rather than a dualist framework.

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“The Integrated Margaret Cavendish”

The scholarship on Margaret Cavendish more reflects the differing disciplines and perspectives of individual scholars and less the central nature of her intellectual nature and arguments. Understanding Cavendish is no simple task. We have virtually no personal correspondence remaining, and, among what remains we have little that attempts to understand herself or her intellectual life. Many authors have tried to fill this void by extracting information from the text of her published works, but this paper argues that one can learn more from the introductory materials to her works that both offer clues as to her nature and discuss explicitly her intellectual goals and ambitions. All of this fails to recognize sufficiently how Margaret Cavendish, significantly more than other writers, worked hard to clarify both what she thought and why she wrote what she did.

The one theme that runs through all these introductory materials (and there were many with some works having ten to fifteen prefaces or letters to her readers) is her combined sense of inferiority and desire to be considered a serious thinker. She thought long and hard about how to convince those who doubted her talent or seriousness that she was the scholar, philosopher and writer that they did not acknowledge. This effort moved between setting the highest goals for her intellectual reputation, her work being “remembered for the ages” or her simply being able to convince her critics that she could be a good wife and still devote time to learning and writing. She had much working against her—a mother who did not encourage (or provide for) her daughters to pursue serious learning, an encouraging husband but a part of a society which would never recognize her as a philosopher, and finally, being caught up in the politics of the Civil War which led to the loyal royalist William Cavendish losing his estates, their going into exile, while she remained a lukewarm supporter of the crown—at best. Even as the most prolific writer among women (and mostly men as well) during the 1600s she never felt secure as an intellectual.

This paper will focus on her personal and intellectual bobbing and weaving, trying to please others and thus garner respect, while holding independent and often outlandish views about gender or the nature and worth of early modern science. She blended a positive and self-indulgent upbringing with marriage to a supportive husband but with a family who was suspicious of her. In addition, as positive as he was about her writings, William’s most important goal was to produce sons that “he was so desirous of male issue...although they came to be persons of the meanest fortunes”, and this posed a health risk for her, if ultimately no children. Basically, her introductions make clear that she held strong views about herself and her works but doubted that the broader society and her readers either understood or respected her or her writings. It is this conflict that is at the centre of this paper.

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“Women ‘die like Worms’: Cavendish Responds to Gendered Violence”

Margaret Cavendish may be the original “Nasty woman.” As such, she makes an ideal pedagogical counterpoint to teaching an English literary canon full of violence against women. From Shakespeare’s *Rape of Lucrece* (1594) and Montaigne’s *Essays* (trans. 1603) to Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* (1688), early modern writers regularly portray the female ideal as chaste, submissive, and willing to die for obedience or honor. When a female character fails to demonstrate these qualities, she is swiftly—and often brutally—punished. Wayward women who escape punishment—Britomart, Viola, Portia, Rosalind, and Travellia, for example—do so while disguised as men, raising questions related to gender performativity and a contemporary awareness of inequity. From treatises on witchcraft and female conduct to essays, poems, and plays, this literary violence serves as a control mechanism, guiding women towards ‘appropriate’ behavior; the longterm results of which continue to play out today. This paper examines Cavendish’s pointed—and at times, angry—response to gendered violence in *The World’s Olio* (1655) and *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* (1656), ending with a discussion of pedagogical approaches—including alternatives to teaching canonized violence—that engages responsibly with the #MeToo movement.

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“Philosophy as Fiction in *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (1668)”

The final and most concise statement of Cavendish’s metaphysics, *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (1668) has just recently begun to attract the attention of historians of science and philosophy—and rightly so. While ostensibly “a second,” “much altered” edition of *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), *Grounds* is in fact an entirely new work that aptly illustrates Cavendish’s development as a philosopher from the 1650s (with *PPO*) to the Restoration period. While its arguments about nature are generally in accordance with those we find in her later, Restoration work, including *Observations* and *Philosophical Letters* (1664), *Grounds* states her philosophical system more succinctly than these texts and also includes a fascinating appendix that contains five conjectural sections devoted to such ideas as the possibility of alternate, “Irregular” worlds; “Restoring-Beds, or Wombs,” that bring life to annihilated bodies; and the distinctions between nature and God (with this section constituting Cavendish’s most sustained attempt to reconcile her philosophy and Christianity). In outlining her most advanced philosophical ideas and, at the same time, entertaining wildly experimental concepts, *Grounds* beautifully illustrates Cavendish’s ongoing investment in the value of imaginative thought. This paper will focus on the ways in which *Grounds* strains modern concepts of “philosophy,” and even more specifically on how Cavendish weaves fiction into *Grounds* in ways that demonstrate her commitment to isolating the outer fringes of what is known and knowable. In her appendix, specifically,

Cavendish foregrounds the radically provisional nature of human knowledge by making light of her *own* thinking and writing, and, specifically, equating her philosophy to pure fantasy. In other words, she anticipates and dramatizes the condemnation of her own system to illustrate its radical contingency, which is, of course, an essential aspect of her philosophical thinking. All told, Cavendish's self-positioning in *Grounds* shows her unique self-awareness as a philosopher and her recognition of the ways in which philosophy and fiction necessarily collide.

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“Fancy and Prophecy: Cavendish and 17th Century Prophetic Women”

In Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” she suggests that women exist in the periphery of male-dominated societies, and therefore have limited power and agency, not only because men govern their patriarchal societies, but also because other women refuse to hear them. This paper will investigate Cavendish's use of fancy in *The Blazing World*, alongside 17th Century prophetic women writers who were able to get both men and women in their societies to listen to them through the divinely authoritative voice of prophecy. Though prophecy and fancy are different in many respects, they are similar in that both engage in the metaphysical realm via a type of hallucination, whereby visions of an alternate reality are experienced. Where early Protestant prophetic women writers, such as Anna Trapnell and Margaret Fell Fox, used their divinely ordained gift of prophecy to question political, social and religious power dynamics within their societies, Cavendish similarly uses fancy in *The Blazing World* to create a new world where the female Empress not only dictates the rules of science and politics, but also inhabits a priest-like role in order to restructure and govern the religion of her new world.

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“The Image of Margaret Cavendish in Soviet and Russian Literary Scholarship and History of Science”

This paper aims at analyzing the representation of Margaret Cavendish in Pre-Soviet, Soviet and Post-Soviet Russia. Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle was largely ignored by Russian and Soviet literary scholars; she was not mentioned in the academic histories of English literature at all. Nevertheless, we can follow the rise of the awareness about Cavendish in Russia from the earliest reference to her in Brothers' Demidov Travels to Europe in the mid-eighteenth century and short entries in early Russian encyclopedias from

the nineteenth century to the wide discussion of her achievements in the early twenty-first century. Special attention is going to be paid to Cavendish's image of a literary critic in the book on classical art published in 1973, to the representation of her as an important woman writer in the articles and dissertations by Maria Bulanakova, Olga Ovcharova and Irina Erlikhson at the beginning of the new millennium, and to her role of a woman amateur scientist in the works by Inna Lisovich and Elena Zaitseva-Baum among others.

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“Women’s Friendship in *The Blazing World*”

While the most evident utopia in Margaret Cavendish's *A Description of a New World Called the Blazing World* is the Blazing World itself, women's friendship acts an alternative utopia to that which the Empress finds ready-made. This paper argues that Cavendish drew from the conventions of the romance genre to mobilize women's friendship, a concept that was philosophically “no-place” in her time, as a figure for utopia, which etymologically means “a good place that is nowhere.” As the friendship between the Duchess and the Empress visualizes the joining of different individuals, it signifies both absolutism and Cavendish's scientific theory of a vitalistic natural world. However, at the same time, the competition and jealousy that arise between these women also convey skepticism towards such ideals of unity. Women's friendship, therefore, serves as a site of critical utopia in *The Blazing World*: it at once reinforces the political and scientific values of the Blazing World and puts them to question. Examining women's friendship in *The Blazing World* can shed new light not only on Cavendish's notion of utopia but also on the relationship between the genres of utopia and romance in her work and on early modern women's friendship more broadly.

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“As the last walls dissolved’: portals to other worlds in Margaret Cavendish’s plays and fiction”

‘We were in that place which might present us with anything...’ (Lessing 189)
‘showing [] the way out of this collapsed little world into another order of world altogether.’
(Lessing 190)

This paper draws on the concluding events of Doris Lessing's dystopian futurist fiction *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) as a starting point for exploration of portals and transitions to new or alternate, woman-oriented worlds in Margaret Cavendish's plays and fiction. Margaret Cavendish is rightly celebrated as a pioneering science fiction writer in English for her prose work *The Blazing World* (1666). Portals or doorways into other worlds are a recognised key generic trope of science fiction and fantasy. This paper investigates ways in

which Cavendish may have anticipated this trope, not only in her fiction but also in her plays. This paper will also cross reference Ursula Le Guin's provocative short story 'Sur' (1982), an alternative feminist history of polar exploration in which a collective of early C20 women discreetly pioneer discovery of the South Pole. Le Guin's fiction will equally be used as a starting point for considering Cavendish's alternately gendered stagings of exploration and heroism.

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"Panaceas and Butterflies: Cavendish on Universal Remedies"

Margaret Cavendish's philosophical observations leave us in little doubt as to her opinion about the feasibility of a universal remedy, or cure for all diseases. In the *Philosophical Letters* (1664) and in the *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666) respectively, she decries universal remedies as consisting "rather in hope and expectation, then in assurance," mere philosophical fictions "except it be proved, that all kinds of Diseases whatsoever, proceed from one cause; which I am sure can never be done, by reason there is as much variety in the causes of diseases, as in the diseases themselves." It's her prose fiction, *The Blazing World* (1666), that puts these otherwise definitive pronouncements back into question. There, in the capacious framework of her imaginary world, Cavendish stages an extended reflection on what an ideal panacea would look like: a chewable organic gum that gently, progressively, yet radically purges the aged body, producing a hard cocoon-like shell, that, in nine months' time, releases a fresh youthful body. Rather than remedy all diseases, like the philosopher's stone of the alchemists, Cavendish's panacea restores lapsed youth, effectively eliminating the bio-political problems posed by reproduction and fertility, succession and inheritance, age and youth. Lest the fictionality of the passage should strike readers as merely bizarre, this paper examines the depth of Cavendish's engagement with early modern scientific debates around universal remedies. On the one hand, the passage reflects her broader ambition to overstep the Paracelsian and Helmontian projects of synthesizing 'chymical' panaceas and develop instead a 'natural' medicine, a project that came to be shared by the likes of Everard Maynwaring, England's most voluble proponent of universal remedies and chronic gentle purging. On the other hand, Cavendish's fictional panacea echoes her observations of butterflies in the process of metamorphosis. Substituting chrysalis for chrysopoeia, Cavendish places herself in conversation with a now-neglected tradition of early English entomologists, from Thomas Muffet to the Lady Eleanor Glanville, whose contributions to natural history deserve to be better celebrated and better understood. This paper therefore aims to contextualize Cavendish's complex treatment of panaceas within these larger natural-historical and medical developments of the early modern period. It also builds on recent scholarship surrounding Cavendish's medical biography in order to hypothesize more local, more intimate reasons for Cavendish's interest in theorizing panaceas, especially the age gap between the Duchess and her significantly older husband.

Roundtable:

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“A Roundtable Discussion on Biography and Fictionalized Biography of Early Modern Women Writers and Visual Artists.”

This roundtable will consider the relationship between biography and various sorts of fictionalized biographies of women writers and visual artists. The three panellists will each make brief introductory remarks: Hofrichter will deal with the problems of transforming the life of an actual painter from the 17th century, Judith Leyster, into that of a character in a novel. Miller will discuss her experience representing the life of Mary Sidney in a bio-fiction novel as part of a series of novels about women authors in early modern England titled Shakespeare’s Sisters. Fitzmaurice will examine the life of Margaret Cavendish as shaped by the novelists Danielle Dutton and Siri Hustvedt. The bulk of the session will be devoted to discussion among the panellists, as well as the audience, regarding the rewards and challenges of fictionalizing the lives of early modern women writers and visual artists.