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"Margaret the First": Rebelling Against Gendered Modes of Utopian Writing

Emma Cornwell

"MARGARET THE FIRST":
REBELLING AGAINST GENDERED MODES OF
UTOPIAN WRITING

by

EMMA CORNWELL

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PROFESSOR PRAKAS
PROFESSOR KOENIGS

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"Oh, I'm just a girl trying to find a place in this world."

— Taylor Swift, "A Place in This World"

INTRODUCTION

Critics often gesture to utopian works as being necessarily masculine or necessarily feminine, yet they never seem to fully articulate what defines each of these categories. So, what has remained implicit in these criticisms must become explicit. While texts may be authored by a male or a female, the masculine and feminine modes of utopian writing are not necessarily interested in the author's agency within the text but rather with what takes places within the stories themselves.

The major distinction between the feminine mode of utopian writing and the masculine mode of utopian writing lies in the intersection between the location of the utopia and the relationships formed between the utopia's inhabitants. First of all, masculine utopias exist outside of the world in which we live, while feminine utopias are located either within this world or within microcosms of this world. Furthermore, masculine utopias feature characters who utilize their own experiences and terms as a means of explaining and describing the geographic location of the utopia in an attempt to assert their authority over it and establish a hierarchy of power. While feminine utopias, on the other hand, highlight the importance of relationships within the setting, particularly of female friendships and female friendship networks which frequently display a happy acceptance of inequity among the inhabitants, and position the location as the occasion for these relationships. Feminine utopias, then, because they are not interested in conquest in the way that masculine utopias are, suggest that this mode of retirement to a microcosm is significant and implicitly better than the world in which we

live and, moreover, that they have something the rest of the world wants to and ought to emulate.

Furthermore, regardless of the gender of the author, male and female utopian characters tend to act in the same ways. Male utopian characters are interested in finding, conquering, and attempting to get something from the utopia before returning to their homeland. This means that they are not interested in cultivating a social relationship with the people who reside in the utopias they travel to. But female utopian characters are inherently social beings. They do not receive or even search for any sort of benefits from outside of the utopian community in which they reside. Ultimately, each of these characters exhibit the same sorts of values and actions whether they were written by a male or female author.

However, Margaret Cavendish, a female author of two utopian texts: "The Convent of Pleasure" and *The Blazing World,* seems to subvert this gendered binary of utopian writing and even of utopian characters. Although she is a female author herself and her works are, in one manner, continuous with the feminine mode of utopian writing because they suggest that her utopias are better than the world in which we live and that we ought to emulate them, Cavendish is not completely in line with this mode. Indeed, she also utilizes components of the masculine mode of utopian writing. The main character of *The Blazing World*, the Empress, despite being female herself, can eventually be categorized as a typical male utopian character. But again, she is not completely in line with the masculine mode of utopian writing either. Therefore, Cavendish ultimately exists outside of this gendered binary by drawing strategies from both of them.

SECTION ONE:

DEFINING MASCULINE AND FEMININE MODES OF UTOPIAN WRITING

In "Navigating Past, Potential, and Paradise: The Gendered Epistemologies of Discovery and Creation in Francis Godwin's *Man in the Moone* and Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*," Jennifer Mi-Young Park asserts that it is a masculine mode of writing, and indeed of masculine utopian writing, to utilize one's own experiences and terms as a means of explaining and describing a place, specifically through their use of language. Masculine utopian works seek to explore and uncover the truths about the places in which they take place. Protagonists of these types of works speak with authority as they use methods such as science and philosophy to explain the utopian setting around them. That is to say, these characters arrive at the utopian setting, observe the ways in which it is good, and impose their own terminology onto it, thus conquering the land by making it fit into their own ideals.

Francis Godwin's protagonist in *The Man in the Moone*, Domingo Gonsales, is an explorer. Gonsales informs his readers from the very opening lines that "it is well enough and sufficiently knowone to all the countries of *Andaluzia,* that… *Domingo Gonsales* was born of Noble parentage, and that in the renowned city of *Sivill,* to wit in the yeare 1552," and he continues to give an even further detailed history of himself (Godwin, 69). Gonsales is named, he has a known history, and it is this sense of "complete, precise knowing" which Park asserts "can be coded as male-oriented" (Park, 121). However, Park fails to acknowledge that masculine characters do not need to be necessarily known or given a history in order to assert their authority. This history gives Gonsales credibility

as an explorer and being an explorer is specifically masculine. However, it is not Gonsales' history that constitutes his masculine character. It is his intentions of exploration and conquest that do.

The masculine mode of utopian writing locates the utopias they describe as somewhere other than this world in which we live. Ultimately, it is this otherworldliness which gives rise to challenges for the male protagonist, such as his inability to speak the native language. This posits the utopia and its inhabitants as other, giving the male protagonist an incentive to attempt to conquer the land and to take its customs and practices back to his homeland. In locating these utopias elsewhere, masculine utopian works suggest that utopias are geographic locations which need to be discovered, and moreover, conquered by protagonists who hail from the world in which we live as a means of learning how to better their homelands.

The utopia that Domingo Gonsales travels to is explicitly positioned as a place which is outside of the world in which we live. In his note "To the Ingenious Reader," Gonsales tells his readers that he "hast here a new discovery of a new *world"* (Godwin, 67, emphasis in original). And later in his tale, he proclaims his "arrivall in that New World of the Moone" (Godwin, 97). Gonsales makes it very clear that the utopia he claims to discover is outside of our world, by frequently reaffirming it newness and by virtue of the fact that it is the moon of our earth. This locating of utopia as outside of our known world is reflective of the greater masculine utopian tradition.

The otherworldliness of the land described in *Utopia* is made clear in the novel's title page. Thomas More asserts that the land described by his narrator, Hythloday, is "the Best Form of a Commonwealth" which can be found on "the *New* Island of Utopia"

(More, 1, emphasis added). Although the island of Utopia may be situated on our Earth, it is certainly not a part of the world in which we live. It is new, since it is undoubtedly a creation of More's invention, but it is still suggested that it is present on our known concept of Earth since it is accessible by sea. To get there one must travel through "channels [which] are known only to the Utopians themselves, and hence it hardly ever happens that a foreigner enters the bay without a Utopian pilot" (More, 52-53). At first glance, Utopia appears to be an island situated in our world, but, by suggesting that it is an entirely new island, it is clear that it is a land which was created from nothing but Thomas More's authorial imagination. The island of Utopia, therefore, is framed simultaneously as being seemingly of this planet but also as a novel world. And because of this novelty, it can be classified as a geographic location that is not a real place in the world in which we live, ultimately demonstrating a way in which *Utopia* is an inherently masculine utopian text.

Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, however, seems to subvert this mode of positioning utopia as outside of our own world or as a novel space within it. Instead, the narrator offers a detailed chronicle of his ship's course which seems to suggest that the utopia exists within the world in which we live and as we know it. He writes that he and his crew "sailed from Peru… for China and Japan, by the South Sea" (Bacon, 2). By explicitly naming countries which undoubtedly exists in our world, the narrator implies that Bensalem, too, exists in the world in which we live. But despite this, *The New Atlantis* does not totally disrupt the masculine mode of utopian writing. Indeed, critics have "usually read [*The New Atlantis*] as an allegorical fable, a political blueprint for society in which happiness could be reached through scientific and technological

development and a strict social separation of labour" (Cottegnies, 77). This is clear in the work's ending and the natives of Bensalem giving the narrator permission to take what he has learned in Bensalem and "to publish it for the good of other nations" (Bacon, 28). Therefore, it is logical to assume that *The New Atlantis* is indeed "an allegorical fable," rendering it as inherently outside the world in which we live because it is merely an allegory and not, as the work seems to suggest, a real location in our world (Cottegnies, 77). As a work which is meant simply to showcase ideals, it is clear to the reader that this utopia is an entirely new land which does not exist but which, like More's invention of the island of Utopia, is the creation of Bacon as an author. Therefore, although it is posited as existing in our world, the utopia of Bensalem is actually a new land which does not actually exist and is merely an ideal.

Because these geographic locations of masculine utopian texts exist outside of the known world in which we live, male protagonists of these works are described as explorers who discover them. And ultimately, through the process of believing themselves to discover this already inhabited place, these male protagonists attempt to conquer these utopias and establish a hierarchy in which they are at the top, above the native inhabitants.

Upon his lunar arrival in *The Man in the Moone*, Domingo Gonsales encounters a challenge that needs to be met, as he cannot speak the lunar language. And so, by imposing the language that he needs to define what he finds, he posits a sort of conquest of the utopia. Gonsales' own language fails him in his immediate attempt to describe the color of the moon. He cannot identify it in positive terms but instead described it using negative terms which he can identify. He notes that it is "neither blacke nor white, yellow

nor redd, greene nor blue, nor any colour composed of these… it [is] a colour never seen in our earthly world, and therefor neither to be described unto us by any, nor to be conceived of one that never saw it" (Godwin, 104). In an attempt to impose his own knowledge onto this new place and since his native language is not applicable here, Gonsales must employ his own terminology, even if he can only categorize what the moon is not rather than what it is. In doing this, Gonsales implies that his knowledge is superior, and thus he situates himself as a hierarchal authority. It is this sort of mindset that utopias need to be uncovered by an outsider which defines the masculine mode of utopian writing.

Hythloday, the narrator of *Utopia*, imposes his own terminology on the world he tells of as well. In his note to Peter Giles at the beginning of the text, author Thomas More notes that when transcribing what Hythloday relayed to him, "there was no need to strive for eloquence, since [Hythloday's] language could hardly be polished, first because it [is] informal and extemporaneous, and also because he is a person… not well versed in Latin as in Greek" (More, 3). Therefore, because Hythloday does not speak very eloquently, he needs to describe Utopia using his "informal and extemporaneous" language when speaking about it to More (More, 3). In this way, Hythloday uncovers truths about and explains Utopian society using his own terminology. And thus, Hythloday posits his story as a conquest of Utopia itself, since Utopian culture and Utopian practices would not be known if he had not described them using his ineloquent language. With this, Hythloday asserts a sort of entitlement to Utopia, which even Thomas More himself cannot claim, as he is the only one who can tell its story and of its practices.

As for the narrator of *The New Atlantis,* language is not an issue, since the native people of Bensalem provide the sailors with a "scroll… written in in ancient Hebrew, and in ancient Greek, and in good Latin of the school, and in Spanish" (Bacon, 3). However, this does not prevent him from utilizing his own terminology and experiences as a means of conquest. In fact, the sailors are only let into Bensalem because they are Christians themselves. Even in this new land, the sailors find themselves "amongst a Christian people, full of piety and humanity" (Bacon, 6). Because it is "known to few, and yet kn[ows] most of the nations of the world," Bensalem already has "the languages of Europe, and kn[ows] much of [its] state and business" (Bacon, 9-10). The utopia of Bensalem, then, does not need the narrator's terminology to be imposed onto it because it already utilizes it. Ultimately, this implies that Bensalem does not need to be taken over by the narrator and his fellow European sailors in the same way that Gonsales feels the need to utilize his language to make a sort of conquest of his lunar utopia. But because the utopia and its people already possess the greatness of European society, there is no need for the narrator and his fellow sailors to impose it on them or posit and sort of conquest of the land.

So ultimately, language is utilized by these male protagonists as a mode of conquering utopia and asserting hierarchal power over the native people. The project of the male utopian character, then, is found in the intersection between his attempt to gain something by discovering and conquering the utopia and his lack of engagement with the residents of that utopia. In both *The Man in the Moone* and *Utopia,* engagement with the lunar and Utopian people is mainly implied in the text and is not explicitly described by either narrator. There is no mention of any prolonged interaction with the beings that

already dwell there. Both Gonsales and Hythloday recount their stories as if they were merely observers of these worlds.

The narrator of *The New Atlantis*, on the other hand, describes his participation in extended social contact with the people on Bensalem. However, despite being social with the native people, he remains an observer of the utopia. He acquires as much knowledge as he can from his time by attending rituals, learning of their customs, and exploring the land before returning home, ultimately suggesting that his time there as a sort of vacation on which he "lived most joyfully… enough to make [him] forget all that was dear to [him] in [his] own country" (Bacon, 15). He is merely a visitor in Bensalem who sets out to notice "what [is] to be seen in the city and places adjacent… and continually [was] met with many things right worth of observation and relation" (Bacon, 15). Therefore, while he engages with the utopian residents, he never does so in a manner that is anything but educational and observational. So, like Domingo Gonsales and Hythloday, the narrator of *The New Atlantis* is simply an observer of utopia. He does not seek to build relationships or become a part of the community of this utopia, but rather he wishes to obtain knowledge from the community which has been already established there and bring it back to his homeland.

Because they do not seek to actually join these utopian communities, male utopian characters also maintain that their ultimate goal is to finally return to their respective homelands where they will share the knowledge that they have acquired from their travels. Gonsales, Hythloday, and the narrator of *The New Atlantis* all posit their voyages as times which will eventually end, even if that does not actually happen. Hythloday's return home is implied by his relaying of his tale and his knowledge to

Thomas More who then transcribes it for other to read. And the narrator of *The New Atlantis'* homecoming is implied in the people of Bensalem bidding him farewell, saying "God bless this relation… I give thee leave to publish it for the good of other nations" (Bacon, 28). With this ending, the people of Bensalem implore the sailors go back to their homeland with all that they have learned in their time there, to write it down, and even to publish it for others to read and learn from. Therefore, in retelling the story of his travels by actually writing *The New Atlantis*, it is implied that the narrator ultimately made a successful return to his homeland.

However, in *The Man in the Moone*, Domingo Gonsales never makes his final voyage home because he is held captive in China on his way back. But this is not a subversion of Gonsales as a male utopian character because indeed it was never his intention to not complete his journey. Before he even departs, Gonsales affirms to his readers that once he returns, he will bring with him the knowledge and teach them about the "most rare and incredible secrets of Nature, that all the Philosophers of former ages could never so much as dream of" (Godwin, 73). Throughout the text, too, he repeatedly asserts that he will tell of his journey once he is back. And furthermore, he frequently mentions his wife and children who are back at home waiting for him. Therefore, it was always Gonsales' ambition to return home, still marking him as a classic male utopian character.

But unlike these masculine utopian works in which the protagonists desire to return to their homelands and do not intend to engage in the utopian community but seek merely to learn from it for their own benefit, feminine utopian works focus on the relationships between the utopia's inhabitants and the specifically all-female

communities which they describe. And furthermore, while masculine utopian works take place in an otherworldly or novel location, feminine utopian works and their communities exist within a microcosm of the world in which we already live and as we already know it.

The poems of Katherine Philips demonstrate a perfect example of feminine utopian writing. Several of Philips' poems prioritize small, intimate spaces for her friendships to thrive in. For example, in her poem "A Retir'd Friendship, to Ardelia," Philips addresses her friend and elates that "in one another's hearts we live" (Philips, 32). In another poem entitled "L'amitié: To Mrs. M. Awbrey," she writes "thy heart locks up my secrets richly set,/ And my brest is thy private cabinet" (Philips, 9-10). These intimate settings, while seemingly restrictive, are actually indicative of what is so quintessential about female utopian writing. Only here, in these intimate settings situated in the world in which we live, can relationships thrive, since they are safe from the wretchedness of the rest of the world. Again, Philips' poems exemplify the ways in which female utopian works suggest that there is no need to find a new place and conquer it but rather it is better to retire to a microcosm of the world in which we live on order for female friendship to occur and to flourish. In "Authorship, Friendship, and Forms of Publication in Katherine Philips," Hillary Menges asserts that "rather than being isolating, this retired exclusivity paradoxically fosters a communicative freedom" and describes the "liberating potential of restricted spaces" (Menges, 520). Feminine utopian writing, then, emphasizes relationships and sees place as the reason for these relationships are able to flourish. Although Philips is not writing overtly utopic poetry, she can be classified as a writing in the feminine mode of utopian writing because she does not explicitly employ another

genre and because her poems, like feminine utopias, take place in the world in which we live.

Female utopian characters, then, are not interested in conquest or in acquiring knowledge for the betterment of their homelands. Indeed, unlike their male counterparts, these female utopian characters have to need or desire to find another otherworldly place in order to have utopia. On the contrary, they seek to retire actually from their homelands into idealized microcosms of the world in which they already live and have no intention of ever returning. Therefore, female utopian texts ultimately suggest that this sort of conquest is unnecessary, since utopia can be actually created and fostered within these microcosms of the world.

These feminine utopias are not only the location in which these relationships occur, but the way in which they are able to come about. Feminine utopian settings take place in a wide diversity of locations, ranging from entire worlds to singular rooms. But for the feminine mode of female utopian writing, location is important only insofar as it brings about relationship and allows it to flourish. Sarah Scott's novel *Millenium Hall* describes an all-female utopian institution in which several women of varying ages, backgrounds, and economic status live together in perfect harmony. In the Hall, the women share property, share responsibility, and emphasize the education of one another. The novel then suggests that this successful community stems from the piety the women share through their education, their communal residence in the Hall, and their mutual support of one another. It is the Millenium Hall itself, then, that produces these relationships by bringing these women of unequal status together and that provides a

space which allows this network of female friendship to succeed, marking it as a specifically feminine utopia.

In feminine utopian works, then, there is a happy acceptance of inequity in the community. This is a sharp contrast from the male utopian characters who actually strive for inequity in their attempts to conquer utopia and establish themselves as hierarchal authorities. Perhaps it the most vital aspect of the community in *Millenium Hall* is the fact that while there is still inequity among the residents, there is no dominance of one woman over the other.

In "Utopian Exchanges: Negotiating Difference in Utopia", Lee Khanna asserts that the female friendship network of *Millenium Hall* "enunciates an exchange of giving and receiving relevant to the utopian premise of [the novel]" (Khanna, 26). While the women living in the Hall have varying financial circumstances, the constantly share and help one another. While Miss Mancel and Miss Melvyn are both in school, Miss Mancel has more financial stability and access to a private tutor. Miss Mancel, then, offers to may for Miss Melvyn to enjoy these benefits as well, but Miss Melvyn rejects her offer. Miss Mancel views this rejection as an absence of friendship from Miss Melvyn. After Miss Mancel makes her hurt feelings known, Miss Melvyn realizes

> that the greatest proof of a noble mind is to feel a joy in gratitude; for those who know all the pleasures of conferring an obligation will be sensible that by accepting it they give the highest delight the human mind can feel, when employed on human objects; and therefore while they receive a benefit, they will taste not only the comforts arising from it to themselves, but share the gratification of a benefactor, from reflecting on the joy they give to those who have conferred it: thus the receiver of a favour from a truly generous person, by owing owes not, and is at once indebted and discharged (Scott, 94).

Sharing wealth and accepting the fact that there is inequality in the community, then, is a vital part of the idealized feminine network in *Millenium Hall.* The women find "joy [when] they give to those who have conferred it;" therefore, they value giving what they have to others (Scott, 94). In this communion, each woman is able to not only receive and "taste… the comforts arising from it to themselves but [is also able to] share the gratification of a benefactor" (Scott, 94). Therefore, there is no hierarchy in the Hall, despite its inequality. The women strive for community rather than striving for dominance.

This interaction between Miss Mancel and Miss Melvyn exemplifies the give and take of relationships between women of unequal status which are so common in the Millenium Hall. And so, the novel itself suggests that this sharing of finances is part of what makes the Hall a utopia. Khanna notes that "inequities… are here revalued by inscribing multiple instances of the joy of receiving and giving that redresses/makes up for imbalance, loss, deficiency, disappearance, suffering, lack" (Khanna, 27). This revaluation, though, occurs because the location of the utopia allows it too. The women are brought together in their shared space which allows them to live a more idealized life. It is these sorts of relationships, since they would not occur elsewhere, which render the utopian location, in this instance the Hall, as the means by which these relationships can come about.

This happy acceptance of inequality in the community described in Scott's *Millenium Hall* is indicative of how female utopian characters, unlike their male counterparts, do not seek to conquer a space or to take any knowledge or material goods

outside of the utopian community. The female residents of the Hall are loyal to the location and to the shared community of their utopia. In "Institutions of Friendship in Sarah Scott's Millenium Hall", Bryan Mangano argues that in providing introspection and narrating the stories of other residents, "the teller, who has presumably had intimate conversations with her subject, sympathizes with the heroine's past thoughts and translates them into the language of third-person narration" (Mangano, 477). This is evident in the same interaction when Miss Mancel offers to pay for Miss Melvyn's private tutoring when Mrs. Maynard, a third resident of the Hall, narrates her perspective on Miss Melvyn's thoughts and feelings. She speculates that if Miss Melvyn had "been of the same age with herself, she would have felt a kind of property in all she possessed friendship, the tenure by which she held it; for where hearts are strictly united, she had no notion of any distinction in thigs of less importance, the adventitious goods of fortune" (Scott, 92). This intimacy that Mrs. Maynard has in being able to speculate about the feelings of her fellow resident is indicative of the female utopian character and her affiliation with her utopian community.

It is this loyalty to the community which marks these feminine works as utopian. These communities, unlike the masculine utopian worlds, are not created because the geographic locations of these utopias are situated within this world or within microcosms of this world that are otherwise located in it. They are idealized spaces which exist within the world as we already know it. This ultimately suggests that female utopias are in some way more realistic than masculine utopias. In "Sarah Scott, Sophie von La Roche, and the Female Utopian Tradition," Hilary Brown asserts that the full title of the novel (*A Description of Millenium Hall and the Country Adjacent, Together with the Characters*

of the Inhabitants and such Historical Anecdotes and Reflections as May Excite in the Reader Proper Sentiments of Humanity, and Lead the Mind to the Love of Virtue) makes clear its realistic didactic nature, and that this is an explicitly feminine mode of authorship.). She says that certainly "Scott hoped to promote values which could be applied to the real world" (Brown, 473). Therefore, Scott's novel is prescriptive, but setting it in the world in which we live suggests that it is actually a viable suggestion. Therefore, the microcosms in which feminine utopias exist are globally significant and implicitly better, since they are realistic and possess something which is desirable to the rest of the world.

This desirability is indicated by the male narrators of *Millenium Hall*. Though written by a female author, the story is relayed by two male observers, Mr. Lamont and another unnamed narrator, who are not residents of the Hall. In fact, they are both sent away at the end of the novel, prompting them to return home just as other male utopian characters but also allowing the Hall to continue to thrive as an all-female paradise typical of a feminine utopia. Upon encountering the Hall, Mr. Lamont comments to one of the women residents that "if any people have a right to turn reformers, you ladies are best qualified, since you begin by reforming yourselves; you practice what you preach, and therefore must always be listened to with attention" (Scott, 166). While these men indeed engage with the residents of the utopia and even validate their success to them directly, they do so only for their benefit and for the benefit of their homeland, suggesting that the Hall possesses something good which the male characters deem would benefit their homelands and the rest of the world.

These male characters of *Millenium Hall*, the unnamed narrator and Mr. Lamont, then, despite existing in a female utopian work, still do not display female utopian characteristics. Indeed, all male utopian characters appear to possess the same qualities no matter the author's gender. Reminiscent of the male characters who believe they have discovered utopia in their exploration, in the end of the novel, the unnamed narrator of the work actually takes the practices and the philosophies which he observes in the Millenium Hall and brings them back to his own estate. This, Brown claims, "indicate[s] a potential feminization of the whole of society," starting with the male characters within the work itself and eventually permeating into the real world (Brown, 473). But while this may be true, furthering the agenda of the feminine utopian novel, it is nonetheless wholly emblematic of the male utopian character. By stealing and adopting the practices of the utopia they believe they have discovered and bringing them back to their homeland, the male characters in *Millenium Hall* still exemplify a typical male utopian character, despite being written by a female author.

SECTION TWO:

MARGARET CAVENDISH'S SUBVERSION OF THE UTOPIAN GENDERED

BINARY

Margaret Cavendish, like other female utopists, writes about female characters

who retire from the world in which we live. She chronicles an all-female commune

similar to the Hall of Scott's *Millenium Hall* in her play "The Convent of Pleasure." In

the play, Cavendish cites the reason for the character Lady Happy creating this commune

as the terribleness of men themselves since they "are the only troublers of Women; for

they only cross and oppose their sweet delights, and peaceable life; they cause their pains,

but not their pleasures" ("Convent", 101). Lady Happy, then, creates her own idealized

space. She asserts that she wants "to live incloister'd with all the delights and pleasures

that are allowable and lawful; [her] Cloister shall not be a Cloister of restraint, but a place

for freedom, not to vex the Senses but to please them" ("Convent", 101). While Sarah

Scotts' Hall prioritizes education and communal living amongst women of various

backgrounds, Cavendish's Convent highlights aesthetic and individual pleasure, all of

which appeal to the senses.

Much like *Millenium Hall* and the Poems of Katherine Philips, because it takes

place in a small space which is a microcosm of the world in which the Lady Happy

already exists, "The Convent of Pleasure" is initially marked as a feminine utopian work.

However, ultimately, while the female networks of both *Millenium Hall* and "The

Convent of Pleasure" stem from a utopic location which gives rise to female friendship,

the bases on which these networks are built are vastly different. And indeed, it is

precisely this difference which demonstrates the way in which Margaret Cavendish defies the feminine mode of utopian writing. While Cavendish's Convent is constructed for and caters to individual tastes and desires, Scott's utopia involves shared responsibilities and finances and prioritizes each member's education. While the residents of the Millenium Hall accept the inequality among them and do not seek status or domination despite this inequality, the residents of Lady Happy's Convent display hedonistic and selfish tendencies. Unlike the female characters of *Millenium Hall,* the female character of "The Convent of Pleasure" possess little to no loyalty to their community. Therefore, "The Convent of Pleasure" describes a utopia which is about the self rather than about the community and the relationships between the women, ultimately leading to its demise and marking the play as specifically *not* feminine.

"The Convent of Pleasure" continues to diverge from the feminine mode of utopian writing through the effects of its male characters. While Mr. Lamont and the other unnamed male character return home after their visit, allowing the women in the Hall to continue to flourish outside of a male context, the women in Lady Happy's Convent are not given the same peaceful outcome. Instead, once infiltrated by a male presence, the Convent must be dispersed. In concluding her play in this way, Cavendish implies that female friendship networks will ultimately fail because they exist outside of a patriarchal context which is so vital to Cavendish's authorial success. And while this does not automatically position Cavendish as an author following in the male mode of utopian writing, it certainly further locates her as an author outside of the feminine mode of utopian writing.

Part of what destines the utopia described in "The Convent of Pleasure" to fail is the ways in which Margaret Cavendish employs a masculine framework to describe an all-female utopia. Cavendish's attempt to align herself with other male writers in order to establish her authority is reflected in her "utopian heroines [who] learn that their projects are always already circumscribed by cultural assumptions about female sexuality and identity" (Bonin, 352). In "Margaret Cavendish's Dramatic Utopias and the Politics of Gender", Erin Lang Bonin argues that "the insistent impermanence of ["The Convent of Pleasure] suggests that women's desires are marginal, inappropriate, or even impossible to imagine and sustain outside of patriarchal contexts" (Bonin, 352). This ultimately distinguishes Cavendish's play as necessarily outside of the female mode of utopian writing.

In the final act of "The Convent of Pleasure," Lady Happy's Convent must dissolve once the inhabitants discover that their space has been infiltrated by a male. Madam Mediator tells the rest of the women that they are "all betrayed, undone, undone; for there is a man disguised in the *Convent*" ("Convent", 128). The Prince, who has infiltrated the Convent, then insists upon marrying the Lady Happy upon his being discovered. And so ultimately, the play ends in a marriage between the Prince and Lady Happy, and this Lady Happy's Convent and its utopic female network ceases to exist. With this ending, Cavendish frames the idealized society in her "The Convent of Pleasure" as one which could never actually survive. In its total downfall and the inhabitants' insistence that the whole Convent has been "all betrayed, undone" following a single infiltration of a male, Cavendish implies that idealized networks of female friendships can never truly flourish, for they will inevitably become compromised

("Convent", 128). While the Convent does provide a location for female friendships to be created, it does not allow them to flourish since it prioritizes individual and selfish pleasure over the prosperity of the community.

But despite writing "The Convent of Pleasure" as a subversion of the female utopian mode of writing in this way, Margaret Cavendish still describes the Prince as a conventional male utopian character and thus adheres to the traditional binary in a way. The Prince fits and exemplifies the traditional male utopian character in his affinity for discovery and his lack of desire to become a part of the community of the utopia. The only relationship which he seeks is with the Lady Happy. And in the same way that other male utopian characters desire to take away knowledge from the utopias they believe they have discovered, he desires to take the Lady Happy away from the Convent and marry her.

However, Cavendish is not consistent in her writing her male characters as always adhering to their traditional roles. The male character of the Emperor in her novel *The Blazing World,* in fact, does not exhibit many of the same characteristics as the Prince or other classic male utopian characters. Indeed, the main function of the character of the Emperor is simply to give the Empress her power. He does not position himself as a hierarchal authority, since he quickly relinquishes his power. While, in "The Convent of Pleasure", the most prominent male figure is seen as the reason for the utopia's ultimate demise, in *The Blazing World*, the most prominent male figure is actually seen as the catalyst for utopia. In *The Blazing World*, then, the male character is positioned as the enabler while the female character embodies the characteristics of a traditionally male utopian protagonist in her finding, though unintentional, of her new world. With this,

Cavendish takes a conventionally masculine mode and makes it feminine through her female character of the Empress.

But still, the Empress is not a completely male-coded protagonist. The Empress's subversion of the masculine utopian character is evident in her lack of desire to conquer the world that she arrives in and in her ability and her desire to join the utopian community adapt to its language and customs. While Domingo Gonsales arrives on his lunar paradise in *The Man in the Moone*, he immediately fails as he tries to learn the language. And so, Gonsales uses his earthly, human knowledge to make sense of his new geographic location which cannot be described in earthly terms. Unfortunately for him though, his knowledge does not apply, and his language fails him. And instead of defining the lunar paradise by using the terms of the lunar people, Gonsales uses his own earthly terms to name and locate his surroundings.

The Lady of Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, on the other hand, is faced with a similar situation upon her coming into her new world. But instead of struggling as Gonsales does, the Lady quickly adapts and learns the native language of her utopia. She arrives in the world, and

> no sooner was the Lady brought before the Emperor, but he conceived her to be some goddess, and offered to worship her; which she refused, telling him, (for by that time she had pretty well learned their language) that although she came out of another world, yet she was but a mortal; at which the Emperor rejoicing, made her his wife, and gave her an absolute power to rule and govern all that world as she pleased. But her subjects, who could hardly be persuaded to believe her mortal, tendered her all the veneration and worship due to a deity…she was made Empress (*Blazing World*, 132).

Therefore, it is precisely the Lady's quick learning which allows her to rise to power in the world, for she would not have been able to communicate with the Emperor had she not learned the native language.

So, while Cavendish's protagonist is worshipped by those in her utopia as if she had conquered them, she was actually given this power because of her ability to adapt to the utopia's linguistic difference instead imposing her own terms in order to define the world around her. By quickly eliminating the challenge with so deeply troubles Godwin's protagonist, Cavendish seems to subvert the masculine mode of utopian writing. The Lady, then, is not a conqueror who defines paradise in their own terms in an attempt to seize power in the way that Domingo Gonsales does. Rather, she is a benevolent learner whose flexibility allows her to be given her power by the inhabitants of the utopia themselves. Both the Empress and the residents of the Blazing World accept and embrace the inequality that exists between them, much like the women who reside in the Millenium Hall do, aligning *The Blazing World* with the feminine mode of utopian writing. This inherently feminine acceptance of inequality is seen immediately upon the Lady entering the Blazing World, however, the Empress's character is still reminiscent of male utopian protagonists who maintain their position of power in the utopia's hierarchy. Unlike the women residents *Millenium Hall*, the Empress does not have any sort of give and take relationship with the other inhabitants of her utopia: her subjects. She is simply their leader.

The Lady becomes the ruler of the Blazing World as she is given her power and glorified and even given the title of Empress upon her arrival as the Emperor "conceived her to be some goddess and offered to worship her… [and] her subjects, who could

hardly be persuaded to believe her mortal, tendered her all the veneration and worship due to a deity" (*Blazing World*, 132). But still, despite her position of power, the Empress is not a completely male-coded character Unlike conventional male utopian characters, The Lady arrives in the Blazing World against her will, and furthermore, there is no indication that she has any intention of returning to her home world or bringing back any knowledge which she gains in the new world for her home world's benefit. She enjoys her new world in which she "live[s] and reign[s] most happily and blessedly" (*Blazing World*, 203). However, upon learning that "the world she came from was embroiled in a great war," she returns, wielding the knowledge she has acquired over he time in the blazing world (*Blazing World*, 203).

However, once the Empress returns to her home world, she begins to embody the traditionally male utopian character. She believes that she is benefitting her old world by conquering it by virtue of what she has learned and gained in her new world. She posits herself to the people of her old world as "an angel sent from God to deliver them out of the hands of their enemies" and affirms that she would not "return into the Blazing World until she had forced all the rest of that world to submit to that same nation" of her old world (*Blazing World*, 211). So, although the Empress starts out as defying the male utopian character, she ultimately embodies it in its entirety. Margaret Cavendish clearly noticed that conquest is a masculine mode of utopian texts and that male utopian characters, whether they are written by male authors or female authors, embody these characteristics. And so, Cavendish tries to recuperate this masculine mode by writing the female protagonist of the Empress in *The Blazing World* as ultimately becoming a classically male utopian character.

But still, Cavendish does indeed still employ some aspects of the feminine mode of utopian writing through the social nature of the utopia in *The Blazing World*. Although the ending of "The Convent of Pleasure" suggests that idealized networks of female friendships are ultimately impossible, Margaret Cavendish proposes a seemingly contradictory example in *The Blazing World*. The relationship between the characters of the Empress and the Duchess is particularly highlighted, and indeed there is no insinuation of its coming to a close either. In the end, the Duchess "carrie[s] her beloved world along with her and invite[s] the Empress's Soul to observe the frame, order, and Government of it. Her Majesty [is] so ravished with the perception of it, that her soul desire[s] to live in the Duchess's World" (*Blazing World*, 216). The two women share a special utopic bond reminiscent of the feminine mode of utopian writing, given that each woman has created her own world in her own mind but that each can still travel into the worlds of one another.

So, much like the small spaces of the poems of Katherine Philips, the Empress and the Duchess create intimate spaces "in which they further develop their intersubjective bond," allowing their relationship to flourish (Heffernan, 74). Therefore, each of their worlds is a utopia for them both. Furthermore, even if one reads the two women as both being autobiographical characters which represent Margaret Cavendish herself, a relationship with Cavendish's own self, then, is being prioritized in the text and can be seen not only as an idealized relationship with one's self but as a viable blueprint for self-love.

Moreover, in "'A World of My Own Creating': Private Worlds and Social Selves in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*", Megan Heffernan argues that despite the

Empress' being an almighty and autonomous individual, her relationship with the Duchess is indicative of a larger pattern in the *Blazing World* which suggests that the work is more social than individual. This argument, indeed, would further align *The Blazing World* with the feminine mode of utopian writing. Heffernan claims that through the way in which the two women "have no difficulty penetrating the other's cosmos," Cavendish implies that "the sovereign individual is both physically and spiritually permeable, open to communication with others, and constituted through these spiritual visions of community" (Heffernan,74). The novel, then, is posited as social but only insofar as Cavendish is social with herself. But still, figuring the work as social suggests its inclination towards the feminine mode. If "the sovereign individual" is indeed "permeable" in these ways, *The Blazing World* may in fact align Cavendish with a more female mode of utopian writing (Heffernan, 74).

In "Gender, Genre, and the Utopian Body in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World*", Marina Leslie proposes that "although Cavendish clearly challenged and revises generic boundaries, she also seeks inclusion in male literary and philosophical canons, and in order to gain recognition she must also be to some degree recognizable within such canons" (Leslie, 7). She does this, then, by attaching her work to male credibility. She prefaces *The Blazing World* in her note "To the Reader" by referencing the work and greatness of specifically male figures: she says her work is "a description of a *new world*, not such as *Lucian's,* or the *French*-man's world in the moon" and that she herself "cannot be *Henry* the Fifth, or *Charles* the Second, yet [she] endeavor[s] to be *Margaret* the *First*" (*Blazing World*, 24, emphasis in original). She takes care to distinguish herself

and her work from them, but, in doing so, she nonetheless aligns herself with them, positioning herself as a masculine authority.

At the same time, Margaret Cavendish seems to be adopting this masculine paradigm of conquest through her own authorship. Tessie Prakas' article "'A World of her own Invention': The Realm of Fancy in Margaret Cavendish's *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*" asserts that Margaret Cavendish implores her readers to create worlds of their own but that in doing so, her readers are not only engaging with Cavendish's dictatorial world but are also "submitting to the unfettered ambition of 'Margaret the First'" (Prakas, 139). This is to say that Cavendish empowers her readers and her peers to create their own worlds but, in this process, positions the Empress as an authority whose own objectives her readers must emulate, rendering these readers as creators who are not completely thinking in their own terms. It is precisely this assertion of Cavendish's own power and authority which is reminiscent of the male tradition.

Cavendish not only positions herself as a sort of masculine authority but also as masculine in her desire for authorial recognition. In "Authorship, Friendship, and Forms of Publication in Katherine Philips," Hillary Menges positions Katherine Philips' demure mode of diverting attention from herself in her publication as directly opposed to Margaret Cavendish's forthright desire for her work to be known and praised in publication. Menges says that "Philips did not boldly declare her desire for literary immortality… [and that] unlike Milton, Cavendish, or countless other poets, Philips does not insist upon the capacity of her poems to serve as vehicles for future honor, commemoration, and monumentalization" (Menges, 536). Menges, then, seems to subtly

suggest that this further aligns Cavendish with a masculine mode of authorship by comparing Cavendish to John Milton and other male authors who share similar quests for fame and authorial immortality. And while Milton himself is not a utopist, he is a figure that other scholars frequently engage with Cavendish. So ultimately, because is candid about her desire for a lasting reputation, Cavendish aligns herself with male authorship. Indeed, in her outspoken desire for her work to be known and for it to be remembered, Cavendish transgresses traditional notions of her prescribed female gender and inhabits a role which is conventionally thought to be not her own.

On the other hand, by making a spectacle of herself, such as she did with her flamboyant visit to the Royal Society, Cavendish attempts to feminize traditionally masculine spaces. Her traditionally masculine desires of grandeur in her life and in her texts are made known in her own feminine manner. She is not just attempting to make a power grab for the masculine mode, but instead she is trying to do something which has been fundamentally coded as masculine in a feminine way. Therefore, by inhabiting an authorial role which is neither feminine nor masculine, Margaret Cavendish complicates traditional binary notions of masculine modes of utopian writing and feminine modes of utopian writing, ultimately paving the way for later utopian authors, both male and female, to break these molds as well.

Ultimately, Margaret Cavendish as an author enters a new, uncharted space, and she is eventually remembered and memorialized for doing so. But the only reason Cavendish is permitted to rebel in this way is because of her social position. With her elevated economic status and the loyal support of her husband, Margaret Cavendish was less confined to a singular feminine paradigm than other female utopists writing at the

same time, such as Sarah Scott or Katherine Phillips, were. But regardless of this context, the implications of both of Cavendish's works and their implied critique of the traditional binary still stand. Both "The Convent of Pleasure" and *The Blazing World* are self-promoting, though in different ways, but neither work adheres to a single masculine or feminine mode of utopian writing. Instead, Cavendish creates an entirely new space for herself which exists outside of this masculine/feminine binary, and she suggests that others to do the same.

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