

**Worlds within Worlds: Community, Companionship and Autonomy in Margaret  
Cavendish's *The Blazing World***

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Margaret Cavendish's *The Description of a New World, called the Blazing World* (1666) has often been read as a work that both draws on the utopian genre and complicates it.<sup>1</sup> While it makes direct reference to earlier utopian models, it does not follow their course, something that is made explicit from the outset. Unlike the mariners of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627), who

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Nicole Pohl, who notes that 'Cavendish critically intervenes in the classical model of utopia ... intercedes in the philosophical utopia of Bacon and ... in the popular genre of celestial utopias put forward by John Wilkins, Francis Godwin and in France, Cyrano de Bergerac' in order to create 'utopian societies in which female agency is at the heart of the matter'. See *Women, Space and Utopia, 1600-1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 35-6. Lee Cullen Khanna similarly shows how Cavendish's 'transformation of subject positions changes utopian constructs', reading *The Blazing World* as an antecedent to later re-workings of the utopian genre by women writers, while Kate Lilley suggests that through its meta-discursive quality, *The Blazing World* indicates 'the emancipatory possibilities of utopian writing for women', providing 'a material and linguistic opulence which is self-consciously extravagant and excessive, even parodic'; see Khanna, 'The Subject of Utopia: Margaret Cavendish and Her Blazing-World', in *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*, ed. by Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerten (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994), pp. 15-34 (p. 15) and Lilley, 'Blazing Worlds: Seventeenth-Century Women's Utopian Writing', in *Women, Texts and Histories 1575-1760*, ed. by Clare Brand and Diane Purkiss (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 102-33 (p. 120). But where Lilley suggests that the text's focus privileges 'sexual, social and educational over legal and/or political reform' (p. 128), Pohl argues that '*The Blazing World* is precisely about the process of ... political and social reform' (p. 37). However, Lisa T. Sarasohn argues that while '*Blazing World* is one of many utopian works produced in early modern Europe ... Cavendish's vision [in this work] is far from utopian; see *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy during the Scientific Revolution* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), p. 163. Similarly, Anna Battigelli considers that 'though there are utopian moments in *Blazing World* ... the text yields no utopian readings without immediately problematizing them'; see *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1998), pp. 154-5, fn 52. Paul Salzman draws attention to and interconnection with Cavendish's philosophical work, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, which parallels the publication of Bacon's *New Atlantis* with his *Sylva Sylvarum*; see 'Narrative Contexts for Bacon's *New Atlantis*', in *Francis Bacon's New Atlantis: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Bronwen Price (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 28-47 (pp. 44-5). Sarasohn comments on this feature of *The Blazing World* more particularly, suggesting that 'It is as much a hybrid as the creatures that populate it' (p. 163). Pohl elaborates on the complexity of this 'generic mix', arguing that *The Blazing World* incorporates 'travel narrative, celestial utopia and fairy tale, interdispersed with a long section on seventeenth-century natural philosophy and finally, a Royalist utopia' (p. 36).

willingly undertake their perilous voyages into unknown provinces and are located within the camaraderie of a crew, Cavendish's protagonist is a 'young Lady', exiled from her own community when she is abducted by a foreign merchant, who 'steal[s] her away' to sea (p. 125).<sup>2</sup> But as a result of divine vengeance, a storm blows the vessel off course to the North Pole and the merchant and his crew all freeze to death, while the 'virtuous Lady survives' (p. 125). Bacon's shipwrecked mariners weather a tempest to find themselves, like More's, within a remote domain of this world. However, in Cavendish's narrative not only are the lady and crew 'driven to the very end or point of the Pole' of their own world, 'but even to another Pole of another world, which joined close to it', whereby the boat carrying the lady is 'forced into' the new world, the Blazing World, to which hers is adjoined (p. 126). There she is shown 'all civility and kindness imaginable' by the anthropomorphic creatures who inhabit this 'strange ... place' (p. 127) and, having been 'conceived' by its Emperor 'to be some goddess', he 'made her his wife' (p. 132). But stranger still and in unprecedented opposition to conventional seventeenth-century wifely duties, the Emperor also 'gave her an absolute power to rule and govern all that world as she pleased' (p. 132). Where More's and Bacon's visitors are placed in the role of admiring observers of the communities they enter, whose operations they record as a means of beneficial instruction to the 'weal-public', Cavendish's protagonist is allowed not only to become an agent of action, having been a puppet of fate, but also a sovereign self.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, far from offering an ideal society, or 'the best ... mould of a commonwealth',<sup>4</sup> simply waiting to be discovered, Cavendish's text takes an interrogative approach to the new world its protagonist encounters. It provides a playful commentary on the social makeup of the Blazing World, testing out the various types of community – political, scientific, religious – it comprises and revealing how they are questioned, altered and disrupted by the interventions of its new inhabitant.<sup>5</sup>

In addition, the trope of interconnected worlds underscoring *The Blazing World* bears a tangential relationship to a seventeenth-century discourse of a particular type of community – that of ideal friendship. This essay will suggest that the transformative

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<sup>2</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World. The Description of a New World Called The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. by Kate Lilley (London: William Pickering, 1992), pp. 119-225. All subsequent quotations from the text will be from this edition.

<sup>3</sup> More, Thomas. *Utopia*, in *Three Early Modern Utopias*, ed. by Susan Bruce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 1-148 (p. 16).

<sup>4</sup> Francis Bacon, *New Atlantis*, in *Francis Bacon: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. by Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 457-89 (note, p. 786). This is cited in William Rawley's Preface to *New Atlantis* and, although Bacon does not supply details about New Atlantis's mode of government, Rawley indicates what a utopian text is expected to contain.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed account of these aspects of the text see my 'Journeys Beyond Frontiers: Knowledge, Subjectivity and Outer Space in Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*', *Rhetoric, Revolution and Restoration in Seventeenth-Century England*, spec. issue of *Literature & History* 7.2 (1998), 21-50.

qualities of this trope lie at the heart of *The Blazing World's* utopian vision. But, like the other forms of community the text portrays, the concept of ideal friendship does not go unquestioned and shows the text's acute awareness of its potential pitfalls, especially when located within a feminine form. Indeed, Cavendish uses the utopian mode in order to probe the ethos and values of its abstract ideals. As in the paradise of Milton's epic, discussed in this collection by Rosamund Paice, *The Blazing World* shows how human relations in practice unsettle theoretical models.

## I. Contiguous Worlds

The image of two self-contained worlds conjoined is central to early modern accounts of friendship and their classical antecedents, providing a figure for the concept of 'one soul in bodies twain' or 'Two friends, one soul', as Aristotle, citing Euripides, puts it.<sup>6</sup> John Donne provides a particularly striking version of this concept, describing friendship's accord as 'two temperate regions girded in' in his verse letter 'To Sir Henry Wotton';<sup>7</sup> while for Cavendish's close contemporary, Katherine Philips, ideal friends 'are, and yet they are not, two', comprising 'Two bodyes and one minde'.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, willing submission to friendship's claims paradoxically grants its subjects authority and liberty so as to create a new mode of being.<sup>9</sup> As Philips's speaker, Orinda, suggests in 'Friendship's Mysterys, to my dearest Lucasia': 'We are our selves but by rebound, / And all our titles shuffled so, / Both Princes, and both subjects too'.<sup>10</sup> While early modern concepts of ideal friendship take a variety of forms, they follow their classical precedents in commonly incorporating values of virtue, wisdom, equality, justice and integrity, and in making 'mutual moral improvement and enhanced self-knowledge' their object.<sup>11</sup> Perfect amity is thus frequently presented as forming an exclusive realm of its own, offering a 'utopian "counterpolity"' that operates independently from and is

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<sup>6</sup> See, respectively, Michel de Montaigne, 'On Affectionate Relationships', in *The Complete Essays*, trans. and ed. by M. A. Screech (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 205-19 (p. 214) and Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by J. A. K. Thomson, rev. and ed. by Hugh Tredennick (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 243.

<sup>7</sup> John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. by A. J. Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 214, l. 13.

<sup>8</sup> Katherine Philips, 'Friendship in Emblem, or the Seale', p. 107, l. 24 and 'The Enquiry', p. 152, l. 26, in *The Collected Works, Vol. I, The Poems*, ed. by Patrick Thomas (Stump Cross: Stump Cross Press, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> On the complex ramifications of the notion of voluntary servitude in the discourse of early modern friendship, see Marc D. Schachter, *Voluntary Servitude and the Erotics of Friendship from Classical Antiquity to Early Modern France* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008). The term 'voluntary servitude' comes from the title of Etienne de La Boétie's book of 1571, addressed to Montaigne, in which inequality in friendship is rejected.

<sup>10</sup> Philips, p. 91, ll. 23-5.

<sup>11</sup> Keith Thomas, *The Ends of Life: Roads to Fulfilment in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 196. For a range of discussions about the variety of early modern friendship and their relationship to classical ideals and Renaissance humanist values, see, for example: Penelope

often unseen by the wider community, while of necessity co-existing alongside or within this larger frame.<sup>12</sup> As we shall see, Cavendish shows that she was well-acquainted with various versions of this well-documented discourse.<sup>13</sup>

However, while these figures of two spheres ‘yoked together’ and worlds within worlds echo through Cavendish’s narrative, they are presented in a variety of often problematic permutations.<sup>14</sup> The form in which this image is initially introduced indeed raises problems: where for Montaigne ‘true and perfect friendship’ ‘engender[s]’ a ‘congruity and affinity’ that is ‘equable’ and ‘equitable’, the contiguous relationship between the Empress’s native world and the Blazing World is clearly not one of ideal union or proportion and does not signal two in one, but rather unlikeness and clearly differentiated alternatives.<sup>15</sup>

In turn, in spite of the insistent stress on the Blazing World’s unity, it embodies a range of fragmented, self-contained domains, comprising many islands of different climates that, unlike *New Atlantis*’s primarily generic citizens, are inhabited by a wide variety of beings with different interests and perspectives, from ‘the ice strange creatures in shape like bears’ who greet the young lady to the ‘immaterial spirits’ to whom she addresses theological questions once she is Empress (pp. 127, 165). Indeed, in spite of its

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Anderson, ‘The Absent Female Friend: Recent Studies in Early Modern Women’s Friendship’, *Literature Compass* 7.4 (2010), 243-53; Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics 1550-1714* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Bray, Alan. *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Kathy Eden, *Friends Hold All Things in Common: Tradition, Intellectual Property, and the Adages of Erasmus* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer’s Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1994); Daniel T. Lochman, Maritere Lopez and Lorna Hutson, eds., *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Tom MacFaul, *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Schachter; Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2002); Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth-Century England: Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Thomas, pp. 187-225.

<sup>12</sup> Shannon, p. 12. Shannon demonstrates how the discourses of early modern ideal friendship ‘comprise a strategy of private sovereignty’ centred on likeness and equality rather than difference and hierarchy, thereby offering an autonomous ‘separate polity’ from ‘the ordinary terms of political and courtly life’ and providing ‘new modes of agency’ (pp. 23, 44, 45, 33).

<sup>13</sup> In the years surrounding the production of *The Blazing World* numerous treatises on the subject of ideal friendship appeared, most notably *Friendship* by Francis Finch (referred to as *Palaemon* in Philips’s work) in 1654, which is dedicated to Lucasia and Orinda, and Jeremy Taylor’s *A Discourse on the Nature, Offices and Measures of Friendship* in 1657, which was written in response to a letter from Philips asking whether Christian ethics and exclusive friendship were compatible and, according to Alan Bray, was reprinted seven times within the following 30 years; see Bray, p. 142. For an examination of the exchange between Philips and Taylor and for Bray’s lack of reference to Philips when discussing the importance of Taylor’s treatise see Hutson, ‘The body of the friend and the woman writer: Katherine Philips’s absence from Alan Brays’ *The Friend* (2003)’, in *Still Kissing the Rod?* Spec. issue of *Women’s Writing* 14.2 (2007), 196-214 (pp. 205-10).

<sup>14</sup> Montaigne, p. 213.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 208, 211.

appearance of ‘peace and tranquillity’ and the civility with which its inhabitants greet each other (pp. 130, 127), the Blazing World is underscored by anxieties about sedition. Perhaps in an ironic reference to Bacon’s omission of ‘a frame of Laws’ in his representation of New Atlantis’s compliant society,<sup>16</sup> we learn that the Blazing World ‘had so few laws’ because ‘many laws made many divisions, which most commonly did breed factions, and at last break out into open wars’ (p. 134). Even so, when she is made Empress, the young lady is given attire that includes ‘a buckler, to signify the defence of her dominions’ and ‘a spear ... which signified that she was ready to assault those that proved her enemies’ (p. 133), apparel that, while symbolising protection, also suggests the potential threat of invasion and civil strife.

Moreover, the various internal communities over which the Empress presides are by no means ideal and signal the contingency of her self-determining powers. Soon after she is given sovereignty, the Empress ‘erected schools, and founded several societies’ in accordance with the ‘profession’ that ‘was most proper for the nature of’ the ‘species’ of her varied inhabitants, so the fox-men become her politicians, ‘the spider- and lice-men her mathematicians, the jackdaw-, magpie- and parrot-men her orators and logicians’ and so forth (p. 134). However, she is often unsettled by the results of her specialists’ investigations when she questions them over their areas of expertise, discovering that ‘wheresoever is learning, there is most commonly also controversy and quarrelling’ (p. 202). For example, when recounting their findings from observations made through the use of telescopes, the bear-men ‘fell into a great dispute’ (p. 140). Nor do they simply succumb to the Empress’s authority when she decides that such instruments are ‘false informers’ and on two occasions commands the bear-men to break them (p. 141). Instead, they persuade her ‘to spare our glasses’ and she relents on condition that they ‘cause no factions or disturbances in state, or government’ (p. 142). Similarly, the enquiries of her chemists, the ape-men, ‘concerning the primitive ingredients of natural bodies’ produce ‘a great many debates and contentions’ (pp. 153-4) and, in a mischievous allusion to the practical and socially efficacious claims of New Atlantis’s scientific community, Salomon’s House, the Empress commands them to ‘busy yourselves with such experiments as may be beneficial to the public’ (p. 155). Supporting this policy, though, her anatomists subsequently refuse to comply with her request ‘to dissect such kinds of creatures as are called monsters’ on the grounds that ‘it would be but an unprofitable and useless work’ (p. 157). The Empress’s scientific communities thus signal areas of potential disruption, as well as revealing the limits of her command over her new environment, something that is emphasised when we later learn that ‘although she possesses a whole world, yet enjoys she but a part thereof;

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<sup>16</sup> Bacon, *New Atlantis*, note, p.786.

neither is she so much acquainted with it, that she knows all the places, countries and dominions she governs' (p. 186). Her sovereignty is partial, suggesting fragmentariness within a self-contained sphere.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, when enquiring about the Blazing World's religious community, the Empress finds many of their practices 'very defective' (p. 162); for example, she discovers that women are excluded from church assemblies because of what the priests consider to be 'their importunate persuasions' (p. 135), in spite of the priests' claims that there is 'no diversity of opinions' as 'they all had but one opinion concerning the worship and adoration of God' (p. 135). She subsequently converts the Blazing World to her own religion, founds 'a congregation of women' and establishes 'a well-ordered and settled condition' in both church and state (pp. 162, 164-5). And yet she herself later acknowledges the disturbance her interventions have produced when, 'troubled' by the 'contentions and divisions' between its inhabitants, she reflects that the Blazing World 'is not so quiet as it was at first', fearing the conflicts will 'break out into an open rebellion' (p. 201). The Emperor's gift of sovereignty thus seems double edged, eliciting unease alongside authority. Furthermore, little detail is given to either the familial or regal relationship between the Emperor and Empress. Indeed, for the first part of the narrative the Empress seems an isolated figure. The values of her world jostle with those of the Blazing World to produce dis-equilibrium and the world into which she escapes turns out not to offer a utopian refuge, providing her neither with autonomy, nor a wholly ideal community.

## **II. Worlds within Worlds**

It is typical of friendship discourses to define ideal amity through its distinction from other types of relationship that are identified as being, in contrast, deficient in some way. So, for example, Aristotle's somewhat utilitarian analysis of friendship explains that 'in every community there is supposed to be ... some friendly feeling', for friendship 'seems to be the bond that holds communities together'.<sup>18</sup> In turn, friendship is founded on the notion of community because 'friends have all things in common'.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, according to Aristotle, friendship shares some features with other social bonds such as comradeship, citizenship, religious guilds, social clubs and various forms of familial relations. However, the latter are 'secondary friendships' in that the claims of

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<sup>17</sup> I make this point in my 'Journeys Beyond Frontiers' in specific reference to the text's troubling of notions of absolutism. See pp. 35-6.

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, pp. 215, 201.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215.

justice, duty and mutual benefit are often variable, unstable and disproportionate, varying in degree according to ‘the intensity of friendship’.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, ideal friendship is founded on ‘equality and similarity’ of affection and goodness because each party ‘being steadfast in themselves, they are steadfast also towards each other’.<sup>21</sup>

In an odd sort of way, *The Blazing World* follows a similar pattern in its framing of friendship. Various forms of social bonds are explored and found to be wanting. That is, until we reach the very centre of the text. At this point the Empress, having stretched her enquiries to her spirits about theological matters to their limit, decides ‘to make a Cabbala’ of her own (p. 179).<sup>22</sup> Requiring the assistance of ‘a spiritual scribe’ in order to do so, she is advised by the spirits not to select the souls of famous learned men, such as Descartes, Hobbes and Henry More, because they are ‘so self-conceited, that they would scorn to be scribes to a woman’, and instead to invite the Duchess of Newcastle to take up this position on the grounds that ‘the principle of her writings, is sense and reason, and she will without question, be ready to do you all the service she can’ (pp. 180-1). Like numerous accounts of amity, friendship’s starting point is thus textual.<sup>23</sup> And so the Duchess of Newcastle’s soul enters the Empress’s, which ‘embraced and saluted her with a spiritual kiss’ (p. 181), thereby bringing companionship into the Empress’s hitherto somewhat disconnected experience of community. It is here that the trope of friendship is fully played out as two in one and the idea of a utopian vision seems to be fully realised.

Even though they begin in a hierarchical relationship where the Duchess is summoned to serve the Empress in her textual enterprise rather than being elected as a friend, this soon shifts to one of a more equalised, mutual and proportionate kind. Yet the fact that

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 216, 215.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 214.

<sup>22</sup> Cabbalistic ideas were a source of fascination to a number of Cavendish’s contemporaries, including the Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614-87), who attempted to produce his own cabbala, a ‘complete system of knowledge’ that provided ‘a synthesis of Neoplatonism with his own theological concerns, and with the new philosophy’, and his acquaintances Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1636-89) and Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-98), who, as Jacqueline Broad points out, ‘edited the kabbalistic writings of the followers of Isaac Luria (1534-72)’, from whom developed the idea of ‘spiritual monism’; see, respectively, Robert Crocker, ‘Henry More: A Biographical Essay’, in *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies*, ed. by Sarah Hutton (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), pp. 1-17 (p. 5) and Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 73. Sarah Hutton argues that the Empress’s approach to writing a Cabbala ‘literal, philosophical and moral – refers directly to the “cabala” of Henry More’s own making, his *Conjectura Cabbalistica: or, a Conjectural Essay of Interpreting the Minde of Moses according to a threefold Cabbala, viz. Literal, Philosophical, Mystical, or, Divinely Moral*, published in London in 1653’; see ‘Margaret Cavendish and Henry More’, in *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle*, ed. by Stephen Clucas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 185-98 (p. 192).

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Montaigne, pp. 206-7, although it was through reading a work already written by Etienne de La Boétie that first brought the attention of this friend to him.

the Empress begins the story as a commoner, while the Duchess enters with a status already in place and established outside the Blazing World, signals a more complex power relation between the Empress and Duchess than simply that of sovereign and subject. Nonetheless, to some extent their friendship also attests to Bacon's view in 'Of Followers and Friends' that friendship, where it exists, tends to be between unequals, 'whose fortunes may comprehend the one the other'.<sup>24</sup> Rather than simply following the Ciceronian ideal of parity in amity, theirs involves a negotiation between equality and inequality. The Duchess combines the role of monarchic advisor with the position also deemed crucial to ideal amity of offering 'good counsel', providing the honesty and wisdom vital to both.<sup>25</sup> In this, the Empress follows Bacon's observations in his essay 'Of Friendship' in which he notes 'how high a rate great kings and monarchs do set upon this fruit of friendship', and how some of 'the wisest and most politique that ever reigned' have 'raise[d] some persons to be as it were companions and almost equals to themselves' 'whom both themselves have called friends'.<sup>26</sup> The reasons why this is so are indicated in his discussion about the 'fruit of friendship', which includes the provision of 'faithful counsel' together with assisting in making 'daylight in the understanding, out of darkness and confusion of thoughts'.<sup>27</sup>

The pertinence of such advice is suggested when the Duchess explains why the Empress's own proposals to write a Jewish, philosophical, moral or political cabbala are problematic and guides her instead 'to make a poetical or romancical Cabbala, wherein you can use metaphors, allegories, similitudes etc. and interpret them as you please' (p. 183). The Empress subsequently takes 'her counsel' and 'made her also her favourite' and this shortly produces 'such an intimate friendship between them, that they became platonic lovers, although they were both females' (p. 183).<sup>28</sup> The term 'favourite' has negative connotations of course, smacking of partisanship, parasitism and indulgence. By placing this implicitly pejorative term alongside the ideal of Platonism, Cavendish seems to be both playing with and reconfiguring friendship's terms of intimacy, while at the same time drawing attention to the intricate politics of friendship and its potential erotics. Perhaps here, as David Wootton suggests in his analysis of Bacon's essays on friendship, 'the favourite needs to be interpreted as a special sort of friend', rather than

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<sup>24</sup> Bacon, Francis, *Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral* (1625), in *Francis Bacon: A Critical Edition of the Major Works*, ed. by Brian Vickers, pp. 341-456 (p. 437).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 395.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 391-2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 391, 393.

<sup>28</sup> The erotic implications of this are particularly complicated by Cavendish's view in her other writings that the soul and body are not separate entities, as discussed later.

the opposite of amity.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, as we shall see, the Duchess comes to exemplify Bacon's definition of a monarch's special friend as being a partner in care ('*participes curarum*'), rather than what are commonly understood as being mere 'privadoes; as if it were matter of grace, or conversation'.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the Blazing World itself is not the utopia, but rather provides the locus for redefining ideal friendship between two figures who enter it from outside and, within this alien domain, are enabled to reshape their identities through the merging of their souls.

Moreover, far from producing misrule, factionality or calling the Empress's 'sovereign condition into question', as Shannon suggests was the way in which early modern writers predominantly represented the friendships of monarchs, the Empress's intimacy with the Duchess helps to secure her sovereign status by generating amicability within the society of the Blazing World more broadly.<sup>31</sup> Possibly following Aristotle's view that 'concord seems to be something like friendship', while 'faction' is 'enmity',<sup>32</sup> together with one of friendship's 'principal obligations', which is to provide 'admonitions' as part of one's 'counsels' to one's friend,<sup>33</sup> the Duchess recommends the Empress 'to dissolve all' the societies she has created because of the 'perpetual disputes and quarrels' they cause, 'for 'tis better to be without their intelligences, than to have an unquiet and disorderly government' (p. 202). If she takes this action, the Duchess reasons, the Empress will manifest wisdom and virtue, qualities fundamental to both perfect friendship and ideal sovereignty, in showing herself 'so wise, as to perceive her own errors, and so good, as not to persist in them' (p. 202).

Holding 'a very great esteem' for the 'just and impartial judgement' of 'her dear Platonic friend', the Empress 'willingly follow[s]' the Duchess's 'advice' and subsequently 'lived and reigned most happily and blessedly' (pp. 200, 202-203). In the process, she demonstrates a thorough grasp of the distinction between counterfeit and genuine friendship identified as being a crucial point of discrimination when choosing companions in Bacon's essay on friendship, among others. Like Bacon's 'perfect and

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<sup>29</sup> Wootton, David, 'Francis Bacon: Your Flexible Friend', in *The World of the Favourite*, ed. by J. H. Elliott and L. W. B. Brockliss (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 184-204 (p. 184). Wootton discusses 'three different images of friendship' manifested in the three major editions of Bacon's *Essays* that match the various stages of his professional life; see pp. 186, 184-204.

<sup>30</sup> Bacon, *Essays*, pp. 391-2.

<sup>31</sup> Shannon, p. 128. Shannon indicates that this was the one office deemed unacceptable to *amicitia*, for '[w]hile kings could (and good kings must) have their counselors, Renaissance texts insistently return to the difference between a monarch's private or personal friend and this official, advisory role'; see pp. 127, 125-55. However, as demonstrated, the Duchess occupies both roles.

<sup>32</sup> Aristotle, p. 201.

<sup>33</sup> Montaigne, p. 207. This concept is apparent in a range of friendship treatises. Cicero, for example, suggests that 'you are under an obligation not only to advise your friend frequently but to rebuke him if necessary'; see Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Laelius: On Friendship*, in *Cicero: On the Good Life*, trans. and ed. by Michael Grant (London: Penguin, 1971), pp. 175-227. (p. 220).

entire' friend, as opposed to a flatterer, the Duchess is revealed to 'speak as the case requires',<sup>34</sup> for by persuading the Empress 'to alter her own decrees, acts and laws' (p. 202), the Duchess shows that 'there is no such remedy against flattery of a man's self, as the liberty of a friend'.<sup>35</sup> Having achieved a harmonious government as a result of the Duchess's 'faithful admonition',<sup>36</sup> the Empress thus concludes at the end of the first part of the narrative that the Duchess is indeed 'not a flattering parasite, but a true friend' (p. 202).<sup>37</sup>

Nor is their friendship one-sided; it works for the mutual benefit of each party, 'they being like several parts of one united body' (p. 183). So, while cultivating an amicable world without, their friendship also produces a harmonious inner world within the Blazing World. We learn that there is 'no concealment' between the Empress and the Duchess, for 'these two loving souls did often meet and rejoice in each other's conversation' (pp. 183, 202). Within this internal domain they enjoy Bacon's 'first fruit of friendship', that is, the 'communicating of a man's self to his friend', the result of which is to 'redoubleth joys' and cut 'griefs in halves', something that for Montaigne is 'fostered by mutual confidences'.<sup>38</sup>

Noticing one day that the Duchess seems 'very sad', the Empress, 'very much troubled' by this, enquires into 'the reason of her melancholic humour' (p. 183). The Duchess confides that it 'proceeds from an extreme ambition ... that I would fain be as you are, that is, an Empress of a world' (pp. 183-4). She thus pinpoints the difference in position between herself and the Empress, while also indicating her desire to be more like her in her wish to raise herself to an equal status. Following Cicero's view of friendship between unequals that 'the superior partner in a friendship' is 'under an obligation to do everything he can to lift the friend to his own level', the Empress does not hesitate in offering to assist the Duchess, for 'I love you so well ... that I wish with all my soul, you had the fruition of your ambitious desire' (p. 184).<sup>39</sup> As Montaigne suggests, the ideal friend 'more than anything else' seeks 'the good of the other, so that the one who furnishes the means and occasion is in fact the more generous, since he gives his friend

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<sup>34</sup> Bacon, *Essays*, pp. 395, 394, 396.

<sup>35</sup> Bacon, *Essays*, p. 394.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 394.

<sup>37</sup> See Bacon's essay 'Of Friendship' in which he distinguishes between 'the counsel of a friend and of a flatterer', p. 394. Bacon's discussion closely follows Plutarch's 'How to tell a flatterer from a friend', which also suggests that 'everybody is himself his own foremost and greatest flatterer', whereas a true friend 'by doing always what he ought to do, is oftentimes agreeable and oftentimes disagreeable, not from any desire to be disagreeable, and yet not attempting to avoid even this if it be better', for 'when there is need of reprehension, he assails with stinging words and all the frankness of a guardian'; see Plutarch, *Moralia*, trans. and ed. by Frank Cole Babbitt and others, 16 vols (London: Heinemann; Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1927-2004), I (1927), pp. 265, 295, 297.

<sup>38</sup> See Bacon, *Essays*, p. 393 and Montaigne, p. 207.

<sup>39</sup> Cicero, pp. 212-3.

the joy of performing for him what he most desires'.<sup>40</sup> So the Duchess's desire counterbalances the Empress's wish to help her friend in enabling her both to perform a beneficent act on her behalf and to make them more equal.

Just as the Duchess gives her faithful counsel, so the Empress provides 'her dearest friend' with 'my best advice how to accomplish' this task (p. 184), calling upon the help of her immaterial spirits. Having discounted the possibility of the Duchess becoming an empress of one of the existing terrestrial worlds, the spirits suggest instead that the Duchess 'create your self a celestial world ... for every human creature can create an immaterial world ... within the compass of the head or scull; nay, not only so, but he may create a world of what fashion and government he will' (p. 185).<sup>41</sup>

The counsel she receives therefore parallels that which she previously gives to the Empress when she suggests that she should create her own cabbala and interpret its figures at her own pleasure rather than being subject to the dictates of external ones. Similarly, a self-created world gives the Duchess the advantage of being able to 'make what world you please, and alter it when you please, and enjoy as much pleasure and delight as a world can afford you' (p. 186). Thus, having tried out various models 'in the framing of her world' and finding that 'no patterns would do her any good', she resolves instead 'to make a world of her own invention' (p. 188). And so the internal sphere of the head becomes the location for such a world, apparently enabling liberty of desire, will and imagination, together with absolute control over what is contained within it. Where for Montaigne perfect friendship 'is a matter of the mind', here the mind is identified as being a self-defining arena.<sup>42</sup>

Not only does the Duchess immediately 'take' the spirits' 'advice' to 'create a world of my own', but the Empress too (p. 186). Consequently the spirits 'left these two ladies to create two worlds within themselves: who did also part from each other, until such time as they had brought their worlds to perfection' (p. 186). However, the Empress is 'so ravished' by the Duchess's world that 'her soul desired to live in' it (pp. 188-9). The Duchess, in what seems to be a singularly un-amicable gesture, is not having any of it, though, and 'persuaded' the Empress instead 'to make such another world in her own mind' (p. 189). Imitating her friend and following her advice thus involves partition. The Empress and the Duchess are both equal and alike in being sovereigns of self-

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<sup>40</sup> Montaigne, p. 214.

<sup>41</sup> This seems to be an extension of the spirits' idea that each creature, including man, is 'a little world' (pp. 169-70). Pohl notes that 'the motto "I made a world of my own"', which is also identified in Cavendish's Epistle to *The Blazing World*, 'echoes that kind of expansionist vision' signalled in Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621); see pp. 35-6.

<sup>42</sup> Montaigne, p. 209.

created internal worlds, but different and separate in that they construct these domains independently, suggesting individual rather than mutual choices or ‘the total interfusion of ... wills’.<sup>43</sup> While for Montaigne perfect friendship indicates a standard paradox in which possession of amity signals the dispossession of a differentiated identity, for ‘nothing was his or mine’ and ‘having captured my will’, he ‘brought it to plunge into his and lose itself’, in *The Blazing World* the Duchess and Empress’s friendship implies no such loss, but rather inaugurates a double gain of entry into the other’s soul together with an individual identity that is self-contained.<sup>44</sup>

The values of ideal friendship and the utopian vision they embody are complicated, then, almost as soon as they are introduced. In a reversal of amity’s customary practice in which the two amicable selves should first be integral and complete within themselves before merging as one, here the mingling of their souls is the means by which the Empress and Duchess become autonomous agents.<sup>45</sup> By each creating independent dominions within their internal world of friendship, they both mirror each other and highlight their divisibility. Nor does their autonomy signal a ‘steadfast’ identity,<sup>46</sup> as is conventionally the case when preparing to enter the bonds of ideal friendship, but rather mutability and flexibility, premised on pleasure rather than virtue. Within this context, they cease to be dependent on the knowledge of others; nor are they subject to external codes, values or persons, including those of friendship, but simply to their own self-determined, transmutable desires, for they can create, dissolve and transform their worlds at their own leisure and as often as they like. Their self-created domains, then, are distinct from friendship itself, even though friendship is the starting point that enables their production.

### III. Worlds Within and Worlds Without

Not only does desire complicate friendship’s bonds as a result of the internal arena of the mind, though, but also through external factors. While Montaigne suggests that in perfect friendship ‘each completely’ holds ‘the reins of each other’s desires’, *The Blazing World* wittily questions the possibility of this and highlights the negotiations

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<sup>43</sup> Montaigne, p. 214.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>45</sup> Shannon discusses this prerequisite for entering ideal friendship in early modern texts, in which “sovereign amity” is often treated as ‘an apex of individual or “private” sovereignty’; see p. 31, and also pp. 30-38. I discuss this feature of preparing for friendship in reference to Mary Chudleigh’s work in “Phantoms of my own creating”: Amity, Elegy and the Limits of Friendship in Lady Mary Chudleigh’s Works’, in *Amity in Early Modern Literature and Culture*, spec. issue of *Literature & History* 20.1 (2011), 75-91 (pp. 77-8).

<sup>46</sup> Aristotle, p. 214.

friendship must make with outside concerns.<sup>47</sup> The Duchess's name itself reminds us of how her identity is fundamentally connected to that of her husband and the values of the world she has left behind: it signals both the social status conferred on her through marriage and the duties that implicitly go with her title.<sup>48</sup> The Empress, indeed, seems to acknowledge this herself early on when, in spite of their 'intimate friendship', she gives the Duchess 'leave to return to her husband and kindred into her native world', provided 'that her soul ... visit her now and then' (p. 183). But recognition of these external obligations also makes her 'desirous to see the world the Duchess came from' (p. 189). So, 'Those two female souls travelled together as lightly as two thoughts into the Duchess her native world' (p. 190). Thus, they seem to operate as a self-contained sphere outside of the Blazing World as well as within it.

Once there, though, the bonds of friendship are tested and amicable ties are loosened by marital ones, ties that suggest not only duty, but also those of affection and eroticism, for the Duchess expresses 'an extreme desire to converse with the soul of her noble lord and dear husband' (p. 192). Indeed, so strong is this desire that it causes her to lose 'any consideration of the Empress's soul' (especially in reference to his well-being after she witnesses him exercising with his sword just before eating), driving her instead to leave 'her aerial vehicle' and enter 'into her lord', only to be followed shortly, and somewhat farcically, by the Empress: 'and then the Duke had three souls in one body' (p. 194).

This triadic convergence of Platonic souls does not lead, however, to 'concordance and harmony' with the holy trinity, as Cavendish's contemporary Henry More suggests in relation to the journey of the soul in his influential version of neo-platonism,<sup>49</sup> but to the all too human, discordant emotion of jealousy on the Duchess's part when the souls

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<sup>47</sup> Montaigne, p. 213.

<sup>48</sup> Both the Empress and the Duchess make much of the details of the Duchess's place in the social hierarchy when the Duchess expresses her desire to be an empress.

<sup>49</sup> Henry More, 'To the Reader Upon the first Canto of *Psychozoia*', in *Philosophical Poems*, Facsimile reprint of the 1647 edition (Menston: The Scolar Press, 1969), sig. B8-B8v. In this work More refers to the parallel between 'the famous Platonicall triad', Ahad, AEon and Psyche, his allegorical figure for the world's soul, and the Christian trinity. *Psychathanasia* takes this parallel further, suggesting that 'Three centres hath mans soul in Unity/ Together joynd; or if you will, but one./ ... Th' high'st intellection,/ Which being wak'd the soul's in Union/ With God', see *Philosophical Poems*, p. 133, Book 3, Canto 1, Stanza 14, ll. 118-19, 121-3. In this More is drawing on the Triad of Plotinus, who 'was perceived by More as the reviver of a sacred wisdom deriving ultimately from the ancient Jews, a "Cabbala" which it was his own duty to restore to its proper place in Christian philosophy in his own day'; see Robert Crocker, 'Mysticism and Enthusiasm in Henry More', in *Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies*, ed. by Sarah Hutton (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), pp. 137-55 (p. 141). A. Jacob asserts that *A Platonic Song of the Soul* (1642, included in More's *Philosophical Poems* 1647), of which these works form a part, was 'the first major philosophical document' of the Cambridge Platonists and that by the 1650s More was 'the most important Platonist philosopher in England'; see A. Jacob, 'Introduction', in *Henry More The Immortality of the Soul*, ed. by A. Jacob (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), pp. i-xcii (pp. v, viii). Cavendish was certainly familiar with Henry More's ideas and those of the Cambridge Platonists, responding specifically to More's work in her philosophical writing and even

of the Empress and the Duke ‘became enamoured of each other’ (p. 194), an exchange that seems to disrupt the notion that friendship is ‘enjoyed in proportion to our desire’.<sup>50</sup>

Remembering, though, ‘that Platonism was divine, as being derived from divine Plato’, the Duchess reassures herself that ‘no adultery could be committed’ between them and conveniently ‘cast forth’ her jealousy almost as quickly as it arrives (pp. 194-5). Even so, the narrator creates a somewhat troubling, if wonderfully absurd, image when she ruminates that had the Duke had ‘some such souls more’ he ‘would have been like the Grand Signior in his seraglio, only it would have been a platonic seraglio’ (p. 194). This reminds us of the lurking issue of bodily desire and how the corporeal refuses to be so easily detached from the chaste soul, a matter that is also notably acknowledged in Plato’s *Symposium* when the drunken Alcibiades interrupts Socrates’s account of Diotima’s discourse on ‘the mysteries’ of ‘the rites of love’, which is presented as an ascent from the body towards ‘divine beauty’, and signals the ‘great mass of mortal rubbish’ such an ideal notion excludes (pp. 47, 49). Furthermore, the amatory interplay between soul and body is suggested earlier in Cavendish’s narrative when, on catching sight of her husband, the ‘aerial vehicle’ carrying the Duchess’s soul ‘became so splendidous, as if it had been enlightened by the sun; by which we may perceive, that the passions of souls or spirits can alter their bodily vehicles’ (p. 194).<sup>51</sup>

Cavendish’s philosophical writing indeed makes explicit her monistic view that the body cannot be separated from the soul.<sup>52</sup> In *Philosophical Letters*, for example, she

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sending a presentation copy of her *Philosophical Letters* (1664) to him, of which four sections are devoted to challenging his views. Hutton convincingly demonstrates that ‘Henry More’s part in *Blazing World* is larger than is normally recognised’; see Hutton, p. 192. It seems likely, for example, that the reference to the Duchess’s departure from the ‘aerial vehicle’ carrying her soul directly satirises More’s neo-platonic view that ‘upon release from the earthly body, the soul “transmigrates” into either an aerial or aetherial body’, for, as Cavendish claims in *Philosophical Letters*, the soul ‘being material, has no need of any Vehicles’; for both quotations see Broad, p. 60. Cf. More’s *The Immortality of the Soul* (1659), which, following ‘The Platonists’, makes a hierarchical distinction between ‘Terrestrial, Aereal, and Aethereal or Celestial’ vehicles ‘in every one whereof there may be several degrees of purity and impurity’ according to the condition of the soul, for ‘as one Soul is more noble then another, so is the difference of this diviner Body’, More, *Immortality*, pp. 156, 162, Book 2, Chapt XV, secs 2-4. For a detailed discussion about Cavendish’s critique of More’s philosophical writing, see Broad, pp. 35-64, Hutton, pp. 185-98 and Sarasohn, pp. 135-41.

<sup>50</sup> Montaigne, p. 209.

<sup>51</sup> This is perhaps an ironic reversal of Henry More’s theory concerning the many ‘Alterations and Modifications’ the body undertakes from its original condition of ‘pure Light and Flame’ ‘before it light[s] into such a contexture as to prove the entire Body of any one person in the world’. See More, *The Immortality of the Soul* p. 148, Book 2, Chap XII, sec. 6.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* in which Cavendish argues that the soul is ‘a material self-moving substance; for the soul of man is part of the soul of nature, and the soul of nature is material’, though she also makes clear that she is referring to the ‘natural, not the divine soul of man, which I leave to the Church’, unlike, by implication, other natural philosophers. See Margaret Cavendish, *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. by Eileen O’Neil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 221.

specifically counters Henry More's dualistic perspective that the body and soul are distinct, even if united, entities, asserting 'that I am no Platonick; for this opinion is dangerous, especially for married Women, by reason the conversation of the Souls may be a great temptation, and a means to bring Platonick Lovers to a neerer acquaintance, not allowable by the Laws of Marriage, although by the sympathy of the Souls'.<sup>53</sup> As Jacqueline Broad suggests, Cavendish shows here that 'she does not believe that "the conversation of Souls" is a completely disembodied exercise, but must inevitably lead to a more carnal kind of relationship', thus placing the bonds of friendship in direct competition with those of marriage, while also suggesting the potentially erotic overtones of amicable relations.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, once the Duchess has recovered from her lapse into jealousy, the exchange between the three souls does not 'give birth' to Diotima's concept of 'divine beauty itself', but rather generates the rather less grandiose outcome of 'pleasant' conversation, even if this intercourse transcends the bounds of mortal dialogue in paradoxically being 'so pleasant, that it cannot be expressed' (p. 195).<sup>55</sup> However, such colloquy is not enough to satisfy the Empress's desires. In a way that both reflects and deviates from friendship's mirroring, the Empress's enjoyment of this Platonic threesome comes to a sudden halt when, ironically paralleling the Duchess's earlier desire to be with the Duke, her soul grows 'sad and melancholy, for want of' the Emperor's 'beloved soul' (p. 195), even though he does not know that her soul is absent and has not been mentioned directly since giving her absolute power. However, she only returns after agreeing to assist the Duchess in 'her desire' to reconcile the difference between the Duke and Fortune, so as to make them 'friends' (p. 196). The Empress thus helps to set up a trial between Fortune and her friends and those of the Duke in order to settle this

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<sup>53</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophical Letters: Or, Modest Reflections Upon some Opinions in Natural Philosophy, Maintained By several Famous and Learned Authors of this Age, Expressed by way of Letters: By the Thrice Noble, Illustrious, and Excellent Princess, The Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London, 1664), p. 219. See also More's *Psychathanasia*, which describes 'The soul's strange nature, operation, / Her independency, loose union / With this frail body', 'For both the body and the bodies spright / Doth things unto particulars confine, / Teaching them partiall friendship and fell spight'; see *Philosophical Poems*, p. 113, Book 2, Canto 2, stanza 7, ll. 58-60 and p. 124, Book 2, Canto 3, stanza 8, ll. 64-6. Similarly, *The Immortality of the Soul* argues for the soul's 'vitall union with the Body', and yet clearly differentiates between them when identifying the vehicles in which the soul is carried; see p. 17, The Preface. See fn. 49, above.

<sup>54</sup> Broad, p. 61. This is something that my 'Journeys Beyond Frontiers' touches on. See p. 49, fn. 62 in particular. David Michael Robinson also highlights the erotic overtones of this section of *The Blazing World*, quite rightly suggesting that 'A nonsexual seraglio is an absurd idea' and that this signals 'the ambiguity and humor with which platonic love is consistently treated in' the text; see 'Pleasant Conversation in the Seraglio: Lesbianism, Platonic Love, and Cavendish's *Blazing World*', *The Eighteenth Century* 44.2-3 (2004), 133-66 (pp. 147, 145). However, he goes further, arguing that 'female homoeroticism, and not simply a more general fluidity of desire or gender, suffuses Cavendish's work, describing *The Blazing World* as 'a lesbian fantasy' (pp. 139, 145).

<sup>55</sup> Plato, *The Symposium*, trans. and ed. by Christopher Gill (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 49.

dispute, albeit partially, before she is reunited with the Emperor. The text, then, troubles the notion of a self-contained, exclusive union of friendship by insisting that it negotiates with the complexities of marital ties and that it extends its reach to help foster a network of friendly relations connected to those ties, while at the same time allowing the amicability of two in one to be sustained.

However, not only must friendship interact with bonds of this kind, it must also accommodate other sets of interests. Having settled state affairs in the Blazing World, the Empress is 'extremely troubled' to discover that a war is raging in her native country, ESFI, and decides to intervene (p. 203). While the Emperor offers her 'all the assistance which the Blazing World was able to afford' (p. 203), his suggestions as to how to address military matters are dismissed by the Empress as impracticable: that is, apart from his final one, which is to consult 'your dear Platonic friend the Duchess of Newcastle' because of 'her good and profitable counsels' (p. 204). He therefore requests the Empress 'to send for her soul, and confer with her about this business' (p. 204). At this point the Emperor retreats into the shadows and allows the dynamic force of friendship to take centre stage when, once again, the Duchess's role of intimate friend embraces that of political advisor as she and the Empress immediately enter into 'serious council' about military strategy (p. 205).

As with her husband, the Empress at first questions the Duchess's advice, but unlike the Emperor, her friend remains 'steadfast',<sup>56</sup> insisting that the Empress 'have but a little patience, and rely upon my advice', as a result of which 'you shall not fail to save your own native country' (p. 206). The internal sphere of amicability, in which the Empress 'loved the Duchess as her own soul' (p. 206), thus becomes the means through which the Empress can also outwardly demonstrate her commitment to public duty by 'show[ing] the greatness of her love and affection which she bore to her native country' (p. 205). Remaining as two in one when the Empress confirms that 'Your soul ... shall live with my soul, in my body' in their expedition to ESFI (p. 206), they thus face the challenge of warfare as a united front.

Nor are they thwarted by the obstacles they confront when, for example, having conquered 'all the several navies of the enemies' (p. 211), they must then find a means of releasing traffic and trade to ESFI. Indeed, they deploy a 'no holds barred' military policy, involving, with the help of the Blazing World's creatures, destruction, carnage, 'fire', 'force' and 'a total ruin' of all adversaries in order to generate from the ashes the 'miraculous delivery' of ESFI and to secure it as 'the absolute monarchy of all that

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<sup>56</sup> Aristotle, p. 214.

world' (pp. 211-14). Through these apocalyptic means, not only do the friends transform ESFI, but also the Empress's relationship to her native country. She does not merely return as 'a great and powerful princess', having been 'a subject of this kingdom', which, as she informs us, 'is but a small part of this world', but obtains the status of 'some celestial creature, or rather an uncreated goddess' (pp. 209-10, 215).

Through her amicable relations with the Duchess, her identity is metamorphosed both within the domain of friendship and without it, enabling her to act out the role of public saviour by giving her agency within her native world where before she had none.<sup>57</sup> What this episode makes clear, then, if it was not before, is that the Duchess and Empress's friendship does not entail withdrawal into a self-contained utopian retreat, but is the source of *vita activa* and direct engagement with public life.

#### **IV. Prologue and Epilogue**

If this interconnection between inner and outer worlds is apparent within the fabric of the narrative, so it is within the text more broadly. In the Prologue and Epilogue to the reader the speaker's internal 'world of my own creating' is explicitly brought into the public arena to be actively shared with, among other inhabitants of the world external to it, 'my noble female friends' (p. 124). The relations the speaker sets up with her audience indeed establish a framework of amicability where belligerence is to be avoided at all costs: the *Blazing World* is presented as an exemplar of 'a peaceable' domain in which there is no discord, and the speaker further demands that 'the world I have made' should not be usurped (p. 224-5). In turn, she offers to 'delight' her readers with the 'variety' of her work of 'fancy' and, through this act of generosity, will receive the reward of bestowing pleasure on her audience, for 'if it add any satisfaction to you, I shall account my self a happy *creatoress*' (p. 124). She thus invites her readers either to join her world and become her subjects or, alternatively, to instigate through their reading of *The Blazing World* the possibility to 'create worlds of their own' (pp. 224-5), thereby granting her audience both entry into her self-created community and autonomy.

Furthermore, in her Epilogue the figure of the Duchess within the narrative is directly connected to the writer without and her 'ambition' to be 'Authoress of a whole world' (p. 224). This world, however, is not simply the product of the internal sphere of 'fancy, framed in [her] own mind, according as [she] pleases' (p. 123), but is presented

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<sup>57</sup> In my 'Journeys Beyond Frontiers', I note the way in which the Empress 'is metamorphosed into a Christ-like figure or second Eve'; see p. 39.

alongside ‘my serious philosophical contemplations’ which are the result of ‘searching and enquiring after the causes of natural effects’; that is, Cavendish’s *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*, which appeared alongside *The Blazing World*. The text is therefore presented as two in one, in which *Observations* and *The Blazing World* are ‘joined ... as two worlds at the ends of their poles’ (pp. 123-4).<sup>58</sup> It embraces different perspectives and sets of interests, while issuing from a single ‘Authoress’ (p. 224). Rather than being at odds, these different worlds of philosophy and fancy are placed in an amicable relation, suggesting affinity within differentiation as they both derive from the same source as ‘effects, or rather actions of the rational parts of matter’ (pp. 123-4). Indeed, both assist and benefit each other, for philosophy ‘requires sometimes the help of fancy, to recreate the mind, and withdraw it from its more serious contemplations’ (p. 124).

As if to mirror this textual relation, in the Epilogue we are informed that the Empress remains the Duchess’s ‘dear Platonic friend’, even though the Empress’s rule over the Blazing World is clearly demarcated from the Duchess’s over her philosophical world (p. 225). Indeed, the Duchess promises not ‘to disturb’ or ‘depose’ the Empress’s government, even though she created her world, and concludes the text by opening up the possibility of creating ‘another world for another friend’ (p. 225). Friendship, then, is given the last word, but is presented as a unity that enables individual autonomy, works alongside community and refuses exclusivity.

*The Blazing World* thus uses the utopian mode in order to investigate contemporaneous discourses of friendship and the classical ideas that informed them so as to produce its own witty take on these. In turn, friendship becomes the location for discussion about what a utopia might comprise. Instead of elevating amity as a self-contained ideal with its own autonomous principles, Cavendish’s version of friendship is required to accommodate the individuated internal worlds of each party and actually enables each to produce self-created domains. Furthermore, the text demands that amicable relations interact with types of community other than its own and engage directly with attachments each friend holds elsewhere. Just as Cavendish views the soul as being tied

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<sup>58</sup> Battigelli rightly notes that these texts are ‘in fact companion pieces’, highlighting their link as ‘philosophical texts aimed at contesting the Royal Society’s experimental program by specifically targeting Hooke’s celebration of microscopes and telescopes’; see p. 102. While this is true, the connection between them is more complex than this suggests. I also discuss the link between *The Blazing World* and *Observations* and their critique of Hooke in my ‘Journeys Beyond Frontiers’, pp. 25-33. Pohl adds a further complexity to the interconnection between these two texts by suggesting that ‘Cavendish originally planned to complement’ them ‘with a play, now called “A Piece of a Play”’, and that *The Blazing World* ‘would therefore have consisted of three different but complementary genres with analogies and cross-references throughout the book’; see p. 36.

to the body, friendship is fundamentally linked to the world outside it, each having the capacity to transform and be transformed by the other. Friendship, then, must operate as a world within other worlds to which it is connected, not separate, and must adapt and recast itself in reference to competing interests and potentially discordant concerns. Conversely, it has the ability to reshape the world external to it through the dynamic energy of its own affective values. In this, disengagement from the outside into an imaginary no place is shown to be neither possible nor desirable. Rather the utopia of *The Blazing World* presents a negotiation between autonomy, companionship and community that is born out of amity.