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# Creative Currencies: Circulation and Sovereignty in *The Alchemist*, *Urania*, and *The Blazing World*

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Creative Currencies: Circulation and Sovereignty in *The Alchemist*, *Urania*,  
and *The Blazing World*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English from  
The College of William and Mary

by

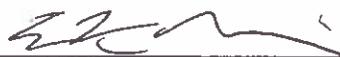
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Accepted for Honors



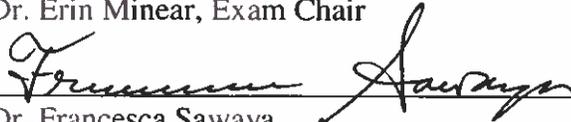
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## Introduction

Building a world, whether physically or fictionally, involves defining its systems of value. How do we appraise what we see and exchange what we earn? How do we esteem one another? Once we can answer these questions, our world gains logic, or at least a working foundation for sociopolitical order. Yet as our world evolves, so must our answers.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, English society had upended nearly every aspect of how it defined value. England's understanding of value as "material or monetary worth" ("Value," def. I.1.a) remained in fluctuation due to the monetary policies of its rulers. Kings Henry VIII and Edward VI reduced the precious metal content of the nations' coins for personal profit during the Great Debasement; Queen Elizabeth I set the coins back to their original worth; and James I attempted to avoid debasement, but then inflated the price of gold (Deng 87, 95; Madox 12, 17). Monarchs decided what particular coins were worth at the outset of their reign, and they continually neglected to mint smaller, less profitable coins. This "problem of small coins" led small business owners to issue their own tokens for customers (Deng 98-99). On both a macro and a micro level, absolute economic value was subjective.

Even beyond coinage, circulation remained an ever-crucial vehicle of value. "The relative worth, usefulness, or importance of a thing or (occasionally) a person" ("Value," def. II.6.a) became an increasingly frequent economic discussion throughout the century as England's economy deepened its mercantilist practices. Increasing the country's wealth via war or trade—or in particular, by increasing its exports—necessitated a continual flow of goods and services, within and outside the country's borders. Sociopolitically, this goal fueled England's interest in empire. England thereby valued

gold and silver, but by extension, it also valued power. Those who played the most decisive roles in the nation's circulatory processes were those who stood to reap the greatest profits.

The face of an English coin conveys more than just the piece's monetary value. It often portrays the face of the ruling monarch, accompanied by images that express the monarch's vision for the nation; for instance, crests, crosses, ships, and crowns adorn Elizabethan coins. Thus, monetary circulation not only bolstered the country's domestic wealth and markets, but also implicitly reinforced the monarch's sociopolitical values.

I extend this metaphor of intrinsic and extrinsic value circulation to seventeenth-century England's literary circulation. A written work entertains and intellectually enriches its audience, but it also grants us unparalleled insight into the desires and priorities of its author. The work's external appearance and internal, content-specific thematic interests work together to impress a certain image of the writer upon the reader—an image that the writer has carefully crafted. Indeed, within the context of early modern drama, Sandra K. Fischer observes that language itself becomes a crucial way of insisting upon a speaker's worth:

The equation between words and coins not only rests on their similar function in the act of exchange--words as the tokens of intellectual exchange—but also encapsulates the transition from intrinsic to exchange value. Words, like individual worth, begin to be valuable not so much for what they represent (intrinsic worth) but for what profit or esteem their utterance can engender (exchange value). As *dramatis personae* seek replacement values for the old economic hierarchy, they discover the status and profitability of wit, with words as their currency. (21)

Fischer notices this trend among speakers in fiction, but the same is true for the authors who create these “*personae*.” For early modern dramatic characters and writers, alike, the “status and profitability of wit” points to the status and profitability of those who used it.

English seventeenth-century literary circulation remained restricted to the country's elite. Within the royal court, playwrights first gained monarchical patrons—and then audiences. Poets passed their sonnet cycles along to carefully-chosen noble friends. Some of those nobles even used their educational access and aspirations to compose their own creative work.

These processes launched the work of Ben Jonson, Lady Mary Wroth, and Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, respectively, into the public sphere. Making their work available for consumption meant entering their society's nuanced and perpetually changing realms of value. In doing so, these authors insisted that their work was valuable. Their texts were indeed the *products* of their imagination, made available for consumption through performance and publication. Just as readily, however, these writers' creative work became the vehicle through which they could reimagine their world and rewrite themselves within it. Their writing became a form of currency: they could exchange their imaginative work for a chance at self-redefinition.

For female writers, such an opportunity proved particularly crucial. Women had limited agency within economic and literary circulation alike, as the systems that governed both only selectively recognized their labor. Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women" introduces her central question of female oppression with the idea that "A woman is a woman. She only becomes a domestic, a wife, a chattel, a playboy bunny, a prostitute, or a human dictaphone in certain relations. Torn from these relationships, she is no more the helpmate of man than gold in itself is money" (28). The "relationships" she notes are as relevant to supporting her twentieth-century, post-capitalist era critique as they are to explaining the seventeenth-century circulation of Dol Common's body in

*The Alchemist*, or to the factors that precluded the circulation of Mary Wroth's *Urania*.

As my analysis will show, women have long had to choose among prescribed roles through which their labor can become valuable, in fiction and in history. They do not live in a system where their value is intrinsic.

The female authors I study here imagine a different possibility. Not only do they offer their intellectual labor through their writing, but they also use this creative labor as a form of self-determinative value assertion. The utopian undertones of Wroth's *Urania* and Cavendish's *The Blazing World* enable both authors to create worlds in which they may tell their stories without inhibitions. They create female characters who resemble themselves, share stories and ideas that follow their own, and hold higher sociopolitical positions than themselves—and literary worlds in which this process is possible. In *The Alchemist*, Jonson's principal female character is a prostitute and actress who must play, not write, her roles. The fact that he situates her within England's immediately post-Elizabethan, early Jacobean era—the era in which he was currently writing—suggests that the renewed limitations placed on a woman like Dol did not feel as crucial to him; he does not need to refigure his contemporary world, because he and his labor are already valued within it. Wroth and Cavendish, by contrast, find promise in imaginative fiction, and they use it to create new roles and worlds for themselves.

My thesis will examine the different implications that literary circulation and sovereignty had for Jonson, an established male writer, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, compared to Wroth and Cavendish, women writers who wrote later in the period. For a female writer, publishing her work was rare and controversial. Placing her work on the market exposed not only the work, but also the writer, herself, to

appraisal. By analyzing the ways that Jonson, Wroth, and Cavendish's female characters circulate and gain power in their texts, I hope to explain how their authors did the same in their society. I argue that this process cannot be separated from its economic and sociopolitical context.

### I. Circulating Dol Common

*The Alchemist*, in John Mebane's terms, is a play of continual "alchemical ascent and descent" and, on a material level, of "stripping or deflation" (128). Just as alchemy promises to transform base metals into gold, its scheming, supposed practitioners in Jonson's play are themselves elevated beyond their own socially "base" beginnings through the guise of their scheme. Subtle leaves his formerly destitute position, wearing "the several rags/You'd raked, and picked from dunghills," to instead represent himself as a world-renowned alchemist who "can extract/The souls of all things by his art" (Jonson I.i.33-34; IV.i.85-86). Jeremy the Butler becomes the eponymously-named Face, a con artist who triumphs over his co-conspirators, his customers, and even his master, Lovewit, and his Blackfriars audience. Dol Common's social trajectory, however, fails to evolve. Her value throughout the play "ascends and descends" more steeply than that of her male co-conspirators, as does her ability to self-determine it.

Jonson opens the play by imbuing Dol, its sole female protagonist, with the most holistic, decisive understanding of the scheme at hand. When Face and Subtle loudly bicker about their own socioeconomic positions, Dol asks whether they have "no more regard/To [their] reputations?" as she urges them to lower their voices, and she further implores that they "Have yet some care of me, of your *republic*" (I.i.108-110, emphasis mine). The term "republic," with its sociopolitical resonance, is key. As their "republic," she wields a decisive power over and among their actions, as evidenced by her

subsequent threat to “grow factious.../And, take my part, and quit you” (I.i.140-141) if their petty personal disagreements put her own stake in the scheme at risk. In doing so, she would effectively wage a “civil war,” in Hugh Jenkins’s terms (168). Dol warns them to remember that they are a “venture tripartite” that will ultimately split the profits of their scheme equally (Jonson I.i.135); by threatening to take her own part herself, she asserts her own labor to be just as valuable as theirs. For this reminder, Subtle and Face praise her, calling her “Royal Dol” (I.i.174) and seemingly recognizing her as the authoritative, almost sovereign voice of reason in the scene.

Yet Dol’s description of herself as their “republic” also relinquishes a certain degree of autonomy. As a “republic,” she is Subtle and Face’s “public thing” (Jenkins 167); she remains Dol *Common*, a reference to both her status as a prostitute and to the shared claim that her co-conspirators and customers alike have over her body. Jenkins connects both Dol’s body and her initial idea of a “republic” to a broader inherent tension between “commonwealth” and “common wealth” (167). The accessibility of Dol’s body provides a sexual, commodified “wealth” to her male customers, but within male-centric Jacobean moral values, this “wealth” is all too “common.” These dynamics are at play even as Subtle and Face reject Dol’s metaphor, making a reference to monarchy—“*Royal Dol*”—rather than responding to the republic Dol describes. As such, “*Royal Dol*” could refer exclusively to the authoritative nature of her assertion. It could also, however, connect her back to this idea of commonality through an additional pun on royal currency, in which she is compared to a seventeenth-century “royal” coin,<sup>1</sup> passed from hand to hand, its ownership and value ever in flux. Indeed, the reward Face imagines Dol

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<sup>1</sup> A “royal,” or “ryal,” was a gold coin in circulation during Elizabeth I’s reign (Landreth 239).

ought to receive for her conciliatory words immediately after she speaks them remains grounded in the economics of her sexual transactions and adaptability:

...at supper, thou shalt sit in triumph,  
 And not be styled Dol *Common*, but Dol *Proper*,  
 Dol *Singular*: the longest cut, at night,  
 Shall draw thee for his Dol *Particular*. (Jonson I.i.176-179,  
 emphasis mine)

Her triumphant seat at the metaphorical table, and faux-monarchical renamings, are rewards for her sexual labor, rather than her intellectual merit. Where Dol views herself as a member of an equally-trifurcated republic, Face and Subtle place themselves within a monarchy, wherein each person vies for dominance: over each other, and over Dol. They speak here of drawing “cuts,” or “straws,” to decide who will sleep with Dol and make her his “Particular” that night, with Dol “seated” and passive, receiving no say in the matter. The metaphoric instability between Dol’s republic and their monarchy thereby points to a more pervasive misunderstanding of Dol’s value. Is she “royal” in this scene because she has reclaimed some pragmatic sovereignty over the arguably unprofessional Subtle and Face, or because her male co-conspirators recognize that their business is only viable if they can offer her as a commodity—as corporeal currency?

This question underlies all of Dol’s scenes in *The Alchemist*, and undermines the true “equality” of their “venture tripartite.” The instability of Dol’s political metaphors serves as an implicit representation of early modern England’s evolving gender politics, as the country transitioned from female leadership under Queen Elizabeth I to the masculine reign of James I. In this sense, “Royal Dol”—and each possibility of Dol as queen—must also be considered alongside Elizabeth I, her historical referent. Within this context, Jenkins crucially argues that Dol’s position within this line in *The Alchemist*

cannot be separated from the misogyny that underlay James I's political policies, especially following the reign of a dynamic female monarch. Citing James I's "An Elegy...concerning his counsel of Ladies & Gentlemen to Depart the City of London according to his Majesties Proclamation,"<sup>2</sup> Jenkins analyzes the ways in which the proclamation itself links female desires—and particularly, their sexual "vices"—to those of the entire city of London. James contrasts the vices of city women with the virtues of country women, effectively "us[ing] female figures to negotiate between" an urban, "degenerate, artificial, luxurious" economy—which in turn "transform[s] the primitive accumulation of London's burgeoning economy into female commodification and consumption"—and a rural, "natural, useful economy" (Jenkins 168). As such, Dol's very presence and even fleeting moments of authority in the play signals implicit insurgency. Anthony Ouellette emphasizes that she and Subtle "come from the City's margins" and run their scheme within Face's place of employment, a comfortable house in Blackfriars (379). By inviting her into this central London space, and granting her a central stage for her labor in both Lovewit's house and onstage in the play itself, Jonson places Dol squarely within the landscape against which his era's shifting gender values were being played out, and he highlights the accompanying moral and narrative constraints of that position.

Jonson further plays into these complex gender dynamics through his implicit pun on "queen" and "quean"<sup>3</sup> in his representations of Dol; these puns conflate Elizabeth, the

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<sup>2</sup> This poem emphasized that London-dwelling—and particularly male--nobility should move out of the city and back into their countryside estates, complementing James I's earlier legal proclamations that directed the same (Sharpe 144). Josephine Roberts also cites these proclamations in her introduction to Volume I of *Urania* to make similar claims about the misogynistic sociopolitical times in which Wroth was writing. This context will be further explored in the Wroth section of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> Slang for "prostitute" ("Quean," def.1).

“virgin queen,” with the urban, sexually licentious figure of the prostitute.<sup>4</sup> Particularly in a post-Elizabethan era, the idea that one letter can separate legitimized female political authority from taboo, objectified female sex work dangerously suggests that a similarly thin line exists away from language, in morality and reality. When considering the creative work that, like Jonson’s, was patronized during the early years of James I’s reign, this kind of metaphoric and legal gender politics argued throughout James I’s “Elgie” is crucial context enough. Yet its implications become even graver when read as a response to his predecessor, Queen Elizabeth I, whom Dol channels in the various roles she plays throughout the scheme. I extend this reading to the oscillation of Dol’s value throughout *The Alchemist*: as an at times derisive, at others morally and politically critical, reflection of Elizabeth I’s “Golden Age” through the retrospective, satiric lens of early Jacobean theatre.

Dol’s first transformation into this Jacobean “Elizabeth” occurs when Subtle and Face choose to cast Dol as Dapper’s “fairy queen” aunt, who promises to shower him with riches. This title’s reference to Edmund Spenser’s 1590 *Faerie Queene* would be recognizable to early seventeenth-century theatrical audiences, as would the accompanying association of the Faerie Queen with Elizabeth herself. As Subtle and Face introduce the concept of Dapper’s “Queen of Fairy” aunt to him, they say that “He’s o’ the only best complexion/The Queen of Fairy Loves” (Jonson I.ii.105-106), a line that Caroline McManus recognizes as a reference to Elizabeth’s penchant for attractive young men (204). Face advances this commentary—and perhaps implicitly voices Jonson’s response to the famously virgin queen—in his subsequent description: “Her Grace is a

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<sup>4</sup> I borrow the phrasing of this dichotomy from my advisor, Dr. Erin Webster.

lone woman/And very rich, and if she take a fancy/She will do strange things” (Jonson I.ii.155-157). Dol Common’s portrayal of a pseudo-Elizabeth gives Face and Jonson a unique venue to describe an unmarried female ruler as primarily “lone,” “rich,” and “strange,” prone to acting in response to her “fancies” instead of a thoughtful consideration of her subject, her nephew. Such a description unites Dol’s Elizabeth with the Jacobean positioning of London as an “artificial, luxurious” economy of feminine vice, and places historical and fictional Elizabeth firmly at its helm. Being “lone” and “strange,” these female rulers are kept sociopolitically distanced from their male subjects, becoming safe sites for the projection of their most rampant desires. Both Elizabeths seemingly exist for the sole purpose of enriching their male subjects; their “golden” ages become literal, meant to feed masculinized forms of greed.

The possibilities of this “golden age,” and lack thereof, appear even before Dol’s official performance as Queen of Fairy. Epicure Mammon’s desire “To get a nation on [Dol]” (IV.i.128) metaphorically undermines the conditions of Elizabeth’s reign; where historical Elizabeth’s “golden age” is considered alongside her virginity and her political prudence, the golden age Mammon envisions for himself and Dol hinges upon the imaginative sensual and procreative properties of material gold—and Dol’s embodiment of them. Before he meets Dol, Mammon insists that he will “Heighten [him]self, talk to her, all in gold.../...She shall feel gold, taste gold, hear gold, sleep gold/ Nay we will *concumbere* gold” (IV.i.25, 29-30, emphasis Jonson’s). Through Mammon’s perverse perspective, gold leaves the realm of commodification to become a sexualized state of being. Here, “gold” no longer stands for material wealth or for Dol’s physical pleasure, but for the transformation of his own moral baseness— his professed vices of greed,

gluttony, and lust—into a legitimate basis of sociopolitical power. Within this reign, the “golden age” over which he and Dol will preside depends upon their ability to “concumere gold”: to physically produce the era via sexual procreation. Such a phrase synthesizes his lust for her with his greed; to Mammon, “life” and “lust” are indistinguishable, and he wishes for a “perpetuity” of both (IV.165-66). In this way, Dol becomes a mere vehicle for both his imaginative reign and for the reign of his own vices. Her physical body will bear his nation, and his idolatrous behavior towards her solely worships this possibility—not Dol herself.

Even in Mammon’s most elaborate fantasies, Dol’s status as a queen remains transitory, an identity she can put on and discard at Mammon’s command. He narrates the way she “shall *wear* [the light],” be “*adorn[ed]*” by “the jewels/Of twenty states” and own a Mammon-purchased “wardrobe/Richer than Nature’s...to *change* thyself” (IV.i.109-110, 141-142, 166-167, all emphasis mine). Even though Mammon reads “the house of Valois” and “the Medici” in her facial features (IV.i.57-58), the clothes and jewels she physically wears in his vision are what distinguish her as a queen; she can “change” herself from “quean” to “queen” through a mere change of clothes. Just as Mammon’s reign hinges upon “the philosopher’s stone,” a material—yet imaginary—object, Dol’s transformation into his queen hinges upon her luxurious material adornments. Like the act of alchemy itself, Mammon’s visions of Dol and their shared golden age reign indicate only surface-level transformations, never escaping their inherent “baseness.” Mammon still views his fantastical interaction with Dol as a transaction and pays Face for it (IV.i.173). His golden age becomes a commodity, and so does Dol within it.

Dol, however, recognizes her position, as well as the instability of Mammon's unruly "golden age," carrying forward the political metaphors she uses at the play's beginning. After Mammon describes her as a "miracle," one that will "Set all the eyes/Of court afire, like a burning glass/And work 'em into cinders" (IV.i.139-141), Dol responds:

I could well consent, sir.  
 But, in a monarchy, how will this be?  
 The Prince will soon take notice; and both seize  
 You, and your stone: it being a wealth unfit  
 For any private subject. (IV.i.146-149)

Inquiring after the political feasibility of his vision, and declaring how much wealth "any private subject" ought to have, Dol offers a more grounded musing upon economic and moral value than any of her male counterparts in the scene. Mebane argues that throughout *The Alchemist*, Jonson links imagination "with the senses and with physical desire" (132), much in the way that Epicure Mammon does. Mammon and Dapper share a view of Dol as "a projection of [their] own desires and indulgence of [their] own extravagant fantasy," a form of idolatrous worship that Jonson finds and critiques in many of his contemporaries' work (134). In this scene, and throughout the play, Dol Common voices this critique most resoundingly. Commenting "We may be said to want the gilt, and trappings/The dress of honour; yet we strive to keep/The seeds, and the materials" (Jonson IV.i.48-51), Dol articulates a desire for holistic stores of value and "honour," ones that extend beyond easily-malleable, extrinsic "gilt," "trappings," and "dress." A political society, whether a republic or a monarchy, must be founded upon legitimate, intrinsic "seeds" and "materials" of "honour." In casting "quean" Dol as a golden age "queen," and defining her status through her "gilt" and "dress," Jonson offers a sensually debased practice of imagination that undermines both the laudatory,

Spenserian verses dedicated to Elizabeth and the sociopolitical definition of the “honour” that defined her rule. In representing Dol as Elizabeth, he grants her limited narrative space to renegotiate her role.

Once Dol appears to Dapper as the Queen of Fairy, she almost explicitly performs the role of Elizabeth I, as McManus, Jenkins, and other scholars highlight. Dol resembles Elizabeth in both her rhetoric and her dress, using the royal “we” to command Dapper to “Arise, and touch our velvet gown” (McManus 204; Jonson V.iv.28-27). McManus characterizes Dol’s performance with Dapper as a reversal of Elizabeth’s royal maundy, a ceremony in which the reigning monarch gives commemorative coins to their subjects; Dol-Elizabeth’s maundy requires a flow of money and gifts to *her*, rather than vice-versa (207). I, however, view this scene as yet another blurred distinction of Dol as “queen” and “quean.” Dapper must “bring’s a thousand pound” and “touch” and “kiss” the velvet skirts of the gown and even Dol’s “departing part”—her backside—in return for an impossible promise of “three or four hundred chests of treasure/And some twelve thousand acres of Fairyland” (Jonson V.iv.47, 27-29, 54-55, 57). In essence, he pays to sexually interact with Dol, making this scene scarcely different from prostitution. He believes that his genuflection is sincere, even going so far as to relinquish his most valuable material possessions and be gagged and bound in a privy in order to “purify” himself before seeing her. Yet if the *The Alchemist*’s moral code entails enduring tangible discomfort and supplication in exchange for an immaterial reward, Dol experiences these consequences most exclusively.

The overarching difference between Elizabeth and Dol’s authority is that Elizabeth could distinguish a separate “body politic” from her “body natural,” while Dol

cannot. Ernst Kantorowicz defines the “body politic” as a body “that cannot be seen or handled” (7)—a definition that seemingly precludes it from sexual objectification. Indeed, most speculation about Elizabeth’s “body natural” centered upon whether or not she would marry and produce an heir, but these questions granted Elizabeth significant diplomatic leverage. As she indulged and rejected her vast range of suitors—and navigated her own court’s agenda—she “strategically blended imperiousness with an elaborate cult of love” (Greenblatt 222). She artfully mixed metaphors in her speeches, making alternating references to herself as England’s mother or wife depending on the context, and comparing herself to male monarchs and philosophers when she needed to draw attention away from her femininity altogether. Queen Elizabeth I thereby played a variety of literal and figurative roles throughout her reign, and she maintained staunch political and creative control over all of them. In the words of one French ambassador, “She is a princess...who can act any part she pleases” (222).

By contrast, though Dol Common is a gifted actress, her role as “queen” supersedes any other part she plays. Dol, in a post-Elizabethan age and a city misogynistically characterized by its vice, finds her natural and political bodies converged: her political metaphors rejected, and her physical body objectified. Dapper’s repeated touches and kisses already adds a level of objectification to his “queenly” supplication, but this context is advanced by the fact that these motions are directed specifically at her gown: the sole “evidence of her royal identity” (McManus 207). Where Elizabeth’s “courtiers and advisers, on their knees, approached the queen, glittering in jewels and gorgeous gowns, and addressed her in extravagant terms that conjoined romantic passion and religious veneration” (Greenblatt 222), Dol earns no such respect

without her costume. Only when she wears the gown does a male customer's purchased affection—and her adherence to it—become dignified. Face facetiously offers her “a sheet, to save your velvet gown” before she and Subtle escape over the house wall (Jonson V.iv.134, 131), acknowledging that her costume is her last remnant of any claim to respect or even membership in their “indenture tripartite.” The “mocking consideration,” in McManus's terms (205), that Face exhibits here confirms that Dol never left the constraints of her extrinsic value. The goods that Subtle and Face extract from Dapper never reach Dol, certainly not at the play's end, where Face seizes the profits for himself. Even while she portrays the “Queen of Fairy,” Dol remains the play's reigning “quean,” circulating alongside, and in exchange for, the male customers' gold.

Regardless of which costume they don—and for whom—Subtle, Face, and Dol promise their customers that they are the embodiment of their vainest desires. Only for Dol, however, does this proclamation prove literal; she becomes both the physical and imaginative site of male customers' greed, even when they work alongside her. The transformation of their scheme from a Dol-termed “*venture* tripartite” to a Face-termed “*indenture* tripartite” proves that the republic Dol envisions in her mind never exists in reality. In their monarchy, “queen” and “quean” remain indistinguishable. In their “indenture,” they are all servants, but only Dol's labor and body remains in perpetual service. Jenkins argues that the possible “productivity” of her sexual labor—the possibility of her pregnancy—poses the greatest underlying threat to the “patriarchal order of the household” (166). Yet Mammon and other characters rely upon the metaphoric reproductivity of her body for their profits. Through Dol, they can *all* “concumere gold”: Mammon can consume luxurious dishes and rule his “free state”;

Dapper can receive treasure and land; and Subtle and Face can use Dol's "transformation" into these different queenly characters to cover the charade—and reap the profits—of their false alchemical scheme. As such, Dol Common's value in the play lays at the intersection of these social and material alchemies. Her synthesis of "queen" and "quean," of virtue and vice, offers an insurgent response to Elizabeth as a historical queen—and seemingly dismal prospects for the fictional and factual queens who will follow.

## II. Wroth Rewrites Circulation

Just eleven years after Jonson invoked these dualities in *The Alchemist*, Lady Mary Wroth—his family friend and occasional muse—engaged them directly by publishing *Urania*, the first woman-written English prose romance. The narrative itself proves ambitious; *Urania* intersperses its prose with complex poetry, and its plot spans two volumes, several fictional generations and geographical settings, and over 1000 characters. Wroth's most daring literary decision, however, was to place women's voices and desires at *Urania*'s forefront: to grant her characters the political legitimacy Dol seeks, while also depicting their struggles towards self-sovereignty.

It is fitting, then, that Jonson dedicated *The Alchemist* to Wroth.<sup>5</sup> In his dedication, Jonson writes that *The Alchemist* is not an acceptable offering to Wroth on its own, but becomes so through "[her] value of it," through her "judgment (which is a Sidney's)." <sup>6</sup> With this acknowledgment as explanation, he goes on to declare that he will

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<sup>5</sup> Jonson's well-documented admiration of Wroth includes not only this dedication, but also "two epigrams and a sonnet" (Lamb 2).

<sup>6</sup>This reference alludes to both the social and literary illustriousness of Wroth's family, and Jonson's intimacy with several members of her family in both contexts. Her father, Sir Robert Sidney, was well-regarded in the Jacobean court, as was Wroth herself at the beginning of her court career. Her uncle was the famous Philip Sidney, author of *Astrophil and Stella* and *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, and her

not “paint” *The Alchemist* as anything apart from what it represents, “lest it talk or look like one of the ambitious faces of the time who, the more they paint, are the less themselves” (3). This gendered metaphor advances *The Alchemist*’s implicit analogies between a woman’s costume and her underlying “self”; his play punishes Dol for her “painting” by reducing her creative, theatrical labor to sexual objectification, and failing to recognize her intrinsic value outside of these roles. Yet Jonson’s language also points to an authorial privilege not afforded to women writers: the ability to control how one’s original text will be received and interpreted by its audience. Jonson stages *The Alchemist* as an explicit satire, a social commentary where the author and the Blackfriars audience alike are in on the joke. *Urania*’s circulation, by contrast, found itself at the mercy of its courtly audience, and Wroth’s intention behind it remains the subject of long-running critical debates even today.

The male members of James I’s court who read *Urania* as a *roman à clef* used this interpretation to doom *Urania*’s print run. Most infamously, Edward, Lord Denny, wrote scathing letters to Wroth upon finding a parallel between himself and her fictional Sirelius,<sup>7</sup> and the threat of his poor opinion proved so costly to Wroth and the Sidney family that she stopped *Urania*’s circulation altogether. In recounting this episode, Jennifer Lee Carrell writes that Denny’s letters “reveal that the most powerful men in England, including King James, seem to have been acquainted with her book and to have

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aunt, Mary Herbert, was the latter title’s eponymous Countess of Pembroke and an acclaimed--if more traditional--poet and translator in her own right.

<sup>7</sup> The *Urania* episode in question sees Sirelius “rescuing” his wife from her father’s murderous rage after her father suspects her of cheating on Sirelius (Carrell 86; *Urania* 439). Denny interpreted this portrayal as Wroth insinuating that he had been made a cuckold in his personal life, and he resented this implication. As Carrell points out, however, there exists no evidence to support his claims, nor is there any evidence that other courtly readers came to this conclusion independently: “Denny and his family remain to this day the only identifiable people within the *Urania* other than Wroth’s family, and Denny publicly blazoned this identification himself” (86).

read it with fact-digging occupations similar to his own” (86). Courtly men continued these “occupations” far after *Urania*’s print run ceased; Carrell describes how the seventh earl of Rutland, George Manners, sent Wroth his progress on a handwritten “key” that tracked the parallels between her romance’s characters and their perceived Jacobean court counterparts, and asked her ““to interpret unto me the names as heere I have begunn them, wherein you shall much oblige me”” (87). In *The Alchemist*, Dol’s immediate society rejects her attempts to claim an equal part in their cozenry scheme. In the 1621 Jacobean court, Mary Wroth’s fellow nobles make her attempt to publish an imaginative work divorced from its sociopolitical context impossible.

*Urania*’s content almost directly anticipates Denny’s letters and the work’s ensuing circulatory politics. Even as Wroth’s female characters occupy monarchical positions, the circulation of their emotions and bodies face the same gendered consequences with which Dol contends in *The Alchemist*. These consequences even appear in appraising, market terms throughout the text; Parselius’s arduous pursuit of Dalinea is justified by the claim that “the rarest jewel is not to be had at the highest rate,” and Antissia observes that Pamphilia’s sorrow was never “richlier appareled than lately you have dressed her,” and she compares Pamphilia’s heart to a “world of treasure” (Wroth 94.14, 125.37).<sup>8</sup> Indeed, one of Wroth’s nameless female characters directly reclaims this market language when she refuses to accept a suitor’s advances or “circulate” in the way her male family members dictate for her. She claims that “She was not Marchandise, nor to bee gaind that way, but her love was free, and freely should be given” (478.40-41).

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<sup>8</sup> Nearly all *Urania* citations come from Roberts’ 1995 edition of *The First Part of the Countess Montgomery’s Urania*, and they will be presented in (page number.line number) format. The exception is one later reference to *Urania*’s second part.

*Urania*'s reclamation of this appraising language indicates that Wroth's women use the metaphor of circulation differently than do Jonson's men. Wroth's female characters can use these terms to point towards their individual morality, and to withdraw from a male-oriented social "market" in a way that Dol cannot. This refusal to circulate, as many critics contend, is ironically prominent in *Urania*'s most circulated<sup>9</sup> section: its concluding sonnet sequence, "Pamphilia to Amphilanthus." Jeffrey Masten has influentially argued that "Pamphilia to Amphilanthus"—the first sonnet sequence to feature a female speaker—subverts the Petrarchan tradition by not only allowing the usually silent, female "beloved" to speak, but also allowing her to "stage a movement which is relentlessly private" and "articulate [her] resolute constancy, sovereignty, and unwillingness to circulate among men" (69). In other words, Wroth and her female characters publicize their privacy. They circulate their decision to refuse circulation. Yet instead of finding paradox here, Wroth finds power. Daniel Juan Gil notes that "even the most conventional Petrarchan poems" point towards a romantic circulatory failure (75): they feature a male speaker bemoaning his female beloved's refusal of his advances, or to otherwise become his "Marchandise." From this point of view, the position of the beloved becomes available for profitable reclamation. By writing and circulating her female speakers' romantic refusal, Wroth can leverage the Petrarchan tradition's inherent "social position and blockage," and become herself "the poetic, literary and public

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<sup>9</sup> Especially among the seventeenth-century nobility, poets often circulated their sonnets among their immediate social and literary circles. Wroth likely made no exception with "Pamphilia to Amphilanthus" in the time before *Urania*'s publication. Daniel Juan Gil posits that the appearance of *Urania* and the appended "Pamphilia to Amphilanthus" sonnet cycle in print, rather than the more aristocratically conventional manuscript form, contributed to Denny's rage; the print format meant that readers outside of the court's carefully-crafted aristocratic circles could access the text and the alleged connection it drew between himself and Sirelius (88).

currency from which the eyes of a contemporary readership cannot turn away” (Gil 75-76).

In this way, *Urania* makes the impulse to love and the impulse to write synonymous. Writing becomes a required consequence of love; throughout the romance, characters of both sexes frequently burst into song or sonnet when grappling with particularly intense—and often romantic—emotions, even when they have no audience. *Urania*’s first song belongs to the titular Urania, a shepherdess who laments that she does not know her true parentage, meaning that she “does not know herself.” From this point forward, poetry becomes an essential means of both emotional expression and self-knowledge. Even a character like Musalina, who initially lacks these poetic episodes, finds that “she was grown likewise a poet as being a *necessary* thing, and as *inseparable* from a witty lover as from youth” (498.6). In *Urania*, verse becomes an essential part of self-figuration. For its female characters, poetry becomes a reliable vehicle for self-sovereignty.

The concept of poetry-as-sovereignty proves even more crucial for the romance’s more prominent female characters, such as Pamphilia and Antissia. Initially presented as romantic rivals competing for Amphilanthus’s love, they both write lovelorn sonnets, and Wroth uses the quality of their creative work to assess their moral qualities. Wroth describes Pamphilia as “excellent in writing” (62.31), paralleling the moral “excellence” numerous characters find in her virtues. Antissia even directly notes to Pamphilia that “all perfections hav[e] joynd, and united their strengths to make you wholly *excellent*,” and Wroth describes Pamphilia’s mind as “the richest World of wisdom of her sex” (95.26-27, emphasis mine; 93.9). In keeping with these descriptions, Wroth imbues Pamphilia’s



Which cruell Love doth send into my heart,  
 Keepe in thy skin this testament of me:

Which Love *ingraven* hath with miserie,  
*Cutting* with grieffe the unresisting part...

...Thy sap doth *weepingly* bewray thy paine,  
 My *heart-blood drops* with stormes it doth sustaine...  
 (92.35-41; 93.1-2, emphasis mine)

She takes up the very knife-pen Love used when “ingrav[ing]” and “cutting” her own “unresisting” heart as she carves her work upon the tree. Instead of art imitating nature, nature now forcefully “imitate[s]” Pamphilia’s art, particularly the “torments” of her pining heart that her sonnets emblemize. This scene testifies to Pamphilia’s impressive poetic control, not only in the union of nature and art, but also in the consistency of her imagery between this sonnet and the first; the adjective “weepingly” and the image of her “heart-blood drops” continues the synthesis of blood and tears she establishes in her first sonnet. Carving the poem also launches her into a moment of uncharacteristic impulsivity. After she completes the poem, she begins picking up some tree branches around her and wearing them, as “anew began her complaints” (93.22-23). Even as she indulges in this action, however, she recognizes its opposition to her values. Pamphilia “quickly threw [the branches] off, vowing...not to carry the tokens of her loss openly on her browes, but rather wear them privately in her heart” (93.24-26). In this “vow,” she refuses to both “openly” wear her grief’s “tokens” and “carry”—or circulate—these tokens according to any terms but her own. Pamphilia exercises her self-sovereignty in poetry and in principle.

By contrast, Wroth characterizes Antissia’s emotions and art by their *lack* of control. Having once been purchased by a merchant and treated as “merchandize” (38.32-40), Antissia still struggles to resist the people and passions that seek to overpower her.

Her first sonnet is prompted “either by her owne passion, or the imitation of that excellent Lady [Pamphilia] to put some of her thoughts in some kind of measure” (114.12-13); the fact that she cannot distinguish between these two possible catalysts signals that she lacks Pamphilia’s poetic instinct and command. Indeed, the sonnet itself follows the English sonnet form without deviation, but its ending stanza and couplet suggest that the poem’s structure represents the extent of Antissia’s poetic control:

Obedience, feare, and love doe all conspire  
 A worth-lesse conquest gain’d to ruine me,  
 Who did but feele the height of blest desire  
 When danger, doubt, and losse, I straight did see.  
 Restlesse I live, consulting what to doe,  
 And more I study, the more I *undoe*. (114.24-29, emphasis mine)

Where Pamphilia writes about “twin[ing]” and otherwise restraining her emotions and imagery, Antissia’s emotional images “conspire” against her. Her writing, or “study,” will only diminish her control and give her more to “undoe.” Within her sonnet’s strict structural conventions, the content of the sonnet supplied by Antissia herself proves less original, and quickly begins to unravel; she views her love as a “worth-lesse conquest *gain’d to ruine me*,” an empty transaction in which she gives without expecting to receive. Instead of finding sovereignty, she finds herself “consulting what to doe,” perhaps even consulting her romantic rival for poetic inspiration.

Upon realizing that she has lost to Pamphilia in poetry and love alike, Antissia amplifies her poetry’s tormented, transactional language. Her next written poem abandons the English form and presents itself in a series of haphazard couplets that discuss Amphilanthus’s profit and her loss:

But O you cannot, I have much displeas’d  
 Striving to gaine, I losse have seiz’d.  
 My state I see, and you your ends have gain’d  
 I’m lost since you have me obtain’d. (327.14-17)

Here, Antissia explicitly commodifies herself. She “los[es]” herself in the fact that Amphilanthus has now “obtained” her. In “Striving to gaine,” Antissia implies that unlike Pamphilia, she does not inherently occupy a confident place of political or moral authority. This power displacement comes from the fact that she has not united her creative and emotional actions. Instead of calmly giving her poem “buriall” and achieving symbolic closure, as Pamphilia does, she throws these verses into the fire for reasons unbeknownst to *Urania*’s narrator: “...whether judgment of seeing [these lines] but poore ones, or humble love telling her that she had committed treason to [love’s] throne, moved her, I cannot justly tell” (327.28-30). The fact that Antissia cannot distinguish between love and her own “judgment” implies that her “losse” is both romantic and poetic in nature.

Love further overwhelms Antissia’s “judgment” when she mirrors Pamphilia in carving “characters of her sorrow” (328.35) into a tree. Wroth purposefully leaves the description of these “characters” vague; in Pamphilia’s tree-carving episode, Wroth gives the full text of Pamphilia’s sonnet and makes no question of her authorship, but in Antissia’s, she does not specify whether Antissia’s “characters” constitute words or images, or whether or not they are Antissia’s original creations. Furthermore, following the tree-carving, Wroth allows Antissia to create the impulsive “crowne of branches” that Pamphilia resists, and further strips away the former’s agency by having the tree “crowne” her:

...in the *crowne* of this tree she made a seat big enough for her selfe to sit in, the armes, and branches incompassing her, as if she were the hat to weare the *Crowne* of Willow, or they were but the flowers of it, and her selfe the forsaken compasse, out of which so large and flourishing a *crowne* of despised love proceeded, so...she was either *crownd*, or did

*crowne* that wretched estate of losse, a pitifull honor, and griefefull government. (328.35-41)

Antissia's "Crowne" here signals shame, not sovereignty. The fact that her "love" and "losse" are equalized through the descriptors "despised," "wretched," "pitifull," and "griefefull" signal that Antissia's "government" operates without independent agency or control; like the "forsaken compasse," she remains directionless as a lover and an author. Naomi Miller construes Antissia's crown as an "act of defensive retreat and withdrawal...devalued by the power of the male gaze to objectify position" (177), a reading that contrasts Wroth's own appropriation of the male Petrarchan "gaze" in her sonnets for Pamphilia. Antissia therefore becomes the circulated Petrarchan subject, even as she writes, and is defined by her thwarted desire for circulation. The narrator's final remark—"This was the reward for her affection, and which most poore loving women *purchase*" (Wroth 328.42, emphasis mine)—directs literal emphasis to this position Antissia occupies: at the losing end of a personal and poetic transaction. In loving Amphilanthus, she becomes the "Marchandise" of an uninterested consumer. In writing about her love, Antissia builds a moral "estate" that Wroth continually diminishes in value.

Through the juxtaposition of Pamphilia and Antissia, Wroth reclaims the equation of women's work and women's bodies that governs the construction of her own work. Pamphilia and Antissia's sonnets become synonymous with their authors: the quality and presentation of the women's work represents those qualities of the women themselves. Pamphilia's work depletes Antissia's artistic merit through its existence, just as her moral "excellence" ultimately discredits Antissia as a romantic rival for Amphilanthus. The transactional nature of their writing, however, extends beyond their rivalry or the

emotions their poetry describes. If the women's sonnets reached an unintended audience, they could face widespread social disgrace; their frank emotional expression threatens the status quo of their gender and courtly roles. As such, the women are united less through a shared love interest than through their shared desire for privacy. Their art lies not only in poetry, but also in self-protection.

This principle of guardedness consistently governs *Urania's* instances of self-representation and exchange. Whether the representative objects are poems or other romantic art forms, like miniatures, their exchange holds crucial, socially constructed implications for their givers and recipients, and *Urania* explores this subtext. Miniatures, or small portraits, portrayed their female subjects more intimately<sup>10</sup> than their family's official paintings. Operating as "love tokens," in Patricia Fumerton's terms (70), the miniatures were exchanged and withheld with the kind of discretion that governed seventeenth-century market transactions. As such, these pictures—along with sonnets—became the currency of courtship. Like any medium of exchange, these items held both intrinsic and extrinsic value.<sup>11</sup> The former type of value governs the way that miniatures and sonnets, alike, were protected, obscured from exchange altogether. Fumerton notes that many miniatures, including Queen Elizabeth's, were concealed away from public view, often in private bedchambers. Furthermore, they enabled their own privacy: the pictures themselves were sometimes contained within ornate concealing structures, such

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<sup>10</sup> As seen in Pamphilia's miniature--which will be discussed shortly--women's miniatures created this "intimacy" by depicting them more casually than they would typically appear in public. They might have their hair down or adopt a softer pose, and the miniaturist often focused the picture on their hands and upper body (Fumerton 70).

<sup>11</sup> On a fundamental philosophical level, extrinsic value is value assigned to the object externally, while intrinsic value is value inherent to the object itself: an intangible moral or experiential value (Zimmerman and Bradley). Speaking of how these terms operate in discussions of currency, David Landreth writes that "intrinsic value was defined by the dynamics of the market, [while] the extrinsic value was produced by the authority of the state" (13); I extend this metaphor and characterization of "market dynamics" to not only economic, but also social exchange.

as lockets, and then shut inside the owner's cabinet<sup>12</sup> (Fumerton 71-72). Revealing a miniature in a courtly context became itself an intimate act; to view a noble's miniature, one had to earn their trust and affection. In this process, privacy, itself, becomes a shared commodity—but only if its audience will resist its commodification.

Wroth engages these principles directly in the scene where Amphilanthus sees Pamphilia's miniature. He first asks to see her sonnets, which she has doubly concealed: the poems themselves are in a "deske," and the "deske" is inside her "Cabinet" (Wroth 320.20-24). His request is an invasive, but mutually understood act of intimacy to which Pamphilia consents; sonnets were often revealed in the same space as miniatures were, and thus required the same understanding of trust (Fumerton 85). Once Amphilanthus reads her poetry, he recognizes the sonnets' quality, but claims that Pamphilia uses them to "counterfeit loving" (320.30). He accuses her poetry of presenting the same sort of feigned intimacy as the miniature he is about to see. Only in looking at the sonnets does he accidentally glimpse the "tablet" that contains her miniature, which "shee had forgot to lay aside" (320.38-321.1). The picture's ensuing description appears solely through Amphilanthus's gaze:

He tooke it up, and looking at it, found her picture curiously drawne by the best hand of that time; her haire was downe, some part curld, some more plaine, as naturally it hung, of great length it seemd to bee, some of it coming up again, shee held in her right hand, which also she held upon her heart, a wastcoate shee had of needle worke, wrought with those flowers she loved best. He beheld it a good space, at last shutting it up, told her he must have that to carry with him to the field. (321.1-8)

Amphilanthus's unintended access to the miniature and the sonnets—and Wroth's proximal pairing of these items—reveals the inherent tension between public and private

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<sup>12</sup> These cabinets have their own personal and imperial significance, in *Urania* and more broadly. For more context, see Bernadette Andrea's "Pamphilia's Cabinet: Gendered Authorship and Empire in Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*."

that the objects represent. In appraising both items, he decides which one represents Pamphilia authentically. He wrests this choice away from Pamphilia herself; suddenly privy to her most intimate portraits, he decides that the miniature portrays her most “naturally,” and that he must keep it for himself. By possessing Pamphilia’s optimal, “natural” representation, Amphilanthus believes that he possesses her. Amphilanthus’s ownership thereby attempts to transform Pamphilia’s privacy into privation. His gaze threatens to deprive her of both the miniature and her claim to her own authenticity.

Yet, tellingly, Amphilanthus appraises the picture as an unintended recipient. Immediately after he asks to keep the miniature, Pamphilia reveals that the picture “was made for her sister” (321.9), not for him. The sonnets, by contrast, have him as their subject, but these are the objects he accuses of inauthenticity. Pamphilia tells him that he is “deceived in this for I doe love” (320.34-35). Amphilanthus accesses her most private artistic possessions, but he fails to access her intentions. Pamphilia’s mind and emotions remain firmly outside his grasp, because he sees her art without hearing it confess her love for him. Though Pamphilia claims that she forgot to hide her miniature, she nevertheless succeeds in guarding her most intimate feelings from him. We know her sonnets are “about” Amphilanthus, but she does not give the poems to him—or anyone else—of her own volition, except when another character requests that she do so. Her poetry, not her miniature, remains her most authentic portrait—and the one she gets to keep.

This concept of poetic authenticity forms a crucial parallel between Pamphilia and her author, as *Urania*’s sonnets constitute a careful portrait of Wroth herself. The work becomes Wroth’s narrative miniature, a creative piece she can use to guardedly represent

and circulate intimate details of her life. Roberts particularly identifies Pamphilia's sonnets about Lindamira as a pastoral "fictionalized self-portrait" of Wroth; Lindamira shares Wroth's social and educational background, and even Wroth's banishment from the royal court (*Poems of Lady Mary Wroth* 175). Their most significant commonality, however, lies in Lindamira's adherence to *Urania's* love story "formula," a pattern that governs many of the romance's storylines for its female characters. Carrell describes this formula at length:

A young woman grows up in close proximity to a young nobleman, and she realizes that she loves him long before he returns that love. They marry, but not each other—the woman especially unworthily, "on a jealous husband." At court, however, the old friends see each other and fall in love—a chaste love for married folk. Nevertheless, this love provokes the suspicion and jealousy of the queen, and the lady eventually loses her position at court and retreats to her husband's home in the country. The husband dies, but instead of this opening a window for bliss, she finds that her love has deserted her for another woman. His infidelity does nothing to shake her constancy, though it produces reams of poetic love complaints. Despite tears and poetry, her lover cruelly scorns her. However, he returns to her briefly, and their relationship blooms again, before he leaves her again, once more for another woman. Despite continual betrayal, the lady, who has lost her beauty due to continual weeping, declares that she will remain forever constant to her first and greatest love. (94)

Just as this narrative appears "nowhere in particular...and everywhere at once" in *Urania* (94), the story has the same correlation to Wroth's life. Jonson called Wroth's husband, Robert Wroth, a "jealous husband" to whom she was "unworthily married" (*Ben Jonson*, 1.142), and after Sir Robert's death, Wroth had two illegitimate children with William Herbert, her cousin and the rumored inspiration for Amphilanthus (Lamb 2, 4). As Carrell argues, this pattern "is not Wroth's lived story," but "a fiction that both reflects and distorts her biography; its open-ended nature allows Wroth to control the outcome of each retelling, at least within the *Urania*" (94). *The Alchemist* sees Dol Common

changing costumes in order to “try on” different levels of authority, optimizing her limited sphere of control within the cozenry scheme. *Urania* grants its female characters—and author—more extensive options. In a woman-written romance, they can “try on” different ways of representing themselves narratively: they can represent their lived experience with various endings and within various contexts and authorial styles. Wroth’s work fails to circulate in the Jacobean court after Denny’s rebuke, but through her creative agency, her story circulates within *Urania* itself. This embedded circulation—and its ensuing ambiguity between biographical fact and fiction—grants power to Wroth and to the female characters who reinterpret her story.

The circuitous nature of Wroth’s literary representations further embeds itself in Pamphilia’s crown of sonnets, which were published along with *Urania* as part of a separate but related sonnet cycle. In sonnets 77-90 of the cycle, “Pamphilia to Amphilanthus,” the figurative labyrinth Pamphilia uses throughout the crown symbolizes a complex network of emotional and narrative desires. Through Pamphilia, Wroth explores how a woman can be both emboldened and entrapped by her own literary constructions. A crown of sonnets is an impressive, yet constrictive poetic construction; the last line of each sonnet becomes the first line of the next one, and the poems themselves stay concentrated on one theme. Pamphilia addresses her crown to “Love,” rather than Amphilanthus, and considers Love through the image of a labyrinth—one in which she remains trapped. Her dedication to Love indicates that she will spend the ensuing poems trying to navigate her *own* emotions, rather than woo Amphilanthus. Yet within the poems, the labyrinth makes this goal arduous.

The crown's opening lines establish Pamphilia's love "labyrinth" as idiosyncratic and hopeless. As she stands at the opening of the maze, she asks, "In this strange labyrinth how shall I turn?" (Wroth, "Pamphilia to Amphilanthus," Sonnet 77, line 1). She sees the "Ways...on all sides" (Sonnet 77, line 2) and finds a consequence in each one: she will "burn" in love if she goes to "the right hand," or find her "bliss" "hinder[ed] [by] suspicion" should she go left (Sonnet 77, lines 3, 5). The various directions of the maze are thereby equalized by the pain and uncertainty they would inflict upon Pamphilia. In comparison to a typical labyrinth, which tempts its runner with alluring paths that falsely promise escape, her maze is transparent. She questions "*how*," not "where," "shall I turn," because she already knows what she will find at each direction and cannot comfortably decide among them.

In the poems that follow, Pamphilia attempts to find constancy in love and poetry alike. Constancy, defined as both "faithfulness, fidelity...to a person or cause" and "The state or quality of being unmoved in mind" ("Constancy," def. 2, 1.a), appears as Pamphilia's defining desire throughout *Urania*. Yet she cannot commit to one faithful, figurative representation of love in the crown. Once Pamphilia has immersed herself into this "dangerous" labyrinth, she experiments with a series of recurring images throughout the crown that are meant to make Love a reliable, tangible concept, but her instability within these images never yields the constant "content" she desires. The first of these images is fire and light; in Sonnet 78, Pamphilia's first definition of Love assertively equates it to a virtuous, perfect star:

Love is the shining *star* of blessing's *light*;  
 The fervent *fire* of zeal, the root of peace,  
 That lasting *lamp* fed with the oil of right;

Image of faith, and womb for joy's increase. (lines 9-12, all emphasis mine)

This depiction of Love appears promising. As the “star of blessing’s light,” radiating “blessings” and serving as the “root” of peace, Love is equated with utmost piety, purity, and naturalness. Halfway through this description, however, the image begins to undo itself. Between lines 10 and 11, Pamphilia reveals that Love is not a naturally occurring “fire,” but instead a humanly constructed “lamp” that must be continually “*fed* with the oil of right”; rather than existing as a stable stronghold for virtue on its own, Love must have virtue continually fed into it by Pamphilia and her fellow lovers. Even in Pamphilia’s first poetic experiment with Love and light, Wroth implies that this comparison, like a fire, will eventually burn out. Pamphilia will only ever find “*image[s]* of faith,” never faith itself. Indeed, her other images of Love also fail. Various sonnets in the crown depict Love as a legal court and a political ruler, but both positions enable Love to punish Pamphilia. To depict love, she must labor and lose. Love, not Pamphilia, controls its own expression.

Pamphilia’s struggle to truthfully represent Love therefore symbolizes an even deeper conflict: how she will represent herself as a lover. As her sonnet structure requires, Pamphilia ends the crown in the same physical and metaphorical place from which she began it: by asking, “In this strange labyrinth, how shall I turn?” (Sonnet 90, line 14). Pamphilia has thereby consciously exhausted her options for “turning” in the maze, having discovered that each direction is ruinous. Her only answer is to stay enmeshed within the maze, to keep creating this impossible world of contradictions and conditions and in doing so, stay Love’s “painter...and draw [her] only dear”—Love—“More lively, perfect, *lasting*, and more *true*/Than rarest workman” (Sonnet 83, lines 9-

11, emphasis mine). Compared to Dol's more conventionally product-oriented labor in *The Alchemist*, Pamphilia's poetic and emotional labor places its emphasis on the process of writing, rather than the written product. Pamphilia's inability to move, or circulate, in the maze is indeed rhetorically limiting, but the difference between her and Dol is that Pamphilia ultimately sets the terms of her own failure to circulate. She cannot find a stable image to portray Love and her accompanying constancy, but she can briefly, imaginatively move among them in her mind. The fact of her poetic constructions proves her most useful source of constancy, if not the content of the constructions themselves.

In offering Cupid her "Crown of Sonnets Dedicated to Love," Pamphilia seemingly gives up her own crown: she relinquishes her own poetic sovereignty. Her sonnet cycle, however, does not end here. Pamphilia instead concludes "Pamphilia to Amphilanthus" by reclaiming and defining her literary purpose—and then abruptly renouncing it:

My Muse, now happy, lay thyself to rest,  
Sleep in the quiet of a faithful love,  
Write you no more, but let these fancies move  
Some other hearts; wake not to new unrest,

But if you study, be those thoughts addressed  
To truth, which shall eternal goodness prove;  
Enjoying of true joy, the most, and best,  
The endless gain which never will remove. (Sonnet 103, lines 1-8)

The labyrinth suddenly gains clarity. Pamphilia abandons constancy to command her muse towards "truth," suggesting that a distinction exists between the two concepts. If we read "truth" as not only "faith and trust," but also "Something that conforms with fact or reality" ("Truth," def. 5), then we realize that her creative aims extend beyond representing faithfulness. Pamphilia—and by extension, Wroth—hopes to represent her

“thoughts” *faithfully*. The second half of this final sonnet advances this idea of faithful representation:

Leave the discourse of Venus and her son  
 To young beginners, and their brains inspire  
 With stories of great love, and from that fire  
 Get heat to write the fortunes they have won,

And thus leave off: what's past shows you can love,  
 Now let your constancy your honour prove. (lines 9-14)

By bequeathing love “discourse...To young beginners,” Pamphilia suggests that her love labyrinth exists as a means towards self-knowledge as a poet and as a person, not just as a lover. Her final sonnet certainly implies emotional resignation, exhaustion from the impossibility of loving an inconstant man.<sup>13</sup> Yet resignation does not render her efforts futile. Pamphilia insists that her work serves as a testament to her emotional and poetic virtue; her couplet claims that “what’s *past* shows you can love,” and that those testaments to her constancy will “prove” her honour. Mary Moore claims that this poem “accepts the self and its poetic accomplishment,” but reads Pamphilia’s relinquishment as an “absence of desire” and an allusion to “an audience of future love poets, suggesting Pamphilia's, and thereby Wroth's, poetic progeny” (121). Some even read the sonnet’s concluding line as a final, direct call upon Amphilanthus to return Pamphilia’s emotional labor,<sup>14</sup> demanding that his honor be held to the same high standard as hers and judged by the same criteria: by the extent of his “constancy.” I, however, argue, that no matter the final couplet’s purpose, its inherent declaration insists that Pamphilia’s work accurately represents Pamphilia herself. Her poetry can stand alone and signify *her*. Contrasting

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<sup>13</sup> With their names’ Latin roots, and within the context of the poem, “Pamphilia” means “lover of one,” and “Amphilanthus” means “lover of many.” As such, the pair proves both star-crossed and language-crossed.

<sup>14</sup> I credit my awareness of this reading to CUNY Ph.D. candidate Alicia Andrzejewski, who analyzed the sonnet during a sample lecture at William & Mary.

Moore's perspective, I read a desire for, and reclamation of, self-sovereignty in Pamphilia's poems: a creativity that eschews the need for "progeny," or literary procreation. In this sense, Pamphilia sets the terms of her readers' literary access to her within the work itself. Those who wish to interpret Pamphilia and Wroth need not ask for a "key." They need only read the authors' words more closely.

As demonstrated by Pamphilia's poetic crown, *Urania*'s most decisive sources of political and personal sovereignty come not from material stores of value, but from literary ones. *Urania*'s writers come from noble backgrounds, much like Wroth herself; her main characters even surpass her own sociopolitical position, as they all have—or gain—royal titles. Rather than focus on these characters' political ascent and descent, however, *Urania* instead asks how their titles, surroundings, and emotions affect their self-understanding. Their faithfulness to their constituents runs concurrently with their faithfulness to themselves. In the second part of *Urania*, a fellow female monarch, Veralinda, tells Pamphilia to "bee the Emperess of the world, commaunding the Empire of your owne minde"<sup>15</sup> (Wroth, *Urania* 112.20-21), implying that Pamphilia's mind is a "world" in itself. Accordingly, Pamphilia's political kingdom is named Pamphilia; beyond its geographical resonances with the physical region by that name during the seventeenth century,<sup>16</sup> the alignment of country and queen—an arrangement unique to Pamphilia—suggests that Pamphilia has unique opportunities for self-sovereignty in politics and in poetry alike. This similarity also implies that Pamphilia's mind, kingdom, and poetry serve as equally essential parts of her world, and are perhaps each worlds over

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<sup>15</sup> Roberts notes that this quote "anticipates" Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, particularly its epilogue (*Urania* xlixn39). This work and connection appear in the following section of this thesis.

<sup>16</sup> The region of Pamphylia was located in south Asia Minor (Hogarth 662); rather than "lover of one," as in Wroth, the region's Greek-derived name meant "of mingled tribes and races" (Liddell and Scott). Andrea also makes reference to this context in her analysis of *Urania*'s imperialist intersections (335).

which she may reign uncontestedly, yet in different ways. As such, each of these “realms” forms an essential part of her identity.

We thereby must understand Pamphilia as both public and private, as private made public, and vice versa. Josephine Roberts writes that *Urania* “reflects the concepts of a fragmented self, in which characters must split their existence between life at court, where they are on constant display, and their rare moments of solitude, when they retreat either to their private chambers or natural settings” (*Urania* lxiii). During this period, privacy, itself, was becoming “rare” in the sense of both scarcity and value. *Urania* uniquely asks what it means to have access to one’s own privacy, and how fair—or painful—it is to want access to another person’s, either for love or for spite. For Pamphilia, her fellow female characters, and their female creator, the idea that a woman could place both her claim to sovereignty and her identity into something inaccessible was a complicated assertion: empowering for her, and enraging for those—like Denny—who felt that their access to her was denied. When we consider her characters’ fragmented existences, we can ask if these characters exist as fictional fragments of Wroth herself. Pamphilia carries Wroth’s literary “excellence” and desires for self-sovereignty. Antissia suffers the inflictions of societal shame for writing. *Urania* wanders through thousands of pages, struggling to redefine herself. Together, and separately, they tell different versions of Wroth’s story. They live different versions of her fate.

The highest praise Jonson ever offered Mary Wroth came in the 1612 poem he dedicated to her, “To Mary Lady Wroth.” In it, he insisted that she was a timeless model for all women, that “had all antiquitie been lost/All history seal’d up, and fables crost”—and if humanity thereby lost all depictions of women as “a Nymph, a Muse, a Grace”—

those who wanted to recreate those depictions could “but create them all, from you” (Jonson, “To Mary Lady Wroth,” lines 1-2, 4, 6). This assertion builds to his insistence that she is “*Nature's Index*, and restore/I' your selfe, all treasure lost of th'age before” (19-20, emphasis Jonson's). *Urania* implicitly responds to this praise by pointing out its limits. The romance's women are queens, lovers, writers, dreamers, and doubters. They each embody some or all of these roles and find entire worlds within them. Wroth's women offer more possibilities to one another than merely playing a nymph, muse, or grace. Where Jonson's Dol acts out all three of these roles and can only access them through acting, Wroth's women have the access and fight to maintain them.

*Urania* tells Pamphilia that “‘Tis pity...that ever fruitlesse thing constancy was taught to you as a vertue...understand, this vertue hath limits...those...with whom it is broken are by the breech free to leave or choose again where more staidness may be found” (*Urania* 400). She measures constancy by its profitability, and values it by how easily it can be escaped. Yet Pamphilia pushes against these limits by practicing constancy towards herself. She controls her own circulation and valuation. In this way, she represents the boldest—yet most inaccessible—version of Wroth's story.

### III. “Commanding the Empire of Your Owne Minde”: Cavendish's Literalization

Denny jeeringly advised Wroth to “leave idle books alone/For wiser and worthyer women have writte none” (*The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth* 33). In 1664, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, made reference to this line in a piece titled “To All Noble, and Worthy Ladies,” wherein she anticipates male audiences' responses to her creative work:

And very like they will say to me, as to the *Lady* that wrote the  
*Romancy*

*Work, Lady, work, let Writing Books alone,  
For surely Wiser Women ne're Wrote one. (Poems and Fancies A4r-v)*

Margaret Hannay characterizes this reference as Cavendish's dual defense of both her and Wroth's creative work (307). In claiming solidarity with a female writer who published approximately 40 years before her, Cavendish simultaneously demonstrates how much and how little has changed for women writers in that timeframe. The title of her poem boldly addresses itself to the audience Denny denies; Cavendish implies—and expects—an audience of female readers, and she esteems them highly. Yet the narrow expectations of male readers and literary markets persist, still threatening to define and conflate the woman writer and her work.

In *Urania*, Wroth attempts to redefine this conflation. In her 1666 science fiction utopian work, *The Blazing World*, Cavendish reimagines and empowers it. *The Blazing World* originally served as a fictional appendix to Cavendish's *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy*. The latter work was a scientific treatise meant to advance Cavendish's bid to participate in her era's male-dominated empirical conversations. Women were barred from membership in the Royal Society of London, the prominent English science academy that boasted members such as Robert Hooke and Robert Boyle. If women did formally engage with the era's emerging empirical discoveries, it was primarily through translation<sup>17</sup> or observation of men's work, unless they were wealthy enough to serve as patrons or advance their own writings (Mendelson 11-13). Cavendish had this privilege, and she intended to optimize it. Backed by her noble standing and the full-hearted support of her husband, William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, she asserted

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<sup>17</sup> Translation, itself, was not an inherently constrictive medium. Aphra Behn's 1688 translation of Bernard de Fontenelle's *A Discovery of New Worlds*—a text in which a male natural philosopher explains his observations to a curious woman—grants greater narrative agency to the woman and makes other crucial changes characteristic of Behn's own authorial voice.

unprecedented creative control over the content and appearance of her works. She included multiple pages of introductory material; worked with a female printer, Anne Maxwell, for several of her initial print runs; and designed her books' binding so that they would physically resemble the scholarly books published by the period's leading male natural philosophers (Shaw, "Cavendish"). Wroth's agency in bringing *Urania* to publication remains dubious, with the work's lack of introductory material and the uncertain origins of editorial manuscript marks and changes (Roberts, *Urania* cv). Cavendish, by comparison, seamlessly integrates her work into her scholarly aims, furnishing a societal narrative for herself in content and style alike. In doing so, she inserts her work into both the literary and intellectual economies of her time.

Yet, as my previous analyses of Wroth and of Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies* piece make clear, even Cavendish's publication strategies could not entirely elide the circulatory barriers unique to seventeenth-century women writers. As such, *Blazing World* demonstrates a new model of circulation and self-representation that lay outside of the period's literary economy—and the possibilities for female authority altogether. Cavendish's opening preface to the work advances the thread of female authorship and audiences that "To All Noble, and Worthy Ladies" established; the prologue even uses the same title,<sup>18</sup> implying that the work itself was crafted with a female audience in mind. She defends her choice to append *Blazing World* to her scientific treatise by creating a unique distinction between empirical "Reason" and fictitious "Fancy": the former is "a rational search and enquiry into the causes of natural effects," the latter is "a voluntary

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<sup>18</sup> In Mendelson's edited edition of *Blazing World*, the title of the preface is "To the Reader." This editorial change further suggests that Cavendish assumed a female readership, or otherwise excludes gender from her considerations of audience and of who would benefit from the authorial approach she voices in her introductory material.

creation or production of the Mind,” and the former requires the latter “to recreate the Mind, and withdraw it from its more serious contemplations” (Cavendish, *Blazing World* 59). Her aim “to recreate the Mind” proves profound on its own. She characterizes the process as a necessarily interdisciplinary engagement, involving the union of imagination and empiricism. What elevates her purpose even further, however, is the fact that the Mind she seeks to “recreate” is female. Calling herself a “Happy *Creatoress*,” Cavendish positions herself outside of the subservient roles women typically played in philosophical discourse. Her world, the Blazing World, is “not such as *Lucian’s*, or the *French* man’s World in the Moon; but a World of my own Creating” (60, all emphasis Cavendish’s). Rather than serving as a vehicle for men’s ideas, Cavendish’s world will circulate her own.

Such a radically different employment of literary authority requires a redefinition of that authority itself. Accordingly, Cavendish characterizes her approach through yet another distinction: that between masculine “Covetousness” and feminine “Ambition.” She claims that “I am not Covetous, but as Ambitious as ever any of my sex ever was, is, or can be” (60). Being “covetous,” or “Having an ardent or excessive desire of/for anything” (“Covetous,” def. 1.a.), is a quality she associates with male rulers and conquerors. She cites Kings Henry V and Charles II and Emperors Alexander and Caesar by name, claiming that she “cannot be” the kings and has “neither power, time, nor occasion to conquer the world” like the emperors (60). Attributing the inaccessibility of kingship to a lack of power, and the inaccessibility of empire to a lack of opportunity, Cavendish initially implies that the moral distinction she makes between herself and the men is borne from resignation. Here, however, an additional definition of “covetous”

proves illuminating: “Culpably or inordinately desirous of gaining wealth or possessions; *esp. of that which belongs to another or to which one has no right*” (“Covetous,” def. 2.a., emphasis mine).

Reading this sense of the word, we realize that what distinguishes Cavendish’s desire is not only her gender, but also her inherent right to her own authority. Ambition, or “The ardent...desire to rise to high position, or to attain rank, influence, distinction or other preferment” (“Ambition,” def. 1.a.), at first seems synonymous with “Covetousness,” wanting power for power’s sake. Yet within the context of her scholarly goals, Cavendish’s struggle for recognition becomes a quest for both renown and survival. “Ambition” carries unique urgency for female creators. If we further consider ambition as “A strong or ardent desire of anything considered advantageous, honouring, or creditable. Const. of (rarely for) a thing, *to be or do something*” (“Ambition,” def. 3, emphasis mine), we realize the full meaning of Cavendish’s claim. In “desir[ing]...anything considered advantageous,” and “desir[ing]...to be or do something,” her ambition implies a desire for purpose. Her desire is not “excessive” or sick. Within her limited options for societal authority, her desire is simply necessary.

Cavendish completes the vocabulary of her authorial authority by coronating herself as “Margaret the First” (60). With this title, she separates herself both from the aforementioned male rulers and—at least in name—from any living or historical female monarchical referent. By eschewing the terms of masculinized political power, she establishes a new form of building a world: a feminine-charged world that does not rely on the body, but on the mind—her mind. In doing so, we might say that she attempts to subvert the conflict that limits Dol in *The Alchemist*, the damning letter “a” in “quean”

that prevents Dol from realizing an Elizabethan level of authority and rejects her metaphorical attempts at building a republic. Moreover, Cavendish rejects any false, disadvantageous pretenses of power and value altogether: she claims that the imaginative world she will describe has “more Gold in it then all the Chymists ever did, and (as I verily believe) will ever be able to make,” an argument that, as Mendelson notes, seemingly refutes the process of alchemy upon which Jonson’s model of creative economics rests (60). In *The Alchemist*’s world, imagination perverts wealth, authority, and circulation. The only access that Dol and Mammon have to gold or to the possibility of reigning is through their bodies’ sexual contact. Face and Subtle—two men—are in charge of the scheme that enables this dynamic, but their scheme takes place in Jonson’s contemporary 1610 London; as such, their laboratory is a microcosm of the true sociopolitical world outside of it. For Cavendish, then, to claim that her world possesses gold beyond the limits of the alchemists’ abilities is to assert that the authority and structure of her world will surpass their imagination. *Blazing World* prioritizes the feminine creative over the masculine corporeal, and insists on a distinction between them.

What further distinguishes “Margaret the First” is the fact that this title positions Cavendish as both author and character. Pamphilia and her fellow writer-queens in *Urania* reflect different aspects of Wroth, but are ultimately distinct from her in both name and purpose. We read Pamphilia and her “excellence” as autobiographical, but not as “Mary” or “Mary the First.” Cavendish, by contrast, uses the guise of political authority to create an authorial persona for herself. This persona is the only female voice in the work that has a name at all, as Cavendish refers to her other principal female characters solely by their titles: Lady, Empress, and Duchess. These women, along with

her “Margaret the First” or “Creatress” persona, all act as extensions of Cavendish in a kind of creative trifurcation of her narrative voice. Many scholars who have written about Cavendish’s trifurcation, or “multiplicity,” in Geraldine Wagner’s terms, view her three narrative self-representations as being the Creatress, the Empress, and the Duchess. I diverge from this view by proposing that the trifurcation instead occurs among the Lady, the Empress, and the Duchess. Even though the Lady and the Empress are the same woman, they play wholly distinct narrative roles in *Blazing World’s* structure.

Mendelson’s textual introduction describes *Blazing* as having a “tripartite structure which is then replicated on different scales.” The characters travel among three different worlds and represent three “idealized avatars of Cavendish” (24), and they do so within a work that Cavendish splits into three parts, each with their own genre. As she writes in her preface, “The First Part is Romancical; the Second, Philosophical; and the Third is meerly Fancy; or (as I may call it) Fantastical” (60). Considering this structure, I argue that the Lady, Empress, and Duchess represent *Blazing’s* Romance, Philosophy, and Fancy, respectively. As an extension of both Cavendish’s narrative voice and her self-conception, each character allows Cavendish to interact with a different vehicle for her creative ambition. If she, the Creatress, can construct three worlds within three genres, then she has created three different intellectual microeconomies in which her story can circulate. Each woman has her own title, face, and agenda in the narrative; they are distinct coins, but all have their circulatory place and purpose in the *Blazing World’s* macroeconomy.

Cavendish’s economy trades ideas and stories, proposing an alternative standard of wealth and power apart from material acquisition. Tellingly, the Lady—the first

fictional representation of Cavendish that *Blazing* presents— does not yet have this type of power. When the Lady is introduced, she is entirely subject to men’s thoughts. She is kidnapped and initially deprived of her agency in the beginning of the novel for the sole reason that a male merchant—“a stranger in [her] nation, and beneath her both in birth and wealth”—“fell extreamly in love with [her]” (61). Purposefully leaving the Lady silent, this opening episode is told entirely from the merchant’s perspective to demonstrate that the conventional sovereignty of male opinion, alone, is enough to overpower her in her own country, irrespective of the class differences between the merchant and the Lady. The merchant “*fancied* himself the happiest man in the world” after he “forced her away” (61, emphasis mine), and if thoughts and fancy are power in *The Blazing World*, then he retains it. Indeed, after his death, the Lady’s narrative world remains ruled by traditionally male-articulated conceptions of womanhood. The “tempest” that kills the merchant and everyone on his ship—and delivers the Lady, the sole survivor, into the Blazing World’s realm—is wrought “by assistance and favour of the Gods to this virtuous lady,” with her life only preserved “by the light of her beauty, the heat of her youth, and protection of the gods” (61). These forces are not only exogenous, but also corporeal, marked by their sensuality and giving no voice or value to the Lady’s intellectual attributes. Neither the Lady’s former world nor the new world in which she arrives belong to her. She instantly becomes a subject of both.

Yet this utter anonymity and powerlessness distinguishes the Lady as the embodiment of *Blazing World*’s romance, and the extent of its interactions with romance genre conventions. The Lady’s entrance into the Blazing World is emblematic of how many female characters enter the world of romance: by being kidnapped or otherwise

subject to a man's desires, and overall constructed through predominantly male authors' desirous narrative lenses. Mendelson describes the Lady as a romantic stock character, calling her "generic" and "...the passive object of the male gaze," doomed "to become a male possession, captured in the end through rape, seduction, and marriage" (27). Even the social and emotional politics of Wroth's *Urania* center largely upon possession. The romance sees Antissia and other female characters kidnapped and entrapped by male captors multiple times, and the work's production, and scenes like the one with Pamphilia's miniature, is governed by men's covetous entitlement to women's bodies and stories. In *Blazing*, the fact that the Lady's captor is a "merchant," as was Antissia's, alludes to and then rejects the ways in which mercantilist philosophy informs this impulse. If the merchant arrives in the Lady's country for trade, hoping to increase his own wealth, then the value that he attributes to the Lady is whatever he thinks she will add to his other possessions. She is valuable for her beauty and social standing—and for the possibility that he might own her. This system precludes *Blazing World's* existence. For this reason, Cavendish must not only allow her Lady to escape the merchant, but must also have her outlast him entirely. As Wagner writes,

This first romantic adventure registers how the Lady's, and her author's, creative self-fulfillments are contingent upon the symbolic death of that masculinist, economic and exploitative concept of women's identity to which the merchant subscribes...Only by escape from a world where she is merely a transferable object can the lady (and her author) explore her multiplicity and become self-defining. (15)

In *Urania*, Wroth has some of her secondary female characters reject their own mercantile and market-contained circulation, particularly the idea of becoming "Marchandise." *The Blazing World* sees Cavendish move this ideological rejection to the

forefront of her text, and embolden both her characters' and her own reaction against it as story progresses.

Accordingly, when the Lady is subsequently introduced to the Blazing World's Emperor, we might presume that she will become just another transaction, that the Emperor has the same interest in her as the merchant. Her first meeting with the Emperor, however, gradually introduces the new economics and power structure of Cavendish's romance. Rather than perceive the Lady's beauty as a reason to "force her away," the Emperor "conceived her to be some goddess, and offered to worship her" (Cavendish 69). Unlike the merchant, the Emperor's aim is not to increase his own wealth through possessing her beauty or her social standing. The Blazing World's wealth is *already* abundant by earthly standards; its cities are constructed from "marble," "alabaster," "Agat," "amber," and "Coral," as well as "other precious materials not known in our world." The Emperor's imperial city itself is named "Paradise," and "was built of Gold and their Architectures were noble, stately, and magnificent" (68), and the Emperor's palace embodies this opulence:

The first part of the Palace was, as the Imperial City, all of Gold, and when it came to the Emperors appartement, it was so rich with Diamonds, Pearls, Rubies, and the like precious stones, that it surpasses my skill to enumerate them all. Amongst the rest, the Imperial Room of State appear'd most magnificent; it was paved with green Diamonds (for in that World are Diamonds of all colours) so artificially, as it seemed but of one piece; the Pillars were set with Diamonds so close, and in such a manner, that they appear'd most Glorious to the sight; between every Pillar was a bow or arch of a certain sort of Diamonds, the like whereof our world does not afford... (69)

This idyllic amount of wealth, and characterization of the royal city as "Paradise," subverts Mammon and Dol's sexually-charged and unequal golden age. Rather than value the Lady for her propensity to produce wealth, the Emperor values her for her own

attributes, placing her above himself by “worshipping” her. In doing so, he begins to advance one last conventional romance trope, one that *Urania* engages wholeheartedly: esteeming women for their physical beauty and moral virtue, and holding them to that faultless standard. He moves beyond sexualized possession into conditional devotion, making a final push for the Lady’s narrative to follow prescribed romantic genre lines.

Yet the Lady resists. The action that transforms the Lady into the Empress is her *refusal* of his devotion. She reiterates that despite her otherworldly origins, she is “but a mortal,” and the Emperor responds joyfully and “made her his Wife, and gave her an absolute power to rule and govern all that World that she pleased” (70). The state does not possess the Lady; the Lady possesses the state. Cavendish literalizes this dynamic by having the Lady’s new Empress attire match the description of the Palace itself:

On her head she wore a Cap of Pearl, and a Half-moon of Diamonds just before it; on the top of her crown came spreading over a broad Carbuncle, cut in the form of the Sun; her Coat was of Pearl, mixt with blew Diamonds, and fringed with red ones; her Buskins and Sandals were of green Diamonds: In her left hand she held a Buckler, to signifie the Defence of her Dominions; which Buckler was made of that sort of Diamond as has several different Colours; and being cut and made in the form of an arch, shewed like a Rainbow; In her right hand she carried a Spear made of a white Diamond, cut like the tail of a Blazing-star, which signified that she was ready to assault those that proved her Enemies. (70)

She wears many of the same gems that decorate the palace, and with her “assault”-primed, “Blazing-star” spear made of “a white Diamond,” she reflects the militaristic implications of the diamond “bowes” and “arches” that appear between the palace’s pillars and decorate the “Imperial Room of State.” The Lady, now Empress, now co-opts a previously masculine form of power that initially belonged to the emperor alone. In this sense, not only does the Blazing World reward her for the very qualities her original world refuses to see, but it also upends the conventional romantic trajectory of her story.

As Rachel Trubowitz notes, “the inner excellence of the young Lady finds immediate veneration in the outside world, over which she is bequeathed absolute dominion” (233); instead of becoming a passive, admired goddess, doomed to a pedestal, she retools the Emperor’s worship into a form of subservience. Her new role will rely on male power, but more so on her ability to command it. The terms of romance advanced by masculinized literary perspectives give way to Cavendish’s literary sovereignty.

The *Blazing World*, itself, initially seems to be a romantic construction, but I argue that the moment that the Lady becomes the Empress is the moment that the *text* switches from “Romancical” to “Philosophical.” Though she now has imperial tools and power at her disposal, the Empress precedes any use of the “sovereign power” she “got...from the Emperor” with the thorough questions she asks of the World’s inhabitants, as she “desired to be informed both of the manner of their Religion and their Government” (Cavendish, *Blazing World* 70-71). These questions, and the subjects’ engagement with them, demonstrate that she has more figurative and literal claim to her sovereignty than Dol and even *Urania*’s women do in their respective worlds. Unlike her fictional precedents, the Empress can initiate and control the circulation of her ideas. She can exercise her political power, and thereby ensure that her governmental propositions and metaphors gain the audience they deserve.

These ideas prove fundamental to the *Blazing World*’s reimagined socioeconomic structure. The *Blazing World*’s economy “used no coyn, but all their Traffick was by exchange of several Commodities” (70), and the most valuable commodities—at least under the Empress’s new reign—are ideas. Indeed, the *Blazing World*’s male intellectual subjects, rather than the Lady/Empress, become the characters

who are valued by what they can produce. Comprising various species of male, anthropomorphic human-animal hybrids, these scholar-subjects immediately become the Empress's highest priority. Their scholarly and economic function follows their form, and the Empress structures her society accordingly:

...each followed such a profession as was most proper for the nature of their species, which the Empress encouraged them in, especially those that had applied themselves to the study of several Arts and Sciences; for they were as ingenious and witty in the invention of *profitable* and useful Arts, as we are in our world, nay more; and to that end she erected Schools, and founded several Societies. (71, emphasis mine)

As the Empress spends the ensuing pages in intense philosophical debates with them about the Blazing World's existing institutions, and about general scientific principles, Cavendish continues to reappropriate the romance genre's male-female worship convention, but to serve a new end. Having asserted her creative authority by having her generic romance Lady refuse the Emperor's worship—and gain power from this decision—Cavendish now begins to use *Blazing* to assert her authority in natural philosophy.

Mendelson notes that the subjects' positions as scientists “serves as a parody of the Baconian agenda of the Royal Society” (71n3); indeed, their debates with the Empress allude to many Royal Society members' names and ideas, and even quote their work directly.<sup>19</sup> Viewing this parallel in conjunction with the fact that the Empress's “subjects, who could hardly be perswaded to believe her mortal, tender'd her all the veneration and worship due to a Deity” (70), I argue that Cavendish uses this section of *Blazing* to both rewrite her own experiences with the Royal Society and circulate the scientific ideas they rejected. Instead of regarding the Empress with derision or aesthetic

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<sup>19</sup> I owe my knowledge of this textual feature to my advisor.

fascination, in the way that the Royal Society often viewed Cavendish, the Blazing World's animal-men offer her genuine intellectual engagement—and then reverence. They surrender to her authority, rather than expect her to surrender her opinions to theirs. Wagner claims that for Cavendish, “Constructing herself as an Empress whose word commands respect and fear from an exclusively male society of intellectuals is...the height of romance” (20). Despite their arguments’ general divergence,<sup>20</sup> Trubowitz agrees with Wagner on this point, arguing that “The Lady’s harmonizing of private virtue, public honor, and political power pushes Cavendish’s utopia in the direction of romance” (233). I depart from both perspectives to argue that Cavendish uses the story’s romantic origins as a springboard for her philosophical ideas’ circulation.

To this end, the animal-men’s engagement with Cavendish’s ideas—whether arguing against them or advancing them—positions them both as representations of the Royal Society and as anthropomorphized representations of Cavendish’s own thoughts. This portrayal parallels Cavendish’s *Sociable Letters*, in which she equates her thoughts to “so many Creatures in herself”:<sup>21</sup>

This Lady only to her self she Writes  
 And all her Letters to her self Indites;  
 For in her self so many Creatures be,  
 Like many Commonwealths, yet all Agree. (Wagner 1; Cavendish,  
*SociableLetters* 10)

If we consider these different groups of anthropomorphic subjects as each constituting an intellectual “Commonwealth,” we find that this metaphor proves apt for explaining how

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<sup>20</sup> Trubowitz argues that the authoritative possibilities available to the Empress are made possible by *Blazing*’s utopian leanings, and that its inherent utopia genre is inflected by romance. Wagner directly contradicts Trubowitz, claiming that *Blazing* is instead a utopian-inflected romance and that the romance genre facilitates Cavendish’s “multiplicity” and creative agency throughout the work.

<sup>21</sup> Both Wagner and Catherine Gallagher quote this passage. The full passage quoted here comes from Wagner’s article, while Gallagher limits her reference to the third line (Gallagher 30).

each group represents a distinct metaphoric realm of Cavendish's philosophical opinions. In describing the subjects' various positions, Cavendish not only elaborates upon how each group's physical form matches its function, but also illuminates the vast range of the philosophical principles she—through the Empress—will engage in this section:

The Bear-men were to be her Experimental Philosophers, the Bird-men her Astronomers, the Fly- Worm- and Fish- men her Natural Philosophers, the Ape-men her Chymists, the Satyrs her Galenick Physicians, the Fox-men her Politicians, the Spider- and Lice-men her Mathematicians, the Jackdaw- Magpie- and Parrot-men her Orators and Logicians, the Gyants her architects... (Cavendish, *The Blazing World* 71)

These distinctions inform how the Empress employs her authority with each group. In one instance, she derides the “Parrot men” for the way that their parroted “chopt Logick” and “Syllogismes...disorders my reason” and barely abstains from dissolving their society (79). To the Bear-men, she scorns their telescopes and microscopes<sup>22</sup> because “Nature has made your sense and reason more regular than Art has your Glasses”; she only rescinds her “Command...to break them” by having them promise to keep their conflicts “within their Schools” so that they will not cause civil disorder (77). Each conversation ends with a definitive decision on the Empress's part as to the utility and ideal employment of the group's ideas. As such, these conversations serve as metacognitive representations both of Cavendish's philosophical opinions and of how she arrived at them. Though the creatures have distinct animal-human hybrid forms and empirical functions, they all ultimately “Agree” with the Empress following their disputations with her. Their service to the Empress's intellectual “Commonwealth” and Cavendish's intellectual economy always proves deferential. As we recall from her preface, Cavendish

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<sup>22</sup> The images the Bear-men describe seeing in their telescopes were understood to be some of the defining images from Robert Hooke's *Micrographia*, which was published shortly before Cavendish's *Blazing* and *Observations*. Though she does not cite Hooke by name in this scene, she uses this allusion to his images to critique his ideas.

aims to “recreate the mind”: a female mind, her own. She uses this philosophical section of the text to prove the legitimacy of her ideas, and also how adeptly she can create and advance them.

The animal subjects’ deferential servitude becomes even clearer when compared to the Empress’s next intellectual debate partner. The Duchess, who the Empress originally brings to the Blazing World as a scribe, distinguishes herself from the Empress’s subjects by gaining comparable intellectual sovereignty to the Empress. After the latter decides that she would like to write a Cabbala, she searches for a perfect scribe, rejecting the names her spirit-advisor suggests—“*Galileo, Cassendus, Des Cartes, Helmont, Hobbes, H. [Henry] More, Etc.*”—because they are “so self-conceited that they would scorn to be Scribes to a Woman.” The spirit then suggests one last scribe: “The Duchess of Newcastle” (119), or Margaret herself. Though she is brought to the Blazing World as a “plain and rational writer” who is “ready to do [the Empress] all the service she can” (119), the Duchess immediately resists the role of passive subject. She arrives for the sole purpose of recording the Empress’s Cabbala, but then challenges the Empress on the religious, moral, and political groundwork of her Cabbala, ultimately directing the Empress’s ambition back to her own mind by encouraging her to create “a poetical or romancical Cabbala, wherein you can use metaphors, allegories, similitudes, etc. and interpret them as you please” (121). The Empress asserts that “no sovereign does make a subject equal to *himself*” (122, emphasis mine), implying that masculine conceptions of sovereignty, in particular, rely upon hierarchy. Yet the fluidity of soul and mind that distinguishes her friendship with the Duchess suggests that within the female conscience,

creative sovereignty can exist in several distinct, uncontested realms, even within the same mind.

By introducing the Duchess character as a figure who stimulates the Empress's creative potential, Cavendish begins to move away from philosophy and into her third genre, "Fancy." Examining fancy both as "the process, and the faculty, of forming mental representations of things not present to the senses" and as a way "to express aptitude for the invention of *illustrative* or decorative imagery" ("Fancy," def. 4.a., emphasis mine), I argue that the Duchess grants us further insight into Cavendish's mind in terms of *Blazing*'s textual production. Mendelson highlights the fact that the "Duchess" character shares Cavendish's messy handwriting; just as the Empress resolves that "any of my Secretaries may learn [the Duchess's] hand" and "shall write [her writings] out fair and intelligible" (119), Cavendish had to have her own scrawling manuscripts rewritten whenever she prepared to print them (Mendelson 25n3). As such, the Duchess's servitude in the *Blazing World* is precluded by the fact that she represents the ways in which Cavendish constructs her fancy. After experiencing the romantic and philosophical "recreations" of Cavendish's mind in the previous sections, we begin to gain full insight into how that mind was created. The shared handwriting gives us a fictional representation of Cavendish's textual production process, giving the Duchess character a representative function that is distinct from those of the Lady and Empress—and no more or less servile than them.

The Duchess's metaphoric function also more fully answers the question of how Cavendish treats the Empress's female subjects. The other women of the *Blazing World*, like their male peers outright "worship" the Empress, becoming "very devout and zealous

Sisters” once the Empress includes them in the world’s church and inspires them with her preaching (100). With this example being one of Cavendish’s only mentions of the Blazing World’s female subjects, some critics argue that Cavendish’s general exclusion of the World’s women from leadership points towards her adoption of the more “covetous,” masculinized leadership she eschewed in the beginning; she wants to direct all of the narrative power to the female characters who directly reflect herself. Her “To All Noble, and Worthy Ladies” preface, however, offers a different possibility. The final protection and validation she offers her world is the fact that “it is in every ones power” to make “a World of their own,” as she has (60).

Indeed, *this* solution ultimately replaces the Empress's Cabbala in the text. After the Duchess suggests the “romancical Cabbala” as an answer to the Empress's ideological ambition, the Empress and the Blazing World’s spirits answer the Duchess's ambition to “be as you are...an Emperess of a World” by suggesting that the two women each “create your self a Celestial World” (123). The Duchess and Empress therefore share “ambition” and creative impulse, but they “also part from each other” (124) in creating their self-contained worlds, implying that their authority over their worlds exists in harmony with, but not within any hierarchical dependence upon, one another. Cavendish’s preface implies that this world-building is available to readers of all genders. Yet the preface’s address to “Ladies”—and the fact that two female characters explore this possibility in the text itself—suggests that this idea proves particularly powerful for female readers and writers alike.

Just as fancy and reason work together to “recreate the mind,” the Duchess and the Empress create a new world of possibilities for the female imagination through their

platonic love, bringing feminine creative sovereignty to a new height. The Duchess reflects her authorial namesake in expressing “an extreme *ambition*”—borrowing the language of Cavendish’s preface directly—to “be a great Princess” (121). As she and the Empress realize that no opportunity for her exists to transcend her Duchess title in her physical home world, the Blazing World’s spirits further reinforce the preface by discouraging the idea of conquering a world, because “Conquerers seldom enjoy their conquest, for they being more feared than loved, most commonly come to an untimely end” (122). Instead, their suggested alternative is that the two women create their own worlds:

...every humane Creature can create an Immaterial World fully inhabited by immaterial Creatures, and populous of Immaterial subjects, such as we are, and all this within the compass of the head or scull; nay, not onely so, but he may create a World of what fashion and Government he will, and give the Creatures hereof such motions, figures, forms, colours, perceptions, etc. as he pleases...also he may alter that world as often as he pleases, or change it from a natural world, to an artificial; he may make a world of Ideas, a world of Atomes, a world of Lights or whatsoever his *fancy* leads him to. And since it is in your power to create such a world, What need you to venture life, reputation and tranquility, to conquer a gross material world? (123, emphasis mine)

The spirits’ concluding question here holds particular resonance for female writers. The possibility of literally “conquering a gross material world” remains firmly out of most women’s grasp, but we need look no further than *Urania*’s publication history for evidence that circulating their ideas is indeed a “venture” of “life, reputation and tranquility.” Cavendish’s noble position and supportive marriage offers her greater protection from these consequences, but the question remains on her mind. Yet she proceeds to circulate her thoughts, create her “immaterial,” fictional world, and allow her Duchess to do the same because that immateriality offers comfort. Immaterial ideas,

themselves, lie outside the realm of material consequences, and immaterial worlds offer a greater range of possibilities for how a female writer can imagine herself.

Adding further significance to this idea is the fact that the Duchess of Newcastle is the first mortal female character to enter the Blazing World aside from the Empress, but she is entirely removed from her corporeal human form. She and the Empress mainly interact as “two female souls” who “travelled together as lightly as two *thoughts*” (127, emphasis mine), transcending their physical bodies—and their separate physical home worlds—in the meantime. Their figurative representation as “thoughts” makes their travel among their physical and imaginative worlds symbolic of how Cavendish’s own “fanciful” ideas circulate. Where outside of fiction, she cannot reach unquestioned political or authorial sovereignty in England or its literary market, respectively, she can represent her authorial hand as transcending her earthly position. She can position herself, as the literary-minded Duchess, as distinct from the more philosophically authoritative Empress, but represent both of them as crucial parts of her intellectual conscience: parts that ought to circulate together.

As such, Cavendish’s establishment of the souls as the distinctly female, constant, portable versions of the Empress and the Duchess imbues those souls with a powerful sense of sovereignty. The Empress learns that the spirits that would inhabit her physical body in her absence have “no difference in sexes among them,” but are nevertheless governed by “*her* sensitive and rational corporeal motions” (127, emphasis mine). Their souls, as intangible constructions of themselves, are the novel’s only immovable entities among the “infinite” imaginary worlds that they could create and destroy; their minds and values, more than their bodies, are “unalterable” (157), granting the Empress and

Duchess jurisdiction over these worlds and the power to build them. Catherine Gallagher defines this process as an infinite form of subjective absolutism. They can create as many worlds as they like, and in Gallagher's words, their imaginative world-building process has three steps:

- (1) The absolutist imagines the self as microcosm;
- (2) The microcosm requires an absolute ruler, a figure of the self in the world of the self;
- (3) The ruler of the microcosm, finding herself to be but a part of the microcosm she inhabits, must create yet another microcosm in order to meet the demands of absolutism. (32)

Within this framework, the soul, as a self-microcosm, becomes an entire, disembodied world, the stable basis for all other imaginative realms. The soul is subject and monarch in equal measure, constantly generating new realms to rule in order to maintain its authority.

I argue, however, that an impulse towards raw authority is not the Duchess's—or Cavendish's—sole motivation, at this point in the work or otherwise. One of the main distinctions between the Empress and the Duchess exists in their different titles, and the fact that the Duchess's title is Cavendish's own. They thereby have different motivations for exercising their creative powers, and the Duchess's reasons reflect Cavendish's title-specific experiences as Duchess of Newcastle. The Empress exercises her creative authority in order to prove her intellectual authority. The Duchess, though the Empress's intellectual equal, uses her power to initiate visits to her home world to argue for the reinstatement of her husband's estate—a primary concern for Cavendish, to which she makes direct reference in the preface. Reflecting upon how William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, lost his land and income during his exile in the English Civil War, Cavendish notes in her preface that she “should onely desire so much [Gold] that might suffice to

repair my Noble Lord and Husband's Losses"; likewise, the Duchess mourns the fact that "my dear Lord and Husband...has lost...half his Woods, besides many Houses, Land, and moveable Goods; so that all the loss out of his particular Estate did amount to above half a Million of Pounds" (60, 132). This biographical allusion, along with the reference to the Duchess's handwriting and the physical production of her text, marks the Duchess's character as a direct representation of Cavendish as a dual duchess and a writer, and the dual privileges and pressures of those roles. When we see the Duchess's "light" travel and circulation through her worlds, we can recognize that Fancy, itself, becomes both a "light" escape from, and an insistence upon the urgency of, the factors that prevent Cavendish from realizing her ambitions outside of fiction.

Yet within her fiction, Cavendish can put her literary power on impressive, nuanced display. She fuses all three of her autobiographical characters, and the genres they represent, in the second part of *Blazing World*. This section of the text begins with the Empress learning that her original world—the world from which she was stolen at the beginning of the text—"was embroiled in a great War" against her "Native Country" (143), an event that serves as Cavendish's nod to the ongoing Second Anglo-Dutch War that began in 1665, as she was working on *Blazing* (Mendelson 143n3). The Empress initially regrets that she cannot defend her country because her immaterial spirits cannot leave the Blazing World; for this reason, she claims, "I know not how to shew my readiness to serve my Native Country." She then reveals a more deeply probing reason for her worlds' militaristic divide: "...the violent and strong actions of War, will never agree with Immaterial Spirits; for Immaterial Spirits cannot fight, nor make trenches, Fortifications, and the like" (143).

Here, Cavendish once again engages her preface's distinction between "ambitious" and "covetous." She characterizes the Empress's spirits as being incompatible with the conquest and "violence" that pervades the Lady's world. Indeed, these latter forces were the ones that forced the Lady away from her world in the first place. The Empress at first attributes her spirits' incompatibility to a lack of ability, claiming that their immateriality precludes them from enacting material violence. For Cavendish, though, the true incongruity lies not in inability, but in disagreement. In the Blazing World, the Empress finds immaterial subjects that are "like many commonwealths, yet all *agree*." When she then tries to reconcile the power that the Blazing World respects with the power she would need to exhibit in her original world, she finds that these methods "will *never* agree." The immaterial spirits, and Cavendish, fundamentally *disagree* with conquest, regardless of their ability to perform it. The question of how Cavendish will navigate this essential difference defines the remainder of the section. In answer, she has each of her autobiographical fictional presences take on a distinct presence in the conflict.

The Duchess becomes the Empress's military strategist; both responding to the war in the fictionalized ESFI—the Empress's country, named as an anagram of England, Scotland, France and Ireland—and representing the real Duchess of Newcastle's England, she proves adept at the role, having lost family land and fed her ambition during her own country's conflicts. She advises the Empress to "have but a little patience, and rely upon my advice," and she claims that this counsel will allow the Empress to "save your own Native Country, and in a manner become Mistress of all that World you came from" (145). In this promise, the Duchess raises the stakes of the conflict. Despite the

Empress's assertions otherwise, her impetus for fighting is no longer nationalist loyalty. She fights for the possibility of being “Mistress of all that world [she] came from,” of avenging the powerlessness she felt in that world, especially when she was kidnapped from it by mercantile forces. These stakes are advanced further when the Empress requests that the Duchess's “Soul...shall live with my Soul, in my Body” when she returns to her former world, and that she “shall solely desire [the Duchess's] Counsel and advice” (146). They wage their war as united Empress and Duchess: as the natural philosopher and noble writer who had to find their authority outside of their worlds because their home worlds did not recognize them. Had the Empress remained as the Lady, she would have been counted among the spoils of victory. By appearing to her former world *as* the victory—as a brilliant military commander—she aims not to conquer her world, but to conquer the forces that excluded her from it.

To conquer these forces, Cavendish plays by their rules, seemingly contradicting the “disagreement” with conquest that has hitherto defined *Blazing World*. As she sails into her former world, the Empress “commanded numbers of Fish-men to wait on her under water, and Bird-men to wait on her in the air; and Bear- and Worm-men to wait on her in Ships, according to the Duchess's advice” (147). To reinterpret their roles for military service so readily appears hypocritical. Yet these new roles are not far removed from the empirical structure of the *Blazing World*: each group is assigned a form of military service appropriate to their physical form, just as their intellectual service was assigned likewise in the *Blazing World*'s academic realm. The vehemence of her subjects' loyalty also remains unchanged. She notes that “some would rather chuse to be drowned, then not tender their duty to her” (147).

Many critics take issue with this portion of *Blazing*, asking how we ought to reconcile the first part's emphasis upon creative power with what appears to be a gross display and advocacy of imperialism and absolutism in the second part. Though Cavendish's military strategy carries these undertones, it does not conquer for the sake of conquering. Rather, her characters use these strategies to assert their power by recreating the Blazing World in the Lady's world: recreating Cavendish's mind in a way that the world's powers will find impossible to ignore. Indeed, once the Empress spots her country's enemies, the attack she and the Duchess issue is one of imaginative illusion, not violence:

The Empress before she came in sight of the Enemy, sent some of her Fish- and Bird-men to bring her Intelligence of their Fleet; and hearing of their number, their station and posture, gave order that when it was Night, her Bird-men should carry in their beaks some of the mentioned Fire-stones...and the Fish-men should carry them likewise, and hold them out of the Water, for they were cut in the form of Torches or Candles, and being many thousands, made a terrible *shew*; for it *appear'd as if all the Air and Sea had been of a flaming Fire*; and all that were upon the Sea, or near it, did verily believe, the time of Judgment, or the Last Day was come, *which made them all fall down, and Pray*. (148, emphasis mine)

If her world will not recognize the force and existence of the Blazing World, then she will set their world ablaze. Even in this strategy, she seeks not to destroy, but to dazzle. It only *appears* that the sea is on fire; the fact that this religiously-inflected "shew" causes them to "pray" implies that even before they see the Empress, they are already beginning to worship her, just as the Emperor offered to worship her when she met him as the Lady.

The Empress also incites worship through another decidedly non-violent tactic: how she dresses herself. In one appearance, she "appear'd with Garments made of the Star-stone" and has her subjects carry her and light her so that she "seemed to walk upon the face of the water"; upon seeing this illusion, the "hearts" of "her Country-men...began

to tremble,” and because she looks “like an Angel, or some Deity,” these men “all kneeled down before her, and worshipped her with all submission and reverence.” Despite seeing her as a deity, they later wonder whether she is “an Angel,” “a Sorceress,” “a Goddess,” or a Devil-delivered “delu[sion]...in the shape of a fine lady” (150), both undermining her intentionality and attempting to justify their own gullibility. The Empress continues this effect when she appears in the diamond- and Star-stone-studded imperial robes she receives at the beginning the novel. Though the jewels mean nothing to the Blazing World—there, diamonds are “as Peble-stones” (151)—they constitute an impressive display of wealth, and thereby power, to her former world.

The Empress uses her military powers to reinterpret her creative powers into a form that her former world’s “Great Councils” of men will not only understand, but also respect and fear. In using this catalyst for her characters’ actions, Cavendish makes *Blazing* her response to the “Councils” that rejected her outside of fiction: to the “humiliating experience appearing before the Interregnum Committee for Compounding in 1651 to petition for income from her husband’s estates” that Mendelson recounts (149n1) and to her derided appearance before the Royal Society (Wilkins 245-246). Accordingly, once the Empress addresses these “Councils,” the only condition she demands is respect:

...I have chosen rather to quit my own Tranquility, Riches, and Pleasure, then suffer you to be ruined or destroyed. *All the return I desire, is but your Grateful acknowledgment* and to declare my Power, Love and Loyalty to my Native Country; for though I am now a great and absolute Princess and Emperess of a whole World, yet I acknowledge that once I was a Subject of this Kingdom, which is but a small part of this World... (150, emphasis mine)

To appear to these worlds at all, in fiction or in fact, is to invite threat to her own privileges, to her reputation and autonomy. Appearing means engaging her power and her powerlessness in equal measure, and trying to understand how they inform one another.

To this end, the prime subjects of the Empress's violence are the material forces that were violent with her in her previous status as the Lady: merchant ships. She vows to “burn and sink all those Ships that would not pay [her country’s king] Tribute,” and when these forces “denied it with great scorn,” then the Empress “immediately commanded her Fish-men to destroy *all* strangers Ships that traffick’d on the Seas” (151, emphasis mine). Even when she moves on to burning the resistant towns (153), she does so for the same reason: they do not respect ESFI’s authority, and more fundamentally, they do not respect hers. Yet only through violence does she secure her former world’s respect and ESFI’s military victory. As she gives her final victory address to the gathered ships, they gather because “the effects of her Power and Beauty did kindle a great desire in all the greatest Princes to *see* her,” and they aim to “wait on her Majesty” before she leaves (154); in other words, knowing that they cannot possess her beauty in the way the merchant attempted at the beginning, they now wish to give her the same visual- and aesthetic-based worship that the Emperor did. What pushes them, and this section of *Blazing*, away from these romantic genre tendencies is how ESFI understands her power. Their final decision to worship her is indeed based on her “splendid and transcendent beauty,” but even more tellingly on their wonder that a mortal being could “have so great a power as she has, to walk upon the Waters, and to *destroy* whatever she pleases, not onely whole Nations, but a whole World” (154, emphasis mine).

This statement reveals that despite the Empress's victory, the fundamental incompatibility between the Blazing World and ESFI can never be answered. The “Princes” of ESFI respect power when it destroys worlds. Cavendish respects power when it creates worlds. No matter how much respect Cavendish’s avatars win in ESFI, they remain incompatible with the nation’s covetousness. Even the Empress's jewels appear as an anti-covetous extension of her power and of the Blazing World’s alternative moral and economic value structure, as Lisa Walters notes:

The empress wears items devoid of economic value, rather than precious materials and rich attire, to symbolize her power. Providing a commentary on the foundation of economics, Cavendish suggests that what is considered valuable, whether it is gold or a monarch, is not inherently valuable in itself. Value is placed externally by the interpretative powers of the community at large. (185)

Not only is the jewels’ value placed and reinterpreted by the “community” of the Empress's home country, but the Empress's attire is also revalued within the *Blazing World*’s context. When Cavendish previously appeared before powerful, male-dominated communities, such as the Royal Society, they spent more time commenting upon the eccentricity of her clothes than upon the value—and circulation—of her ideas. In *Blazing*, Cavendish makes spectacle a site of authority, not humiliation. She conquers her world’s material-driven hierarchical powers through immaterial “interpretative” and imaginative powers.

The Empress thereby refuses to give ESFI the Blazing World’s gold because “their natures are such, that much gold, and great store of Riches makes them mad, insomuch as they endeavour to destroy each other for Gold, or Riches sake”; in this sense, she claims that “their Covetousness is infinite” (156). She recognizes the same greed in ESFI that Jonson recognized in 1610 London: the need to “concumere gold,”

and the use of the imagination to disempower and exclude. Even when the Empress offers the Duchess some gold, the Duchess once again echoes Cavendish by stating that she is “not covetous, nor desir’d any more wealth then what her Lord and Husband had before the Civil Wars” (154). By *Blazing*’s end, all versions of Cavendish choose the possibility of creating infinite worlds over that of indulging infinite Covetousness. Only by taking charge of their ideas’ creation and circulation can they define the terms of their authority—and then claim it. When Mammon and Dapper worship Dol, they do so out of sexual admiration and societal derision. When ESFI and the Blazing World worship Cavendish’s avatars, they do so out of generic misunderstanding that Cavendish soon corrects.

Cavendish reflects on how *Blazing* has reappropriated genre in her final “Epilogue to the Reader,” fusing romance, philosophy, and fancy into one last definition of her work: that of a “Poetical description” (163). Such a characterization seems odd, as *Blazing* is written in prose, not verse. Instead, “Poetical” gains its significance when we define it as “relating to composition or creativity” and as characteristic “Of the rising or setting of a star” (“Poetical,” def. 4, 1.b.). Viewed through these lens, *The Blazing World* aims to grant us insight into its own complex creation: how this bright, intellectually fiery world came to be. Cavendish returns briefly to romance by justifying the deaths of “some few men in a little Boat...which was necessitated to punish their crime of stealing away a young and beauteous Lady” (161). She confirms that these deaths were symbolic, further proving that this event helped her work veer from romance. Moving forward to philosophy, she connects the Empress's command over the Blazing World to her *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* that preceded the work; the Blazing World

has its philosophical Empress, and “concerning the *Philosophical* world”—the nonfictional one—Cavendish asserts, “I am Emperess of it myself” (163). This description aligns her with the Empress, and connects the Empress character’s authority in the *Blazing World* with Cavendish’s goals in the Royal Society. Yet the most definitive tie with which she leaves her reader is that between herself and the Duchess, her Fancy. Cavendish calls herself “not only Emperess, but Authoress of a whole World,” but then unites herself with the Duchess by calling the *Blazing World*’s Empress her “dear Platonick friend,” whose world inspires her not to usurpation, but to creating more for herself and “another friend” (163-164). She reuses the language of “platonic,” loving souls that united the Empress and the Duchess, and removes all distinction between the Duchess and herself.

With this gesture, she implies that *The Blazing World* is the poetical Cabbala that her characters sought to write. The work comprises the Empress's philosophy and the Duchess's fanciful, handwritten literary production—and therefore, a rewriting of the powerless romance Lady’s story. *Blazing* is Cavendish’s vision for the generic romance Lady, but also for Wroth, “the *Lady* that wrote the *Romancy*” (Cavendish, *Poems and Fancies*). She uses the work to assert her own intellectual authority, and in doing so, advances the possibilities for how “Authoresses” may circulate their work outside of sociopolitical barriers. She suggests a form of circulation for “Creatoresses” outside of Dol’s procreation or Denny’s possession: where women’s bodies of imaginative and creative work may exchange hands, rather than their bodies themselves.

### Conclusion

In place of a commonwealth, *The Alchemist* offers Dol Common as a “common” good to be widely circulated among its male characters, as a vehicle for increasing their wealth. *Urania* enables Wroth’s story to circulate in a way that the 1621 London social circles preclude; her female characters share and represent different versions of her own love story, but the bounds of romance—and its powerful readers in the Jacobean court—still restrain her story’s availability. By 1666, Margaret Cavendish can take much greater creative control and liberties than could Wroth. She faces the same questions of leadership and literary authority as her Sidney predecessor, but offers more definitive answers.

In this present thesis, I hope to have illuminated the connections among these three seventeenth-century authors, and to have connected their stories across genre and time to argue for their place in how we understand the evolution of early modern female authorship in terms of value and circulation. Yet even within this conversation, I know there are many questions left unanswered. Prominent among these is the question of empire. An undeniable imperial impulse underlies these works’ shared interest in wealth and possession. Epicure Mammon envisions his “golden age” spanning countries, an implication that makes Dol both his queen and his conquest; her “commonwealth” is the first site he eyes for his covetous vision. Amphilanthus is named Holy Roman Emperor, leaving us to wonder what the sociopolitical implications are for Pamphilia if she were to be Holy Roman Empress—and whether or not such a role is available or compelling for her, in Wroth’s vision or otherwise. As for Cavendish’s Empress, we have ample evidence for questioning whether or not her forced submission of ESFI is truly as allegorical as she claims. The visual brilliance of her attacks stand, but their broader

implications—if repeated for other worlds, for other purposes—remain valid considerations. In future studies, I hope to examine these implications more closely and expand the models of circulation I have proposed here accordingly.

Another theme I hope to explore more thoroughly, perhaps as an alternative to these works' imperialist contexts, is that of love. Deirdre McCloskey has cited the idea that economics is “the science of conserving on love” (97), and many of the the love-focused works written by this period's female writers could offer a new perspective on this idea. One of the glaring absences in *The Alchemist's* economy and world, alike, is that of love. Jonson's characters interact with one another through insults and self-interest, motivated by profit alone; the effect is comedic, but the implications are dark. Conversely, *Urania* offers two types of hierarchy: the characters' monarchical positions, and their moral “excellence,” demonstrated by their constancy in love. By the time we reach *Blazing World*, Cavendish's characters can create and travel amongst entire worlds, bounded by platonic love and friendship. Love, like imagination, is a force that can be perverted and weaponized, but can more powerfully catalyze authority and possibility. Exploring the treatment of love in these works and others will complement and advance the discussions I have started here.

As for this project's opening question of value, and where we can locate it in the three principal works studied here, my answer is that we will find value in the careful line between creativity and creation. Creativity denotes the imaginative power that allowed these authors to bring these works into being, and into circulation. Creation denotes their materialized state. Before we can ask questions of appraisal and exchange, we must first ask, “Who can create—and for whom?”. Dol is creative, but men conflate her theatrical

creations with procreation. Wroth's creations prove fatefully subject to men's creativity. Cavendish claims full reign of both qualities, regardless of her society's allowance. Their progression demonstrates that for fictional and historical female creators, only self-determined creativity can answer ambition. Only self-determined creation can be wholly their own, not subject to conquest or possession beyond their control.

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