

ABSTRACT

JACOB ROBISON CLAYTON. *A World of One's Own: Cavendish's Fanciful Places and the Male Academy.* (Under the direction of Dr. John Morillo.)

In the development of what would become the scientific method, seventeenth century natural philosophers offered the world a new way of knowing. Advocating for an experimentalist view of science, the men who would become the principal members of Britain's Royal Society sought to distance themselves from alternate philosophies of nature. In contrast, Margaret Cavendish's natural philosophy extolls the virtues of material vitalism, a brand of natural philosophy drawing from atomism, vitalism, and even alchemical paradigms. While her explicitly scientific works have been examined in some depth by scholars like Lisa Sarasohn and Anna Battigelli, her pseudo-novel *The Blazing World*, I argue, has not been explored within the context of its unique historical moment. Before science and before feminism, Cavendish's *Blazing World* presented a gendered critique of the New Science, foreshadowing the field of feminist science studies that would emerge in the late 20th century.

Cavendish casts the writer as a subject situated in a distinct epistemological space, and, by locating the speaker, Cavendish limits his ability to know. This insistence on humanity's limited perception is applied to the male academy and to the endeavors of the newly founded Royal Society. By creating new spaces of feminine rule, Cavendish seeks entry into the masculinist academic conversation. By privileging personal perspective over the academy's disembodied objectivity, Cavendish subverts masculine claims to authority and argues that her unique perspective is equally valuable. Beginning with a brief explanation of space and place in the context of modern feminist criticism, this paper will explore Margaret Cavendish dissenting science before going on to examine the specific ways she creates, transgresses, and reconceives

space in *The Blazing World*. By reframing women as creators of scientific knowledge, Cavendish illustrates her own ability to engage in the high-stakes knowledge-making of natural philosophy.