

AN ECOCRITICAL EXPLORATION OF THE  
UNIQUE NATURE OF EARLY MODERN  
OCEANS IN *THE BLAZING WORLD*  
AND *THE TEMPEST*

by

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Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN ENGLISH

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

December 2010

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to my thesis committee, Dr. Amy Tigner, Dr. Wendy Faris, and Dr. Kevin Gustafson. Their patience, guidance, and insights helped me discover a wonderful topic and navigate a sea of scholarship. Additionally, Dr. Rebecca Dark contributed feedback and insights essential to my chapter concerning *The Blazing World*. I am grateful to Dr. Margaret Lowry, Dr. Timothy Morris, and Dr. Kenneth Roemer for their guidance and support throughout graduate school. All my professors encouraged me to develop and share my ideas, and my achievements would not have been possible otherwise.

Additionally, I would like to thank family and friends. Brian Edgar encouraged me to challenge myself and instilled in me the confidence necessary for success. Wilton Wright and Veronica Rendon studied by my side when the hours of research and writing became long and uncertain. I owe my deepest gratitude to my mother, Pamela Earnest, and sister, Kelly Earnest. This thesis would not have been possible without their love and support. They are amazing, compassionate, and brilliant women. They are the blessings and pillars of my life and work.

November 17, 2010

ABSTRACT

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Early modern perceptions of oceanic space diverged from standard perceptions of nature on land (or land-nature) because oceans presented a different type of wilderness. Because oceans defied early modern definitions of nature, they refused to support the developing mechanistic approach in the way that land-nature did. My argument begins with a chapter exploring science and nature in the early modern period. My second chapter expands this demonstration with an exploration of *The Tempest*. Shakespeare's self-reflexivity and exploration of boundaries in representing islands and oceans exemplifies their liminal position within nature. In my final chapter, I examine Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* to examine how the liminal position of oceans within the humankind-nature paradigm necessitated a hybrid mechanistic-organic relationship and representation. These explorations illuminate how oceans, as an extraterrestrial space distanced from traditional, terrestrial nature, constituted a different kind of natural phenomenon and contributed to a global mentality.

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CHAPTER 1  
EARLY MODERN OCEANS

1.1 Mapping an Argument

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries a new view of nature began to take shape in distinction from the inherited Greek tradition: instead of an organism, the universe could better be thought of as a machine.

– Gabriel Egan

The contemporary image of our planet is a green and blue globe suspended in the dark, sweeping, and mysterious mass of outer space.<sup>1</sup> Trying to imagine a time before such an image existed in cultural rhetoric raises the question of how earlier cultures constructed an image of the globe in its entirety. One answer rests in the exploration of another dark, expansive, and mysterious environment – the ocean. Seventeenth-century oceanic exploration aided the development of a global perspective, and texts such as Margaret Cavendish’s *The Blazing World* and William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* demonstrate how this perspective intersects with changing perceptions of nature upon the ocean and within oceanic discourse.

Cavendish ends *The Blazing World* with a powerful, representative image that combines the globalizing and mobilizing functions of oceans with a supernatural representation of an organic relationship with nature. She writes: “[the empress] being entered into her own ship, the whole fleet sunk immediately into the bottom of the seas, and left all the spectators in a deep amazement; neither would she suffer any of her ships to come above the waters until she arrived into the Blazing World” (216). By blending conventions of utopian fiction, scientific discourse and travel narrative, writers such as Shakespeare and Cavendish reexamine the

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<sup>1</sup> See Heise for an in-depth discussion of the “Blue Planet” image. Heise describes how the Blue Planet instigated a non-scientific rhetoric and global mentality, later reversed by “fears of corporate conspiracy,” “possibility of catastrophic collapse,” and the realization of the need for ecological awareness and action (26). This fostered a local mentality emphasizing community and regional environmentalism.

relationship between nature and humankind. Particularly, this relationship reveals the unique position of oceans within natural phenomena in a period of shifting scientific philosophies and methods.

I argue that early modern perceptions of oceanic space diverged from standard perceptions of nature on land (or land-nature) because oceans presented a different type of wilderness. This environment was uninhabitable and untamable, deviated from traditional definitions of nature, and made possible a connected, global perspective that conventional conceptions of land-nature as apportionable did not support. Deviations of ocean-nature from land-nature – the inability to support human steps, the hidden and diverse ecosystem, and the spatial and temporal expanse that overwhelms the field of vision – facilitated textual representations combining utopian fantasy, science fiction, and travel narrative. Because oceans defied early modern definitions of nature, they refused to support the developing mechanistic approach in the way that land-nature did. Instead, oceanic space required travelers and writers retain aspects of an organic paradigm to integrate with those of the scientific revolution in order to understand and represent the vast and seemingly supernatural nature of oceans.

My argument begins with a chapter exploring science and nature in the early modern period. Travel narratives, travel fiction, and travel within fiction demonstrate how oceans deviate from traditional representations and definitions of natural phenomena. I will briefly demonstrate such deviation of oceans in fictional examples found in Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*. My second chapter will expand this demonstration with an exploration of *The Tempest*. Shakespeare's self-reflexivity and exploration of boundaries in representing islands and oceans exemplifies their liminal position within nature. In my final chapter, I examine Cavendish's *The Blazing World* to examine how the liminal position of oceans within the humankind-nature paradigm necessitated a hybrid mechanistic-organic relationship and representation. These explorations will illuminate how oceans, as an extraterrestrial space distanced from traditional, terrestrial nature,



constituted a different kind of natural phenomenon and contributed to a global mentality.

## 1.2 Science and Nature

The early modern period was a time of expansion, as scientific philosophy developed through pursuit of new knowledge and understanding; great thinkers such as Francis Bacon, Robert Hooke, and Isaac Newton laid the foundations of the scientific revolution. This movement and its inventions, discoveries, and debates brought a new worldview, a mechanistic approach, which Robert Hooke describes in his *Micrographia*: “we may perhaps be inabled to discern all the secret workings of Nature, almost in the same manner as we do those that are the productions of Art, and are manag’d by Wheels, and Engines, and Springs, that we devised by human Wit” (4). This desire to know the “secret workings of Nature” inspired a new conceptualization of the world and a new relationship between humankind and natural phenomena.

Texts by members of the Royal Society laid the foundation of the scientific revolution and modern scientific method. Today, the Society remains active, publishing electronically, fostering education, and supporting research. In celebration of its 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Society’s webpage describes its inception on the 30<sup>th</sup> of November in 1660:

a dozen men gathered to hear the young Christopher Wren give a lecture on astronomy. In the discussion that followed they decided to form a society for the study of the new and still controversial Experimental Philosophy. Two years later Charles II made it his Royal Society and in the 350 years since it was founded, its Fellows have given us gravity, evolution, the electron, the double helix, the internet and a large part of the modern world. (royalsociety.org)

Such great advances arose from the humble beginnings, as the dissent from dominant discourse and methodology spurred a revolution in science. The Society contends “the history of science since 1660 is closely intertwined with the story of the Royal Society” (royalsociety.org). This revolution inspired a new relationship between humankind and the earth.

In *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant describes negative aspects of this new relationship: “As the sixteenth century organic cosmos was transformed into the seventeenth century mechanistic universe, its life and vitality were sacrificed for a world filled with dead and passive matter” (105). Slowly, the world seemed more machine than organism; therefore, with the advancement of science came a loss of intimacy with nature, a loss of interconnection between humans and their surroundings. Merchant explores organic and mechanistic views, defining each: “*Mechanical* referred to the machine and tool trades; the manual operations of the handicrafts; inanimate machines that lacked spontaneity, volition, and thought; and the mechanical sciences,” and “*organic* usually referred to the bodily organs, structures, and organization of living beings, while *organicism* was the doctrine that organic structure was the result of an inherent, adaptive property in matter” (xxiii-iv). At first glance, oceans dwell within the broad concept of “nature”; however, I suggest further investigation reveals that oceans resist such classification.

To explore shifting paradigms of nature requires an understanding of the goals and methodology of ecocriticism. Humans are part of nature and therefore entwined with their object of study. Subjectivity is inevitable, and necessitates an awareness of definitions of ecology as well as humankind’s role in constructing those definitions. Neil Evernden contends that inter-relatedness is the crux of ecology and a commonly misunderstood or over-simplified concept. The inter-related essence of ecology is not merely a matrix of causal connections, but rather “a genuine *intermingling* of parts of the ecosystem. There are no discrete entities” (93). Subsequently, no single, dominant, correct perceived model of nature exists. From the seventeenth-century, a new understanding of the environment developed through scientific advancement, technological innovation, and climate change. Describing the changing trends of today, William Howarth states, “Science is evolving beyond Cartesian dualism toward quantum mechanics and chaos theory, where volatile, ceaseless exchange is the norm. While some forms of postmodern criticism are following this lead, many humanists still cling to a rationale bias that ignores recent science” (78). One sees evidence of the more recent argument in

modern social networking technology and Internet discourse. Organicism, particularly its notions of interconnection and causation, will soon be essential to the survival of our planet.

Investigating this paradigm shift away from organicism within early modern discourse can illuminate new approaches and solutions to contemporary environmental issues.

The exploration of the constructed status of nature precipitates an ecocritical interrogation of issues, such as the way nature is represented, the purposes served by particular natural phenomena, and the influence of scientific theories upon perceptions of nature. Examining evidence of the human-nature relationship within our historical narrative illuminates those social, cultural, and political factors influencing the construction of that narrative. Merchant contends that nature, like gender, is a construction rather than a constant, and lacks “unchanging ‘essential’ characteristics” (xvi). This means that “individuals form concepts about nature and their own relationships to it that draw on the ideas and norms of the society into which they are born, socialized, and educated,” and “people living in a given period construct nature in ways that give meaning to their own lives as elites or ordinary people, men or women, Westerners or Easterners” (xvi). The task of the historian or critic is to question factors shaping the construction of concepts such as nature and gender in order to analyze their effects on society and its texts.

Mechanism distanced civilization from nature. Merchant asserts, “The removal of animistic, organic assumptions about the cosmos constituted the death of nature... Because nature was now viewed as a system of dead, inert particles moved by external, rather than inherent forces, the mechanical framework itself could legitimate the manipulation of nature” (193). While land-nature was slowly dominated, dissected, studied, and exploited, oceans defied such acts and therefore complicated definitions of nature. Nautical travel, exploration, and trade flourished in early modern England, and the rising merchant economy and prevalence of travel narratives established a growing interest in oceans. Oceans evolved from boundaries separating regional, local environments to roadways facilitating international travel, connecting a previously divided planet, enhancing global awareness, and encouraging explorers, merchants,

and writers to conquer the wilderness of the ocean.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.3 Travel Narrative

The seeds of this early modern global mentality are evident in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century cartographic accuracy, function, and aesthetic. Evelyn Edson explores cartographic evolution, illustrating how maps textualized and embodied the growing, global world in the “elimination of such inaccessible and impossible places in favor of the world as a continuum of homogenous space, open in all directions to human travel” (228). The transformation from the perception of proximity connecting local and regional people, places, objects, and ideas to a broader early modern worldview of spatial-temporal distance spanning a multicultural and exotic, yet discoverable and connected globe is evidentiary on the ocean and within oceanic discourse. The ability of oceans to represent this changing mentality contrasts with terrestrial representation and perception – where the scientific revolution influenced shifting definitions of nature. The difference between ocean nature and terrestrial nature reveals the former’s ability to accommodate and facilitate a growing world.

However, the size and unconventional nature of oceans defied partitioning and domination. In a passage from *The Arte of Navigation*, published in Spain in 1551 and brought to England in 1561 through Richard Eden’s translation, Martín Cortés describes the importance of ocean travel’s universal, unifying force:

thus shall they that nowe live, and lyke wise they than shal succede us, see  
and perceave, howe much more the worlde oweth and is beholding to your  
Majestie, then were the auncient Egíptians to their Isis. She gave them letters  
to reade, but your Majestie hath geven rules and orders to sayle on the seas.

The profite of Isis, was onely for one province. But the commoditie that ensueth

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<sup>2</sup> Concerning this development, Anna Battigelli writes: “The defenders of the new science frequently used geographical tropes because they proved particularly useful in foregrounding the errors of Aristotle and other ancients and thus in outlining the progress already made and yet to be made by modern science. The relatively recent remapping of the world caused by the Copernican revolution, by Columbus’s discovery of the new world, and by increased travel, had proved beyond a doubt that ancient cosmographers had partial or erroneous knowledge” (103).

of your doynge, is universall for all provinces and nations, and for all seas, as well to go to places discovered, as also to discover landes and regions yet unknowen. (3)

By comparing the gifts of Isis to the commands of “the most mightie and victorious monarch Charles the Emperor,” to sail the seas, Cortés demonstrates the period’s perception of the momentous nature of ocean travel and discovery. This demonstration suggests a globalizing functionality of oceans, as developments in navigation and technology have “universal” effects for all regions, and assumes that information from one area can reach all areas because water connects them. However, Cortés knew the ocean would resist domination:

What can be more difficulte then to guyde a shyppe engoufled, where only water and heaven may be seene. One of the foure most difficult thynges wherof Salomon maketh mention in his Proverbes, is the viage of a shyppe by the sea. The which Galfrede expounding, faith that in humayne thynges, none is more fearefull or more daungerous, then to aventure lyfe in a weake and thinne piece of wood, or for a man to commit himselfe to the rage of furious wyndes amonge the tempests of the sea, and there to hasarde that he loveth so well. (4)

By characterizing ocean travel as the most dangerous endeavor humans can undertake, Cortés composes a disclaimer to warn of the sea voyager’s assumed risk. Although his guide was the most advanced of his day, he asserts that, in the face of the unpredictable and tempestuous ocean, no seaman could control or manipulate oceans. Travellers could merely employ techniques and technologies to work with or upon oceanic space.

Travel narratives and logs documented climate, location, and interactions with new cultures and foreign lands, and fostered significant interest in travel and exploration. With the proliferation of the printing press, the travels of Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, Ferdinand Magellan, Martin Frobisher, and Francis Drake, the translations of Richard Eden, and the narratives of Thomas Nash and John Mandeville reached a large audience and encouraged interest and wonder in ocean-crossing travel. Peter Mancall suggests that these writers not only

presented physical descriptions of voyages but also revealed their anxieties:

would a storm blow up and capsize their vessel? Would some unknown wild animal attack? Would the people they met decide to kill them? Such fears were reasonable. Yet the dominant tone of these accounts was not trepidation, but wonder at the marvels being witnessed and glee at the possibility of making a profit from new discoveries. (47)

Representing the unsettling and unfamiliar expanse of the ocean encouraged experimental discourse. The boundaries between fact and fiction blurred when the conventions of travel writing were appropriated, parodied, and embellished. Concerning this blurring in printed travel narratives, Mancall writes: “To modern eyes, the claims made on some pages of sixteenth-century printed books seem far-fetched. Rather than dismiss these texts, we must understand them within their own contexts” (7). Embellishment was not merely for entertainment, as the strange and new experiences of exploration often lacked context and challenged representation. In *Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtiful Empire of Guiana* (1596), Sir Walter Raleigh writes of seeing “in those passages of very rare colours & forms, not elsewhere to be found, for as much as I have either seen or read them” (41). Raleigh is struggling to describe the possessions and rituals of the people of Orinoco. He continues, “On that branch which is called *Caora*, are a nation of people, whose heades appear not above their shoulders, which though it may be thought a meere fable, yet for mine owne part I am resolved it is true” (69-70). Outlandish descriptions do not wound Raleigh’s credibility, as he is venturing into new, exotic territory. By contriving a mixture of factual account and exaggeration, he recreates for readers the unknown and exotic mood of his voyage.

In representing nature, travel writers employ gendered language in a manner indicative of differing perceptions of varying environments across the globe. In *A True Report of the Third and Last Voyage into Metacognita: Achieved by the worthie Captaine M. Martine Frobisher* (1578), Thomas Ellis’s use of personal pronouns to personify nature and objects exemplifies such convention:

we came by a marvelous huge mountaine of yce, which surpassed all the rest that ever we sawe: for we judged him to be neere a foure score fadams above the water, and we thought him to be a ground for any thing that we could perceve, being there nine score fadams deepe, and of compasse about halfe a mile, of which Island I have, as neere as I could, drawne and here set down the true proportion, as he appeared in diverse shapes passing alongest by him.

(11)

Elsewhere, Ellis uses the feminine pronoun to refer to oceans. A sprawling, solid mass is the constant, and it is surrounded by the uncertainty and danger of fluid and ice. The masculine element is solid earth; the feminine is unpredictable, chaotic water. In Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (1638), gender pronouns vary in a single passage:

The reason thereof I conceive to be this that whereas the Earth according to her naturall motion (for that such a motion the hath, I am now constrained to joyne in opinion with Copernicus,) turneth round upon her own Axe every 24 howers from the West unto the East: I should at first see in the middle of the body of this new starre a spot like unto a Peare that had amorsell bitten out upon the one side of him; after certain howers, I should see that spot slide away to the East side. This no doubt was the maine of Afterstrike. (56-7)

The feminine pronoun is used for Earth, in the tradition of Mother Nature (be she a vehement shrew or nurturing mother), yet Godwin uses "he" for another celestial body. This masculine element is like a pear with a bite taken from it, suggesting a nature that can be dominated and exposed to its core, its underlying system mechanistic and comprehensible. Merchant argues how nature is feminized: "The witch, symbol of the violence of nature, raised storms, caused illness, destroyed crops, obstructed generation, and killed infants. Disorderly women, like chaotic nature, needed to be controlled" (127). Literary representations of women and nature suggest they are organic and chaotic, in need of control and dissection, yet it is precisely their wholeness, their mystery, which resists a mechanistic approach.

Blurred genre boundaries encouraged fiction writers to appropriate travel narrative convention, as Sir Thomas More does *Utopia*. Because in travel and utopian fiction, cartographic illustrations and geographic descriptions added verisimilitude, Miles Ogborn and Charles Withers argue that “there is a negotiation of the boundaries of fact and fiction which lay at the heart of the relationship between geographical knowledge and the world that it depicted” (32). Travel writers appropriated literary tropes such as the romance of chivalry and the noble savage in order to draw from previous knowledge, convention, and vocabulary while representing unknown or exotic experiences. Discourse creates and influences perceptions of nature, essentially giving a voice to the voiceless, and while discourse is influenced by those with power, it is also shaded with subtle deviations from the dominant voices of history. In discerning the place of oceans within the shifting human-nature relationship of the early modern period, nonfiction sources – travel narratives, logs, nautical law, sailing manuals, and maps – paint only a partial picture of how early modern culture perceived and visualized oceans.

#### 1.4 Travel Fiction and Fictional Travel

##### *1.4.1 To The Moon*

Fictional texts offer additional evidence of the representational nuance required by non-terrestrial nature within certain early modern discourse. In Cavendish’s text, the protagonist is captured and transported to a utopian world. She travels through this diverse and innovative world and becomes its Empress, creating societies and engaging in scientific, political, and philosophical discourse. This textual appropriation of travel narrative convention blurs boundaries between possibility and reality, nature and supernatural, to present alternative approaches and perceptions of nature. In his fictionalized travel narrative, *The Man in the Moone, or A Discourse of a Voyage Thither* (1638), Francis Godwin describes the globe:

A great shining brightnesse to occupy that roome, during the like time (which was undoubtedly none other than the great *Atlantick* Ocean). After that succeeded a spot almost of an Ovall form, even just such as we see American to have in our Mapps. Then another vast cleernesse representing the West



Ocean; and lastly a medly of spots like the Countries of the East Indies. So that it seemed unto me no other then a Huge mathematicall Globe, leasurely turned before me. (57-8)

Godwin's narrative employs the tone of a non-fictional travel account but fictionalizes it with a fantastic image of the globe in its entirety. Ursula Heise explores the evolution of the contemporary image: "What the analysis of genres such as allegory and collage, and of tropes such as that of the network, suggests is the importance of formal choices in the imagination and representation of the global. Through such choices, existing ideas and ideologies of collectivity and totality, some with very long cultural traditions, are deployed in the attempt to envision global ecological belonging" (Heise 65).<sup>3</sup> Although her work concerns twentieth-century environmentalism, her meaning is relevant to early modern perceptions of the globe. Although humans were beginning to mechanize nature, the expansive blue covering and connecting the globe made oceans a different kind of nature, untameable and organic.

Godwin participates in an emerging genre, blending truth and untruth by adhering to travel narrative language, format, and convention, while narrating a fictional story. His format is daily entries, loaded with facts of the journey. Yet he appropriates the paradisiacal convention, such as when he describes falling ill on a voyage and stopping to recover at "the famed blessed Isle of S. Hellens, the only paradise, I think, that the earth yeeldeth, of the healthfulnesse of the Aire there, the fruitfullnesse of the soile, and the abundance of all manner of things necessary for sustaining the life of man" (14). Godwin writes of wanting to dominate the land, indicative of the period's colonizing approach to sea travel. The island seems "a miracle of Nature, that out of so huge and tempestuous an Ocean, such a little peece of ground should arise and discover it self" (16). With his fictional account, Godwin explores the untameability of oceanic environment. Oceans and tempestuous weather make travel unpredictable, however they

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<sup>3</sup> Heise continues: "An awareness of such forms and their cultural background and implications is part and parcel of an environmentally oriented cosmopolitanism that not only seeks to explore how global systems shape local forms of inhabitation but also is aware of how this exploration itself is framed by culturally specific assumptions" (65).

extend and enhance possibility.

Godwin's description of the island upon which he shipwrecks reveals the possibility and wonder produced by fictional islands. He describes the perpetual harvest of the island:

"Limmons, pomgranats, Almonds, and the like, which beare Fruit all year long, as doe also the fig-Trees, Vines, Peare Trees (whereof there are divers sorts,) Palmintos, Cocos, Olives, Plumms" (16-7). Along with these exotic fruits, he discovers "divers faire walkes made by hand and set along upon both sides, with fruit-Trees, especially Oranges" (16). Oceans, both useful and dangerous, encouraged and impeded nautical travel, inspiring narrative experimentation with generic convention – including fluidity of truth and boundaries, technological speculation, the construction of the isolated and supernatural island, and the mimicry of nature in order to establish an effective organic relationship with nature upon the tempestuous, majestic oceans.

#### *1.4.2 To Utopia*

Godwin's paradise is a blend of man-made and miraculous nature, comparable to that of Sir Thomas More's *Utopia*: "On the back side of the houses, through the whole length of the street, lie large gardens enclosed round about with the back part of the streets" and "They set great store by their gardens. In them they have vineyards, all manner of fruit, herbs, and flowers, so pleasant, so well furnished, and so finely kept, that I never saw a thing more fruitful nor better trimmed in any place" (54). Blending tamed nature with chaotic, insular nature reflects the desire but ultimate failure of man to dominate the island environment. The solution is to order domestic nature, and to cooperate with untameable nature. Utopia is fortified by a unique mixture of the work of man and nature: "The outside or utter circuit of the land is also full of havens, but the landing is so surely fenced, by nature and what by workmanships of man's hand, that a few defenders may drive back many armies" (50). The island's isolation makes possible the revision of society and manipulation of laws of humans and nature. Isolation, therefore, is intentional. The island is isolated and travel to or around it is dangerous, because of a hidden rocky terrain. Oceans provide isolation for this experimentation, and islands provide a stage for creation.

This island setting and oceanic isolation allow More to develop a nontraditional definition of nature and relationship between humankind and the environment, as in his utopian musings on husbandry. Each citizen serves for two years in agricultural labor, mastering the cultivation of crops and livestock. They are taught to be “expert and cunning in husbandry” (51). This requirement establishes a shared literacy among Utopians, and because the entire population is versed in natural phenomena and its cultivation, humans and nature share a relationship of intimacy and integration. This close relationship is exemplified in incubation practices: “They bring up a great multitude of pullen, and that by a marvelous policy. For the hens do not sit upon the eggs, but by keeping them in a certain equal heat they bring life into them and hatch them. The chickens, as soon as they come out of the shell, follow men and women instead of hens” (51). The organic relationship with nature develops as baby chicks follow humans and not their mother hens, suggesting a maternal or nurturing relationship between human and animal and an integration of humans within natural phenomena.

#### *1.4.3 Through Chaos*

Like Godwin and More, Milton experiments with nature by blending the known and unknown, the ordered and chaotic. *Paradise Lost* demonstrates how the creation of worlds can synthesize the natural and supernatural to foster a globalized perspective informed by ecological awareness. The geography of heaven, hell, chaos, and earth develop a global perspective. Within this space, Milton focuses on one community, Eden, and uses time (before and after the fall) to contrast two localized communities and their differing relationships with nature.

The second book contributes to this geography with Satan’s journey through Chaos as he moves from Hell to Earth. Chaos is a complicated synthesis of water and air, an in-between place through which Satan travels to colonize and conquer Earth:

Before their eyes in sudden view appear  
The secrets of the hoary deep, a dark  
Illimitable Ocean without bound,

Without dimension, where length, breadth, and heighth,  
And time and place are lost; where Eldest Night  
And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold  
Eternal anarchy, amidst the noise  
Of endless wars, and by confusion stand. (2.890-7)

This void represents the epitome of oceanic environment and representation, it is vastness and boundless on all planes (time and space), and is without light and leadership. Chaos is adjacent to Earth, allowing Satan terrestrial access and creating both boundary and bridge. His hesitancy to enter suggests the dangers of travel in a space of anarchy. The likeness of Chaos to an ocean suggests the primordial nature of water. Water makes up most of the earth and our bodies, it contributes to creation. Order was imposed upon Chaos for Earth to exist, and oceans resonate chaos and remind of the chaotic nature behind the control and order of humankind.

CHAPTER 2  
THE TEMPEST  
2.1 Introduction

By borrowing from generic conventions of travel narrative, early modern fiction could layer the fantastic with realism. Sailing to a new place creates the promise of discovery and excitement of novelty. In *The Tempest*, after his party wrecks upon a seemingly deserted island and experiences strange encounters, Gonzalo remarks:

Faith, sir, you need not fear. When we were boys,  
Who would believe that there were mountaineers  
Dew-lapp'd like bulls, whose throats had hanging at 'em  
Wallets of flesh? or that there were such men  
Whose heads stood in their breasts? which now we find  
Each putter-out of five for one will bring us  
Good warrant of. (3.3.43-9)

Shakespeare refers to the real and fantastic accounts of sea voyagers to blur the boundary between fact and fiction. While the account he creates through his art is fictional, the possibility exists that others have experienced comparable encounters.

*The Tempest* exemplifies the nuanced, liminal positions of both oceans and islands within shifting conceptions of nature during the early modern period. Shakespeare's descriptions of distance, space, and travel; representations of the chaotic ocean; use of nature and the supernatural; and experimentation with literary, natural, and ontological boundaries upon the island contribute to the text's exploration and deviation from convention. Lawrence Bowling writes: "The tempest in the natural sphere symbolizes the basic discord and confusion

in the moral and political spheres. The title of the play refers not merely to the brief storm in the first scene but also the greater tempest which is dealt with throughout the play” (207). The play’s title and opening scene create a storm that overturns societal convention, setting the stage for a play of boundary pushing, chaos, and – to use Roland Greene’s term – island logic.

Islands are surrounded by water, distanced from civilization, and isolated from mainland and mainstream convention. Oceanic space produces these defining attributes. Therefore, the strangeness of oceans extends to islands; the fluid, uncontrollable and undissectable nature of oceans protects islands and differentiates them from continents. Greene argues that *The Tempest* is a play of encounters and island logic, and the “encounter is therefore tied to the making of identity: it is assumed to take place between agents who are opposites in some degrees (including, in many humanist texts, the self as other), and this factitious opposition establishes identity on both sides” (139). I contend that island logic is attributable to oceans; the boundaries, distance, and isolation provided by oceans creates island logic, and therefore the social and literary explorations upon the island prove commentaries on the nature of oceans and oceanic deviations from the traditional nature-human paradigm.

## 2.2 On a Ship at Sea

By beginning *The Tempest* “on a ship at sea” and filling the space with “a tempestuous noise of thunder and lightning,” Shakespeare immediately displaces his audience into the unknown and establishes an atmosphere of danger (1.1). The use of the adjectival form “tempestuous” begins a versatile motif of storm language that permeates the play. Although the storm ceases after the initial scene, descriptions recur throughout all five acts. Miranda describes the tempest as a battle between sky and sea: “The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch, / But that the sea, mounting to the welkin's cheek, / Dashes the fire out” (1.2.3-5). This dialogue creates a battle of the elements in which sky battles ocean, fire and water conflict, and a chaotic, cyclical image separates oceans and island from the safety of societal convention. Leo Marx describes the storm and Shakespeare’s use of realism: “In the first scene Shakespeare uses every possible device to stress the violent, menacing power of nature.

Above all, he makes the storm scene a scene apart. The rest of the action is colored by fantasy, but the storm is depicted in spare naturalistic tones. We are invited to imagine a real ship in a real tempest” (55-6). Because Prospero and his art have not yet been introduced, the tempest can use the very real element of danger to establish the chaos of nature that will frame and underscore the play.

Soon, the supernatural origins of the tempest become apparent. Although Prospero and his art cause the storm, he cannot completely control or dominate nature. All physical manifestations of power and supernatural phenomena occur through Ariel. Prospero did not dominate nature to control it. Instead, he freed nature from nature – Ariel from a tree. He joined the organic web of nature on the island, and subsequently enslaved Ariel. Gabriel Egan observes, “The most striking thing about Prospero’s power is that it is almost entirely mediated through Ariel, via whom he controls the lesser native spirits that he calls ‘meaner ministers’” (157). Prospero’s power is not supreme or absolute because it is necessarily entwined with, and therefore reliant upon, nature. Prospero’s enchantments, “the real and sordid domination of nature, are irreversible. Like Sycorax, who imprisoned Ariel but could not release him, Prospero has the power to change the world in ways that he cannot undo. This ship is whole at the end of the play no because Prospero put it back together but because it was not smashed in the first place” (Egan 169). Ariel, and by extension Prospero, can manipulate elements, induce sleep, and project visions and images. However, they cannot create. The play illustrates the power and strangeness of natural phenomena. Prospero remains at the mercy of nature, and the storm’s chaotic power represents the resistance of oceanic and insular nature.

Miranda, Ferdinand, and Ariel all describe the tempest at different points in the play, reinforcing its danger and perpetuating its power over the story’s environment, structure, and language. During the second scene, Ariel describes to Prospero how he boarded the ship, moving upon the deck and through the cabins, to enhance the storm’s effects upon the vessel:

I flamed amazement: sometime I'd divide,  
And burn in many places; on the topmast,

The yards and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,  
Then meet and join. Jove's lightnings, the precursors  
O' the dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary  
And sight-outrunning were not; the fire and cracks  
Of sulphurous roaring the most mighty Neptune  
Seem to besiege and make his bold waves tremble,  
Yea, his dread trident shake. (1.2.198-206)

The play begins trapped on a doomed vessel, limiting the audience's perspective through isolation. The descriptions of Ariel and other characters broaden that perspective to include the entire ship. Ariel adds smells, sounds, and fiery images to enhance the apparent danger of the storm. Prospero replies to his vivid description, "Who was so firm, so constant, that this coil / Would not infect his reason?" (1.2.208-9). Nature, in the form of the tempest, resists domination and instead controls the men aboard the ship. Their reasoning is flawed; their conventions and traditions are either useless or idiotic. The tempest remains a driving force throughout the text.

The unknown and dangerous elements of ocean travel create possibility and opportunity; they provide distance from convention, land-nature, and society by allowing characters to become lost on the expanse of the ocean. With the ship taking on more water, Gonzalo cries: "Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an / acre of barren ground, long heath, brown furze, any / thing. The wills above be done! but I would fain / die a dry death" (1.1.64-6). Such a cry reinforces the expansive and danger of oceans and ocean travel. Gonzalo is more afraid of drowning than a land-based death. Upon the ocean, humans have less control. Death by drowning is comparable to rape, as water overtakes the body, forcefully enters, and ends life.<sup>4</sup> The danger and unknowability of drowning reflects that of oceans in general.

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<sup>4</sup> Merchant discusses the language of rape and domination employed by Sir Francis Bacon and other early modern scientists and writers when referring to nature: "Disorderly, active nature was soon forced to submit to the questions and experimental techniques of the new science" (164). The threat of drowning illustrates how oceans resist and reverse traditional approaches to nature.



The chaos of the ocean and unpredictability of sea voyage due to weather conditions was difficult to deal with, and fiction attempts to create a pattern. Looking for a positive sign, Gonzalo remarks about the boatswain: "I'll warrant him for drowning; though the ship were / no stronger than a nutshell and as leaky as an / unstanch'd wench" (1.1.46-8). By prescribing the ship's outcome to fate, suggesting control is from the heavens, characters find comfort in chaos. The ship is "dash'd all to pieces" and the storm disperses certain passengers about the island, where magic and isolation present a setting for these separated groups to experience altered societal and natural laws (1.2.8). In *The Tempest* and other travel fiction, storms blur boundaries of earth and sky, and if a ship is carried away by such a storm, exotic realities of magic, new creatures, and different natural and social conventions may be revealed.

As in *The Blazing World* and other fictions, *The Tempest* attempts to impose order upon chaos by ascribing meaning to natural phenomena. Those travelers with good intentions are aided by fate; those with poor intentions or past sins are hurt by it. Immediately after the tempest, Prospero tells Miranda of their own arrival to the island. Twelve years earlier, they were carried safely to shore, despite their lack of manpower and vehicle: "A rotten carcass of a boat, not rigg'd, / Nor tackle, sail, nor mast; the very rats / Instinctively had quit it" (1.2.146-58). Despite the odds, they survive. Prospero attributes this to fate:

O, a cherubim  
Thou wast that did preserve me. Thou didst smile.  
Infused with a fortitude from heaven,  
When I have deck'd the sea with drops full salt,  
Under my burthen groan'd; which raised in me  
An undergoing stomach, to bear up  
Against what should ensue. (1.2.152-8)

Prospero needs to believe heavenly forces controlled his fate because this validates his existence and give him a purpose upon the island – to raise his offspring and retake his power. This belief is further validated when his enemies fall within his reach:

By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune,  
Now my dear lady, hath mine enemies  
Brought to this shore; and by my prescience  
I find my zenith doth depend upon  
A most auspicious star, whose influence  
If now I court not but omit, my fortunes  
Will ever after droop. (1.2.178-84)

Prospero needs to believe fate will help those with good intentions. Because he lacked political aspirations or negative intentions, he and his daughter came ashore and landed safely, spared by the sea. The second party, a group with mixed intentions and past sins, is subjected to a violent wreck. What ousted Prospero from power on the mainland gives him power on the island: his books, studies, and art: "Knowing I loved my books, he furnish'd me / From mine own library with volumes that / I prize above my dukedom" (1.2.166-68). Upon the island, conventions are reversed and sometimes obliterated.

The ocean's function as a social equalizer, also evident in *The Blazing World*, is mirrored by a supernatural defiance of other conventions of land-nature. *The Tempest* begins with a storm that endangers all crew and passengers, regardless of class or title. Those of traditionally lower class, such as the boatswain, have more power upon the ocean. The crew has a chance of saving the ship and passengers, of fending off the chaos of nature, of dominating the ocean. Those near the top of the hierarchy are in the way: "You mar our labour: keep your / cabins: you do assist the storm" (1.1.13-4). In this case, those who are part of the power structure within conventional society serve the chaos of the storm upon the oceans.

The storm sets the stage for a play that explores the idea of the transferability of power. Upon the ocean, when battling the elements, the ship's crew has the most power. In response to Gonzalo's demand for patience, the Boatswain replies, "When the sea is. Hence! What cares these roarers / for the name of the King?" (1.2.16-7). The ocean does not fall under King Alonso's jurisdiction. In exploring power and hierarchy in *The Tempest*, Elizabeth Fowler

suggests: “All these forms of social relation are tested by the play, and all suffer a sea-change within it: not in order to describe ideal relations to us (far from it, as all are vexed), but rather in order to turn these forms before us like jewels in the light, to invite us to search out their flaws and facets” (39). In this situation, political power is ineffectual, and those without sailing expertise are comically ineffectual. The ocean is dangerous to all, regardless of royalty or title. Responding to Gonzalo’s advice to “remember whom thou hast aboard,” the Boatswain cries:

None that I more love than myself. You are a  
counsellor; if you can command these elements to  
silence, and work the peace of the present, we will  
not hand a rope more; use your authority: if you  
cannot, give thanks you have lived so long, and make  
yourself ready in your cabin for the mischance of  
the hour, if it so hap. (1.1.20-6)

The Boatswain is privy to the rules of this environment. In this setting, he knows he may speak out of place because he harbors power. Although sinking, with death seemingly imminent, Antonio remains loyal to the monarchical hierarchy. In response to the Boatswain’s outburst, Antonio remarks: “We are less afraid to be drowned than thou art” and “Let’s all sink with the king” (1.1.45, 62). Antonio’s lack of fear and his need to adhere to power structure and remain with the king reveal his ignorance in this setting.

Nature, as a storm upon the ocean, has capsized societal convention. By opening with this scene, “*The Tempest* opens with a ship out of control, overmastered by a storm. As the mariners attempt to govern her, the courtiers harangue them” (Fowler 37). The power and responsibility to govern – to organize the microcosmic society upon the ship – has shifted. The shipwreck extends these overturned conventions and chaotic paradigms to the island, allowing the audience to experience a new way of seeing society and nature. The audience shipwrecks with the crew, discovering this strange and isolated island.

### 2.3 Subtleties of Island Logic

Enchantments extend throughout the play, eventually prompting characters to mistrust their own sense. To Gonzalo, Prospero remarks: "You do yet taste/ Some subtilties o' the isle, that will not let you/ Believe things certain" (5.1.123-5). Because islands are defined by the natural boundaries of oceans, hybrid natural-supernatural definitions percolate through island space, resulting in fluid laws of nature and society. Greene writes, "Celebrated in productions such as utopias, romances and *isolarii*, islands are held at a premium in the sixteenth century not merely out of geographical curiosity but because they afford a perspective that can have only an oblique relation to the accumulating and totalizing worldview of the imperial and economic centres" (141). This unique perspective allows island space to embody the mechanistic-organic approach to nature because the water's natural currents provide a means of travel in cooperation with nature. Greene describes how islands "make possible the observation of their own constructedness" and asserts that *The Tempest* "uses the vantages of encourages and islands to offer predictions about the magic of early modern worldmaking" (141). Worldmaking on the islands of More, Cavendish, Shakespeare, and others suggests oceans provide a malleable supernatural space for social experimentation.

The island setting, though removed from society, is not meant to reflect a nostalgic return to an idealized past and harmonic relationship with the environment. This island is a reevaluation of societal convention, an examination of hierarchical power structures and of the relationship between humans and nature. Marx describes how the play's opening scene distances it from the pastoral genre: "We begin with a commonplace event of the age: a ship caught in a storm and beached on an uninhabited island. It is like an Elizabethan news report. By beginning with this episode, Shakespeare avoids the artificiality, the initial wrenching away from the world of ordinary experience, what we expect of pastoral" (69). The island is not simply a vacation or Edenic experience, but rather a staging area for a variety of commentaries and encounters. Green suggests, "On the island... what matters is that their removal makes for a different measure of known, objective distances. Space that had been conceived within an

established political order now seems open and unscripted” (142). Trinculo, Stefano, and Caliban entertain the notion of attaining sovereignty; Antonia and Sebastian attempt to recreate the past and usurp the King of Naples; and the educations of both Miranda and Caliban prove experiments in gender and the nature/nurture paradigm.

After the storm, the separated groups and their encounters serve to question social hierarchies. The episodic structure of the play allows for a comparison of character motive and development. Greene suggests: “The leap from the established worldview of the European travelers to a logic conditioned by their island experiences is made in several episodes of the play; the drive toward, and away from, insularity motivates much of the action as well as the outlook of the play” (141). Ferdinand, a king’s son, is made a captive and slave, yet he embraces this servitude because of love. Separated from the group, Trinculo, Stefano, and Caliban believe they can procure power and authority. Stephano escapes the tempest in the butt of a sack, and “like the ungovernable boat of *The Tempest’s* opening scene, this drifting butt invites us to deliberate on the limits, duties and sources of authority” (Fowler 39). Fowler suggests his survival forces us to question Prospero’s art because either his motives are adulterated or his power is fallible and ineffective.

Island encounters allow Alonso to see his previous political decisions in a new, negative light. Begging Miranda’s forgiveness for past sins, Alonso remarks on the oddity of overturning a traditional power paradigm: “But, O, how oddly will it sound that I/ Must ask my child forgiveness!” (5.1.197-8). The remote location of the island becomes a staging area for refashioning, destroying, or creating relationships and their conventions. Greene writes:

Islands often undermine some of the mystifications of capital and power. Suddenly, in the light of island logic, the exertions with which capital fashions a world according to its own unquestioned values come to look like exertions; we are encouraged to notice the trail of investment that furnishes the island with people and materials, and – quite simply – those whose power is untraceable and natural elsewhere are much more easily questioned. (140)

Although Prospero retains dominance, his energy and drive dwindle near the end of the play. We see those in power sin and repent, and those striving to sin fail. The patriarchal power structure is questioned. Deceit and treachery form the backbone of greed, and instigate nature's wrath, causing the audience to question the motivations and outcomes of supreme authority.

Island logic affects perspective, as characters perceive the environment in different ways and change their own perceptions throughout. Adrian deems the island a "desert," "uninhabitable and almost inaccessible," where "the air breathes upon us here most sweetly" (2.1.34, 37, 45). In just a few lines, Adrian's description shifts from negative to positive. He attributes human characteristics and agency to the air, suggesting a positive outlook is more effective when nature resists domination. Other characters demonstrate varying perceptions of the island:

GONZALO. Here is everything advantageous to life.

ANTONIO. True; save means to live.

SEBASTIAN. Of that there's none, or little.

GONZALO. How lush and lusty the grass looks! how green!

ANTONIO. The ground indeed is tawny.

SEBASTIAN. With an eye of green in't. (2.1.48-53)

Concerning this exchange, Marx comments: "it is a comic version of the effort to reconcile conflicting images of the new world. But for all the jesting a genuine sense of the terrain – its palpable presence – comes through. The actuality of the landscape, hence the close juxtaposition of fact and fancy, is indeed a distinguishing mark of pastoral set in the new world" (51). Because each character perceives the environment differently, the audience is given a more complex, complete view of the setting. Caliban reveals his own view of the environment: "Be not afeard; the isle is full of noises,/ Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not./ Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments/ Will hum about mine ears" (3.2.133-36). When combining these perceptions, we see motivation and character color human's view of nature. From his extended time on the island and away from civilization, Caliban has a clear view of the

island's beauty, potential, and complexity. Gonzalo is optimistic and good intentioned, and therefore sees possibility. Antonio and Sebastian are inherently negative, unsatisfied with their surroundings and hoping to move up and out, and their impressions are bleak and fleeting.

In addition to these differing perspectives, recalcitrant nature is personified in the character of Caliban. Caliban resists the education or "nurture" of his colonizer, Prospero, who is perpetually angry at his rebellion: "Thou most lying slave, / Whom stripes may move, not kindness! I have used thee, / Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee / In mine own cell" (1.2.344-7). Caliban is therefore entirely "nature," or instinctual: "Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else/ This isle with Calibans" (1.2.352-3). He wants to control the island because he naturally resists being controlled and enslaved. Habitually, he believes procreation is a means to do this. Having been raised on-island, he reflects the natural phenomena and environment of the island. Richard Grove writes: "*The Tempest* is realistically complex in that it confronts the contrasting problems of the response to a new physical environment and the response to the indigenous inhabitant, the latter presented in the shape of Caliban, a 'noble savage' character probably inspired by Montaigne's writings" (34). The island setting allows audiences to question traditional power structures. Despite Caliban's faults, he retains claims to the island and his freedom, and even as the protagonist, Prospero's totalitarian actions are questionable.

Both Ariel and Caliban, similar personifications of nature, are essential to Prospero's dominance and control of the island. Concerning Caliban, Prospero states: "We cannot miss him: he does make our fire,/ Fetch in our wood and serves in offices" (1.2.314-5). Caliban is not merely a slave, but also a guide to the island. He is connected to nature, and continually labeled a monstrosity: "servant-monster," "the folly of this island," "Monsieur Monster," "abhorred slave," and "a born devil" (3.2.4,4,17; 1.2.353; 4.1.188). Neither human nor animal, Caliban presents a liminal position, a hybrid ontology. His representation, existence, and treatment reveal the complexities behind a human-dominant approach to nature. Caliban does not need people; he needs nature and freedom. If the island were entirely uninhabited, it would be Caliban's

paradise.

The distanced, complex nature of the island allows others to see a paradise as well, either through imaginative exaggeration or love's lens. This setting "provided the setting for a bewildering variety of speculation about the Edenic qualities of the island and the potential it offered for erecting an alternative Utopian society on the one hand and for starkly encountering the difficulties of sheer animal survival on the other" (Grove 34). Only hours past enslavement, Ferdinand remarks: "Let me live here ever; / So rare a wonder'd father and a wife / Makes this place Paradise" (4.1.122-4). Unlike the nostalgic, return to nature of the forest, the shipwreck on an island scenario finds not the past, but a revised, Edenic, or utopian society. Gonzalo describes his utopian image of the island, a commonwealth where:

Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,  
And use of service, none; contract, succession,  
Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;  
No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;  
No occupation; all men idle, all;  
And women too, but innocent and pure;  
No sovereignty (2.1.142-51)

Additionally, Gonzalo describes his ideal relationship with nature:

All things in common Nature should produce  
Without sweat or endeavour: treason, felony,  
Sword, pike, knife, gun, or need of any engine,  
Would I not have; but Nature should bring forth,  
Of its own kind, all foison, all abundance,  
To feed my innocent people (2.1.155-60)

Islands provide staging for experimentation with societal conventions and social dreaming. The ideal result of an organic relationship with nature is an Eden of no trade, toil, or conflict, an entirely harmonious and natural existence. However, Gonzalo remains the author and therefore



absolute ruler of his imaginary utopia. Gonzalo contends, "I would with such perfection govern, sir, / To excel the golden age" (2.1.163-4). Commenting on Sebastian's observation that Gonzalo makes himself king of his utopia, Antonio remarks, "The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the / beginning" (2.1.153-4). Thus lies the inherent contradiction, which we will see again in *The Blazing World*, a harmonious society requires a harmonious governing body, which is impossible, save for that body being singular. Therefore, Gonzalo's utopia is a totalitarianism, and only utopia to him. This isolated island presents blank canvas, upon which Gonzalo and others experiment with and question social conventions, hierarchy, and possibility.

#### 2.4 Authorship, Boundaries, and Self-Reflexivity

The supernatural undercurrent of the play aids the experimentation with generic, literary, and natural boundaries. For example, "Wind and water are the mobile and fluid forces of nature, and appear in various guises throughout the play: the sea that surrounds the island, the winds controlled by Prospero and Ariel" (Anderson 41). Such a surrounding, distanced from mainland conventions, allows for the use of visions and enchantment that explore the relationship between natural phenomena, reality, and the supernatural. The island defies representation, and characters search, but cannot find, words to describe their experiences. Alonso remarks: "I cannot too much muse / Such shapes, such gesture and such sound, expressing, / Although they want the use of tongue, a kind / Of excellent dumb discourse," and later: "This is as strange a maze as e'er men trod/ And there is in this business more than nature/ Was ever conduct of" (3.3.36-9, 5.1.242-44). His designation of more than nature is significant. The island differs from the mainland; nature is "more" or super. Bowling observes: "In *The Tempest*, more than in any other of Shakespeare's plays, the supernatural is used as a means of giving further amplification and extension to the natural" (206). In this case, "super" natural does not imply something different from nature, but rather enhanced or enchanted nature.

This supernatural undercurrent is assisted by the play's metaphorical use of natural language. Just as descriptions of the tempest recur, tempestuous language underscores the

dialogue. To Sebastian, Gonzalo remarks, “It is foul weather in us all, good sir, / When you are cloudy” (2.1.137-8). The tempest extends throughout the play, informing not only structure and setting, but also the inner turmoil of characters. Concerning those he enchanted, Prospero observes: “Their understanding / Begins to swell, and the approaching tide / Will shortly fill the reasonable shore / That now lies foul and muddy” (5.1.79-81). Using this language to describe characters’ inner turmoil suggests the text has been infected or overtaken by the sea. The dialogue is not immune to the reach and manipulation of the tempest and enchanted nature.

Self-referentiality extends to an awareness of audience and process. Shakespeare “explores to its logical conclusion the ideological power of theatre to transform its spectators, placing special emphasis on illusions that seem the irruption of the supernatural in the natural world” (Egan 150). Throughout the play, characters question the attentiveness of their audience. To Alonso, Gonzalo asks, “do you mark me, sir?” (2.1.165). Prospero regularly asks Miranda if she’s listening, with “dost thou attend me?” and “Thou attend'st not” (1.2.78,87). Characters worry for their importance and existence, if no one listens, both become questionable. This awareness extends to the play itself, as the island’s blurring of boundaries allows for the textualization of the audience that reveals the constructs and confines of the play. Audiences “are encouraged to apply an island logic to the play itself, with no Prospero to guide us back; what we might make of the play by these lights is its most radical aspect, for it introduces the method of its own unmaking. Island logic leads us to ask of *The Tempest* questions that it will not ask itself – an ethical imperative in a world of encounters” (Greene 145). Prospero attempts to put his guests at ease by revealing the fleeting nature and artificiality of his magic. Appealing directly to the audience, he explains that the “revels now are ended,” and the actors

Are melted into air, into thin air:  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Ye all which it inherit, shall dissolve

And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep. (4.1.150-58)

The effect is self-referential, as he pulls back the curtain of aesthetic process to reveal his world as fiction. Green argues that the play's "extraordinary fertility must have something to do with giving itself over entirely to a mode or outlook that elsewhere is supplementary, eccentric, and of course insular: the play obliges us to elaborate it, criticize it, and – what is illusory – complete it" (145). Like the tempestuous opening scene, the play's final act overturns convention by transferring power to the audience. Subsequently, the audience occupies a new position and can explore the authorial perspective and question traditionally unquestioned power structures.

Additionally, these blurred boundaries extend to authorial awareness and self-referentiality in Prospero's concluding epilogue. In hopes of succeeding in his goal to please the audience, Prospero asks for pardon and release. The limitations of the island symbolize those of authorship and aesthetic, as Prospero asks, "Let me not, / Since I have my dukedom got, And pardon'd the deceiver, dwell / In this bare Island by your spell; / But release me from my bands / With the help of your good hands: / Gentle breath of yours my sail / Must fill" (Epilogue 5-12). The bareness of the island represents a blank slate and equalizing apparatus. The audience, a traditionally powerless and passive entity, is give the power of authorship – to end the story and free the prisoner. Islands, Greene argues, "enforce a certain clarity: they have definable borders, they are conceptually autonomous from the world at large, and they encourage attention to the conditions of indigeneity and importation" (140). Had Prospero been on a continent, his plea would be impossible. But with the prospect of travel across the chaotic, surrounding oceans, and isolated from traditional conventions of authorship and monarchical power structure, Prospero can reveal to the audience that they indeed have the power of creation.

Prospero's freedom is beyond his command. The heavens control the seas, which in

turn control the ships upon them. Pleas to a higher power are the only means to appeal for safe passage. Prospero must leave behind the uncivilized, natural island to return to civilization. He must travel through chaos first – a rite of passage, a bridge back to the traditions of court and conventions of regal hierarchy. Prospero's "rôle as protagonist posits a singular figure who can draw the world together again into a unity – he is the protoglobalist, though whether he represents the capitalist, the humanist, the patriarch, or all of these is left tacitly uncertain. However, he can be depicted only within and from the horizon of the island" (Greene 139). Although he has been the controller and manipulator of the entire play and although he's controlled supernatural forces of the island to return what was his, he must still rely on wind to get home. Without wind, there will be no travel or progress. Prospero attempts to textualize the audience, asking them to create such wind. Prospero came to the island without notions of power or colonization, and was safely transported to its shore. Once on the island, however, he attempted to colonize by imprisoning Ariel and Caliban. Prospero asks for mercy and forgiveness. Although he is restoring past power and avenging the sins of others, Prospero still perceives a risk. He cooperated with nature to achieve the supernatural, yet he knows fate, by means of a tempestuous ocean, can punish those with bad intentions.

CHAPTER 3  
THE BLAZING WORLD

3.1 The Duchess and Her Blazing World

Similar to shifting theoretical concepts of the natural world, Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, evades clear and direct classification. After feminism revived critical interest in the history of women's writing, the resurgence of Cavendish scholarship revealed the unique perspective in her writing (xii). She wrote from the liminal position of a woman denied membership to the Royal Society, participation in man's pursuit of knowledge, and a formal education. Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz describe how this position affects literary scholarship: "Cavendish's works, more than any others', it seems, require a hybrid perspective, and it bears evidence to their complexity and modernity that they still challenge their readers' responses and reading practices three-and-a-half centuries after they were first written" (8). In a time when it was difficult for women to seek and find publication, Cavendish succeeded and even refused to use a masculine pen name (Lilley x).

Throughout her life, Margaret Cavendish inhabited a marginal position that was near, yet denied, power and prestige. She was handmaid to a queen, exiled during the interregnum, and a visitor of the Royal Society who was denied membership. Describing how Cavendish's scientific treatises, plays, and poems found audiences in the seventeenth and twenty-first centuries, Eve Keller suggests: "Ideally, Cavendish wanted her ideas to be included in the process of debate; denied that, she offered an analysis that is insightful precisely because it is spoken from outside the discursive and institutional forums it explores" (450). Exemplifying this exterior position are her utopian fiction *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* and its non-fiction companion *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* (1666), which

explore natural philosophy and critique experimental method. Keller writes: “Cavendish’s critique of the new science was unique on at least two grounds: first, in that it charged that the mechanist model and the experimental method were more potent as social than as epistemological constructions; and second, in that it recognized the functioning of gender in that construction” (451). By pointing out the constructed nature of such systems, Cavendish critiques the so-called objectivity of scientific method.

Cavendish begins *The Blazing World* with an authorial exegesis to the reader:

*fictions* are an issue of man’s fancy, framed in his own mind, according as he pleases, without regard, whether the thing he fancies, be really existent without his mind or not; so that reason searches the depth of nature, and enquires after the true causes of natural effects; but fancy creates of its own accord whatsoever it pleases, and delights in its own work. (123)

With this explanation, Cavendish gives herself the freedom of original creation, laying the foundation for a self-aware, critical text rooted in, but not constrained by, cultural and scientific discourse.

The beginning of *The Blazing World*, Bronwen Price asserts, “presents two types of narrative which change direction and alter shape through crossing boundaries with each other... This ‘many-in-one’ feature is echoed throughout the text, resulting in a dialogue between one way of shaping understanding and another which serves to challenge emerging concepts of knowledge, subjectivity and sexuality” (129). Cavendish blends the social dreaming and technological conjecture of utopian fiction with the discourse of natural philosophy.<sup>5</sup> She plays with the creation and boundaries of worlds and her fictional and authorial self, and “with such a proliferation of worlds and selves, then, Cavendish clearly uses her utopian tale to continue –

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<sup>5</sup> See Lawrence for more on the unique writing of Cavendish. Lawrence writes: “For Cavendish, the romance geography of the imaginary voyage provided an opportunity for a baroque reinvention of women’s agency in the social world. In the topos of exilic wandering, Cavendish discovered a lexicon of impulsion, motion, and reaction with which to explore ambiguities of agency. If the imaginary voyage enabled her to try out the pleasures of various social hypotheses, she used the genre to circumscribe action in a nexus of power relations” (72-3).

rather than to retreat from – her assault on experimental, mechanical science, based as it is in the assumption of a discrete self and a stable object” (Lawrence 462). Cavendish’s elevated societal status afforded her an informal education and the financial backing for career in writing, which she used to make her voice heard. In turn, she gave a voice to voiceless nature in the form of “creature-men,” unique human-animal hybrid characters. These characters are part human and part animal; they have the power of speech and the rights of citizenship. This voice allows them to contribute to political, social, and technological discourses of *Blazing World*.

Through my investigation of *The Blazing World*, I argue that the oceanic environment deviated from early modern perceptions of nature and facilitated a literary representation of blurred genre boundaries and supernatural, speculative, and utopian tendencies. Cavendish depicts oceans, travel, innovation, and islands because they provide distance from conventional, day-to-day nature (forests, fields, hills, and agriculture). This distance allows her to manipulate natural laws and social norms, experiment with possibility and reality, and deviate from traditional approaches to nature. Cavendish represents expansion and global exploration with a synthesis of drama, travel narrative, utopian fiction, and scientific contemplation. This synthesis reveals that the scientific method is misconstrued as subjective; that humans are not separate from, but rather part of, nature; that nature is diverse and defies one definition or generalization; and that humans should embrace different ways of seeing, alternate approaches, and new perceptions and interpretations.

To understand definitions, representations, and functions of nature in Cavendish, it is important to explore how this concept was linguistically conveyed. Nature, or more appropriately natural phenomena, had multiple, overlapping definitions referencing both humans and the material world. With respect to humans, nature was “the properties, inherent characters, and vital powers of persons, animals, or things, or more generally to human nature. It also meant an inherent impulse to act and to sustain action; conversely, to ‘go against nature’ was to disregard this innate impulse” (Merchant xxiii). Additionally, referring to the material world, nature was “a dynamic creative and regulatory principle that caused phenomena and their change and

development. A distinction was commonly made between *natura naturans*, or nature creating, and *natura naturata*, the natural creation” (xxiii). As Cavendish and other writers explore the relationship between humans and natural phenomena, they necessarily explore human nature as well. By employing ocean travel, islands, and technological advancement and speculation, Cavendish represents oceans as nature to be utilized and studied but also as more than nature, a super-nature resisting dominance and partitioning. In doing so, she creates a text that questions a uniformly mechanistic approach to all natural phenomena.

### 3.2 A Synthesized Mechanistic-Organic Approach

Oceans necessitate that technology travel across and by means of water and encourage humankind to explore and progress. Early modern expansion exemplified a desire to harness nature, which resulted in positive discovery, connection, and adventure, but also perpetuated and sometimes initiated negative colonization, exploitation, and misrepresentation. In *The Blazing World*, nautical travel allows a greedy merchant to commodify the tale’s heroine: the merchant, “travelling into a foreign country, fell extremely in love with a young Lady; but being a stranger in that nation, and beneath her both in birth and wealth, he could have but little hopes of obtaining his desire... he resolved to steal her away; which he had the better opportunity to do, because her father’s house was not far from sea” (125). Cavendish uses the Lady’s proximity to the sea to demonstrate the opportunity oceans provide, as water allows the merchant to seize the object of his desire despite his inferior social standing. Ocean travel results in both positive and negative opportunity, as the merchant obtains his greatest desire against odds and societal convention, while the Lady is torn from her home and unwillingly taken on this sea voyage.

The ocean’s function as a social equalizer, evident in other seventeenth-century works such as the opening scene of *The Tempest*, is mirrored by a supernatural defiance of other conventions of land-nature. In *The Tempest* and other travel fiction, storms blur boundaries of earth and sky, suggesting a supernatural experience, and if a ship is carried away by such a storm, exotic realities of magic, new creatures, and different natural and social conventions may



be revealed. Similarly, in *The Blazing World*, the dangers of the ocean are identical for all levels of social hierarchy, and the merchant, “fanc[y]ing] himself the happiest man of the world,” is interrupted by a violent storm that takes the lives of his crew and carries their ship off course (125). Here Cavendish establishes the real and terrific dangers of ocean travel. In this case, the merchant has utilized nature for commodification and exploitation, but is punished quickly. Price suggests, “While the merchant seems initially to set the terms of the story, the tempest results in the male crew not knowing ‘what to do or whither to steer their course.’ This signals the abductor’s imminent loss of possession of the woman and control over her story” (128). Because the Lady is the only inexperienced sailor aboard, the unlikelihood of her survival insinuates an agency in nature, an intentional super-natural intervention. This storm, sent by heaven, punishes the merchant and his crew for their wicked deed but spares the Lady. The fate of those upon ships rests in the power of the ocean, a power outside and surrounding their vessel where conventional social and natural laws do not apply.

Cavendish’s heroine begins a captive and becomes explorer, approaching her oceanic expedition without designs of exploitation or colonization. Because she lacks negative intentions, she is not only saved from the storm but also embraced and elevated in her new setting. The Lady stumbles upon a utopian world, *Blazing World*, and “being withal of a generous spirit, and ready wit, considering what dangers she had past, and finding these sorts of men civil and diligent attendants to her, took courage, and endeavoured to learn their language” (Cavendish 130). She begins her oceanic travels with no malicious intent and therefore develops an organic relationship with her discovered world. Unlike a colonizer, she is willing to learn and cooperate with the creature-men of *Blazing World*. The Lady “was so far from being afraid of them, that she thought her self not only safe, but very happy in their company: by which we may see, that novelty discomposes the mind, but acquaintance settles it in peace and tranquility” (130). Because of this cooperative approach, and due to her great spirit and beauty, she marries the world’s emperor, and thus becomes a leader without being a colonizer.

This outcome, in addition to demonstrating Cavendish's own desire for fame and power, suggests that she imagines both positive and negative approaches to oceanic travel and to interaction with new cultures. Science, trade, and travel were dominated by men, and Cavendish's drive for wealth and status revealed to her the restrictions and exclusivity of these fields. Angus Fletcher contends that Cavendish attempted to "translate Nature's qualities onto a mortal woman" and that "throughout Cavendish's philosophical writings, Nature is personified as a female sovereign" (125). Fletcher's position that Cavendish's protagonist actually personifies nature is more extreme than my own, as he suggests this organic relationship has an almost allegorical function. I contend instead that Cavendish uses her protagonist to explore and develop an alternative to the standard and partitioning mechanistic approach to nature, synthesizing it with an organic approach.

Utopian and supernatural conventions, including punishing and rewarding travels through exceptional means, allow for the presentation of oceans as unconventional nature. Elizabeth Spiller suggests that Cavendish "uses the utopian romance – a genre whose central concern is that which could be but is not true – to comment on the inadequacies of experimental and observational science" (196).<sup>6</sup> By emphasizing the local-global relationship fostered by early modern oceans, she creates a world of idiosyncratic communities of bear-men, fox-men, grass-men, and others, joined by one language and government, connected by waterways, and enriched by cultural variety. In allowing the Lady to experience such a utopian world, Cavendish underscores her wholly positive approach to exploration. Modifying scientific method, the Lady (now the Empress) cooperates with nature embodied in these men-animal creatures to learn about the world with connection, inquiry, and conversation. The Empress assigns groups different areas of study "most proper for the nature of their species," and privileges those studying the sciences, "for they were as ingenious and witty in the invention of profitable and

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<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Spiller focuses on Cavendish's use of the lens in telescopes and microscopes. She compares *The Blazing World* with Galileo's *Starry Messenger* and suggests both texts critique the telescope as creating "artifice, mediation, and a necessary distortion" (218). I argue that in addition to such a critique, Cavendish is experimenting with method and creating a hybrid organic/mechanistic approach to nature.

useful arts, as we are in our world, nay, more; and to that end she erected schools, and founded several societies” (Cavendish 134). These assignments lead to conversations informing the Empress of the work and discoveries of these creature-men. Each society reports to the Empress for a series of inquiries as she attempts to learn about this new natural world.

Through these conversations, both the Empress and creature-men revise their existing body of knowledge, effectively creating knowledge together through cooperation and open-minded dialogue. This openness to other perspectives is Cavendish’s critique of the scientific method and its attempts to remove opinion, emotion, and the innate subjectivity of humans. Spiller argues Cavendish’s approach indicates an assertion that “philosophy should lead to a pleasant, speculative, and sometimes fanciful ‘conversation’ between rational souls” (218). Although this is an accurate characterization of the text, Cavendish’s critique goes beyond implying the pleasantness of philosophical conversation. Price suggests:

Their inquiries question what kind of things can be known and the premises upon which identities are shaped. One way of forming understanding is made contingent through its contiguity with another. Nature is thus transformed from a domain which we think we know – experienced through our deficient senses; as, for example, air and wind – into a world beyond the frontiers of our comprehension. (132)

These conversations and technologies ennoble the knowledge and invention in *Blazing World* and thereby imply the superiority of a hybrid organic/mechanistic process of discovery. Because the Empress is a beloved, intelligent, and fearless leader, Cavendish suggests the conversational method of discovery is an advantageous alternative to the scientific method.

In addition to defying the rigidity of scientific method, the Empress rejects certain representative, partitioning tools – such as the microscope – in order to elevate her own organic-mechanistic approach. When discoursing with bear-men on the motions of stars, the Empress criticizes their telescopes, “your glasses are false informers, and instead of discovering the truth, delude your senses... let the bird-men trust only to their natural eyes, and

examine celestial objects by the motions of their own sense and reason” (Cavendish 141). After more questions concerning the practical use of the microscope, the Empress similarly deems it insufficient. These dialogues critique the impracticality of science by suggesting that practical possibilities and solutions are admonished as base or ignoble and therefore overlooked. Spiller contends, “Expressing a conservative resistance to the dissociation of seeing from knowing, Cavendish attempts to close the space that opens up between the scientist’s assured sight of truth and the reader’s less direct apprehension of it in the text” (212). In addition to resistance, Cavendish also creates an inclusive approach to science, suggesting the connection between the natural world and humans should lead to cooperation, not distance. Her reaction to these technologies suggests the selective, enhanced vision of microscopes and telescopes do not lead to absolute truth and that scientific exploration should move beyond abstraction and petty debate toward practical application.

Cavendish fashions an alternative approach to nature that will later permeate and ultimately define her oceanic representation. Cavendish further criticizes scientific method when her Empress inquires into the nature of blood circulation, to which her society replies, “that it was impossible to give her Majesty an exact account thereof... as soon as they had directed an animal create to find out the truth thereof, the interior corporeal motions proper to that particular figure or creature were altered” (146). This answer unearths a core issue of scientific exploration: objectivity. Cavendish was aware that, although scientific discourse presented progressively more sophisticated and advanced methods of division and study, humankind could not (and cannot) study nature without altering, interfering, and changing the object of study. Therefore, by adding an organic approach to the mechanistic scientific method, the explorer is aware of the effects of self and study upon and within the environment. The organic approach is not inferior due to its emphases on connection and lack of objectivity, but rather superior because of its awareness of the impossibility of objectivity as well as its promotion of cooperation between humans and their surroundings in order to achieve positive results for all of nature – humankind included. This cooperation is crucial to oceanic travel in

Blazing World, where inhabitants understand and mimic oceans in order to survive and eventually harness the power of nature.

By combining human-made and natural technology and by representing the cooperation of humans and nature through the Empress's conversations with animal-men, Cavendish reinforces the importance of self-awareness and the need to modify the mechanistic approach with organicism. The Empress demonstrates awareness of her effect on the environment by noticing cultural disharmony; because her societies have caused "such contentions and divisions," she fears they will rebel and dissolve the government. Despite the idiosyncratic nature of this world, a preoccupation with connection remains. Although fearing disgrace, the Empress, "so wise, as to perceive her own errors, and so good, as not to persist in them," overcomes vanity and abolishes the societies (202). Self-awareness is an essential factor lacking in a mechanistic, divided approach to science and society. Cavendish suggests that science is a social construction and therefore fallible and that remaining connected to community and environment is essential to positive, sustainable progress. This mechanistic-organic approach is applied to oceans through Blazing World's geography and nautical innovation, suggesting that ocean space facilitates an unconventional approach to nature and the blurring of generic boundaries.

### 3.3 The Supernatural Oceanic Space

The mechanistic/organic paradigm in *The Blazing World* parallels a supernatural current throughout text, with oceans represented as chaotic, exotic, and sometimes vindictive, and with oceanic technology transcending early modern scientific boundaries into the speculative. For early modern sailors, the sheer size of the ocean, both in visual expanse and physical distance, creates a mysterious, uncontrollable atmosphere surrounding oceanic travel that Cavendish echoes in her oceanic depictions. Unable to calculate accurately longitude and subsequently location, travelers were forced to create meaning by mapping oceanic space. In travel discourse, sailors documented people, places, events, weather, direction, and time to create textual maps. According to Ogborn and Withers, "The only practical way for those on

board ship to know where they were with any tolerable degree of accuracy was to know where they had been and the direction in which they were moving. This produced a series of sequential observations, each one dependent on the last” (21).<sup>7</sup> This application of meaning contributed to an untameable, supernatural oceanic space, a space of hybridity combining the viewable surface of the ocean with the unknowable depths below the surface and beyond the horizon. Although oceans proved useable with technology and discourse, control was illusory, perpetually shattered by violent, unpredictable climates manipulating the vessels and travels of humans. Cavendish draws on early modern oceanic discourse to reinforce the need for mechanistic/organic approach to nature.

In the beginning of *The Blazing World*, a storm carries the merchant’s ship northward and the crew freezes to death, in a manifestation of the chaotic danger of nature. The Lady is kept alive “by the light of her beauty, the heat of her youth, and protection of the gods” (126). Cavendish suggests the storm was not entirely random, but punishment for the merchant, who was “most unfortunate; for Heaven frowning at his theft, raised such a tempest... so that the vessel, both by its own lightness, and the violent motion of the wind, was carried as swift as an arrow out of a bow, towards the North Pole, and in a short time they reached the Icy Sea” (125). This stormy and icy ocean transports the Lady to an entirely new globe, one that is connected to her home world at the North Pole. The calculating forces of the environment punish the wicked. Consistently, storms and weather transport vessels to Edenic, paradisiacal, or exotic locations, seemingly random and chaotic, but with controlled calculation that suggests a supernatural higher conscious or agenda on the part of nature. Nature’s resistance to the domination of a mechanistic paradigm is illustrated frequently in literature when storms command men, wreck ships, and splinter the illusion of human control.

Cavendish’s arctic setting for interplanetary travel also emphasizes the supernatural conceptualization of the north and its frozen, almost oceanic landscape. Historical perceptions

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<sup>7</sup> Ogborn and Withers discuss the reliance on recorded knowledge and how “commercial directories; merchants’ guides to trades, commodities, and exchange rates; printed maps and gazettes; and instruction books... all sought to codify knowledge as a way of ordering this new world” (15).

of the north are alternatively or simultaneously dangerous wilderness, exotic land of treasure, and innocent paradise. Davidson describes the perceptions of the north during the period: "In Europe the map of relations between north and south was catastrophically redrawn at the Reformation: a new set of divisions appeared and, from the sixteenth century, travel between north and south was gravely restricted. Legends once more grew about places rarely visited" (38). Using the North Pole to connect worlds is significant, as it synthesizes an unknown exoticism – the juxtaposed states of solid and liquid water and the substantial danger of freezing oceans – with the social dreaming of utopia. In his description of Martin Frobisher's journey north, Thomas Ellis wrote: "And as we thus lay off and on, we came by a marvelous huge mountaine of yce, which surpassed all the rest that ever we sawe: for we judged him to be neere a foure score fadams above water... Therefore being but one Island of yce, and as we came neere unto it, and departed from it, in so many shapes it appeared" (13). The size and composition of this "island of ice" make it incomprehensible, as the sailors attempt to estimate its size above and below water, and the light and angle of vision change its apparent shape.

Ice is the solidified state of water, a seemingly supernatural embodiment of a concentrated oceanic space. In *The Blazing World*, the north is a localized representation of nautical travel and water, and particularly their danger, mystery, and supernatural undertones. Spiller contends, "This 'northern passage' critically transforms both the geographic and generic boundaries of Cavendish's fictional worlds" (213). Cavendish's north symbolizes a global, oceanic highway by connecting one world to another.<sup>8</sup> Employing the North Pole for this connection suggests the globalizing function of oceans in the early modern period and emphasizes oceans and the north as supernatural spaces of mystery.

To conquer a nature-supernatural hybrid space, Cavendish fashions nautical technology with forward-reaching conventions of speculative fiction. Cavendish demonstrates

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<sup>8</sup> Edson describes how the transformation of maps coincided with changing perceptions of the globe. By the Renaissance, she explains, "No longer [was] the ocean a simple rim around the edge of the know world, but an open, explorable highway, sprinkled with friendly islands and others yet to be discovered. No place is marked uninhabitable, including the formerly forbidding polar and torrid zones; instead, the whole world is open to human adventuring and settlement" (224-25).

an awareness of navigational deficiencies and speculates on improvement, not only in technological development, but also with advancement of human skill. The creature-men of Blazing World are “very good navigators... and though they had no knowledge of the lodestone, or needle, or pendulous watches, yet (which was as serviceable to them) they had subtle observations, and great practice,... they were excellent augurers, which skill they counted more necessary and beneficial than the use of compasses, cards, watches, and the like” (Cavendish 128). Cavendish’s choice of “augurers” is significant, as it brings to mind fortune telling and divination (OED). This choice of specialization for Blazing World inhabitants resonates with the supernatural and suggests the need to match oceanic space with supernatural ability. The use of divination implies the value of an ability to predict climate and other conditions for successful navigation on unpredictable, chaotic oceans. In a synthesized organic-mechanistic approach to nature, these navigators develop technology and skill to cooperate with and utilize nature. These navigators match the supernatural aspect of the ocean with their own divination abilities, defying the laws of nature along with and in defense of the chaotic ocean. Oceans cannot be dominated by traditional means, and only through unconventional skills and technology that embrace cooperation and connection with nature and the supernatural can humans and the creature-men harness the full potential and power of oceans.

In a surprisingly accurate speculative creation, Cavendish presents another organic-mechanistic approach in the form of wind-energy engines powering her ships. Her creature-men fashion a “certain engine, which could draw in a great quantity of air, and shoot forth wind with a great force” to harness the wind (129). In this case, current sail technology is appropriated and improved upon via speculation. Cavendish describes these engines:

They place behind their ships, and in a storm, before; for it served against the raging waves, like canons against an hostile army, or besieged town. It would batter and beat waves in pieces, where they as high as steeples; and as soon as a breach was made, they forced their passage through, in spite of even the most furious wind...; for [this artificial wind] had a great advantage of the waves



than the natural of the ships; the natural being above the face of the water, could not without a down-right motion enter or press into ships, whereas the artificial with a sideward motion did pierce into the bowels of the waves. (129)

This wind-powered engine embodies the synthesis of organic-mechanistic views presented by *The Blazing World* because the invention is man-made and technologically advanced yet mimics the natural element of wind and its effect on water. The creature-men appropriate and modify nature to move in cooperation with the ocean. Yet, the language is significant, as ships force passage by “battering” and “beating” water. Cavendish uses the violent vocabulary of war to suggest an unpredictable, chaotic atmosphere upon the ocean. Oceanic travel was dangerous, fraught with storms and wrecks. The text’s presentation of the need to mimic and improve upon nature in order to cooperate with, and when needed battle, natural space, suggests the dominance of the ocean and the revised approach necessary to exist in oceanic space.

This combination of mimicry and improvement exemplifies Cavendish’s mechanistic-organic complication of the human relationship with nature, implying that coexistence does not require distance, but rather cooperation and the awareness necessary for mimicry. For example, “they joined as many together as the compass or advantage of the places of the liquid elements would give them leave; for their ships were so ingeniously contrived, that they could fasten them together as close as a honey-comb without waste of place; and being thus united, no wind nor waves were able to separate them” (129). The honeycomb arrangement is an essential addition to *Blazing World*’s mechanistic-organic use of oceans. Strong winds and waves establish the danger of oceanic travel and prompt technological advancement. This advancement mimics the natural shape of honeycombs, but with man-made materials and improvements appropriating land-nature for oceanic space. However, only “places of the liquid elements” can allow these ships to create such a formation; therefore, creature-seamen must work both with and against natural phenomena. Finally, because the arrangement avoids wasting space, Cavendish assimilates the efficiency of scientific method and advancement in a

conscientious use of natural space. Efficiency becomes an organic matter, relying upon and in reaction to unpredictable nature, and conveying an approach of cooperation with environmental elements.

The conscientious use of oceanic space extends to Cavendish's synthesis of natural and urban geography, as islands comprise a majority of *Blazing World* and waterways serve both as roads and as geographical outlines defining the map of the world. The imperial city, Paradise, "was divided by a great number of vast and large rivers, all ebbing and flowing, into several islands of unequal distance from each other, which in most parts were as pleasant, healthful, rich, and fruitful, as nature could make them...[and] rivers did run betwixt every street" (130-1). Island space embodies the mechanistic-organic approach because the water's natural currents provide a means of travel in cooperation with nature. Humans manipulate nature to construct streets and pull carriages; roads signify the domination of nature by covering ground with elements mined from the earth and modified or by changing the natural geography or landscape of the environment; horses are saddled, bridled, and whipped to pull humans. In contrast, river travel indicates an organic relationship with nature, as the natural current carries boats that do not harm the environment.

The creature-men respond to a nautically-connected world with idiosyncratic innovation that does not harm the environment, that mimics forms of nature, and that suggests their approach combines technological ingenuity and organic cooperation with nature. Bird-men develop boats resembling nests; fox-men's are comparable to fox-traps, and grass-green men have honeycomb-like ships (Cavendish 127-9). This variety demonstrates cultural uniqueness in service of global interconnectedness, and because all means are either natural or nature mimicry, they further demonstrate ecological integration. Additionally, each region presents climatic and geographical distinction. The bear-men reside in the cold climate of underground caves, the fox-men on a warmer island, and the satyrs enjoy "a pleasant and mild temper" on a different, wooded island (128). Cavendish uses geographical and climatic detail to demonstrate the presence and power of nature and the importance of remaining aware of its influence. The

inhabitants of Blazing World respond to their planet's abundant waterways in different fashions, suggesting they cannot standardize oceanic travel because climatic and regional differences necessitate a fluid, modifiable, organic approach.

In addition to idiosyncratic innovation, Cavendish creates ships not for combat, trade, or colonization, but for travel, and enforces the organic-mechanistic mentality by informing and reflecting societal structure. The golden ships of the Emperor "were neatly made, and required not such thickness, neither were they troubled with pitch, tar, pumps, guns, and the like, which make our wooden ships very heavy; for although they were not all of a piece, yet they were so well soddered, that there was no fear of leaks, chinks, or clefts; and as for guns, there was no use of them" (129). These ships reinforce the prominence of nautical travel. The government and innovations of Blazing World foster human progress and connection, while trade partitions society, albeit less violently than combat or war. Merchant ships of Blazing World, made of leather, are inferior to the Emperor's golden ships in composition and function (129). This detail reinforces social hierarchy and the organic-mechanistic hierarchical occupations facilitated by oceanic travel. Violence and colonization are not condoned or even plausible with these weaponless ships. Additionally, the Empress's ships are designed by "shipwrights, and all her architects, which were giants" (205). Creatures of great size have the noble occupation of shipbuilding, reflecting the great size of oceans and the need for magnificent, capable ships to explore them. Cavendish clearly elevates nautical technology and ocean travel, but only of a certain type – of adventure and exploration – that disparages domination or colonization.

In her final, most prominent representation of oceans, Cavendish's allegiance to social hierarchy and power structure prompts her to employ Blazing World's technological and nautical innovations to reinforce the power of the monarchy. Upon hearing news of conflict at home, the Empress sails to her planet to assist a monarch in establishing a totalitarian government to rule the entire world. In this final episode, the Empress uses speculative technology and the supernatural to establish an organic relationship with oceanic space and eventually to embody the awesome, terrible power of oceans. Fletcher examines this representation of nature's

power: “Cavendish invests in nature with a terrible grandeur, reminding her readers that they are subject to a force whose guiding principle is not their well-being... insisting that the power to kill is not just a theoretical right but one that is continually exercised” (125).<sup>9</sup> This investment demonstrates the misfortunes of an oppressive totalitarianism and hierarchical societal structure inherent in both a completely organic worldview and entirely globalized mentality. If everything is connected and completely cooperative, and if one entity can harness the power of nature, that one entity can control everything.

The Empress’s synthesis with the ocean leads to a sensational and oppressive power and begins when she orders creature men to build ships able to sail underwater (205). The Duchess advises the Empress to “command a great number of your fish-men to wait on your ships; for you know that your ships are not made for cannons, and therefore are no ways serviceable in war; for though by the help of your engines they can drive on, and your fish-men may by the help of chains or ropes, draw them which way they will” (206). Lacking the aid of airtight compartments, the Empress sails underwater and effectively enters the uninhabitable, underwater oceanic space. Her ships are no longer powered by engines but by fish-men who penetrate the mysterious space beneath the ocean’s surface. They use firestone, an element that sets ablaze when wet, to light the way above and below the surface. In addition to relying upon nature for the quintessentially human tool of fire, this element brings fire to water, synthesizing opposing elements in a supernatural demonstration of the power of organicism. This supernatural element emphasizes the amazing possibilities intrinsic to an organic relationship with nature.

Upon reaching her world, the Empress cooperates with natural elements to obtain and exert power, appearing “with garments made of the star-stone, and was born or supported above the water, upon the fish-men’s heads and backs, so that she seemed to walk upon the face of the water” (210). Recreating Christ’s walking on water seems to transform the Empress

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<sup>9</sup> While Fletcher suggests the Empress has personified nature throughout text, I suggest she has evolved with a synthesis of organic and mechanistic methods, becoming one with nature only at the end.

into a deity; yet, rather than doing so with an innate miraculous power transcending nature, she cooperates with nature in an organic, supernatural fashion. This approach gives her immense power, too much power for an individual, and she destroys ships and hinders trade until all enemies are forced into submission: "Thus the Empress did not only save her native country, but made it the absolute monarchy of all that world" (214). Her endeavor reflects the Ovidian notion of a Golden Age of complete cooperation and harmony. Comparable to Gonzalo's utopian musings in *The Tempest*, this notion suggests that Edenic musings or longings for a Golden Age require a single, controlling or authorial voice to direct societal and natural laws towards harmony.

The Lady's global domination suggests not only the awesome and terrible power of a completely organic relationship with oceans but also the globalizing, colonizing potential of oceans, nautical travel, and technology. Twice the Empress convenes with commanders and her native country's monarch, and

having no other place of reception for them, she desired that they should be pleased to come into open seas with their ships, and make a circle of a pretty large compass, and then her own ships should meet them, and close up that circle... and being all met in the form and manner aforesaid, the Empress appeared upon the face of the water in her imperial robes. (215)

By bringing politics onto oceanic space and under its power and supernatural laws, the Empress harnesses the globalizing potential of oceans to control and connect ships. This formation alludes to earlier honeycomb formations but has evolved from an efficient matrix reflecting nature to a natural entity itself, allowing the Empress to exert natural and political power. Such an evolution is complete when "her own fleet came into the circle, without any visible assistance of sails or tide; and herself being entered into her own ship, the whole fleet sunk immediately into the bottom of the seas" (216). This disappearance solidifies the Empress's organic relationship with the ocean because it resembles the violent act of drowning, while the Empress remains completely safe, both supernatural and part of nature. The word

“immediately” eliminates a transition from the ship’s existence in a natural, open-air state, to plunging into the depths of the unknown, depicting her organic relationship with nature as a supernatural and fearsome design.

*The Blazing World* moves among genres of travel narrative, utopian exploration, scientific discourse, and adventure novel to establish an incredible hybridity of definitions and emphasize the dangers, and the potential power, of oceans. The Empress transforms from inadvertent and frightened explorer, to inquisitive leader, and finally to absolute monarch. Representing the final state of this transformation is the image of her leaving her world for the second time and returning to Blazing World:

Air and seas appear of a bright shining flame... Bird-men carried her upon their backs into the air, and there she appeared as glorious as the sun. Then she was set down upon the seas again, and presently there was heard the most melodious and sweetest consort of voices... so that it seemed as if sea and air had spoke and answered each other by way of singing dialogues. (215)

Such a powerful transformation illustrates a complete conversion to an entirely organic relationship with nature because the Empress has embraced oceanic space by plunging to its depths. She can now exist within a space of impossibility and therefore harbors supernatural ability. Her ability mimics nature – the ability of a fish to breath underwater – and physically unifies the Empress and the ocean in a representation of the ultimate organic relationship with nature. This event combines the three natural elements of fire, air, and water, and excludes earth, to suggest that although land-nature can be partitioned and dominated, ocean-nature remains mysterious, supernatural, unbreakable, and organic. Oceans resist the dominance and partitioning of mechanism, yet serve the expansion of humankind by connecting local regions and forming the globe. Cavendish suggests this space requires a mechanistic-organic approach combining the technological ingenuity of humans and a cooperation with and mimicry of nature, while still harboring dangers and perilous potential in its tempestuous and unpredictable power.

### 3.4 Conclusion

More than a half of a century separates *The Tempest* and *The Blazing World*. In this period, Robert Hooke, Robert Boyle, and other scientists formed the Royal Society. Scientific inventions and discoveries, such as Robert Hooke's work with the microscope, Galileo Galilei's work with the telescope, René Descartes's writings, and Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis*, influenced Cavendish's writing and view of both mechanism and organicism. Cavendish's text resists scientific method and attempts to revise the concept of a scientific society. In this manner, she fashions a hybrid mechanistic-organic approach and constructs a powerful protagonist. Shakespeare's Prospero also attempts to work with nature and gain power, but his comfort with a traditional power structure limits this endeavor. In the end, Prospero relinquishes the supernatural and must rely upon the audience to free him to set sail for Naples, whereas the Empress embraces nature and the supernatural to harness the power of the ocean. The culmination of both a purely mechanistic and purely organic approach to nature is a hierarchical structure and the pursuit of power. Hybridity, the combination and cooperation of both approaches, serves as a system of checks and balances. When the Empress merges the two, she fashions a method of discovery that embraces conversation, inclusion, and equality.

Experimenting with humankind's perceptions of, and approaches to, nature suggests that the organic/mechanistic dichotomy is an overly-simplified paradigm, and that the human/nature partition is equally simplistic due to differing "natures" of terrestrial versus oceanic space. Charting oceans proves an effective step in diversifying definitions, representations, and perceptions of nature. Among other environments, deserts are comparable in expanse and uniformity but differ in material makeup and supported modes of travel. The environments of rivers, lakes, canyons, valleys, forests, and mountains across zones of moist, dry, and polar climate regions present extensive natural diversity. Like the varying cultures of the world, different environments simultaneously demonstrate similarities and diversity, and generalizing the study of nature in literature can lead to overly simplistic analyses.

The variety of genres, literary conventions, and descriptions employed to represent

different environments should be investigated in order to understand humankind's relationship with nature(s) throughout history and to anticipate and resolve current and future environmental issues. Heise argues: "Rather than focusing on the recuperation of a sense of place, environmentalism needs to foster an understanding of how a wide variety of both natural and cultural places and processes are connected and shape each other around the world, and how human impact affects and changes this connectedness" (21). The study of nature in literature necessarily reveals much about history, science, culture, and literary representation. Oceans do not fit neatly under the paradigm of "nature," they deviate through resistance and idiosyncrasy.



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