

RE-IMAGINING EARLY MODERN WOMEN'S DRAMA AS SCIENCE FICTION

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Little attention has been paid to the role of Science Fiction in seventeenth-century drama by women dramatists because the Science Fiction genre is largely considered to be a product of modernity. Susan Gray and Christos Callow state that Science Fiction theatre came into being in the nineteenth century, while John Clute has argued that the Science Fiction genre emerged after the Industrial Revolution as a response to the increased speed of history (Gray and Callow 67; Clute 23-24). However, the scientific and social developments of the seventeenth century such as the invention of the first reflecting telescope and the increase in trade, travel, and colonisation, which influenced the portrayal of other worlds, other cultures, and the representation of space exploration on stage, demonstrate that the themes of Self/Other, new worlds, and new technologies which constitute Science Fiction were present in seventeenth-century drama (Scholes 41-42).

This article will show that the origins of Science Fiction theatre can be traced back to the seventeenth century and will explore the way in which the performance of Science Fiction in early women's drama cathartically addresses 'Otherness' to expose and shape attitudes towards gender and ethnicity. Drawing on Callow and Gray's theorisation of Science Fiction theatre as "psychological inner space, and the social and political spaces between individuals, groups and societies" (65-66), I analyse the way in which Margaret Cavendish's private and immersive performance of *Utopia* and Aphra Behn's public and communal Science Fiction comedy cathartically reimagine and question existing relations within their society. Analysis of early modern women's Science Fiction importantly reveals that seventeenth-century women dramatists were already experimenting with the psychological slippage between self and 'Other' that characterises Science Fiction, along with setting their plays in the domestic household to produce an atmosphere of confinement which focuses on the psychological and emotional impact of interaction between old and new worlds and new technologies, which Callow and Gray identify as the future direction of Science Fiction theatre, but which, as I will show, is also exhibited earlier in seventeenth-century drama (67-68).

Science fiction has been defined as a "thought experiment," a genre of fiction which imagines other worlds or futures (Baker 7). The genre often achieves this through the "novum" or novel element in the text, usually an advance in science or technology that features heavily in the narrative and energizes the dynamic between the world in which the text is set and the context in which the text was produced (Suvin, "Poetics of SF Genre" 372-373). In Margaret Cavendish's play *The Lady Contemplation* (1667) the novum is the figure of the "she-philosopher" and the Utopian world she has created. In Aphra Behn's publicly performed farce *The Emperor of the Moon* (1687) the telescope is the novum that provides insight into the lunar world. As Brian Baker states

in *Science Fiction* (2014), Science Fiction demonstrates a clear “relationship between the imagined world and that which produced it” (7). In this article I examine the ways in which Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn employ elements of Science Fiction and Utopia to create a feeling of estrangement, which prompts spectators to reflect critically on the elements of the fiction that intersect with their own world. Clute has argued that Science Fiction is the most positive form of Fantastic literature (26). I argue that Science Fiction on the seventeenth-century stage works as a form of catharsis which offers solutions for a way forward as it encourages spectators to confront their own anxieties. Behn and Cavendish use elements of Science Fiction to explore the emotional and psychological impact of anxieties about the self as ‘Other,’ the country’s future, and relationships with the colonial Other by generating an atmosphere of estrangement, confinement, and repressed desire which is finally expelled by the protagonist’s realisation of their fantasies through performance which generates slippage between self and ‘Other.’ Each dramatist explores ‘Otherness’ in the context of gender and ethnicity: Behn’s *The Emperor of the Moon* creates a stage spectacle about lunar inhabitants to explore relationships between England and its foreign allies, while in Cavendish’s *The Lady Contemplation* the she-philosopher Lady Contemplation represents the ‘Other’ because she does not conform to gender stereotypes. Behn’s play employs Science Fiction to address anxieties about cultural exchange and desire for the ‘Other,’ while Cavendish’s play, which is set in the domestic sphere of the household, explores feelings of exile and ‘Otherness’ which she experienced as a female intellectual in seventeenth-century patriarchal society. The novum of the she-philosopher in Cavendish’s work and the phallic telescope in Behn’s play are portrayed as reconfiguring the emotional and desiring body as a male sphere to challenge spectators’ views of the female body as irrational. In *The Emperor of the Moon* Doctor Balliardo’s telescope becomes a metaphor for his sexual fantasy of a union between Earthlings and lunar people. Each play cathartically encourages its audience to view the ‘Other’ differently, both the foreign ‘Other’ and the female body as ‘Other.’ Cavendish’s play, which features a protagonist who views herself as a mind without a body (192), depicts Cavendish directly responding to and feeling liberated by Descartes’s view in *Meditations of First Philosophy* (1641) that mind and body were distinct from one another. Descartes’s view that the mind could exist independently from the body, generates hope for women such as Cavendish’s she-philosopher that they will not be defined by their bodies in future (Descartes 1-62).

Adam Roberts’s *The History of Science Fiction* (2005) has importantly traced the origins of Science Fiction back to early modern prose narratives, such as Thomas More’s *Utopia* (1516) and Francis Godwin’s *The Man in the Moone* (c.1638) (Roberts 38). Scholars have already investigated the representation of female Utopias in Cavendish’s work and have explored relationships between women in Behn’s plays, but less attention has been paid to their work as Science Fiction theatre. Despite the difference in audience, Cavendish’s private audience and Behn’s public audience, each dramatist presents an immersive spectacle of Science Fiction which portrays the imaginative possibilities of Science Fiction as cathartic. Comparing Behn’s and Cavendish’s work demonstrates how public and private examples of Science Fiction theatre produce different effects. As I will show, Cavendish’s *The Lady Contemplation* appeals to women confined by the household, whereas Behn’s focus on the telescope addresses the way in which we perceive ourselves and others.

As Jane Donawerth has acknowledged in relation to nineteenth-century Utopian fiction: "Utopia invited women to write because they could reimagine their lives rather than recording their oppressions" (Donawerth cited in Wolfe 197). In other words, the Utopian genre became a thought-experiment for women to create another future. While Cavendish's other closet dramas – *The Bell in Campo* (1662), *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668) and *The Female Academy* (1662) – have been recognised as examples of female Utopia, Utopia in *The Lady Contemplation* has received less critical attention. *The Lady Contemplation* offers a vision of an alternate world of imaginative possibility which runs parallel to reality. In Cavendish's play, the Lady Contemplation's "Airy fictions" which she describes to the audience are contrasted with and criticised by her visitors, who disparage her immersion in fantasy and instead praise the merits of "the material world" (184). The Lady Contemplation's position as a woman confined to the household connects with Cavendish's society in which women's freedom was limited.

The play's focus on a protagonist who is obsessed with living an ideal existence is characteristic of the Utopian genre in which the Utopian model proposed provides a vision of stability, consistency, and control (Roberts 54). For the Lady Contemplation, immersion in her own imagination is the ideal existence because the "lovers which [her] Fancy creates [...] speak or are as silent as [she] will have them" and do not challenge her authority (184). The Lady Contemplation's Utopian vision is consistent with Baker's definition of Utopia as "a community in which socio-political norms and individual relationships are organised on a more perfect principle than in the author's own community" because her Fantasy world offers her more freedom and control than the patriarchal world that is the playwright's and the reader's or spectators' reality (37). Lady Contemplation's imagination enables her not only to choose her lovers, but to create them; she states, "my lovers which my Fancy creates, never make me jealous" (184).

Science Fiction offers Cavendish an appealing and orderly alternative amidst the chaos of Civil War and her family's exile to France for being Royalist supporters during a period of Interregnum. Cavendish's view of the imagination as an escape from the trauma of Civil War is evident in the following quotation from the play:

the greatest pleasure is in the imagination [...] for it is more pleasure for any person to imagine themselves the Emperor of the whole world than to be so, for in the imagination they reign and rule without the [...] fears of being betrayed or usurped.
(Cavendish 183)

Anna Battigelli has commented on the role of the imagination in Cavendish's works in terms of agency in the world and exile from the world. She argues that the heroines of Margaret Cavendish's plays can be split into two types, the "active cavalier" and "the contemplative cavalier." Where the former adventurous heroine takes steps to reform their world, the latter retreats from it, but each is at odds with their world (26). Battigelli's view encapsulates divided interpretations of the Utopian genre, whether Utopia should provide a productive future model of society or whether

the genre represents an unproductive and impossible ideal. In contrast to the active heroine of Cavendish's prose fiction "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity," published in *Natures Pictures* (1656), Lady Contemplation fits into the category of the "contemplative cavalier" and can be read as a representation of Cavendish herself, a woman who rejected public life in favour of the Fantasy worlds her writing provided her with. Unlike Cavendish's other female Utopias portrayed in drama, *The Lady Contemplation* represents the benefits of the creation of imaginative Utopia in the private sphere.

The Lady Contemplation's imagination provides her and her female spectators with the ability to imagine engaging in activities that women would not be permitted to participate in in the public sphere. While Cavendish's protagonist cannot completely escape from her reality and is often interrupted, she possesses the means for herself and for spectators to retreat from it into an alternative reality. As Simon Spiegel acknowledges, this is largely achieved by making the strange familiar, the unnatural natural (372). Lady Contemplation normalises isolation from others in the world by explaining the merits of such a lifestyle to her visitors. She argues that rather than "enslave" herself to the body, which is "full of corruption," she would rather create "bodiless creatures" with which she can "nobly, honestly, freely and delightfully entertain" herself (192). The comments cited above react against the early modern perception that women were ruled by their emotions (Heavey 9) and governed by the body which was deemed corrupt (Paster 24). The protagonist's vision of "bodiless creatures" imagines a future in which women are not judged by their bodies, but their minds. Cavendish's Utopia resists the way in which women's behaviour was regulated and judged in seventeenth-century society as the protagonist's philosophical discourse "offend[s] no ears" (217). As Suvin's concept of cognitive estrangement or making the strange familiar suggests, Science Fiction promotes recontextualization through such estrangement and therefore challenges the view that the current state of things cannot be altered (Suvin 32; Spiegel 370). Although Lady Contemplation's immersion in fantasy is deemed unnatural by the other characters within the play, their criticisms of her lifestyle are contrasted with her own contentment with such an existence. Contemplation is considered "idle" by the other characters in the play and damaging to one's physical health as it is dangerous to "bury thy life in fantasms" (205, 183). The aptly named Sir Humphrey Interruption is puzzled to see her deep in contemplation and asks: "what makes you so silently sad?" (186). Yet Lady Contemplation is portrayed as happiest in scenes where she is deep in thought. Her imagination provides her with agency and enables her to create new and alternative worlds which never fail to divert her and most importantly, do not disappoint. Gweno Williams's filmic production of Cavendish's plays incorporated a scene in which Lady Contemplation imagines herself leading an army into battle to emphasise for the viewer the freedom that Lady Contemplation's imagination provides (Cavendish 220-221, Wood and Williams 2004). This positions Cavendish as choosing to write Science Fiction in order to propose an alternative future for women.

Lady Contemplation's self-created imaginative Utopia directly contrasts with the world inhabited by those who visit her house, and with seventeenth-century society in which women's freedom was limited. Cavendish maintains a connection between Lady Contemplation's Utopia and the world spectators are familiar with, through the scenes which feature visitors to Lady

Contemplation's home. As she never leaves her home, we learn about Contemplation's imaginings through her discussions with visitors to the house. However, these visits from outsiders are portrayed as interruptions which spoil "the Triumph [...] [of her imaginary] Marriage" (183). These interruptions fracture Lady Contemplation's and the audience's immersion in her fantasy world at the same time that they provide the audience with insight into it. These visitors disrupt her harmonious existence and they resemble the outsiders to her own personal utopia because they criticise her "Airy fictions" and view her ideal existence as dysfunctional (184). The audience are positioned with the Lady Contemplation as the play is primarily set within one room in Lady Contemplation's home. The representation of social interaction as an inconvenience and an interruption to her musings demonstrates the Lady Contemplation's seclusion from society: "if you will leave me alone, I will think of you when you are gone; for I had rather entertain you in my thoughts, than keep you company in discourse" (186). This is consistent with what Chris Ferns refers to as Utopia's isolation "designed to protect it from contamination by the real world" (2). We see Lady Contemplation cross over from pleasant immersion in her Utopian fantasy life to her anxiety when others impede upon her peace. An outside invitation to a ball causes her distress as her fictional lover hangs himself: "pray leave me alone that I may cut him down and give him cordials to restore life" (210). At this point her fantasy life cannot continue as it is interrupted by the world around her, staging the tension between the ideal of her utopia and the practise of it.

For Cavendish, Science Fiction is a genre which offers escape from outside trauma and is a medium used to write about feelings of exile. Science Fiction provides a productive way for Cavendish to shape gender relations during a period in which women were not able to participate in public affairs. Cavendish employs her imagination to escape from her traumatic reality. As Battigelli rightly points out, "Cavendish's compulsive writing career can similarly be understood as a redirection of energy away from correcting or reforming the external world to shaping the more governable worlds of the mind" (82-83). Battigelli relates this withdrawal from public life to the trauma Cavendish suffered being exiled to Paris during the Civil War (44). Findlay has observed that Cavendish often writes about her home even though home was a contested site for the Royalist Cavendish family who were exiled during the Civil War (53). Scholars refer to Cavendish's plays as Household or Closet Drama because these plays were not written for the public stage but were inspired by Cavendish's family home (Findlay 9, 50-54). In light of Findlay's argument that Household Drama if performed would have been performed for close family and friends, providing "a safe way for women to remake the world" (21), female readers or spectators of Cavendish's play who were constrained to the private sphere may have been able to relate to the feeling of enclosure in a domestic space generated by the play's setting in Lady Contemplation's home and the use of the household as a performance space (146). If the play was indeed performed female spectators would find themselves in the Lady Contemplation's exact position, exposed to a Fantasy world which offers limited escape from the constraints they find themselves in as members of patriarchal society.

Utopian narratives in prose fiction are often criticised for closing off discussion and for being static in their approach because the narratorial figure presents a singular view of utopia and directs the reader's approach to this form of government (Roberts 54; Ferns 2). In contrast to the portrayal

of Utopia in prose fiction, there is no narratorial voice in a play. The live and inherently interactive nature of drama invites audience members to rely on their own judgement and decide either to applaud or denounce this new world and their encounter with its inhabitants by clapping their hands or expressing their distaste – the latter was something that seventeenth-century spectators regularly did (Love 27). The first part of the play ends with Lady Contemplation choosing to “rest at home” and remain with her fancies, and the second half of the play ends with the protagonist declaring, in protest to an arranged marriage, that she will continue to engage in contemplation which brings her true happiness (211, 244). Considering Cavendish’s domestic audience, this could be read as a bleak assertion that women cannot change the situation. Or, it could be read as portraying Fantasy as an escape route for women. Erin Lang Bonin has observed that in Cavendish’s three other Utopian works utopia comes to an end, and that this: “suggests that women’s desires are marginal, inappropriate, or even impossible to imagine and sustain outside of patriarchal contexts” (352). With Bonin’s observation in mind it is significant that the play ends with the Lady Contemplation still immersed in her utopian world accessed from her imagination while enclosed in the domestic sphere. Spectators and readers of *The Lady Contemplation* are empowered as they themselves are visitors to Cavendish’s Utopia which is portrayed as a space of possibility for women. Contrary to Bonin’s view, *The Lady Contemplation* provides its audience with an example of a sustainable utopia that one can escape to whenever one pleases.

Cavendish promotes the imagination as a site of personal utopia as the plots which run parallel to the Lady Contemplation’s story, such as that of the flirtatious Lady Conversation and the vulnerable Lady Virtue, expose the dangers of gossip, rape, and damaged reputations women suffer in the public sphere. The private nature of closet drama not only provides a safe forum for Cavendish to question the expectations placed upon women in the public sphere, it also places emphasis on spectators as active agents who must rely on their own imagination and judgement to interpret scenes which are verbally represented. Like Ursula le Guin’s and William Morris’s Utopian fiction, Cavendish’s drama is closer to the genre of Utopia which promotes personal freedom from social conventions, rather than order (Ferns 15). Lady Contemplation’s Utopia then is self-created for the individual. Rather than utopia as a form of imposed government, Cavendish proposes the creation of a personal utopia through the imagination as a form of private solace for other women. Cavendish’s portrayal of Utopia contrasts with Jameson’s view of Utopian narratives as “collective wish-fulfilment” in her focus on Utopia which is self-created by the individual for the individual (Jameson xi-1). Cavendish implies that such freedom can be achieved through one’s own mind, opening spectators’ and readers’ minds to the possibilities that Science Fiction explores.

Through the “she-philosopher” as novum, Cavendish constructs a performance of Utopia which goes against early modern stereotypes of women’s imagination or fancy as irrational or related to the body. As previously stated, Cavendish achieves this by drawing on Descartes’ distinction between mind and body to create a female character for whom the mind is “the soules body and the thoughts are the actions thereof” (192). In contrast, men are depicted as irrational, bodily creatures: “though man hath a rational soul, yet most men are fools, making no use of their reason” (198). Through the figure of Lady Contemplation, Cavendish creates a Utopia which estranges gender

stereotypes and expresses her own frustrations with the exclusion of women in natural science, philosophy, and fiction to depict the imagination as a tool of liberation which provides women with agency through the ability to contemplate alternate realities. Cavendish's stance has much in common with Aristotle's view in his *Politics* (4th century BCE) that the ideal state is "the life of the mind or contemplation" (Aristotle cited in Sargent 19). Cavendish's Household Drama is an immersive, intimate and safe performance of Science Fiction among friends.

While Cavendish focuses on the cathartic nature of Science Fiction narrative which enables the individual to remodel their existence, Behn focuses on the way in which the communal experience of Science Fiction theatre can reconfigure our relations with others. The style of Behn's and Cavendish's drama reflects their approach as Behn's play was publicly performed and has a variety of stage sets, while Cavendish's private play is set within the private household. Aphra Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* depicts the telescope as the novum that promotes cross-cultural encounter between Doctor Balliardo and lunar inhabitants. However, Behn satirises members of her own society when she disrupts the boundary between self and others by revealing that the lunar inhabitants are other characters in the play who pretend to be from the moon, cathartically portraying that there is no difference between ourselves and those from other worlds or nations. Behn employs what Theodore Shank refers to as making the actual fantastic by representing something unexpected on stage (Shank 169-170). By having the actors appear confused as to whether the spectacle is truth or illusion, Behn breaches the boundary between stage spectacle and audience and in doing so, self-consciously draws attention to the foreign dignitaries for whom the play was performed, and to England's relationship with other nations.

Behn's staging of Science Fiction is far less personal and far more communal than Cavendish's, drawing on early Science Fiction narratives to satirise members of her own society, and exposing the characters' fantasies as desire for the colonial Other. As Adam Roberts has acknowledged, scepticism towards Copernicus's theory that the planets revolve round Earth gave rise to a fascination with other worlds and a sense of wonder at the Universe (36, 40). Behn's comic farce forms part of an emerging tradition of prose and dramatic works which envisioned other worlds and other peoples. Inspired by Francis Godwin's prose narrative *The Man in the Moone* and De Fontelle's *Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds* (1686), which Behn translated in 1688, Behn's spectacular comic farce *The Emperor of the Moon* satirises beliefs held by the more eccentric members of the Royal Society that there were inhabitants on the moon. In the words of the seventeenth-century writer Thomas Barker, this was the dream of "a voyage to the Moon" by the "planet-struck" who imagined "making wings to fly thither" (84-85). As John Shanahan has noted, the satirical portrait of natural philosophers onstage was part of a broader trend which conflated scientific spectacle with performance, or "the tricks of showmen and players" (550). With Shanahan's view in mind, it could be argued that Behn is competing with, and exposing, a new form of Court theatre: the scientific experiments presented before the King. The popularity of scientific spectacle with the King would account for the lavish staging of Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon*.

Critics have commented on the way in which Science Fiction reveals the desires and anxieties

of its audience (Roberts 45-46). In Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* the protagonist Doctor Balliardo is "in rapture" at the idea of his daughter and niece having sexual relations with lunar people (325). Behn's play engages with colonial travel narratives, which were popular throughout the early modern period and the Restoration, to address the desire for the foreign 'Other' and anxiety about how English spectators related to other nations. Behn's main character Doctor Balliardo is tricked by his daughter and niece who have their lovers pretend to be the fictitious Prince Thunderland and Emperor of the Moon to secure permission to marry. This plot culminates in a lavish stage spectacle in which the Prince and Emperor descend to Earth (the stage) from the Moon (mechanical scenery). Doctor Balliardo spies on the women asleep, and over-hearing their feigned dreams of courtship with Prince Thunderland and the Emperor of the Moon is "ravished." His reaction of being "rapt!," "leaping and jumping" in a fit of "transported" ecstasy is a comic expression of eroticism and desire at imagining the union between earthlings and lunar people (306).

Al Coppola has identified the role desire plays in Behn's comedy and has argued that the play comments on "improper spectating" as lunar enthusiast Doctor Balliardo uses his telescope to spy on the King (484). In the play Balliardo's telescope has sexual overtones as it is a phallic object which positions Balliardo as a peeping-tom spying on individuals in their bedchambers. Both incidences of spying, "the King in his closet" and Balliardo's daughter and niece asleep present invasions of the private sphere. Behn clearly shows that Doctor Balliardo is at a loss to determine whether what he is seeing is real or contrived and his "telescope, microscopes, all his scopes" provide a metaphor of misreading through blinkered vision (281). On the stage, the telescope is often used as a comic device to present disconnection between what a character believes they can see and what spectators know to be false as they watch con-artists hold up a picture in front of the telescope's lens as in Thomas Tomkis's comedy *Albumazar* (1614).

Behn was not the only dramatist to criticise the telescope and relate its capabilities to the practice of misinterpretation. Margaret Cavendish also expressed her dislike of telescopes and microscopes, which many viewed as providing a better understanding of nature, but for Cavendish represented an invasive form of tunnel vision which involved ignoring the whole form of the subject (Spiller 192-221; Keller 447-471). Doctor Balliardo's usage of the telescope is figured as a form of fanaticism, an obsession with the possible existence of lunar people which blinds his vision and is a form of lunacy. Like the Lady Contemplation's fancy which is figured as dangerous, Doctor Balliardo's fantasies come from "reading foolish books" or more specifically, texts which were the early modern equivalent of modern-day Science Fiction (280). Here Behn reverses the gender stereotype that associated women with an over-active imagination by positioning Balliardo as consumed by fancy. The Doctor later expresses dismay that the young suitors are not "the emperor of the moon? And [...] Prince Thunderland" and deep disappointment that there is "no moon world!" (333). Staging Balliardo's fantasy is seen as a cure for or exorcism of Balliardo's desires. As the young scheming suitors state: "We'll find a medicine that shall cure your fit—/ Better than all Galenists" (305). Although the youth indulge Doctor Balliardo's fantasy, they do this mainly for their own ends, but also to exorcise the fantasy by revealing that it is so. This raises an interesting question of whether the communal experience of Science Fiction in the theatre can be viewed as a form of catharsis,

used to express, quench, or expel the desires and anxieties of its spectators. In the realm of the play, performance of other worlds certainly offers such a possibility, as it is through their fantastical plot that the women in the play are able to achieve their desire to marry men of their choice and Doctor Balliardo is briefly amazed to meet a lunar inhabitant. By imagining and enacting the Fantasy of other worlds the women are provided with a new form of agency.

The play's exploration of and interest in the 'Other' and in other worlds is partly due to its audience. As Jane Spencer notes, the play was performed as an afterpiece for foreign dignitaries (vii- xxii). The play therefore was designed to bring two worlds or cultures together through comedy. The realisation that life on the moon is "just as it is here" would have been a unifying joke for the dignitaries the play was performed for by commenting that we are all the same (324). In her introduction to *The Emperor of the Moon*, Jane Spencer comments on the way in which this boundary between stage and audience was crossed in Carol MacVey's 1992 production in which the actor playing Harlequin invited a member of the audience to climb the staircase to the moon (xxi). MacVey's production emphasises the playful and interactive nature of Behn's comedy which bridges the boundary between stage and Fantasy, self, and 'Other.'

Behn provides her audience with an earthly rather than a transcendental or divine vision of the lunar world. *The Emperor of the Moon* self-consciously comments on fiction's representation of other worlds and cultures as exotic, while exposing that they are in fact the same as Earth. When Dr. Balliardo asks Harlequin, posing as "an ambassador from the moon," about the government and society on the moon, he is dismayed to discover it is "just as it is here," that the lunar men have mistresses and the women gamble (Behn 324). This is comic as spectators know that Harlequin is not from the moon and is describing the only society he knows: their own.

In this section I argue that Behn's *The Emperor of the Moon* which relies heavily on spectacle and less upon spectators' imaginations, effectively engages audience members in the fiction, and transports them to that world, whilst encouraging them to reflect on their own world. In *Science Fiction and the Theatre* (1994) Ralph Willingham argues that comedy and Science Fiction go well together and stresses the simplicity of Science Fiction theatre, arguing that: "illusionistic trickery is often unnecessary and distracting in staging science fiction works" (38).¹ In the case of seventeenth-century drama moveable stage machinery was an important technological novum which enabled theatres to portray a variety of locations swiftly and is integral to my discussion of Behn's portrayal of Science Fiction. The proscenium arch which framed the scenic action in Restoration drama clearly depicted the play as illusion. Behn achieves reflection on spectators' own world through Fantastika by generating slippage between the characters' position in the play and their acknowledgement of a change of scene which refers not to the painted scenery but surprisingly to the theatre audience itself to disrupt the illusion that the play has created. I argue that Behn's disruption of the illusion by referring to the theatre itself is used strategically to frame actuality in a way that makes it appear fantastic as Shank argues (169-170).

Despite appearing to mock fans of early Science Fiction as suffering from lunacy from

reading “foolish books” Behn indulges her audience’s desire for spectacle, particularly spectacle which creates a vision of the exotic. Behn’s comedy made its money from the allurements of spectacle and the skilled practice of stage machinery. The manipulation of stage scenery provided a lavish spectacle for audience members which captured the power of Doctor Balliardo’s imagination made manifest through the other characters’, or rather the theatre company’s, creation of spectacle. Behn’s stage directions show the way in which stage machinery, music, and dance were choreographed to create the dramatic entrance of the Emperor of the moon:

The globe of the moon appears first, like a new moon; as it moves forward it increases, till it comes to the full. When it is descended, it opens and shows the emperor and the prince [who] come forth with all their train, the flutes playing a symphony before [the emperor], which prepares the song; which ended, the dancers mingle as before. (330)

This was the climax of the play and the spectacle which audiences paid to see. The power of the spectacle is clear from Bellemante’s reaction: “Heavens! What’s here? What palace is this? Not part of our house, I’m sure” (326). Elaria states: “’tis rather the apartment of some monarch” (326). Originally part of the plot to trick Doctor Balliardo, even his niece and daughter are impressed by the spectacle created. This playfully preserves the fantasy for spectators as the characters in the play who engineered the spectacle are surprised by it. Having the performers acknowledge the audience while delivering these lines would also have added to the uncertainty as to whether the spectacle is a representation of truth or illusion. Shank’s essay in the influential edited collection *Staging the Impossible: The Fantastic Mode in Modern Drama* (1992), presented the view that Science Fiction theatre can frame actuality in ways that appear fantastical to spectators (169-170). Shank states that the effect of this form of theatre is to remind its audience of theatricality, drawing attention to the illusion as constructed by revealing its construction. Elaria’s lines mark the movement from Doctor Balliardo observing other nations, to reference England’s monarchy. As a Royalist, Behn’s play pays homage to Britain’s restored monarchy, the country’s wealth, its power, and its trade with and colonisation of other nations, exemplified by Kepler’s line: “Now, sir, behold, the globic world descends two thousand leagues below its wonted station, to show obedience to its proper monarch” (327). This reference to the monarch, not only acknowledges the sovereign’s role as patron of the theatre, but it also marks a return or transition from the fantastical moon-world to theatre-goers’ reality. Contrary to Willingham’s advocacy of simplicity in Science Fiction theatre, Behn’s lavish Science Fiction farce provides an example of the way in which illusion in Science Fiction theatre can be effectively employed to stimulate spectators’ awareness and reflection on their own society by reminding them of their position as spectators in a theatre.

I have shown that Science Fiction theatre predates the nineteenth century and began in the seventeenth century. Considering Behn’s and Cavendish’s work as Science Fiction theatre opens up new avenues of interpretation and prompts exploration of the way in which women dramatists imagined new possibilities to combat feelings of ‘Otherness’ and re-shape perceptions of the ‘Other.’

The imaginative and theatrical techniques exhibited in Cavendish's and Behn's plays may help to inform our readings of recent Science Fiction theatre and its effect on audiences, particularly as the experimental nature of Cavendish's plays which transform the domestic into a place of estrangement fit into the domestic style of Science Fiction theatre acknowledged by Callow and Gray, as that which explores the psychological and emotional dynamic between characters onstage to create feelings of estrangement (65, 67-68).

Scholars have had difficulty in categorising Margaret Cavendish's writings but considering Science Fiction in her plays helps to reconcile the slippage between reality and Fantasy and to draw attention to the way in which she responded to the scientific and philosophical developments of her age, and used these to imagine a future for women. Both of these plays promote catharsis as they expose the slippage between self and 'Other' and generate new associations about gender by exploring 'Otherness.' Behn's publicly performed *The Emperor of the Moon* presents the performance of Science Fiction as a communal and unifying experience, a spectacular Fantasy which unites different cultures through tropes of Science Fiction and comedy. Behn mocks the fantastical to reveal the two nations' similarity rather than their difference. *The Emperor of the Moon* employs Science Fiction narratives to expose and to mock colonial desire. As a private performance, Cavendish's *The Lady Contemplation* is a far more intimate performance of Science Fiction, one which encourages private immersion in Utopian Fantasy as a means of escape.

These plays mark a change in attitudes towards the body of the female writer and her role in creating fiction. Produced towards the end of Behn's highly successful career as a playwright for the public stage and performed for political visits by foreign dignitaries *The Emperor of the Moon* demonstrates the shift in public perception of women dramatists and their role in public affairs. *The Lady Contemplation* reconfigures the view of women's Fancy as irrational and stemming from the body, to argue that contemplation is productive, liberating and involves the mind, rather than the body. *The Lady Contemplation* is a private and introspective performance of utopia which comments on Cavendish's struggle to be taken seriously as a writer and a thinker. Cavendish's household drama which may have been performed in the domestic space demonstrates the way in which site-specific performances of Science Fiction can powerfully dissolve the boundary between fiction and actuality to confuse spectators' sense of fiction with reality. Behn's comedy demonstrates that the slippage between Fantasy and actuality that Shank refers to can be found prior to the nineteenth century. Reimagining early women's drama as Science Fiction offers possibilities for considering the ongoing relationship between mind, body, individual and state, community and alienation, self and other, audience and fiction in Science Fiction theatre.

NOTES

1. More recent studies in Science Fiction theatre, such as Callow and Gray's reflection on the genre, acknowledge that Science Fiction can be staged in a variety of ways from the simple stage set to plays that use a variety of special stage effects (60-68).

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BIONOTE

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