Chapter 20

CAVENDISH AND THE NOVEL

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IN earl Y twent Ieth- Centur Y treatments of the novel's evolution as a genre, Margaret Cavendish is mostly missing.[1] When we do catch a glimpse of her, she makes her appearance as a literary critic rather than a contributing author in her own right. In the topic's magnum opus, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740*, for instance, Michael McKeon places her in the company of Meric Casaubon and Père le Moyne, who are at pains to distinguish between historical accounts on the one hand and fictional romances on the other.[2] Here, Cavendish insists that her *Life of William*—the biography of her husband released the year after her science romance, *The Blazing World*, was published—is historical and not to be confused with "pleasant Romances," which amount to "telling Romansical Falshoods for Historical Truths."[3] Cavendish voices precisely the period's urge to tease fact from fiction at a moment in time when "narrative" accounts of any sort seemed to be mixing the two modes, an urge ripe for careful scrutiny and therefore rightly at the heart of McKeon's guiding premise. "To formulate the problem of the origins of the novel in terms of how one dominant prose form 'became' another," he writes, "is really to ask how romance responded to the early modern historicist revolution. In seventeenth-century prose narrative, verisimilitude and the claim to historicity are incompatible and competitive expressions of that revolution."[4] Cavendish's contemporary, Casaubon, insists on this fundamental incompatibility, for he is not convinced that "a thing is true, because it is possible; no, nor because probable: nay, it is certain that many lyes and falshoods are founded upon this very thing, *probability*." The truth

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1 Though she is not mentioned in either, Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* and M. M. Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* are also particularly useful for thinking about Cavendish's place in the evolution of the genre. An explicit early consideration of Cavendish appears in R. B. Johnson, *Novelists on Novels: From the Duchess of Newcastle to George Eliot* (London: Douglas, 1928). More serious references to Cavendish in this regard began in the 1970s and have continued to increase so that, currently, it is not uncommon for *The Blazing World* to receive at least a nod. For two excellent discussions addressing the plurality of stories now available for the rise of the novel more generally, see Margaret Reeves, "Telling the Tale of the Rise of the Novel," *CLIO: A Journal of Literature, History, and the Philosophy of History* 30 (2000): 25–49, and Margaret Anne Doody, *The True Story of the Novel* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996).

2 Michael McKeon, *The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987).

3 Margaret Cavendish, "The Preface," *The Life … of William Cavendish, Duke … of Newcastle* (London, 1667), sigs. b2v, C2r.

4 McKeon, *Origins*, 53.

of history is anchored in certainty, not adrift in probability. In a similar vein, Le Moyne rejects the notion that history is a subcategory of rhetoric, for "how can you reconcile Truth, the soul of History and the goal of the Historian, with verisimilitude, the form of Oration and the aim of the Orator?"[5] Just as certainty is preferable to probability, so verifiable facts are preferable to accounts that may nevertheless claim the more moving truths of subjective experience without such anchors. Gesturing toward future events, McKeon suggests that contrary to the sentiments expressed by these resisting critics—particularly for early eighteenth-century readers eager to consume the newly emerging novel at rates far surpassing their desire for histories—verisimilitude eventually would "prevail, but only in the long run and only as the reformulated doctrine of 'realism.' "[6]

McKeon's further point is of special interest here, for it jolts Cavendish out of her cameo appearance in this trio of voices and suggests that her place in the history of the novel is considerably more interesting than one might suppose. As McKeon goes on to explain,

> In the short run and throughout the critical period of the origins of the English novel, the claim to historicity is dominant. And when it is refuted, the terms are less likely to be those of Aristotelian verisimilitude than those of extreme skepticism. The claim to historicity and its more extreme negation of "romance" are preferable, at first, for obvious reasons: they are a far more direct and immediate reflection of empirical and skeptical epistemology.[7]

Empirical and sceptical epistemologies are precisely those which Cavendish herself evaluated regularly in her body of philosophical work, which included *Poems, and Fancies* (1653), *Philosophical Fancies* (1653), *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1663), *Philosophical Letters* (1664), *Grounds of Natural Philosophy* (1668), and *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666, revised 1668), to which she appended her fictional narrative, *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*. In the latter, she diverges notably from Casaubon and Le Moyne, for she is less interested in narrowly defining history as a category of truth untainted by probability than she is in sorting out the varieties of truth to be had in multiple modes of experience. Indeed, unlike Casaubon, she frequently insists that probability is all that can really be hoped for when narrating truth, given the limits of human understanding. And in contrast to Le Moyne, who resisted any reconciliation between "the soul of History" and mere verisimilitude, Cavendish argues, "Next to finding out truths, the greatest pleasure in study is to find out

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5 Meric Casaubon, *Of Credulity and Incredulity, in Things Natural, Civil, and Divine* (London, 1668), 155, and Père le Moyne, *De l'histoire* (Paris, 1670), 85.

6 McKeon, *Origins*, 53. For additional studies that take up the question of realism, see Rachel Carnell, *Partisan Politics, Narrative Realism, and the Rise of the British Novel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Lennard Davis, *Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997); Jesse Molesworth, *Chance and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Realism, Probability, Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Ian Watt, *The Literal Imagination: Selected Essays* (Stanford: Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, 2002).

7 McKeon, *Origins*, 53.

probabilities."[8] That is, Le Moyne must rely on a notion of certitude for his contrast, but it is certitude that Cavendish rejects. When she insists that her *Life of William* is not made up of "Romansical Falshoods" (fiction), she means that biography's purpose is generically distinct from that of romance, not that fiction has nothing to do with truth.

With that distinction in mind, and as we think about Cavendish within the early genealogy of the novel—a family tree that, as all serious critics of the genre acknowledge, included elements from epic and romance, augmented by the refinement of dialogue and setting advanced by Renaissance drama—Cavendish's own words on the new genre she was developing in *The Blazing World* are certainly worth hearing.[9] That book was appended to her science treatise, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (hereafter *Observations*), an amalgam of what we would now think of as both the "physical" and "social" sciences, linking her ideas on magnetism, astronomy, and matter's self-directing mechanisms (including the vital energies inherent to each kind of matter) to her thoughts on religion, collective political identity, and how individual minds assert both autonomy and connection. In fact, her novel's prologue, "To the Reader," firmly asserts that she is simply shifting the mental expectations of one genre, "my serious Philosophical Contemplations," to another, which she refers to as "Fiction."[10] Science and philosophy deal in facts, but their comprehension of Nature (the world overall, as well as human nature), is limited, since history itself shows that "Philosophers may err in searching and enquiring after the Causes of Natural Effects, and many times embrace falsehoods for Truths."[11] She is careful, here, not to dismiss errors in philosophy and science as unintentional fabrication, for the inevitability of human error in the pursuit of knowledge "doth not prove that the ground of Philosophy is meerly [sic] Fiction, but the error proceeds from the different motions of Reason." On her theory of mind, remember, reason is a function of material elements of perception receiving input from material things—perceptions brought inward for cogitation by inner features (also material in

8 *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London, 1655). In both this and *Poems, and Fancies* (1653), Cavendish borrowed from Epicurean and Stoic philosophy to flesh out a stance that posits how our grasp of truth may shift. Depending on circumstances, an understanding of theories of probability (which posit that a given set of actions is likely to have particular results but may have others) or necessity (which account for things beyond our control) may be equally useful for pointing us toward further knowledge.

9 For good discussions of the novel in relation to Renaissance drama, see Jean Jules Jusserand, *The English Novel in the Time of Shakespeare*, trans. Elizabeth Lee (London: Unwin, 1890); Steven Moore, *The Novel, An Alternative History: Beginnings to 1600* (New York: Continuum, 2010); and Kate Louise Rumbold, *Shakespeare and the Eighteenth-Century Novel: Cultures of Quotation from Samuel Richardson to Jane Austen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

10 Margaret Cavendish, *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*, ed. Sara H. Mendelson (Ontario: Broadview, 2016), 59, hereafter *Blazing World*. All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

11 In 1605, Francis Bacon asserted that the "literary" (his word) and the empirical categories were complementary, two forms of scientia, or knowledge, that contextualize each other. See chap. 2 of Francis Bacon, *Of the Proficience and Advancement of Learning* (London, 1605).

nature) developed precisely for that purpose. There is no Platonic realm of truth accessible to material perceptions (and no non-material mind à la Descartes to transcend that materiality), and for this reason, ultimately "all do ground their Opinions upon Reason; that is, upon rational probabilities, at least, they think they do."[12]

After clarifying for her reader both the strengths and the weaknesses peculiar to the pursuit of fact-based truth—our perceptions of reality are both generally reliable and physiologically limited—and after explaining how and why such intellectual ventures must always be understood as probabilities or approximations, whereby "some may come nearer the mark than others," she then turns to the new genre she is developing.[13] The shift in literary form will allow for a novel engagement with many of the same elements already developed in her science treatise, but the trajectory will be entirely distinct, since "[t]he end of Reason is Truth; the end of Fancy is Fiction." As she leads her readers into new territory, here, she wants to be clear about what her new genre is meant to achieve. "But mistake me not," she warns, "when I distinguish *Fancy* from *Reason*; I mean not as if Fancy were not made of the Rational parts of Matter; but by reason I understand a rational search and enquiry into the causes of natural effects; and by Fancy a voluntary creation or production of the Mind." Cavendish distinguishes between two modes for understanding two corresponding aspects of reality: science and philosophy treat of the *actual* (the rational observation and elucidation of the facts or "natural effects" available to perception), while fiction aims at *potential* (the propositional form of reason which extrapolates freely from those facts toward larger patterns of truth via imagination). No surprise that key elements of Aristotle's famous model for understanding the wholeness of reality emerge here, since, in contrast to Plato's or Augustine's non-material models of transcendent truth, Aristotle's paradigm in *Metaphysics* was as firmly anchored in the material world as Cavendish's.[14] Another way of grasping what she is getting at in her preface, then, is to say that she wants two very different *mindsets* for dealing with human approximations of the larger unities (actual and potential) that make up the "one Truth in Nature."[15] Factual exposition is one mode useful for getting into the state of mind most appropriate for the pursuit of truth; fiction is a different mode, useful for getting into another state of mind altogether. The particular benefit of this latter mode, which is in part meant to "recreate [refresh] the Mind, and withdraw it from its more serious contemplations," is that it more fully and formally insists on something so easily lost to view in the dense treatises of science or the chronicles of history: the quest for knowledge

12 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 59.

13 Note that there is never any question regarding the importance of her science treatise. What follows is not, she insists, "a disparagement to Philosophy, or out of an opinion, as if those noble study were but a Fiction of the Mind." *Blazing World*, 59.

14 Much of Cavendish's early philosophical work engaged with Aristotle on various levels. In "Further Observations upon Experimental Philosophy" she even goes out of her way to defend "Aristotle, who is beaten by all." She goes on, "In my opinion, he was a very subtle philosopher, and an ingenious man." *Observations*, 195.

15 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 59.

must include invention (how do we apply what we observe?) and problem-solving (what can the past teach us for solving the great riddles of life?)—simply describing events, processes, or phenomena is insufficient. That is, some parts of science are (and must be) like a game, an inviting fictional arena with a different set of rules for engaging with possibility.[16]

After explaining the particular purpose of the new literary form she has developed (that is, to refresh the mind in the game-like mode of propositional or imaginative reasoning), Cavendish then moves on to explain the elements of that form. What follows, she notes, is fiction, yet it is *not* an amorphously fanciful spree untethered from the philosophical pursuits of *Observations*: "But lest my Fancy should stray too much, I chose such Fiction as would be agreeable to the subject I treated of in the former parts [her science treatise]." Once more, she is quite careful to make a distinction between what her reader might reasonably suppose about her fictional project and what that project actually entails. In this case, she notes that she is not creating a science romance in the mode of "Lucian's" or "The French man's [Cyrano de Bergerac's] *World in the Moon*."[17] Rather, the novelty of her form is to be found in its progressing frames of reference: "The first part whereof is *Romancical*, the second *Philosophical*, and the third is meerly *Fancy*, or (as I may call it) *Fantastical*."[18] Close attention to the distinctive features of each part of her "Fiction" suggests that she managed to develop something that happily borrows from Cervantes (and Shakespeare) but goes beyond, incorporating elements that would later come to be thought of as characteristic of eighteenth-century novels. To put it another way, while Cavendish correctly can be understood to model an early iteration of an enduring form of genre literature—in this case, science fiction—she is also moving in the direction of a new verisimilitude, one that relies more on a dramatization of human psychology than on believable "facts" or histories.

The elements of that portrait of believability, detailed below, allow for further questions meant to encourage a richer and more nuanced sense of the rootedness of the later English novel in the narratives of its immediate seventeenth-century predecessors. With respect to Cavendish specifically, there is no particular need to limit this backward glance to *The Blazing World*, since her oeuvre is so generically diverse. For instance, we might wonder how our historical understanding of Samuel Richardson's epistolary novels *Pamela* (1740) and *Clarissa* (1747–1748) might be enhanced, were we to read

16 For a good discussion of Cavendish's persistent desire to link philosophy to pleasure, see Lisa Walters's chapter in this volume.

17 See Savinien Cyrano de Bergerac, *Histoire Comique contenant les Estats et Empires de la Lune* (Paris, 1657); and Lucian of Samosata, *The True History*, translated by Francis Hickes and printed with *Certaine select dialogues of Lucian* in 1634. Cavendish borrows elements of plot and theme from both. For a good discussion of Cavendish in relation to de Bergerac, see Line Cottegnies, "Brilliant Heterodoxy: The Plurality of Worlds in Margaret Cavendish's 'Blazing World' (1666) and Cyrano de Bergerac's 'Estats et Empires de la Lune' (1657)," in *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Brandie R. Siegfried and Lisa T. Sarasohn (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 107–20.

18 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 60.

them in light of Cavendish's *Sociable Letters* (1664) or in relation to *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* (1656) and *The Blazing World*, where female protagonists are seen as prey yet exercise agency and independence of mind despite their difficult circumstances. Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) might take on interesting evolutionary hues in light of Cavendish's heroine-become-empress who, after successful ventures in another land, returns to subdue her home world and its male authorities. What happens to our understanding of parody when the Houyhnhnms and Yahoos of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) gaze back at *The Blazing World*'s coterie of animal-men philosophers? Does Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749) borrow the strategy of the intrusive narrator from Cavendish's early models? Might Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote* (1752) humorously take from Cavendish as well as Cervantes? Or consider Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, where revivification—and the question of what defines a soul—echoes Cavendish's imagined possibilities for "soulification" in *Observations*.[19] Would we appreciate Jane Austen's matchless dialogue even more were it set alongside Cavendish's epistolary fiction, *Sociable Letters*, where we encounter the same "paradoxical form of an impersonal intimacy" that is at once "a kind of perspective and simultaneously the way that perspective is developed within the text"?[20] These questions are the unexplored backdrop for what follows, which is a foray into aspects of Cavendish's narrative fiction meant to aid in future, more thoroughgoing considerations of *The Blazing World* in the history of the novel.

The Romancical

With these research possibilities in mind, we turn to the three-part structure of *The Blazing World*. The first component Cavendish stresses as central to the form she is developing is the "Romancical," a genre famous for magical landscapes, otherworldly creatures, conflicts with monstrous and metaphysically dangerous enemies, and meditations on the meaning of beauty and love. Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1532), Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590–1596), Sidney's *Arcadia* (1581, 1590), and Wroth's *Urania* (1621) kept this genre pertinent to concerns of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century readers. Spenser's work gave Cavendish a strong model for the allegorical potential of the genre; Sidney provided early examples of particularly bold, beautiful, and articulate female characters (Philoclea and Pamela); and Wroth gave female interiority a riveting complexity independent of, though entangled with, male experience. Cervantes's *Don*

19 For recent related discussions useful for thinking about Cavendish, see William Poole, "Francis Godwin, Henry Neville, Margaret Cavendish, H. G. Wells: Some Utopian Debts," *ANQ* 16 (2003): 12–18.

20 See D. A. Miller, *Jane Austen or, The Secret of Style* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 60. See also Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). Twenty-first-century novelists such as Siri Hustvedt and Danielle Dutton pay overt homage to Cavendish, not only as a well-spring of artist thought but as a subject worthy to be a focus of fiction in her own right. See Siri Hustvedt, *The Blazing World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014), and Danielle Dutton, *Margaret the First: A Novel* (New York: Catapult, 2016).

Quixote (1605) proffered a richly insightful burlesque of the genre and began the work of linking the psychological exploration of romance to the realistic social observation that would become the distinctive feature of the eighteenth-century novel. All of these influences are apparent in *The Blazing World*, but it is also worth noting that romance—despite its declining popularity—would have been a natural choice for Cavendish, especially given the series of highly dramatic catastrophes experienced by the English in the early 1660s. The Great Fire of London, another round of plague, and the disastrous sea battle with the Dutch who sailed upriver to destroy the English navy in its own harbour—all were profoundly shocking, with aftereffects that left those documenting these events turning to the bizarre imagery of the biblical Book of Revelation as the best analogue for experience.

Taking up romance's reliance on wandering heroes whose recursive perambulations propel them from one situation to another (with shifts in circumstance and expectation), the first segment of Cavendish's book combines the drama of England's recent collective experience with elements recollected from episodes from her own life. Notably, *The Blazing World*'s plot traces Cavendish's personal history, including the experience of exile, struggles with foreign languages, and an unexpected encounter with a powerful man who falls in love with the heroine, marries her, and grants her unprecedented freedom as a philosopher and world-manager. The roots of the heroine's renown are revealed to be due, in part, to her singular situation in the world of men, as well as to philosophical dialogues with various thinkers. Finally, the book develops a growing certainty that enduring fame would be the result of multiple versions of the philosophical self couched in print and taken up by other minds.[21] As threads of collective experience and individual identity are thus woven together upon this loom of romance—recent English history is thoroughly entwined with Cavendish's personal experience and hopes—her readers are encouraged to be double minded as they approach an otherwise all too familiar opening scene:

> A Merchant travelling into a forreign Countrey, fell extreamly 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; however his love growing more and more vehement upon him, even to the slighting of all difficulties, he resolved at last to steal her away.[22]

The account begins with an omniscient point of view, stressing not the heroine's sense of things but the kidnapper's rationalizations for abduction, especially his fierce "Love" and equally fierce frustrations at differences of "Birth and Wealth" that would make

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21 For the parallel account in Cavendish's early memoir, see *A True Relation*, in *Natures Pictures* (London, 1656). See also "Phantasm's Masque," in *Poems, and Fancies* (1563, 1664, 1668), where she similarly redacts her own biography into the account of a fictional heroine. Note that Utopian fiction similarly takes up recognizable elements of history. For a good discussion of this in relation to Cavendish, see Marina Leslie, *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

22 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 61.

appropriately persuasive overtures impossible. Furthermore, we learn that "when he fancied himself the happiest man of the World, he proved to be most unfortunate," a moment of dramatic irony in which his mounting joy is reversed by "Heaven," which, "frowning at his theft, raised such a Tempest, as they knew not what to do, or whither to steer their course." This corrective action swiftly propels his ship to the "North-pole," where the kidnapper and crew freeze to death and "the young Lady onely, by the light of her Beauty, and heat of her Youth, and Protection of the Gods" remains alive. As it turns out, there is a passage from the pole of her world to the pole of another, and the ship carries her though it—from the home of her youth into a new and foreign realm of wonder.

At this point, the narrator disrupts the story to directly address the reader and explain how a particular theory of science might explain this multiple-worlds phenomenon. If this is a slightly heavy-handed reminder that Cavendish's own science treatise is joined to her *Blazing World* at their respective poles, it is also the point at which the narrator insists on joining us more overtly in observing and occasionally commenting on the action. When this omniscient, intrusive narrator moves back to the story proper, she turns our attention to the perspective of the victim-become-heroine, for "the distressed Lady, she seeing all the Men dead, found small comfort in life." In the old world, the heroine's point of view did not yet matter, but the narrative of the new world begins with her perspective. Alone and surrounded by rotting bodies on the stranded ship, the lady scans the horizon in hopes of some further recourse, only to discover coming towards her across the ice, "strange Creatures, in shape like Bears, onely they went upright as men."[23] She is taken to safety as their guest, but her discomfort in the extreme cold is obvious, so the bear-like creatures of the city decide to take her to the warmer abode of the Emperor. On their way, they encounter "Fox-men," "Bird-men," "Satyrs" (as Mendelson notes, probably referring to orangutans), and various other creatures who combine animal forms with particular types of intelligence and expertise. In fact, the narrator tells us, they had developed "extraordinary Art, much to be taken notice of by experimental Philosophers."[24] More particularly, in this instance, there was "a certain Engine, which would draw in a great quantity of air, and shoot forth wind with a great force; this Engine in a calm, they placed behind their ships, and in a storm, before; for it served against the raging waves."[25] The propositional aspect of reason that romance is meant to foster becomes apparent in the first of many scenes where something familiar, such as a bellows, is shown to have potential properties useful for solving problems yet to be explored in the "real" world of the reader.

The heroine and her guides pass several cities on their way, "some of Marbel, some of Alabaster, some of Agat, some of Amber, some of Coral, and some of other precious materials not known in our world."[26] Shakespeare's poetic rendering of time's

23 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 62.

24 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 65n1.

25 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 65–66.

26 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 68.

transformative power chimes softly here: "Full fathom five thy father lies, / Of his bones are coral made; / Those are pearls that were his eyes; / Nothing of him that doth fade, / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange."[27] Shakespeare's prospect of rich transformation sets the stage, so to speak, for the metamorphosis of thought in Cavendish's book as the narrator takes her travellers from literary and biographical memory to imagined realms of propositional reasoning. As the heroine and her guides approach the "Imperial City," also called "Paradise," we learn that it is a place of waterways (allowing for convenient travel) and magnificent buildings. If this sounds suspiciously like an amalgamation of London, Paris, and Antwerp, it should[28]—but the language of this passage also takes up biblical visions of the New Jerusalem, where "home" is the place of new beginnings drawn out of life's ferocious and confounding experiences. For readers steeped in the Book of Revelation, where a torn world gives way to a new realm typified by buildings and temples made of "pearls," "jasper," "gold," and "clear glass"—and where the dwellings are lit by their own radiance, "like a most rare jewel"—Cavendish's "Imperial City" would have been immediately recognizable.[29] In fact, she further cues her readers to her sources by stressing the religious orientation of the city's dominant structures. The passageway from the city to the palace "had on either hand a Cloyster, the outward part whereof stood upon Arches sustained by Pillars … the Palace it self appear'd in its middle like the Isle of a Church" and "between the outward and inward part of the Cloyster, were the Lodgings for Attendants." Subsequent descriptions of the various apartments of the palace again rely heavily on the Book of Revelation, and we are not surprised to learn, given the religious orientation of the place, that the heroine is mistaken for the divine female figure at the gates of the New Jerusalem, invoking the humour of displaced associations: "No sooner was the Lady brought before the Emperor, but he conceived her to be some Goddess, and offered to worship her." She refuses, explaining she is only mortal, and the Emperor responds by giving her "absolute power to rule and govern all that World as she pleased."[30] This is where a fairy tale might end, but it is precisely here that Cavendish's book of unveiling opens out to the landscape of her *Observations*.

Taking on her new identity in this foreign realm, the heroine-made-Empress accouters herself in garments studded with precious jewels, including a diamond buckler

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27 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 1.2.397–402.

28 For further discussion of Cavendish's fruitful experiences in cosmopolitan Antwerp, see James Fitzmaurice's chapter in this volume.

29 See Revelation 21–22.

30 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 68–70. Worth noting here is Williams's prefatory poem to *Sociable Letters*, wherein reason is the "Emperour in every Head … And thus her [Cavendish's] thoughts, the Creatures of her Mind, / Do Travel through the world amongst mankind … / And Observation Guides them back again / To reason, their Great King, that's in the Brain." See "Upon her Excellency the Authoress" in Margaret Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, ed. James Fitzmaurice (Toronto: Broadview, 2004), 44.

that "shewed like a Rain-bow," then heads out to learn all she can, for she "desired to be informed both of the manner of their Religion and Government."[31] She will also investigate their theories of natural philosophy. She erects schools and founds several learned societies, and she encourages the local inhabitants to apply themselves to professions "most proper for the nature of their species."[32]

> The Bear-men were to be her Experimental Philosophers, the Bird-men her Astronomers, the Fly-, Worm- and Fish-men her Natural Philosophers, the Ape-men her Chymists, the Satyrs her Galenick Physicians, the Fox-men her Politicians, the Spider- and Lice-men her Mathematicians, the Jackdaw-, Magpie- and Parrot-men her Orators and Logicians, the Gyants her Architects, etc.[33]

Here it is worth recalling that in the segment of *Observations* titled "Of the Rational Soul of Man," Cavendish argued strongly that the "natural soul, otherwise called reason" belongs to all things, and "we cannot in reason conceive that man should be the only creature that partakes of this soul of nature." In fact, "Truly, if all other creatures cannot be denied to be material, they can neither be accounted irrational," since reason is imbedded in the smallest "particle" of matter itself.[34] The beasts here are not merely a parody of the exclusively male Royal Society's fellows; they also provide a vision of lively intelligence working in unexpected forms, within the very creatures Descartes insisted had no power of reasoning.[35]

The Philosophical

The transition from the "Romancical" to the "Philosophical" includes a touch of orientalist intrigue that smacks of the sociological impulses of early seventeenth-century travel literature. Court "Eunuches" and prohibitions against female participation in public religious or political events cause the Empress to wonder whether these men

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31 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 70. The description of the Empress's attire is intentionally reminiscent of the Rainbow portrait of Elizabeth I. In the Second Part of *Blazing World*, Cavendish will again allude to Elizabeth by way of recognizable elements borrowed from the Armada speech, when the Empress addresses her troops. Of course, both this and Queen Elizabeth's original dress harkened back to the image of the Bride standing at the gates of the New Jerusalem at the end of John's book, Revelation.

32 Echoes of Bacon's *New Atlantis* may be discerned throughout. For a more lengthy discussion, see Frédérique Aït-Touati, "Making Worlds: Invention and Fiction in Bacon and Cavendish," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Early Modern Literature and Science*, ed. H. Marchitello and E. Tribble (London: Palgrave, 2017), 489–503.

33 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 71.

34 Cavendish, *Observations*, 221.

35 See René Descartes's "Letter to the Marquis of Newcastle, November 23, 1646," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985–91), 3:304.

"were Jews, Turks, or Christians?"[36] The unremarkable way in which the narrator tells us that females are never allowed out is chilling, despite the tantalizing savour of Persian-inflected captivity narratives.[37] There is something worrying about this narrator. In addition to being occasionally intrusive, she is also unreliable, refusing to assert a moral context for the slave status of the females of this world. Moreover, she has suggestive memory lapses, as when, after first enumerating the kinds of beings inhabiting the new world, she assures us that there were "many more, which I cannot remember."[38] This creates a paradox, the effects of which tend to linger below the tale's waterline only to surface at key moments throughout the subsequent narrative, typically in order to startle us from a too-accommodating posture of complacency as readers. Essentially, by allowing a crack in memory, our storyteller reveals her position of observation to be imperfect, even potentially in error, yet this increases the characterization of the narrator—gives us, that is, an observing character who might be mistaken but is therefore more authentic. This tale starts to feel true, somehow, despite the presence of animal-men and purple or "Grass-green" eunuchs, thanks to this strand of verisimilitude: the verity that in any account that relies on our memory of truth, we are bound to forget something.

The door of the "Romancical" hangs on this subtle hinge—which consists of our actual experience of memory's flaws being yoked to the "trustiness" of a similarly flawed fictional character—and quietly swings open to a "Philosophical" drama of dialogic inquiry. As the tale moves to the "Philosophical," then, we are led not by a flawless guide speaking with absolute authority but by a narrator who bustlingly interrupts the flow of her own story to explain things to the reader, a storyteller who acknowledges the limitations of her own memory with a casual candour that seems "real." This sense of a real consciousness at work in the story is further sustained by the piling up of seeming irrelevancy, of more and more detail that is both engrossing and excessive. The entire first section of *The Blazing World* seems to recapitulate Cavendish's early insistence in *Poems, and Fancies* that the mind is never really fully knowable because at its most characteristic moments it exceeds the tools of scientific narrative (in contrast, think of Hobbes's insistence that he could explain human nature by means of geometric principles). In "The Circle of the Brain Cannot Be Squared," she writes, "A circle round, divided in four parts, / Hath been great study 'mongst the men of arts … / For while the brain is round, no square will be; / While thoughts divide, no figures will agree." The poem goes on to dismiss additional geometrical analogies, concluding, "For such is man's curiosity, and

36 Mendelson notes that contemporaries were familiar with Ottoman practices through the work of Robert Withers, *A Description of the Grand Signor's Seraglio, or Turkish Emperor's Court* (London, 1656). See also James, *Political Writings*, 17n25.

37 For a good discussion of such narratives, see Eric Dursteler, *Renegade Women: Gender, Identity and Boundaries in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). For a broader context, see Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

38 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 71.

mind, / To seek for that which hardest is to find."[39] *The Blazing World*'s narrator and heroine each dramatize this sense that human curiosity—even when temporarily off track or seemingly disorderly—mirrors Nature's infinite capacity to exceed expectation. This sense that human consciousness is a jumble of both receptive experience and leaping curiosity requires a new form of engagement from the reader.[40]

As the narrator turns our attention from physical features of the new world (seascapes, landscapes, architectural detail, and biomorphic descriptions of the new world's inhabitants) to the heroine's conversational exploration of ideas with her animal-men, the story develops a particular relationship between the heroine's wandering (which resulted in new encounters with strange yet familiar forms) and her subsequent wondering (which details her intellectual trek across the terrain of seventeenth-century theories of science). By mustering the palpabilities of animal-men—letting bears and foxes, spiders and worms, all trail their familiar features across the page—the narrator anchors consciousness per se to the material world, for here "tracking" bears is tracking thought; "following" foxes is listening to reasons; "noting" spiders is heeding the logic of algebraic geometry expressed in webs of silk. Because this narrator is both realistically unreliable *and* constantly focused on the heft of nature as the grounds for narration, the seemingly fantastical elements of the tale now function more fully as elements of propositional reason. That is, as our heroine heads into the lively disputations for which the book is famous—where arguments from the attached volume, *Observations*, emerge sometimes in the discourse of the Empress and sometimes in the assertions of the animal-men—the landscape of understanding has been narratively perturbed so that probability is understood to grant proximity to truth, no more and no less. And now, as the heroine engages in conversations with her various societies of animal-men on questions at the heart of moral philosophy and physical science (which in Cavendish's day were still thoroughly entwined), the declarations she makes must be more carefully considered, weighed against the possibility of error and human fallibility.

The heroine-Empress, like the narrator, is an interesting protagonist for this venture, one whose views occasionally exhibit the same sorts of cracks in the seemingly stable landscape of cold reason which were previously revealed at the site of the narrator's openly flawed memory. Mere nuance at the start of the philosophical segment, this point becomes more apparent as the conversations progress. For instance, the Empress's blanket condemnation of "their telescopes"—a stance Cavendish does not take in her science treatise, where, although she does vigorously criticize naive and indiscriminate presumptions about nature based on drawings of things viewed through flawed lenses, she also openly relies on the partial knowledge gained from those same lenses for some of her own suppositions—is not narrated as the proper stance toward the

39 Cavendish, "The Circle of the Brain Cannot Be Squared," *Poems and Fancies*, ed. Brandie R. Siegfried (Toronto: Iter, 2018), 134.

40 For a slightly different take on this aspect of Cavendish's works, see Line Cottegnies's chapter in this volume.

tools of science but as the annoying overgeneralization that becomes the provocation for the Bear-men to reveal their own previously unacknowledged motivation. When commanded to destroy their "Telescopes," they kneel and patiently explain that in addition to the sheer delight in gazing at "Celestial bodies" there is another pleasure at stake. "Besides," they go on,

> we shall want imployments for our senses, and subjects for arguments; for were there nothing but truth, and no falshood, there would be no occasion for to dispute, and by this means we should want [lack] the aim and pleasure of our endeavours in confuting and contradicting each other; neither would one man be thought wiser then another, but all would either be alike knowing and wise, or all would be fools.

The Empress consents but insists that their disputations be held within "Schools."[41] At the outset of this scene, the Empress espouses a notion of truth that relies on a highly uncharacteristic (for Cavendish) embrace of certainty: since telescopes cannot provide certain knowledge, they should be destroyed. The Empress does not revise that position—she merely allows for a restricted form of vanity to appease her people.[42] The Bear-men, rather than arguing for probable knowledge and the methodologies that would help nudge the results of their inquiries into closer proximity to truth, simply argue for unfettered inquiry and purposeless social status. Neither of these positions is embraced by Cavendish in the prologue to the story, which suggests that we are not watching a heroine who is merely the author's avatar for wish-fulfillment; rather we are following the intellectual journey of a compellingly attractive but clearly flawed character, a wondering heroine *for* whom we cheer but *at* whom we aim a measuring gaze. In fact, the lingering influence of the prologue is the slender thread which, like Ariadne's, is meant to guide us back to the simple premise with which Cavendish began: fiction aims at *potential*; it is the propositional form of reason which extrapolates freely from facts toward larger patterns of truth via imagination. With that thread lightly in hand as we retrace our steps through this exchange, the scene's true rhetorical path may be discerned, for the implication through negation is simply this: open debates, divorced from vain desires for social status, are better for the sake of truth than dogmatic assertions (the Empress) or aimless inquiry (the Bear-men). The further inference is that since all modes of perception (instrumentally augmented or not) are limited, multiple means of garnering further information provide a better approximation of reality than any single effort could.

These moments stack up in the philosophical segment, and one of the results is a growing sense of distance between the author (whose views are set forth in the prologue), the narrator (who is intrusive and unreliable), and the heroine of the story (who

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41 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 79.

42 Remember that in *Observations*, Cavendish critiques the naive "certainties" that artificial lenses bring their viewers; she strongly urges methods that run such encounters through various modes of reasoned/rational critique, such as those she models throughout her treatise.

often contradicts the author's philosophy and the narrator's commentary).[43] Moreover, the back-and-forth of the question-response segment echoes "An Argumental Discourse," which opens *Observations*:

> When I was setting forth this book of Observations upon Experimental Philosophy, a dispute chanced to arise between the rational parts of my mind concerning some chief points and principles in natural philosophy; for, some new thoughts endeavouring to oppose and call in question the truth of my former conceptions, caused a war in my mind; which in time grew to that height, that they were hardly able to compose the differences between themselves, but were in a manner necessitated to refer them to the arbitration of the impartial reader … to reduce them to a settled peace and agreement.[44]

The various conversational exchanges in *The Blazing World* merely multiply, humorously, the process that *Observations* granted as central to any serious inquiry.

As the Empress continues her investigations, her queries eventually lead to considerations of matter and the possibility of immaterial beings. Disembodied spirits promptly enter the scene. Authoritative (in places even bombastic) yet accommodating of her questions, these entities proffer an alternative to the animal-men whose various intelligences dramatized the core of Cavendish's philosophy—all matter is intelligent, and all intelligence is material—and the Empress finds her mind taken up with assertions about immateriality, the possibility of occult knowledge (or hermetic philosophy), and the paradox of material minds producing immaterial thought. As in the exchanges with the animal-men, the Empress and the "Spirits" do not neatly divide their discursive parts so that the protagonist always advances Cavendish's own ideas. Sometimes she does, but at other times the Spirits do, as when they articulate a many-worlds theory or suggest that there is only one supernatural good "which was God," thus contradicting their own existence.[45] In fact, as they continue, the Spirits almost word-for-word recount key passages from *Observations*. For instance, on the topic of Nature, they assert,

> Nature is but one Infinite self-moving, living and self-knowing body, consisting of three degrees of inanimate, sensitive and rational Matter, so intermixt together, that no part of Nature, were it an Atome, can be without any of these three degrees; the sensitive is the life, the rational the soul, and the inanimate part, the body of Infinite Nature.[46]

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43 This is not to say that Cavendish never puts her own ideas in the mouth of her heroine. She does. But she does not always do so, and frequently other creatures are given the opportunity to iterate views from *Observations* while the Empress expresses agreement in some cases or confusion at the complexity of the idea in others. Jen Boyle's in-progress digital edition of the *Blazing World* with glosses from *Observations*, currently titled *Observations upon a Blazing World*, will make such moments easier to trace.

44 Cavendish, *Observations*, 23. The catechism-like structure is most noticeable in *Blazing World*, 23–42.

45 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 114.

46 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 114.

These Spirits begin to look suspiciously like the seemingly disembodied character of ideas per se rather than spiritual entities with minds of their own.

No surprise that the Empress's mind leaps from questions about a "Plastik power in Nature" to whether "all Beasts could speak?" More questions arise, but not systematically as in disquisition—they pile up helter-skelter the way they do in a curious person eagerly engaging with the expanse of possible knowledge: do souls choose bodies? Are spirits naked? Were animals always able to talk? Were "all those Creatures that were in Paradise … also in Noah's Ark?" A lengthy dismissal of numerology is developed, and the math of infinitesimals, though granted its due, is revealed to be a limited tool for expressing Nature's infinite capacity.[47] The seemingly trivial is interspersed with larger questions, including the possibility of metaphysical evil, the function of memory in relation to forethought, the definition and nature of a world per se, and what it means to have a soul.[48] Parodies of contemporary thinkers such as Van Helmont and Henry More are interspersed with queries of more import, a strategy that insists on a mode of reading necessarily steeped in the game of sorting.

The Fantastical

With the hanging questions of worlds and souls piling up like clouds on the horizon of thought, the Empress decides to work up a cabbala of her own. She needs a scribe, but Aristotle, Pythagoras, Plato, Epicurus, and the like are all rejected as "so wedded to their own opinions, that they would never have the patience to be Scribes."[49] Contemporary philosophers are also rejected—Galileo, Gassendi, Descartes, Helmont, Hobbes, and More (in fact, everyone whose theories have been discussed in the preceding passages)—since they would "scorn to be Scribes to a woman." Instead, the Spirits suggest someone else, "a Lady, the Duchess of Newcastle," who is described as "not one of the most learned, eloquent, witty and ingenious, yet she is a plain and rational Writer, for the principle of her Writings, is Sense and Reason."[50] With the introduction of the Duchess of Newcastle as a character within the novel, the frame now widens to include not only the "Romancical" with which we began, and the "Philosophical" through which we have just ranged, but also the "Fantastical," which redoubles the opportunity for comedy even as it more firmly establishes the common ground shared by the book's other two genres. Indeed, granted that romance is the genre of the human psyche exploring a moral universe, and given that natural philosophy is the mode for systematically examining how real worlds work, the "Fantastical" is not so much a third category as a fusion of the other two—the hermaphroditical genre for understanding how the mind makes worlds. This is where Cavendish's debt to Cervantes is most visible and where her ingenuity with "fiction" is most distinctive.

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47 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 108, 110, 112–15.

48 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 111, 104–5.

49 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 119.

50 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 119.

As the two women set about making their worlds, we learn that the Duchess "was most earnest and industrious to make her world, because she had none at present." She considers the opinions of Thales, Epicurus, and Aristotle and

> endeavored to create a World according to Aristotle's Opinion; but remembering that her mind, as most of the Learned hold it, was Immaterial, and that according to Aristotle's Principle, out of Nothing, Nothing could be made; she was forced to desist from that work.

The absurd logic here is meant to further distance the character of the Duchess from Cavendish the author through a delicious strand of narrative irony—Cavendish the author has not been "converted" to the notion of immaterial soul or mind as the character of the Duchess has.[51] In fact, *Observations* emphatically rejects the idea of nonmaterial mind—Cavendish does not believe it, and she does not want us to believe it. The character of the Duchess, in contrast, continues to struggle with possible paradigms for creating her own world, even as the narrator turns to similar struggles bedeviling the Empress:

> In the meantime the Empress was also making and dissolving several worlds in her own mind and was so puzzled, that she could not settle in any of them; wherefore she sent for the Duchess, who being ready to wait on the Empress, carried her beloved world along with her, and invited the Empress's Soul to observe the frame, order and Government of it. Her Majesty was so ravished with the perception of it, that her soul desired to live in the Duchess's World; but the Duchess advised her to make such another World in her own mind; for, said she, your Majesties mind is full of rational corporeal motions, and the rational motions of my mind shall assist you by the help of sensitive expressions, with the best instructions they are able to give you.[52]

Subsequent scenes all revolve around the pleasure of the game: what governments do you most admire and why? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each? The exchanges on various topics are surprisingly similar to the sorts of decisions and problem-solving involved in the popular modern game of WorldCraft, a game that combines the pleasures of creation and competition with fascinating questions about what a desirable world looks like and how it should be run. Notably, it is the Duchess who interjects doubt as to the reliability of the Spirits with whom the Empress has been so thoroughly engaged in the previous two dozen pages. When the Empress insists she will be instructed by the Spirits to avoid "gross errors" in her cabbala, or world-patterning, the Duchess replies, "Alas! … Spirits are as ignorant as Mortals in many cases, for no created spirits have a general or absolute knowledge."[53] In short, the hilarious moment when the author appears as a character in the novel happens with the explicit object of dismissing certainty.

What follows is an interesting hall of mirrors in which Cavendish the author is sometimes reflected in the character of the Duchess and sometimes in the character of the Empress. After considering cabbalas based on theology, mathematics, ethics, and political

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51 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 124–25.

52 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 126.

53 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 120.

theory, the Duchess prods the Empress in the direction of the kind of book in which they both currently appear, a "fictional" yet material world which the reader holds in her hands: "I would advise you, rather, to make a Poetical or Romancical Cabbala, wherein you can use Metaphors, Allegories, Similitudes, etc., and interpret them as you please." After settling on this, the Empress gives the Duchess leave to "return to her Husband and Kindred into her native world, but upon condition, that her soul should visit [the Empress] now and then" for the sake of their "intimate friendship." In subsequent visits they discuss frustrated ambition and melancholy; the niceties of why and how an aristocratic title may be used; the possibility of the Duchess becoming an empress of another world as the heroine had; and the shameful attitude of playwrights in Cavendish's world who "condemn" a good "Relation" [story] "into a Chimney-corner, fitter for old Women's Tales, then Theatres."[54]

Eventually, after an especially long visit, the Duchess misses her husband, William, and the Empress decides to accompany the Duchess to the world where the Newcastles reside. They enter the Duchess's world, visit courts of law and churches, take a view of the royal family, and travel through Nottinghamshire, into Sherwood Forest, and on to the Duke's house, where they observe William for a time as he directs his horses in "the Art of Mannage" and then practises "the exercise of the Sword." This spiralling journey comes to another comedic pitch when the Duchess, worried that her "Husband used such a violent exercise before meat," promptly leaves the "areal Vehicle" in which she and the Empress had been travelling and enters William's head. The Empress follows, and the imperturbable William, ever the good host, graciously welcomes them.[55] This world of the mind is filled with an "immaterial assembly" who witnesses oratorical debates between the Duchess and Fortune, and appearances by Truth and Honesty, who denounce the Newcastles' bad fortune as undeserved. The scene concludes with friendship all around.[56]

Note that the intrusive narrator is still at work in the Fantastical segment, and she jostles her way into the middle of the tale of travel in the Duchess's world: "But one thing I forgot all this while," she interrupts—and after an aside on souls, air, and the vehicles used for soulful travel, she reluctantly subsides, "And now to return to my former Story." This time, however, the narrator's bumptiousness is matched by the outrageousness of the scene taking place in William's head, and it helps us to see something quite particular about Cavendish's latest manoeuvre—she is creating a moment of laughing with her reader by laughing at herself and William. The laughter here is stripped of judgemental tones even as judgement is the locus of the oratorical entertainment.[57] This structure for laughing with her reader is also a prompt *for* her reader on how to engage with the final short segment, "The Second Part of the Description of the New Blazing World," wherein

54 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 129.

55 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 132.

56 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 128–41.

57 The debate with Fortune concerning William's unfair treatment at the hand of an ungrateful monarch allows for judgement to be directed elsewhere.

the Empress once more seeks the counsel of the Duchess on the question of how to get back to "the World she came from."[58] The book began with a young woman being swept across a watery passage from one world into another, and it ends with that same woman, now an empress, needing to find her way back in hopes of providing "assistance" against those attacking her "Native Country, where all her Friends and Relations did live." The imaginative Duchess suggests that they employ mermen to find the original passage, and once found, they begin preparations. When all is ready, they decide that the Duchess will travel with her friend in the soul of the Empress, and after a spectacular victory—a burlesque in which the Empress performs snippets from Queen Elizabeth's Tilbury speech while harnessing her Fish-men to bear her up so that she seems to walk on waves—the Empress, the Duchess, and the narrator at last fold into one another.

The final scene of the book intensifies this fan-like folding and unfolding of authorial identity: the Duchess is back in her world, but her friends often ask her to tell of the Empress and the "Blazing-world," which she does, explaining of the Empress that she "spent most of her time in the study of Natural Causes and Effects … and she loved to discourse sometimes with the most Learned persons of that World."[59] Still within the fictional frame, the Duchess takes her listening friends back to the spectacular jewel-based architecture of the city of "Paradise," now adding "Unicorns" and "Gyants" to the tale as we retrace our steps from the Fantastical, past the Philosophical, and back to the Romancical. The book ends the way Shakespeare concludes *The Tempest*, with a character/narrator/author inviting the audience to hear all three speaking in one, and encouraging the audience to take up and continue the tale in their own minds as they leave this one: "and if any should like the World I have made, and be willing to be my Subjects, they may imagine themselves such, and they are such; I mean, in their Minds, Fancies, or Imaginations; but if they cannot endure to be subjects, they may create Worlds of their own, and Govern themselves as they please." Cavendish's "Fiction" essentially ends with the directive, "Play on!"

To conclude, *The Blazing World* takes the burlesque of romance further than Cervantes did, reaching toward forms of verisimilitude that would eventually become common elements of the eighteenth-century novel. First, in the course of creating a genre suited to pleasure and propositional reasoning, Cavendish underscores her endeavour's philosophical premise—knowledge is probable, not certain—by crafting an intrusive, unreliable narrator. Additionally, in order to create an engaging heroine meant to mirror Cavendish's sense that the mind always exceeds the strictures of method even as it benefits from reason, she develops a special mode for expressing consciousness, what James Wood (speaking of Shakespeare) calls "a rambling consciousness," typified by "those moments when a character is allowed to drift, to go on mental safaris, to travel into apparent irrelevance, to be beside the point."[60] Furthermore, Cavendish relies on dialogue as a means of unveiling hidden motivations and contradictions in thought, a

58 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 143.

59 Cavendish, *Blazing World*, 161.

60 James Wood, *The Irresponsible Self: On Laughter and the Novel* (New York: Picador, 2004), 33.

move that gives us a different sense of the "truth" of the moment than the narrator's commentary. Finally, the novelist invites the reader to laugh with her by laughing at her, placing a recognizable version herself in the most absurd circumstances that nevertheless enhance bonds of friendship for the characters within the tale while inviting readers to feel they, too, share those bonds. Jane Austen would eventually burnish these same elements to a fine sheen of insight and delight.

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