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Hybridity of Genres in Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*❖

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ABSTRACT

The prose fiction *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* was published by Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, as a supplement to her scientific treatise *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* in 1666. The generic structures of the work have been hotly debated among Cavendish scholars. This essay argues that *The Blazing World* is a prose fiction composed of "hybrid" rather than simply "mixed" genres, in which the various generic modes are organically intertwined within the body of the work much like a "textual cyborg." Exploiting the cannibalistic potential of the newly emerging form of the novel to consume preceding genres into its textual body, Cavendish adopts various generic modes in *The Blazing World*, incorporating elements of romance, utopia, Menippean satire, science fiction, and political allegory. Each generic mode is carefully chosen by Cavendish as a suitable vehicle to advance her ideas on issues in politics, natural philosophy, social customs, religious practices, and artistic productions. As a prose fiction crossing generic boundaries, *The Blazing World* is thus an important precursor of prose fiction with hybrid genres, which anticipates the further development of the genre of the novel in the eighteenth century and beyond.

KEYWORDS: genre study, romance, utopia, science fiction, satire, allegory, the novel

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I. Introduction

The prose fiction *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* was published by Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, as a supplement to her scientific treatise *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* in 1666.[1] Although *The Blazing World* is generally viewed as a fictional utopia, the work exceeds and resists generic classification. Numerous Cavendish critics have noticed the appearance of various elements from different genres in *The Blazing World*, and the scholarly designations of genres for this work are highly diverse and inconsistent. Many scholars have indicated the mixed nature of *The Blazing World*, yet in doing so they have tended to focus on the discontinuity of various generic elements in the work.[2]

[1] In my essay I refer to the former work as *Blazing World* and the latter as *Observations* when I cite them parenthetically. Otherwise I would follow most Cavendish scholars and refer to the former work as *The Blazing World*. All the original spelling and punctuation from the 1666 edition have been retained in the quotations.

[2] For example, Josephine Donovan calls *The Blazing World* a "utopian fantasy" as well as a "feminist fantas[y]" (49, 83). Katie Whitaker describes this work as "a work of varied and surprising imagination, combining elements of fantasy, science fiction, romance, utopian political theory, and philosophical and theological debates" (282). Sarah Hutton states that Cavendish's "subject matter includes both fact and fiction, philosophy and fantasy" and that there is "baffling blend of comic and serious elements" in her writings (161). Quoting Cavendish's own words, Nicole Pohl regards the work as a utopia "of mixt Natures," and finds in it a combination of "a fantastic travel account, scientific didactic prose and fairy tale" (55). Highlighting Cavendish's own definition of "the hermaphrodite" as "of mixt Natures," Pohl describes how the work is "doubly hermaphroditical," not only because of its position as a supplement to a scientific treatise *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, but also because of its combination of several generic elements (55). While Sarah H. Mendelson directly calls *The Blazing World* "science fiction masterpiece" (Introduction xvi); in an essay published in the same year, Tien-yi Chao points out that *The Blazing World* can "be read as a survey of the author's . . . various writing styles" without giving it a specific generic denotation ("Contemplation" 60). Later in 2012, Chao observes that "Cavendish was apparently familiar with the rules of various genres, enabling her to innovate and hold up to ridicule mainstream literary practices" ("'Between'" 74). In an essay comparing Cavendish and Milton, Stephen Hequembourg refers to *The Blazing World* as "a utopian fiction" (177). Anne M. Thell calls *The Blazing World* "a fantastical travel narrative" and particularly describes this work as "shape-shifting as it does from romance to philosophy to autobiography" (128, 20). However, Thell's term of "shape-shifting" refers more to the shifting of narrative worlds and personas than to genres. For genre-shifting, Thell merely quotes Cavendish's own words about the division of her fiction into three parts: "Romancical," "Philosophical," and "Fancy" without further analyzing the exact ways in which Cavendish shifts among the genres (20). Matthew J. Rigilano refers to *The Blazing World* as a "philosophical adventure" and "fantastic quasi-utopia" (71, 78). Jen E. Boyle simply calls *The Blazing World* a "romance" (145), but also indicates the feature of "genre-crossing" in Cavendish's oeuvre and how the genres in her work can be "read as iterative variations on her broader philosophy" (145, 164). In the introduction to her edited volume of Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies* (2018), Brandie R. Siegfried refers to *The Blazing World* as a "science-fictional romance" and notes Cavendish's experimentation with literary genres in all her writings (3, 13). Siegfried observes

Instead of using the term "mixed," I propose using "hybrid" to describe the generic structures of Cavendish's work. While the term "mixed" describes different genres sewn together like "patchwork" in one piece of work whereby it might be easy to find where one genre ends and another starts, the term "hybrid," as in hybrid organisms, highlights the fact that the different genres are so organically entwined with and grown into one another that it is difficult to disentangle the genres from one another.

The lack of consensus among Cavendish critics as to the generic structures of *The Blazing World* is indicative of the fact that Cavendish does not follow conventional generic rules, but instead incorporates different generic elements as they suit her narrative purposes. In this essay, I argue that by deliberately defying fixed conventions of traditional genres, Cavendish adopts various generic modes in this prose fiction, each carefully chosen as a suitable vehicle to advance her ideas on issues in politics, natural philosophy, social customs, religious practices, and artistic productions. As a prose fiction crossing generic boundaries, *The Blazing World* is thus an important precursor of prose fiction with hybrid genres, anticipating novelistic works such as Delarivier Manley's *The New Atalantis* (1709) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). By disentangling the numerous generic threads embedded in Cavendish's work, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of the development of prose fiction and the novel in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

II. Early Modern English Prose Fiction Combining Different Generic Modes

The Blazing World contains elements of different genres, which is a feature shared by some prose fiction written in early modern England. As Rosalie Littell Colie observes, the "literary invention . . . in the Renaissance was largely generic" (17). In Renaissance and seventeenth-century England, many writers chose to combine two or more generic modes in their prose fiction. A survey of the development of prose fiction and the novel demonstrates that the genre of the novel is significantly influenced by numerous other preceding literary

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that Cavendish's *The World's Olio* (1665) "extends her proclivity for literary experimentation" and that Cavendish continues this trend in her *Nature's Pictures*, *Plays*, *Orations of Diverse Sorts*, and *CCXI Sociable Letters* (13); yet in this introduction Siegfried does not further elaborate how Cavendish experiments with literary genres in those works.

genres. The generic hybridity of *The Blazing World* participates in the development of the novel, which—as scholars including Paul Salzman,[3] Michael McKeon,[4] Patricia Meyer Spacks,[5] J. Paul Hunter,[6] and Margaret Anne Doody[7] have shown—was a form that emerged from generic experimentation with preceding literary and textual forms such as epics, romances, travel narratives, histories, letters, journals, pamphlets, dramas, and the like.

In vividly metaphorical terms, Michael McKeon describes how the novel has been viewed as

> the *modern* genre, the newcomer that arrives upon a scene already articulated into conventional generic categories and that proceeds to cannibalize and incorporate bits of other forms—the traditional and canonic genres as well as aberrant, "nonliterary" writings—in order to compose its own conventionality. (11)

McKeon stresses that the novel's "lack of 'internal' rules, its resistance to the authority of traditional convention, its self-creation through the negation of other forms" with its apparent "loss" of structure can actually be viewed as the novel's flexibility, resembling living rather than dead languages (11).[8] Because

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[3] Salzman argues that Renaissance prose fiction was "pre-eminently a series of mixed forms" and points out "a general disappearance of barriers between modes of fiction" in the mid-seventeenth century, which made crossing generic boundaries "particularly flexible" (348, 289, 287). Salzman places Cavendish's *The Blazing World* in the category of utopias and imaginary voyages, describing it as "a most unusual blend of imaginary voyage, utopia, and autobiography" (298).

[4] Michael McKeon indicates the difficulty in classifying seventeenth-century prose fiction into neat literary genres because numerous types of works "intersect with one another to create *strange, hybrid forms*" (25, emphasis added).

[5] Patricia Meyer Spacks observes that the "many recognizable forebears" of the eighteenth-century novel include religious allegory, romance, drama, moral essay, and journalism (13-18).

[6] J. Paul Hunter lists many sources that contribute to the emerging novel, including "popular thought and materials of everyday print—journalism, didactic materials with all kinds of religious and ideological directions, and private papers and histories" (5).

[7] Margaret Anne Doody argues against the concept of the novel "superseding/displacing/replacing" some other genres like epic or romance as entailed in Watt; instead, she focuses on "continuities" and "connectedness" of the novel and other literary genres (*True Story* 2-3, 9). According to Doody, the great tradition of the novel can be traced through the medieval ages back to Ancient Greece and Rome, which then influenced sixteenth-century Spanish novels and seventeenth-century French novels, and was inherited by the English novels in the eighteenth century and beyond (288).

[8] It is noteworthy that Margaret Anne Doody uses the same verb "cannibalizes" in her 1991 essay on *Evelina*. In this essay, Doody analyzes how the novel "enters into dialogue with other works, or

of its lack of established internal rules in its emerging stage, the novel has the flexibility and potentiality to exploit, incorporate, and subsume various elements from other genres in the process of its development.

I agree with Margaret Anne Doody that the genre of the novel was not suddenly invented in the mid-eighteenth century (*True Story* 9), but rather its development involved numerous prose fiction writers who had tried their hands at the preceding genres, selecting from and adopting those modes and elements that best suited their narrative purposes. Cavendish's *The Blazing World* stands out as a significant case in the development of the novel. Cavendish was among the generic experimenters marching boldly ahead of her time; her *The Blazing World* displays a combination of hybrid generic modes with notable innovation. Cavendish's contribution to the development of the novel with her bold innovation and experimentation with generic forms should be brought to the front and properly credited.

III. Cavendish's Idea of Genres

In her preface to *The Life of the thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince William Cavendish* (1667), Cavendish declares her ignorance of the "Rules and Directions" of genres proposed by "Many Learned Men." Sara H. Mendelson argues that Cavendish's apparent assertions of her lack of skills or ignorance of generic rules should be viewed as "a rhetorical ploy" and that they "deny what they appear to assert," because indeed many of Cavendish's prefaces show her familiarity with the "ancient Rules" and canons of genres, but she deliberately rejects them and refuses to be restrained by them ("Playing Games" 198). Mendelson later indicates that "Cavendish consciously flouted the rules that governed contemporary conventions of styles and genre" and was always "eager to try novel formats and hybrid genres" (Introduction xv).

In her essay analyzing Cavendish's use of genres in relation to her political exile, Emma L. E. Rees states that "genre in the 1650s still possessed a *potentiality* and *openendedness*. The generic skeleton of Cavendish's work, *far from being fossilized and immovable*, was not even fully constituted. Indeed,

parodies or *cannibalizes* or subverts them" ("Beyond" 365; emphasis added). This verb accentuates the "devouring" energy of the novel, which subsumes preceding generic forms as it develops into a full-grown genre. Patricia Meyer Spacks similarly points out the novel's liberating absence of rules: "[t]he novel in its newness enjoyed few rules of composition" and that such "absence of established rules" offer "the exhilarating sense of possibility" for fictional experiments (18).

Cavendish treats all genres as having *organic potential and adaptability*" (25; emphasis added). Recalling Michael McKeon and Patricia Meyer Spacks, Rees's argument here underscores the particular potential of the novel at its initiating stage and subsequent development: just because the genres are not yet "fossilized and immovable," the novelistic form can exploit other preceding generic forms to its own advantage, transforming and incorporating their generic features to suit the novelist's needs. For Cavendish, genres are not ossified literary categories but organic modes, consisting of features and techniques that can be exploited for her own use on different occasions. This may explain why Cavendish prefers to adopt the adjective forms such as "romancial," "fantastical," "philosophical," "comical," "tragical," and "historical," rather than the nominal forms of the genres in her own writings, as exemplified in her long descriptions on the title page of her *Natures Picture* (1671).

Although Cavendish does not represent herself as an erudite scholar of the various genres but instead "humbly" calls herself ignorant of the rules in academia, the very fact that she disregards the conventional rules of literary genres may actually empower her to move among different genres rather effortlessly. When she writes, what she focuses on are the main purposes and effects she wants to create through her writings. She resorts to the genres that can best suit her social-political agenda and create certain effects on the readers, or to avoid certain accusations on her pride, self-interest or slandering personages, to name just a few.

IV. Hybrid vs. Mixed Genres

In the introduction to their edited book *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period* (1999), Erica Fudge, Ruth Gilbert, and Susan Wiseman cite Donna Haraway's famous essay "Cyborg Manifesto" to indicate how questions involving hybridity, "transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" were crucial to the early modern period of European Renaissance and Enlightenment (2). According to Haraway, the borders "between the human and the animal," between organism and the machine, and "between the physical and the non-

physical," have become blurred in our posthuman age (2).[9] I will adopt the hybrid nature of Haraway's cyborg concept as the "ultimate dissolver of boundaries" to illustrate Cavendish's fusion of genres in *The Blazing World* (Fudge et al. 7),[10] which further entails the development of the genre of the novel.

In her 2012 essay exploring the influence of alchemy on Cavendish's *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* and *Blazing World*, Tien-yi Chao argues that "Cavendish's writing may be best viewed as an imitation of Nature: dynamic and ever-changing, with all its various parts interlinked" (74). Similarly, Anne M. Thell notes that

> Cavendish's organic materialism posits nature as continuous, infinite, and interdependent. Everything in the universe is made up of an elemental substance, matter, that is not self-sufficient or divisible (like atoms), but codependent and part of a continuous, unified whole (something like a living cell network). (9)

In other words, Cavendish's materialism is "organic," which emphasizes an interdependent engagement among different elements.

Extending Chao's and Thell's arguments, I contend that *The Blazing World* is composed of hybrid genres organically intertwined with each other, instead of mixed genres loosely connected, as in the "framed-novelle," a significant genre whose history and development have been analyzed by Josephine Donovan in her study of early modern prose fiction in England and the European continent from 1405 to 1726. Basing her theory on Russian critic Shklovsky's thesis that links modern novels with collections of short stories, Donovan argues that the framed-novelle is "a progenitor of the novel" (29). In definition, a framed-novella is a framed narrative consisting of many short stories. As part of "casuistry," the frame narrators tell and comment on the stories as cases to support their own theses. According to Donovan, women adopted and modified a male tradition of the framed-novelle (the most notable being Boccaccio's *Decameron*) in order to refute male misogyny and advocate feminist viewpoints.

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[9] Cavendish's invention of the animal-men in *The Blazing World* that blurs the boundaries between humans and animals may be compared to "the cyborg" proposed by Donna Haraway.

[10] This phrase is used to refer to Jonathan Sawday's essay in the same volume.

Donovan argues that Cavendish's *Natures Picture* signals "a movement away from the framed-narrative format and toward the novel" (48). As Donovan indicates, the first part of the work, entitled "SEVERAL Feigned Stories IN VERSE," contains a framed narrative involving several gentlemen and ladies who tell stories and comment on one another's stories. In the second part of the work, entitled "SEVERAL Feigned Stories IN PROSE," Cavendish dismisses the narrative frame altogether, and three of the stories (two novellas and one autobiography) "threaten to break out of the collection completely" and become "autonomous entities in their own right, more mini-novels than novellas" (Donovan 48, 50). Extending Donovan's argument, I contend that structurally Cavendish's *The Blazing World* has moved beyond the simpler formula of the "framed-novelle" with loosely mixed inset stories toward a more organic integration of hybrid genres closely intertwined with one another. Her practice in this text is moving toward the novel *per se* as we know it today.

In summary, in a work with "mixed" genres, different genres are mixed together and presented either sequentially or with one genre embedded in other larger genres in layers. A work written with mixed genres could be based on a framed narrative in which the frame narrators tell stories of different genres, but each embedded story could stand alone as an independent part and be detached or separated from the narrative without harming the natural flow of the story. In contrast, in a work with "hybrid" genres, the boundary of different genres may not be very clear-cut. Instead, like a hybrid living creature, it may be difficult to tell exactly where the previous genre ends and where a new genre begins, or in analogy, to discern exactly where the head ends and the torso of the body begins in a hybrid creature. It may be difficult to excise one generic part from the text without seriously harming the natural flow of the story, which would be, metaphorically, much like removing bodily parts from a living creature and thus leading to its injury, or even death.

V. Hybrid Genres in *The Blazing World*

To illustrate my arguments on the hybridity of genres in Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, in the following sections I will analyze how Cavendish resorts to various genres in her work to suit different purposes, including romance, utopia, Menippean satire, science fiction, and political allegory.

(I) Romance and the "Fantastical"

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, English romance was influenced by Greek romance, medieval chivalric romance, and later French heroic romance, all featuring the protagonists' adventurous travel and love affairs, with elements of fantasy.[11] The *roman d'aventure* (the adventure romance) fashionable during 1619 and 1640 is mostly "episodic and chivalric," but the heroic romance, which grew out of the adventure romance and developed between 1640 and 1665, features an epic structure and is concerned primarily with the burning effects of "love" on the heroes and heroines along with its possible conflict with one's "duty" (Salzman 177-79). The French heroic romances such as Madeleine de Scudéry's "longwinded" works were popular among fashionable British ladies reading in groups in salons.

In her preface to *Natures Picture* (1671), Cavendish claims that she had never finished reading even one romance: "Though some of these Stories be Romancical, I would not be thought to delight in Romances, having never read a whole one in my life." As Nancy Weitz points out, these statements indicate Cavendish's recognition of romance's long-term reputation for immorality despite Cavendish's delights in exploiting the romance genre's potential for creating a story (149). Cavendish reveals her negative judgment on romances in general, a genre notorious for inciting "Amorous thoughts" in the minds of young female readers and subjecting them to the power of passion to the point of follies or vices, instead of love of chastity and virtue.

Textual analysis of the narrative structures of Cavendish's Book I of *Natures Picture* and *The Blazing World* displays the sharp contrast between the "framed-novelle" with mixed inset stories in the former work and the hybrid integration of romance and other genres in the latter. In Book I of *Natures Picture*, Cavendish uses a very short and succinct transitional framed narrative to loosely connect all the inset stories told by different speakers. The boundaries between each individual inset story and the framed narrative are clearly marked with the story titles in italics and a line of space between the framed narrative and the inset stories themselves. Theoretically then, with such clear structural boundaries, each of the inset stories could be detached from the work and still be completely understood and appreciated as an independent narrative.

[11] One prominent example was Sir Philp Sidney's immensely popular *Arcadia* (1593), which combined the pastoral and heroic modes modeling on Greek romance of Heliodorus' *Aethiopica*.

In contrast to *Natures Picture*, the generic boundaries in *The Blazing World* are not that clear-cut. Romance seems only to serve as the frame or backdrop of the story in *The Blazing World*. The beginning of this work reads like a typical romance: "A merchant travelling into a forreign Country, fell extreamly in Love with a young Lady; . . . 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" (Part I, 1). Such opening promises a romance since it involves an innocent virgin in distress, an infatuated young man, and kidnapping as an intrigue. However, this story is soon transformed into an exotic, fantastic journey to an alternative world, in the course of which the lady miraculously becomes the only survivor, while the merchant along with all his sailors are frozen to death (Part I, 2).

Here Cavendish adopts one of the common motifs in traditional romance[12] from the Middle Ages to the Reformation (Cooper 106-36): the "rudderless boat," also known as the "self-steering boat" or the "enchanted boat" (Ma 89), which typically features the leading character(s) being cast on a boat without sail or oar, adrift on the open sea at the mercy of the highest providence. The hero or heroine will then be miraculously saved and survive the sea journey to testify that he or she has passed the test posed by the deity. In *The Blazing World*, the helpless kidnapped virgin is left alone on a boat full of men during the sea journey. Cavendish describes how the divine power is behind this dramatic event: "Heaven frowning at his theft" raises a strong tempest to force the boat towards the North Pole (Part I, 2). As a "self-steering boat," "by assistance and favour of the Gods to this virtuous Lady," this boat carrying the lady and men "so turn and wind through those precipices, as if it had been guided by some Experienced Pilot, and skilful mariner" (Part I, 2). With the succinct description of how the virgin is saved "by the light of her beauty, and the heat of her youth, and Protection of the Gods" (Part I, 2),[13] Cavendish

[12] In *English Romance in Time* (2004), Helen Cooper surveys the conventional motifs of romance from the Middle Ages to the Reformation, including the knights' quest, fighting dragons and monsters, heroes or heroines cast adrift on "rudderless boats" (107), fairy queens, fantasy, magic and the supernatural, actively desiring women in love, and women on trial.

[13] This sentence seems to parody the conventional *deux ex machina* in epic when the heroes are timely saved by gods in a perilous situation. It implies Cavendish's negative view of epic as well as romance, as Donovan indicated, expressed in her *Sociable Letters* (1664): "my Reason believes they Writ Unreasonably, not only of their Feigned Gods, or of their Feigned Fights, and of their Feigned Fortunes or Successes; The truth is, they . . . contain . . . more Impossibilities than Probabilities";

efficiently and effectively links the undercut romance to the utopian and science fictional modes by having the heroine arrive at an alternative new world beyond the Earth.

In "The Epilogue to the Reader," Cavendish playfully remarks: "I have destroyed but some few men in a little Boat, which died through the extremity of cold, and that by the hand of Justice, which was necessitated to punish their crime of stealing away a young and beauteous Lady" (*Blazing World*, Part II, 121). Cavendish's metafictional gesture of admitting killing only some men in her story as punishment for their crime reveals her challenging attitude toward the romance conventions. While in traditional romance it is the gods who determine the fate of the hero/heroine, in *The Blazing World*, Cavendish announces that it is the author herself who assumes the prerogative of the gods to punish or protect the romance characters in the name of justice. By parodying the romance conventions, Cavendish relinquishes the romance framework.

Besides this originally promising romance story that fails the reader's expectation, in one more place Cavendish's work might have shown the potential of the romance, yet the author chooses not to pursue its development along the traditional line of the romance genre: the romance between the abducted lady and the Emperor of the Blazing World. In the process of the encounter and the incredibly short marriage proposal between the nameless lady and the Emperor (*Blazing World*, Part I, 13), the development of the story lacks conventional romance elements such as romantic courtship between the lady and her suitor, the romance language involving irresistible emotions of falling in love, exaggerated love wish and despair, tear-triggering love letters interchanged between the lovers, conflicts between love and duty, or any sort of love intrigue. Unlike the typical love-sick hero of the traditional romance, the Emperor only worships the lady for her goddess-like beauty without expressing any sexual desire; unlike the actively desiring woman craving for love in romance, the lady seems to be more interested in her new power to govern the new world. Such meager romance plot, or *un*romantic plot, shows that Cavendish deliberately cuts out the inflaming descriptions of men's desire over women or women's desire for love in traditional romance, because she condemns romance's negative effect on young hearts, especially women. With

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Cavendish believes that instead of the heroic deeds in epic and romance, characters' behavior "should be Natural . . . for what One man can Disorder, or Rout an Army, with his Single Strength or Courage?" (257; Donovan 3).

this arrangement, Cavendish may avoid any moral censure of her choice to incorporate limited aspects of the romance framework into her story.

(II) Utopia

Since the "romancical" vision is insufficient for Cavendish to launch her social, political and sexual agendas (*Blazing World*; "To the Reader"), she turns to other generic modes for inspiration, here including utopia, satire, and science fiction. Despite their apparently different formal structures, hidden agendas or thematic emphases, one feature common to the three genres is that they often involve imaginary, fictional travel to an alternative world. This feature can be found very early in the storyline of Cavendish's *The Blazing World*.

The opening of *The Blazing World* resembles a romance (Part I, 1-2), yet with the abduction of the lady from the shore onto a boat, an unexpected sea journey quickly starts. After a short digression to explain the scientific principles behind the possibility of entering this alternative new world (Part I, 3),[14] the narrator returns to the main story (Part I, 4). Starting from this and throughout pages four to eighteen, Cavendish gives lengthy observations of various strange inhabitants of that world, the meeting of the heroine with the Emperor, who makes her Empress, and more information about the new world revealed through the Empress's conversation with the statesmen and priests. In this section along with the preceding brief narrative digression, we can find elements of science fiction and utopia so intricately, almost seamlessly, interwoven into the narrative that it is difficult to tell the starting or ending points of each particular genre.

I will first focus on the utopian elements of *The Blazing World*. By its earliest definition as it was coined by Thomas More with his *Utopia* (1516),[15] "utopia" literally means a "good place" which is also "no place," and this punning entails the "contradictoriness" that such "perfect state may be approximated only in the imagination" (Holmesland 3n1). Utopian literature commonly involves a journey to a better but non-existent world. Christine Rees traces the origin of utopian thought to ancient Greece, represented by the

[14] The digression and the familiar tone of the narrator addressing the reader with "You must know . . ." (*Blazing World*, Part I, 4) is reminiscent of Thomas Nashe's intrusive narrator in *Unfortunate Traveller* (for example, the first-person narrator addressing the reader with "You will say, . . . " on p. 255).

[15] *Utopia* was first published in Latin in 1516, and first translated into English in 1551.

simple-life utopias of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, which were later inherited by Renaissance utopian writers such as Thomas More, François Rabelais, and Michel de Montaigne (7-35). On the agenda of the ideal commonwealth established by these founders of ancient and early modern utopias were inquiries into "what the inhabitants of utopia eat and wear, how they spend their time in work, education, and recreation, how they conduct relationships and bring up children, how they deal with those who violate their codes, and their ways of coming to terms with sickness, old age, and finally death" (C. Rees 8).

To serve as a contrast to Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, I will first discuss the structural design of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1551). In More's *Utopia*, the reader is presented with two separate books with fictional letters appended to them. The core story about "Utopia" is narrated by Raphael Hythloday in the second book, but it is framed within the conversation among the fictional "More," "Peter Giles," and Hythloday. There is a clear-cut boundary between the beginning of the descriptions of "Utopia" and the framed narrative, as indicated by the book boundary. More's *Utopia* adopts a framed narrative to contain the utopian narrative in a layered structure; it is easy to cut the utopian narrative off the whole text to form an independent story standing on its own.

Different from the layered structure of the framed narrative in More's *Utopia*, Cavendish's *The Blazing World* integrates the hybrid genres of romance and utopia more organically. In *The Blazing World*, as the story opens with a romance involving a love-sick merchant kidnapping a fair lady from the seashore with a boat, the narrative then shifts its focus on the sea journey of the lady toward the north pole. The sea journey serves as a smooth transition between romance and utopia, as shown in the following passage with the signals of the utopian mode in italics:

> . . . the young Lady onely . . . remaining alive: Neither was it a wonder that the men did freeze to death; for they were not onely driven to the very end or point of the Pole of what World, but *even to another Pole of another World*, which joined close to it; . . . *At last, the Boat still passing on, was forced into another World*: . . . (Part I, 3; emphasis added)

The descriptions of the sea journey connect the two generic modes seamlessly. The romance, the connecting sea journey, and the utopia are so organically intertwined with one another that it is almost impossible to leave out the sea journey or indicate a clear-cut boundary between the two genres.

After undergoing the journey to the unknown world, the nameless lady first encounters "strange Creatures" in shapes of bears who walk upright as men, speaking "in a language which the Lady did not understand" (*Blazing World*, Part I, 4), and then meets other beast-men. Like other travelers to utopian worlds, the lady "endeavoured to learn their language; which after she had obtained so far, that partly by some words and signs she was able to apprehend their meaning" (Part I, 9). After the lady becomes the Empress of the Blazing World, she first calls together all the statesmen and priests, and gradually learns about the current political, religious and social state of the new world through a series of questions and answers. The world has never known war of any kind, because it is ruled by one emperor, and all the inhabitants speak one common language and believe in one religion (Part I, 14-18). Such objective, meticulous descriptions of the grander political, religious, and social structures in a new, unknown place from a visitor's point of view are typical of the utopian fictions by Thomas More and many of his followers.

Cavendish's decision to shift from the "romancical" to the utopian mode is significant, for it reveals her discernment that the genre of utopia better serves women writers seeking a liberating framework in which to voice their reformative or revolutionary messages. Marina Leslie views utopia as a "very unstable ground for charting out the relation of the literary text to its historical context" and shows how utopia is "variously assumed to escape, to challenge, to idealize, or to disguise" history (2, 6). As an exiled royalist writing during the turbulent political upheaval of the Civil War, Cavendish resorts to the utopian mode to promote her ideas on social, political and gender issues in response to contemporary historical events. Since the male-dominated patriarchal world of Cavendish's own time is too restraining for women and the political, religious turmoil in contemporary England is intolerable, Cavendish creates a utopian world in which she sets forth ideal solutions to disconcerting problems in the real world. Therefore, through the eyes of the narrator following the nameless lady, now enthroned as the Empress, the reader is presented with many positive aspects of this alternative world. These are ideal but non-existent

practices in Cavendish's England during the Civil War, but through her utopian creation Cavendish may escape from, challenge, and rewrite history.

Women's utopian visions deviate significantly from traditional men's utopia in that women favor "collectivism" over "hierarchy," and cooperative relations over binary oppositions (Donawerth and Kolmerten 12-14), the latter of the pairs having been deep-rooted and prevalent in men's writings.[16] Christine Rees notes that the classical and Renaissance utopias by men are not wholly "egalitarian" in the exercise of power (18).[17] Rae Rosenthal similarly points out that in feminist utopias women tend to "value egalitarianism, cooperation, connection, tolerance, generosity, and most importantly, harmony" (74-75). In *The Blazing World*, when the Empress wonders why there are no women in the places of their worship, the priests reply that women often cause problems in public places of religious or political activities and that therefore they usually pray at home privately in their own "closets." Upon hearing this, the Empress decides to establish a "Congregation of Women," so that women can worship together. As the narrator comments, the women "generally had quick wits, subtile conceptions, clear understandings, and solid judgments;" thus they soon become expert theologians and "very devout and zealous Sisters," contributing to the general devotion of the citizens under the guidance of the Empress, who assumes the new role as the religious leader (*Blazing World*, Part I, 60).

With post-1960s feminist utopias in mind, Deborah Rosenfelt traces "women's progress from passivity to action, from weakness to strength, from victimization to agency, from silence to expression, from oppression to liberation" (273). These terms could be aptly appropriated to explain Cavendish's generic shift from romance to utopia and her preference to the latter over the former in *The Blazing World*. In the context of romance, Cavendish's heroine appears to be a passive, weak, silent, oppressed victim of the male kidnappers; however, as the framework suddenly shifts to utopia through the sea journey, the liberated heroine is able to transform into an active, strong, potent Empress, freely expressing herself and exercising her power at

[16] For example, utopian societies by male authors such as Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627) and Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines* (1668) are usually constructed upon patriarchy and fail to incorporate women as subjects.

[17] For example, in Plato's utopia, with only a few exceptions, female talents are normally excluded from joining the government, and the ideal governing class would be "male, middle-aged or older, highly educated" (C. Rees 18).

will without any restraint in this alternative world. Such a sharp contrast highlights the unsatisfying limitations of conventional romance and the great potential of utopia to empower women, liberating them from the social, political and gendered stereotypes in the real world.

(III) Menippean Satire

The genre of satire usually involves the triangular relationship among the satirist, the satiric target, and the audience. As Edward W. Rosenheim observes, what satire achieves in its "attack" is either to persuade the reader to condemn the satiric victim, or to please the reader by representing an object "in a degrading manner" (307). Incited by his concern with vice and folly, the satirist as a "moralist" or "social arbiter" resorts to stylistic or rhetorical devices to persuade the audience to take his side in attacking the satiric target (Clark 37). The targets under attack are mostly "historically authentic objects of attack" that are recognized by the audience (Rosenheim 322). Among the various devices, "dialogues and symposiums" are common in Menippean satire to present conflicting philosophical arguments and debates (Bakhtin, *Dialogical Imagination* 21-22; *Problems* 118-20).

Amid the utopian descriptions of the Blazing World, the Empress establishes the "societies of the Vertuoso's" and engages in an extended series of conversations and inquiries on topics of natural philosophy in which a satiric mode gradually emerges and becomes the dominating genre (Part I, 19-60). This long section unfolds with the questions and answers between the Empress and different tribes of inhabitants. The parts involving the Empress's conference with the Bear-men as experimental philosophers (Part I, 26-33), Spider-men as mathematicians (Part I, 55-56), Lice-men as geometricians (Part I, 56), Parrot-men and Magpie-men as orators (Part I, 56), and Jackdaw-men as logicians (Part I, 57-59) are specifically written in the satiric mode, with the aim of ridiculing certain absurdities of these male scientists, philosophers and scholars in their intellectual pursuits.

Sarah Hutton analyzes *The Blazing World* as "a satire on contemporary science" and suggests Cavendish's model to be the Greek satirist Lucian of Samosata (161). Although the scientific debates in Cavendish's work resemble those in Bacon's House of Salomon in *New Atlantis* (1627), Cavendish's societies merely take the form of the House of Salomon but actually reveal her

mockery of such a system. While Bacon presents a fictional *ideal* scientific society with positive implications, Cavendish's societies are composed of many arrogant and quarrelsome virtuosi who are enthusiastic about their absurd experiments.

In this section we see Lucianic influence on Cavendish's work, and Lucian is writing in the greater Menippean tradition. One common satiric device in Menippean satire is the use of the "satiric symposium," in which the characters from various walks of life gather together to talk about topical issues. The content and style of their speech betrays the speaker's own temperament and biased opinions. For example, the Empress shows anger with the disputes among the Bear-men about their different observations of the stars using telescopes, and commands them to break those telescopes. "[B]eing exceedingly troubled at her Majesties displeasure concerning their Telescopes," the Bear-men "kneel'd down, and in the humblest manner petitioned that they might not be broken," admitting that they "take more delight in Artificial delusions, then in natural truths. . . . for were there nothing but truth, and no falshood, there would be no occasion for to dispute, and by this means [they] should want the aim and pleasure of [their] endeavours in confuting and contradicting each other," finally confessing that the telescopes are their "onely delight, and as dear to [them] as [their] lives" (Part I, 28). Through the words spoken by the Bear-men themselves, Cavendish satirically exposes their self-contradiction, which arises from self-interest instead of purely rational pursuit of truths. In a similarly satiric vein, the Parrot-men also unwittingly "act out" their own absurdity as shown in Cavendish's satirical descriptions: "one of the Parrot-men rose with great formality, and endeavoured to make an Eloquent Speech before her Majesty; but before he had half ended, his arguments and divisions being so many, that they caused a great confusion in his brain, he could not go forward, but was forced to retire backward, with the greatest disgrace both to himself, and the whole society" (Part I, 56).

Cavendish does not use the satiric mode throughout this part of the text involving the scientific societies the Empress establishes. Cavendish's satire is targeted at only some of the virtuosi in the societies, particularly Bear-men and Parrot-men.[18] This part of the text, focusing on the conference of the Empress

[18] The satirized virtuosi in the schools and societies founded by the Empress may allude to the real-life virtuosi in the Royal Society of Cavendish's time, demonstrating the underlying political enmity between certain royalist noblemen and the newly arising scientists and scholars who lacked aristocratic backgrounds.

with the scientific virtuosi, is written in the combined generic modes of scientific discourse and satire. When Cavendish considers the topics and issues to be worth exploring and the methods used proper, she casts the conversations in the mode of a scientific treatise, resembling her own scientific writings, such as *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, a philosophical critique of the same targets Cavendish attacks satirically in *The Blazing World* (first published together with as *Observations* in one volume). However, when Cavendish disapproves of either the choice of topics or methods adopted by the virtuosi, she shifts the narrative to the satiric mode in order to critique them more effectively. In Cavendish's descriptions, not only are the scientific opinions of these virtuosi mentioned above ridiculous and self-contradictory, but much of their speculation, investigation or experiments are equally futile, impractical, and pointless without making any constructive contribution to the outside world. As a satirist, the Empress's tone is rational, tainted with anger and disapproval, closer to the angry Juvenalian satirist than to the humorous Horatian satirist, and less tolerant of the human failings such as pride, greed, selfishness and lust.

Another satiric scene takes place when the Empress starts to search for an appropriate scribe for her own Cabbala project. Here Cavendish mocks both ancient and modern male scholars by attempting to evoke their souls (*Blazing World*, Part I, 89-90). In response to the Empress's request, the immaterial spirits comment that ancient famous writers such as "Aristotle, Pythagoras, Plato, Epicurus . . . were so wedded to their own opinions, that they would never have the patience to be Scribes," while modern famous writers such as "Galileo, Gassendus, Des Cartes, Helmont, Hobbes, H. More" are "so self-conceited, that they would scorn to be Scribes to a Woman" (Part I, 89). Through the mouth of the immaterial spirits, Cavendish as the female satirist indirectly voices her attack on these prominent male scholars, past and present.

Still another satiric section can be found when the souls of the Empress and the Duchess travel together to the Duchess's own world to survey the life of the people there, as the narrator describes:

> . . . in a moment [they] viewed all the parts of it, and all the actions of all the Creatures therein, especially did the Empress's soul take much notice of the several actions of humane Creatures in all the several Nations and parts of that World, and wonder'd that for all

> there were so many several Nations, Governments, Laws, Religions, Opinions, &c. they should all yet so generally agree in being Ambitious, Proud, Self-conceited, Vain, Prodigal, Deceitful, Envious, Malicious, Unjust, Revengeful, Irreligious, Factious, &c. (*Blazing World*, Part I, 103-04)

Here Cavendish makes use of the "satiric catalogue," a common device in traditional satire in which the satirist lists all the characteristics of the people in parallel structures so as to emphasize the vices and depravity of the world that seem to go on and on without an end.

As Hutton indicates, "Cavendish's references to contemporary scientific and philosophical theories are anonymous" and "she distorts them, sometimes almost beyond recognition" (168). Cavendish chooses to resort to the satirical form in these sections because she aims to attack the real, though highly distorted, ridiculous situations that are existent in her own world; these situations deviate from past ideals represented by the former rule of Charles I and his royal precedents. Such sense of nostalgia is typical of classical Roman satirists who condemn the present vicious age and look back at the golden age where everything was in its ideal, perfect state.

(IV) (Proto-)Science Fiction

In *Glossary of Literary Terms*, M. H. Abrams puts science fiction and fantasy under the same entry, defining them as "novels and short stories that represent an imagined reality that is different in its nature and functioning from the world of our ordinary experience"; in contrast to fantasy, science fiction makes "explicit attempt . . . to render plausible the fictional world by reference to known or imagined scientific principles, or to a projected advance in technology, or to a drastic change in the organization of society" (278, 279). With such a definition in mind and considering the time of development of science fiction, most scholars would regard it as anachronistic to call Cavendish's *The Blazing World* a science fiction. I would concur with Donawerth and Kolmerten, who regard this work as a "prototype" of science fiction (4), and adopt the term "(proto-)science fiction" in discussing *The Blazing World*.

Although the generic mode of science fiction does not dominate Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, and although Cavendish does not seriously challenge how women are constructed or radically overturn traditional gender roles, Cavendish does attempt to explain the possibility of plural worlds with scientific principles to render her fictional new world plausible. The basic structure underlining the story is a human girl's accidental intrusion into an alternative world, one among the many that co-exist with the ordinary world here on Earth as we know it. This design reflects Cavendish's own opinions on one topical issue in science and natural philosophy of her time: the possibility of "multiple worlds" that was heatedly debated in the seventeenth century (Cavendish, *Margaret Cavendish* 8n10). With the revival of atomism and new discoveries in astronomy, scientists and natural philosophers such as Kepler, Galileo, Descartes and Hobbes questioned Aristotelian theory of the uniqueness of the Earth. These scholars conjectured whether other worlds existed and whether these worlds, including the moon, could be inhabited by human beings. In response to the controversy, imaginary voyages to the moon were seriously envisioned and published, including Johannes Kepler's posthumous *Somnium* (1634), Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (1638) and John Wilkins's *Discovery of a World in the Moone* (1638), among others (Battigelli 53; Cavendish, *Margaret Cavendish* 8n10).

According to Susan James, "Cavendish aims to reconcile her own account of matter with the view that there can be many worlds" (Cavendish, *Margaret Cavendish* 8n10). On the same issue, Anna Battigelli argues that Cavendish's questioning of "the reliability of the senses" does not prevent her from speculating about the possibility of plural worlds (53-54), as shown in the following poem by Cavendish:

> Just like unto a *Nest of Boxes* round,
> *Degrees of sizes* within each *Boxe* are found.
> So in this *World*, may many *Worlds* more be,
> Thinner, and lesse, and lesse still by degree;
> Although they are not subject to our *Sense*,
> A *World* may be no bigger then *two-pence*.
> (*Poems* 44)

For Cavendish, although our natural senses cannot perceive tiny worlds as small as coins, worlds "thinner" and "lesse" than our world might still exist within others, just like smaller boxes inside bigger boxes. In another poem, Cavendish reveals her skepticism about ever obtaining true knowledge about nature and the universe, and implies that the only certainty is the inevitability of death: "The more we search, the lesse we know, / Because we finde our *Worke* doth endlesse grow. / For who doth know, But *Stars* we see by *Night*, / Are *Suns* wich to some other *Worlds* give *Light*?" (*Poems* 36). This poalso betrays Cavendish's suspicion that other worlds, shone by what we perceive on Earth as stars, might be out there, though beyond our reach, beyond "our outward sense," even beyond our "Imaginations."

In *The Blazing World*, Cavendish articulates a similar opinion about the possible "plurality of worlds." The first passage with which Cavendish explains the possible existence of infinite worlds appears in the story as a "digression":

> At last, the Boat still passing on, was forced into another World: *for it is impossible to round this Worlds Globe from Pole to Pole, so as we do from East to West, because the Poles of the other World, joining to the Poles of this, do not allow any further passage to surround the World that way; . . . You must know, that each of these Worlds having its own Sun to enlighten it, they move each one in their peculiar circles; . . . we in this world cannot so well perceive them, by reason of the brightness of our Sun, which being nearer to us, obstructs the splendor of the Suns of the other Worlds, they being too far off to be discerned by or optick perception, except we use very good Telescopes, by which skilful Astronomers have often observed two or three Suns at once*.
>
> But to return to the wandering Boat, and the distressed Lady; she seeing all the Men dead, found small comfort in life. . . . (*Blazing World*, Part I, 3-4; emphasis added)

Here Cavendish explicitly attempts to provide rational, logical explanations for the existence of another world joined to ours in the North Pole as well as the possible entry into this other world. Cavendish's reference to known scientific or astronomical principles of her time to render her creation of the Blazing World plausible, at least partially fulfills one defining characteristic of science

fiction indicated by Abrams, which I cite at the beginning of this section. This scientific explanation, though presented as a digression, is nevertheless well integrated into the narrative progression of the text.

The other passage containing the scientific explanation of the possible routes between the Blazing World and the original world of the Empress appears in the second part of the text, when the Duchess advises the Empress to send "Mear-Men" to search for such routes:

> And after the Duchess had considered some little time, she desired the Emperess to send some of her Syrenes or Mear-Men, to see what passages they could find out of the Blazing-World, into the World she came from; *for said she, if there be a passage for a Ship to come out of that World into this; then certainly there may also a Ship pass thorow the same passage out of this World into that. Hereupon the Mear-or Fish-men were sent out; . . . at last having found out the passage, they returned to the Emperess, and told her, That . . . there was but one Passage into that World, which was so little, that no Vessel bigger than a Packet-Boat could go thorow; neither was that Passage always open, but sometimes quite frozen up*. At which Relation both the Empress and Duchess seemed somewhat troubled, fearing that this would perhaps be an hinderance or obstruction to their Design. (*Blazing World*, Part II, 4-5; emphasis added)

In this passage, the explanation with scientific principles is so organically integrated with the utopian mode that it would be impossible to cut this part out without seriously harming the natural flow of the narrative or omitting an important element of the plot.

To transport the Empress and her men back to the world where the Empress originally comes from, the Duchess then asks the giants, who are architects, to construct vehicles much like modern submarines: "the Duchess told them how some in her own World had been so ingenious, and contrived Ships that could swim under Water" (*Blazing World*, Part II, 5). We are not certain about Cavendish's knowledge of the technology of newly-invented submarines in the early seventeenth century; however, Cavendish may have heard about it from Constantijn Huygens, an acquaintance in Antwerp

(Cavendish, *Margaret Cavendish* 92n176). Her decision to include this technology along with the application of known scientific principles in her fictional work may indeed make it legitimate to call this work a "prototype" or a "precursor" of science fiction.

As a contrast to Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, Johannes Kepler's *Somnium* (1634), which also contains science fictional elements, is framed in multiple layers like the Chinese box. The opening of the story describes how the narrator has recently read a Bohemian story, and has fallen asleep after watching the stars and the moon one night, dreaming about reading a book narrated by Duracotus. Within his own narrative, Duracotus records a very lengthy discourse given by the "Daemon from Levania" after he and his mother conjure her teacher, one of the Daemons from the moon. To wrap up the framed narratives, Kepler describes how the dreamer suddenly awakens from his dream in the middle of the "Daemon's" speech (28-29). In Kepler's *Somnium*, the boundaries among the three layers of the framed narratives (by the first narrator, by Duracotus, and by the Daemon) are clear-cut, indicated by a line of space or the section title (such as "The Daemon from Levania"). In contrast, departing from such layered structures of framed narratives as adopted by Kepler, in *The Blazing World* Cavendish integrates different generic modes organically entwined with one another, demonstrating the potential of the novel in cannibalizing various genres into its textual body.

There are several other designs by Cavendish that further indicate *The Blazing World*'s relation to science fiction. For example, the inhabitants that the nameless lady first encounters in the new world include various kinds of animal-men; even the inhabitants with human forms have complexions with extraordinary colors such as blue, purple, green, red, orange, etc. (*Blazing World*, Part I, 14). Such descriptions of unusual creatures seem to anticipate those colorful aliens in various shapes that appear in some science fictional works or fantasy centuries after Cavendish's time.

While male writers of science fiction tend to equate scientific discoveries and advanced technology with men and to equate women with nature, Cavendish sets an alternative case that women can join scientific debates and rational speculations about the universe. Once allowed opportunities and resources, women can create amazing and effective technology with ingenuity as well as or even better than men.

(V) Political Allegory

The term "allegory" is derived from Greek *allêgoria*, meaning "one thing in words, another in meaning" (Murrin 163). Lynette Hunter similarly indicates that "allegory . . . is derived from *allôs* and *agoreuein*, signifying 'other speaking,' other than what is said, or, what is not said" (266). Jeremy Tambling defines "allegory" as "a rhetorical device within language which exploits the gaps between words and meanings" (171). Starting from the twelfth century, writers began producing texts with plural meanings, commonly utilizing the device of "personification," which "giv[es] life to abstract ideas by endowing them with a mask" (Tambling 171). Copeland and Struck also stress how personification has been "a central component of allegorical procedures . . . from late antiquity through the late Renaissance" (6).

As Paul Salzman indicates, the pastoral romances in the early seventeenth century, such as Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania* (1621), John Barclay's *Argenis* (1621), and Sir Percy Herbert's *The Princess Cloria* (1661), adopted the form of political allegory and *roman à clef* to present contemporary individuals in the disguise of romance characters (139). Wroth may have been inspired by her uncle Sidney, who portrays himself as Philisides in *Arcadia* (1593), to depict herself and her family as romance characters in *Urania*. Although similarly choosing political allegory to depict the tumult during the Civil War, with her *Blazing World* Cavendish boldly opts to use her own name and her husband's among the allegorical figures. Like Wroth with *Urania*, with *The Blazing World* Cavendish departs from the romance convention by depicting not courtship but marriage,[19] making the heroine marry the Emperor almost immediately after they encounter each other, without any proper courtship before the marriage.

Nancy Weitz points out that Cavendish is familiar with emblematic figures and uses them in her works, especially her plays (150). Although Cavendish

[19] Paul Salzman observes that "Wroth creates a feminist reading of the romance form" by directing the reader's attention to "the women who are left behind by the questing men, or whose paths cross the heroes' with invariably miserable results" (141). Moreover, Wroth departs from the romance convention of courtship by depicting marriages, which are seldom happy but almost always involve adultery, usually with faithful women tortured by their jealous husbands (141-42). In other words, different from male writers of idealized romance, Wroth explores the usually overlooked, more realistic situation of women in the courtly milieu, most often in decline and in disappointment (143-44).

does not use allegory *per se* in her "Assaulted and Pursued Chastity," the story contains allegorical figures and prefigures Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). Cavendish personifies Virtue, Youth, and Beauty, which resonates with the Petrarchan tradition of emblematic literature;[20] Cavendish sets Virtue against Youth and Beauty, as a figure for the conflicts between the virtuous lady, the baud and the ravisher (Weitz 154).

Prominent elements of political allegory involving similar strategies can be found in *The Blazing World* (Part I, 112-23). In the scene of the immaterial assembly composed of the souls of the Empress and the Duchess, and some immaterial spirits, a case of the enmity between the Duke and Fortune is presented before the heavenly Judge Truth at the request of the Duchess's soul. In this scene, the human characters of the Empress and the Duchess (on behalf of the Duke) confront and interact with the personified abstract concepts such as Fortune, Prudence and Honesty (Duke's friends), Folly and Rashness (Fortune's friends), and Truth as the judge. All the language is allegorical, and many abstract ideas or qualities are personified as immaterial spirits. This scene resembles a scene in a play, in which all the present characters take turns giving their speeches, all marked in italics in the text; the content and style of each speech not only betrays the speaker's unique character but also his or her beliefs and values.

The generic mode of the allegory in *The Blazing World* starts after the souls of the Empress and the Duchess meet with the Duke's soul when the Empress's soul is returning to the Blazing World. The Duchess's soul desires that the Empress could help "make an agreement between her Noble Lord, and Fortune." With this request, the allegorical mode of the narrative (shown in italics below) is initiated:

> . . . both the Dukes and Duchess's soul . . . wished, that if it had been possible, the Emperess's soul might have stayed a longer

[20] Nancy Weitz analyzes how Cavendish dramatizes the conflicts between the personified Youth/Beauty vs. Virtue representing the inner struggle of the heroine as she faces the persuasive arguments of a bawd on behalf of a married Prince as ravisher, turning it to a "female/female struggle" rather than "female/male" one (154). Here, as Weitz argues, Cavendish's use of the male rhetoric seems to "undercut her attempt to assign blame for rape to the 'Masculine sex'" (154). Surprisingly, after rejecting the bawd's argumentation, the proactive heroine decides to use the pistol for self-defense and eventually injures the ravisher. Weitz contends that such "moral twists and turns" reveal how Cavendish tries to negotiate the "conflicting ideologies: the misogynistic, the Petrarchan and Neoplatonist, and . . . 'scientific'" (157).

> time with them; but seeing it could not be otherwise, they pacified themselves: *But before the Emperess returned into the Blazing-world, the Duchess desired a favour of her, to wit, that she would be pleased to make an agreement between her Noble Lord, and Fortune. Why, said the Emperess, are they enemies? Yes, answered the Duchess, and they have been so ever since I have been his Wife; . . .* (*Blazing World*, Part I, 111-12; emphasis added)

This is the first time the personified figure of "Fortune" with the capitalized initial is introduced in the narrative as if it were a human character.

The allegory concludes after the court meeting of all the immaterial parties when the Duchess is about to return to her own country:

> *Thus the Duchess's soul, after she had taken her leave of the Emperess, as also of the Spirits, who with great civility, promised her, that they would endeavour in time to make a peace and agreement between Fortune and the Duke, returned with Prudence and Honesty into her own World*: But when she was just upon her departure, the Emperess sent to Her, and desired that she might yet have some little conference with her before she went; . . . (*Blazing World*, Part I, 120; emphasis added)

The allegorical mode is organically interwoven into the utopian mode as Cavendish narrates the events involving the main characters of the Empress, the Duchess, and the Duke. The introduction of the first allegorical figure Fortune and last departure of the allegorical figures Prudence and Honesty are so seamlessly woven with the utopian mode that their appearance or departure from the story do not strike the reader as uncanny or bewildering.

In the beginning of the court hearing, Fortune declares that "*this Duke who complains or exclaims so much against me, hath been always my enemy; for he has preferred Honesty and Prudence before me, and slighted all my favours*" and that the Duke even scornfully calls her "*Inconstant Fortune, who is onely a friend to Fools and Knaves*" (*Blazing World*, Part I, 115). Here Cavendish indirectly claims that her husband has always been very honest and prudent, and emphasizes that he chooses to be so even if his choice might not bring him fortune's favors. Cavendish also obliquely hints at the moral depravity of those

"fools and knaves" in her own country who seem to be unfairly favored by fortune during the tumultuous Civil War.

Moreover, through the mouth of the personified Honesty, Cavendish voices her commendation of her husband:

> *I Honesty bred him [the Duke] from his childhood, and made a perpetual friendship betwixt him and Gratitude, Charity and Generosity; and put him to school to Prudence, who taught him wisdom, and informed him in the rules of Temperance, Patience, Justice, and the like; then I put him into the University of Honour, where he learned all honourable qualities, arts, and sciences; . . . made him fit for Heaven's blessings, and Fortune's favours; . . .* (*Blazing World*, Part I, 118-19)

The personification of abstract concepts creates a distance from the potentially direct, boastful proclamation of the long list of Duke's admirable virtues, making the Duchess's statements appear to be merely an indirect, humble hint at his moral qualities, which approach might appeal to Cavendish with her wish for cultivating a humble and self-effacing image of herself and her husband, even when she is extolling her husband's virtues. Without the filter of allegorical language, what Cavendish is trying to convey here might become blatantly flattering descriptions of all the positive traits demonstrated by her husband.

When the Duchess's soul pleads for her husband's case but is chided by Honesty for "mistrust[ing] the Gods blessings," she is so disconcerted and upset that she weeps dejectedly (*Blazing World*, Part I, 119). This speech implicates an internal debate within Cavendish's mind, which makes her disconcerted and upset just like the fictional Duchess. Cavendish may be torn between following prudence but losing fortune's favor and neglecting justice in order to court good fortune. In this section of *The Blazing World*, Cavendish projects such painful inner psychological struggle onto different personified abstract concepts, and then transfers most of the fault to Fortune's being inconstant, foolish, rash and hard to please. As allegory is used to "replace the particular with the generalizing" (Cooper 10), the allegorical mode thus serves as a proper and ideal medium for Cavendish to implicitly express her opinions on the sensitive

topical political issues without running the risk of being accused of seeking self-interest or slandering the particular personages involved in the real world.

VI. The Hybridity of Genres Reflecting Cavendish's Theorization of Nature

If we use the metaphor of the body to illustrate the interconnectedness among the hybrid generic modes in Cavendish's text, the opening romance frame can be compared to the "head" of the body. As the romance heroine involuntarily embarks on the sea journey on a "rudderless boat," miraculously protected by the gods to survive the harsh condition of extreme cold, and enters an alternative world (*Blazing World*, Part I, 1-3), the text starts to show possible directions of development into utopia and science fiction, shaping toward both genres in different parts. The sea journey, as typical of real or imaginary travel narrative, can thus be compared to the "neck" of the body, offering numerous possibilities of connecting to any shape or form for the living organism of the text.

What follows the arrival at this alternative world are descriptions of the hybrid inhabitants of animal-men the heroine encounters, the shifting landscape, the buildings and architecture, the royal palace, and how the heroine quickly learns the local language, through which to get to know the situations of the political system, laws, religion, food, and activities the inhabitants are engaged with (especially in Part I, 3-18, with most of the remaining story taking place in the utopian world till the end). Connected to the "neck" of the sea journey, this section of the utopian mode forms the main "torso" of the body. This torso of the utopian mode, nevertheless, is not purely utopian, but contains elements that anticipate future science fiction, as illustrated by the short descriptions of how the old world and the alternative world(s) are connected, along with the narrator's scientific explanations of how multiple worlds might co-exist and of the possible passage between these different worlds (Part I, 3). We could probably view this short (proto-)science fictional part as a "small lump" (without its medical malignant connotations) connected to the "neck" of the sea journey, grown with the torso of the utopian part.

Like a living organism, the narrative gradually shapes toward scientific discourse with lengthy debates along with satire on experimental philosophy (*Blazing World*, Part I, 19-60). In intricate ways, the scientific discourse and satire are intertwined with the "torso" of the utopian mode like "limbs" of

unequal length, or "big lumps" of unequal sizes grown within the torso, each developed to form parts of the living body (Part I, 27-28, 56-59). Still there is a section of political allegory involving the Empress, the Duchess, the Duke, and personified figures of abstract concepts (Part I, 112-21), which can be viewed as another "smaller lump" grown inside the torso of the body. The growth and development of the big or small "lumps" may not follow existing, normal physical rules (that is why I adopt the medical term "lumps"), but they are grown into the body, so organically conjoined with the body that it is impossible to cut them off the body without causing bleeding injury or even death to the living body. The blood vessels that run through the whole textual body of *The Blazing World* are represented by the leading character, the nameless lady who later becomes the Empress. It is through her that Cavendish links all the various growing parts within the living body of the work. Taking her away would be like cutting the blood vessels, which would certainly lead to the death of the body.

Cavendish's design of the hybridity of genres in *The Blazing World* conforms to her own theorization of Nature. Tessie Prakas argues that "Cavendish's writing . . . valorizes the autonomy and agency of individual entities to an extent that runs counter to that hierarchical framework" (127). Unlike Thomas Hobbes's hierarchical structure of the political system, the generic structure of *The Blazing World* is not in any sense based on a hierarchical framework. Rather, it reflects what Cavendish champions as freedom and autonomy of individual parts within the whole body. While I agree with Prakas that Cavendish advocates an "anti-authoritarian" mode in *The Blazing World*, I do not view the "individual creative freedom" entailed in the work's preface as reflecting Cavendish's vitalist theories championing "total, universal liberty" (Prakas 128). I contend that these various generic modes are not totally independent of each other; rather, they are interdependent upon and interlinked with one another to form an organic whole.

The hybridity of various genres in *The Blazing World* supports Lisa Walters's view that Cavendish tries to "decentralize and complicate the unity of any structure on generic, political and philosophical levels," demonstrating how Nature and her particulars work "in multifaceted ways" (184). The generic forms in *The Blazing World* are not hierarchically structured with a master genre as an absolute monarchy on top to take control of all the incorporated generic modes as its obedient subjects (neither are these generic forms loosely

mixed together with weak or even no connections with one another). The hybrid genres are not structured as layers of frames as smaller boxes placed within bigger boxes, for Cavendish stresses that

> When I say, That the Rational part of Matter lives in the Sensitive, and the Sensitive in the Inanimate; *I do not mean, that one lies within the other like as several Boxes are put together, the lesser in the bigger*; but I use this expression onely to denote the close conjunction of these three degrees, and that they are *inseparably mixt together*. (*Observations* 52; emphasis added)

The generic hybridity in *The Blazing World* reflects Cavendish's own vitalistic view of nature, one which maintains that while each part is autonomous and free, the different parts are also interdependent upon each other at the same time. In *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, Cavendish illustrates how the three degrees of matter in nature are intermixed together and could not be separated from one another:

> But I speak of the three prime degrees of Matter, which are the constitutive principles of Nature, and the cause of all natural effects, viz. the animate (sensitive and rational) and the inanimate; which *as they are intermixt together*, are infinite in the body or substance of Nature, that is, they make but one infinite, corporeal, self-moving Nature; and therefore I desire that my expression of the mentioned parts, *may be understood as of united, and not as of separated parts*; for it is *impossible almost, to conceive them divided, much less to separate them actually from each other*: . . . (47-48; emphasis added)

In similar ways, the genres in *The Blazing World* are not "self-sufficient or divisible" to stand independently on their own; their interdependencies illustrate how all the individual parts in Nature, even if as small as an atom or particle, are not divided and separated, but closely working with one another to form the synergistic body of the text. The different generic modes grow within the body of the text in their own ways and fulfill their own functions respectively. They are also interdependent upon each other, so intricately linked

with one another that one part could not be easily separated from the rest without harming the narrative flow of the whole work.

Like the Empress as an all-powerful female monarchy who can govern the kingdom as she pleases, Cavendish as an author has freedom to choose from different genres to suit her needs in creating her literary work. In creating the fictional world, Cavendish allows each part to grow organically in its own way, each freely, integrally grown into and intertwined with one another like closely linked bodily parts in a living organism. Moving from the romance story combined with the travel narrative, *The Blazing World* grows to a utopia in which Cavendish can freely experiment with and accommodate her political, philosophical, social concepts and theories. However, when seeking to express her criticism of certain experimental methods adopted by real-life members of the Royal Society, Cavendish turns to the satiric mode, sharply exposing the absurdity she observes in some of the scholars without actually naming them. By so doing, Cavendish reduces the potential risk of incurring displeasure or accusation from the eminent personages involved, which has usually been one of the practical considerations for writers to resort to satire.

In *The Blazing World*, the development from romance to the generic possibilities of utopia, science fiction, and satire is gradual, not sudden, and the key connection is the sea journey undertaken by the main female character. The growth of utopia, science fiction, satire and allegory within the body of the text is not balanced or parallel; instead, it is more organic and does not follow conventional generic rules. Without a hierarchical, centralized controlling narrative structure on top, the intricately intertwined generic modes are freely growing in their own ways to perform different functions, which mirrors Cavendish's own unique theorization of Nature and her infinite parts with their own free will, life, and knowledge.

VII. Conclusion

Although structurally *The Blazing World* contains a combination of various genres like other preceding or contemporary prose fiction in England, in significant ways this work differs from other comparable fictional works, demonstrating Cavendish's innovation. *The Blazing World* is different from the framed-novelle which loosely mixes together the individual, usually disconnected inset stories. The hybridity of genres in *The Blazing World* is also

different from the multiple layers of embedded narrative frames one within another, as in More's *Utopia* or Kepler's *Somnium*, which forms another thread in the development of prose fiction and the novel. Unlike Sidney's *Arcadia* with its consistent pastoral setting, chivalric romance motifs, Greek character names, epic *in medias res* opening, and its overall structure modeling on Greek romance, Cavendish's *The Blazing World* reduces the romance elements to the minimum, even to the point of parody, and flexibly shifts among various generic modes. Unlike Bacon's *New Atlantis* with its consistent utopian structure throughout the text, Cavendish's *The Blazing World* is composed of interwoven parts of different generic modes without a single dominant genre to take over and control the development of the narrative. Cavendish presents her story plots and messages by breaking out of the constraints of particular genres and allows each generic mode to develop and be organically intertwined with one another, forming a hybrid "monster"-text of *The Blazing World*.

In his *Renaissance Hybrids: Culture and Genre in Early Modern England*, Gary A. Schmidt surveys the image of hybrids in the Renaissance and early modern England (19-52). Hybrid animals were usually viewed as absurdities during this period. A work like *The Blazing World* with hybrid genres could be similarly viewed as an anomaly by Cavendish's contemporaries. Just like a monster with disparate parts of its body organically grown into one another without following the common laws of nature (i.e., generic conventions), *The Blazing World* may read/look like a shocking monster, or a "textual cyborg," uncommon in the publishing world. Furthermore, a fictional work published by a woman may be considered doubly abnormal and monstrous, particularly for her disregard of conventional restrictions on women from actively taking part in the masculine domain of scientific discourse and literary publication.[21] Nonetheless, with such innovative combination of hybrid generic modes, Cavendish's work pioneers the genre of the novel much ahead of her time.

Writing in the political and social turmoil of the Civil War, Cavendish was among the bold experimenters of generic modes, disregarding, defying and breaking away from the generic conventions and rules to produce the structurally complicated, bewildering yet fascinating work of *The Blazing World*, dazzling the readers past and present. This work may not be called

[21] Cavendish's natural philosophical works are not written in the form of traditional scientific treatises but involve a variety of genres, most of which are, in Yves Citton's words, "too puzzling in their form and too disturbing in their content to be taken seriously by her contemporaries" (6).

a novel yet, partly for its lack of in-depth psychological development of the characters, realistic details closer to the daily life of the middle or lower classes, or more unified plot structure. However, from this work we see the embryo of the novel to be more fully grown and developed in the next century; we can even see the seed of science fiction, which was to be "invented" and more fully established in much later times (Cavendish's *The Blazing World* was published about one and a half century earlier than Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* [1818]). With *The Blazing World*, Cavendish demonstrates the immense, almost liberating potential of the emerging new genre of the novel with its devouring, cannibalistic abilities to consume and incorporate various other genres. Thanks to its lack of formulating rules, prose fiction writers are allowed more freedom to experiment with various generic modes at their will, and cumulatively the narrative forms grow more complex in structure, eventually becoming the more fully-grown genre of the novel prominent in the eighteenth century and beyond. When the restrictions are gone, brushed aside and disregarded, innovation and creativity come into play, and new inventions are born. The shadows, or influence, of Cavendish's *The Blazing World* can be seen in later novelistic works, including Delariviere Manley's *The New Atalantis* (1709) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726).

Somewhat similar to Cavendish, Manley adopts the allegory for the narrative framework in the beginning of *The New Atalantis*. Manley also incorporates elements from romance, Menippean satire, and utopia in the development of her story. The names of the allegorical figures like Virtue, Justice, Astrea, clearly show the influence of Cavendish's *The Blazing World*. Manley's descriptions of the goddesses Virtue and Astrea flying in the air to see the universal human depravity with the satiric catalogue is highly reminiscent of Cavendish's use of the same technique in *The Blazing World* (Part I, 103-04).[22]

Like Cavendish with *The Blazing World*, Jonathan Swift exploits the potential of travel literature and utopia in *Gulliver's Travels*; the leading characters in both works land in unknown worlds after their turbulent sea

[22] Resembling Cavendish's invisible pair of the souls of the Empress and of the Duchess in *The Blazing World* (Part I, 103-04), the Goddesses Astrea and Virtue make themselves invisible to make it easier for them to survey the world from on high (Manley 9). Through the mouth of the Virtue as a scorning Juvenalian satirist, Manley presents a satiric catalogue of universal human depravity: "Mortals being by Nature as well as Custom corrupt, . . . without [a generous Education], Man is the greatest Brute of the Creation; the Rustic Soul, looks out in *Native Ignorance*, *Cruelty*, *Avarice*, *Distrust*, *Fraud*, *Revenge*, *Ingratitude*, *Self-Interest*, the whole ignoble Train" (4-5).

voyage. Like Cavendish, Swift also adopts Menippean satire (particularly the "satiric symposium") in his novel to expose the absurdity of his contemporary society through the conversations between the naïve visitor Gulliver and the inhabitants of the alternative worlds, attacking the corruption and obsequious flattery of the government officials who set their eyes only on trivial matters and personal interests while being blind to the grander, more imperative issues involving the welfare of the whole nation.

Cavendish creates *The Blazing World* as an important precursor in the English prose fiction with hybrid genres. Anticipating later British novelists in the next century, Cavendish's case evidences early women writers' contribution to the development of the novel as early as the seventeenth century, refuting the theory of what Ian Watt calls the "rise of the novel" with a few great "fathers of the novel" in mid- and late eighteenth century (9-59).[23]

[23] The male novelists discussed in Ian Watt's influential but controversial work *The Rise of the Novel* include Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, and Henry Fielding. The earliest of their novels is Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which appeared in 1719; and Richardson, the generally acclaimed "father of the novel," did not publish his first novel *Pamela* until as late as 1740.

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