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ROYALIST, ROMANCIIST, RACIALIST: RANK, GENDER, AND RACE IN THE SCIENCE AND FICTION OF MARGARET CAVENDISH

BY SUJATA IYENGAR

When Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, published *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* in 1666, she became the first British woman to write and publish scientific work.¹ Perhaps eager to demonstrate her knowledge of the newest scientific theories, Cavendish added a new section to the second edition of *Observations* in 1668, a section that responded, as Rosemary Kegl remarks, to current debates about racial origin, and in particular to the question of whether white and black men were descended from the same human ancestor—Adam.² In the 1668 text, Cavendish argues that black men are *not* descended from Adam: “Blackmoors [are] a kind or race of men different from the White . . . For, if there were no differences in their productions, then would not onely all men be exactly like, but all Beasts also; that is, there would be no difference between a Horse and a Cow, a Cow and a Lyon, a Snake and an Oyster.”³ The differences between white and black men are as pronounced as those between “a Horse and a Cow, and Cow and a Lyon.” This statement appears to collapse two different senses of the word “race”: species difference (like that between a “Horse and a Cow”) and color difference. Equating species and color difference, Cavendish concludes that the “Blackmoors” are as different from “White” people as cows are from lions. But, as Kegl brilliantly observes, Cavendish’s romantic utopia, *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*, which was bound and published together with *Observations*, carefully *distinguishes* between race, meaning species difference, and race, meaning variants of skin-tone:

the ordinary sort of men [in the Blazing World] . . . were of several complexions: not white, black, tawny, olive or ash-coloured; but some appeared of an azure, some of a deep purple, some of a grass-green, some of a scarlet, some of an orange-colour, etc. . . . The rest of the inhabitants of that world, were men of several different sorts, shapes, figures, disposition, and humours . . . some were

bear-men, some worm-men, some fish- or mear-men [mer-men], . . . some bird-men, some fly-men, some ant-men, some geese-men, some spider-men, some lice-men, some fox-men, some ape-men, some jackdaw-men, some magpie-men, some parrot-men, some satyrs, some giants, and many more, which I cannot all remember.⁴

The subjects of the *Blazing World* comprise people who are racially diverse in two different senses: they have skins of varying colors, and they belong to diverse species. Cavendish's romance thus "draws a distinction between difference based on species or complexion, understood as 'humours,' on the one hand, and difference based on complexion, understood as 'colour,' on the other."⁵ Kegl suggests that this apparent inconsistency on the subject of racial difference between *Observations* and *Blazing World* reflects seventeenth-century confusion about the meanings of both race and color, citing Samuel Pepys's appreciative description of Cavendish's "black" Italian waiting-woman, Ferrabosco, and of a little "black boy" who ran up and down the chamber when Cavendish visited the Royal Society. Pepys's editors gloss "black" as "brunette," but Samuel Mintz imagines the child to have been an "exotic graft in an English garden"; we have no way of knowing whether he was the black-haired son of a lady-in-waiting, or an African page.⁶

This cultural confusion about the meaning of skin-tone and its relationship to racial or species difference might contribute to Cavendish's fantastic *Blazing World* of colors, as Kegl proposes, but I would argue that Cavendish's riot of color is not a response to late seventeenth-century confusion about color as much as a romantic reply to the emerging pseudo-scientific discourse that *did* connect color with race. Pepys mused, "The whole story of this Lady is a romance, and all she doth is romantic"; Cavendish develops "romance" from "historicall reportes" or "historicall rimes," as George Puttenham has it, into what Thomas Blount defines as "a feigned History," the representation of an alternative universe, a history that is willfully and willingly imaginary.⁷ Throughout her romances, Cavendish briefly envisions situations in which the hierarchies of race and species difference that were emerging in the seventeenth century do not exist; she also imagines herself and her heroines in positions of absolute royal power. Both Cavendish and her husband, William, Duke of Newcastle, were ardent Royalists who lost their estate and fortune during the Interregnum and were forced into exile in Antwerp.⁸ Cavendish's fictional worlds were a Royalist riposte to

the Interregnum, a rejoinder that affirmed the supremacy of distinctions of rank above all other categories—race, gender, or religion.

This is only possible, I will argue, in her blazing worlds of fiction. As a scientist, Cavendish affirmed the inferiority both of women to men and of black men to white. As a royalist and a romancist, however, Cavendish's belief in the primacy of rank as a way of distinguishing between classes of people leads her in her monarchical romances to contradict various theories of sexual and racial inferiority which were current in Restoration England and which she herself espoused in her scientific writings. Fiction allowed her both the freedom to imagine such a world, and the security of knowing that such a world could never come to pass.

I. POLYGENESIS AND SCIENTIFIC RACISM

The word "race" refers loosely in the seventeenth-century to differences not only of skin color but also of sex, rank, occupation, and religion.⁹ When Cavendish adds a commentary to *Observations* describing "Blackmoors" as a separate "race" from white men, she is responding to the newest pseudo-scientific theories connecting race, skin color, and species origin, theories that contradicted earlier accounts, like Sir Thomas Browne's, that accounted blackness a mystery but did not consider black skin to be a sign of species difference. Browne's "Of the Blackness of Negroes," the most detailed discussion of skin color in the first half of the seventeenth century, dismisses the theory, popular with both the classical and early modern authors, that African nations became dark skinned because of their exposure to excessive sunlight or heat. He argues that there is a difference between the dark skins of sunburnt Europeans, "Artificial Negroes, or Gypsies," and those of the Africans or real "Negroes," maintaining that, since there appears to be little or no correlation between exposure to the sun and the darkness of Africans' skin, the Africans' blackness must be "spermatical" or hereditary. At the same time, he cannot believe that the sperm (the "seed") of black men is darker than that of white ones (another popular belief). On the contrary, sperm is "first and in its naturals white, but upon separation of parts, accidents before invisible become apparent; there arising a shadow or dark efflorescence in the out-side."¹⁰ The distinction that Browne draws is subtle but meaningful. Blackness is not essential, although it is inherited; it is an "accident," a "dusky" cover for the Africans' natural whiteness.

Blackness gilds the “out-side” of essentially white men. In contrast to George Best, who had also argued that blackness was hereditary rather than environmental, Browne denies the tradition that explained black skin as the curse of Noah on his son Cham, reasonably observing that there is no logical reason to consider black skin a “curse”: “if we seriously consult the definitions of beauty, and exactly perpend what wise men determine thereof, we shall not apprehend a curse, or any deformity therein.”¹¹ He concludes that blackness is simply a mystery.

Browne explains blackness as an inherited trait, but at no point does he articulate a theory of what we now call racialism—a belief that human beings with different physical characteristics (such as skins of different colors) belonged to different species, like cats and dogs, and that certain species were superior to others. In fact he explicitly states that “Negroes” descend from “the seed of Adam,” just like Englishmen, Chinamen, Guinea Moors, and all the inhabitants of the world.¹² Nonetheless, as Winthrop Jordan points out, Browne asked “questions on the origin of things . . . he had firmly set forth a case for the innateness of blackness with a quasi-genetic explanation which confirmed the permanence of the color without, unfortunately, doing anything to explain its original cause.”¹³ Most early mythologies of skin color assume, like Browne, that all men and women, regardless of skin tone, were descended from Adam, a theory of creation called monogenesis. Even Best, who assumed that “blacke Moores” were “cursed” by God, never doubted their kinship to Englishmen.¹⁴ Few English writers take seriously the notion that black Africans, white Europeans, and tawny Moors descended from different species, or through polygenesis. To do so would be to doubt the word of the Bible.

Polygenetic theories and the notion of an inherited slave caste were more common in New England and the West Indies than in Britain. Richard Ligon divides the inhabitants of Barbados into three groups, “Masters, Servants and slaves,” and concludes that “the slaves and their posterity” are “subject to their Masters for ever.” Henry Whistler lists in 1655 “all sortes: English, french, Duch, Scotcs, Irish, Spaniards thay being Jues [Jews]” and finally “Ingones [Indians] and miserabell Negors borne to perpetuall slavery thay and thayer seed.” A tract in defense of the tobacco colonies that circulated in 1656 maintained that, while white women could do domestic work, black women should be sent to work in the tobacco fields because they were “nasty and beastly.”¹⁵

Theories of polygenesis did not become widely popular in Britain until the eighteenth century, but their first appearance marks a radical change from the mythologies of color, the casual xenophobia—sometimes linked with color, sometimes with religion, sometimes with both—that predominated during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. The notion of species difference was not a cause but a symptom of Britain's increasing involvement in the slave-trade. "By the turn of the [seventeenth] century Bristol and London were both thriving slave ports," writes Peter Fryer, who has found from parish records a continuous black presence in the Home Counties during the second half of the seventeenth century.¹⁶ And while an African slave in Britain in 1600 would almost certainly have spent a lifetime as an expensive, liveried status symbol in an aristocratic household, and might not have been treated very differently from the other servants, by mid-century a middle-class owner might suddenly decide to sell such a slave to the American plantations, against her will.¹⁷ Polygenesis provided a convenient explanation of racial difference that conflated variation with inferiority.

Cavendish's own addition to *Observations* in 1668 is one of the earliest British statements of polygenesis. But, as we have seen, in *Blazing World* she distinguishes between species difference and skin color as signs of race, in a fictional challenge to her own polygenetic beliefs. This romantic challenge to the emerging hierarchies of skin color encompassed not only pseudo-scientific pamphlets from the New World, but also the emerging empirical discourse investigating the origins of color itself, a discourse that Cavendish interrogated in both "philosophical" and fictional terms.

II. OBSERVATIONS OF COLOR

Robert Hooke, the first person to observe cell structures through a microscope, explains blackness as the absence or "privation of Light" in the cells ("pores") of an object. He argues that the depth, frequency, and dryness of these pores in charcoal, coals, and burnt objects explains their blackness:

certainly, a body that has so many pores in it as this is discover'd to have, from each of which no light is reflected, must necessarily look black . . . black being nothing else but a privation of Light, or a want of reflection; and wheresover [sic] this reflecting quality is deficient, there does that part look black . . . from a porousness of the body.¹⁸

Hooke defines black as an absence not only of light but of matter and movement, suggesting that burnt objects have lost the water that filled their cells and reflected the light back to the eye of the viewer. Black objects enjoy a strange “universal kind of transparency . . . that light onely is reflected back which falls upon the very outward edges of the pores, all they that enter into the pores of the body, never returning, but being lost in it.” Thus we can see the shape of a black object, but its center is like a black hole, to use an anachronistic comparison: once light or energy goes into it, it cannot come out again. Hooke and his Royal Society colleague Robert Boyle discovered independently that light was a wave (or, in Hooke’s words, that “there is no luminous body but has the parts of it in motion more or less”).¹⁹ They also argued that the phenomenon of color depended upon this motion of light (we would now say, upon the wavelength of light) and upon its refraction and reflection in various media, like air, water, or “Muscovy glass” (mica).

Cavendish knew and responded to the work of Hooke and Boyle; an interested, indeed, keen observer of the new science, when she visited the Royal Society in 1667 she was reported to be “full of admiration, all admiration” for its “Fine experiments of Colours, Loadstones, Microscope, and of liquors.”²⁰ Mintz conjectures that the “experiments of Colours” that Pepys and Cavendish observed were probably those described by Boyle in *Experiments and Considerations Touching Colours* (1664), in which he produced “a red colour out of two transparent liquors” and turned red Rhenish wine “a lovely green.”²¹ On her visit to the Society, Cavendish professed her admiration for their experiments, but both *Observations* and *Blazing World* regard empirical science with a quizzical, sometimes satirical eye.

Cavendish expresses her critique partly through what seems like the incongruous yoking of a scientific treatise and a romance in a single volume. She links the two works expressly in her “Epilogue to the Reader,” calling the one her “Philosophical World,” the other her “Blazing” one, and claiming that they both come from “the most pure, that is, the most rational parts of . . . my mind,” a “pure” rationality that she contrasts to the “conquests of *Alexander* and *Caesar*.” In her praise of the “rational,” extolling a Cartesian model of abstract thought over experimental science, Cavendish argues that her imaginary, female worlds are superior to the masculine model of colonial domination exemplified by Alexander because she has not “caused so many . . . deaths as they did,” “esteeming peace before

war" (*B*, 224). In the same way, Cartesian rationalism provides Cavendish with her response to the Baconian empiricism of the Royal Society, whose experiments attempted a kind of experimental "conquest" over the natural world.²²

Hooke's experiments are criticized in a section of *Observations* that pointedly parallels his discussion of charcoal. First, Cavendish insists, colors cannot be caused only by the presence of light, because "the refraction or reflection of light is so inconstant, as it varies and alters continually . . . whereas on the contrary, we see that natural and inherent Colours continue always the same."²³ Cavendish argues here that color remains constant despite the fluctuations of light, which is constantly changing. Second, she argues that blackness cannot be caused by the absence of light and the presence of "pores,"

for if the blackness of a Charcoal, did proceed from the absence of light in its pores, then a black Horse would have more or deeper pores than a white one . . . also a black Moor would have larger Pores than a man of a white complexion; and black Sattin, or any black Stuff, would have deeper pores than white Stuff: But if a fair white Lady should bruise her arm, so as it did appear black, can any one believe that light would be more absent from that bruised part then from any other part of her arm that is white, or that light should reflect otherwise upon that bruised part, then on any other? (*O*, 52)

It is unclear whether Cavendish is using "pores" in the sense that Hooke intends; she mocks a science that is based on observation, but here she uses her own observations to challenge its results. Her examples reflect her gender and rank: Hooke observed charcoal, cork, and Muscovy glass, but Cavendish observes horses, the African slaves of her noble acquaintances, satin, and her own skin, and she finds no difference in their apparent porosity. Darkness cannot be merely the absence of light, she avers, because if we can only perceive sensations or objects through light, we would not be able to recognize the dark and distinguish night from day, which is "contrary to common experience, nay, to sense and reason" (*O*, 54). Cavendish's appeal to "common experience" and "sense" contrasts the kind of observation that she prizes (like the appearance of black versus white satin) with the microscopic observation of Hooke, which she finds so misleading.

Cavendish interprets night vision as a sign of the inferiority of the physical senses next to the superior sense of reason; if we cannot see colors at night, it is our sight that is imperfect. Just because you can't see them doesn't mean they aren't there. Eyes are misleading, reason

tells the truth; thus colors are by no means “lost or lessened in the dark, but . . . onely concealed from the ordinary perception of humane sight” (*O*, 55). Cavendish insists that colors do not change or disappear, thereby combining a belief in both the similarity and the difference of the “black Moor” and the man of a “white complexion”; they have similar pores or cell-structure, but their skin colors are “fixt and inherent” (*O*, 56). Her chapter on blackness concludes with a vehement belief in the fixedness of colors, a belief, however, that she immediately modifies in her next chapter, “Of Colours,” where she concedes that there may be two sorts of colors, “Homogeneous” and “Heterogeneous”; that is, colors that are fixed, innate, and unified and colors that are changeable, external, and varied respectively. Superficial colors, like those caused by “the Yellow or black Jaundies” (*O*, 59) or by blushes (*O*, 61), are heterogeneous, but underlying colors are homogeneous or unchanging.

Arguing both for and against the possibility of color change is typical of Cavendish. But whereas in *Observations* she comes up with an answer to the conundrum of color, however concessionary, in *Blazing World* she refuses outright to explain why her Blazing Worlders have complexions of such astonishing shades as “azure,” “deep purple,” “grass-green,” “scarlet,” or “orange-colour.” She mocks both the experimental scientists of the Royal Society for their need to find a logical explanation for everything, and her own desire to avoid a single, unified conclusion:

Which colours and complexions, whether they were made by the bare reflection of light, without the assistance of small particles, or by the help of well-ranged and ordered atoms; or by a continual agitation of little globules; or by some pressing and reacting motion, I am not able to determine. (*B*, 133)

This tongue-in-cheek parenthesis alludes to several different competing theories of light, color, and matter.²⁴ In 1637 Descartes argued that light was made up of particles or atoms, that light was stable, unified, and homogeneous, and that color was the result of refraction or modification to a beam of white light. In 1665, while the plague ravaged Cambridge, Newton was writing a treatise “On Colours” that subscribed to the particle theory, but he suggested that light was unstable, various, and heterogeneous, and that color was not a modification of white light but the result of separating white light into its constituent colors.²⁵ The same year, Boyle and Hooke were

arguing that light was not a particle but a wave that pushed forward (“made by . . . a pressing and reacting motion” [B, 133]). Hooke and Newton would in fact fight so bitterly on the subject of waves versus particles that Newton would retire to Cambridge in disgust. In her light-hearted summary of competing theories of color, and in refusing to cite any one of them to explain the skin colors of the Blazing Worlders, Cavendish steps whimsically over the whole dispute.

Cavendish complained in the preface to *Observations* that she was insufficiently educated to understand the new science, but she clearly knew the terms of the debate—she just couldn’t or wouldn’t accept them. In particular, she saw no place for a unified theory of color in a *romance*, any more than she saw the need for a notion of identity that cohered around any characteristics other than nobility. Her understanding of identity in the romances veers between essential characteristics that cannot be changed (this is the case with rank and, in *Blazing World*, with gender) and fluid attributes that change constantly within the narrative (such as color, race, nationality or the direction of sexual desire). Cavendish first addressed the connections between fiction, skin color, rank, and gender in her romantic fable *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*. This tale plays in a controlled manner with the limits of identity—royal, racial, and gendered—by erasing these limits briefly during the narrative before redrawing them at its conclusion.

III. ASSAULTED AND PURSUED CHASTITY

The heroine of *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* changes her name and her gender according to her circumstances: “Miseria” when pursued by a rapacious Prince; “Affectionata” when she injures this Prince to preserve her chastity; “Travellia” when, dressed as a boy, she is adopted by a Captain and travels the world. Cavendish often uses the male personal pronoun to refer to the cross-dressed Travellia, as if the heroine (like Virginia Woolf’s Orlando) does indeed change sex for the duration of “his” adventure. Such pronominal ambiguity is typical both of early modern romances and of Elizabethan and Jacobean accounts of the transvestite theater; Marina Leslie argues that the gender confusion in *Assaulted*, like the unorthodox methods by which Travellia preserves her chastity, thwarts a reader’s expectations of the romantic narrative.²⁶ Having encountered and “civilized” a land of royal cannibals, Travellia is captured and sold as a mercenary to the Queen of Amity, who is fighting the King of Amour.²⁷ Travellia escapes the Prince, who now leads the King’s army, until, in

a parody of the masculine exchange of women in marriage contracts, the Queen hands him/her over to the Prince as part of a peace treaty with the King—on condition that Travellia become “Viceregency” of the Kingdom of Amity (A, 116). Travellia is perfectly willing to marry her Prince at this point, having defeated him in battle and won the hearts of the people.

While Travellia can transcend the constraints of gender because of her rank and superior knowledge, none of the people she encounters can transcend their rank, here explicitly connected to skin color. As Kate Lilley remarks, in this world skin color illustrates “a profound physical difference between subjects of different rank.”²⁸ While the common folk are purple, “all those of the royal blood, were of a different colour from the rest of the people, . . . of a perfect orange colour.” In addition, while the commoners have teeth “black as jet,” the royals have teeth and nails “white as milk”; while the commoners have hair “white as snow,” the royals have hair that is “coal black” (A, 68). The royal family and their subjects belong to tribes who are physical opposites. So great, in fact, is the distinction between classes that the lower ranks are consumed like animals:

they had a custom in that country, to keep great store of slaves, both males and females, to breed on, as we do breed flocks of sheep . . . The children were eaten as we do lambs or veal, for young and tender meat; the elder for beef and mutton, as stronger meats.

Cavendish’s tone is deliberately sardonic; from her enforced exile in Antwerp, the Duchess can contrast the “tyrannical” monarchy of her fictional world with the comparatively gentle regime that her real compatriots had overthrown. At the same time, the fact that the cannibals are *royal* connects them viscerally to the ancient sovereigns of England: “these of the royal blood all their skins were wrought [decorated with blue woad; perhaps scarred or tattooed], like the Britons” (A, 69). The image of the ancient Britons evokes both difference and kinship; the cannibals are primitive, like the Britons, but they are also potentially civilized relatives to the English. Cavendish expresses a slight wistfulness that civilization entails a necessary sacrifice of royal authority; part of what makes the vision utopian for her is the fact that the cannibals have power so absolute that they can literally consume their subjects.

The cannibals’ royalty and their respect for social hierarchies render them morally recuperable in Cavendish’s world view; they also make it possible for Travellia to reinscribe the colonial and masculine

power structures of Cavendish's own world, as Leslie observes.²⁹ Having married her Prince, Travellia responds to his submission by giving him back his authority: "She answered, that he should govern her, and she would govern the kingdom" (A, 116). Cavendish does not provide a "popular or populist feminist vision"; women can become powerful rulers, but only through marriage.³⁰

Travellia's sacrifice of domestic power for political control corresponds to the strain of "Tory feminism" that Catherine Gallagher identifies in Cavendish's writing. Gallagher observes that Cavendish imagines herself as absolute and omnipotent; she even sets herself up as a monarch in her own right. Consider her well-known defense of *Blazing World*:

though I cannot be *Henry* the Fifth, or *Charles* the Second, yet I endeavour to be *Margaret* the *First*; and although I have neither power, time nor occasion to conquer the world as *Alexander* and *Caesar* did, yet rather than not to be mistress of one, since Fortune and the Fates would give me none, I have made a world of my own: for which no body, I hope, will blame me, since it is in every one's power to do the like. (B, 124)

Gallagher observes that such a "self-sufficient" sense of self might seem to contradict a belief in the supremacy of the real monarch, but that, for Cavendish, "the monarch becomes a figure for the self-enclosed, autonomous nature of any person." Gallagher's influential article argues that the Duchess's blind faith in the monarchy might have been what enabled her to question the subordination of women and that "the ideology of absolute monarchy provides, in particular historical situations, a transition to an ideology of the absolute self."³¹ She maintains that Cavendish sees only two possible ways of conceiving the self, as monarch and as subject; however, since women are excluded from citizenship and full subjecthood, the only available position for them is absolute monarchy. In exile from England, kingless, William loses his sense of self because he is no longer a subject (he becomes *abject*, lost, incomplete), but his wife becomes an absolute monarch, one whose feminine, imaginary realm poses no threat either to the exiled English sovereign whom they both support or to her husband's domestic authority.³²

Exchanging power in the home for power in the province enacts precisely the gendered Royalist paradox that Gallagher identifies: a man can achieve autonomous subjectivity through service to a monarch, but a woman can become an autonomous subject only by

being a monarch herself, which in *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* immunizes her from gender. When their leader announces that she is a woman, “although . . . habited like a man,” the faithful soldiers of Amity exclaim, “Heaven bless you, of what sex soever you be.” Travellia’s sex makes a vast difference to her love life, but none “what . . . soever” to her subjects (A, 115). Her compromise allows both herself and her Prince to be complete subjects, at least in Cavendish’s Tory utopia.

We need to extend Gallagher’s model, however, to account fully for Cavendish’s utopianism. What gives Travellia her authority to civilize the cannibals (who are, after all, royal by birth, as she will become by marriage) but her own sense of superiority to beings different from her in color, shape, and culture? In *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*, rank can outweigh differences of gender and color; women can appropriate the power of rank, but only through marriage; but ultimately, the “moral” or rational knowledge to “civilize” can replace all these criteria as a ground for authority (A, 75). Ten years later, Cavendish undertook another literary experiment with race, romance, and royal power. In *Blazing World*, however, rank is displayed not through but in spite of variations in skin color and species, in a romantic response or challenge to the observations of the new science.

IV. BLAZING WORLD

The fantastic plot of *Blazing World* recalls *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* in several ways, beginning with an attempted rape, featuring multicolored natives, and concluding with a successful female monarchy. A young Lady, kidnapped by a rapacious merchant, finds herself adrift at sea in the Arctic; while the sailors on board the ship die of cold, her chastity preserves her, and she crosses the North Pole to the adjoining pole of the Blazing World, of which she eventually becomes Empress. Like Cavendish herself, or like Travellia in *Assaulted*, the Empress takes the rank of her husband, the Emperor, whose narrative function is to forward the romance plot by ennobling the Lady (the only instance of class mobility that Cavendish countenances). Deciding to write a Cabbala, the Empress summons the Duchess of Newcastle from Earth to be her scribe. Having left their bodies behind in the Blazing World, the Duchess and the Empress travel to our world as souls in order to investigate alternative systems of government. When the Duchess of Newcastle becomes discontented because she wishes to rule a world, like her friend the Empress, the Empress counsels her to make a world of her own in her imagination, where she, too, can enjoy absolute power.

The people of the Blazing World exist in a variety of colors and humors (as in the quotation with which I began this article), but these physical variations replace cultural or religious ones:

the men were of several complexions, but none like any of our world . . . there was but one language in all that world, nor no more but one Emperor, to whom they all submitted with the greatest duty and obedience, which made them live in a continued peace and happiness, not acquainted with other foreign wars, or home-bred insurrections. (*B*, 130)

Enjoying absolute power over her subjects, scientists, and soldiers, and their absolute devotion, the Empress rules by controlling knowledge and its production; the narrator implies that if subjects can be kept ignorant of foreign uprisings or domestic troubles, they will remain at peace. Carrie Hintz suggests that female autonomy in *Blazing World* exists only under conditions of political control and censorship; there is one language, one ruler, one religion, and within that religion, “no diversity of opinions,” and only one form of worship (*B*, 135). In this sense it is Restoration England’s opposite: in England there are fewer variations in human color and none in shape, but multiple religions, varying opinions within single religions, and even more forms of worship.

In the Blazing World, the most important cultural or social distinctions are those between “the imperial race,” who are Princes “made eunuchs for that purpose”; “the ordinary sort of men,” who are multicolored; and the “rest of the inhabitants,” who are animal-men scientists. These distinctions seem to replicate some of the divisions of Restoration England, but with important differences. Rank is not inherited in the usual sense, since the Princes are “eunuchs” (*B*, 133), nor is it visible through bodily variation (in contrast to *Assaulted*), but has to be enforced through what Kegl rightly identifies as “sumptuary laws”:

None was allowed to use or wear gold but those of the imperial race, which were the only nobles of the state; nor durst anyone wear jewels but the Emperor, the Empress, and their eldest son, notwithstanding that they had an infinite quantity both of gold and precious stones in that world. (*B*, 133)³³

As in *Assaulted*, the “imperial race” of the utopian world is verbally linked to “the King, the Queen, and all the royal race” of England (*B*, 192); England serves as both tacit parallel and counterexample,

where royalty is likewise established through custom and taboo rather than through explicit bodily differences, but where reproduction is of paramount importance.

The three distinct classes of people in the *Blazing World* cannot be identified as separate or inferior races by many of the usual or emergent criteria of Restoration England (sex, skin color, religion, species difference). The “imperial race” lacks the physical signs of gender difference; the “ordinary . . . men” lack a recognizable taxonomy of skin color, since the paratactic parade of colors in the *Blazing World* contrasts knowingly with the hierarchies of color in Cavendish’s world (they are “not white, black, tawny, olive or ash-coloured” [B, 133]); the variously-shaped “inhabitants” are both “men” and animals, rational scientists and irrational beasts. Occupation or service seems to figure as the main distinction between the three groups, although even this system breaks down; we don’t really know how the “ordinary,” multicolored people spend their time (perhaps this reflects Cavendish’s own ignorance of middle-class life).

The Empress reinforces the loose connection between vocation and species difference by setting the various fish-, bear-, bird-, ape- and fox-men to various types of scientific experimentation, “proper to their species” (for example, bird-men investigate the nature of the wind, fish-men enquire why the sea is salty, worm-men look for the sources of minerals, and lice-men—in a rather churlish swipe at Robert Boyle—attempt to weigh air [B, 134]). The tasks assigned to the scientists connect physical shape and species to intellectual function, creating a scheme of classification that repeats the emergent real world associations of various races (in Cavendish’s pseudo-scientific thinking, different species) with particular qualities. Just as species difference in Cavendish’s seventeenth-century world is used to assign “beastly” work to black women and domestic work to white ones, just as gender difference is used to assign domestic work to white women and intellectual work to white men, so species difference among the “ordinary sort of men” in *Blazing World* alters the kind of scientific work that they can do. Unlike in the historical world, however, species difference does not bar them from participating in intellectual work altogether; it does, however, limit them to engaging in empirical science, in observations of *physical* objects in the material world.

The Empress, on the other hand, can enjoy pure Cartesian logic, with no material or tangible basis. She convinces the scientists that, for example, black cannot be caused by the absence of light, because

we can still see black objects (*B*, 143); on another occasion, she unceremoniously dismisses her chemists (ape-men), who cannot give a straightforward definition of the elements of nature. Having “imposed a general silence upon them,” she concludes vigorously that “nature is but one infinite self-moving body, which by the virtue of its self-motion, is divided into infinite parts, which parts being restless, undergo perpetual changes and transmutations by their infinite compositions and divisions” (*B*, 154), triumphantly reaching this conclusion by rational speculation, without the aid of empirical observation or testing. The source of the Empress’s power is her rational ability and her knowledge; just as Travellia’s knowledge outranked the royalty of the cannibals and allowed her to “civilize” them, so the Empress’s abstract Cartesian logic renders all others—regardless of their shape, color, or gender—inferior.

Asserting this logic as the basis for power allows Cavendish to avoid declaring a belief in either mono- or polygenesis in her romance, just as she avoids declaring a preference for one theory of light above another. When the Empress speculates that a single seed or “seminal principle” might be responsible for the creation of vegetables and minerals (a single origin for all species), the Blazing scientists reply that, although vegetable seeds retain their “species” or character after reproduction, they “increase not barely of themselves, but by joining and commixing with other parts, which do assist them in their productions, and by way of imitation form or figure their own parts into such or such particulars” (*B*, 152). Paradoxically, Blazing vegetable seeds retain specificity—remain true to their species—but produce various differences in their offspring through a process of grafting rather than, as in the real world, through cloning (cuttings) or sexual reproduction (pollination). Helped by the “art” of “creatures that live within the earth” (*B*, 153), seeds can even yield “mixed species,” which are useless “weeds” to humans; “[g]ardeners and husbandmen” should not, however, interfere in the earth creatures’ mixed grafting, because “’tis a great prejudice to the worms” who are simultaneously sustained and generated from each species of plant (*B*, 153). Species difference is both essential, in that each “particular” kind of worm is descended from particular flowers, fruits, or roots, and mutable, because “in general . . . like . . . all other natural creatures,” the worms derive from “the corporeal figurative motions of nature” and can themselves produce new life-forms. Difference is essential, but it’s not essentially hereditary, because reproduction is a collaborative project that can have uncertain

outcomes. This erratic reproductive process partly explains the confusion that the Empress elicits when she asks “what opinion [the scientists] had of the beginning of forms?” only to be told that “they did not understand what she meant by this expression” (*B*, 152): there is no point of origin, “nothing new in nature, nor . . . a beginning of any thing” (*B*, 153). This constant renewal explains why the “imperial race” does not die out, even though the princes are “made Eunuchs” (*B*, 133). Later we learn that Blazing human reproduction is based not on sexual relations but upon spontaneous generation (*B*, 155–56), a system that “can project the disabling of patriarchy,” as Carol Neely observes, even as it evades the question of where, when, and how all species, and their differences, originate—a question that was intriguing philosophers, and Cavendish herself.³⁴ Like systematic explanations of light and color, coherent theories of species difference and heredity are out of place in a romance that accepts only the rules of Cartesian logic and timeless, endless, boundless “nature.”

The Empress’s statements on the nature of nature—infinite, ever changing, self-moving, yet divided into discrete parts whose divisions are always collapsing—could equally well be a statement of Cavendish’s views on the “female monarchical self,” to borrow Rachel Trubowitz’s phrase. Trubowitz observes that Cavendish states outright her belief in the inferiority of women to men in her scientific writings, and Trubowitz also suggests that the “female monarchical self” in *Blazing World* allows the possibility of female autonomy but requires the antifeminist exclusion of women from “employment in church or state” (*B*, 135) in order to preserve the Empress’s “imperial singularity.”³⁵

When the “female monarchical self” is embodied, certain physical characteristics cannot be changed. One of these attributes is color, which Cavendish sees as essential to the body but irrelevant to the mind. The scientists of the Blazing World explicitly deny that color is a superficial or light-dependent characteristic on one of the few occasions when they convince the Empress, instead of being convinced by her:

Why, said the Empress, colour is only an accident, which is an immaterial thing, and has no being of itself, but in another body. Those, replied they, that informed your Majesty thus, surely their rational motions were very irregular; for how is it possible that a natural nothing can have a being in nature? . . . there is no body

without colour, nor no colour without body; for colour, figure, place, magnitude, and body, are all but one thing, without any separation or abstraction from each other. (*B*, 151)

The Empress moves from believing that color cannot exist without light to believing that color is an essential part of physical embodiment. As aspects of physical nature, “color, figure, place, magnitude, and body” are all functions that imprison the soul. Spirits have no permanent or essential colors, as one of these spirits tells the Empress: “colour belongs to body, and as there is no body that is colourless, so there is no colour that is bodiless” (*B*, 175). When the spirits travel to various worlds, they have to take a material “vehicle,” or body, and when they have a vehicle, they have a color. Human beings, in contrast, have not “immaterial spirits” but “material souls.” These souls can travel in vehicles “of the purest and finest sort of air” (*B*, 193) because they are “self-moving, living and self-knowing” (*B*, 176). Cavendish does not address the question of whether air has a color; since she wrote *Blazing World* before she saw Boyle’s experiment with the air-pump, she probably considered air to be bodiless, and therefore colorless.³⁶ It is as “material souls,” clothed in air that the Duchess and the Empress embark upon their travels.

Color can, indeed, *must* be left behind when the soul travels out of the body, but gender is an essential attribute of the soul, and cannot: “they were both females,” confirms the narrator (*B*, 183). What seems at first to be a binary distinction between material/immaterial becomes blurred by the Duchess’s and Empress’s travels as gendered, “material souls,” just as the confusion between materiality/immateriality challenges the Empress’s earlier assumptions about the superiority of rational Cartesianism over physical scientific investigation; perhaps the two spheres of intellectual enquiry are not as different as the Empress believes, since souls can be both abstractions and “material” objects clothed in air, all at the same time.

The narrator ironizes the Empress’s beliefs further by breaking down another material/immaterial distinction—the difference between “platonic” and earthly love, between friendship and sexual desire. It is not simply the case that “material souls” retain a vague gender identification; they appear to retain the physical possibilities of sex as well. When an “immaterial spirit” suggests that the Empress enlist the Duchess of Newcastle to be her scribe, the Empress agrees, adding,

neither will the Emperor have reason to be jealous, she being one of my own sex. In truth, said the spirit, husbands have reason to be jealous of platonic lovers, for they are very dangerous, as being not only very intimate and close, but subtle and insinuating. You say well, replied the Empress; wherefore I pray send me the Duchess of Newcastle's soul. (*B*, 181)

The spirit seems to be contrasting the dangers of opposite-sex platonic lovers, whom he characterizes as crafty and “insinuating,” with the safety of a female scribe, and the Empress seems to agree. The passage defuses the threat that female friendship or love might supersede the marital tie, but once the Duchess (or rather, the Duchess’s “soul”) is brought to the Blazing World, the Empress finds that platonic lovers do not have to be male: “truly their meeting did produce such an intimate friendship between them, that they became platonic lovers, although they were both females” (*B*, 183). Presumably we are meant to keep the spirit’s strictures on platonism in mind still: the Duchess is evidently as “subtle and insinuating” as any of the male scientific scribes could have been, but her gender prevents the Emperor from experiencing jealousy. Although the gender of the Duchess’s and Empress’s souls is fixed, the direction of their erotic desires (their sexual orientation, to use an anachronism) is not.

We see this dual status of platonic love (as something that both replaces and consolidates opposite-sex marriage) when the souls of the Duchess and the Empress, while visiting the Duke, both leap into his body. The narrator observes that, “Had there been but some such souls more, the Duke would have been like the Grand Signior in his seraglio, only it would have been a platonic seraglio” (*B*, 194). Kegl analyzes this image in terms of seventeenth-century anxieties about the power of the Ottoman Empire (arguing that Cavendish constructs the Blazing World both in tension and collaboration with the Turkish realm) and suggests that Cavendish’s denial of sexual activity here “precludes the possibility of sexual contact between women and allows the continued representation of the mobilization of their desire.”³⁷

The image does both these things, but it also mocks the narrator by highlighting the absurdity of a “platonic seraglio.” Critics have tended to underestimate the degree of witty self-consciousness in *Blazing World*; even Kegl’s theoretically sophisticated account collapses “Margaret Cavendish” the narrator with the “Duchess of Newcastle” who appears in the text. The hasty “only it would have

been a platonic seraglio” destroys not the vision of the harem, but the notion of platonic love, particularly when it is followed by an account of the Duchess’s jealousy:

But the Duke’s soul . . . afforded such delight and pleasure to the Empress’s soul . . . that these two souls became enamoured of each other, which the Duchess’s soul perceiving, grew jealous at first, but then considering that no adultery could be committed amongst Platonic lovers, and that Platonism was divine, as being derived from divine Plato, cast forth of her mind that Idea of jealousy. (*B*, 194-95)

Cavendish is surely satirizing the Duchess’s logic as well her own authorial idealism: the slangy phrase, “divine Plato,” parodies her own enthusiasm for idealistic philosophy and points out the inefficacy of ideal, Blazing-World solutions to real-world problems. The narrator writes as though the Duchess has entirely suppressed her jealousy, but this solution to the problems of sexual competition is in every respect imaginary.³⁸ Only in a platonic world can all three subjects (Duke, Duchess, and Empress) continue to be intimate yet autonomous, connected yet apart, just as only in a “romancical” world can Margaret Cavendish become “*Margaret the First*” and triumph over “*Alexander and Caesar*” (*B*, 124).

Gallagher characterizes Cavendish as a “Tory feminist,” but we might equally call her a “Tory utopianist,” for whom freedom depends upon both the subject’s own individuality and the suppression of other, lesser-ranked, subjects. Just as Cavendish argued that science proved that women were essentially different from and weaker than men, so she argued that science proved that black men were essentially different from white ones, who were descended from Adam. And just as her model for female subjectivity depended upon an imaginary female monarchy, so her model of racial equality and plurality in *Blazing World* was chimerical, fictionally possible because it seemed historically *impossible*.

Anna Battigelli suggests that *Blazing World* offers an alternative model for both scientific discovery and subjectivity, one in which fancy, instead of being an unwanted side-effect of intellect, takes the central position in defining subjecthood. But Cavendish clearly contrasts her scientific endeavors with her “romancical” ones and imagines that they have very different purposes:

If you wonder, that I join a work of fancy to my serious philosophical contemplations; think not that it is out of a disparagement to

philosophy; or out of an opinion, as if this noble study were but a fiction of the mind; . . . though philosophers may err, . . . this does not prove, that the ground of philosophy is merely fiction, . . . since there is but one truth in nature . . . But *fictions* are an issue of man's fancy, framed in his own mind, according as he pleases, without regard, whether the thing he fancies, be really existent without his mind or not. (*B*, 124)

Despite her disagreements with both the physical means and the philosophical methods of the experimental scientists, Cavendish clearly distinguishes their motives from her own in writing "fiction." Cavendish believes that it is a philosopher's duty to seek out the truth, and many philosophers err because there is "but one truth" to be discovered; those who fail to see this "one truth" are therefore bound to err. But fiction writers can indulge themselves and their readers. Note that Cavendish has separated the two uses that Sidney attributed to poetry: "philosophy" now has the duty to teach, "fiction" to delight. Part of this delight, for Cavendish, stems from the constant awareness that her *Blazing World* is imaginary. The Empress's freedom depends upon the subjection of those lower in rank; the ranks in certain ways correspond to the emerging racial classifications of seventeenth-century England; but Cavendish's imagined infinity of worlds also allows the possibility of freedom—not in another's fictional universe, but in one's own.

Thus when Pepys wrote about Cavendish, "The whole story of this Lady is a romance, and all she doth is romantic," his analysis was correct.³⁹ Cavendish both wrote and lived a romance: willfully presenting herself in frontispieces as both an eccentric genius and a devoted wife in order to defuse her critics, as James Fitzmaurice argues; deliberately cultivating the appearance of eccentricity with the "antique" appearance and "extravagancies" of clothing that Pepys and others found fascinating; creating romantic versions of herself both in print and in person.⁴⁰ A romantic public persona allowed Cavendish to write and publish; a romantic attachment allows her *Blazing Empress* to become an absolute monarch; and only in and *through* romantic invention can women, and human beings of different colors and shapes, become complete and autonomous subjects.

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NOTES

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¹ Cavendish herself has during the twentieth century been considered variously “a crazy . . . bogey to frighten clever girls with” (Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own* [San Diego: Harvest, 1989], 62), a madcap would-be scientist (Gerald Dennis Meyer, *The Scientific Lady in England 1650–1760* [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1955]), and, today, the most canonized of English seventeenth-century women writers. See, for example, Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women’s Writing 1649–88* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1989); Moira Ferguson, “A Wise, Wittie and Learned Ladie’: Margaret Lucas Cavendish,” in *Women Writers of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Katharina Wilson and Frank J. Warnke (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1989), 305–18; and Hilda Smith, *Reason’s Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists* (Urbana-Champaign: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1982). Much early feminist criticism discussed the apparent contradiction between her reactionary political views and her radical demands for female equality, but Catherine Gallagher characterizes Cavendish’s royalism not as a contradiction to her feminism but as the precondition that enabled it (“Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Genders* 1 [1988]: 24–29). Cavendish’s lack of scientific method has been re-evaluated as a feminist challenge to experimental science in its principles and practices: see Lisa T. Sarasohn, “A Science Turned Upside Down: Feminism and the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 47 (1984): 289–307; Eve Keller, “Producing Petty Gods: Margaret Cavendish’s Critique of Experimental Science,” *ELH* 64 (1997): 447–71; and Anna Battigelli, “Between the Glass and the Hand: The Eye in Margaret Cavendish’s *Blazing World*,” 1650–1850 2 (1996): 25–38. Meanwhile, Lee Cullen Khanna’s “The Subject of Utopia: Margaret Cavendish and Her *Blazing World*,” in *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*, ed. Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Komerten (Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1994), 15–34; Carol Thomas Neely’s “WOMEN/UTOPIA/FETISH: Disavowal and Satisfied Desire in Margaret Cavendish’s *New Blazing World* and Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*,” in *Heterotopia: Postmodern Utopia and The Body Politic*, ed. Tobin Siebers (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1994), 58–95; and Londa Schiebinger’s *The Mind Has No Sex* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989), have reclaimed *Blazing World* as the first women’s utopia, characterized by female autonomy unavailable to Cavendish herself (see also Sylvia Bowerbank, “The Spider’s Delight: Margaret Cavendish and the Female Imagination,” *Women in the Renaissance: Essays from ELR*, ed. Kirby Farrell [Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1988], 392–408; and Rachel Trubowitz, “The Re-enchantment of Utopia and the Female Monarchical Self: Margaret Cavendish’s *Blazing World*,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 11 [1992]: 229–46), but still limited in various ways (see Carrie Hintz, “‘But One Opinion’: Fear of Dissent in Cavendish’s *New Blazing World*,” *Utopian Studies* 7 [1996]: 25–37; and Marina Leslie, *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1998]).

² Rosemary Keg], “‘This World I Have Made’: Margaret Cavendish, Feminism and *The Blazing World*,” in *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging*

Subjects, ed. Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, and Dymphna Callaghan (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 119–41.

³ Quoted in Kegl, 135.

⁴ Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (London: Penguin, 1994), 133. Hereafter abbreviated *B* and cited parenthetically by page number. Cavendish's punctuation and grammar are idiosyncratic; she complained that she had never been taught the rudiments of grammar, but I agree with Lilley that standardizing the text loses the flavor of Cavendish's prose. I have followed Lilley in retaining Cavendish's punctuation except where the sense is hard to decipher.

⁵ Kegl, 135.

⁶ Samuel Pepys, *Diary*, vol. 8 (1667), ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1974), 243; Samuel I. Mintz, "The Duchess of Newcastle's Visit to the Royal Society," *JEGP* 51 (1952): 175.

⁷ Pepys, 163; George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (London, 1589), facsimile reprint in *English Linguistics 1500–1800: A Collection of Facsimile Reprints* 110, ed. R. C. Alston (Menston, Yorks.: Scolar Press, 1968), sig. C, sig. M; Thomas Blount, *Glossographia* (London, 1656), facsimile reprint in *English Linguistics 1500–1800* 153, sig. Ll5. Blount also gives the noun "Romancist," which I borrow for my title: "Romancist (from the Spa. Romancista) one that composes such Romances" (sig. Ll5).

⁸ For Cavendish's life, see her own autobiography, *A True Relation of My Birth, Breeding and Life*, in *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader*, ed. Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview, 2000), 41–63; Douglas Grant, *Margaret the First* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957); Kathleen Jones, *A Glorious Fame* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988); and Smith. Since "The Duchess of Newcastle" and "The Duke of Newcastle" both appear as characters in *Blazing World*, I shall henceforth refer to the author as "Cavendish," her husband as "William," and to their literary incarnations as "The Duke" and "The Duchess."

⁹ Peter Erickson identifies two phases of early modern race studies. The first includes Eldred Jones's *Othello's Countrymen* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), and G. K. Hunter's "Othello and Colour Prejudice," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, vol. 53 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), which discussed the presence and significance of dark-skinned characters in Renaissance drama. The stage and the literary representation of black characters remained the focus of continuing work in the 1980s, such as Elliot Tokson's *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama, 1550–1688* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982), or Donald Barthelmy's *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Renaissance Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1987).

In the early 1990s, however, a new wave of critics observed that racism, far from being an inevitable response or the natural consequence of church teachings (as Hunter had suggested), arose in the Renaissance as the reflection of rapidly changing economic and social conditions, most notably colonial expansion and the black presence in Britain. Such treatments include Ania Loomba's *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1989); Jyotsna Singh's *Colonial Narratives/Cultural Dialogues: "Discoveries" of India in the Language of Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1996); Imtiaz Habib's *Shakespeare and Race* (Lanham, M.D.: Associated Univ. Presses, 1999); *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London:

Routledge, 1994), the essays of which considered the historical conditions necessary to produce a racially informed feminist literary criticism; and Kim Hall's groundbreaking *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995), written from a black feminist perspective, which urged critics to historicize the meanings of whiteness. James Shapiro's *Shakespeare and the Jews* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996), and Nabil Matar's *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999), interrogated race, nation, and religion. Michael McGiffert's special issue of *William and Mary Quarterly* (1997), questioned the disciplinary boundary between early British and early American literature. The essays in *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in the Renaissance*, ed. Joyce Green MacDonald (London: Associated Univ. Presses, 1997), continue to uncover "the real work that notions of racial difference are made to do under specific political, sexual, and economic regimes" (MacDonald, introduction, 9). At the turn of the millennium, John Michael Archer's *Old Worlds* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2001), Shankar Raman's *Framing "India"* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 2002), Mary Floyd Wilson's *English Ethnicities* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000), Arthur L. Little's *Shakespeare Jungle Fever* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, forthcoming), and my own work engage with the historical process of racialization in projects that range from the origins of English genealogies to re-evaluations of the roles of cartography, climate theory, travel, trade, and labor in early modern understandings of race and skin color.

¹⁰ Sir Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646), vols. 2–3 of *The Complete Works of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Faber, 1928), 3:242.

¹¹ George Best, "A True Discourse of the Three Voyages of Discoverie, for the Finding of a Passage to Cathaya, by the Northwest, Under the Conduct of Martin Frobisher Generall," *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1600), ed. Richard Hakluyt, 8 vols. (London: Dent, 1926), 5:170–276; Browne, 3:245.

¹² Browne, 3:240.

¹³ Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black* (Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture/Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1968), 16.

¹⁴ Best, 182.

¹⁵ These quotations are found in Jordan, 65, 66.

¹⁶ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power* (London: Pluto, 1984), 32.

¹⁷ In 1687 Dinah Black appealed to the courts for protection from her mistress, Dorothy Smith, who wanted to sell her for field work in America. Dinah's legal situation was unclear, but unfortunately we do not know the outcome of the case (Fryer, 32).

¹⁸ Robert Hooke, *Micrographia* (1665) (Lincolnwood, Ill.: Science Heritage, 1987), 101.

¹⁹ Hooke, 102, 54.

²⁰ Pepys, 243.

²¹ Quoted in Mintz, 174.

²² Cavendish challenged the new science in specific instances as well as in her general approach to natural philosophy, in particular by mounting in both *Observations* and *Blazing World* a three-fold attack on lenses that directly contradicts Hooke's examples (see Battigelli, 35).

²³ *Observations on Experimental Philosophy* (London: 1666), 51. With the exception of the passage on "Blackmoors" cited below, all quotations from *Observations*

tions are from the 1666 edition, which is hereafter abbreviated *O* and cited parenthetically by page number.

²⁴ For more detailed and precise accounts of optical theories of the seventeenth century, see “Sir Isaac Newton: CAREER,” *Britannica Online*, Online, Internet (<<http://www.eb.com:180/cgi-bin/g?DocF=macro/5004/62/0.html>> : Stanford Univ., 9 May 1998).

²⁵ Sir Isaac Newton, *Opticks* (1704) (New York: Dover, 1952).

²⁶ Leslie, “Evading Rape and Embracing Empire in Margaret Cavendish’s *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity*,” in *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Leslie (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1999). Stephen Orgel comments on the pronominal ambiguity of prose romances and theatrical accounts in *Impersonations* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 32–34.

²⁷ *Assaulted and Pursued Chastity* (1656), in *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, 75. Hereafter abbreviated *A* and cited parenthetically by page number.

²⁸ Lilley, introduction to *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, xxi.

²⁹ Leslie, “Evading Rape,” 192.

³⁰ Leslie, “Evading Rape,” 195.

³¹ Gallagher, 26, 25.

³² See Gallagher, 28.

³³ Kegl, 129.

³⁴ Neely, 83.

³⁵ Trubowitz, 240.

³⁶ Perhaps Cavendish took the conceit of spirits dressed in air from John Donne:

Then as an Angell, face, and wings
Of aire, not pure as it, yet pure doth weare,
So thy love may be my loves speare;
Just such disparitie,
As is twixt Aire and Angells puritie,
’Twixt womens love, and mens will ever bee.

It is tempting to speculate, however, that she would not have agreed with his concluding lines. See Donne, “Aire and Angells,” in *Donne: Poetical Works*, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), 50–52.

³⁷ Kegl, 134.

³⁸ Trubowitz’s molecular metaphor for female friendship in *Blazing World* as “the intimate bond between self-sufficient atoms” (240) is just as apt for the marriage of the Duke and Duchess: expansive yet self-contained, made up of discrete unions (between Duke and Duchess, Duchess and Empress, Empress and Duke) that continually dissolve and reform, like chemical bonds.

³⁹ Pepys, 163.

⁴⁰ James Fitzmaurice, “Fancy and the Family: Self-characterizations of Margaret Cavendish,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 53 (1990): 199–209; Pepys, 163, 186.