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**Donald Young**

Cavendish's Queer Fancies, Scientific and Romantic, in *The Blazing World* and *The Convent of Pleasure*

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## **Abstract**

In *The Blazing World*, Margaret Cavendish presents a concept of fancy, whereby an individual creates their own fictional world to realize those ambitions which cannot be realized in the real world. This concept is similar to the queer futurity of José Esteban Muñoz as presented in his book, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, but Cavendish distinguishes herself from Muñoz in fancy's lack of concern with the real world. This article analyzes how Cavendish uses this concept to imagine scientific, social, and sexual realities unavailable to her in *The Blazing World* and *The Convent of Pleasure*. In imagining social, sexual and romantic possibilities in *The Convent of Pleasure*, Cavendish exposes the limits of her concept of fancy: its inability to bring about tangible change in the real world.

## Introduction

In “The Defense of Poesy,” Sir Philip Sidney defends poetry against various charges brought against it by his contemporaries. Poetry’s detractors claim that it is useless fancy that breeds idleness at best and is morally and spiritually corrosive at worst. Sidney’s response to this attack is to assert poetry’s utility as a tool to instill virtue. “For if it be as I affirm, that no learning is so good as that which teacheth and moveth to virtue; and that none can both teach and move thereto so much as poetry: then is the conclusion manifest that ink and paper cannot be to a more profitable purpose employed” (Sidney 570). The value of poetry—and literature as a whole—then comes from its capacity to provide social utility. The fanciful nature of literature justifies itself by its ability to have a positive utilitarian effect on the real world.

A very different approach to the fantastical is found in Margaret Cavendish’s *The Blazing World*. This idiosyncratic work, published alongside one of Cavendish’s philosophical texts, is considered by many to be the first work of science fiction. *The Blazing World* shows the creation and domination of another world, ruled by women who eagerly inquire into scientific and philosophical mysteries. In this text, one finds a radically different approach to fancy, one that is ostensibly queer, where fancy exists in spite of the real world, rather than for the sake of it, while in her later play, *The Convent of Pleasure*, she portrays what fancy cannot accomplish: meaningful transformation of structures of oppression in the real world. In these fancies she creates, Cavendish imagines worlds of female agency, women’s inclusion in the scientific community, and same-sex romance.

This paper seeks to analyze the specific conception of fancy which Cavendish develops in *The Blazing World*, enumerating the different ends to which Cavendish applies fancy and how these fancies contrast with the historical reality of her lifetime. Following this, the events of her play *The Convent of Pleasure* will be read as an application of Cavendish’s concept of fancy to realize female social and homosexual desires. In this instance though, its application serves to reveal the concept’s own limits.

Cavendish begins *The Blazing World* with a section titled “To the Reader,” where she declares: “[...] although I have neither power, time nor occasion to conquer the world as Alexander and Caesar did; yet rather than not 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” (124). In this excerpt, Cavendish elucidates her reason for creating this work of fancy, that being to realize her desire to have a world of her own. Unlike Sidney’s concept of fancy, Cavendish’s fancy is not justified by any social utility external to the one who

fancies. Fancy needs no justification, rather “fancy creates of its own accord whatsoever it pleases, and delights in its own work” (*The Blazing World* 123).

Tessie Prakas has previously discussed fancy in *The Blazing World*, concluding that the fancy as introduced in the section titled, “To the Reader,” is undermined by the narrative of the work. The author of this essay contends that the actions of the Duchess of Newcastle in *The Blazing World* reinforce this concept, rather than undermining it. Cavendish’s concept of fancy is in many ways similar to José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of queer futurity, presented in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (Muñoz 18). In this text, Muñoz defines queerness as “a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (1). For Cavendish, fancy fulfils a similar role. She is cognizant that her ambitions are doomed to be unrealized, but the fanciful world she creates offers her a way to get beyond the disappointing present. Furthermore, Cavendish’s creation of a world of fancy is a mode of desiring. In imagining this idealized world, she is actively desiring the alternate reality she has created, while the projection of herself into this fantasy (which she does quite literally) serves simultaneously as a fulfillment of that desire (*The Blazing World* 182).

In Cavendish’s concept of fancy, I contend, fancy is a potentiality. Muñoz defines potentiality as “a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense” (9). Without fancy existing in the present, the potential of its existence is present in the imagining, and that presence exists as a queer, invigorating force that allows its creator to survive a disappointing reality. Take the Duchess of Newcastle’s simultaneous existence within her real world and *the Blazing World*. *The Blazing World* being a fancy, her simultaneous existence in these two worlds is analogous to the experience of one having a fancy. The presence of *the Blazing World* offers the Duchess reprieve from her native world, with its “so many several nations, governments, laws, religions, opinions, etc.” that “all yet so generally agree in being ambitious, proud, self-conceited, vain, prodigal, deceitful, envious, malicious, unjust, revengeful, irreligious, factious, etc.” (*The Blazing World* 190).

What differentiates Cavendish’s fancy from Muñoz’s queer futurity is its relationship with time. Whereas queer futurity is expressly concerned with the future, fancy is not. Fancy, rather, emphasizes the relationship to the present. Queer futurity involves a hope that the potentiality will become actuality. Cavendish’s fancy has no such hope. Fancy offers an individual the opportunity to encounter a potentiality which is extremely unlikely to become actuality anytime soon. Fancy is the imagining of a world which is

not and will not be actual but exists as a potentiality which can be felt out by the individual.

A result of this distinction is that fancy does not share the external character of queer futurity. Queer futurity is attached to the possibility of change in the real world, and it is this hope that serves as a positive force. Cavendish's fancy, in contrast, is an internal project, one that serves as a survival mechanism for an individual more so than a positive political force. One imagines what could be but will not be, and this imagining allows the individual to take pleasure in these fictitious worlds. It is very similar to escapism. The individualism of fancy is even reflected in Cavendish's writing, take these lines from the epilogue of *The Convent of Pleasure*: "...she is careless, and is void of fear; / If you dislike her play she doth not care" (54). There is a disregard for those desires, such as virtue or social utility, that are not for the self.

## The Blazing World Analysis

Moving on to the narrative of *The Blazing World*, it begins significantly: "a young Lady" (*The Blazing World* 125) is kidnapped by a foreign merchant who intends to sexually assault her. However, before this heinous act can be committed, a storm causes the young Lady's captors to lose control of the vessel. It drifts on to the North Pole where the merchant and his men freeze to death. That *The Blazing World* begins with an act of sexual violence directed towards a woman is important. This establishes the grim condition of women which Cavendish is going beyond in creating her fancy. *The Blazing World* exists as a world in which this patriarchal structure of power is reversed. Consider the young Lady's elevation to the Empress. When she is brought before the Emperor, rather than seizing her by force as the merchant did, he "conceived her to be some goddess, and offered to worship her" (*The Blazing World* 132). After their subsequent marriage, the Emperor "gave her an absolute power to rule and govern all that world as she pleased" (*The Blazing World* 132). Here, the Emperor gives up his absolute monarchial power to the Empress, who thus realizes Cavendish's ambition to rule her own world.

*The Blazing World* is also a homosocial space for women, where they can socialize free from the restrictive effects of patriarchy. The friendship between the Empress and the Duchess is so intimate that they are called "platonic lovers" (*The Blazing World* 183). In stark contrast to the isolated situation of the Empress at the beginning of the play, and very similar to Cavendish's later play, *The Convent of Pleasure*, *the Blazing World* is a distinctively female space, where women can coexist and engage in activities which bring them pleasure.

Within the text, the Empress and the Duchess engage in the same fancy-creation that Cavendish herself is engaged in. The Duchess suffers from a melancholy which “proceeds from an extreme ambition” (*The Blazing World* 183). The fictional Cavendish desires to be the ruler of her own world. Finding no terrestrial world uninhabited, and deigning not to conquer an inhabited one, the Duchess takes the advice of some friendly spirits and decides to create a celestial world for herself. Hearing of this possibility from the spirits, the Empress asks, “[C]an any mortal be a creator?” (*The Blazing World* 185). To which the spirits respond: “Yes . . . for every human creature can create an immaterial world fully inhabited by immaterial creatures, and populous of immaterial subjects, such as we are, and all this within the compass of the head or scull . . . And since it is in your power to create such a world, what need you to venture life, reputation and tranquility, to conquer a gross material world?” (*The Blazing World* 185-186).

The creation of worlds of fancy serves as an alternative to the real world. When one finds one's ambitions too great for the scope of the real world, or the conditions of the real world too harsh, a fanciful world is where one can go to escape uncompromising reality. The purpose of creating these worlds is not to cultivate virtue in the real world, but for the creator to “enjoy as much pleasure and delight as a world can afford [them]” (*The Blazing World* 186). There is something undeniably queer in this turn away from utilitarian justifications for fancy. One of the goals of queer theory broadly is the recontextualization and subsequent reevaluation of normative positions, such as the claim that art ought to have a social utility (Berlant and Warner 345), making this text's challenge to this claim decidedly queer. In its place, Cavendish offers fancy for fancy's sake, fancy that exists because it is pleasurable and precisely because what it depicts is not real.

Returning to the world the Duchess constructs, she attempts to create this world in accordance with the doctrines of various philosophers—Thales, Pythagoras, Plato, Epicurus, Descartes, and Hobbes—but none of them prove adequate. Thus, she “resolves to make a world of her own invention” (*The Blazing World* 188), using her own philosophical thought as the basis for the fantasy world she creates. The inability of the thought of canonical philosophers to capture the world the Duchess desires displays the failure of traditional Western thought to articulate the “queer” desires of those not found within the philosophical canon, such as women. Cavendish directly speaks of the prejudice against women in philosophy in *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*:

I might set up a sect or school for myself, without any prejudice to them [ancient philosophers]: But I, being a woman, do fear they would soon cast me out of their schools; for, though the muses, graces and sciences are all of the female gender, yet they were more esteemed in former ages, than they are now; nay, could it be done handsomely, they would now turn them all from females into males: So great is grown the self-conceit of the masculine, and the disregard of the female sex. (249)

Cavendish's fancy of a feminine scientific utopia in *The Blazing World* is a reaction to the distinctly masculine and misogynistic character of the early modern scientific project. Consider the scientific utopia imagined by Francis Bacon in *New Atlantis*. In *New Atlantis*, Bacon imagines the island of Bensalem, whose utopian conditions are owed to the work of Salomon's House, a mysterious scientific organization. Bacon's utopia, despite its lofty dreams of progress, offers little place for women within it. Women are only discussed in relation to the family structure and marriage—two patriarchal institutions. Bensalem's Feast of the Family, "a most natural, pious, and reverend custom" (Bacon 169), honors the supreme patriarch of the family, while Bensalem's marital traditions celebrate chastity and the naturalness of "the faithful nuptial union of man and wife" (Bacon 173). It is not only in family and marriage practices that Bacon's utopia is masculine and patriarchal, but also in the structure of Salomon's House. The leaders of Salomon's House are called "the Fathers of Salomon's House" (Bacon 175), a title evocative of the role of the father within the family structure of patriarchal societies. Bacon's utopia offers a decidedly masculine scientific utopia, serving as an indication of the general attitude of the period, to which Cavendish's feminine scientific utopia can be contrasted.

Turning now to Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, there is a section near the beginning of text where the Empress engages in a lengthy dialogue with the various species of animal-men of *the Blazing World*, whom each practice a particular profession within natural philosophy, mathematics, logic, or rhetoric. The Empress impresses these animal-men scholars with her knowledge and insight, as they did not know "that her Majesty had such great and able judgement in natural philosophy" (*The Blazing World* 155).

This peculiar section of *The Blazing World* shows Cavendish creating a fancy of a scientific community that allows women a place within it. This fancy starkly contrasts with reality, as there was no place for Cavendish in the scientific community at her time because she was a woman. Cavendish could not join the premier natural philosophical society of her day, the Royal Society, because she was a woman. Furthermore, Marcy Lascano notes that "very few philosophers engaged with Cavendish" (30). "Cavendish points to

misogyny and the barring of women from universities as key factors in this exclusion” (Lascano 36). Due solely to her gender, Cavendish hit a wall which she could not get beyond. Her wealth and privilege afforded her far more freedom than other women of her day, but she was still unable to have the same opportunities as a man. Her world of fancy allowed her to get past this insurmountable barrier through creating a fictitious world where a woman can be welcomed into the scientific community. A world of fancy exists then as a space where those not represented within traditional thought can develop their own way of being-in-the-world distinct from what is deemed acceptable within patriarchal scientific conventions.

Moving on to the content of Cavendish’s philosophical thought, Cavendish was very critical of experimental natural philosophy, which believed that systematic observations and experiments would provide insight into the causes of phenomena in the natural world. Her opposition to this methodology likely contributed to her exclusion from the Royal Society as well. The stated goal of many experimental natural philosophers was the understanding of Nature. Cavendish scoffed at this. Unlike many natural philosophers, she understood people as part of Nature. Since people are part of nature and “no part of nature is able to understand the whole” (Lascano 33), people cannot hope to understand Nature. The relationship between most natural philosophers and Nature becomes more complicated when the gendering of Nature as a woman, by both them and Cavendish, is considered. These masculine natural philosophers (Cavendish directly responds to Robert Hooke) place themselves outside of and opposing feminine Nature, rather than within it.

The scientific community in *The Blazing World*, in contrast, through embracing the ideas of the Empress which are themselves the ideas of Cavendish, reconcile the opposition to the feminine found in natural philosophy. Cavendish even more directly says this in the passage already quoted from *Observation Upon Experimental Philosophy*, where she claims that “science [is of] the female gender” (249), but men would rather make it masculine, thus emphasizing that gendered conflict. By accepting the unity of themselves with feminine nature, the gendered tension of science is reconciled, and it is achieved by the inclusion of a woman in the scientific community. In this way, Cavendish’s fancy imagines the flaws of science which could be overcome if her and other women would be included.

The gendered opposition of science is further criticized by Cavendish in her discussion of “art,” by which she means tools such as microscopes and telescopes. Ventriloquizing Cavendish, the Empress says, “[N]ature has made your sense and reason more regular than art has your glasses, for they

are mere deluders, and will never lead you to the knowledge of truth" (*The Blazing World* 141-142). To attempt to use tools to understand Nature, like the experimental natural philosophers, is folly. Nature has already provided you with everything you need to understand causes, that being your unaided senses and your reason; the use of technology will only serve to make your understanding less clear. The internal turn that this emphasis on reason versus experimentation proposes is reminiscent of Cavendish's concept of fancy. There is this implication that the potential for what you need is already inside of you, and any attempt to find a solution outside of yourself is a mistake.

In *The Blazing World* then, Cavendish offers a specific notion of fancy, one which she uses to create a utopia of female agency and scientific engagement which could not be realized in the real world. In her play released two years later, *The Convent of Pleasure*, Cavendish continues to utilize the concept of fancy, this time to again create a female utopia, but also to imagine female same-sex relationships and even the limits of her own individualist concept of fancy.

## The Convent of Pleasure Analysis

In *The Convent of Pleasure*, Cavendish imagines a convent of only women who have chosen to escape men entirely so they may pursue pleasure and avoid pain. These women, led by Lady Happy, enter the convent explicitly to avoid the sufferings of heterosexual marriage, which are clearly depicted in the play within the play that occurs in Act III, showing the pain of childbirth and adulterous, deadbeat husbands. Though it is impossible to know whether *the Convent of Pleasure* was a fancy for Margaret Cavendish, the opulence of the convent and its celebration of pleasure, found also within *The Blazing World's* idea of fancy, makes this a likely possibility.

Over the course of the play, Lady Happy falls in love with a princess who has joined *the Convent of Pleasure*, but these feelings which Lady Happy experiences put her in a melancholic state. In Act IV, Scene 1, there are two fantastical sequences where the Princess and Lady Happy, occupying masculine and feminine roles respectively, play characters in a heterosexual romantic pairing with one another. These sequences are fancies in the same sense as in *The Blazing World*. Lady Happy imagines these sequences to experience the homosexual desire she feels but is unable to reconcile. Lady Happy says, at the beginning of Act IV, Scene 1,

"But why may not I love a woman with the same affection I could a man? / No, no, Nature is Nature, and still will be / The same she was from all eternity" (*The Convent of Pleasure* 33).

The difficulty that Lady Happy has encountered is that she has devoted herself to Nature and to pleasure, but she considers homosexual desire unnatural. Considering the unity of Nature and pleasure asserted by Lady Happy in Act 1, Scene 2, then same-sex desire must be natural as it is pleasurable. The imitations of heterosexual romance found in these sequences, rather than championing the naturalness of heterosexuality, exhibit Lady Happy's inability to get beyond the heteronormative assumptions which inform her concept of what is natural and unnatural. That the Princess and Lady Happy must occupy separate masculine/feminine roles within their relationship is the result of a discourse of romance that could only be understood through a heterosexual lens.

In Act V, Scene 1 of the play, it is revealed that the Princess is actually a prince in disguise. Despite this event, the Princess and the Prince can be read as two distinct characters. Contrasting the disguised gender plot found within *The Convent of Pleasure* with the one found in Ben Jonson's *Epicoene or the Silent Woman* clarifies this point. First, in *Epicoene*, there are clues that Epicoene is not in fact a woman, so the inevitable reveal at the end of the play can be anticipated. The most obvious clue is Epicoene's name, which comes from the word "epicene" defined by *Oxford English Dictionary* as "a person having characteristics of both sexes, or of neither; a person of indeterminate sex; a hermaphrodite, transsexual, or transvestite." Meanwhile, the clues as to the Princess's identity as the Prince are sparse and vague. One such clue is a statement by the Princess that embraces of Lady Happy "though of a female kind, / May be as fervent as a masculine mind" (*The Convent of Pleasure* 34).

Similarly, consider Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, where the bulk of the play's comedy comes from the audience's knowledge that Cesario is not a man, but rather the woman, Viola, disguised as one. Secondly, *Epicoene* was a play written to be performed, while *The Convent of Pleasure* is a closet drama. When a theatergoer would see a performance of *Epicoene* in the early modern period, they would know that the character of Epicoene was being played by a male. The revelation that Epicoene was a man pretending to be a woman would then be a confirmation of what they already knew, but within the context of the play rather than outside of it. In contrast, being a closet drama and hence not to be performed, the Princess in *The Convent of Pleasure* does not have this peculiar relationship to gender. The absence of this means that the revelation that the Princess is really a prince functions as a transformation rather than a reveal of something that was in front of the audience's eyes the whole time. While Epicoene is always to some degree a man in women's clothes, the Princess goes from a woman in women's clothes to a woman in man's clothes, before transforming into a man in man's clothes

in an instant. These discrepancies between *The Convent of Pleasure* and other plays with similar plot elements lend themselves to a reading of *The Convent of Pleasure* where the Princess and the Prince are two separate characters. In response to this, one could argue that because of narrative conventions of the time, the Princess's transformation into the Prince could be anticipated, but just because narrative conventions could lead one to anticipate this does not mean the distinguishing characteristics of *The Convent of Pleasure* should be discredited. Cavendish's play is one which feigns operation within narrative conventions, but surreptitiously subverts them.

The existence of *the Convent of Pleasure* and the relationship between Lady Happy and the Princess are both underscored by the knowledge that this is not a state which the play itself can allow to continue uninterrupted. The state of things found in Acts II, III, and IV of *The Convent of Pleasure* is one which cannot continue. It is a convention of early modern comedies that their conclusions involve a restoration of the heteronormative order which is subverted throughout the other parts of the play.

Consider Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, where the play concludes with the queer romance between Viola and Olivia being reconciled by their marriages to Orsino and Sebastian respectively. Olivia and Sebastian's heterosexual marriage also reconciles the romantic desire of Antonio for Sebastian. Although many early modern plays may meander within the queer over the course of their narrative, there is seemingly an inability for them to finish within the queer. The conclusion must bring with it the reinforcement of heteronormative values and the reintegration of any ostensibly queer characters into the acceptable, heteronormative social order. Although one may wish to imagine a version of *The Convent of Pleasure* where the convent continues to exist and Lady Happy and the Princess live happily forever after, it is evident that this could not be so, at least at the time of Cavendish's writing. Despite this, reading *The Convent of Pleasure*, one can feel Cavendish straining against the restriction of convention.

In Act III, as mentioned briefly before, the women of the convent put on a play in which they enumerate the sufferings of women in heterosexual marriage. These many snapshots of marital life showcase adulterous, drunken, gambling husbands, and even one husband fittingly named Mr. Negligent. Also seen is both the pain of losing a child and of giving birth to one. This fictitious play eventually reaches this conclusion:

*Marriage is a curse we find,*

*Especially to womenkind:*

*From the cobbler's wife, we see,*

*To ladies—they unhappy be. (The Convent of Pleasure 31)*

Having finished the play, one may conclude that it reaffirms the value and necessity of heterosexual marriage over any non-normative desires, such as desire for a solely female space or romantic desire for another woman, through the marriage of Lady Happy to the Prince and the dismantling of *the Convent of Pleasure*, but the queerness of *The Convent of Pleasure* seems to reach beyond its conventional heteronormative finale.

What Act III and much of the play prior to the final act shows is a queerness that eludes the attempted reintegration of the conclusion. The reasons for the creation of the convent and the refusal of heterosexual marriage are clearly provided. Lady Happy provides a philosophical argument as to why the convent should exist in Act I, Scene II and the play within a play further justifies this by exhibiting the sufferings of heterosexual marriage for women in Act III. The play does not provide a rebuttal to the outlook of Lady Happy and the convent posit. To conclude, because the play ends with a heterosexual marriage and the disintegration of the convent, Cavendish is asserting the value of heteronormativity, is a mistake. The failure of heteronormative society to answer the criticisms of it brought forward by Lady Happy and the women of *the Convent of Pleasure* exposes the play's conclusion as empty; it is the failure to silence the queer and reintegrate them into heterosexual norms.

Reading *The Convent of Pleasure* an important question may arise: what is the conflict? The interpretation of the central conflict in this play is the basis for any further interpretation. A traditional interpretation of *The Convent of Pleasure* would likely conclude that the withdrawal of the women is the central conflict. The problem is then that this denial of heteronormative and patriarchal conventions will result in the destruction of society if something is not done. The anxiety experienced by the side characters Facile, Adviser, Courtly, Take-Pleasure, and Dick shows the mayhem caused by the convent. They need wives to be able to reproduce and continue the status quo, so they come up with the plan to "put [themselves] in women's apparel, and so by that means get into the Convent" (*The Convent of Pleasure* 21). What the reader wants to happen is for the convent to be dissolved so order may be restored.

If the central conflict is interpreted as the attempts to destroy *the Convent of Pleasure* though, then the play's interpretation takes a different course. While narrative convention may lead one to prefer the traditional interpretation of the conflict, the content of the play does lend itself to this queer alternative. This queer reading of the conflict does require a queering of form, as the structure of the play favors the traditional interpretation, with the play beginning with the convent's creation and ending with its dissolution. As has already been noted, there are the justifications for the convent in Acts I, II and III which are oddly sympathetic if *the Convent of Pleasure* is meant

to be read as the problem and again, these justifications are never rebutted.

What also must be considered is the framing of the previously mentioned male side characters. Facile, Adviser, Courtly, Take-Pleasure, and Dick are not written to be likable, even though a traditional reading of *The Convent of Pleasure* would entail these men being the sympathetic characters. Consider this line from Adviser, where he gives his opinion of what the consequences for Lady Happy should be for creating *the Convent of Pleasure*: “Her heretical opinions ought not to be suffered nor her doctrine allowed, and she ought to be examined by a masculine synod, and punished with a severe husband, or tortured with a deboist husband” (*The Convent of Pleasure* 13-14).

This kind of misogynistic call for punishment directed at the protagonist is hardly what would be coming from a character that the reader should consider right, especially considering Cavendish’s criticism of patriarchal institutions in her philosophical writing. These characteristics that strongly contrast with the traditional understanding of the play’s conflict lend credence to the queer interpretation offered, which further supports the argument that the play’s final heterosexual marriage is not a reconciliation of the queer. Instead, the play’s conclusion is the sorrowful end to the fancy of same-sex love and female utopia created by Lady Happy and the women of *the Convent of Pleasure*.

## Conclusion

Having defended this queer reading of *The Convent of Pleasure*, the Prince’s appearance is not then the realization of a romantic fancy, but the death of one. Notably absent from the play is any reaction to the Prince from Lady Happy to her marriage. The Prince declares his intention to marry her, stating that he “will have her by force of arms” (*The Convent of Pleasure* 48) if the councilors of the state do not allow it. This exclamation is a disconcerting expression of intended violence, which frames the marriage between the Prince and Lady Happy as one of possessorship rather than one of mutual affection. This contrasts with the equality found in the romance between Lady Happy and the Princess. Following this, Lady Happy has only four lines of dialogue, contained solely within the final scene, that are mostly irrelevant. Finding herself within a heterosexual marriage, not only has Lady Happy’s voice and agency disappeared, but so has the fancy she had constructed of a homosexual romance and a place free of patriarchal oppression. While *The Blazing World* introduces fancy and its potential as a positive endeavor for those whose ambitions are too great for reality, *The Convent of Pleasure* exposes the limit of fancy: its individual focus renders it impotent to meaningfully change oppressive structures in the real world.

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