Chapter 19

GENERIC *BRICOLAGE* AND EPICUREANISM IN MARGARET CAVENDISH'S IMAGINATIVE WORKS

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THE LATEST RESEARCH in the field of Cavendish studies has definitively established how thorough Margaret Cavendish's literary ambition was. While earlier critics of the 1980s saw in Cavendish a woman writer with a prodigious but often inexplicable literary output, recent scholars have shown the unusual degree of self-fashioning and conscious plotting of her career as a writer.[1] What has emerged is how systematic her exploration of genre after genre was—first poetry, then natural philosophy (in treatises, essays, aphorisms, and letters), fiction (novellas and a longer romance), life-writing (both biography and autobiography), and finally drama. Her literary ambition has almost no equal in the period, except perhaps in Ben Jonson. She often voices this feminist, literary ambition with brashness, as in the preface to her scientific romance of a new world dominated by a woman, *The Blazing World*: "I am not covetous, but as ambitious as ever any of my sex was, is, or can be; which makes, that though I cannot be *Henry* the Fifth, or *Charles* the second, yet I endeavour to be *Margaret* the *First*."[2] Entering into dialogue with tradition, Cavendish systematically takes up conventional forms and refashions them in a strikingly idiosyncratic manner to serve a political and a gender-oriented agenda. Critics have shown, for instance, how her scientific romance, *The Blazing World* (1666), and her biography of her husband allowed her to affirm her royalism.[3] Others have focused on her appropriation of genres as pre-feminist strategies of assertion and have shown how she breaks away from a male-dominated literary tradition by subverting generic codes.[4]

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1 On this aspect of Cavendish's literary output, see Anna Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998); Stephen Clucas, ed., *A Princely Brave Woman. Essays on Margaret Cavendish* (London: Ashgate, 2003); Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz, ed., *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003); Emma L. E. Rees, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); Lara Dodds, *The Literary Invention of Margaret Cavendish* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2013); and Lisa Walters, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Science and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

2 Margaret Cavendish, *The Blazing World and Other Writings*, ed. Kate Lilley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), 124.

3 For an opposite interpretation of Cavendish as leaning towards republicanism, see John Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 177–211, and Walters, *Margaret Cavendish*, chap. 3.

4 See, among many others, Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish*; Rosemary Kegl, "'The World I Have Made': Margaret Cavendish, Feminism and 'The Blazing World,'" in *Feminist Readings*

Finally, in the last twenty years or so, historians of philosophy have at last started taking her philosophy seriously, as entering into dialogue with that of her contemporaries in vital ways.[5]

In this essay, I return to Cavendish's appropriation of Epicurean philosophy in her imaginative, rather than her scientific, works because it allows us to address two issues central to her oeuvre. First, by incorporating philosophical and scientific issues into fictional genres, she leads us to question our understanding of literary genres in the seventeenth century. Second, she also self-consciously annexes a field specifically considered as "serious," and therefore theoretically reserved for men, by importing it into "lighter" genres deemed more acceptable for women—poetry and romance—while providing us with experimental forms, demonstrating, in Anna Thell's apt words, "the value and necessity of speculative, imaginative thought."[6] It is well known that Epicurean

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of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects, ed. Valerie Traub, M. Lindsay Kaplan, and Dympna Callaghan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 119–41; Linda Payne, "Dramatic Dreamscape: Women's Dreams and Utopian Vision in the Works of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle," in *Curtain Calls: British and American Women and the Theater, 1660–1830*, ed. Mary Anne Schofield and Cecilia Macheski (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1991), 18–33; Laura Rosenthal, " 'Authoress of a Whole World': The Duchess of Newcastle and Imaginary Property," in *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England: Gender, Authorship, Literary Property* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Lisa T. Sarasohn, "A Science Turned Upside Down: Feminism and the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 47 (1984): 289–307; Sophie Tomlinson, " 'My Brain the Stage': Margaret Cavendish and the Fantasy of Female Performance," in *Women, Texts and Histories, 1575–1760*, ed. Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (London: Routledge, 1992), 134–63; and Susan Wiseman, "Gender and Status in Dramatic Discourse: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle," in *Women, Writing, History: 1640–1740*, ed. Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (London: Batsford, 1992), 161–77.

5 See for instance the work done by Eileen O'Neill in her introduction to her edition of Cavendish's *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), x–xlvii. See also Susan James, "The Philosophical Innovations of Margaret Cavendish," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 7 (1999): 219–44; David Cunning, "Cavendish on the Intelligibility of the Prospect of Thinking Matter," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 23 (2006): 117–136; and Cunning's entry, "Margaret Lucas Cavendish," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2012), ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/margaret-cavendish/ (accessed April 20, 2018); Kourken Michaelian, "Margaret Cavendish's Epistemology," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 17 (2009): 31–53; Lisa Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish: Reason and Fancy during the Scientific Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); Sandrine Parageau, *Les Ruses de l'ignorance. La contribution des femmes à l'avènement de la science moderne en Angleterre* (Paris: Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2010); Eileen O'Neill, "Margaret Cavendish, Stoic Antecedent Causes, and Early Modern Occasional Causes," *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Etranger* 203 (2013): 311–26; and Brandie R. Siegfried and Lisa T. Sarasohn ed., *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish* (London: Routledge, 2016 [2014]).

6 Anna M. Thell, " '[A]s Lightly as Two Thoughts': Motion, Materialism, and Cavendish's 'Blazing World,' " *Configurations* 23 (Winter 2015): 1–33 at 3.

philosophy was considered more woman-friendly than other schools of thought, as some women and slaves had been admitted into Epicurus's garden.[7] Now seems a particularly appropriate time to re-evaluate Cavendish's engagement with Epicureanism in light of the recent editions of some of her most important works: after Eileen O'Neill's 2001 edition of *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* in the prestigious "Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy" series, we now have a new edition of *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*, edited by Sara H. Mendelson for Broadview Press (2016), and, in 2018, the scholarly edition of *Poems and Fancies* edited by Brandie Siegfried, which should durably change our perception of Cavendish's poetry.[8] Thirty years after Lisa T. Sarasohn's ground-breaking 1984 article, which established the now standard narrative of Cavendish's shift from Epicurean atomism to a form of vitalist materialism—a view she further developed in *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (2010)—the work done on Epicureanism in the period, in particular on the occasion of the recent Oxford edition of Lucy Hutchinson's translation of Lucretius (2012), has shed fresh light on the revival of Epicureanism that is the background of Cavendish's durable engagement with Epicurus. As Siegfried's edition of Cavendish's *Poems and Fancies* makes clear, the significant editorial changes between the three successive editions of the poems (the last of which was published in 1668) show that Cavendish's attitude towards Epicurean atomism was far more complex than is generally thought. This is confirmed by Cavendish's continuing fascination, as late as 1668, with the Epicurean ethics popularized by Gassendi in France and Charleton in England, which is demonstrated by a play like *The Convent of Pleasure* (published in *Plays, Never before Printed*). The present chapter aims at taking stock of the current state of the field, but it will also discuss the possible influence on Cavendish's perception of Epicureanism of several contemporary works that have not always been given their full due: it is now established that Cavendish is indebted to her friend Walter Charleton's translations and adaptations of the defences of Epicurus written by Pierre Gassendi in Latin and that she was also aware, in her later published works at least, of Cyrano de Bergerac's *Etats et Empires de la lune* (Paris, 1657)—translated into English in 1659 as *Selenarchia, or, The Government of the World in the Moon*.[9] But Cavendish was also probably cognizant of three other works important for the revival of Epicureanism in

7 Richard W. F. Kroll, *The Material World: Literate Culture in the Restoration and Early Eighteenth Century* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 9, and Penelope Anderson, *Friendship's Shadows: Women's Friendship and the Politics of Betrayal in England, 1640–1705* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 118.

8 Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. O'Neill; Margaret Cavendish, *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World*, ed. Sara H. Mendelson (Ontario: Broadview, 2016); Margaret Cavendish, *Poems and Fancies with The Animal Parliament*, ed. Brandie R. Siegfried (Toronto: Iter, 2018). My thanks to Brandie Siegfried for letting me see an early version of her work; this essay, drafted mostly before it came out, offers a different reading of the poems, however.

9 For the influence of Charleton on Cavendish, see Line Cottegnies, "Le 'renouveau' de l'épicurisme en Angleterre au milieu du dix-septième siècle de Walter Charleton à Margaret Cavendish—une histoire franco-britannique," *Études Épistémè* 14 (2008), and Lisa Walters's chapter in this

England in the mid-seventeenth century, which might have shaped her thinking about Epicurean atomism and ethics: the 1650 French translation of Lucretius by Abbé Michel de Marolles, *Le Poëte Lucrèce* (which was the first translation of Lucretius into any vernacular language), John Evelyn's partial translation of Lucretius which follows suit, *An Essay on the First Book of T. Lucretius Carus De rerum natura* (London, 1656), and finally the often-mentioned but little-read *History of Philosophy* by Thomas Stanley in four volumes, published between 1655 and 1662.

Margaret Cavendish's versatility in her exploration of fictional and philosophical genres has often puzzled her readers, although critics have often questioned the existence of a dichotomy. Rather than seeing a divide between her imaginative works and her works of natural philosophy, they have tried (with more or less traction) to show the underlying consistency of her multi-faceted thought, which could take contradictory forms.[10] It has also been suggested that perhaps we should not try to reconcile the overt contradictions that can be perceived in her oeuvre, because Cavendish might have used her fiction and poetry to explore philosophical ideas imaginatively, in what I would like to call "moments of thought" or thought experiments,[11] which, like the multiple selves of Montaigne's *Essays*, should not be seen as a coherent whole but as a collection of successive states of being and thought. It is almost banal now to point out that a constant characteristic of her imaginative works is their generic hybridity. In her first published work, the 1653 *Poems, and Fancies*, she discusses natural philosophy in verse. Her longer romance *The Blazing World*, which is rightly considered the first work of utopian science fiction to have been written by a woman,[12] stages the heroine's

collection. For the influence of Cyrano de Bergerac, see Line Cottegnies, "Brilliant Heterodoxy in Margaret Cavendish's 'The Blazing World' and in Cyrano de Bergerac's 'Etats et Empires de la lune et du soleil,' " in *God and Nature*, ed. Siegfried and Sarasohn, 107–20.

10 Lisa Walters argues, for instance, that Cavendish's reliance on contradiction is a way of undermining the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction, and that her whole opus expresses an episteme which is both radical and revolutionary, but minimizes Cavendish's avowed royalism; *Margaret Cavendish*, 393.

11 For a tolerance of contradiction, see Thell, " '[A]s Lightly as Two Thoughts,' " but also John Shanahan, "Natural Magic in 'The Convent of Pleasure,' " in *God and Nature*, ed. Siegfried and Sarasohn, 141–60, 169.

12 While Cavendish's *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* can be connected with the line of lunar or stellar voyages stemming from Lucian down to Cyrano de Bergerac, it can also be seen as an early model for eighteenth-century utopian works such as Eliza Haywood's *Memoirs of a Certain Island Adjacent to the Kingdom of Utopia* (1725) or Mary Delariviere Manley, *Secret Memoirs … From the New Atalantis* (1709). It has also been named in connection with Sarah Robin Scott, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, or Charlotte Perkins Gilman. For the connections between Cavendish and Lucian, see Sarah Hutton, "Science and Satire: The Lucianic Voice of Margaret Cavendish's 'Description of a New World Called the Blazing World,' " in *Authorial Conquests*, ed. Cottegnies and Weitz, 161–78, and between Cavendish and moon voyages, see Mary Baine Campbell, *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Bronwen Price, "Journeys Beyond Frontiers: Knowledge, Subjectivity and Outer Space in Margaret

discovery of a new world adjacent to ours, her rise to power, and finally her rule over all aspects of society, in particular the scientific and intellectual life of her new subjects. The romance features lengthy disputations between societies of scientists reminding the reader of contemporary debates at and around the Royal Society.[13] It includes in particular the satire of what Cavendish saw as the shortcomings of current experimentalism, when the "Emperess" rebukes the devotees of the microscope for trusting their sensorial "delusions."[14] Cavendish's poetry and fiction thus reveal a complex and oblique relationship with the natural philosophy she appropriates. Through her use of fiction, she was striving for a "freer," less codified approach to science and thought she could still contribute to the scientific debate of the day. Yet she was running the risk of being marginalized, even ignored. In fact, she never gained the status of a "virtuosa" among her contemporaries, although she was one of the first women admitted to visit the Royal Society in 1667,[15] and she repeatedly complained that male thinkers ignored her. The misunderstanding lingered for over three centuries, and it is only in 2001 that her major philosophical opus, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, made its entry into an important philosophy series.[16] What are we then to make of the fictional works which offer a commentary on the natural philosophy of her day? The generic conventions of her chosen media necessarily refract the issues at stake in a different way. By foregrounding the transmuting power of the female imagination, Cavendish genders science and appropriates a male field.[17] In doing so, she makes natural philosophy subservient to her

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Cavendish's 'The Blazing World' (1666)," in *The Arts of Seventeenth-Century Science: Representations of the Natural World in European and North-American Culture*, ed. Claire Jowitt and Diane Watt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 127–45; Cottegnies, "Brilliant Heterodoxy in Margaret Cavendish's 'The Blazing World' "; and Frédérique Aït-Touati, *Fictions of the Cosmos: Science and Literature in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), chap. 6.

13 For the influence of Bacon's *New Atlantis*, see among others Line Cottegnies, "Utopianism, Millenarianism and the Baconian Programme of Margaret Cavendish's 'The Blazing World' (1666)," in *New Worlds Reflected: Travel and Utopia in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Chloë Houston (London: Ashgate, 2010), 71–91, and Frédérique Aït-Touati, "Making Worlds: Invention and Fiction in Bacon and Cavendish," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Early Modern Literature and Science*, ed. H. Marchitello and E. Tribble (London: Palgrave, 2017), 489–504.

14 On satire, see Hutton, "Science and Satire," and for a revision of the common view, Emma Wilkins, "Margaret Cavendish and the Royal Society," *Notes and Records*: *The Royal Society Journal of the History of Science* 68 (2014): 245–60.

15 For a contemporary testimony, see Samuel Pepys, *The Diary*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols. (London: Bell, 1970–83), 8:186, 196, 209; 9:123; and Samuel Mintz, "The Duchess of Newcastle's Visit to the Royal Society," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 51 (1952): 168–76.

16 Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. O'Neill.

17 Cavendish often describes imagination as inherently female and works of fiction as an honest occupation for women, although this is a double-edged argument: "*Poetry*, which is built upon *Fancy*, *Women* may claime, as a *worke* belonging most properly to themselves: for I have observ'd,

self-celebration as a female author (or "authoress").[18] But the paradox remains: why did a woman with no formal education, but extraordinary literary ambition, turn to natural philosophy? And, given her ambition for fame and glory,[19] why did Cavendish choose to discuss intellectually demanding issues in fictional genres, thereby making her texts vulnerable to criticism? To make matters worse, rather than remaining safely within the boundaries of accepted scientific wisdom, she chose to focus repeatedly on a sensitive philosophical trend, Epicureanism. Thus not only did her choice of fiction as vehicle for science undermine her claim to authority, her choice of an ancient philosophy that was considered dangerously heretical in the seventeenth century did as well. I would suggest that in two important works that bracket her literary career—her 1653 poetry miscellany, *Poems, and Fancies*, and her 1668 play, *The Convent of Pleasure*—Epicurean physics and ethics offered the "authoress" a "soft" entry into a world of ideas from which she had been excluded by virtue of her gender and education. Epicurean philosophy enabled her to create utopian spaces for a subversive female subject and, as such, proved instrumental in her development as a self-fashioning woman author.

Cavendish clearly conceived the two sides of her oeuvre as interrelated. Her prose romance, *The Blazing World*, was first intended as an appendix for her treatise, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, like *New Atlantis* to *Sylva Sylvarum*.[20] If read as a companion piece for the latter, the romance offers an ironic and sometimes parodic perspective on many of the issues under study. A case in point is her satire of experimentalism, with the hair-splitting debates among the scientists of the utopian "Blazing World." However, Cavendish was writing from a marginal position, as a woman who had no formal education and yet, braving contemporary reactions, ventured into print, and as a bold explorer of genres heterogeneous with the subject matters they treated. When Claude Levi-Strauss coined his famous concept of "intellectual bricolage," he precisely saw heterogeneity as one of its main characteristics. Distinguishing between two kinds of scientific knowledge, he pitted the "engineer" (or expert in a given field) against the "bricoleur," who is able to "make do with whatever is at hand, that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project."[21] Levi-Strauss used this notion of

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that their *Braines* work usually in a *Fantasticall motion*," *Poems, and Fancies* (London, 1653), sig. A3. All subsequent quotations from this edition.

18 "A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life," in *The Life of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, to which is added the True Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life by Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle*, ed. C. H. Firth (London: Routledge, n.d.), 178.

19 "[A]ll I desire, is *Fame*, and *Fame* is nothing but a *great noise*, and *noise* lives most in *Multitude*; wherefore I wish my *Book* may set a worke every *Tongue*" (*Poems, and Fancies*, sig. A3).

20 On the complementarity between Bacon's two works, see David Colclough, " 'The Materialls for the Building': Reuniting Francis Bacon's 'Sylva Sylvarum' and 'New Atlantis,' " *Intellectual History Review* 20 (2010): 181–200.

21 Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, anonymous trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966 [1962]), 19–20.

"bricolage" as an analogy to define "mythical thought," but it is tempting to apply the concept to the generic creativity that Cavendish manifests in her work. One striking illustration of this hybridity at work is her poetry written on such subjects as the dance of atoms or the mechanisms of the passions.[22] On numerous occasions, Cavendish underlines the novelty of her gendered, clean-slate (*tabula rasa*) approach to science and philosophy. In some instances, she denounces the shortcomings of a female aristocratic education, which generally included not much more than learning how to spell and read, sewing and dancing lessons, as well as a smattering of French.[23] But she repeatedly claims to have turned what could be considered a handicap into a strength, putting forward a wholly positive conception of originality that rejects the slavish and pedantic imitation of previous authors. In this respect, her gender effectively made her one of the first "Moderns" against the supporters of the "Ancients," anticipating a later public debate.[24] In *Poems, and Fancies*, she even boasts provocatively about failing to have read any of the authors who previously wrote on the topics she discusses.[25] The engraved frontispiece of a later work, *The Worlds Olio* (1656), shows her at her writing desk beneath conspicuously empty bookshelves, while the motto underlines her intellectual self-reliance:

> Studious She is and all Alone, […]
> Her Library on which She looks
> It is her Head her Thought her Books.
> Scorning dead Ashes without fire
> For her own Flames doe her Inspire.

As is well known now, Cavendish launched into an extensive reading programme in the 1660s, which led her to revise her scientific ideas significantly. But back in 1653, when she first began writing imaginatively about science, she chose to explore a philosophical doctrine which, even though it was going through a revival, was still considered as excitingly marginal in the field of seventeenth-century philosophy—Epicurean atomism.

The idea of an Epicurean renaissance in the 1640s and 1650s was originally put forward by Thomas Franklin Mayo and Robert Hugh Kargon and has more recently been qualified by scholars such as Reid Barbour, Stephen Clucas, Howard Jones, David Norbrook, and Catherine Wilson.[26] The period saw the publication of major texts

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22 *Poems, and Fancies* (London, 1653), 5–46 in particular.

23 Cf. "A True Relation of my Birth, Breeding and Life," in Cavendish, *Life*, 157.

24 See Cottegnies, "The 'Native Tongue' of the 'Authoress,' " in *Authorial Conquests*, ed. Cottegnies and Weitz, 103–19. For the quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, see Paddy Bullard and Alexis Tadié, ed., *Ancients and Moderns in Europe: Comparative Perspectives* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2016).

25 *Poems, and Fancies*, sig. [A6].

26 See Thomas Franklin Mayo, *Epicurus in England (1650–1725)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934); Robert Hugh Kargon, *Atomism in England from Harriot to Newton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966); and more recently Reid Barbour, *English Epicures and Stoics: Ancient Legacies in Early Stuart Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998); Stephen

important for the history of Epicureanism in the seventeenth century—in particular Walter Charleton's multi-volume adaptation of Gassendi's works (from 1652) and John Evelyn's first partial English translation of Lucretius's *De rerum natura* (1656).[27] The influence on English thought of Gassendi, who was instrumental in "christianizing" Epicurus, cannot be underestimated.[28] The history of the atomic revival, however, is one of continuity rather than clear-cut epistemological shifts, and publication dates are not the only relevant factor in constructing a history of the reception and circulation of heterodox ideas: scribal publication and oral exchanges also need to be taken into account. While in exile in Paris and later in the Netherlands, the Marquess (later Duke) of Newcastle was an important patron for Royalists, such as Hobbes, Davenant, Cowley, Evelyn, Denham, Finch, Kenelm Digby, and Charleton himself. Margaret Cavendish necessarily approached some of the most influential and important thinkers of her day, including Gassendi himself, with whom William Cavendish had been corresponding and who visited them when they were in Paris.[29] She also corresponded with Charleton.[30] It is easy to see why Epicureanism, with its reputation of being women-friendly, could be perceived as a marginal entry into science, as it required no previous formal academic education. To try to clear Epicurus's reputation, Gassendi had shown that the women the philosopher accepted in his garden community were not courtesans (as was often claimed by

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Clucas, "The Atomism of the Cavendish Circle: A Reappraisal," *The Seventeenth Century* 9–10 (1994): 247–73; Howard Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1992 [1987]); Catherine Wilson, *Epicureanism at the Origins of Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); David Norbrook, "Introduction," in Lucy Hutchinson, *The Works, vol. I: The Translation of Lucretius*, ed. Reid Barbour and David Norbrook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), i–cxvi; and David Norbrook, Stephen Harrison, and Philip Hardie, ed. *Lucretius and the Early Modern* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

27 See in particular Walter Charleton, *The Darkness of Atheism Dispelled by Reason* (London, 1652), *Physiologia Epicuro-Gassendo-Charltoniana* (London, 1656), and finally *Epicurus's Morals* (London, 1656); John Evelyn published a translation of bk. 1 of Lucretius as *An Essay on the First Book of T. Lucretius Carus De Rerum Natura* (London, 1656). Evelyn never saw the other five books through print; the manuscripts are held in the British Library, except for bk. 2, which is lost (BL Evelyn MSS 33–34).

28 See Lisa T. Sarasohn, *Gassendi's Ethics: Freedom in a Mechanistic Universe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), and Sabina Fleitman, *Walter Charleton (1620–1707), Virtuoso: Leben und Werk* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1986).

29 Waller and Petty later recall the intellectual life at the Cavendishes' Paris abode; see William Petty, "Epistle dedicatory," *Discourse made before the Royal Society … Concerning the Use of Duplicate Proportion in Sundry Important Particulars together with a New Hypothesis of Springy and Elastique Motion* (London, 1674), sigs. [A8v]–[A9v], and Waller's oral testimony, recorded in John Aubrey, *Letters Written by Eminent Persons*, 2 vols. (London, 1813), 2:626.

30 Cf. *Letters and Poems in Honour of the Incomparable Princess Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle* (London, 1667), 111, for example.

his detractors).[31] Epicurean thought thus gave Cavendish a place from which to think about philosophy and science; it also stimulated her imagination, because it allowed her to think about matter as free from too strict a sense of hierarchy. Finally, it gave her a publishing niche, as she could claim the status of a popularizer, writing more specifically for the curious female reader. It is not surprising, therefore, that Cavendish explicitly set out writing *Poems, and Fancies* for female readers. Even though she increasingly came to fear the reprobation of her female readers, she first seems to have thought that if they gave her their sympathy, she could act as their champion: "So shall I get *Honour*, and *Reputation* by your *Favours*; otherwise I may chance to be cast into the *Fire*. But if I burn, I desire to die your *Martyr*."[32]

It is not known whether she actually had access to a manuscript translation of Lucretius: no print translation of Lucretius would have been available to her before Evelyn's version of Book 1 in 1656, except Marolles's French translation which inspired Evelyn.[33] What is known, however, is that Cavendish was well aware of Epicurean atomism as early as 1653. When she describes an ideal library in her 1656 miscellany *Natures Pictures*,[34] she includes Epicurus among the few authors she admits. *Poems, and Fancies*, which could almost qualify as a work of scientific vulgarization, includes explicit references to Epicurean atomism: Cavendish muses on various aspects of atomism in a way that is fanciful but illustrates several contemporary debates.[35] She can thus be credited with being one of the first English authors to assert her belief in heliocentrism, and she does so in a poem.[36] Critics, perhaps taking Cavendish's claims to "singularity"[37] at face value, have tended to overemphasize the eccentricity of her poetry. The collection consists of an apparently random combination of "fairy poems," poems about atoms, the passions, her own thoughts, but also animals, the Civil War, etc., not to mention the frequent prose interruptions in which she instructs her reader on how her text should be read. When read in its context, however, the volume is much less of an oddity, as

31 See Pierre Gassendi, *De vita et moribus Epicuri [1647]. Vie et mœurs d'Épicure*, ed. Sylvie Taussig (Paris: Alive, 2001), 301–4.

32 "To all Noble, and Worthy Ladies," sig. [A3v].

33 The first complete translation of Lucretius was published in 1682 by Thomas Creech as *Titus Lucretius Carus His Six Books of Epicurean Philosophy*. Lucy Hutchinson was herself working on her own manuscript translation in the 1650s, but it was not published, although it might have circulated. See Norbrook, "Introduction," in Hutchinson, *The Works, vol. I*, and Reid Barbour, "Lucy Hutchinson, Atomism and the Atheist Dog," in *Women, Science and Medicine 1500–1700*, ed. Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton (Stroud: Sutton, 1997), 122–37, and Reid Barbour, "Between Atoms and the Spirit: Lucy Hutchinson's Translation of Lucretius," *Renaissance Papers* (1994): 1–16.

34 *Natures Pictures* (London, 1656), 357–61.

35 See Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish*.

36 See *Poems, and Fancies*, 149 [error for 173]. This defence of heliocentrism she shares with Cyrano.

37 Cavendish, "A True Relation," in *Life*, 175.

Hero Chalmers and, more recently, Brandie Siegfried have argued.[38] It is worth pointing out, for instance, that "scientific" poetry (neo-Latin or English) was a well-established sixteenth-century tradition in England, which Robert M. Schuler attributes to the rediscovery of Manilius and Lucretius one century earlier.[39] As Brandie Siegfried convincingly shows, Cavendish's volume bears intriguing similarities to *De rerum natura*.[40] It is no coincidence if Cavendish's volume, in a distant echo of Lucretius—or perhaps George Buchanan's 1586 *De Sphaera*, for that matter[41]—opens with a poem about the creation of the world, entitled "Nature calls a Councell, which was Motion, Figure, matter, and Life, to advise about making the World."[42] In a volume published in London in 1650, Anne Bradstreet, a contemporary of Cavendish's and reputedly one of the first American authors, also muses on scientific phenomena in a series of poems on "The Four Elements," "The Four Humours in Man's Constitution," "The Four Ages," "The Four Seasons," etc.[43] But Bradstreet's scientific background is the conventional Galenic theory of the humours, which makes Cavendish's poems look more audacious. As for the fairylore, Cavendish probably derives it from the famous *Hesperides* (1648) of Robert Herrick, whose poetry was widely read among Royalists in the period and whose taste for miniaturization she shares.[44] But her preoccupation with the infinitely small could also stem from a fascination with the new scientific discoveries entailed by microscopic observations, and can perhaps even be linked with her interest in such polemical doctrines as the plurality of worlds, which was, incidentally, also an Epicurean tenet. Cavendish comes back repeatedly to this idea, and muses about the existence of multiple worlds, in her poetry collection. This enduring fascination led her, years later, to write her work of "science fiction," *Blazing World*, about the discovery of a new world, contiguous to ours like two pearls in a necklace. Here in her poetry, however, she muses on the existence of the infinitely small and meditates on minuscule multiple worlds, sometimes replicated *ad infinitum*, worlds within worlds within worlds, like "a Nest of *Boxes*": "For *Creatures*, small as *Atomes*, may be there, / If every *Atome* a *Creatures Figure* beare" (44). In a poem like "A World in an Eare-Ring," she merges two poetic traditions heterogeneous to each other—a gallant, *précieux* line and the scientific tradition—and "feminizes" both by turning a female jewel, the earring, into a vehicle for another, miniature world: "the *Ladies* well may weare / A *World* of *Worlds*, as *Pendents* in each *Eare*" (45).

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38 Hero Chalmers, "'Flattering Division': Margaret Cavendish's Poetics of Variety," in *Authorial Conquests*, ed. Cottegnies and Weitz, 123–44, and Siegfried, "Introduction," *Poems and Fancies*.

39 See Robert M. Schuler, ed., "Three Renaissance Scientific Poems," *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978): 117.

40 Siegfried, "Introduction," *Poems and Fancies*, 18–22.

41 Or even such religious poems as Du Bartas's *Divine Weeks* (first complete translation, London, 1605).

42 *Poems, and Fancies*, 1.

43 Cf. Anne Bradstreet, The *Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America* (London, 1650).

44 Cf. Marjorie Swann, "The Politics of Fairylore in Early Modern English Literature," *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (2000): 449–73.

In spite of its relative fancifulness, Cavendish's enterprise perfectly echoes Lucretius's "method" and his justification for choosing verse:

> So since our Methods [sic] of *Philosophy*
> Seems harsh to some, since most our Maxims flie,
> I thought it was the fittest way to dress
> These rigid Principles in pleasing Verse,
> With fancy sweetning [sic] them; to bribe thy mind
> To read my Books, and lead it on to find
> The Nature of the World, the Rise of Things,
> And what vast profit to that knowledge brings.[45]

Cavendish too uses the appeal of poetry to convey more serious scientific arguments. Her poetry obeys a principle of variety, as is revealed by the favourite gendered metaphors she uses to define her own "method," those of the "olio," "hodge-podge," or "motley":[46] she thus compares herself to a cook, incorporating serious intellectual issues into lighter poetry, or elsewhere to a seamstress dressing them under pleasant garb.[47] These are apt metaphors for her implicit didacticism: her poetry was not primarily designed for the male, knowing readers, but for female readers—at least at the beginning of her writing career. In her more forthright pre-feminist moments, she shows a clear sense of belonging to a community that has been kept in ignorance: "we are kept like birds in cages to hop up and down in our houses […]; thus wanting the experiences of nature, we must needs want the understanding and knowledge and so consequently prudence, and invention of men."[48] In an edition of *The Blazing World* that was issued separately from *Observations on Experimental Philosophy*, she even claims to be writing the romance specifically for women readers (a claim that does not feature in the combined edition): "by reason most Ladies take no delight in philosophical arguments, I separated some from the mentioned Observations, and caused them to go out by themselves, that I might express my respects, in presenting to them such fancies as my contemplation did afford."[49]

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45 Lucretius, *Titus Lucretius Carus His Six Books of Epicurean Philosophy*, trans. Thomas Creech (London, 1699 [1692]), 29.

46 For instance, in *Poems, and Fancies*, 128–29, or in *The Worlds Olio*, in which it is a structuring metaphor.

47 Cavendish also describes Nature as a cook (*Poems, and Fancies*, 127–28). In *Playes* (London, 1662), she casts herself as "a plain, cleanly English Cook-maid, that dresses Meat rather wholsomely than luxuriously" (sig. [A8v]). Another favourite metaphor of hers is that of the dress (e.g. "Natures Dresse," *Poems, and Fancies*, 127). Interestingly enough, she took special pride in designing her clothes herself, as she tells us in her autobiography (*A True Relation*, 175).

48 "To the Two Universities," *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London, 1655), n.p.

49 *The Blazing World* (London, 1668), n.p., Wing N 850. For more detail about the complex editorial history of *The Blazing World*, see Line Cottegnies, "Appendix: A Bibliographic Note: Cyrano's 'Estats et Empires de la Lune' and Cavendish's 'Blazing World,' " in *God and Nature*, ed. Siegfried and Sarasohn, 209–15, 210–11.

In *Poems, and Fancies*, she thus muses about an Epicurean theory of matter: she echoes more specifically Lucretius's philosophy of matter as expanded in Books 1 and 2 of *De rerum natura*—with some forays into Book 4, for his analysis of perception, and Book 6, for the meteors. There is little doubt that her atomism in the volume is Epicurean in outlook, although it is usually assumed that the influence of Lucretius on her writings had to be indirect.[50] Direct echoes are perhaps indeed few and far between; however, most of the qualities and characteristics of the atoms described by Cavendish can be found in Lucretius. Like the Latin poet, she describes nature as being composed of four categories of atoms, all of different shapes, all eternal and infinite in number: the square atoms cohere to make up earth, the round ones water, the long atoms constitute the air, and the sharp ones fire. The square atoms are in fact her invention, for Lucretius had remained unspecific about the shapes of atoms, describing them simply as smooth or irregular, dense or loosely linked, round or long, small or big. Lucretius, however, had not expressed a strict correlation between particular atom shapes and the various elements,[51] as for him no matter could be composed of just one kind of atoms.

There are deeper similarities between Lucretius's theory of matter and Cavendish's, as shown by Brandie Siegfried.[52] Some of the basic principles are the same: for both thinkers, nothing can be made out of nothing, and the variety of created things is the result of the various movements and combinations of atoms in a vacuum. For both, the universe is conceived as infinite and the hypothesis of a plurality of worlds is evoked. But there are also major differences. Cavendish falls short of affirming the role of chance in the creation of the world and she carefully avoids discussing the notion of the controversial "swerve" or *clinamen*.[53] More daringly, contrary to Epicurus (or most mechanists of her days), she gives her atoms an autonomy, which already foreshadows her embrace of vitalism in the mid-1650s: "Small *Atomes* of themselves a *World* may make" (5). She thus creates a world without God's agency, while Nature, which she occasionally describes as a female principle, is almost divinized.[54] As a consequence, God takes no part in the Creation she describes in the opening poem, which evokes Lucretius's argument about the indifference of gods to men. But Cavendish ignores the potentially audacious

50 See Sarasohn, "A Science Turned Upside Down," 304n1, Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish*, 49–61, and John Rogers, *Matter of Revolution*, 177–211.

51 *De rerum natura*, 2:334–522. Brandie Siegfried interprets this in the context of an interest in Euclidian geometry ("Introduction," *Poems and Fancies*, 26–28).

52 See her "Introduction," *Poems and Fancies*, 18–26.

53 Siegfried, "Introduction," *Poems and Fancies*, 18.

54 "Eternal God, Infinite Deity, / Thy Servant, NATURE humbly prays to Thee, / That thou wilt please to favour Her, and give / Her parts, which are Her Creatures, leave to live" (*Philosophical Letters*, London, 1668), 543. See Sophia B. Blaydes, "Nature Is a Woman: the Duchess of Newcastle and Seventeenth-Century Philosophy," in *Man, God, and Nature in the Enlightenment*, ed. Donald C. Mell, Jr., Theodore E. D. Braun, and Lucia Palmer (East Lansing: Colleagues, 1988), 51–64, and Sara Mendelson, "The God of Nature and the Nature of God," in Siegfried and Sarasohn, ed., *God and Nature*, 27–42.

consequences of some of these propositions, in particular on the immortality of the soul and on divine providence. By failing to comment on these, she seems to refuse to condemn Lucretius at a time when the contemporary critical debate concerning Epicurean atomism was raging.[55]

Cavendish's version of atomism is also at variance with Epicurean atomism as far as the motion of atoms is concerned:[56] Lucretius describes them as continually clashing; for Cavendish, they alternately clash[57] and enter into attraction or "sympathy" with one another (a term reminiscent of Neo-platonic or Paracelsian thought). But the most important discrepancy between Cavendish and Lucretius concerns the vitalism she attributes to atoms. As Stevenson has shown, Cavendish's turn to a vitalist, corpuscular theory of matter can be seen as growing out of her initial Epicurean atomism, which served as a stepping-stone to a personal theory of matter.[58] In her more mature philosophical works of the 1660s, she offers a thorough critique of Epicurean atomism, perhaps because she had realized by then the potentially daring implications of her initial positions. In *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666), in particular, she returns to the problem of sensation and rationality to offer a biting critique of Epicurean materialism: "how absurd it is to make senseless corpuscles the cause of sense and reason, and consequently of perception, is obvious to every ones apprehension and demonstration" (sig. [Yy1]). Even though her description of natural phenomena, in the same volume, still owes much to the atomism she so forcefully criticizes, it is clear that by this stage in her intellectual development Cavendish no longer needed Epicureanism, having elaborated a more satisfying, syncretic doctrine.

How can we assess, then, the status of Cavendish's Epicurean "stage" in her intellectual development? A critic like John Rogers, at one end of the spectrum, sees in her conversion away from atomism an audacious attempt to construct a gendered vitalist utopia, with a view to liberating "women from the constraints of patriarchy." By attributing free will to bodies of matter, he claims, Cavendish created the basis for a revolutionary political system which could free her gender, although she might have recoiled

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55 On the identification of Hobbes with a contemporary Epicurus, see Samuel Mintz, *The Hunting of Leaviathan: Seventeenth-Century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962). It is only in her 1668 *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* that Cavendish clearly comes to criticize Epicurean atomism. See Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish*, 60–62, and Sarah Hutton, "Anne Conway, Margaret Cavendish and Seventeenth-Century Scientific Thought," in *Women, Science and Medicine*, ed. Hunter and Hutton, 218–34, in particular 225–26.

56 The central role she attributes to motion shows the influence of Hobbes. See Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish*, 62–84, and Sarah Hutton, "In Dialogue with Thomas Hobbes: Margaret Cavendish's Natural Philosophy," *Women's Writing* 4 (1997): 421–32.

57 Atoms are often presented as at war with one another, a metaphor that reminds us that she was writing during the Civil War.

58 Cf. Jay Stevenson, "The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish," *SEL* 36 (1996): 527–43, in particular 536–37. Stevenson takes issue with the idea of a radical conversion to vitalism in the 1660s. See also Siegfried, "Introduction," *Poems and Fancies*, 45.

from the Republican implications of such a scheme.[59] But Cavendish was far from being a consistent thinker, and she defies generalization; it is therefore difficult to extend Cavendish's theory of matter to the political field: in fact, it could be argued that her dissociation of a theory of matter from politics testifies to a wider epistemic change—the end of the analogical correspondences that, for centuries, had held together microcosm and macrocosm. Her poetry miscellany might be read as the perfect illustration of this phenomenon: in her poetic world, analogies and similitudes no longer hold the universe together and the epistemological bonds between microcosm and macrocosm seem to have come loose. The collection thus includes a series of poems in which Cavendish plays on ossified analogies and metaphors by giving free rein to her imagination in a form of compulsive metaphorizing—her own recurrent word is "to similize." Her successive analogies comparing nature or the human body with a whole series of heterogeneous objects clearly function as a symptom of the de-anchoring of similitudes.[60] At the other end of the critical spectrum, Anna Battigelli formulates a more cautious assessment of the importance of Epicurean atomism in Cavendish's development, which is still valid today. For her, Epicurean thought allowed the duchess to question the reliability of the senses and to experiment with a mechanist theory of matter. Cavendish, however, grew dissatisfied with "the democratic implications of a universe governed by individual atoms":[61] Faced with the contemporary political chaos, she felt she ought to reject such a system and only retain Epicurean atomism as a metaphor for political and psychological conflict.

In any case, Epicureanism obviously constituted a necessary stage in Cavendish's intellectual development, although she might have grown wary of its metaphysical (and possibly political) implications by the mid-1650s. She would just have had to read Evelyn's embarrassed justification for publishing Lucretius in English, in 1656, to become fully aware of Epicurus's heretical reputation. Evelyn felt the need to sandwich his 67-page-long translation (with Latin text) of Book 1 between a long preface and a hundred-page-long essay entitled, "Animadversions upon the first Book of T. Lucretius Carus," a line-by-line refutation that tapped both Gassendi and Charleton but was highly critical of Lucretius.[62] Like Evelyn, she might have thought that she had to distance herself from the atheistic inferences of Epicureanism. The final section of her 1666 *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*—which can be read as a running commentary on the recently

59 Rogers, *Matter of Revolution*, 181, 200. Walters shares this perspective but sees Cavendish as more radical (see note 10 to this chapter).

60 For instance, "Similizing the Windes to Musick," "Similizing the Clouds to Horses," "Similizing Birds to a Ship," "Similizing the Sea to Meadows, and pastures, the Marriners to Shepheards, the Mast to a May-pole, Fishes to Beasts," "Similizing the Head of Man to a Hive of Bees," etc. (*Poems, and Fancies*, 138, 142, 156 [146], 149).

61 Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish*, 60.

62 For the almost schizophrenic result, see Line Cottegnies, "Michel de Marolles's 1650 Translation and its Reception in England," in *Lucretius and the Early Modern*, ed. Norbrook, Harrison, and Hardie, 179–80.

published *History of Philosophy* by Thomas Stanley—likewise includes a ten-page-long critique of Epicurus. Cavendish used this section as an opportunity to reassert her current philosophical principles. Here her revision of Epicurean atomism is used as the cornerstone of her new vitalist system, based on a conception of Nature as "an infinite self-moving body" (sig. [2Hh1v]). What becomes clear here is that Cavendish's thought gradually emerged from and took shape out of her confrontation with the atomist hypothesis. Both atomism and vitalism thus gave her the confidence and authority she wanted as a female subject to shape herself into a writer concerned with posterity.

Although Cavendish was obviously well informed about Epicurean atomism early in her writing career, she seems to have become interested in Epicurus's ethics only much later. This is evidenced by *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668), which focuses on the idea of the Epicurean garden. Here she developed the potentialities that she had ignored in her elaboration of Epicurean atomism: the moral philosophy of Epicurus, which gave her an opportunity to stage a female utopia, but also, paradoxically, its containment and failure. Cavendish would have had two sources in English at hand to inform her about Epicurean ethics: Walter Charleton's 1656 *Epicurus's Morals*, which was an adaption of Gassendi's *De Vita et moribus Epicuri* (Paris, 1647) and Jean-François Sarasin's *Apologie pour Epicure* (Paris, 1651),[63] and Thomas Stanley's third volume of *The History of Philosophy*, published in 1660, which includes a long section on Epicurus, also loosely adapted from Gassendi, with paraphrases from Diogenes Laertius and Lucretius.[64] We know from *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* that by 1666 Cavendish had been reading Stanley's philosophical compendium.[65] In these pages, Cavendish read a handy synthetic account of Epicurus's physic but also received a crash course in Epicurean ethics. There she found a source for some of the themes and issues she explored in *The Convent of Pleasure*, such as a justification of pleasure as the source of felicity or an extremely eloquent caution against married life as a hindrance to pleasure and tranquillity.[66] There

63 Jones, *Epicurean Tradition*, 202–3.

64 "Epicurus his Life and Doctrine. Written by Petrus Gassendi," followed by a synthesis of his physic and ethics. See *The History of Philosophy. The Third and Last Volume, in Five Parts* (London, 1660), 105–275; for Epicurean ethics, see more particularly 226–75.

65 "I gave myself to the perusing of the Works of that Learned Author Mr. *Stanly*, wherein he describes the Lives and Opinions of the Ancient Philosophers," Margaret Cavendish, *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (London, 1668), 350.

66 See Stanley, discussing Epicurus's "Domestick Prudence," *The History of Philosophy*, 240: "If you find you cannot, without much trouble, live single; that you can patiently bear with a crosse-wife, and disobedient children; that you will not so much as vex, to behold your children crying before you; that you shall not be perplexed and distracted with various sollicitudes, how to provide all things requisite to a married life, how to prevent all the inconveniences, and the like: in this case, to marry a wife, and to beget children, for whom you may provide with a conjugall and fatherly prudence, is lawfull. But unlesse you know your self to be such, you see, by Marriage and Issue, how much you will hinder the happinesse of your life, True tranquillity." For more about marriage, see Walters in Chapter 11 of this volume.

she would also have found a clear presentation of a practical morality based on the praise of sobriety, continence, moderation, fortitude, and friendship.

With *The Convent of Pleasure*, Cavendish offers a philosophical experiment, creating a society obeying Epicurean ethics, with an obvious twist, since hers is an all-female version of an Epicurean community. Lady Happy, an orphan heiress, decides to found a separatist community, a lay "convent," based on freely chosen chastity, to escape from the torments of marriage, which are described as a form of slavery. This alternative social model is clearly perceived as threatening to a patriarchal order based on marriage and the submission of women. Cavendish had already written about a female community in a previous play, *The Female Academy* (1662),[67] but this academy was an educational institution in which young ladies were being taught how to become good wives. This is not the case in *The Convent of Pleasure*, where the reference to Epicurean philosophy, made explicit from the beginning, is used to legitimize an alternative social model. As early as in Act 1, scene 2, Lady Happy, whose very name evokes the Epicurean ideal, solemnly declares her desire for independence: "Men are the only troubles of women […]. I will not be so inslaved, but will live retired from their Company."[68] In another play, *Wits Cabal*, Mademoiselle Ambition, a character who anticipates Lady Happy, denounces a conception of social interactions based on men's desire to acquire power over others—a system which, Ambition argues, destroys women: "[E]very Creature naturally desires and strives for preeminency, as to be superiour, and not inferiour […]; only Women […] are so far from endeavouring to get power, as they voluntarily give away what they have."[69] As a corrective to such a pessimistic view of society, Lady Happy's community explicitly obeys egalitarian, Epicurean principles: "My Cloister shall not be a Cloister of restraint, but a place of freedom, not to vex the Senses but to please them" (220). Happy's perspective is deliberately non-Christian. Invoking, as did Lucretius, the indifference of the "gods" towards men as a legitimizing factor, she sets the satisfaction of the senses as a goal, but within the limits of temperance and reason, a principle that is the hallmark of orthodox Epicureanism.

For her *hortus conclusus* is one based on freedom, as distinguished from licentiousness and excess: "[T]he gods are bountiful, and give all, that's good, and bid us freely please our selves in that which is best for us: and that is best, what is most temperately used, and longest may be enjoyed, for excess doth wast it self, and all it feeds upon." This ethical programme constitutes an audacious critique of Christian austerity, which, Lady Happy suggests, only contributes to legitimizing the subjection of women. She chooses to "serve Nature" instead (220). Oblivious to the men's hostile reactions, she promulgates the "laws" of her community: equality in all things, down to the furniture of each of the rooms or the dresses attributed to each of "Nature's Devotees," friendship, chastity, and the satisfaction of simple pleasures. Even the diet she advertises is a reflection of the

67 *The Female Academy* was published in Cavendish's first volume of plays, *Playes* (London, 1662).

68 *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays*, ed. Anne Shaver (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 220. All subsequent quotations from this edition.

69 Cavendish, *Plays* (1662), 254.

pleasant sobriety she aims at: it is based on simple, natural foods which can be grown within the community, such as fish, cereals, fruit, and clear water.

> For every Sense shall pleasure take,
> And all our Lives shall merry make:
> Our Minds in full delight shall joy, […]
> Each Season shall our Caterers be,
> To search the Land, and Fish the Sea;
> To gather Fruit and reap the Corn,
> That's brought to us in Plenty's Horn;
> With which we'l feast and please our tast,
> But not luxuriously make a wast.
> (220–21)

All care is taken to cater for the slightest wishes of the inhabitants of the "convent": "None in this World can be happier," as one of them concludes (225).

This separatist community is thus governed by strict neo-Epicurean principles: it is defined by retreat into a pastoral community, the celebration of nature and natural needs, the gods' benign indifference to men, pleasure envisaged as the condition of happiness—the latter being defined as the absence of turmoil and control over one's own passions—and finally the importance of friendship. All these Cavendish could have read about in Charleton's 1656 *Epicurus's Morals* or in Stanley's 1660 synthesis. But it is Epicureanism with a twist that finds its way into *The Convent of Pleasure*: Epicurus never described single-sex communities, nor did he advocate chastity as such; he was not against sexual fulfillment as long as it did not lead to over-indulgence.[70] Cavendish seems aware of the subversive nature of this feminist project, since *The Convent of Pleasure* shows the containment of the revolutionary separatist model, as if she knew that such a threatening marginality could not be tolerated. The second half of the play stages the failure of the female community. The alarmed "gentlemen" gather before the walls and literally lay siege to the convent. Both the community and Lady Happy's "Heretical Opinions" (222), as one of the men calls them, are perceived as a threat to the social order. The gentlemen register a situation they describe as quasi-revolutionary and consider using violent means to squash what they see as a form of rebellion, such as burning down the "convent."[71]

But it is from within that the convent will have to be destroyed: a "foreign Princess," who proves to be a man cross-dressed as a woman, gets admitted into the

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70 Lucretius's *De rerum natura* starts with an ode to Venus as the principle governing the world. Interestingly, early feminist utopias were usually based on such a valorization of chastity, from Christine de Pizan down to Mary Astell, who will later also advocate similar utopian all-female communities. See *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies, For the Advancement of their true and greatest Interest* (London, 1694).

71 This scene is an obvious echo of Fletcher's *The Women's Prize, Or The Tamer Tamed* (see Act 1, scene 3). We know that Cavendish knew Beaumont and Fletcher's plays: "Noble Readers, do no think my Playes, / Are such as have been writ in former daies; / As *Johnson, Shakespear, Beamont, Fletcher* writ." Cavendish, *Playes*, 1662, sig. [A7v].

Convent—although his gender is only revealed to the reader (spectator) at the beginning of Act 5, when it is first mentioned in a stage direction.[72] The conventional motif of cross-dressing, a commonplace of the romance tradition and of Shakespearean comedy, receives an original treatment here.[73] The Prince, although astutely described by one of the women as having "a Masculine Presence," seduces Lady Happy as "the Princess," who is herself cross-dressed as a succession of male heroes in the various theatrical entertainments they perform together. At the end of the play, after being saluted as a man by his ambassador, the Prince bluntly confirms his true identity and proclaims his marriage with Lady Happy without further ado. He then dissolves the convent and seizes the building. The climactic seduction scene, placed at the beginning of Act 4, reveals what could be seen as Cavendish's ambivalence towards a separatist community. At various points in the play, the ladies entertain themselves with theatricals, including masques. This allows the "Princess" to cross-dress as a shepherd and thus to become Lady Happy's male suitor in the pastoral masque they perform. As the masque seems to overflow its boundaries, Happy and the "Princess" woo each other in pastoral verse (Act 4, scene 1). This passage has often been read as about same-sex love, but, paradoxically for a moment which could be seen as most subversive, the role-playing brings about a return to the patriarchal order, even though it allows the exploration of marginal fantasies of homoerotic desire in fairly explicit terms.[74] The neo-Epicurean utopia is here eventually proven vulnerable, as it is destroyed by the emergence of love and desire within an all-female community that was in theory based on the exclusion of such feelings. At the beginning of the experiment, when Lady Happy publicizes the Epicurean rule, she specifically describes her community as based on a "natural," alternative religion which demands that passions be kept under control. When she falls in love, she feels she has betrayed this new religion because she has allowed desire to threaten her tranquillity:

> O Nature, O you Gods above,
> Suffer me not to fall in Love;
> O strike me dead here in this place
> Rather then fall into disgrace.
> (239)

However, Lady Happy finally reintegrates the social order, and the Prince abruptly proclaims their marriage with great authority (Act 5, scene 1). The same-sex plot has suddenly dissolved, as if now irrelevant. As with Olivia in *Twelfth Night*,

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72 "Enter an Embassador to the PRINCE," 243.

73 The model that comes most readily to mind is that of Pyrocles, in Sidney's *Arcadia*, who dresses up as a woman, Zelmane, to approach the woman he loves, Philoclea. Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Maurice Evans (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), bk. 2, chap. 11, 286.

74 For different readings of the cross-dressing, see Theodora A. Jankowski, "Pure Resistance: Queer(y)ing Virginity in William Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure' and Margaret Cavendish's 'The Convent of Pleasure,'" *Shakespeare Studies* 26 (1998): 218–55, and Gisèle Venet, "Margaret Cavendish's Drama: An Aesthetic of Fragmentation," in *Authorial Conquests*, ed. Cottegnies and Weitz, 213–28, more specifically 223–25.

homoerotic desire develops more or less harmoniously into different-sex romance and marriage. Cavendish, however, highlights the profound jarring note on which this final containment is based. Like Isabella at the end of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, perhaps in an even more spectacular fashion, the heroine remains obstinately silent at the decisive moment of the revelation. In this key scene, the Prince's proposal is not even addressed to her but to the "Councellors of th[e] State" whose authorization he requires, although he is ready to "have her by force of Arms" (244) anyway—presumably to abduct, if he is not allowed to marry her. In this final, violent scene of the play, the Prince disposes of the building of the convent, and, as if to erase all physical traces of the community, he desecrates it by giving it to the fool Mimick. The containment both of same-sex desire and of the utopian separatist community is thorough and seems to negate the very possibility of such an all-female community. This denouement ostensibly foregrounds the failure of the neo-Epicurean experiment, perhaps its impossibility: first because it ignores the reality of the senses, and then because a patriarchal society posits female submission. A community like Lady Happy's cannot exist within an authoritarian society geared towards marriage and reproduction. The utopia of retreat is a failure because Lady Happy's natural religion is as irreconcilable with society as it is.

A question remains unanswered, however: is the neo-Epicurean, single-sex community bound to fail because it is inherently flawed (chastity being untenable), or is it destroyed by devious means—the intrusion of the wolf in sheep's clothing into the fold? In Act 3, scene 1, the ladies perform a dramatic entertainment which consists of a series of tableaux on the woes of married life, a vivid and witty visual illustration of the troubles of conjugal life that was perhaps suggested by Stanley's *The History of Philosophy*.[75] It shows in quick succession a woman abandoned by her husband, one whose husband is a drunkard, a compulsive gambler, another woman whose children are hungry, another in the pangs of labour, etc. This clearly negative depiction of marriage effectively runs counter to the heroine's passive acceptance of her new status at the end of the play. In a passage that is again reminiscent of *Twelfth Night*, Lady Happy finally confronts her Fool, Mimick, who seems to provide the moral of the play:

> l. happy. What you Rogue, do you call me a Fool?
> MIMICk. Not I, please you Highness, unless all Women be Fools.
> pr InCe. Is your Wife a Fool?
> MIMICk. Man and Wife, 'tis said, makes but one Fool.
>
> (246)

Cavendish's encounter with Epicurean ethic gave her the impetus and the intellectual framework to imagine a female utopian space, but as the play almost ends with this deeply ironical comment on marriage, it finally seems to deplore the necessary, if ambiguous, repression of the subversive potential of such an alternative community.

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75 See note 66 to this chapter.

To conclude, both *Poems, and Fancies* and *The Convent of Pleasure* illustrate Cavendish's fruitful engagement with Epicureanism and show how a heterodox philosophical doctrine could become an empowering instrument to elaborate her own thought. Cavendish was quick to see the potentialities of a doctrine that was not mainstream and therefore ready for appropriation and experimentation. In both works, although in very different ways, she enters into a dialogue with Epicureanism, which turns out to be a stepping-stone in the development of her own philosophy. In her early works, Epicurean atomism allows her to present a woman-friendly theory of matter, although she falls short of elaborating on its republican implications and eventually rejects mechanism to develop her own brand of vitalism. Epicurean ethic lent itself more easily perhaps to her fiction of a female utopia, although she also stages its ambivalent containment under more "realistic" social pressures. Even though in both cases she ends up distancing herself from Epicurean physics and ethics, they are not simply forgotten but incorporated into her own thought. Both works exemplify Cavendish's generic "bricolage" through which she gives a pre-feminist slant to literary genres she perceives as "male." By opening up her poetry miscellany to a heterodox scientific discourse and by resorting to gendered metaphors and references, she creates her own brand of poetry that questions the pre-eminence of male-oriented poetical and scientific discourses. In *The Convent of Pleasure*, Cavendish rehearses and subverts the conventions of the romantic Shakespearean comedy both to celebrate its subversive, liberating potential and to highlight the more sinister subtext of containment it also frequently stages. Through her confrontation with Epicureanism, Cavendish was able to forge empowering intellectual tools and gain the authority she sought.

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