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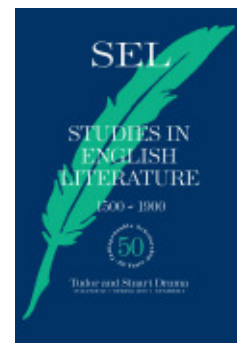
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SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900, Volume 48, Number
2, Spring 2008, pp. 419-442 (Article)

Published by The Johns Hopkins University Press
DOI: 10.1353/sel.0.0002



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Performance, Performativity, and Identity in Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure*

KATHERINE R. KELLETT

One of the most prolific writers in the early modern period, Margaret Cavendish developed a reputation for eccentricity that began in the seventeenth century and remains in force today. A wealthy royalist, she spent most of her adult life writing, experimenting with—and stretching the bounds of—genres as diverse as autobiography, biography, oration, poetry, utopian fiction, science writing, and drama. Cavendish's impressive body of publications earned her admiration among some of her contemporaries, but many more ridiculed her (Samuel Pepys famously recorded in his diary that she was “a mad, conceited, ridiculous woman”¹). Only in the last few decades have scholars, with their renewed interest in women writers, attended to Cavendish as a serious writer.² Although much of her work has inspired a renaissance of critical attention, only recently has her large body of difficult-to-classify plays (nineteen in all) awarded Cavendish much notice, as several critics have observed.³ Yet under the lenses of queer theory and performance studies, her plays—which interrogate the limits of performance with their dizzying mix of theatrical conventions and which often envision utopian alternatives for their female characters—emerge as a provocative site of cultural contestation. In particular, *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668)—a play about virginal women who create a separatist community

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and who are then seemingly reined back into heteronormativity—highlights the instabilities of identity and of performance as a genre.

The critical neglect of Cavendish's plays has in part to do with the question of exactly how dramatic these writings, which have just begun to be produced, actually are.⁴ From their first publication, Cavendish's plays have existed in a nebulous state between stage drama and closet drama. Probably written while Cavendish was in exile during the English Civil War, her plays were published in two separate volumes, *Playes* (1662) and *Plays Never before Printed* (1668), during the decade in which the playhouses reopened and in which women actresses first appeared on the English stage.⁵ In her abundant prefatory material to her 1662 volume, Cavendish, a self-proclaimed melancholic, makes it clear that the choice not to stage her plays is a choice, confessing (whether genuinely or not) that she believes her plays "are like dull dead statues" and that she fears "having them hissed off from the Stage."⁶ Yet despite Cavendish's decision not to produce her plays, they do not fit neatly into the genre of closet drama either—"a term," Anne Shaver argues, "for plays deliberately written to be read in one's 'closet' or private room; it is not a term appropriately applied to plays that simply were not produced."⁷ Instead, her plays comprise a spectacular (and usually subversive) hybridity of theatrical conventions, including pastoral romance, cross-dressing, and masque, stubbornly resisting classification.

Unsurprisingly, critics have intensely debated Cavendish's status as a dramatist. Taking as a cue for posterity Cavendish's statement in her epistle to her 1668 volume that "I regard not so much the present as future Ages, for which I intend all my Books" (p. 273), some scholars insist that the performance aspects of her works are essential to understanding them fully.⁸ Gweno Williams argues against a tradition of devaluing the dramatic merit of Cavendish's plays simply because patriarchal constraints prevented their staging, instead contending that to "reread these plays as performable opens up new insights into the texts themselves, their relationship with other dramatic works, and the position of women in the period."⁹ Others maintain that an understanding of the plays as closet drama—specifically as the genre pertains to Interregnum royalists—is crucial to appreciating their political engagement.¹⁰ Julie Crawford sees *The Convent of Pleasure* as a call to restore "royalists' losses of property and privilege to their former glory," arguing that the play is aimed at an elite audience; more specifically, it resonates with the coterie of "Queen Henrietta Maria's famously female-centered court culture."¹¹

Ironically, however, such arguments about performability often miss the more central issue of performativity in Cavendish's works, particularly in *The Convent of Pleasure*. In this play, Lady Happy and her band of single women reject marriage, instead opting, to the chagrin of the "Monsieurs," to enjoy the pleasures of their self-created "convent." Their rejection of the heterosexual economy is successful in the first part of the play, but the entrance of the Princess, who cross-dresses as a man and incites same-sex desire in Lady Happy, complicates their project. In the end, after several heteronormative performances within the play, the "true" identity of the Princess is revealed to be male, and (s)he marries Lady Happy. Just as theories of performativity dismantle the concept of essential, stable identity, so does Cavendish's *Convent* refigure subjectivity by challenging the norms of what Judith Butler calls the "heterosexual imperative."¹² Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson have called attention to the play's affinity to Butler's theories, stating that the play "unfolds as an ongoing debate over what constitutes 'natural' behavior" and that it demonstrates Butler's idea of "the performative construction of gender."¹³ Yet the play's relationship to performativity needs to be explored more fully. Although critics have argued for Cavendish's deconstruction of "class or gender as necessarily definable monolithic categories,"¹⁴ Cavendish participates in more than gender bending, instead demonstrating how her characters can resignify their position, in Butler's terms, from "abject" to self-sufficient subjects.¹⁵ Not only do the women "have the means to repudiate compulsory heterosexuality," as Bowerbank and Mendelson rightly observe,¹⁶ but they also contest the idea of stable, bodily identity. What at first seems to be a specifically female, oppositional space to heteronormativity, the convent becomes, with closer analysis, a rapidly changing environment that transforms with the language that creates it. Its resistance to stabilization—its curiously immaterial space—suggests that the subversive power of identity exists not merely in bodies, but in the discourse that produces those bodies.

Recently, queer theorists have examined this very subversiveness of the play. Theodora A. Jankowski, for instance, argues that although virginity is traditionally excluded from the realm of sexuality, Lady Happy and her fellow convent dwellers contest this exclusion by representing virginity as a "queer space" that resists the "restrictive and binary early modern sex/gender system" of Protestantism in which normative sexuality for women exists only in marriage.¹⁷ Along similar lines, Valerie Traub contends that

while in early modern legal and theological discourse, anxiety about homosexuality centered on male-male desire, *The Convent of Pleasure* addresses this failure for female-female desire to signify by representing lesbianism as a force that threatens patriarchal authority. For Traub, the irony of the play is that it is only when female-female desire threatens to “usurp male sexual prerogatives” that it becomes visible at all.¹⁸ Yet rather than seeing only Lady Happy or lesbian desire as the queer presences in the play, I would argue that the play as a whole works to reveal the contingency of identity itself, demonstrating how, in Lee Edelman’s words, “queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one.”¹⁹ Queerness does not describe the women at the convent, but instead represents their ability to resignify their bodies and disrupt the coherence of any system that attempts to regulate them. Identity, as Butler contends, exists not “*behind* discourse,” but comes into being only in discourse, or, in other words, only performatively.²⁰

Yet while *The Convent of Pleasure* exemplifies queer performativity, it also calls into question Butler’s distinction between performance and performativity in which “the former presumes a subject, but the latter contests the very notion of the subject.”²¹ The two concepts understandably have had a vexed—and still debated—relationship because of J. L. Austin’s (perhaps “infelicitous”) decision to refer to speech acts as “performatives,” thus linking the same adjective with both performance and performativity.²² On the one hand, Butler’s move to distinguish the two concepts seems reasonable, for she argues against reducing her theories of gender performativity to a simple change of clothing: “The ‘activity’ of this gendering cannot, strictly speaking, be a human act or expression, a willful appropriation, and it is certainly *not* a question of taking on a mask; it is the matrix through which all willing first becomes possible, its enabling cultural condition.”²³ Yet the very acts that Butler names as exposing gender as performative (drag is her most famous example) are often acts of “taking on a mask”—acts of theatrical performance.²⁴ Cavendish’s play, too, puts in close proximity theatricality and socially resistant performativity. As a play that both flaunts theatrical performances (from the play-within-the-play depicting the sufferings of married women to the Maypole festivities and the masque of the sea deities) and questions the stability of its own bodies, *The Convent of Pleasure* reveals the difficulties of disentangling—let alone opposing—performance and performativity. A play in which bodies are conspicuously ambiguous, or even, arguably, absent,

The Convent of Pleasure resists corporeal reification, complicating Butler's contention that a subject is presumed underneath all performances by revealing that subjectivity can never be stable.

Can there be performance without bodies? While the play may not answer that question definitively, the play does make the distinction between stage drama and closet drama much less clear by highlighting the instability of all performing bodies, material or not. Whether or not the play, as many have compellingly argued, is performable, it nevertheless contests traditional demarcations of performance itself, indicating that questions of performativity—that which comes into being only through contingent utterance—can be extended to questions of performance.²⁵ While Lady Happy “performs” her opposition to heterosexual norms by (theatrically) creating her convent, hers is not a resistance that is simply contained by her marriage to the Prince(ss). The “performances” in the convent are not just masks that the women take on, but are also “performative” in that they unveil the contingent nature of patriarchy, of identity, of bodies themselves. Although the play depicts the encroachment of heterosexuality on the women's way of life at the convent, it also exposes the arbitrariness of heterosexuality as a construct by constantly questioning its stability. Cavendish's achievement in *The Convent of Pleasure* is not simply to resist the overwhelming dominance of compulsory heterosexuality by modeling homosexual desire as oppositional, but instead to bring “into relief,” in Butler's words, “the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original.”²⁶

In interrogating Butler's performance/performativity distinction, I wish not to challenge the theoretical assumptions of performativity, as many have done, but instead to demonstrate the expansiveness of the concept. Butler's theories of performativity recently, in fact, have been subject to sharp critiques. Sue-Ellen Case, for example, moving to recover the materialist terms “lesbian” and “performance” in an age where “queer performativity” dominates the critical landscape, charges Butler with a dangerous evacuation of “notions of the subject/agency from within the system of performativity” that ironically evacuates even her own role as a writer.²⁷ More vehemently, Martha C. Nussbaum argues that Butler's theory of gender parody is detrimental to feminism and to gay/lesbian activism: “Butler not only eschews such a hope [of political justice], she takes pleasure in its impossibility. She finds it exciting to contemplate the alleged immovability of power, and to envisage the ritual subversions of the slave who is convinced

that she must remain such."²⁸ My intentions differ from theirs in that I do not endeavor to dispute Butler's theoretical premises or to quarrel with the political implications of queer performativity. My aim instead is to argue that any move to oppose performance and performativity neglects performance's own potential for queerness. By reintroducing the concept of a stable subject within a theoretical construct that excludes that possibility, Butler elides her central tenet of bodily and identity instability. Performativity does not oppose performance, but instead intersects with it, revealing, as Cavendish's peculiarly "bodiless" play demonstrates, that performance is not a narrow genre limited to live, bounded acts, but instead proves an expansive, metamorphic one that contests the constraints of such categorizations. Far from limiting performance, an understanding of performativity, particularly as it operates in *The Convent of Pleasure*, reveals its complexity as a genre.

II

From the beginning of the play, Cavendish posits that the power of the convent stems not from a material rejection of patriarchy—a mere physical escape—but from Lady Happy's discursive ability to resignify the patriarchal world that inhibits her. While in the first scene, the three gentlemen characteristically link women to possessions, suggesting that as consumers in the marriage market, men must "spend all [their] Wealth" in order to purchase the ultimate prize, a "young, rich, and virtuous" wife, Lady Happy immediately shatters their brief patriarchal frame (p. 217, I.i). She argues that men are the impediments to rather than the sources of women's happiness: "Marriage to those that are virtuous is a greater restraint then a Monastery" (p. 218, I.ii). More than offering an alternative to this stultifying reality, Lady Happy's language undermines the totalizing power of patriarchy by reframing its elements. She dismisses the traditionally idealizing blazon as destructive to women, questioning, "should I take delight in Admirers? they might gaze on my Beauty, and praise my Wit, and I receive nothing from their eyes, nor lips; for Words vanish as soon as spoken, and Sights are not substantial" (p. 218, I.ii). Exposing tropes of flattery as pleasing only to the male giver, Lady Happy resignifies pleasure itself, suggesting its source is within: "I intend to incloister my self from the World, to enjoy pleasure, and not to bury my self from it; but to incloister my self from the . . . troubles and perturbation of the World" (p. 220,

I.ii). She goes on to describe, in ebullient rhyming couplets, the physical and intellectual bounty of her intended convent, from the women's "*Minds in full delight*" (p. 220, I.ii) to the "*softest Silk*" they will wear and the "*savory Sauces*" they will eat (p. 221, I.ii).²⁹ Rejecting men's ability to define women absolutely, Lady Happy claims the capacity discursively to bring herself and her world into being and to recreate her subjectivity.³⁰

Because of her class privilege and, more significantly, through her performative utterances, Lady Happy is able to bring those at the cultural margins—virginal women who refuse to marry—to the cultural center, exemplifying what Butler understands as the power of bodies to rearticulate themselves and to question hegemony's stability.³¹ Madam Mediator testifies to the self-sufficiency of the convent, telling the Monsieurs that there are "Women-Physicians, Surgeons and Apothecaries" and that Lady Happy occupies the role of priest (p. 223, II.i). Admittedly, the male characters interpenetrate the scenes in these first two acts, reasserting the unnaturalness of her actions and attempting to regain authority over the women. Monsieur Take-Pleasure, for example, cannot understand Lady Happy's logic, telling Madam Mediator, "you say, The Lady *Happy* is become a Votress to Nature; and if she be a Votress to Nature, she must be a Mistress to Men" (p. 223, II.i). Similarly, Monsieur Adviser demands that Lady Happy's behavior be coerced back into heterosexuality: "Her Heretical Opinions ought not to be suffer'd, nor her Doctrine allow'd; and she ought to be examined by a Masculine Synod, and punish'd with a severe Husband, or tortured with a deboist Husband" (p. 223, II.i). His desire to inflict violence on Lady Happy suggests the seriousness of her threat to the marriage and economic systems; as one gentleman expresses it later in the play, "the fear is, that all the rich Heirs will make *Convents*, and all the Young Beauties associate themselves in such *Convents*" (p. 234, III.x). Without women, he suggests, heterosexual hegemony will lose the ability to reproduce itself.

Yet far from representing an enveloping patriarchal force, the feeble Monsieurs fail to incorporate Lady Happy and her followers back into their heterosexual economy. Ironically, Cavendish reveals that it is they—the representatives of dominant heterosexuality—who are marginalized in the first acts of the play. Unable to penetrate the convent, the men vainly skirt the periphery, attempting to devise ways to break through the walls:

COURTLY. But is there no place where we may peak into the *Convent*?

ADVISER. No, there are no Grates, but Brick and Stone-walls.

FACIL. Let us get out some of the Bricks or Stones.

ADVISER. Alas! the Walls are a Yard-thick.

FACIL. But nothings [sic] is difficult to Willing-minds.

ADVISER. My Mind is willing, but my Reason tells me, It is impossible; wherefore, I'll never go about it.

(p. 227, II.iv)³²

If Lady Happy is not ultimately successful in dismantling the heterosexual imperative at the end of the play, she at least proves successful here in frustrating its proponents. Lady Happy's efforts are resilient to these men's gazes (they are unable to "peak" inside), their physical violence (they cannot smash their way through the "Yard-thick" walls), and their sexual prowess (the impenetrability of the convent diffuses their "wills," rendering them, in other words, sexually impotent). Even their cross-dressing scheme, when they contemplate dressing as "lusty Country-Wenches" to sneak into the convent (p. 227, II.iv), fails to materialize, revealing the *Monsieurs* to be inept at performing the very roles they help construct and reify.

The women's potential for resistance becomes most overt during the play-within-the-play that depicts the horrors of marriage, including the dangers of childbirth, domestic abuse, and husbands who gamble or drink away the family's money. As opposed to the buffoonery of the *Monsieurs*, these male characters (of course, ostensibly played by female ones) inflict tangible suffering onto their spouses, breathing validity into the threat of being "tortured with a deboist Husband" that Monsieur Adviser makes to Lady Happy (p. 223, II.i). In the epilogue to this performance, one of the characters calls marriage a "Curse" for all women of all social classes, reciting that "*From the Cobler's Wife we see, / To Ladies, they unhappie be*" (p. 233, III.x). For Shaver, this episode is so central that she sees the play as forwarding an argument against marriage, pointing to the ways in which "the institution of marriage, as understood in the early modern period, hurts and inhibits women."³³ By "incloistering" themselves from patriarchy, the women at the convent are able to evade the dangers associated with marriage as well as the economic hardships that result when they become the legal property of their husbands and lose access to their own discretionary economic pleasure.

This moment of tangible suffering (and its implied evasion) is a transitory one, however, suggesting that rather than presenting the convent as a feminist subversion ultimately to be contained by heteronormativity, Cavendish never fully stabilizes the material realities of her characters' bodies. Admittedly, in many ways Cavendish seems to envision an alternative utopia for women where they can lead more pleasurable, autonomous, and secure lives apart from the patriarchal world that enchains them. As Erin Lang Bonin argues about Cavendish's utopian plays, "The literal and ideological partitions they construct result in new 'publics' in which women wield political power and authority . . . Because Cavendish positions [these] institutions in opposition to patriarchal economies, she transforms her female characters from objects of exchange into utopian subjects."³⁴ However, as *The Convent of Pleasure* progresses, the convent becomes less a stable "oppositional space," as Bonin puts it, than an unstable performative that resists codification.³⁵ Other than Lady Happy, the women of the convent are never named and never exert their own identities, instead appearing only in the various and constantly shifting roles they performatively inhabit. Contesting the idea that an original, authentic identity exists beneath the roles they play, they are, as Butler phrases it, "*not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy."³⁶ The women's performances, in other words, expose the performative nature of identity. As Cavendish figures and refigures gender identities, sexual desire, and the very landscape of the convent, she suggests that her subversiveness is far more destabilizing than the creation of an alternative space to patriarchy. For Cavendish, the convent exists discursively rather than materially, suggesting that Lady Happy's challenge to heterosexual hegemony is not to compete with a superior homosexual hegemony, but to intimate that her convent and, by extension, identity itself resist materialization.

III

More than an oppositional device, Cavendish's convent more closely resembles what Austin would define as a "performative": "it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action . . . to *say* something is to *do* something."³⁷ By failing so often actually to materialize and by coming into being only through utterance, the convent resists the kind of stability that reproduces oppressive power structures. For example, in the first two acts, the convent is never seen, but only anticipated

and then described by Lady Happy and Madam Mediator. When Lady Happy first tells Madam Mediator about her plans for the convent, she previews its abundant food, fine clothing, and beautiful music, boasting that "*Variety each Sense shall feed*" (p. 221, I.ii). Although the delights that she describes are succulently physical (their "*Nostrils*" are filled "*with perfumed Air*," their "*Ears with sweet melodious Sound*," and their "*Tast with sweet delicious Meat*" [p. 221, I.ii]), these sensual pleasures exist textually rather than as material manifestations. Later, she describes to Madam Mediator the success of her convent, relating in great detail the seasonal luxuries of her inhabitance: "Chambers hung with Taffety," "Bowers and Arbours pruned," "the choisest Meats every Season doth afford," and "Drinks fresh and pleasing" (pp. 224–5, II.ii). Lady Happy's richly detailed description takes on a performative quality; the luxuriant items never achieve visibility with the audience or reader, but instead remain suspended in Lady Happy's profuse—even promiscuous—words.

Even when the action of the play does take place within the convent, it looks less like a convent (even one as materially luscious as Lady Happy describes) than a pastoral or fantastic space for the performance of heterosexuality, such as during the Maypole festivities and the masque. When the Princess makes her first appearance in III.i, she says to Lady Happy, "Why then, I observing in your several Recreations, some of your Ladies do accoutre Themselves in Masculine-Habits, and act Lovers-parts; I desire you will give me leave to be sometimes so accoutred and act the part of your loving Servant" (p. 229). From the moment of entry into the convent, the women perform not just "queer virgins," but also the heterosexual roles they purport to evade as well as, in their play-within-the-play, the extreme pain derived from those roles.³⁸ The pleasure of the convent of pleasure exists only subjunctively; the convent is a site of resistance in the play not simply because it is an alternative space to a competing heterosexual economy, but because it never materializes at all. It exemplifies queerness not by its stable opposition to hegemony, but by its very refusal to stabilize.

Cavendish indicates that in particular, the gender and sexual identities of her characters resist stabilization. Lady Happy, for instance, intimates that she and the other convent dwellers pride themselves in their womanly appearances, telling Madam Mediator that there is "a great Looking-Glass in each Chamber, that we may view our selves and take pleasure in our own Beauties, whilst they are fresh and young" (p. 224, II.ii). She emphasizes that

“Change of Garments are also provided, of the newest fashions for every Season, and rich Trimming” (p. 225, II.ii), suggesting that as “Noble Persons of [her] own Sex” (p. 220, I.ii), they are elegantly—and femininely—costumed. Yet in the scene after Lady Happy’s list of their rich garments, Madam Mediator tells the matrons of the town about the “great Foreign Princess” who has arrived (p. 225, II.iii), whom she describes as “a Princely brave Woman truly, of a Masculine Presence” (p. 226, II.iii). When the Princess enters the play, we learn that the women play men not only to perform the horrors of marriage, but also, as the Princess says, to “act Lovers-parts” (p. 229, III.i). The performing of male roles is not only a cathartic expression of their common female suffering, but is also *pleasurable*, perhaps demonstrating, as Jankowski speculates, “(proto-) butch-femme role-playing,”³⁹ and thus challenging the idea of an authentic sexual or gender identity. What seems at first to be just a performance (the women perform men in a play) also reveals aspects of performativity as the women reiterate and reproduce male gender roles for their “Recreations” (or Re-creations?) (p. 229, III.i), demonstrating Butler’s contention that “One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one’s body.”⁴⁰ The convent is a place of shifting gender roles where individuals recreate their bodies through language.

In the erotically charged exchange between the Princess and Lady Happy at the beginning of act IV, Cavendish brings her interrogation of identity’s boundaries to a climax. Although Lady Happy fears betraying Nature by being sexually attracted to the Princess, she continues to question the stability of Nature’s unity: “But why may not I love a Woman with the same affection I could a Man?” (p. 234, IV.i). Despite her immediate hesitation (“No, no, Nature is Nature, and still will be / The same she was from all Eternity” [p. 234, IV.i]), the Princess convinces Lady Happy to express her desire in the form of an erotic kiss and embrace. Lady Happy’s interaction with the Princess is not simply an oppositional stance to heterosexuality, but a blurring of the homo/heterosexual binary, what Diana Fuss calls the “inside/outside dialectic” of sexuality by which “heterosexuality secures its self-identity and shores up its ontological boundaries by protecting itself from what it sees as the continual predatory encroachments of its contaminated other, homosexuality.”⁴¹ By simultaneously participating in female-female love (Lady Happy believes the Princess is a woman) and male-female love (they are dressed as a shepherd and shepherdess), Lady Happy and the Princess both performatively resist traditional sexual hegemony and reinscribe it.

Not simply creating an alternative identity category, they question identity categories themselves by physically expressing their love, suggesting that sexual love cannot be confined to such oppressive categorization. The Princess suggests that their expressions of love are neither solely female nor solely male, but interact with both genders: "These my Imbraces though of Femal kind, / May be as fervent as a Masculine mind" (p. 234, IV.i). By manifesting both heterosexual and homosexual desire at once, they not only cross the boundary of sexual orientation, but also efface that very boundary.

Far from creating a simple oppositional space within the convent, Cavendish deconstructs the idea of this kind of space by exposing its instability. Abolishing secure gender and sexual identities, Cavendish encompasses the entire world of her play within the realm of queer performativity. The play questions rather than upholds male/female and homo/heterosexual binaries that reinforce oppressive hierarchies, instead demanding new conceptualizations of identity. By resisting stable identities in the play, Cavendish exemplifies queer performativity more radically than by just resisting heterosexuality and instead complicates the very identity categories on which heterosexuality relies to assure its dominance.

IV

Despite the play's initial challenges to fixed identities, the troubling final two acts of the play seem to complicate Lady Happy's achievements in the convent, introducing performances considerably different than the play-within-the-play. While the first three acts of the play demonstrate the characters' performative resistance to stable identities, the last two acts, with their heteronormative performances of the Maypole festivities and the masque, appear to reconstruct patriarchy. The Princess's pressure on Lady Happy to conform to heterosexual custom seems to bear heavily on her, who enters act IV walking "*very Melancholy*" (p. 234), a startling change from the assertive persona she earlier presented to Madam Mediator. Although in the beginning of the scene she defies her uncertainties about unnaturally loving a woman by kissing the Princess, she quickly seems overwhelmed by the elaborate apparatus of heterosexuality, a force so powerful that even Madam Mediator later observes Lady Happy's unsettling transformation: "By my truth, whether your Contemplation be of Gods or of Men, you are become lean and pale since I was in

the *Convent* last” (p. 239, IV.i). Although Lady Happy’s succulent speech once dominated the play, now her voice is more and more subsumed within the increasingly male voices that emerge from the female characters.

During the Maypole festivities, for instance, a traditional celebration of fertility, heterosexuality, and virginal initiation into marriage, the characters present single life as despondent rather than pleasurable, and even the women in the convent begin to articulate heterosexual demands. For example, the Shepherd, presumably played by one of the women, pleads to Lady Happy (who is dressed “as a *Shepherdess*”), “Pity my Flocks, Oh save their Shepherd’s life; / Grant you my Suit, be you their Shepherd’s Wife” (p. 235, IV.i). Shortly thereafter, Madam Mediator enters as a Shepherdess and speaks the alarmingly common argument that women who refuse to marry become miserable old maids, relating that her daughter, who “vows a single life,” will “live a Maid, and Flocks will keep, / And her chief Company shall be Sheep” (p. 235, IV.i). And of course the Princess, in her long speech to Lady Happy about fertility and seasonal regeneration, uses Nature to justify heterosexuality:

Thus Heav’n and Earth you view,
And see what’s Old, what’s New;
How Bodies Transmigrate,
Lives are Predestinate.
Thus doth your Wit reveal
What Nature would conceal.

(pp. 236–7, IV.i)

The Princess argues against Lady Happy’s own volition, suggesting that her purpose is to participate in this “transmigration” of bodies by sexually reproducing. The Princess implies that Lady Happy’s convent is a rip in the fabric of the Earth’s cycle and that the only way to close this aperture is to submit to a married relationship.

More disturbingly, in the masque the Princess reasserts the male language of property ownership that the convent successfully repels earlier in the play.⁴² Presented as the “*Sea-God NEPTUNE*,” the Princess claims patriarchal authority when she declares that as king, all “Watry Creatures” must now “Obey my Power and Command, / And bring me Presents from the Land” (p. 240, IV.i). Her words not only assert monarchical power, but also usurp the female autonomy gained in the convent. The Princess takes possession

of everything in the convent when she says that Nature provides "Me all Provisions which I need, / And Cooks my Meat on which I feed" (p. 241, IV.i) and more explicitly asserts control when she concludes, "I am sole Monarch of the Sea, / And all therein belongs to me" (p. 242, IV.i). In a vampiric manner, the Princess suggests that she feeds off the women who once controlled the convent. The convent women, who previously performed the cruel role of men in women's lives, now play the sea nymphs who pay the sea king homage by subjecting themselves to his magnificence: "*All his Sea-people to his wish / . . . / With Acclamations do attend him*" (p. 243, IV.i). Whereas earlier in the play Madam Mediator argues that in the convent, "every Lady there enjoyeth as much Pleasure as any absolute Monarch can do" (p. 226, II.iii), here the women abdicate their royal power for positions of subjection.

Despite the women's apparent relinquishment of power in their newly subjected roles, however, Cavendish subtly suggests their resistance to this seemingly stable patriarchal universe. The performances in the last two acts continue to resist stabilization by suggesting that the bodies beneath them are fundamentally unstable. Although Lady Happy appears to acquiesce in the Princess's coercions by admitting, "we shall more constant be, / And in a Married life better agree" (p. 238, IV.i), she also counters the Princess's assertions about the naturalness of the body:

And thus your Wit can tell,
How Souls in Bodies dwell;
As that the Mind dwells in the Brain,
And in the Mind the Soul doth reign,
And in the Soul the life doth last,
For with the Body it doth not wast;
Nor shall Wit like the Body die,
But live in the World's Memory.

(p. 237, IV.i)

Although Lady Happy uses a confusing logic in this passage, what is clear is that she privileges the immaterial concepts—wit, souls, the mind—over material ones such as the body and the brain. Unlike the Princess, Lady Happy deemphasizes the body, citing its impermanence and inevitable decay. For Lady Happy, "Souls" exist only citationally in "the World's Memory," coming into being only through the repetitive, discursive utterances in which they are constantly recreated. Lady Happy rejects the Princess's attempts to impose a stable world order onto her, implying that

bodies can never exist as constative entities, but only as “Wit” continually reconstructs them.

Cavendish further deconstructs the stability of bodies by suggesting the ambiguity—or even the absence—of the bodies in her play, most conspicuously, the body of the Princess. True, on one level, the last act of the play is a revelation of the Princess’s transvestitism when Madam Mediator exclaims, “why we have taken a Man for a Woman” (p. 244, V.ii). The play emphasizes the transgressiveness of same-sex desire and the unnaturalness of the kiss as Madam Mediator explains, “No truly, only once I saw him kiss the Lady *Happy*; and you know Womens Kisses are unnatural, and me-thought they kissed with more alacrity then Women use, a kind of Titillation, and more Vigorous” (p. 244, V.ii). Yet as both Traub and Sophie Tomlinson notice, Cavendish refrains from listing the *Dramatis Personae* until the end of the play, listing the Princess as “THE PRINCESS” instead of as “THE PRINCE.”⁴³ Traub argues that in doing so, “Cavendish continues the gender bending outside the frame of the play,” and Tomlinson contends that “in Cavendish’s mind ‘the Princess’ was not an actor but an actress.”⁴⁴ More than simply gender bending or covertly expressing her desire for female actresses in her play, however, Cavendish, by placing the character list after the play’s action, suggests that material bodies are elusive throughout the performance. And by naming her character THE PRINCESS, Cavendish does more than just bridle her back into the realm of the feminine; instead she also hints at the persistence of the Princess’s gender indeterminacy. Even after the Prince(ss)’s supposedly true gender identity is revealed, Cavendish uses the same textual abbreviation (PRINC.) to signify his/her character. Cavendish resists the idea that there can ever be a stable body beneath performance.

Interestingly, Cavendish chooses to end the play with the introduction of a new character, the Mimick.⁴⁵ Through him, a character who exists only to perform rather than to exert a stable identity, Cavendish again destabilizes identity in her play. Ordered by the Prince(ss) to speak the Epilogue, the Mimick (whose name is a synonym for subversive resignification) self-reflexively calls attention to his ephemeral existence:

An *Epilogue* says he, the devil an *Epilogue* have I: let
me study . . . I have it, I have it; No faith, I have it not; I
lie, I have it, I say, I have it not; Fie *Mimick*, will you lie?
Yes, *Mimick*, I will lie, if it be my pleasure: But I say, it
is gone; What is gone? The *Epilogue*; When had you it? I

never had it; then you did not lose it; that is all one, but I must speak it, although I never had it; How can you speak it, and never had it? I marry, that's the question; but words are nothing, and then an *Epilogue* is nothing, and so I may speak nothing; Then nothing be my Speech.

(p. 246, V.iii)

In this whirlwind of assertions and retractions, the Mimick attempts to grasp at the substance of the Epilogue, only to realize that it has no body. Although in exasperation he claims that "words are nothing," what Cavendish suggests is the very opposite—that to speak is to create. In the subsequent Epilogue, which the Mimick brings into being through his words, he admits that he, as a textual character in a play, exists only discursively: "*I dare not beg Applause, our Poetess then / Will be enrag'd, and kill me with her Pen*" (p. 247). His being, he concedes, is at the mercy of the words that shape it rather than the body beneath it.

Certainly, by insisting on the body's elusiveness in the play, Cavendish does not exclude the possibility of her text's performability, for although the Princess must be played by either a man or a woman, the presence of bodies onstage does not necessarily stabilize those bodies. A production of the play does, however, include that risk. Williams's 1995 production, for instance, while demonstrating, according to Bowerbank and Mendelson, that this play "would make a wonderful production,"⁴⁶ chooses to cast as the Princess a man who does not work hard to disguise his masculinity. Writing about her production, Williams argues that only through performance can Cavendish's humor and gender play fully manifest themselves. She notes about the staging of the seduction scene in IV.i that it "is only the presence of an audience which makes possible the effective realisation of the humour and dramatic irony here, which again demonstrates the theatricality of Margaret Cavendish's imagination."⁴⁷ Her production, however, adds an element of dramatic irony to the play that is not present in its textual format (there is no way for a reader to know the Princess's true gender until Madam Mediator reveals it) and effaces Cavendish's insistence on the citational nature of identity. I agree with Williams that the play is performable, but I believe that any production of the play should make an effort to stage bodily ambiguity and convey the Princess's anamorphic ability to transcend gender.

Why, then, if Cavendish writes a play, an art form scripted for embodiment, does she so thoroughly insist on bodily intangibil-

ity? On some levels, Cavendish indicates that the materialized body—in particular, the female body, with its reproductive capacity, its objectified status in relation to men, and its vulnerability to violence—necessarily leads to its oppression. As the female performers of act III demonstrate, perhaps the only escape from this bodily suffering is physically to absent the body from the conditions of that suffering. Yet on other levels, Cavendish is doing more than erasing the body. Instead, her play works to highlight the possibilities for individuals citationally to create and recreate the body. Although it is easy to argue that Cavendish contains female pleasure at the end of the play, Cavendish also makes it clear that the convent doors do not slam shut after Lady Happy's marriage, but remain indeterminately open as the Mimick argues with the Prince(ss) about the Mimick's "Petition" to transform it into a space for "Fools" and "Married Men" (p. 246, V.iii). Suspending rather than resolving their quarrel about who shall inhabit the convent and what it will be called, Cavendish reminds us of pleasure's queer function in the play. For Cavendish, pleasure cannot be contained within (or controlled by) a body, but through discursive utterance always retains the power of subversive reinscription. She leaves the status of female pleasure open not just to express a cultural anxiety about the reinstatement of heteronormativity, but to demonstrate that the possibility for subversion within hegemony cannot be erased.

In stressing the instability of the performing bodies in Cavendish's play, *The Convent of Pleasure* highlights the radicalness of Butler's theories of performativity that she inadvertently tempers when she reasserts the performance/performativity binary. By insisting that the "reduction of performativity to performance would be a mistake" because "performance as bounded 'act' is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer," Butler reintroduces the possibility for stable identity and "bounded" acts in a theoretical framework that seeks to efface any such stability.⁴⁸ As Jon McKenzie points out, this moment is a significant one in Butler's writings, one in which she divorces performance from performativity, terms she had linked in her earlier works: "Butler makes it clear that she now wishes to distinguish embodied performances from discursive performatives, to transfer performance from theatrical to discursive contexts."⁴⁹ Yet *The Convent of Pleasure* challenges the efficacy of such a divorce. The play, like much of queer theory, works to expose the artificiality of any identity binaries, binaries that in Edelman's words uphold "the repressive ideology of similitude or

identity itself."⁵⁰ For Cavendish, any purely oppositional space or separatist community actually works to reinscribe the binaries that it purports to deconstruct. Instead, Cavendish uses the convent performatively to challenge the systems of power that try to define the contours of women's lives and limit them to heterosexual marriage. As Butler puts it, "Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a 'pure' opposition, a 'transcendence' of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure."⁵¹ Lady Happy and her fellow convent dwellers work within such a world of "resources inevitably impure" nevertheless to continue to refashion their identities, proving them to be malleable rather than rigid. Cavendish's characters cannot escape the power relations in which they are embedded, but they can performatively resist them, rendering heterosexual hegemony not a stable structure but a flexible one that breathes and morphs with its constituents' reiterative discourse.

In the end, despite all attempts to pinpoint the dramatic value and meaning of *The Convent of Pleasure*, it continues to resist assimilation and refuses to conform to theatrical convention. It is clear from one prefatory letter "To the Readers" in her 1662 volume that Cavendish relishes such dramatic nonconformity: "and as for the nicities of Rules, Forms, and Terms, I renounce, and profess, that if I did understand and know them strictly, as I do not, I would not follow them: and if any dislike my writings for want of those Rules, Forms, and Terms, let them not read them; for I had rather my writings should be unread than be read by such Pedantical Scholastical persons" (p. 259).

Flying in the face of all scholars who may say otherwise, Cavendish argues that performance is more expansive than its "Rules, Forms, and Terms," and in doing so, demonstrates the elasticity of performance as a genre by reminding us, in an age where scholars debate "the ends of performance,"⁵² of performance's incredible resiliency. Bronwen Price contends that while male members of the seventeenth-century scientific community excluded Cavendish from their circle, labeling her "eccentric," Cavendish's eccentricity (that is, her nonconformity to centrist thinking) in her scientific poetry challenged "the premises that sustain emergent masculine modes of knowing."⁵³ In a similar fashion, Cavendish's "eccentric" dramatic creations urge new ways of realizing performance. Existing in a liminal, "bodiless" state, *The Convent of Pleasure*

changes the way we think about performance by stretching the very boundaries of performance and of identity. As part of rather than opposed to performativity's realm, performance, too, has the discursive capacity to challenge the stability of bodies, promote or resist heteronormativity, and question identity categories. In an era of performance studies, a field built on the challenge of and resistance to traditional demarcations of performance, an understanding of *The Convent of Pleasure's* resistance to assimilation makes an important case for the continued contestation of the limits of performance.

NOTES

I would like to thank Andrew Sofer, Mary Thomas Crane, Caroline Bicks, Kevin Ohi, and the anonymous reader at *SEL* for generously reading and commenting on drafts of this essay.

¹ Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols. (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1976), 9:123.

² Twentieth-century feminist interest in Margaret Cavendish notably begins with Virginia Woolf, whose depiction of Cavendish perpetuates her reputation as a mad, eccentric writer (*A Room of One's Own* [New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1929; rpt. 1991], pp. 66–7). Since then, feminist scholars such as Margaret J. M. Ezell have refuted Woolf's argument that any talented early modern woman, like her mythical Judith Shakespeare, "would certainly have gone crazed" (Woolf, p. 53), and such new ways of approaching women's literary history have helped to open up extensive critical and theoretical analysis of Cavendish's works (among many other early modern women writers). See Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993). For a comprehensive bibliography of Cavendish-related scholarship, see the one compiled by James Fitzmaurice on the Margaret Cavendish Society's website, <http://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~jbf/CavBiblio.html>.

³ See, for example, Anne Shaver, introduction to Cavendish, "*The Convent of Pleasure*" and *Other Plays* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 1–17; Karen L. Raber, "'Our Wits Joined as in Matrimony': Margaret Cavendish's *Playes* and the Drama of Authority," *ELR* 28, 3 (Autumn 1998): 464–93; and Alexandra G. Bennett, "Fantastic Realism: Margaret Cavendish and the Possibilities of Drama," in *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (Madison NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 179–94.

⁴ Gweno Williams staged the first known production of *The Convent of Pleasure* (II.iv through IV.i) at the University College of Ripon and York St. John in 1995, a production I will discuss in more detail later in the article. This production, along with Williams's productions of several other Cavendish plays, are recorded on *Margaret Cavendish: Plays in Performance*, DVD (York UK: Margaret Cavendish Performance Project, 2004). For detailed discussions on the development of these productions, see Alison Findlay, Gweno

Williams, and Stephanie J. Hodgson-Wright, "The Play is Ready to be Acted": Women and Dramatic Production, 1570–1670," *WoWr* 6, 1 (1999): 129–48; and Gweno Williams, "Why May Not a Lady Write a Good Play?": Plays by Early Modern Women Reassessed as Performance Texts," in *Readings in Renaissance Women's Drama: Criticism, History, and Performance, 1594–1998*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 95–107.

⁵ For a study on English actresses in Restoration drama, see Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actresses: Women and Drama, 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992).

⁶ Cavendish, "The Epistle Dedicatory," in *"The Convent of Pleasure" and Other Plays*, ed. Anne Shaver (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1999), pp. 253–4, 253. All subsequent quotations from Cavendish's writings are to this edition and will appear parenthetically in the essay by page number, along with act and scene when quotations are from her play. *The Convent of Pleasure* was first published in Cavendish's collection, *Plays Never before Printed* (London: A. Maxwell, 1668). Although this edition is accessible from databases such as *Early English Books Online*, I cite from Shaver's edition because of its even wider accessibility to modern readers.

⁷ Shaver, p. 8. Cavendish's plays cannot be considered part of the Senecan closet drama tradition, which includes plays such as Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedie of Mariam, The Faire Queene of Jewry* (1613). Unlike Cavendish's plays, Senecan closet drama, a genre "by nature impersonal," followed the neoclassical unities of time, place, and action and "usually concerned issues of public morality, treated philosophically, didactically, or politically" (Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1987], pp. 153, 313n4). Critics such as Marta Straznicky, Hero Chalmers, and Julie Crawford place Cavendish's plays within the context of another wave of closet drama that took place during the English Civil War, when all playhouses were closed, and they argue that like many of her contemporaries, Cavendish subversively advocates for royalist causes in her drama. See Straznicky, "Reading the Stage: Margaret Cavendish and Commonwealth Closet Drama," *Criticism* 37, 3 (Summer 1995): 355–90; Chalmers, "The Politics of Feminine Retreat in Margaret Cavendish's *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure*," *WoWr* 6, 1 (1999): 81–94; and Crawford, "Convents and Pleasures: Margaret Cavendish and the Drama of Property," *RenD*, n.s., 32 (2003): 177–223. Although I agree that her plays are politically involved and subversive, I feel that the categorization of closet drama is still insufficient for their wide range and unpredictable use of dramatic technique.

⁸ See Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson, introduction to *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader*, ed. Bowerbank and Mendelson (Peterborough ON: Broadview, 2000), pp. 9–34; 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 (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 134–63; and Williams.

⁹ Williams, p. 105.

¹⁰ See especially Straznicky, Chalmers, and Crawford.

¹¹ Crawford, pp. 179, 184.

¹² Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 3.

¹³ Bowerbank and Mendelson, p. 17; Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th anniversary edn. (New York: Routledge, 1990; rpt. 1999), p. 34.

¹⁴ Bennett, p. 180.

¹⁵ Butler, *Bodies*, p. 3. I use the term "abject" not as Julia Kristeva psychoanalytically defines it as the traumatic moment of horror "toward the place where meaning collapses" in which an individual loses the division between subject and object, but in the Butlerian sense as the state of exclusion from a subject's position and also the means by which a subject constitutes his/her dominant position. See Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1982), p. 2.

¹⁶ Bowerbank and Mendelson, p. 19.

¹⁷ Theodora A. Jankowski, "Pure Resistance: Queer(y)ing Virginity in William Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* and Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure*," *ShakS* 26 (1998): 218–55, 220.

¹⁸ Valerie Traub, "The (In)significance of Lesbian Desire," chap. 4 in *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002), pp. 158–87, 181.

¹⁹ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Series Q (Durham NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2004), p. 17.

²⁰ Butler, *Bodies*, p. 225.

²¹ Butler, "Gender as Performance: An Interview with Judith Butler," interview by Peter Osborne and Lynne Segal, *Radical Philosophy* 67 (Summer 1994): 32–9, 33.

²² J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 6–11. For discussions on the distinctions between and intersections of performance and performativity, see Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ed., *Performativity and Performance*, Essays from the English Institute (New York: Routledge, 1995); and W. B. Worthen, "Drama, Performativity, and Performance," *PMLA* 113, 5 (October 1998): 1093–107. For overviews of performativity's genealogy, see Jonathan Culler, "Performative Language," chap. 7 in *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 95–109; and James Loxley, *Performativity*, New Critical Idiom (New York: Routledge, 2007). Loxley describes performativity's relationship with contemporary performance theory as "*asymptotic*: an ever-closer proximity without a final, resolving convergence" (p. 140).

²³ Butler, *Bodies*, p. 7. Elsewhere, Butler states that she does not believe that theatricality is "fully intentional," but by opposing performance and performativity, she suggests that performance has a greater aspect of intentionality than performativity (*Bodies*, p. 282n11).

²⁴ Butler, *Bodies*, p. 7. For Butler's discussion of drag, see *Gender Trouble*, pp. 174–80.

²⁵ Performance theorists such as Richard Schechner have widened the scope of what constitutes performance beyond traditional stage theatricality.

See Schechner, *Between Theatre and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1985). *The Convent of Pleasure*, as I will argue, participates in the widening of the boundaries of performance by questioning the stability of the performing body.

²⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 41. I am aware that terms such as "heterosexual," "homosexual," and "heteronormativity" are anachronistically applied to the early modern period; the word "homo-sexuality," according to David M. Halperin, did not appear in English until 1892 when Charles Gilbert Chad-dock translated from the German "Krafft-Ebings's classic medical handbook of sexual deviance, the *Psychopathia sexualis*." The 1887 edition of this handbook employed the term first used in print in two pamphlets most likely written by Karl Maria Kertbeny and published in 1869 ("*One Hundred Years of Homosexuality*" and *Other Essays on Greek Love* [New York: Routledge, 1990], pp. 15, 155n2). The work of critics such as Halperin and Alan Bray has shown that homosexuality was not an identity in the early modern period; instead, individuals who performed homosexual acts participated in just one kind of errant sexual activity. See Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982). Yet as both Bray and Harriette Andreadis remind us, the homo/heterosexual binary that is present in our age was developing in the late seventeenth century with the emergence of concepts such as molly houses (Bray, "Molly," chap. 4 in *Homosexuality*, pp. 81–114) and more "explicitly transgressive terms" for female-female erotic behavior (Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics, 1550–1714*, Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2001], p. 176). I employ the terms "heterosexual" and "homosexual," therefore, simply as useful markers of these nascent, erotic boundaries that *The Convent of Pleasure* explores and also challenges. Andreadis sees the play as one in which "Cavendish obviously questions and manipulates those boundaries for our pleasure and thoughtful reconsideration; but she resolves their troublesomeness by concluding the drama with an overt, perhaps an excessively overt, gesture toward convention" (pp. 87–8). Despite this ending, the play's bodily instability, as I will argue, does not allow for such an easy reinstatement of heteronormativity.

²⁷ Sue-Ellen Case, "Performing Lesbian in the Space of Technology: Part I," *TJ* 47, 1 (March 1995): 1–18, 5.

²⁸ Martha C. Nussbaum, "The Professor of Parody: The Hip Defeatism of Judith Butler," *New Republic*, 22 February 1999, pp. 37–45, 43.

²⁹ All emphasis in the play here and henceforth in the essay is Cavendish's.

³⁰ Cavendish does something similar in her epistle to her 1668 edition, claiming that her books are written "only for [her] own pleasure, and not to please others: being very indifferent, whether any body reads them or not; or being read, how they are esteem'd" (p. 273). For Cavendish, authorship is an auto-erotic experience that does not rely on any outside source for pleasure.

³¹ Butler, *Bodies*, p. 2.

³² In Cavendish's original edition of the play, Monsieur Facil says, "But nothing is difficult to Willing-minds" (*Plays Never before Printed*, p. 19).

³³ Shaver, "Agency and Marriage in the Fictions of Lady Mary Wroth and Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle," in *Pilgrimage for Love: Essays*

in *Early Modern Literature in Honor of Josephine A. Roberts*, ed. Sigrid King, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 213 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 1999), pp. 177–90, 177.

³⁴ Erin Lang Bonin, "Margaret Cavendish's Dramatic Utopias and the Politics of Gender," *SEL* 40, 2 (Spring 2000): 339–54, 339–40.

³⁵ Bonin, p. 347.

³⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 41. In a similar phrase, Cavendish suggests her skepticism about uncovering the essence of bodies when she criticizes the use of microscopes in 1666: "it is not the real body of the object which the glass presents, but the glass only figures or patterns out the picture presented in and by the glass, and there mistakes may easily be committed in taking copies from copies" (*Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, ed. Eileen O'Neill, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001], p. 51).

³⁷ Austin, pp. 6–12.

³⁸ Jankowski, p. 233.

³⁹ Jankowski, p. 237. Butler writes that in "both butch and femme identities, the very notion of an original or natural identity is put into question" (*Gender Trouble*, p. 157).

⁴⁰ Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *TJ* 40, 4 (December 1988): 519–31, 521.

⁴¹ Diana Fuss, "Inside/Out," introduction to *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 1–10, 1–2.

⁴² Some scholars see masques (many of which Cavendish attended) as instruments with which to display patriarchal and monarchical power. See, for example, Roy Strong, *Splendour at Court: Renaissance Spectacle and Illusion* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973); and Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theater in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1975). Others argue for the subversive capacity of masques. See Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, "Enacting Opposition: Queen Anne and the Subversions of Masquing," chap. 1 in *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 15–43; and David Lindley, introduction to *Court Masques: Jacobean and Caroline Entertainments, 1605–1640*, ed. Lindley, Oxford Drama Library (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. ix–xvii. In *Convent's* masque, as I will argue, Cavendish seems aware of masques' abilities both to promote and to disrupt hegemony.

⁴³ Shaver's edition of the play, which I cite in this essay, moves the list of characters to the beginning of the play and changes "THE PRINCESS" to "THE PRINCE" (p. 217). I disagree with her choice to do so because this significant change purports both gender and identity stability for the Princess in a play that, as I argue, contests such stability.

⁴⁴ Traub, p. 180; Tomlinson, p. 157.

⁴⁵ Whether or not Cavendish wrote sections of the last scenes of the play remains ambiguous and controversial. Near the end of the play, the pasted-in phrase "*Written by my Lord Duke*" appears in three places: before a shepherd's speech in IV.i (p. 238), before another shepherd's speech in the same scene (p. 239), and before V.ii (p. 244). Andreadis speculates that William Cavendish's "interpolations may appear at moments when a resolution is needed or to provide closure to a situation that has threatened to get out

of hand" or to reassure "the audience/reader of the boundaries between acceptable and transgressive female same-sex relations" (p. 201n76). For other discussions about the possible collaboration between the Cavendishes and its implications, see Jeffrey Masten, "Material Cavendish: Paper, Performance, 'Sociable Virginity,'" in "Feminism in Time," ed. Margaret Ferguson and Marshall Brown, special issue, *MLQ* 65, 1 (March 2004): 49–68; and Raber. For the purposes of my argument about performativity, however, it matters little whether Cavendish, her husband, or both authored the end of the play.

⁴⁶ Bowerbank and Mendelson, p. 21.

⁴⁷ Findlay, Williams, and Hodgson-Wright, p. 144.

⁴⁸ Butler, *Bodies*, p. 234.

⁴⁹ Jon McKenzie, "Genre Trouble: (The) Butler Did It," in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 217–35, 226.

⁵⁰ Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 23.

⁵¹ Butler, *Bodies*, p. 241.

⁵² Peggy Phelan, introduction to *The Ends of Performance*, pp. 1–19, 5.

⁵³ Bronwen Price, "Feminine Modes of Knowing and Scientific Enquiry: Margaret Cavendish's Poetry as Case Study," in *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500–1700*, ed. Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 117–39, 136.