

**Shakespeare and Cavendish:
Engendering the
Early Modern English Utopia**

A dissertation

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Abstract

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Utopias emerged in the early modern as feminized spaces allowing for fluid constructions of gender, desire and sexuality, which I propose led to utopia's difficulty and possibility. To realize utopia, society must become other on every front, including dismantling the gender binary. In Part I, I focus on representative examples of cosmogonic myths that demonstrate the persistent idealization of utopic unity and wholeness and narrate the moment of gender division. I then turn to utopia's literary origins beginning with Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), and an anonymous fourteenth-century poem, "Land of Cokaygne," considered the first utopia written in English. I conclude Part I by considering the influence of the discovery of the Americas, which promised to bridge the interminable gap between the ideal and the real by offering the concept of utopia a space and place. I focus on the accounts of Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and Sir Walter Raleigh to demonstrate how their narratives fixed the New World's potential through the same deliberate gendering across the span of the early colonial endeavors.

In Parts II and III, I consider several texts by William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673). In Shakespeare's plays, I consider the influence of performativity, enclosure, and mythology on the construction of gender and desire in *Love's Labour's Lost* (1594/5) and then his most utopic plays: *Twelfth Night* (1601/2) and *The Tempest* (1611). Finally, I demonstrate how Margaret Cavendish's repeated creation of utopic spaces is evidence of utopia's particular fluidity for women. For Cavendish, this potential materialized in her singularly "chaotic" writing. I focus on several of her Prefaces, *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1664), and *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (1666), along with two of her plays, *The Convent of*

Pleasure (1668) and *The Female Academy* (1662). I will demonstrate that utopia's development through the early modern as a feminized space facilitated Cavendish's persistent utopicity because utopia offered women, in particular, a genre that could become a *genre féminine* in the tradition of Cixous' *écriture féminine*.

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Foreword

You will not find utopia here; it cannot be found. Utopia is nowhere, because it is everywhere except right here. Then again, some say utopia can only ever be right here, eternally in the present, instead of the nostalgia for the past or idealizations of the future; perhaps it *is* here.¹ Many have imagined it, planned it, negotiated it, and insisted upon its actuality or possibility. They tried to define it, hoping that a stable definition could help realize it. They may have said, “Here it is. Here is a world far better than we have ever known before” about any number of fictional or real places. For want of a better place, they struggled to outline it in terms of hope, desire, politics, or as a physical manifestation of philosophy or ideology. Still, we fail because utopia is not about perfection; to attempt utopia will only reveal the familiar paradox that the only true perfection is imperfection. Concept, genre, and place are the main categories we assign it. However, if it is a place, I cannot say where utopia is or where it was. If one claims they found it, another might find dystopia instead. If it is a genre, I cannot say which text is utopian because few wholly agree on a canonical list. I cannot even say which text was the first utopia. Thomas More named it, but many others imagined it before he did, and in many ways, even *Utopia* is not utopic. Readers may label a work “utopian” despite the author’s intentions or his or her vigorous rejection of the term. If it is a concept, I cannot say when utopianism originated, or how it should be conceived. Utopia is unavoidable and impossible to find. Our long history of philosophy, literature and criticism suggests that we consistently ignore our failures with utopia. Yet, in this failure is success, for some say utopia only succeeds in failure, and so, I shall endeavor to fail in the hopes that you may indeed find utopia here.²

¹ Among others, see José Eduardo dos Reis’s article “The Eternal Present of Utopianism,” an in-depth analysis of Ernst Bloch’s discussion of utopia existing in the eternal present. Additionally, Jean Baudrillard, in his book *America* (1986), insists that America is the only “utopia achieved” because it exists always in the “perpetual present” (76).

² Ruth Levitas, following Fredric Jameson, argues that failure is a necessary condition of utopia. Following their arguments, Christopher Kendrick writes, “the paradox is that it will be a more successful utopia if the effort to resist goes awry, if it fails at what it attempts” (42).

Introduction: Introducing Utopia

Thomas More's Utopians define "pleasure" as that which "man naturally finds delight" in, and they believe that when a person seeks something that is against nature, it is false to name it a "pleasure" at all. For a Utopian, it is simply illogical to say something unnatural is a pleasure as if "one could change the real nature of things just by changing their names" (52). In other words, a thing's nature does not change because of the definition we assign it (an early example of slippery signification). Definitions demonstrate a search for meaning as much as a search for what things mean, and any discussion of utopia must confront the particular difficulty in defining a thing that rarely materializes the same way twice. Utopia is a slippery subject; perhaps more than others given that it appears so often as a metaphor through which other problematic theories and terms are defined (such as with uncertain terms like "origin" and "queer," or seemingly obvious terms like "marvel" and "wonder"). Stuck firm in a need for language, we must consider utopia through inadequate definitions knowing that such endeavors will fail. Perhaps a desire for utopic perfection is "unnatural," but we continue to define the nature of "utopia" even as it defies its own nature.

With *Utopia* (1516), Sir Thomas More "defined" the genre with a handy, malleable, word play of a name, but utopias appeared before More in classical, religious, and philosophical writings throughout history and across cultures.³ Christine de Pizan, for example, imagined and built her utopian city for women in *Le livre de la cité des dames* (1405) a century before More named the genre.⁴ There are examples of

³ Ernst Bloch famously wrote that "to limit the utopian to the Thomas More variety, or simply to orientate it in that direction, would be like reducing electricity to the amber from which it gets its Greek name and in which it was first noticed" (*Principles of Hope* 15). In his effort to isolate the particular social and cultural impact of the development of utopia since More's naming, which I agree with, Bloch perhaps diminishes More's influence on establishing the genre.

⁴ In her study of early modern England's familiarity with de Pizan's *City of Ladies*, Cristina Malcolmson offers a "utopic" reading of de Pizan's place in literary history: "In the study of women writers in early modern England, Christine de Pizan is everywhere and nowhere. [...] She presides as first feminist over her descendants, and her *City of Ladies* is used as a model for their works. [...] Tudor courts were familiar with the idea of a 'city of ladies' in a limited but definitive way, and the manuscripts of her works [...] were available in the royal libraries. Therefore, Elizabeth I [...] could have read Christine's text [and] William and Margaret Cavendish owned the important Harley manuscript collection of Christine's work" (15).

utopias in the narratives of mythology, folklore, and religion, and in the histories of empires, governments, and intentional communities. *Utopia* offered an identifiable signpost for comparison, but liberally applying the Morean name to so wide a variety of forms only broadened and further complicated the genre.

Such an elusive definition can only lead to a more fundamental question: What do we know of utopia? We know that most religions maintain a belief in some form of divine perfection or transcendence, often constructed as a place, whether in the mind or in the hereafter. Can we consider a divine paradise, or other supernatural space, utopic, or must utopia be built by human hands? The qualities and limitations of the various visions of paradisiacal perfection inspire their own problems, but the idea of “heaven” in all its incarnations is sure to influence any plans for building a heaven on earth. History is also full of revolutionary leaders—from Hitler to Ernesto “Che” Guevara—whose political or military endeavors were considered “utopic” in their efforts to recapture the past glories of empires or kingdoms (whether factual or mythic) to gather support for their campaigns (regardless of the actual experiences of their people). Finally, we know utopia always has a sense of place—of location—although it is often a geographically (and/or chronologically) obscure one. Realized in the here and now—the only place utopia can ever be—utopia usually takes shape in the gap between the real and the ideal.⁵ Asking, “What is it?” to understand utopia inevitably leads to asking, “Where is it?” as well. If we have a definition and a description, then how can we get *there* from *here*? The answers never satisfy, despite utopia’s ubiquitous and pervasive presence across disciplines, literary genres, and theories. We keep asking where and what it is because it so easily adapts that whenever one empties it of meaning, it becomes everything and appears everywhere. We can observe utopia’s development, but never outline it, and we can describe its qualities knowing we will never agree on what they are. Discussing utopia requires

⁵ Both Karl Mannheim in *Ideology and Utopia* (1929) and Ernst Bloch in *The Spirit of Utopia* (1918) and the three volume *Principles of Hope* (1954-1959) establish that utopia is conceptually bound to the *hic et nunc*, the “here and now,” of the eternal present.

acknowledging this slipperiness as both its most challenging difficulty and its single consistency. After all, only by continuing this impossible discussion can we hope to understand how and why we imagine utopia as a place that is knowable, reachable, and attainable despite our continued failures.

Consequently, we categorize utopia more often than we define it. J.C. Davis's four forms of "ideal societies" emerging before and after More's text is a widely accepted categorization. The first is the Cockaigne, which is a space of excess, plenty, and hedonistic desire; everything imaginable is readily available and accessible without the bother of labor or consequence. The second form is the Arcadia, which is a space of moderation; everything one needs is easily available, and no one desires more than what they need. The third form is the Commonwealth, which requires individual moral reform, but the government regulates, and provides, all of society's needs. Order and a social responsibility ensure the Commonwealth's ideality. Finally, the Millennium is a divine space that offers salvation in this world in preparation for perfection in the next. Labor and effort are important, but faith and election are paramount and the only route to true perfection. Utopian literature is yet another form because it describes efforts of social or political improvement in the fictional ideal, imagined as potential reforms for the real.

On another front, Lyman Tower Sargent categorizes utopia by dividing utopianism (or "social dreaming") into three distinct variants of what he calls a "multi-dimensional phenomenon" that should never be, but too often is, considered one-dimensionally. He argues that the "dual propensity" of utopianism *requires* fantasy as it is both necessary to human psychic health, but dangerous because one can lose oneself in it. Utopia's imperative of fantasy is "basic to the conflict over the political nature of utopianism" especially given the "twentieth-century argument that utopianism necessarily leads to totalitarianism or violence" (4). Sargent has identified three "faces" of utopianism. The first is utopian literature, which he sub-divides into two traditions: The "body utopia" that offers images of sensual gratification and the

“city utopia” that emerges out of human effort. The other two “faces” are communitarianism and utopian social theory, but for Sargent, utopia is neither genre nor concept exclusively. Instead, the phenomenon yields itself to many understandings and forms. Utopian literature then becomes just one of the possible expressions of the phenomenon of utopianism. Because utopia is multifaceted, it can be an abstract concept and a concrete doctrine simultaneously, as Sargent suggests.

To understand utopia’s complexity, as J.C. Davis presents it, we must consider both its history and its emergence from a continually evolving foundation of cultural, religious, and social hope. Marina Leslie does just that when she considers utopia’s historical perspective in *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* (1998). She insists that defining utopia is not inherently difficult, but that difficulty emerged because of its ambiguous historical usage. The concept of ever finding an adequate definition, Leslie insists, is a utopian goal in itself. We must step away from the familiar categories in the search for a definition because the “descent of the genre” has only ever led us to “what utopia *has* meant.” The desire to define utopia stems from a desire for a “*true* definition” that governs “what it *should* mean now, historically, and in the future.” According to Leslie, this desire demonstrates the difficulty of avoiding the “slippage from descriptive to prescriptive definitions” that has become “endemic to utopian scholarship of every stripe.” The search for a definition is utopian because any search for a single construction covertly “policies its borders by displacing its own negative (or dystopian) ‘other’ onto those utopian fictions that it rejects” because even the most ahistorical form of utopia ends up vacillating “between the antipodal positions of historical impossibility and historical imminence” (4). However, we must measure utopia against its ambiguous history if we are to understand its development, even if “the archaeology of utopia has produced a wealth of contradictory evidence about its historical situation” (5). Given the unavoidable contradiction, it is not surprising that in attempting to define utopia’s indefinability Leslie ends up defining utopia: It is liminal, ambiguous, and perpetually in-between

because it is always “almost,” always slipping, always at a threshold, always neutral, and thus, eternally expected. It may well be that the fundamental problem of defining utopia stems from this constant slippage, materializes as a resistance to definition, or even that the utopia is inconceivable within the stability definitions require.

Many definitions ebb and flow between greater extremes of absolutism and ambiguity, or essentialism and deconstructionism. Krishan Kumar’s definition of utopia, for example, approaches near-total ambiguity; he describes utopia as sitting “tantalizingly on the edge of possibility, somewhere just beyond the boundary of the real” (1). For Kumar, utopia is somewhere “out there” eternally teasing us with the promise of the ideal while we remain helplessly stuck in the real. However, if there is one theorist whose approach to utopianism questions and complicates *Utopia* and utopian theory more than any other it would be Louis Marin in his *Utopiques: jeux d’espaces* (1973).⁶ Marin focuses the full force of his theories on More’s “origin” text to deconstruct utopianism. Marin first approaches utopia by listing what it is *not*: It is not a concept, not a political plan, not a concrete place, nor an abstract form. Utopia can only ever be what it is not. Marin observes that utopia is always realizable as neutrality because it allows the positive and negative simultaneously.⁷ It is imaginable only when binaries are dismantled: “Utopia is simultaneously *ou-topos* and *eu-topos*, the negative of the positive and the positive of the negative in the spelling of the signifier, one in another, as if it were a monogram where both must be read, one, then the other, in the same literal figure immediately given” (91). Thus, we can only read a utopia from two perspectives at once because its fundamental neutrality offers freedom from the

⁶ Translated as *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Space* (1984).

⁷ Marin defines utopia’s neutrality thus: “Etymologically ne-uter, neither one nor the other, grammar defines it as neither masculine nor feminine. It is rather, outside gender; neither active nor passive, but outside voice. In botany or zoology a flower or insect is ‘neuter’ if it lacks organs for reproduction, unable to mate or reproduce itself. In grammar ‘neuter’ verbs are intransitive verbs expressing an action by themselves, without object and without the possibility of an objective case [...] The neuter is intransitive. This means two things. First, it is the expression of a pure action (all infinitive verbs are neuter) Second, it indicates the closure of a subject by his own circularity. He is himself his own object and his actions are his passions: self consciousness” (12). Even in this theoretical definition of utopia (if it is neuter, in everything from science to grammar) gender is the point of division.

violence of binary structures. Eugene Hill concisely captured the impact of Marin's reading when he wrote: "Utopia disorients the elements of the universe of discourse in order to prepare the way for the appearance of something inconceivable or inexpressible within this discourse" (167). If utopia is understood as neutrality, as Marin proposes, then it will always allow both the conception and expression of a potential that must be beyond the patriarchal discourse that structures binary thinking. It is absolutely inconceivable and inexpressible within the binary and so utopia emerges when the binary gives way to fluidity and the possibility of neutrality. If utopia can only exist beyond the binary, then any expression of utopia, from literature to theory, has profound implications for the construction of gender.

Utopianism's slippery origins have only aggravated its ambiguity. According to Sargent, one of the most essential understandings of utopianism's origin is as a "return to the womb or, in a variant version of the womb, as an expression of the myth of the eternal return," although he warns against seeking the "truth" in any single explanation (3). Because of our nostalgic desire to return, there is a noticeable circularity to utopia. The journey to utopia always leads back to origins because utopia cannot end in a destination; its progress is an infinite regress. Proposing a similar circularity in his categorization, J.C. Davis notes that not all ideal societies are utopias, and not all utopias are ideal, but a utopia, unlike an "ideal society," does not assume drastic changes in nature and man. Instead, as he argues, utopia requires that humanity accept limited satisfaction to gain improvement through social shaping (or reshaping). This may ring true given utopia's history, but I propose that a fundamental change in man and nature is a prerequisite for utopia. Utopia can only be successfully realized (and then deferred) through the acceptance of a fundamental change in how society negotiates and constructs binaries in general, and gender in particular.

This dissertation will study the development of the early modern English utopia, in light of its predecessors and successors, to demonstrate how fluidity challenges the binaries that prevent utopia's realization. Across ages and cultures,

utopists have imagined utopias in which gender and forms of desire emerge fluidly, most notably in science fiction, and most powerfully, when written by women. How utopias represent and negotiate gender is central to this dissertation's consideration of its development; I will show that utopias require fluidity in gender and desire because they resist binary constructions as much as they resist definitions. Utopias prove most transgressive at the point of gender because they have been constructed as feminized spaces in an effort to resolve gender transgression. In spite of, and regardless of, the gender of the hand (or mind) that wrote it, imagined it, built it, or reached for it, utopia was (and continues to be) imagined as a feminized space. Fluidity emerges in utopia despite the authors' efforts to mitigate that fluidity through rigid feminization. If we keep in mind Joan Wallach Scott's observation that gender is a critical category in history (as a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes), and that gender is the primary way of signifying relationships of power, then the connections between utopia's historical position (as ideology, political plan, cultural construct) and its role in the literary and critical dialogue come to the forefront (*Gender and the Politics of History* 42). Gender is society's most fundamental binary, and thus, is used to categorize difference itself; utopia appears across disciplines, in practice and theory, as a tool to negotiate, illustrate, play out, or even conveniently imagine away the conflicts that emerge when negotiating difference. Thus, the boundaries of utopia blur at the point of difference, or gender.

Defining utopia is not my goal; I hope to resist definitions as much as possible. Instead of approaching utopia from a single understanding, I will consider it from several diverse perspectives. I will not restrict utopia to a single theory, nor will I exclude a contradicting interpretation if it informs one text better than another does, or if it offers greater insight on the continually evolving dialogue of utopia and utopianism. Each observation adds a facet to the whole that will prove far more valuable to the overall understanding of utopia's development than any one

perspective. It is my hope that this approach will make a “transgressive utopia,” or a utopia that resists enclosure, of this dissertation. Political theorist Lucy Sargisson coined this term in several publications, most notably in *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism* (1997) in which she argues against a static or a blueprint approach to utopianism as a route to social and political change:

Transgressive utopianism is the product of an approach to Utopian thinking that does not insist upon Utopia as blueprint: Utopia as the inscription of perfection. [...] I set about reconceptualising utopia and formulated the idea of a utopianism that was transgressive in some way in which our world is currently ordered. I found language to be one primary ordering factor and, in particular, the tradition of binary oppositional thought that erects hierarchies and associations of hierarchies that mediate our relation to the world. These things affect the way that we think about and relate to the world, and sustainable political change requires that we first enable ourselves to break free of mental constraints and think differently. Thinking genuinely differently is a process that cannot occur within existing constraints and so I suggest that we seek tools that enable a paradigm shift in consciousness (2-3).

Sargisson’s socio-political theory lends itself easily to literature (just as theorists and philosophers, irrespective of their fields, find themselves using literature when discussing utopia). Men who explored utopianism, or wrote utopias, required masculine paradigms of their utopic visions as they simultaneously feminized them. However, because language is the primary means of ordering the masculine hierarchy that was “erected” to mediate gender negotiations ever since its inception, utopias consistently challenge binaries, and so, emerge transgressively. I propose that this element of utopia’s development—its transgressive potential—offered women unparalleled linguistic and literary freedom. Through utopia, women could threaten the structures that resisted fluidity using the same textual spaces through which men hoped to resolve dissonance. To transgress the fundamental binary ordering our world is to transgress gender and power; how we classify gender is integral to how we “think about and relate to the world,” and it is this constraint that the utopic “breaks free from.” Encircled by the enclosure of the gender binary, utopia *must* transgress in order to become. As I formulate a critical and historical foundation of the development of utopia between the real and the ideal, my own utopia will emerge, transgressively,

from the varied “discovery accounts” that made way for the early modern utopia’s emergence as genre, as a place, and ultimately, as a theoretical and philosophical concept.

This dissertation explores the construction, development, and expression of gender in utopia in order to consider the resulting fluidity in representative texts by William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673). The early modern was a historically pivotal moment that offered the necessary conditions for utopia to emerge as a consistently feminized space. I propose that the socio-cultural conditions of the early modern allowed for utopia’s emergence as a textual (and conceptual) space that granted women, in particular, a powerful medium to imagine freedom from the violence of gender assignment. Utopia emerges from a fundamentally fluid generic form. Early modern writers and New World discoverers saw utopia in their new or imagined worlds, described them with “feminine” qualities, unfolded elements in feminized terms, and negotiated the troublesome place of women within their ideal space, in their desire to conquer it and gain the social, physical, or psychological perfection and completion those worlds promised. A transgressive utopia allows for freedom from, or the suspension of, the gender binary. This suspension does not lead to static visions such as the utter erasure of gender, or the establishment of a third gender as another category, or the recovery of a mythical unity or wholeness. Whether in literature or theory, language or praxis, utopia was, and is, never a goal but a constant metamorphic process. The early modern English utopia, in particular, exemplifies how the social, political, cultural, and literary environments created the conditions for engendering utopia’s problematic development, as I will show.

Oscar Wilde offered one of the most profound visions of utopia; it is a place that humanity is always heading towards, and once there, leaving, or, Utopia is

“progress” itself.⁸ What did Wilde mean by naming “progress” as the realization of utopia? Was it the physical movement towards an unknown and unknowable destination (as a verb), or was it the achievement of a goal of continual improvement or change in the current environment (as a noun)? Both forms of progress appear as potentiality, instead of as actuality or finality, and as such, utopia will always be a little further away. Alternatively, post-structuralism locates utopia problematically at the end of history, time, or even reality, and thereby, situating it as an impossibility,⁹ or in the realm of naiveté, essentialism, or even totalitarianism. Then again, colonialism situates utopia at some distant undiscovered shore or unexplored new world in the hopes that the distance and separation from the old world might allow for reconstruction of a new utopia, or the reclamation of lost paradise. Today, utopian literature, often posing scientific or political questions, imagines utopia in distant or alternate futures or worlds, while theory absorbs its many classical manifestations as epistemological metaphors in their search for ideology and understanding. Utopia also appears in philosophy, often as an abstract concept discussed in concrete terms: as a place that could exist everywhere.¹⁰ Aesthetically, politically, socially, and culturally, utopia grows more complex as we realize its origins rest in our inescapable desire for a wholeness we can only achieve through a “return” (whether divine, psychological, or metaphoric), or in the next best thing: A reconstruction of the real as that ideal. Whether in dialogue, literature, or political polemic, utopia must be built solidly but remain mutable. To escape what can never be utopic (the real) and reach utopia (the ideal), society must attempt to escape seemingly unavoidable binaries, but most adamantly, the gender binary on which conflicts of difference and power are based. On

⁸ In “The Soul of Man under Socialism” Wilde states, “A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realisation of Utopias” (141).

⁹On utopia’s placement at the end of history, see Marina Leslie’s reading of Hegel’s *Geist* (*Renaissance Utopias* 6) and Philip E. Wegner’s reading of Jameson, Bloch, and Marin (23, 40).

¹⁰ Many classical works that philosophically negotiated utopia influenced More’s *Utopia*. Among these, Plato’s *The Republic*, Aristotle’s *Politics* (which discusses Plato’s work) and Cicero’s *de re Publica* (51 BCE), and the analysis of these works by Augustine in *City of God* (1467), have all been cited as important influences on More’s political structures of *Utopia* (Dougherty 52).

this critical point, Monique Wittig's essay, "The Straight Mind," proves particularly informative:

The category of sex is a totalitarian one. [...] It shapes the mind as well as the body since it controls all mental production. It grips our mind in such a way that we cannot think outside of it. That is why we must destroy it to start thinking beyond it if we want to start thinking at all, as we must destroy the sexes as a sociological reality if we want to start to exist (8).

Our inability to escape socially assigned gender prevents the progress Wilde defined as utopia, and the possibility of freedom from gender utopia promises. After all, gender is a slippery subject as well. If we never actually land on the shore of Wilde's distant country and say "we are here" then we will never notice there is another shore. We can find utopia only in the constant progress towards the possibility of freedom from gendering.

The majority of the texts I consider in this dissertation are plays; the popularity and consequent development of theater in the early modern, along with the discovery of the New World, coalesced with the period's development of utopia for the theater. The development of utopia is intricately connected to the development of early modern drama because both required a negotiation of space and place that resulted in fluid gender constructions within those spaces. I consider several utopic themes throughout this dissertation, such as enclosure and colonialism, but I will focus of the impact of performativity on gender in utopia in particular. Utopia is ambiguous in any form, but it is particularly so on stage because during a performance the stage transforms into a space in which actors and dialogue (along with the equally dynamic audience) fuel an interactive potentiality. Utopia's possibility is momentarily in the present and locatable on stage. No genre captures this potential as deliberately as drama does because of the immediacy inherent in performance. Jill Dolan names the substantial exchange with the audience during a performance "utopian performatives" and writes:

Utopian performatives describe small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be

like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense. [They] make palpable an affective vision of how the world might be better. [...] Theater and performance offer a place to scrutinize public meanings, but also to embody and, even if through fantasy, enact the affective possibilities of “doings” that gesture toward a much better world (5-6).

Performance fosters a transcendence that generates a momentary lifting of the audience “slightly above the present.” The stage encloses time and place, which allows drama a more complex utopic potential than other genres. The utopic ideality of other worlds (such as Illyria or Prospero’s Island) or other moments in time (such as Henry V’s victory at Agincourt) become real for the audience. That moment grants, as Dolan argues, a “palpable” vision of another world (whether better, perfect, or Other). The utopian performative is established through an “inevitability” of disappearance because “its efficacy is premised on its evanescence”; it may be fleeting, but through performance, utopia is “embodied” and realizable. The simultaneity of performance, or “its present-tenseness,” uniquely suits it “to probing the possibilities of utopia as a hopeful process that continually writes a different, better future” (8, 13). The reality that the performative moment will end draws the audience into a utopia of possibility within the place of the theater and during the space of the performance. Thus, drama has the power to become utopia by instantly, fleetingly, answering the “what” *and* the “where” of utopia.

That theater somehow allows for transcendence is an idea that appears repeatedly through the many critical studies discussing theater and performativity.¹¹ Dolan, for instance, goes on to offer an insightful example of this transcendence from her experience with theater; she accurately captures why we can best understand utopia’s development in terms of the concurrent development of theater:

Theatre remains, for me, a space of desire, of longing, of loss, in which I’m moved, by a gesture, a word, a glance, in which I’m startled by a confrontation with mortality (my own and others’). I go to theatre and performance to hear stories that order, for a moment, my incoherent longings, that engage the complexity of personal and cultural relationships, and that critique the

¹¹ Dolan’s *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (2005) also defines the “small moments” of utopic transcendence possible in the theater (5-6).

assumptions of a social system I find sorely lacking. I want a lot from theatre and performance (455).

A sense of “longing” and “desire” evokes a utopic hope for improvement, a desire for an unspecified “something else” that plays out as difference. Dolan identifies both an “ideal” sense of personal change and the consequent “real” social change inspired by theater. She also describes a tension between being “moved” on one level and “startled” on another. Theater brings order to incoherence and creates a place of safety and enclosure within the complex engagements she finds lacking in the real. Performances allow her to transcend the real and reach a unity experienced as completion or as a reclaimed symmetry and wholeness (as one would find in the metaphorical womb or other space of origin). Indeed, Dolan demands quite a lot of theater. The complex, multivalent relationship between spectator and players lifting “everyone slightly above the present” suggests a physical and chronological, as well as an emotional and spiritual, transcendence is possible (5). Is it absurd to require all this of a form of entertainment? If it is absurd, then why do so many critics, from so many perspectives and disciplines, grant this same powerful quality—transcendence—to the stage, and in particular, the early modern stage? For example, Marjorie Garber in *Vested Interests* (1997) describes transvestites on the Renaissance stage as representing “excess, that which overflows a boundary,” and names their transgressive process the “space of the transvestite.” The transvestite actor thus inhabits an “other” space within the space of the enclosed theater (28). Excess as a means to transgression was theater’s power, according to Garber, for “indicators of excess” were “rearticulated” on the stage as a “vestmentary transgression” that “violated expected boundaries of gender identification or gender decorum. For one kind of crossing, inevitably, crosses over into another” (28). The early modern theater was physically, socially, and culturally transcendent, and because of Garber’s crossing over, it was transgressive as well. Studying theater and performance, *will* lead to gender ambiguity

(and often utopia as well) because transcendence, like transgression, always occurs where gender blurs.¹²

How do we resist re-defining categories that require transgression of their categorization? Dolan encountered this problem in her study of utopia and theater in which she notes that she had to resist the “stark binary” between performance and reality by defining theater’s transcendence as *necessarily* contradictory (19). The “efficacy” of this intimate experience, as Dolan argues, relies on a collaborative and communal imperative “premised on its evanescence” and the “inevitability of its disappearance” (8):

Theater becomes a privileged, intimate area of human experience within which one can demand the promise of another dimension of existence be revealed, and that the impossible be achieved/experienced here and now, in the presence of other living human beings—the impossible, namely a sense of unity between what is usually divided in our daily life: the material and immaterial, the human body and spirit, our morality and our propensity for perfection, for infinity, for the absolute (6).

On stage, infinite possibility is defined by the transcendent “sense of unity” within the “divided” real because the resistance to definition requires definition after all. Dolan does not consider Shakespeare or Cavendish’s plays specifically, but her study of theater’s place in politics, and its influence on social change and responsibility through performativity, offers a valuable example of theater’s utopic potential. After all, Dolan describes theater as not merely transcendent, but redemptive: “[Theater] leaves us melancholy yet cheered, because for however brief a moment, we felt something of what redemption might be like, of what humanism could mean, of how powerful might be a world in which our commonalities would hail over our differences” (8). The transcendence one finds in theater may be a utopic realm, but it is the redemptive element that precisely captures theater’s utopic potential; utopia allows for progress, not just transgression, and ensures continuous progress towards Other.

¹² Among others, Catherine Belsey has argued that early modern English culture was fascinated with tropes of gender ambiguity: “The period of Shakespeare’s plays is also the period of an explosion of interest in Amazons, female warriors, roaring girls and women disguised as pages” (182). These figures, and the possibilities they inspired, lent themselves easily to the stage.

Early modern drama was a critical medium for representing utopia's progression from ideological concept to literary genre, and later, physical possibility (an expression of its metamorphosis from concept to place). More and the writers of New World discovery accounts used classical and religious ideals, and the promise (and anxiety) the New World encounter fostered, to imagine utopia in the Americas to mitigate its foreignness as a "schema of the imagination" (Marin xiii). Louis Marin considers the connection between utopic discourse and several modes that, as he argues, are themselves related to myth and theater:

On a "schematic" or imaginary level utopic discourse "works" as a schema of the imagination. [...] It is a discourse that stages—sets in full view—an imaginary (or fictional) solution to the contradiction. It is the simulacrum of the synthesis. From this the remarkable connection between narrative and descriptive modes can be seen. These modes can also then be tied to the utopic discourse's relation to both myth (ritual) and theater in its synoptic, closed, and centered form (xiii).

Shakespeare and Cavendish participated in the same dialogue that drained classical myths of their utopic gender ambiguity and emptied the New World of its people. Reconstructing origins to better fit the ideal patriarchal perfection and recasting those ideals in newly discovered spaces was part of this effort. The physical presence of utopias on the stage filled these spaces repeatedly as newly imagined utopias, no matter how often the spaces had to be emptied at the end of a performance. Utopic themes appear in an overwhelming number of genres and concepts, and they inspire divergent definitions and understandings. When theoretical concepts use utopia they require a *locus*, and with the identification of a space (such as with the discovery of the Americas) related themes of space "generation" and reproduction (and consequently women) soon follow.

Utopic discourse, in its many modes, allows for a space that can "stage" contradiction by "dissimulating," or by "playing out" in fiction what is impossible in the real; this staging is accomplished through "a sort of double confrontation between myth as ritual and theater as the scene of representation," as Marin argues (61-2). The search for synthesis as a form of cohesion, or a creation of a whole, even if only a

simulacrum of such, demonstrates utopia's preoccupation with origins (and an unexpected reliance on theater and theatrical terminology). False or brief as that wholeness may be, utopia is born from this yearning to repair the unavoidable contradiction. In Part I, I explore myth, the first element Marin specifically connects to the narrative and descriptive modes of utopic discourse, and focus on how gender constructions by way of mythology informed the construction of utopia, *Utopia*, and the New World as utopic. In Parts II and III, I introduce the second element—theater—that Marin relates to utopic discourse to demonstrate the interplay between myth and theater to the development of the early modern utopia. That theater is “synoptic,” as Marin writes, is apparent enough given that a performance can only hold an audience for a specified time, and so, it must provide a whole, even if only briefly and succinctly. Theater must “enclose” because the physical stage is a defined space that encloses actors on the stage, and audiences in the theater, and fuses them into a participatory expression of a whole in a collaborative agreement to suspend reality. Theater is also “centered” on the specified space of the stage, where ritual (of myth and religion) is performed with precise entrances and exits and the repetition of prescribed language. I begin this dissertation keeping Marin's theories of utopia in the forefront; the interplay between myth and theater fundamentally influence how interrelated themes of enclosure along with fluid gender constructions of forms of desire, allow for utopia.

In Part I, I focus on utopia's emergence as a concept by reading mythology and early utopic narratives. From this uncertain, ambiguous origin, I build the historical and theoretical foundation that facilitates my analysis of Shakespeare and Cavendish's utopias in Parts II and III. I consider none of the texts in Part I in great depth, but will read them in conjunction with related discourse and theory, which will allow me to connect the several influences that led Shakespeare, and subsequently Cavendish, to write utopia as they did. I begin with an example from cosmogonic mythology to illustrate how visions of humanity's “origin” influenced subsequent constructions of the

“ideal” in gender, and thus, subsequent images of wholeness and unity. I use this foundation to consider the emergence of utopia in the early modern through three textual sources that each illustrate a specific facet of utopia’s development. First, I consider the construction of utopia as a place in a minor, 13th century anonymous poem—“The Land of Cokaygne”—said to be the earliest utopia written in English. Second, I consider More’s groundbreaking *Utopia* and its influence on establishing the genre. Finally, I explore the idealization of space and/as place through three colonization accounts to illustrate the profound influence of the discovery of the New World on the development of utopianism. Part I is my own “discovery account” of the early modern English utopia, and like the early discoverers of the New World, I will attempt to represent a true accounting of the landscape, borders, and uses of utopia.

In chapter 1, I explore utopia’s “origins” by reading Hesiod’s *Theogony* and other representative examples of cosmogonic myth and their early modern revisions, such as Arthur Golding’s (1536-1605) translation of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (1567). I demonstrate how these prominent classical texts describing the “origin” of gender influenced the early modern construction of gender ideals and how the resulting gendered concepts then manifested in theory, and consequently, utopia. I close the chapter with my reading of an early utopia in English, or rather, a literary “origin” text: an anonymous thirteenth- or fourteenth-century poem, “The Land of Cokaygne,”

In chapter 2, I focus on a different origin of utopia by demonstrating how the mythic foundations contributed to the development of utopia at the dawn of early modern England. I consider Thomas More’s *Utopia* (who introduced the name) and New World discovery accounts by Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and Sir Walter Raleigh (who described the place). Their individual accounts offer a good summary of the utopic conventions used in the New World because their texts span the discovery at the cusp of the establishment of colonialism. Part I, as a whole, will establish my foundation for reading utopia on three levels. Historically, I consider how gender constructions in the mythic origins, and the force of the New World encounter as

translated through the discovery accounts, influenced the early modern expectations of gender ideals and, consequently, utopia. Textually, I consider utopia's emergence through two "origin texts" of the genre: The "Land of Cokaygne" and More's *Utopia*; theoretically, I consider the influence of the construction of gender in mythology and origins in theory on utopia's development.

I begin my study of three plays by Shakespeare in Part II, which I consider from the perspective of drama's particular utopic potential. Shakespeare's stage relied on male actors to play female roles, which formed an all-male utopic enclosure (simultaneously exposed and enclosed), on the stage, which contributed to a desire for gender separation through the assumption of transvestite gender mutability. Women characters were required for playing a utopia on stage, but women were physically unnecessary either for the performance, or for writing the texts. The story might require women, but the all-male cast existed in a woman-free zone of masculine perfection that insisted that women's absent presence facilitated utopia. Many conventional utopic elements appear in Shakespeare's plays, but the utopic potential of performance, proves most informative. Shakespeare's staged plays, in contrast to Cavendish's textual plays (unperformed publically in her lifetime) sustain a significant historical and social presence. The stage is a liminal space exemplifying not the imaginary ideal of the narrative utopia, or the lived real experiences of intentional communities, but the imaginary real of utopic potential. Shakespeare subverted the boundaries of gender and desire, and ultimately, utopia flourished on his stage.

In chapter 3, I begin with *Love's Labour's Lost* (1594/5), one of Shakespeare's earliest comedies, in which the men hope to cloister themselves away from women. The play includes an unconventional ending and elements of myth and enclosure that result in one of Shakespeare's most intriguing utopic endeavors. No other play (without a transvestite heroine) in his canon can boast such purposeful questioning of gender roles, and consequently, no other play so definitively maintained utopic fluidity. In chapters 4 and 5, I turn my attention to what I propose are Shakespeare's most utopic

plays: *Twelfth Night* (1601/2) and *The Tempest* (1611). For *Twelfth Night*, rather than choosing the exotic setting of many of his other comedies, or England itself, Shakespeare imagines another world using the name of an ancient Italian region now conquered at the hands of gender-interchangeable twins. The new land uses the conventional utopic theme of an accidentally discovered land after misdirection or tragedy at sea. This theme, common in colonial accounts, travel and colonization narratives, and utopias in general, emerges full force in *The Tempest*. Shakespeare effectively creates a multi-layered utopia in this play: an imagined island, within an unknown ocean, on an allowing stage, in an enclosing theater. *The Tempest* is also the only Shakespearean play that includes a conventional literary utopia as a detailed description of an ideal world outside the context of the “present” of the play. The play also offers a consistent reimagining of utopia from several perspectives; each character searches for, imagines, or strives for his utopia in some way. Most critical to my reading is that *The Tempest* is Shakespeare’s only play with just a single female character.¹³ Miranda’s isolation on an island of men draws our attention to her because of her gender. Miranda is often bewitched, bartered, or otherwise manipulated, but she moves in tandem with both Caliban and the ambiguously gendered Ariel, and their unions create several shifting utopic spaces within the narrative that circulate through elements of enclosure and gender.

Shakespeare’s status as an icon is utopic in itself. No author is as immediately recognizable, and he has come to emblemize canonical English literature to such an extent that a utopic mythology has developed around his history. Shakespeare’s overwhelming idealized influence makes his use of utopia a critical example for how utopia flourished at the height of the early modern. Margaret Cavendish’s texts, on the other hand, are unfamiliar and often considered inaccessible to readers outside of academic circles. Mostly ignored, her work garnered only minor, usually scathing,

¹³ *Henry V* (1600) can be considered a militaristic utopia for the same reason; the play’s few women rarely speak (except in French, which was often feminized) and are either daughters (traded for military conquests) or servants. *The Tempest* is more specific for my purposes as it also creates another world within a colonial dialogue.

references through history. However, readers eventually discovered just how utopic a writer Cavendish was through an explosion of critical work over the last few decades studying her colorful life and voluminous work. Cavendish's texts demonstrate how utopia progressed through the early modern as an incredibly flexible medium for women writers in particular. With More at the start, Shakespeare at the height, and Cavendish at the close, of the early modern (and their progressive approaches to gender in utopia), I will demonstrate that these authors represent the critical milestones of utopia's development. More named the desire that the mythologies narrated and that the New World discovery accounts had given a "real" land and space, leading Shakespeare to set the stage by animating and locating utopia in space and place, while Cavendish, self-enclosed in her textual worlds, emerged as the most powerfully utopic author among them by demonstrating utopia's greatest potential.

In Part III, I consider several utopias by Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle. Her texts may have been considered wordy, but they are brilliant examples of how utopia flourishes in the fluid chaos of her textual worlds. In *The Bridals* (1668), one of her plays, Cavendish writes:

That great Wits for the most part have few Children, but what their brain produces which are Ideas, Inventions and Opinions; Ideas are Daughters; Inventions are Sons, and Opinions Hermaphrodites; and the production of these Incorporeal Children, hinders the production of Corporeal children (Shaver 189).

Productions of the mind are gendered and as much children of her "great Wit" as the "corporeal" children she never had. They are also not restricted to a two-gender system but can be male, female, or hermaphrodites, expressing their "gender" not in the body or by social norm, but according to their continuing contribution to the dialogue of knowledge. Cavendish chose to participate in the community of scientific, philosophic, and social ideas (or "daughters") of the seventeenth century, even if they would not have her. Her writings draw attention to gender, gendered language, and consequently, the gendered spaces that language inhabits. In her "real" world, turmoil inspired many scientific and political utopias that were a vital part of the escalating

humanistic dialogue. The chance of realizing utopia seemed suddenly possible at the hands of man, instead of the divine. For Cavendish, utopia was an idea, or a “daughter,” and would be for any author who attempted to employ her possibilities.

Beginning in chapter 6 with her Prefaces and *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1664), I explore how the self-described “chaos” of her writing led to her creation of communities, both open and enclosed, as a vehicle for her participation in a dialogue that she believed should celebrate the fluidity of chaos that others struggled to mitigate. By choosing an epistolary format in *Letters*, Cavendish imagined a community for want of a “real” space of female unity and intimacy; she found that space in the prose and verse of her ideal epistolary dialogue. Her choice to fashion a space that allowed for accessible dialogue demonstrates a desire to discuss not only the expected domestic issues, but philosophy, science, and gender differences as well. Cavendish’s writing reflects elements, or fragments, from numerous influences in her life; she chose to absorb and employ nearly everything she encountered into her writing style, whether she gleaned it from a literary source, from personal experience, or from the chaotic social and political environment of her day. *Sociable Letters* validated the female perspective on scientific debates, social concerns, and current events, and acknowledged the quality and worth of an exchange of ideas that included women. In chapter 7, I consider Cavendish’s dramatic communities of women in two of her plays: *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668) and the lesser-known *The Female Academy* (1662). These plays confront the recurrent utopic themes of separatist spaces and enclosure. Cavendish’s use of drama, without performance, to imagine enclosed female communities resonates with much of the anxiety over her contradictory desire to actively participate in the scientific and philosophical dialogue and retreat into her isolated life (both during her exile and after the Restoration).

From separatist spaces to literary circles, Cavendish progresses to what today might be considered a more conventional utopia by creating a new, imagined world in *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World* (1666). My final chapter

considers *The Blazing World*, which was republished in tandem with *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1668) over 150 years after More's *Utopia*. In her preface, she declares:

It is a description of a New World, not such as Lucian's, or the French-man's world in the moon; but a world of my own creating, which I call the *Blazing World*. [...] If it add any satisfaction to you, I shall account my self a happy *creatoress*; if not, I must be content to live a melancholy life in my own world (124).

It is a world of her own creating and she is unconcerned if the “real” world is satisfied. Cavendish proclaims herself a “creatoress”: The authoritative agency as the voice of creation itself—divine, literary, authoritative, scientific, linguistic, and utopic—is hers. She uses colonial and religious language throughout and states that she is creating another “new” world (named in relation to the old), but her self-comparison to two male utopists (one classical and one contemporary) shifts her language's attention to the gender difference between her and the authors she cites.¹⁴ She uses her gender to define her world as her “own,” “new,” wholly other, in contrast to the men's utopias.

Her new world was born of a utopic impulse that told her these “new” worlds, literary utopias, were spaces of possibility for women in particular. Her utopia is another world by grace of its newly gendered creation myth as well as its heroine who, together with Cavendish's narrative self, acts with colonial, military, philosophic, and erotic agency. I propose that Cavendish's utopic writing, in both form and content, demonstrates a realization of Hélène Cixous's *écriture féminine*, which is a utopic theory in itself. Cixous takes to task the role of writing by envisioning a privileged space in which “woman must put herself into the text—as into the world and into history—by her own movement” in order to create “female-sexed texts” by which “woman must write woman. And man, man.” In the task of writing, Cixous sees “*the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive

¹⁴ She mentions the classical Lucian's *True History* (165 AD), then moves past his translator, More whose *Utopia* named the troublesome concept, and ends at her contemporary, the “French-man” Savien Cyrano de Bergerac, whose popular *Voyage dans la lune* (1657) and *l'Histoire des états et empires du soleil* (1662) represented a flourishing French utopic tradition tied closely to their own burgeoning colonialism and scientific exploration.

thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures.” This change can only emerge one way, Cixous demands: “She must write her self, because this is the invention of a new insurgent writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history.” Moreover, this must be accomplished on two levels: Individually, through physical affirmation in which “woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display,” and linguistically, by which woman must seize “the occasion *to speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based *on her suppression*.” Cixous contends that this “feminine practice of writing” is “impossible to define” because “this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded—which does not mean it doesn’t exist. But it will surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogentric system [...]” (“The Laugh of the Medusa” 334-40). It may seem that the *écriture féminine* privileges writing to such an extent as to render theater out of its realm, but both conceive spaces of allowability. As Cixous insists, the writing must be brought about by a return to the body *and* an occasion to speak because it requires a physical presence *and* an oral directive, and the whole is defined as something that cannot be enclosed but must “surpass,” or transgress, boundaries.

Between Cavendish’s prescient response to Cixous’s feminist demands and Cixous’s discussion of theater, we find the critical connections to utopia once again. After all, Cavendish was not only writing utopias in through her “feminine” writing, she was also writing utopias. Susan Sellers explores Cixous’ work in the theater in light of the *écriture féminine* and argues that Cixous believed that writing for theater “enabled her to move away from a writing of the self to a writing of others. [...] In the theatre it is impossible for the writer to install him- or herself at the centre of the text, since the theatre is by definition ‘the land of others’” (76). Sellers argues that, for Cixous, the “stress on theatre’s capacity to overcome the corruption and destruction of the current schema recalls [her] delineation of the aims of feminine

writing” (81). Writing for theater suggests collaboration,¹⁵ and for Cixous, collaboration was fundamental to playwriting (she collaborated on both her plays with Ariane Mnouchkine of the *Théâtre du Soleil*):¹⁶ “The notion of writing with others is augmented by the ever-present sense of the actors who will perform the roles and the play’s eventual audience. [...] This sense of collaboration extends to the extra-linguistic resources of the theatre” (85). Cixous’s reflections on theater encourage us to ask what enables this element of the “extra-linguistic” as a transcendence of language on a transcendent stage. Cixous’s observations highlight the utopic power of theater and how it can exemplify a feminine form of writing and expression within the dialogue of difference and the Other. In her words, theater is the “land of others” and with that one phrase, she captures geographic locality, a sense of difference, of otherness, and of being able to contain what we can never know on the collaborative stage. The *écriture féminine* is a wildly liberating concept and it has earned Cixous derision from those that would pull feminism into a less utopic place, if one defines “utopic” as an unrealistic, naïve idea that leads to nothing certain. Cixous’s *écriture féminine* flows naturally into theater and utopia, and I propose that, in utopia, it has resulted in what can be considered a *genre féminine*, or utopia as a feminine genre.

Cavendish’s hybrid approach to genre, form, language, and structure was a response to the literary conventions and styles of her day, and her appropriation of gender and genre effectively reclaimed the utopic space, particularly in the scientific dialogue she often presented utopically. Her *Blazing World* burned into the genre a clear insistence that utopia was, and could only ever be, a feminized space. Cavendish approached utopia as a woman’s space and hers is a world most certainly “not such as”

¹⁵ Jeffrey Masten studies the extent to which collaboration influenced the development of theater in his book *Textual Intercourse* (1997), which considers the fundamental homoeroticism in the all-male collaborative playwriting of early modern theater.

¹⁶ Cixous delved into playwriting in the late 1980s. Her work with the *Théâtre du Soleil* resulted in two plays about the violent histories of Cambodia and India: *L’histoire terrible mais inachevée de Norodom Sihanouk roi du Cambodge* (The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia), performed in 1984, and *L’Indiade ou l’Inde de leurs rêves* (The Indiad or India of Their Dreams) in 1986. The first of these plays was over eight hours long (a gesture towards the desire to extend the utopic moment of performance).

the men's worlds she mentions. Cavendish may have described her own writing as chaotic, but she was actually rather methodical in reifying her female voice as unique and distinct. We should cease to approach her work by restating Virginia Woolf's complaints, or her historical categorization as a marginal writer whose *Blazing World* was more a nightmare than a political and scientific treatise responding to vital issues of her day.¹⁷ Cavendish wrote utopias in answer to a tradition of utopic writing that was quickly gaining popularity along with scientific exploration and the colonization of the New World. Her voice was revolutionary, emerging from a revolutionary time, and insistently feminine, emerging from a world where her agency as a woman was developing just as it was being more violently suppressed. Men imagined utopia as a place in which the chaos women represented could be shifted into controllable spaces, and female unity was a threat to that hope. Anxiety over women sharing spaces exclusive of men fueled the perception that their friendships were subversive, dangerous, and threatening because of the utopic possibility of female unions outside of masculine control. Women created utopias that allowed for concrete communities within an abstract ideal, participation in a dialogue of forceful exclusion, and perhaps even freedom through enclosure. Men were only able to re/create their ideal world

¹⁷ In "A Room of One's Own" (1929) Woolf strongly criticizes Cavendish. She calls her "hare-brained, fantastical Margaret of Newcastle" and asks, "What could bind, tame or civilize for human use that wild, generous, untutored intelligence? It poured itself out, higgledy-piggledy, in torrents of rhyme and prose, poetry and philosophy which stand congealed in quartos and folios that nobody ever reads." With one hand, Woolf jeered at Cavendish, but with the other, she was impressed by her efforts. She criticizes the misfortune of the age that did not educate women with the reason one needed to be self-critical: "No one checked her. No one taught her." Woolf also describes Cavendish as "a vision of loneliness and riot" whose writing could be compared to "some giant cucumber" that "had spread itself over all the roses and carnations in the garden and choked them to death. What a waste that woman [to] have frittered her time away scribbling nonsense and plunging ever deeper into obscurity and folly till the people crowded round her coach when she issued out. Evidently the crazy Duchess became a bogey to frighten clever girls with" (61-2). Woolf's is a subtle criticism that yearns to complain more of the shameful "waste" of a woman who could have written well if not for the age to which she was born. Cavendish was hare-brained and generous, and wild and untutored, but these are descriptions with a subtle duality. Unfortunately, Woolf's critical influence contributed to an understanding of Cavendish that is also reflected in Manuels' tomic critical work *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (1979) suggests because their sole (footnoted) mention of Cavendish describes *Blazing World* as a utopia "so private" that it borders "on schizophrenia." Cavendish's *Blazing World*, they write, "has much in common with the delusions of Dr. Schreber analyzed by Sigmund Freud in a famous paper" (7). For a thorough reading of the Manuels' dismissive assessment of Cavendish's utopia, see Marina Leslie's *Renaissance Utopias and the Problem of History* (27-131).

once women were in clearly demarcated spaces. Seventeenth-century writers and poets were increasingly imagining thoroughly feminized literary spaces that cannot help but indicate the *écriture féminine*. After all, Cavendish does precisely as Cixous demands women must do: “She must write her self, because this is the invention of a *new insurgent* writing which, when the moment of her liberation has come, will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history” (337). Woman must write her self, and Cavendish wrote herself as far into the dialogue as her position and education allowed.

Today, utopia remains a powerful tool—a “playground” of theory and philosophy—with which to negotiate the boundaries of any subject. This sense of freedom—of play—is the focus of many critical readings of utopia, as in Stephen Greenblatt’s cautious naming of More’s *Utopia* as a “carefully demarcated playground” in (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 63), or Marin’s observation that the imaginary in utopia allows for its inherent “play”:

Utopia masks and reveals the fundamental conflicts in ideology between developing productive forces and social conditions of production formed into judicial and political institutions. It also does so between theory and practice, the practice of theory and the theory of practice as a possible resolution. But utopia performs this masking diversely; it works at multiple levels. As a wandering center of utopia, the imaginary [...] is broken apart and decomposed. It is at work in the fiction and gives it *play* (9).

Whether we call these spaces *jouissance*, the Imaginary, socialism or totalitarianism, the origin, the *écriture féminine*, or the panoptic, they are always ecstatically ambiguous spaces because of the freedom they allow; it is no wonder they are labeled “utopic” as a blanket term. Every utopic dialogue, theoretical or not, continues to teeter on the ambiguous axis between the rigidity of the real and fluidity as the ideal. To gain a glimpse of utopia, we must understand the negotiation of gender within these ambiguous spaces that are at once theoretically abstract and textually concrete. The critical quality of utopia is one of hopeful transcendence of the gender binary, and its inception as an ambiguously gendered space in literature and theory animates this quality. Utopia in fiction has been described as escapist, utopia in theory as

essentialist, utopia in philosophy as naïve, and utopia in practice as reckless, and yet, utopia persists in spite of continued attempts at definition, negation, and categorization. We require utopia to imagine the unimaginable, and the foundation of that unimaginable space is the chaotic freedom and threatening allowability that fosters the possibility of fluidity.

My conclusion will unite these several themes and consider how they inform utopia and its possibilities. I will clarify why the genre is conducive to authors, particularly women. My conclusion will pose questions that consider the influence of the early modern construction of utopia to our current understanding of utopian literature. Utopias appear in an even greater variety of hybrid genres and forms and they use the same themes inscribed into the genre in the early modern. I will consider how our understanding of utopia reflects similar themes (in science fiction and graphic novels, for example). I hope this dissertation will create a nexus between the mythical “origins” of gender ideals and the gender binary, the complex matrix of utopia’s early modern construction, the impulses that engendered the genre, and the overarching idea that utopia’s fundamental wish is never to be gendered at all. Utopia always encounters its failure (its success) in this interminable space of possibility. We need utopia to be fixed and stable, and at the same time, we hope that this stability and fixity will yield fluidity. Utopia consistently fails because of the pull and tug of the binary gender system within which it cannot exist fixedly and stably. A man writes utopia as a woman, but then imposes the masculine order he deems necessary, and the inevitable conflict fails to allow perfection. A woman writes utopia within the masculine world that does not allow her the space to imagine herself differently, and perfection fails again. Utopia exists because it will not allow one or the other. Indeed, just as Wilde imagined, if we ever get to utopia—that other shore—where space is unfixed and gender is fluid, it will no longer be the destination. Utopia fuels the search for itself and, once found, destroys itself because once utopia is achieved it is no longer necessary.

Part I: Discovering Utopia

Interlude: Shakira

Lucky that my breasts are small and humble, / so you don't confuse them with mountains.

Shakira, "Whenever, Wherever," *Laundry Service* (2001)

In 2001, Colombian pop-star Shakira released her first album in English, *Laundry Service*, under the credit "entire album produced by Shakira." The first single, along with its accompanying video, was released to great success in English and Spanish simultaneously as "*Suerte*" [Luck] and "Whenever, Wherever."¹ The accompanying music video begins with her floating in watery darkness until she emerges, forcefully, in a move reminiscent of the birth of Venus. Shakira sings and dances throughout the video as computer-generated images of nature surround her. She is dressed in clothing suggestive of Native American dress: rough-cut leather, silver accessories, fur details, cowry shell bracelets, and a gold cross at her neck.² As she looks to the snow-topped mountains, the land is empty before her; she walks and dances as if taking possession of the land with each step. The scenes alternate between three terrains during the video: a lush and muddy field, a barren desert, and a precarious mountain peak. In the first, the earth rises to surround her. In the second, she walks in the vast desert emptiness, and in the last, she stands at the extreme pinnacle of a high mountain. The nurturing, seductive warmth of the muddy-earth scene is a stark contrast to the other two scenes, which are desolate, unwelcoming, and seem to be inaccessible. This musical and visual conquest of the empty land will end as it begins with her diving from that high mountaintop to leave only a ripple in water to suggest where she went and where she came from. We do not see her enter the water; she disappears and the song

¹ The song's music video, directed by Francis Lawrence, won the 2002 Latin Grammy for "Best Short Form Music Video."

² Cowry shells are sacred to many indigenous African peoples whose religions syncretized with the Catholicism of the Spanish, French and Portuguese in the Americas.

ends with the final sound of indigenous pipe music.³ There is no location, no resolution, no words, and no body, only an echo of her presence with that final sound.

I begin with this contemporary image because it offers an unexpected demonstration of a re-creation and reclamation of the accounts of conquest that conveyed the image of the Americas as empty and feminized.⁴ From the moment of encounter, the Americas were described as empty, available, and awaiting in darkness for cultural and religious enlightenment, but also as innocent, undisturbed, and on first discovery, in possession of such abundance that they had no need of Europe. The Americas were overwhelmingly “natural,” and as such, exemplified the rediscovered land of prelapsarian purity and a dangerously savage heathen land, at the same time. Woman and land are intricately connected, but the connection evokes contradiction ambiguity when combined with expressions of utopia. A similar contradiction emerges in the lyrics of Shakira’s song that resonate with its accompanying video. The familiar historical tropes in the lyrics and video reaffirm the incongruous descriptions the conquistadors bestowed onto the New World. The tropes developed in their accounts of conquest persisted and recurred throughout history as colonialism developed and sustained the image of the New World as an ambiguous utopia.

Shakira emerges from the ocean like the conquistadors, but she needs no ship; she lands, dripping wet, on the shore, grasping it with her bare feet and hands in an

³ The song includes instrumentation from the *charango*, a South American stringed instrument similar to the lute, and the *zampoña*, a Peruvian instrument related to the panpipes.

⁴ Many critical studies discuss the construction of the Americas as empty and feminized. This dissertation is more concerned with how that construction encouraged the parallel image of the Americas as utopic. One informative reading is Robert Markley’s study of John Locke’s thematic use of the mythic Golden Age in the construction of the Americas as “empty.” Markley argues that the image of an exploitable earth suggested “an infinite productivity” that led authors to “project the conditions that existed ‘in the first Ages of the World’ onto the present.” By reducing America to “largely vacant places,” the land became “an abstract space waiting to be defined by the boundary lines of property.” Unsettled land was marked “irrevocably as a resource, a place of seemingly unfettered exchange where the primary relationships among men are defined by labor and commodities. The ‘vacant places of America’—excised from a historical time [...] become virtual constructs. The ‘New’ World is dematerialized in the interests of [an] inclusive vision of ‘Land enough in the World’ to sustain the ongoing development that heralds a contractual return to the Golden Age” (829-30). Markley’s reading of Locke (who deeply influenced the ideological foundations of America) offers insight into the persistence of these constructions in literature and ideology (and even “virtual” worlds). In this “unfettered exchange” the defining element was “primary relationships among *men*” while women were, like the land, awaiting enclosure.

exaggerated physical connection with land and ocean, or both origin and destination. She is a mixed-race, Colombian-Lebanese woman, embodying both the Latin American people and Eastern “others” that Columbus assumed he had discovered. Her dual presence evokes both the imagined and real destinations at once, and the sources of both new and old wealth, but also mocks Columbus’s error and reclaims the false name he gave its inhabitants: “*Indios*.” Maps soon named the New World “America,” a feminized form of Amerigo Vespucci, who was the first to declare it “new” instead of the extreme “other” end of the old world. Later, the U.S. was emblematically personified as “Columbia,” a feminized goddess icon representing a nation often associated with the whole of the Americas despite the many nations they contain, who recalls Shakira’s own nation, Colombia.⁵ Her nationality reminds us that American nations still struggle with the aftermath of conquest, colonization, and oppression, and it is this (real) world, envisioned and named according to a violent past, she re-conquers.

Shakira is alone in the video, except for a bird of prey that she mimics (becoming both hunter and hunted at once) and horses that she disregards altogether. Horses are a clichéd symbol of freedom, but their presence and Shakira’s disregard of them indicates another popular detail. Hernán Cortés, among others, brought horses to the New World, which was believed to have given the conquistadors a considerable advantage in the massacre of indigenous peoples.⁶ Neither ship nor horses does Shakira require in this conquest, or rather, neither male science nor female nature. She wears

⁵ The name “Columbia” first appeared as synonymous with the American Colonies in 1738 as a thinly veiled pseudonym in periodical discussions of British parliamentary proceedings. After the revolution, the name became more widely substituted for the new United States. Phyllis Wheatley’s personification of Columbia in “His Excellency, General Washington” (1775) exemplifies the trend of idealizing the new nation through a neo-classical goddess often depicted clad in the U.S. flag wearing either a Native American headdress or a liberty cap. Meanwhile, the nation we know as Colombia was part of several unions before becoming “The Republic of Colombia” in 1886.

⁶ “The conquest of the powerful Aztec empire in two years’ time by so small a number of soldiers was facilitated by the superior warfare techniques of the Spaniards, who used guns and horses, fantastic creatures in the view of the Indians who thought they talked and were able to understand the verbal orders of their riders” (de Asúa and French 27). The actual influence of the horses in the conquest is controversial and has likely been exaggerated in comparison to a multitude of other more influential factors, but the detail is so widely familiar that it has become an important detail of the myth of discovery.

a gold cross on her body representing the wealth they sought, formed into the symbol of the god they brought, but she wears it in tandem with pagan cowry shells. In one scene, she crawls seductively through mud, unifying herself with the earth they would rape and challenging those that would take either by force. She surmounts the highest mountain, and dances on its impossibly high pinnacle (suggesting almost supernatural power) to reclaim the land from the spot that Columbus was determined held Eden (the Judeo-Christian “origin” projected on to a world that was “new” only to Europe). Columbus saw Eden in those mountains, and he described it as a woman’s body—a breast—in precise detail. Eden may have been inaccessible by any man, but Shakira reaches it so easily she dances at its peak.⁷

The song’s lyrics supplement the video evocatively by further merging the land and the body and introducing ambiguous constructions of gender. She promises her lover that she will climb the Andes if only “to count the freckles on [his/her] body.” She never acknowledges whether the lover is male or female using only vague, or gender neutral, terms. The heteronormative assumption is a male lover, but the lover never appears in the video, and she makes no clearly gendered reference in either version of the song. This is her world alone and she is dancing joyously in celebration of its emptiness. She is the only expression of gender in existence, and the only body we need to acknowledge. Furthermore, the lyrics echo the video’s suggestions; she begins by discussing location and distance as an avenue to, and the cost of, conquest. Only now, *she* is the traveler, the conqueror, while the other (lover) becomes the body she writes: “*Suerte que en el sur hayas nacido / y que burlemos las distancias / suerte que es haberte conocido / y por ti amar tierras extrañas / Yo puedo escalar los Andes solo / por ir a contar tus lunares.*”⁸ The male conqueror is not describing the topography of

⁷ “Not that I believe that the summit of the extreme point is navigable, or water, or that it is possible to ascend there, for I believe that the earthly paradise is there and to it, save by the will of God, no man can come.” Later, he writes: “I do not hold that the earthly paradise is in the form of a rugged mountain, as its description declares to us, but that it is at the summit [...] and I believe that no one could reach the summit as I have said” (“Third Voyage” 36-8).

⁸ The English version reads: “Lucky you were born that far away so / We could both make fun of distance / Lucky that I love a foreign land for / The lucky fact of your existence / Baby I would

her body as land, but the woman *conquistadora* crosses impossible distances and heights to count the marks on the Other's body (the lover's gender is unimportant, what is critical is that *she* is the author and "counts" the Other). The New World was not just available, it was *sexually* available, and Shakira rewrites that sexuality and accessibility by taking control of the ambiguous land-as-body she desires. In her re-conquest, the lover is the foreigner, or the stranger, or the one "born in the south," recalling how southern lands (worldwide) are often feminized. Her encounter with the foreigner inspires love of the other, rather than derision or violent conquest as it did for the conquistadors; she is rewriting the assumed affinity between Women and/as Other. This New World is still feminized, but it is not feminized as Other; instead, it allows for the Other, which forces us to confront the New World's utopic idealization against the dystopic reality of the conquest.

The song's most potent echo of the conquest specifically evokes Columbus's descriptions of the New World, of the location of Eden itself, as a breast. Gendering the origin space as female through the possibility of its New World existence designated the foreign/other as representing the fulfillment of perpetual European yearning for return. Shakira's appearance displays both her presence as a woman and her assumption of the "masculine" role of conqueror, aggressor in love, and sole ruler of all she surveys. She assumes and transgresses these roles by negating Columbus' equation of mountains as breasts, for hers are but "small and humble," which diffuses her femininity, and by extension, the land's femininity as well. This echoes and belittles Columbus's original "confusion" (she warns her lover to beware of the same trap), and by diminishing her breasts, she also androgenizes her own body and that makes her at once woman, man, and no clear gender. Her breasts are not mountains, her body will not be claimed, and her legs (the sole instrument of this conquest) are inherited from "her mother" to privilege maternal origins: "Lucky I have strong legs

climb the Andes solely / To count the freckles on your body," but the Spanish version could be more directly translated to "Lucky that you were *born in the south* / So we could both make fun of distance / Lucky that I met you, and because of you, I love strange lands/ I can climb the Andes only to count your freckles" (Translation mine, emphasis added).

like my mother / To run for cover when I need it.” Her re-conquest is not born of enslavement or submission to a patriarchal hierarchy, but through the freedom to address the “needs” derived from her maternal origins that allow the freedom to run, and thus, return. She is not bound, and neither is her lover because all are free through their *maternal* origins. Her utopia is wherever she may be, such as the nurturing, enclosing soil of the first scene, the heights of achievable mountain-peaks, or the visually infinite potential of empty deserts.

Both versions of the song also parse the body using clichés of love and desire, but do so by reinforcing land as other/lover and woman as conqueror. She does not wish to erase the association of woman/land, but rather redesign it; her breasts may not be mountains, but her eyes “cry a river” in the lover’s absence. In both versions, the chorus re-appropriates common motifs of love as worship through the dramatic image of her physically prostrate at the lover’s feet: “*Sabes que / estoy a tus pies*” [Do you know what / I’m at your feet]. Yet she will not let this stand, and so reimagines this subordinate position by adding a condition: “Tell me one more time / that you’ll live / lost in my eyes.” Her adoration comes at the price of the lover living forever enclosed in her eyes (her body), remaining lost in Utopia/Shakira-as-land, which leaves her only ever at her own feet. At once, she becomes the self and the other, possessing both an indistinct body and uncertain gender. The Spanish version carries this one step further as it closes the chorus: “*La felicidad tiene tu / nombre y tu piel*” [Happiness has your / name and your skin]. She claims the land of the lover’s body as her happiness, her utopia, and then names it with the lover’s name and clothes it with the lover’s skin. Is there a lover at all, or is Shakira both the self and the other? The lover is nameless and formless without gender, body, skin, or name, and exists only in/as her happiness. The lover is nowhere and everywhere, both within her and without her. Shakira accepts the name of other by rewriting the other (as herself) in the manner she deems utopic. The chorus blurs her present life and a possible future she shares with her lover as the two are confounded in the alliterative, rhythmic effect of the chorus:

“*Contigo / mi vida / quiero vivir la vida / y lo que me queda de vida / quiero vivir contigo*” [with you / my life / I want to live life / and what is left of my life / I want to live with you]. Does she love her lover, or her (self) life? Either way, *she* is the counter, the possessor, the speaker; she enumerates the lover as so many accounts of conquest inventoried her land, its wealth, and its people.

In her final expression of the language of the body she cries “*estoy hasta el cuello por ti*” [I am up to my neck in you] a Spanish expression suggesting both an all-encompassing possession and/or exasperation, or that she is both imprisoned and enveloped in the lover’s presence. Utopia often emerges between two meanings, two ways of being, or two ways of gendering. It forms in an uncanny moment of simultaneity in which the self and other both exist, or are drowned and nurtured, or familiar and unfamiliar, at once. Contradiction allows and defines utopia because it is the goal we will always seek, that we will always imagine if that search fails, and that we can never reach without immediately losing it (as in the water that both nourishes and drowns). No image of the New World is outside of the boundaries that constructed it as a utopia, and through that construction, as a woman. More’s name granted utopia form just as the New World granted utopia place, but one rarely finds utopia to be the ideal one originally imagined. In all manner of media and genre, whenever a land (imaginary or actual) was written as utopia, fluid gender emerged; this is not accidental and emerges most evidently as the fusion of land as woman and utopia.

This song demonstrates the relentless persistence of the themes influencing the construction of utopia from its earliest conceptions. For while Shakira so boldly reclaimed and rewrote the echoes of colonial oppression with this song, John Mayer launched his album *Room for Squares* (2001) the same year with the hit single “Your Body is a Wonderland.” His lyrics demonstrate a very different language of conquest: “We got the afternoon / you got this room for two / one thing I’ve left to do / discover me / discovering you” and later “Damn baby / You frustrate me / I know you’re mine all mine all mine.” The chorus—repetitive, insistent, and possessive—follows suit: “Your

body is a wonderland / your body is a wonder (I'll use my hands) / your body is a wonderland." His lyrics contain a blazon in which he equates a mile, cartographically, to an inch on her body and her skin to porcelain. He then offers a catalog of his discovery—"one pair of candy lips and, / [a] bubble gum tongue"—that renders her consumable and edible. This enumeration continues with the "one pair" of lips suggesting that another pair, unnamed, is already accounted for. Her role as "baby" is clear, his possession is understood ("I know you're mine all mine"), his physical appropriation is repeated in the chorus ("I'll use my hands") in order to accomplish the one thing "left to do" to alleviate the frustration she is causing: "Discover" her body as "Wonderland." We do not know where this wonderland ends or the woman begins, but we know that she is as wondrous (a land) as the imaginative descriptions Columbus wrought more than 500 years before, and which countless poets (and utopists) captured.⁹ Mayer's utopia built on her body sells albums (and seems erotic), but we must recognize how it illustrates the sheer persistence of, and common acceptance of, a deliberately gendered language in the construction of the ideal, utopia, and of the land as woman that Shakira was writing against. This complex entanglement of themes allows such disparity to persist even in contemporary reflections of utopia and the conquest such as these songs demonstrate.

⁹ Mayer song's easily recalls John Donne's "Elegy XIX: To His Mistress Going to Bed" (1669), the poem's famous lines seem directly sampled by Mayer: "License my roving hands, and let them go/Before, behind between, above, below, / O my America! My new-found-land, / My kingdom, safeliest when with one man manned, / How blest am I in this discovering thee!" (25-30)

Chapter One

Concept, Theory and Myth in the “Land of Cokaygne”

In his exploration of the representation of space in utopia, Laurent Gervereau considers the representation of More’s *Utopia* as a graphically mapped circle and writes:

The objective [...] is not to reproduce nature, but to propose an idealized version that has been recast, tamed, and ordered by the human hand. What better way to capture this absolute and eternally expected universe than in the perfection of a circle, the feminine roundness, the metaphorical womb of all life awash in amniotic fluid, forever protected and preserved from the outside world? Utopia in this sense is embryonic, a retreat to original purity and to a prelapsarian world, before the screams and the separation. Its wish is never to be born, never to succumb to time (358).

I would add to Gervereau’s argument that utopia’s wish is also never to be gendered. Along with remaining “embryonic” in the maternal wholeness of the womb, and “forever protected” within an enclosure, utopia suggests the possibility of freedom from gender. Gervereau’s powerful metaphor alludes to the ambiguity of utopia’s reliance on the feminine for representation, even as the “human hands” (male) that “recast” it resisted its “nature” (female). He feminizes *Utopia*, and thereby, illustrates the consequence of More’s representation of the island (visually through the accompanying map and metaphorically throughout the text) as a perfect (but man-made) circle, or rather, perfection realized through a masculine reproduction and appropriation of female reproductive terminology. Utopia is always feminine, whether it is metaphorically equated with the mythological Eden or the psychological womb. Woman led humanity to the sin and imperfection that then forged a perpetual yearning for a return to the unity and wholeness such perfection evokes. Thus, she becomes both the cause of utopia’s loss and the source of its realization. More’s detailed textual descriptions of the island and the accompanying maps both suggest a womb that is

knowable and controllable within the unknowable ocean.¹⁰ The oceans surrounding the islands suggested a utopic space as well, particularly in the early modern. More's *Utopia* creates an accessible womb as a non-place within the sea he imagines as a vague, watery blank restricted by rigid physical and social laws to regulate its fluidity.¹¹ When considered through the early modern notion that the womb could move freely within the watery female body (wandering as the explorers searching for utopia did) then "utopia-as-womb" takes on greater possibility and freedom along with its attendant monstrosity.¹²

Through the lens of nostalgia, both the imagined future and the romanticized past are utopic and "pure." There is hope for potential improvement on one hand, and for regaining what was lost on another. The divine purity of the prelapsarian origin is the lost utopia we want to regain, and the idealized societies of the past (imagined as living more "purely," idyllically or in harmony with nature) is the lost utopia that intentional communities work towards recreating. The psychoanalytically idealized purity of the metaphoric womb is fundamentally unattainable, but it is imagined as the only true utopia because it existed before the "screams and separation" that signal

¹⁰ The most familiar woodcut illustrations to More's *Utopia*, the 1516 (Louvain) and the 1518 (Basel), show the island shaped like a womb (See Kendrick 44-5 for a close reading of the illustrations). The later illustration supplements the womb-like island with two garlands holding up a banner stretched upwards to either side, suggestive of the horned uterus, appendages which would be identified later as fallopian tubes. Perhaps most vividly, both illustrations show a church steeple pointed at the mouth of the island/womb where the ocean enters the island. The visual suggestion is one of penetration by the patriarchal church.

¹¹ "The sea emerges as a geopolitically vital yet obstinately unassimilable piece of the world picture. Lying simultaneously within the planetary imaginary and outside the bounds of 'the earth,' the oceanic realm constitutes the early modern world's most massive and politically consequential image of a nonplace" (Balasopoulos 131).

¹² In *Making Sex: Body and Gender From the Greeks to Freud* (1990), Thomas Laqueur includes an anecdote from a seventeenth-century midwife who believed "that women would be as healthy in both body and spirit as men were it not for this organ [the womb], and more generally, that God created its uniquely pathogenic qualities—its tendency to wander and cause hysteria, for example—so as to prevent envy between the sexes and to lead man to pity and love women" (108). Galen considered this belief "totally preposterous," and as Laqueur notes, "the new anatomy made literal interpretation of a wandering womb impossible" (110). Still, fact and belief (like history and myth) were rarely unbiased or universal, and the womb may have wandered in people's imagination just as the island-as-womb surely could. This is further related to the Homeric trope of the "floating island" that English writers would continue to develop through the early modern and into the eighteenth century as dangerous, unstable places (Scott, Jonathan 40). The persistence of this idea and how it relates to utopias and islands can be seen in the science-fiction television series *LOST* (2004-2010) where a mysterious island (simultaneously utopic to some and dystopic to others) could be moved (or move itself) in space and time.

one's emergence into language and division into socially assigned gender (a state in which all desire is dictated only by the impossible wish to return to that origin). Utopia evokes a sense of achieving this perfection as well as "purity" (a term that conjures themes that implicate and oppress women: virginity, chastity, perfection, coldness, whiteness or freedom from blemish, sacrifice, impermeability, and as a result, freedom from the sin that only purity can withstand). The details may vary, but concepts of perfection always include gender as a defining element.

Literary utopias, like theoretical utopias, demonstrate purposeful feminization in its descriptions through images and forms. Gervereau questions whether or not these images "augment the narrative" and he confronts the "entire illustrative undertaking" and the plausibility of the notion of "iconographic betrayal," but he does so specifically in terms conventionally associated with the female body; he connects those forms to theoretical concepts: "The circle is Utopia's first figure. The Utopian island is round and closed, doubly hemmed in by water and walls. Utopia stands apart. It protects itself from the world. It is an enclosure for secret societies" (357). He equates utopia's shape ("the feminine roundness" and "metaphorical womb" within the "perfection of a circle") with capturing the "absolute and eternally expected universe." His astute observation reveals the intrinsic paradox of early modern utopias: Utopia is both feminine and universal, and so, at direct odds with the convention of the universal male. This paradox contributes to the contradiction and ambiguity so prevalent in the early modern English utopia (itself born of multiple origins that both required and resisted gender division). The circle and the womb appear interchangeably as utopic metaphors because of utopia's "protective imperative." Utopia must also enclose "secret societies," as Gervereau notes, through the "water and walls" that "protect it from the world" denoting that the watery, leaky woman must be made whole and inaccessible in order to enclose societies that might offer social perfection. By writing *Utopia*, More named a concept that would become infinitely fluid despite its rigid literary representations. More granted utopia what Roland Schaer has termed a "formal

matrix.” Indeed, “matrix” is an excellent term for More’s effort because its meaning is etymologically suggestive of a womb—of *mater* or the maternal—as the fundamental “feminized” utopian space.¹³ Schaer refers specifically to *Utopia*’s role as travel literature in which the formal matrix allowed “the political imaginary [to] freely roam” (4). This matrix is as accessible to the “political imaginary” as to the critical, philosophical, and gender imaginary. The womb-like map to More’s *Utopia* is one of the many elements that draw this parallel.

Forms of enclosure appear throughout utopianism resulting in the separation of genders in utopian texts from the classical to the contemporary. For instance, Plato discussed enclosure in his major utopic work, *The Republic* (360 BCE), in which he insists on segregating genders because of their differing “natures.” He describes each gender as “different,” despite also insisting that the sole difference between them is “that the female bears and the male begets” (174). Women may well have been capable of the same tasks and occupations, but they would always remain the “weaker partners,” or “the weaker of the two,” and “as they are the weaker sex” they required “a lighter share of duties” (175-6). Plato allowed that women should be equally educated (More also supported this idea in *Utopia* and elsewhere) and should rule in tandem as guardians, but in each debate in which women are discussed, he indicates that men are more proficient. Of course, any empowerment women gain from their historically assigned roles as wives and mothers is summarily neutralized through Plato’s treatise which includes: a eugenics breeding program, the opportunity for male Guardians to take women as a reward for “distinguished service in war and other activities,” and the common access to all women and children (181).¹⁴

Plato’s text was a principal source for More’s *Utopia*, but the construction of a city dedicated to social improvement by and for women surely influenced the early

¹³ “Matrix” is an incredibly flexible term used in many fields. Its primary definition is “a supporting or enclosing structure,” which echoes the prevalent utopic enclosure, but its etymological origin (although rare) is, very specifically, “a womb” (OED, 2nd Edition).

¹⁴ “Our men and women Guardians should be forbidden by law to live together in separate households, and all the women should be in common to all the men; similarly, children should be held in common, and no parent should know its child, or child its parent” (*The Republic* 178).

modern understanding of what an ideal city could offer, and Christine de Pizan's *Le livre de la cité des dames* did just that.¹⁵ The illustrations accompanying her book show two noble women in fine gowns wielding bricks and mortar as they build the walls of their city.¹⁶ Reason, Rectitude, and Justice appear as female characters, as women whom de Pizan endows with divine parentage: "Daughters we three are, and from [God] whom we are born" (176). They commission the narrator to build a city to enclose and protect women with a "strong and lasting defense" against the vitriolic literary attacks that de Pizan had wept over. In this city, "no one will reside except all ladies of fame and women worthy of praise, for the walls of the city will be closed to those women who lack virtue" (177). Enclosure is the premise on which the ideality of her city depends; we find examples of enclosure throughout the genre. More's *Utopia*, for instance, attacks the increasing enclosure of farm lands that marked the development commodity capitalism, but More also rigidly demarcates the physical position of women within the communal island, even assigning them seating at meals depending on whether the too-fluid woman is (like "water and walls") pregnant or nursing (qualities inscribed as physical weaknesses requiring regulation). Considering enclosures means considering the negotiation of genders within enclosures, and this influenced utopia's emergence as a gendered space, whether through division along philosophical gender lines, behind concrete brick walls, or on communal islands surrounded by water.

¹⁵ A manuscript appears in the royal library after 1461, and tapestries depicting scenes from the book are listed in a 1537 royal inventory: "Christine's work and the concept of a 'city of ladies' most likely provided the Tudor courts with an unidentified, generic defense of women and a compendium of rhetorical strategies" (Malcolmson 15-19).

¹⁶ De Pizan's *Collected Works* (1407) include several illustrations. One of them, divided into two panels, shows de Pizan presenting her plans to Reason, Rectitude and Justice in one panel, and in the other, Reason helps Christine build the city by laying bricks and mortar with her. This is a powerful visual because it instills an *active* image of women first negotiating, and then constructing, their utopia in the absence of men. De Pizan's use of the personified virtues to propose, defend and construct the city is also important. Women's idealized images/bodies had been (and would continue to be) used as emblematic of virtues in art, literature and on stage. Reason, the emblem as a daughter of God, *builds* the city allowing the static, passive ideal/emblem-as-woman to participate actively; the ideal becomes real as the passive emblem becomes active woman (See Natalie Zemon Davis 2).

This dissertation will find me shifting between the porous boundaries of genre and theory, history and fiction, and time and place in order to discuss utopia as a concept that can never be a concept, as Marin indicates:

Utopia is a discourse, but not a discourse of the concept. It is a discourse of figure: a particular figurative mode of discourse. It is fiction, fable-construction, “anthropomorphized” narratives, and “concrete” descriptions, exotic, novel and pictorial representation: these are all of its nature. It is one of the regions of discourse centered on the imaginary, and no matter how forceful or precise, how correct or coherent, are its theses, utopia will never become a concept. It will always stay wrapped in fiction and fable-making (8).

Utopia may “never become a concept,” but that does not stop us from constantly conceptualizing it. Marin’s argument denotes how utopia has never sat comfortably or firmly in the conceptual, given how it has had a far more familiar influence as a genre in fiction and narrative. However, like the New World accounts that balanced narrative and description, I too am writing a discovery text with this dissertation, which means my efforts will be incomplete and perhaps contradictory. The conquistadors sought utopia while struggling to satisfy conflicting objectives and multiple agendas (such as promotion, representation, idealization, inspiration, greed, or divinity), but that did not stop them from shaping the real land they found as the ideal utopia they imagined they would find. My struggle will be similar because I must confront utopia’s conflicting origins and forms. The more tangible origins of utopia as a literary genre and as the New World I will discover in my second chapter. In this chapter, I will explore utopia’s intangible, impossible manifestation as a concept and will demonstrate its intricate connection to the construction of gender ideals. Marin insists that utopia can never be a concept, despite our efforts to make it one, because it exists in the realm of the unreal and the fantastical, or the original fables and myths that illustrated them. Therefore, to mythology I must go to uncover the primary foundations of conceptual utopia in the establishment of binary division that made utopianism necessary. Even if, as Marin indicates, utopia cannot be considered conceptually, we soon discover that the failure of conceptual utopias is informative, productive, and as such, worthy of discovery.

The origin of utopia, or utopia as origin, or even the origins we deem utopic are troublesome to articulate. Too many valid answers—some concrete, some abstract, but all simultaneously contradictory and enlightening—flood in when one seeks origins. The one common element I have found is that utopia seems to arise as a means to make sense of division, or the conflicts that arise from division. Seeking unity helps in some scenarios, while ensuring isolation helps in others, but most conflicts require some combination of the two extremes. If division is at the core of utopia's emergence as a concept, then I must consider the roots of the division that necessitated utopia's conceptualization, and the critical metaphor of all division is gender (as difference). Narrative mythology offers the most familiar examples of the fundamental (binary) division that fostered the need for utopianism. I will demonstrate, through a representative example of mythological origins, the pervasive influence of gendering on subsequent constructions of utopia. The familiar mythological narratives demonstrate the same gender fluidity that utopia, in an effort to capture idealized origins, requires.

In the search for utopia, or utopia's origins, asking "where is utopia?" can just as easily be worded "where is she?", as Hélène Cixous asks directly in her influential essay, "Sorties: Out and Out: Attacks/Ways Out/Forays." Cixous tries to find her in order to answer her own question by confronting society's divisive structures:

If we read or speak, the same thread or double braid is leading us throughout literature, philosophy, criticism, centuries of representation and reflection [...] through dual, hierarchical oppositions. Superior/Inferior. Myths, legends, books. Philosophical systems. Everywhere (where) ordering intervenes, where a law organizes what is thinkable by oppositions (dual, irreconcilable; or sublatale, dialectical). And all these pairs of oppositions are *couples*. Does that mean something? Is the fact that Logocentrism subjects thought—all concepts, codes and values—to a binary system, related to "the" couple, man/woman? (63-64).

Cixous examines the construction of binaries through these questions and observations in order to interrogate the specific nature, and diffuse appearance, of Woman. No expressions or cultural concepts are outside the law that organizes everything within a pervasive rigid coupling, and so, binary gender appears everywhere, and is everywhere

subject to opposition and categorization. However, Cixous's more poignant question is if it means something that oppositions are always coupled to, and ultimately restricted to, man/woman. Her essay demonstrates that this coupling matters, but utopia in particular demonstrates just how powerfully it "means something" when opposition and division are bound to humanity's vision of the ideal and how vastly dissimilar "division" manifests for men and women (and for those who may be writing from in-between). Testament to this is the consistent utopianism evoked in the writings of Cixous and many other feminists (and queer theorists); the many parallels between how Woman and utopia appear in the discourse are compelling. Consider how Marin's location of utopia in the discourse echoes Cixous:

As a figure in discourse, utopia is written and imagined within the discourse which criticizes it. It is a discourse located within its own truth, giving it power and authority—but always after the fact—to show how a representation could be produced from a negative side of its contemporary history by discursive rhetorical and poetic operations. [...] The utopic figure cutting through the textual levels of utopia to join them together is therefore not without a referent, but rather has an absent referent (xxi).

Utopia and Women are bound discursively and theoretically; both are imprisoned within a discourse that criticizes and subjects them to negation through absence or as absent referents. If utopia is neutral it wields "power and authority," but only in its representation. It is a troublesome representation because it only ever refers back to itself (as utopia). Jacques Lacan's reflects signifying chain reflects a similar dynamic because the signifier and signified lead endlessly to each other in an attempt to express desire, or utopia, into a discourse that refuses to allow it to become (See *Seminar III* 167). It then cycles endlessly between metonymy and metaphor, or conscious and unconscious. Still, a troublesome representation is sufficient for this troublesome concept. Utopia's neutrality refuses to allow gender to congeal as the positive or negative that discourse requires. In other words, its uncertainty ultimately allows it to become. Angela Carter illustrates this metaphor profoundly but addresses gender specifically: "The male is positive, an exclamation mark. Woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing that only becomes

something when the male principle fills it with meaning” (*The Sadeian Woman* 4).

Utopia is feminized and ambiguous (as nothingness), and the “male principle” that wants to control it by resolving this ambiguity only destroys its utopicity in the attempt.

I could speak to any of Cixous’s (or Marin’s) points at great length, but I will focus on her (and his) references to “myth” to begin at a familiar point of origin. If a desire to resolve division led us to imagine utopia, then the mythological origin of gender division is a significant starting point. This “point” is indefinite and just one of many, but to follow Cixous’s liberating path, I will confront the origin of the gender binary in myth in order to contextualize the foundations of division. Utopia evolved through elaborate literary descriptions of ideal places in mythology that profoundly influenced subsequent constructions of gender in and as the ideal. Marin insists that utopia involves mythic narrative that “plays out” the rituals of attempting realization (11). Mythic narrative is transformative, as Marin notes, because it symbolically explains the opaque, dangerous, anxiety-causing elements of lived experience, the “original insurmountable antithesis of everyday activity is thereby explained” (36).¹⁷ Utopia and myth share multiple origins and narratives that influenced the construction of hierarchical binaries. Marina Leslie considers the historicity of several early modern utopias and argues that myth greatly influenced utopias in several forms throughout history. History is full of literary utopias and separatist intentional utopic communities, while theorists have always “placed” utopias in an unthinkable, unknowable, and/or indefinable space or conceptual realm. Culturally speaking, utopia itself is mythic, and as Leslie argues, in order to transcend its own historical origin, utopia must disguise its

¹⁷ Of mythic narrative, Marin notes: “[In] their reciting and telling a world of oppositions, alienations, contradictions, and want symbolized by narrative is revealed. But the same world is also ordered through myth’s episodes, dramatic actions, and denouement. It is precisely because mythic narrative symbolizes and, in this very symbolization, unfolds as a story that it can reformulate a society’s story—as history—and origin in order to transform it through its telling” (36).

operations even as it articulates them.¹⁸ The desire for transcending, or transgressing, society's divisive origins is essential to understanding the mythic origins of the gender binary. This desire is the critical cog that utopia's operations cannot hide. Utopia cannot sit comfortably within the masculine mechanics imposed on it because it would require writing women out of utopia. The paradox emerges because utopia can neither disguise the instability of its negotiation of gender, nor submit to the rigid gender binary that such discourse requires.

The Judeo-Christian creation myth in Genesis inspired a deep yearning for utopic recovery. What was lost in the Fall was not only an ephemeral divine state, but also a place, or a location, that granted wholeness, unity and completion; our earliest yearning for utopia was always already predicated on loss. Therefore, Columbus sought Eden—the oldest world—in the East rather than “new” world. Meanwhile, Hernán Cortés, Juan Ponce de León, and Francisco and Hernando Pizarro sought mythical legends: El Dorado and the Fountain of Youth. Everyone who set sail for the New World (or at least pretended to), whether as a conquistador, trader, missionary, explorer, or religious exile, carried with him (or her) myths, legends, fables, and even apocryphal tales as told by others that went before, those who reported second-hand from those that went before, or those who never left home but imagined what was out there and then reported it as fact. From the fantastic eastward journey of Marco Polo to the wholly imaginary (though highly influential) travels of John Mandeville,¹⁹ and the later essays of Michel de Montaigne, in particular his influential “Of Cannibals” (1580), it was myth, legend, and fable fueling the wonder of what was “out there” in the new

¹⁸ Responding to Michel de Certeau's assertion that history is our myth, Leslie writes that “utopia meets history [...] at the border of the ‘thinkable.’ Both are social myths whose operations mutually depend on the ability of narrative to articulate and obscure their operations if they are to be effective—that is, to transcend their mythic origin” (*Renaissance Utopias* 12).

¹⁹ In *Marvellous Possessions* (1991), Stephen Greenblatt writes that “Mandeville's Travels” offers “an extreme version of the transformation of empty words into subjects and bodies. Even knowing that there was no Mandeville [...] The fictive body made up of fragments of other bodies, the body that tastes and walks and sees toward which the language of this fourteenth-century text insistently if fraudulently refers” (35). Mandeville's text influenced Columbus's expectations before he travelled, as well as his eventual descriptions of the New World. As a false narrative by an imaginary person, the text represents a new “fictional” mythology (giving an added dimension to how the New World was mythically fashioned as utopia).

mysterious West (or the familiar foreignness of the East). Mary Campbell (with others) reminds us that the “wonder” so often associated with the New World image is also an ambiguous term because it conveys the “sentimentally ennobling sensation of the worldly conquistadors, stopped in their bloody tracks for a moment by the surplus of novelty or its temporary absence of visible use value.” It thereby functions in a way that “embraces surprise, enjoys the excess and alteration which generate it” and is “constitutively open to the rewriting of the past as well as the future, the making of new worlds” (*Wonder and Science* 3). Wonder was ever-present in the New World of Europe’s imagination, and it helped to generate utopia in the New World through a rewriting of the past and a projection of the future at once. Europe applied the same myths to imagine the New World that it had used to imagine its origins in the distant East; before the New World’s “real” image came to Europe’s shores through the growing accounts of violence, conquest, established governance, commerce and trade, all they had was the wondrous “ideal” that mythology helped them construct.

Mythology fuelled the perfection and ideality in New World explorations, and the modern age it signaled. The Americas promised a new possibility for the ideal that had never wholly materialized in the East (particularly after the Crusades) where Eden/Paradise was thought to be located; this only demonstrates what Campbell reminds elsewhere us at the center of all exploration: disillusionment.²⁰ Each myth, whether pagan, Christian, or even fiction, was only ever a myth built upon myth, and their liberal use as evidence and support exemplifies an age steeped in a hierarchical structure born of, and perpetuated by, many competing narratives. Nevertheless, these structures were expanding through exploration and commercial growth. Furthermore, myths have a long and curious history in the critical dialogue because of their epistemological influence. Claude Lévi-Strauss, for one, explored this influence in

²⁰ “At the center of exploration lies disillusionment—just as at the center of the Christian pilgrim’s experience, Jerusalem, lies the frustration of achieving only the physical and not the celestial city” (*Witness and the Other World* 198). The Puritan utopic reconstruction of the new world colonies as a New Jerusalem frustrated and confused attempts to understand the place of utopia (of “The City of God”) on Earth instead of heaven.

order to uncover an underlying structure of mythology. He argues that myth appears around the world, only disguised, and in a multitude of variances. The meaning in myth, as he argues, is not in the narratives themselves, but in the way the elements of each myth, what he terms “mythemes,” intertwine and combine. In other words, the influence of myth is not how they were originally written or narrated, but how their details varied and then were thematically (re)processed or (re)written. There is little doubt of the influence and persistent authority of the images, themes, and motifs that emerged from myths throughout the early modern.

Hesiod’s cosmogonic and Golden Age narratives are good examples of the mythological resources that informed early modern gender constructions and the idealization of original unity. The Golden Age is one of the most familiar mythological themes through which Europe constructed the ideal as a place, and ultimately, utopia. In his study of gardens in seventeenth-century texts, Robert Markley explores how the mythic Golden Age was equated with the New World:

The seventeenth-century garden is figured historically and poetically as an idealized existence of abundance and ease—the pagan account of the Golden Age incorporated, though often uneasily, into Judeo-Christian historiography. The widespread fascination with the Golden Age during the period cuts across political allegiances and theological beliefs, *and the image of a past free from scarcity and division assumes a variety of generic forms*: translations of Hesiod and Ovid, massive universal histories, Arcadian romances, and political speculations. [...] In the century before Locke, the Golden Age was treated not simply as a poetic fable but as a crucial part of the historical record through which a fallen humankind must try to make sense of the political, economic, and ecological crises of its time (818, emphasis mine).

The pagan Golden Age, as Markley notes, syncretized with the Judeo-Christian cosmogonic origins (although “uneasily”) in the century before Locke, and helped shift the foundation of the gender duality Cixous eventually challenged (818). The division the gender binary requires has been around since *man* began to write, as myth became narrative, and narrative became literature and history. The writings of Hesiod (and early modern translations of Ovid) granted the West the myths that would be idealized as utopia. Hesiod’s *Works and Days* (c. 700 BCE), for example, idealizes agrarian characters and their labor, and categorizes the progression of the ages of man

hierarchically as precious metals leading up to the ideal “Golden” age.²¹ However, Hesiod’s *Theogony* (c. 700 BCE) and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (8AD) were the West’s primary sources for the Greek pantheon, and both included cosmogonic narratives that describe and dramatize the beginnings of the universe as gender division.²² Mythology was alive in the early modern as an important thematic and metaphoric resource. Even in a Europe gripped tightly in the dominance of Christian doctrine, art, music, and literature, authors liberally and widely used earlier mythological characters as subjects to idealize and personify aesthetics, to allegorize virtues and heroism, and to entertain with the fantastical legends of the past through art, song, romance, epic, idyll, emblem and allegory. In a way, the inspiration of muses was just as suitable as an instructive resource as the hagiographic guidance of saints who were, in many ways, also mythic. These were the spaces of utopia before the genre formed, and only the New World’s discovery would grant utopia a more tangible location.

Hesiod begins his narrative in the Greek tradition by invoking the muses; he asks, “Which of them first came to be?” or, which of “them” was here first (26). Unexpectedly, of the first two beings, neither is male. From neutral Chaos came “broad-bosomed Earth,” known as Gaia (Gæa, Ge), “sure standing-place for all” the one who is “deathless” (27). Earth is female, immortal, born woman from gender-neutral Chaos. Gaia then parthenogenetically brings forth the first male god, Uranus (Ouranos, Heaven). He becomes her son and lover, but she creates him “first, to be / An equal to herself, to cover her / All over, and to be a resting-place / Always secure, for all the blessed gods” (27). He would be her equal in all things, even as a “resting-place” for the gods; he, too, *must* bear their children as the space for the “blessed

²¹ Hesiod also focuses on bees, which he admired as exemplars because of their rigid social roles and efficiency in labor. Several scholars have considered utopian examples from nature and science, and insects—bees in particular—appear often. Utopists envisioned humanity’s utopic possibility living in cities constructed with “hive” regularity, in rigidly assigned labor (and gender) roles, or through communal labor that might make waste and idleness obsolete. For a good example, see Mary Campbell’s “Busy Bees: Utopia, Dystopia, and the Very Small.”

²² Hesiod’s *Theogony* was first translated into English in 1728, but my concern is not its vernacular reception, but rather the influence that permeated European social thinking through mythic rewritings.

gods” to abide (in effect, their equality must extend to his “bearing” their children). Gaia couples with multiple mates, her children, to populate the Earth and the heavens with the gods and creatures responsible for the cosmos and nature. However, in the beginning, only neutral Chaos and female Earth were generative beings; thus, *the* “origin” was not male, but neutral and/or feminine. When Gaia gives birth to the hundred-handed, fifty-headed Hecatonchires, their father Uranus thought them “most awful” and “hated [them] from the first” (27). Uranus was supposed to welcome the children into himself (as the Heavens) but instead he violently rejects them: “As soon as each was born / Ouranos hid / The child in a secret hiding-place in Earth / and would not let it come to see light, / And he enjoyed this wickedness” (27). Gaia grows angry as her body-as-land swells under the weight of the children she cannot expel from her womb into the sky and she is “strained and stretched.” She decides to take revenge by forging a giant adamantine sickle and begs her sons to help: “My sons, whose father is a reckless fool, / If you will do as I ask, we shall repay / Your father’s wicked crime. *For it was he / Who first began devising shameful acts*” (28, emphasis mine). It was Gaia the mother, the creator, who first judged sin while masculine Heaven, the father, committed the first sin (a direct reversal of maternal Eve as shameful sinner and patriarchal God as condemner).

Among Gaia’s children, only Kronos (Saturn) offers to help; he would come to personify time and would rule over the very Golden Age that was so influential to Hesiod, Ovid, Homer, and in turn, to early modern poets and writers. In answer, Kronos says: “Mother, I undertake to do the deed; / I do not care for my unspeakable / Father, for he first thought of shameful acts” (28).²³ The father as the personification of the divine heavens becomes the “unspeakable” origin and the source of original sin. His was a sin of rejecting the fruits of nature instead of incorporating the fruit of

²³ The description of the heavenly father as “unspeakable” (or as in Hugh G. Evelyn-White’s 1914 translation of Hesiod “our father of evil name”) is informative to how we conceive of, and gender, the speaking subject and the object discussed. It recalls Judith Butler’s formulation in *Excitable Speech* (1997) of the “unsayable.” Speaking the “unsayable,” as Butler argues (and as Kronos acts upon and Gaia facilitates) allows the production of “new and future forms” of legitimation (41).

knowledge. In contrast, Eve's desire for knowledge led to humanity's birth, or the expulsion from Eden/Paradise as womb. Uranus does not speak his own unspeakableness in Hesiod because his words never enter the poem (he is both absent and present). Gaia reveals her plans to her son, hides him in readiness, and waits until the moment when Uranus descends "longing for love, he lay around the Earth, / Spreading out fully." Uranus's sexual act is described as "spreading out," as diffusion rather than penetration, and so, as ambiguous because it makes no clear distinction between a penetrating penis and a sexually diffusive, child-bearing body. The description is reminiscent of Cixous's "Sorties," in which she writes that "her rising: is not erection. But diffusion. Not the shaft. The vessel" (88). The myth of Uranus and Gaia described Heaven as diffuse but with a penis, as absent but present, and as the first source of original sin.

The most utopic element of these origin myths is how gender and gender roles slip between beings/bodies. This original fluidity could not remain; to resolve the dissonance and foster more stable gender division, Woman came to represent the vessel to man's shaft *exclusively*. Ultimately, the original moment of division was fixed with this single violent act as a rejection of its origin. At his moment of arousal, Uranus comes upon Gaia, and Kronos abruptly, and then "eagerly," castrates him:

But the hidden boy
 Stretched forth his left hand; in his right he took
 The great long jagged sickle; eagerly
 He harvested his father's genitals
 And threw them off behind. They did not fall
 From his hands in vain, for all the bloody drops
 That leaped out were received by Earth; and when
 The year's time was accomplished, she gave birth
 To the Furies and the Giants [...] (29).

Hesiod follows the father's cast-off genitals into the waters, and then to the foam from which this dismembered member "grew a girl [...] her name is Aphrodite among men / And gods" (29). According to Hesiod, Venus (Aphrodite) was born from the foamy

waters (as popular images captured), but also the remnants of a penis.²⁴ From the brutal castration of Heaven is born the goddess who would embody the ideal in femininity. This image would persist through the ages because no woman could ever hope to achieve such “feminine” perfection. Ultimately, woman could only ever represent the cause (and effect) of the original castration.

Kronos eventually rises to power after usurping his father (and mother) as ruler of the utopic Golden Age, but it does not end well for him either. Later, he will eat his children whole to prevent their repeating his act. By swallowing them he both atones for, and reverses, his father’s original sin because he takes the children into his body and bears them as his father would not, only he encloses them not in his wife’s body (as his father did) but in his own “masculine” womb. And considering how his children are disgorged later in a violent quasi-birth by his son, Zeus, this moment can also be read as the womb being decoupled from Woman’s control altogether. His body held his Titan children to prevent their growth and progression as well as his own usurpation (in a sense, Time stops time to maintain his utopia).²⁵ Kronos’s sickle is also an ambiguous symbol as the tool against the father suggests both vessel and shaft at once.²⁶

Eventually, Zeus usurps Kronos with the help of Gaia and Rhea (his mother and

²⁴ Hesiod mentions later that Venus’s name is also “Philommedes from / The genitals, by which she was conceived” a name that means “genital-loving” (29). Although Wender notes that “this might be a corruption of philomeides, “laughter-loving,” a more usual (and dantier) epithet” (152). Another recent edition translates the line to emphasize the gender of the genitals as well: “in sea-girt Cyprus, and Philommedes, fond of a man’s genitals, because to them she owed her birth” (Athanasakis 200-201).

²⁵ Over time, the images of Kronos, “Father Time,” and “Death,” would all fuse. These icons would all be allegorically associated with the sickle, and then the Roman scythe, and later the hourglass. Both benevolent and destructive, Time was a revealer of the future and a harsh limiter of life; he was a popular ambiguous symbol persisting through the ages as he metamorphosed from Pagan god to icon. For an informative summary see Samuel Macey’s entry for “Father Time” in his *Encyclopedia of Time* (1994), and further, the older but highly detailed study in Erwin Panofsky’s *Studies in Iconology* (1939), which devotes an entire chapter to Father Time.

²⁶ The sickle represents Kronos in art and literature. It is indicative of his agricultural role as “harvester of time,” but always recalls the original brutality that granted him power. More importantly, it is visually as much a vessel as it is a shaft. The sickle is equally the crescent moon/womb that emblemized Woman, in particular in Diana (Artemis) the virgin-hunter goddess. In England, Diane’s crescent moon/womb would be directly associated with Elizabeth I. More’s island would be designed and described as a crescent moon as well, a point that Marin suggests evoked the rise of the lunar island “cutting off the omnipotent sun” (109) which surely echoes woman/man as much as it does England as Female/Lunar Diana and Spain as Masculine/Sun.

sister/wife), who protect him from the fate of his siblings, allowing son to take a father's power, once again. We find a great deal of circularity, a sense of repeating (or failing to avoid) the sins of the father throughout mythology (utopias are similarly plagued with a sense of circularity). To follow suit, Zeus will later give birth to an exemplary, iconic woman, like his grandfather (although he did not need to lose his genitals in the process).²⁷ These male gods devoured their young in order to resist, or reverse, birth by way of enclosure in body or/as womb, and ended up violently giving birth themselves. The resulting gender roles (and bodies) are anything but absolute, fixed, or complete as the idealized universal body (or, the ideal man). The Romans adopted the Greek mythography, and it consequently spread through the Western world to syncretize with local myths and legends that carried their own pantheons, creation narratives, and consequent gender distinctions. Uranus's castration is the moment of division through which Greek cosmogony illustrates the separation of heaven and earth; consequently, the metaphor has been irrevocably equated with woman/man as the fundamental division, which then necessitated a desire for utopia.

Utopic gender fluidity is the unavoidable result of this fundamental conflict between division and the idealization of lost unity, but the original myth did not emphasize this rigid division as history and literature adopted it. In fact, if one considers the myth closely, one can identify moments of division that are far less violent and "divisive," and that would have allowed for a more fluid gender narrative. For example, the moment when Gaia gave birth to Uranus also demonstrates a key moment of division and is far more allowing of fluid gender. Uranus's castration left the man in the heavens, but a eunuch, and thus it was the castrating woman's own fault that the heavens were forever lost to Women. The promise of utopic wholeness in the (neutralized) Heavens would become newly idealized as the exclusive realm of the

²⁷ Zeus learned that his first wife, the Titan Metis, would bear a child that would grow more powerful than he was. He sought to prevent yet another usurper by swallowing Metis (a sort of preemptive strike to prevent his father's mistake by enclosing the woman in his own body not knowing she was already pregnant with Athena). Metis then bore Athena within Zeus's body and the powerful warrior goddess burst from his forehead fully armed and clothed.

patriarchal god leaving utopia forever out of *her* reach. I propose that Gaia/Woman emerging from neutral Chaos, and independently bringing forth the male, but childbearing, Uranus, is a far more mutable, more transgressive, and thus more utopic, point of division. Hesiod emphasized this mutable origin, but over time, the moment of division would shift to the castration, and the blame would lessen Kronos's role in favor of Gaia's provocation. Focusing on the original point of division would have allowed the feminine and masculine to shift freely between each other, have limitless shared access to creative forces, desire diffusive and/or penetrative sex, and the ability to "bear" children in/as both Earth and Heaven. Division generated by chaotic and/or neutral reproduction allows for gender fluidity rather than the patriarchal penetration that used the womb/sickle as the tool of castration that thus demanded the establishment of the binary. Uranus's castration by his son evolved into an example of the inevitable violence of the maternal towards man, but alternatively, it could have been read as man's violence towards himself (an inevitable consequence of the violence of gender assignment). What emerged as the divisive catalyst was not the maternal that would have allowed for greater flexibility, but instead the violent patriarchal division that endorsed the Law of the Father, and with one strike, denied women utopia.

The Judeo-Christian narrative gained primacy and the entire ordering of the cosmos was ascribed solely to the one, all-giving patriarch. The intermediate step between neutral Chaos and masculine Heaven suggested by a female life-giving Earth was summarily erased from what must become *the* origin. The patriarchal God consumed Gaia's power through his new solitary presence in the Heaven that she had originally created. Similarly, prelapsarian Adam and Eve were more godlike than mortal. Their time in Eden as living, immortal beings lent a "Golden Age" to the new Judeo-Christian origin. Neutral Chaos became the Masculine Father, and now *he* formed Adam in *his* image from inert/infertile clay that required only his generative hands. God became masculine and self-contained; after all, he had little need for genitals

(that might be lopped off). God generates Adam's body from an earth that requires a patriarchal hand to give life, while his mate is created from his male flesh as he sleeps. Adam remains passive and succumbs to the active hand of the patriarchal father in all things, and Eve loses all her maternal roots to the same Earth that God used to form Adam. She is now comprised only of her husband's male flesh. This is not entirely unlike the mythological births of the feminine ideals, Venus and Athena, who both emerged from the bodies of men with no need of mothers that might limit their perfection. Eve's body must bear the children, as Gaia's does, but unlike Uranus, Adam need not bear a thing (except of course, *the thing*). The Fall from grace, the result of "original sin," the first shameful act was Eve's burden to carry (along with her female descendants for all time). Her yearning for knowledge led to her own expulsion from the Eden/womb and to millennia of blame. Meanwhile, the demonized snake in Eden can be seen as a parallel of the earlier dismembered member at the birth of the ideal woman, only now animated and free to lead woman to her doom as repayment. The maternal castration as the point of gender division became the focal point for the singular, conventionally masculine, origin myth.

For early modern England, Arthur Golding's influential translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* set the standard for how the Greek cosmogonic narrative, and the gender roles it helped instill, would take root in the vernacular.²⁸ Poetically, the translation is beautiful, but Golding's concern with the poem's reception influenced his translation deeply as he often shifted to moralizing elements of Ovid's text to fit more comfortably with early modern ideals. The moment of gender division in Golding's Ovid is a fascinating example of how a narrative describing a utopic moment expresses gender fluidity even as the utopist struggles to maintain the binary. Because Golding was translating a utopic text, he could not keep the genders from slipping:

²⁸ I wish to focus on the early modern as the moment of utopic construction and so will not compare Golding's translation with a more current, and perhaps more precise, translation. My project is not to analyze either the differences in Ovid's cosmogonic narrative from Hesiod (and there are many) or Golding's translation of Ovid. My goal is to trace the construction of the gender binary from the moment of division as it appears in representative mythology and how it influenced the early modern construction of utopia, the ideal, and gender in that ideal.

Before the Sea and Lande were made, and Heaven that all doth hide,
 In all the worlde one onely face of nature did abide, [...]
 Not yet the earth amidde the ayre did hange by wonderous slight
 Just peysed by hir proper weight. Nor winding in and out
 Did Amphitrytee with her armes embrace the earth about.
 For where was earth, was sea, and ayre, so was the earth unstable. [...]
 No kinde of thing had proper shape, but ech confounded other.
 For in one selfsame bodie strove the hote and colde together
 The moist with drie, the soft with hard, the light with things of weight
 This strife did God and Nature breake, and set in order streight.
 The earth from heaven, the sea from earth, he parted orderly [...]
 Which when he once unfolded had, and severed from the blinde
 And clodded heape, he setting eche from other did them binde
 In endless friendship to agree. The fire most pure and bright,
 This substance of the heaven it selfe in highest place of all
 The second rume of right to ayre, for lightness did befall.
 The earth more grosse drew down with it eche weighty kinde of matter.
 And set it selfe in lowest place. [...]
 Now when he in this foresaid wise (what God so ere he was)
 Had broke and into members put this rude confussed masse,
 Then first because in every part, the earth should equall bee,
 He made it like a mighty ball, in compasse as we see.
 And here and there he cast in seas, to whome he gave a lawe:
 To swell with every blast of winde, and every stormie flawe.
 And with the waves continually to beate upon the shore,
 Of all the earth within their boundes enclosed by them afore [...] (Book 1, 6-40)

Sea (Amphitrite) and Land are joined and distinct from Heaven, but the earth is clearly feminized as “hir,” as is the Sea, while the God guiding it all is “he.” Earth is initially defined as “unstable” because nothing in existence had yet the “proper shape” and this suggests that only establishing a clear hierarchy would offer stability through the proper ordering of the universe with heaven above, matter (earth) below, and the genders definitively assigned and divided. Meanwhile, Chaos is a “blinde / And clodded heape” and later a “rude confussed masse.” Neither Chaos nor Earth are creative beings as they were in Hesiod, they are disarmed into instability and confusion. Golding translates the time before the division as one in which the “self same bodie strove the hote and cold together” a fantastically utopic moment because the genders (each commonly associated with hot and cold through early modern belief in humoral theory) in the moment before division, are united. Not only were they equal, but they were contained in one body. Ovid introduces this utopic moment by immediately suggesting that all things “confounded” each other in one body. The tone becomes not

one of bliss and unity, but of a confusion that will not do. However, the male God (who should be omnipotent) is here joined in necessary teamwork with the always feminine and cyclical “Nature” to address this strife. Together, they must “break” the strife through separation (thus, division begins). Ovid never answers the unspoken question of why hot and cold existing in one body was something that needed resolving, but the Father must win, and circularity and singular bodies must be set “streight.” They must be set apart from each other in the new “orderly” way that will grant them the “endless friendship to agree” because Ovid also never addresses if they were in disagreement within that one body. Thus, Heaven is set high above all, and air divides him from the “gross” earth now relegated to the “lowest place” because of her weighty “matter.”

Through all this division and categorization, Golding writes, “the earth should equall bee” to explain Earth’s circular perfection. The single masculine God organized the Earth properly in his hierarchy, gave “lawe” to the seas and all things by enclosing it within boundaries, and then granted Earth equality by forming her as a “mighty ball,” or rather, the roundness of the definitive utopic form. The moment of division was so critical that Ovid wrote about it in *Fasti* as well: “But Earth for a long time wouldn’t yield to Sky, / Nor the other lights to the Sun: honours were equal” (Book 5, “Introduction”). The suggestion is that equality existed before the division, and still does in the lost origin humanity will always desire. The moment of division, as it influenced the dialogue of gender construction, illustrates the intricate connection between utopia and myth at the unstable point where fluid gender is allowable and recognizable (and so must be controlled). The gender fluidity in Western mythic narratives, and the subsequent containment and realignment of the fluidity in early modern reconstructions of those origins, indicate why gender evokes such transgression in utopianism. Lucy Sargisson’s work on utopian thought centers on defining transgression as fundamental to utopia, arguing that in feminist and political theory it is a requirement: “Transgression: deliberately stepping over accepted boundaries—is an

intentional act of will. It aims at the creation of something other than the known and familiar. It is not safe. It is not a route to stability. But it is, perhaps, safe in the protected confines of a utopian body” (154). Transgression is required to imagine, conceptualize, or effectively sustain utopia, but it also makes utopia precarious. Spaces emerge out of the possibility that transgression suggests, and those spaces can then become utopian “bodies.” From within the gender binary, utopia must be transgressive in order to resolve the division, paradoxically, through some form of enclosure. Utopia emerges at two ends of a circular journey, as both the creation and destruction, because the gender binary fosters a need for transgression and the possibility of utopia even as categorical rigidity prohibits transgression and destroys utopia. Active participation in constructing utopia requires questioning the linguistic boundaries that divide us by gender (as illustrated by the cosmogonic myths dramatizing the division). An original gender division in myth was not exclusive to Hesiodic or Ovidian mythology; after all, myths from many other sources divided a gendered Earth and Heaven of some kind, often defining a peaceful original unity of an inaccessible realm of ideal/origin that would later be named “utopian” if not “utopia.”²⁹ The possibility of freedom from the gender binary is imaginable in the realm of philosophy and theory; “utopian bodies” may offer safety within gendered discourse, but they also bring with them a divisive history and mythology.

Perhaps this is why Sigmund Freud so often used mythology and literature to illustrate the traumas and resolutions of the human psyche. Mythology provided a rich source of iconic characters and narratives that personify society’s earliest constructions of identity and negotiate the eternally conflicting (or transgressive) forces between primal desires and cultural requirements. Psychoanalytic theory readily adopted mythology as a source of metaphors for clarifying theoretical and developmental concepts of transgression. Psychoanalytic theory, especially in the

²⁹ For example, Egyptian mythology offers a parallel of the Greek division. Earth/Geb is male (and snake-headed) and Heaven/Nut is female. In that myth, the two are divided as a result of desire to have sex continuously; they hung too tightly to each other leaving no room for their children to emerge (Littleton 1397-399).

construction of subjectivity (where gender identity plays an integral part), confronts transgression on many levels. For example, psychoanalytic theory originally classifies the mother/maternal as threatening, and Woman as lack or absence, while transgression (or the desire to transgress) for Freud was representative of the symbolic oedipal murder of the father, while for Lacan, transgression was one form of *jouissance*. Moreover, Lacan argued that Freud's work presented the "murder of the father" as the "great myth [...] at the origin of the development of civilization" and as the "more obscure and original transgression [of] the death instinct" (*Seminar VII 2*). However, both read the (desire for) murder of the father as the point of "origin" of primal trauma that led to the fundamental desire to transgress. Somewhere along the way, conceptions of origins shifted away from the fluidity of the mythological creative mother and powerful, original, neutral chaos, towards the rigid gender division brought about by a violent castrating mother-monster that only ever wanted to consume, or castrate, the father.

From Freud and Lacan we learn how integral transgression is to our illustration of gender division and utopic wholeness by way of mythology. Freud's death drive/instinct (renamed using the Greek mythological metonym, *Thanatos*) illustrates the repetition that the male gods find themselves caught in (a circle of repeating transgression in the hopes of achieving their ultimate desire). Between Freud's reality principle (endlessly deferring gratification) and pleasure principle (endlessly seeking transgression) lays the "thing" (*das Ding*), or the location of "the true secret" according to Lacan. The reality principle is a realm clearly bounded, clearly organized, and clearly *seeking* (desiring) to transgress what is beyond itself. Lacan theorized that Freud's conceptualization of the reality principle, from a certain point of view, is "always defeated" in that "it only manages to affirm itself at the margins":

As soon as we try to articulate [it] so as to make it depend on the physical world to which Freud's purpose seems to require us to relate it, it is clear that it functions, in fact to isolate the subject from reality (*Seminary VII 46*).

Lacan identifies *das Ding* as Freud's reality principle, but also as the absolute Other to self and subjectivity. *Das Ding* is foreign, will always be foreign, and cannot be anything but foreign, to the self. Yet, it is also perfection because it indicates the possibility of fulfillment, and as such, is always the eternal goal—utopia—that cannot be achieved without consequences. We can imagine utopia as something *else*, whether it is better or worse is unclear (even if the process leads to failure), but it is sustained by the tension of constantly desiring to transgress. Lacan writes in the *Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (1992):

The whole progress of the subject is then oriented around the *Ding* as *Fremde*, strange and even hostile on occasion, or in any case, the first outside. [...] That object will be there when in the end all conditions have been fulfilled—it is, of course, clear that what is supposed to be found cannot be found again. It is in its nature that the object as such is lost. It will never be found again. *Something is there while one waits for something better, or worse, but which one wants.* The world of our experience, the Freudian world, assumes that it is this object, *das Ding*, as the absolute Other of the subject, that one is supposed to find again. It is to be found at the most as something missed. One doesn't find it, but only its pleasurable associations. It is in this state of wishing for it and waiting for it that, in the name of the pleasure principle, the optimum tension will be sought (52, emphasis mine).

Lacan's language is intriguing because it has also been applied to a variety of abstract concepts negotiating gender, and of course, to literary utopias and theory. Woman is Other across dialogues; her womb is the origin, the "thing," and the physical representation of original unity everyone seeks. It exists "in the end" (as it did in the beginning) where fulfillment is achieved only through an "optimum tension" of constantly wishing and waiting. The assumption is that Self seeks Other, but the critical detail is that Self is meant to find it *again*, or rather, not for the first time, because it was lost and so must be regained. The end is at once the goal and origin, and as such, circular reasoning suggests that the destination and origin are not only the same, but equally utopic. If *das Ding* is the origin (or origin as utopia) then to origins we must look for "it." This is why origin myths were reconsidered, to illustrate the primal transgression that society is still attempting to articulate and resolve. Transgression allows the possibility of fluidity, or, the inaccessible "thing." The "thing" that the Law

must prevent us from ever attaining by keeping us circling endlessly around it so we sense it, conceive of it, even attempt to use it, but never achieve it. If we transgress, the bliss is lost to the pain of endless repetition; if we transgress and conceive of utopia, only madness results.

Psychoanalytic theory offers creatively flexible conceptualizations of how unity and desire are humanity's central goals and how our subjectivity is formed within our unrelenting movement towards those goals. Exploring transgression in our various theories and philosophies helps demonstrate why utopia (so often used as a metaphor for theoretical concepts) allows for gender fluidity. For instance, Lacan defines transgression much the same way we have seen utopia defined:

Transgression in the direction of *jouissance* only takes place if it is supported by the oppositional principle, by the forms of the Law. [...] The myth of origin of the Law is incarnated in the murder of the father; it is out of that that the prototypes emerged, which we call successively the animal totem, then a more-or-less powerful and jealous god, and finally, the single God, God the Father. The myth of the murder of the father is the myth of a time for which God is dead. But if for us God is dead, it is because he always had been dead, and that's what Freud says. He has never been the father except in the mythology of the son (*Seminar VII 177*).

Lacan traces the "origin of the Law" as it was incarnated into "prototypes" from myth to religion; these connections are not coincidental, and they are bound to the instantiation of gender and subjectivity (psychoanalytically, for Lacan) through myth. It is as if the prototypes can be understood as utopic matrices for the Self, or for subjectivity. If God/The Father is lost in the transforming origins and the mythology of the Son, equally so is Gaia/The Mother lost to the rising primacy of the mythology of The Father. To apply Lacan and Freud's wording to my argument: Woman has never been the Mother (as threatening and monstrous), except in the mythology of Man. Woman was transgressive, powerful, ambiguous, and creative in the mythology; this had to be rewritten. If we can understand the yearning for utopia (the thing) as the possibility allowed by transgression, then we can imagine that utopianism does not merely require transgression, *jouissance*, but it fully achieves it. This achievement is so painful that it results in the endless repetition of the transgression in the hopes of

escaping the pain. Woman is trapped in a discourse that does not allow a place for her except as the realization of transgression itself, or utopia.

The origin of the Law is metaphorically animated through Uranus's castration, but also in his refusal to allow his children to be born and emerge into subjectivity. By enforcing enclosure in the Earth/womb and refusing progress, Uranus fuses the womb with the tomb, and thus rewrites the origin of all as an enclosing grave. Lacan outlines how this myth progressed along the male line because the murder of the father is dependent on the myth of the Son. The loss of perfection was Gaia's fault and Woman became forever subject to Man even though the rain of blood (yielding still more children of Gaia) from an imperfect, open, leaking body (usually assigned to woman) was Uranus's. Despite the great resource of mythological narrative material with which to imagine the construction of gender and subjectivity more fluidly, the gender binary obliges that primal traumas be rewritten along distinct and binary gender lines. We also see this with the concept of the castration complex when the separation between mother and infant defines the adoption of culture and the differentiation of the sexes that psychoanalytically recalls the mythical father/son conflict and the point of gender division as well. Resolving this complex requires confronting the (masculine) fear of loss, the (feminine) definition as lack, and the pivotal role of the mother (maternal) as monstrous, threatening castrator. Lacan took Freud's castration even further into language, to the fantasy of mutilation and the fragmented body, and thus moved ever closer to the convenient details of the origin myth through which the Law of the Father allows identity, name, and subjectivity because it prohibits the threatening ideal/unity of a maternal origin.

Freud, Lacan, and Cixous, and many others have given us substantial theories to conceptualize what are fundamentally utopic processes. The pleasure of deliberating them allows us to reflect meaning into our origins, reality, culture, and society, and our multiple expressions of identity and ideality. We must always progress to this "meaning" by continuing to ask if the utopic origins *mean* something. The

wholeness of the maternal origin, allegorized by the womb (an enclosing space lost with our entry into culture), cannot be actually reclaimed, but it is consistently imagined as the psychoanalytic goal unconsciously guiding desire, and as a literary, philosophical, and conceptual force.³⁰ Arguably, the discourse of psychology itself is utopic with all its metaphoric, terminological slippage, because it hopes to establish and stabilize our understanding of identity, subjectivity, desire and ego. The primitive instinctual *id* Freud proposed, the *jouissance* of Lacan, and even Cixous's *écriture féminine*, are all (un)locatable spaces of imagination, or playgrounds, just as much as they are epistemological concepts. They are eminently utopic because they imagine, play out, conceive, and allow the possibility of what is within or beyond the binary as much as they participate in reiterating the binary.

The myths were carried forward drawing gender more divisively in discourse and many other forms of cultural dialogue. Venus, born of the severed penis, came to personify the feminine ideal, and she would be re-imagined constantly. Her popularity as an icon grew throughout Renaissance Europe, and her birth and life became a metaphor of female perfection; of course, the brutal mythic narrative of her birth had to be rewritten. Botticelli's iconic *Birth of Venus* (1485),³¹ for example, is just one of many visual examples of this less dissonant revision. Centuries of repetition and adaptation of the style and subject before and after Botticelli added to the permanence of the idealization of Venus's birth; in the iconic painting, she does not emerge from a cast-off, severed penis, or appear amid the rain of blood that will generate her siblings. Botticelli presents her attended by a heroic couple, Zephyr and Aura, as they blow Venus on her shell gently to shore into the waiting cloak offered by

³⁰ Freud's social milieu inspired artwork such as Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine du monde* (1866, Musée d'Orsay, Paris) that framed Woman as the origin, headless (without mind), limbless (without action), and fragmented in a celebratory image where her "sex" embodies the source, or the origin, of nothing less than the entire world.

³¹ Sandro Botticelli *The Birth of Venus* (1485) is one of the most immediately recognizable examples of Renaissance art. Homer's *Iliad* (Book V) suggests Venus was the daughter of Zeus and Dione, while Plato's *Symposium* (385 BCE) indicates the two births resulted in two separate Aphrodites. Botticelli clearly meant to represent the Hesiodic version of her birth by having her emerge from the sea, although the painting reflects nothing of the castration.

a Horae (Spring). Botticelli was not interested in capturing the castration of the Heavens, but in reworking the myth to idealize the birth of feminine perfection as it *should* have been or, more importantly, as it would become.³² The painting celebrates Woman as Nature and is awash in the symbols of ideal femininity: She is properly modest, covering her genitals with her hair as Spring awaits to cloak her, and she maintains this modesty despite being surrounded by an abundance of “natural” symbols (seashells and flowers) suggesting the genitals she conceals that the artist reveals.

Botticelli’s painting is a familiar and powerful example of the evolving equation of Woman with nature that began with Mother Earth/Gaia and followed “naturally” to woman-as-land. Darby Lewes explores this metaphor extensively in several texts (not usually considered utopias) from early modern England through to the eighteenth century, which she creatively names “somatopias” (metamorphosing More’s word and emphasizing the utopic elements she senses in the texts): “The idea that women and land are somehow analogous to each other is of course an ancient one. Indeed, somatopias might well be the Ur-metaphor, rooted in the earliest etiological myths that present the earth as a womb from which life sprang” (3). Lewes defines this “ur-metaphor” of women as nature and men as culture as the foundation for somatopias as an ambiguous “body place” that “could be a place either composed of a body or designed for a body (as in providing bodily pleasure).” Yet the term works both ways, as Lewes argues, because “the places are simultaneously composed of female bodies and designed for male satisfaction and act out the conflict between masculinized culture and feminized nature. They function as discourses that serve the twin functions of subordination and oppression (3). Lewes focuses on the same utopian ambiguity I argue emerges as fluidity in the works she studies. Somatopias specifically (and utopias

³² Most scholars agree that the written sources for Botticelli’s painting were Homer, Ovid, and a dedicatory poem by Angelo Poliziano *Stanze per La Giostra* (1475-78). Neither Homer nor Ovid mention the castration of Uranus as the source of Venus’s birth, the Poliziano poem begins where the image of the “cast off member” in the sea, giving birth to her “nonhuman countenance” and the presence of “playful Zephyr” (XCIX 99). If the poem is the source of the painting, the castration was purposefully ignored, or explained away as the painting capturing the moments “after” her birth. Ultimately, the image powerfully recast the myth by erasing her birth’s chaotic gender ambiguity.

in general) manage to work “both ways.” Women are the physical requirement and substance of utopia even as they stand subjected to the masculine utopia written on the land in order to idealize masculine subjectivity and feminized substance.

Utopias are associated with location, or rather, utopia-as-concept transgressed seamlessly into utopia-as-place because the discovery of the New World was predicated on woman-as-place, through metaphor, into the vernacular of woman-as-utopia. The parallel of Heaven/Earth and Man/Woman moved from the mythical and allegorical to the actual, or at least the possible, in much the same way that the Golden Age in reference to the New World (as Markley noted earlier) blurred between myth and fact. The New World became a woman, and thus available for exploring or imagining by Columbus, for conquering and subduing by Vespucci, and ultimately, for raping and commodifying through Raleigh’s propaganda, as I will show in chapter 2. Annette Kolodny argues that the conventional feminization of land became more methodical and deliberate after the discovery of America. What Kolodny senses rising to the surface of a new “American Pastoral” is a sort of paradox, or a simultaneous existence between the ideal and the real, that was swelling in the utopias of the day and those to come, where ideal metaphor and the real coexisted.³³ Whether man-as-culture to woman-as-nature, man-as-mind to woman-as-body, or more generally, man-as-universal, perfect and complete, to woman-as-monstrously lacking, the gender binary was always fundamental to the organization of social structures. Only utopia (soon to

³³ “What happened with the discovery of America was the revival of the linguistic habit on the level of personal experience. [...] Or, perhaps, the connections are more subtle still: was there perhaps a *need* to experience the land as nurturing, giving maternal breast because of the threatening, alien, and potentially emasculating terror of the unknown? Beautiful, indeed, that wilderness appeared—but also dark, uncharted, and prowled by howling beasts. In a sense, to make the new continent Woman was already to civilize it a bit, casting the stamp of human relations upon what was otherwise unknown and untamed. But, more precisely still, just as the impulse to begin again (whether politically, economically, or religiously), so, too, the place of that new beginning was, in a sense, the new Mother, her adopted children having cast off the boots of Europe. [...] If the American continent was to become the birthplace of a new culture, and, with it, new and improved human possibilities, then it was, in fact as well as in metaphor, a womb of generation and a provider of sustenance. [...] The heart of American pastoral [is] the only pastoral in which metaphor and the patterns of daily activity refuse to be separated” (9).

be written in the New World as Woman) allowed the potential for transgressing those binaries.

Mythological narratives did not cast gender divisively; instead, they allowed equal empowerment. As the biblical creation myth gained primacy, gender roles became more rigid. The Christian origin myth accepted not an ancient powerful Earth that required equality of the man she created, but a disobedient maternal Eve whose punishment meant she would eternally groan with the weight of the children she alone must bear along with the eternal weight of subjection, which the Fall mandated. Men cast their ideal as the perfection of the womb that was lost to them, but then rewrote the model of perfection. The ambiguity and conflict within this contradictory re-figuration of “mythic” proportions speaks to why Cixous and many others struggle to ask where Woman is in the hierarchy that slowly consumed her like one of the divine children of a cannibal father. How could she be the cause of the loss of perfection, of the Golden Age, of utopia, and the representation of them all as well? How could she be the source of all, and the loss of all, simultaneously? The answers to these questions are unclear, but in the naming of utopia, and the discovery of the New World as utopia, we may find some insight.

I have demonstrated how utopia as it has been conceptualized depends on the construction of the gender binary from our earliest myths; I will now move to the discovery of utopian literature by focusing on one of the first examples of a utopia in English: “The Land of Cokaygne,”³⁴ a thirteenth- or fourteenth-century poem of uncertain authorship that describes the same Golden Age, but with a medieval sensibility. Pagan circularity (like utopian circularity) was re-ordered to conform to the more hierarchical Christian linearity and chronology, and consequently, the Golden Age

³⁴ From Claeys and Tower Sargent’s collection of literary utopias, *The Utopia Reader*: “The derivation of [Cokaygne] is obscure, but it emphasizes the immediate gratification of physical needs, and the most frequent images are of food. The most famous Cockaignes are from the Middle Ages, but there are many earlier examples” (71). This poem, contained in their anthology, appeared as “The Land of Cokaygne” in A. L. Morton’s *The English Utopia* (1952) who identified it as the first utopia in English (217-22). The poem is usually grouped with a collection of sixteen Middle English poems known as the Kildare Poems.

was re-imagined. The thematic use of the Golden Age often illustrates the bridging of human desires within an environment that did not live up to those ideals, suggesting why it became so flexible a utopic theme that was adapted, repeatedly, into endless new utopic forms. Within the confines of utopia, at least, the theme did not diminish over time.³⁵ In satiric and vernacular accounts of the Golden Age, elements of excess and plenty link it to topsy-turvy world defined the medieval carnival or pagan Bacchanalia, and both are vital roots of the Cockayne tradition.³⁶ It generally included a constant surfeit of food and drink, a sheer reveling in play, an absence of work or strife, and overt sexuality in suggestion and deed. I discuss this minor poem as a representation of an early conventional literary utopia in English. In this, it is an “origin” text, as well as a clear example of the fusion and reconstruction of Pagan and Christian mythologies.

“The Land of Cokayne” is wonderfully indicative of how utopia appeared before More’s naming. Its mixture of satire and utopic themes reveals utopia’s flexibility. Marin noted the link between satire and utopia and argued that the connection has to do, once again, with myth and ritual as the “founding relationship between subversive violence [...] and the period return of the norm and of institutions” (78). As Marin argues, Saturnalia and Carnival are two examples of cultural transgression often categorized as utopic. He argues that transgressions of the law solidify the law because, in utopic contradiction, transgression is both liberating and constraining because it subverts the order that prevents access to origins, and questions the origins themselves:

³⁵ “The Golden Age [...] internalizes tensions between the Judeo-Christian view that history has a beginning, middle, and millenarian end and pagan assumptions that the world cycles through epochs of prosperity and corruption or is locked into a process of irreversible decline. Ironically, it is precisely this ambiguity that enables an indefinite era [...] to function for writers as a device to explore the relationships between sin and scarcity, between human desires and an environment that seemed to offer, in the long term, only diminishing returns” (Markley 821).

³⁶ Brenda Garrett outlines the several elements that define the Cokayne: “The tradition seems to be related to the classical Greek Golden Age and the myth of the Fortunate Isles with their location in the West, barrier of water, garden of natural abundance, song birds, rivers, jewels, and easily available women” (2).

The relation between the ritual of overthrow and satire, between satire and utopia, leads us to the ambiguity contained in every social critique. It simultaneously defines a norm and unfolds the discourse that would deny it. Saturnalian anarchy is the negative, ritualistic critique of the institution in mythic narrative; the norm is this negation, its ideality, and also the positivity where it is accomplished, as the regulation of current constraints makes up the bliss of the Golden Age. [...] Utopia establishes transgressions as norms. [...] In other words, in utopia transgression is not related to the law; it has become the law (78-9).

Following Marin's theory, this poem uses satire and sexuality as a means to dismantle the patriarchal structures that represent the "law" of the real and introduces a new, transgressive law as the foundation of the ideal, as I will show.

The poem narrates the adventures of the monks and nuns of two abbeys on an island "out to sea, far west of Spain" (71). The poet immediately differentiates the island from "paradise," which he locates in the west long before the New World granted a westward location to the search for Eden, and thereby he contradicts the supposed Eastern location of Paradise in this poem. The poem distinctly outlines the separation between what is utopic in one sense, and paradisiacal in another, and while the poet is clearly mocking Cokaygne, he demonstrates a clear preference for it over paradise.³⁷ To firm up this distinction, the poem's first description is of Paradise rather than the Cokaygne itself, as we would expect. Moreover, the poet describes Paradise with a mixture of reverence and boredom:

Though Paradise is merry and bright
 Cokaygne is a fairer sight.
 For what is there in Paradise
 But grass and flowers and greeneries?
 Though there is joy and great delight,
 There's nothing good but fruit to bite,
 And only water thirst to quench.
 And of men there are but two,
 Elijah and Enoch also;
 Sadly thither would I come
 Where but two men have their home (72).

³⁷ After all, the only way to get to this island is to undergo extreme penance: "He must wade for seven years / In the dirt of swine-pen bears, Seven years right to the chin" (76). To reach this utopia one must go through shit first. It is absurd, humorous, offensive and a further expression of the body utopia. It also recalls Swift's Gulliver returning home from the several utopias he explores, only to choose to live in his horse stables (as a personal utopia) after returning home.

The poet's distinction between Cokaygne and Paradise is "sadly" reverential; paradise is reserved for the divine and, though it contains "joy and great delight," it is dull because it offers nothing but fruit and water to eat and drink, and is populated only by two men, who are "deathless" as the gods. In reverence to the biblical fathers of the Old Testament, the poet mentions only Elijah and Enoch who were granted a deathless entrance to heaven ("and of the men there are *but* two"). The poem suggests the isolation of these two patriarchs, and indicates that the land is lacking *because* of their presence. The poet repeatedly indicates that the failure of the Christian Paradise is what it *lacks*—women, wine, and food—but also that the divine Paradise, heaven, is *reserved* for men as nothing is mentioned of the other biblical personae known to have been granted assumption into heaven. After all, Mary, mother of Jesus, should live there as well, and perhaps the female saints as part of the community of saints. Initially described by what it lacks, and further on by the lack of a specific gender, Paradise is at once a feminized space, and a space that holds only men. As we shall see, the Cokaygne offers a more desirable utopia outside of the restrictions of the Christian paradise.

In contrast, the Cokaygne is described with an initial reminder that "No land is like it anywhere / Under heaven no land like this" (72), immediately separating it from Paradise/Heaven and alienating it from the known world. A sort of ambiguous, self-negating descriptive language, in which a statement contains its falsification, emerges quite often in utopias. By saying there is "no land like this under heaven" the speaker recognizes its exemplarity and its falsity simultaneously. Thomas More would go on to use similar descriptions in *Utopia*, as would Columbus in his attempts to capture excess in a way that might convey superlatives of superlatives. Utopia is "no land" in this world, following a classical adage Hythloday uses regarding his love of adventure and travel: "The road to heaven is equally short from all places" (5). The poet also notes that "night" and "death" do not exist there; the absence of darkness and immortality these usually represent at once liken the island to the timeless Golden Age and

estrangle it from the Christian heaven as the only place where one could escape death. This Cokaygne is happily populated by men *and* women, but the women appear first coupled with men (“There no man or woman wroth”) and later with what they lack (“There’s no man or woman blind”). In contrast, the men appear singular, complete, and in a positive light: “Lucky the man that there may be.” The poem’s women are either in tandem with men or left out of the description altogether and introduced instead through qualities—blindness and wrath—they do not possess, or by what they lack. What a telling combination of qualities, for lack of blindness suggests vision (a passive sense) and lack of wrath suggests peace and compliance (a passive quality). The latter becomes a more relevant lack when we discover the treatment of women in the poem.

Of woman’s place in this philosophy, Cixous writes, “either woman is passive or she does not exist. What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought” (64). Cixous’s theories informed Judith Butler’s location of non-normative sexuality in the social and cultural constructions of gender, which demonstrate that for Woman to exist in utopia, she must be passive so the men can realize utopia through them.³⁸ She must inhabit the unthinkable, unsayable role in the gender binary that was, in the cosmogonic origin myth, the Father/Heaven. On the point of progression from myth to utopia, Drucilla Cornell’s reading of Lacan argues for the constitutive requirement of women to subjectivity:

The Woman or the feminine is “there” in her absence as the lack that marks the ultimate object of desire in all subjects. To say that she is unknowable is

³⁸ In brief, Butler locates non-normative sexuality “outside” the Symbolic that “serves as a locus of subversion.” She argues that “the construction of an ‘outside’ that is nevertheless fully ‘inside,’ not a possibility beyond culture, but a concrete cultural possibility that is refused and redescribed as impossible. What remains ‘unthinkable’ and ‘unsayable’ within the terms of an existing cultural form is not necessarily what is excluded from the matrix of intelligibility within that form; on the contrary, it is the marginalized, not the excluded, the cultural possibility that calls for dread, or minimally, the loss of sanctions. [...] The ‘unthinkable’ is thus fully within culture, but fully excluded from *dominant* culture” (*Gender Trouble* 98-9). Woman and the non-normative sexuality ascribed to the monastic interactions in “The Land of Cokaygne” are both outside and inside simultaneously because they are fully within culture, as the men need the women’s participation only to exclude them from participation. Butler assigns this reality to social and cultural discourse and its presence in literary utopias illustrate this construction most effectively. Women authors sensed this freedom and often chose utopia/utopianism as a genre or medium (including Judith Butler herself).

not, then, to argue that her lack is not felt. Indeed, Woman as lack is constitutive of genderized subjectivity. Even so, Woman does not exist as a “reality” present to the subject, but as a loss. As a result, Lacan explains some of the great myths of the quest in which masculine identity seeks to ground itself as quests for her. The feminine becomes the Holy Grail. Within Lacan’s framework, the myths of Woman are about this quest to ground masculine subjectivity. Because they tell us about masculine subjectivity, and not about Woman, they cannot serve as clues to unlocking her mystery. [...] Women are cut off from the myths that could give the feminine meaning and therefore, in Lacan’s sense, we are silenced before the mystery of the ground of our own identity, of our origin. The “feminine” is given meaning in the symbolic order that belies her very existence, as the Other in their myths and fantasies of that order. Woman “is” imaginary (39).

Women’s silence from within the very ground that was built “of” her is tangible in its absence. She is sensed, felt, but unseen and unheard because she is the substance and the realization of utopia, but she must not be “in” utopia, in other words, she cannot enjoy what is utopic in utopia. From the origin myths that outlined the expectations of her female identity, to the initial constructions of utopia that “cut her off” from her mythic origins, and then idealized her through a revision of those same myths: This is the critical progression of how Woman exists in/as the ideal, in/as the imaginary, and through that figuration as loss, lack, and absence. “She” is essential to formulating a gendered division, but only in her absence as material, as natural background, as a tool for building utopia through reproduction. The text does not allow her a space. To use Cornell’s example, the feminine is the “Holy Grail” thus equating Woman with the definitive mythological object. She becomes the object of quest through the quintessential myth that depicts an overwhelmingly masculine utopia: King Arthur, Camelot, his knights, their sworn brotherhood, their quest, and the round table from which they ruled equally only with other men. Their ultimate destruction results from the machinations of inconstant women; the Grail is always the goal, in its Christian reading as the cup of Christ, or its older pagan reading as Vessel. That so many psychoanalytical concepts express this tension illustrates why utopia required the loss of woman, and through that loss, allowed for the utopia men could perceive as perfect.

Consequently, in this poem, the women “do not have,” while the men are discussed in terms of what they have a right to have: “There is a mighty fine Abbey, /

Thronged with monks both white and grey [...] Every man takes what he will / As of right, to eat his fill / All is common to young and old / To stout and strong, to meek and bold” (73). Common ownership is privileged while private property is vilified (a theme that will become proverbial in utopias). Similarly, the island’s “spoils” are shared and described not in relation to the island, or the abbey (described in rich detail and material worth), or food, or even wealth in general, but specifically through the exchange of women. The island’s female inhabitants first appear in a flurry of violence and prostitution meant to lampoon the supposed deprivations of monastic life (a separatist utopia). This moment reveals how critical women were to men’s utopias:

Now the young monks every day
 After dinner go to play [...]
 The Abbot counts it goodly sport
 To see his monks in haste depart,
 But presently he comes along
 To summon them to evensong.
 The monks refrain not from their play,
 But fast and far they flee away,
 And when the Abbot plain can see
 How all his monks inconstant flee,
 A wench upon the road he’ll find,
 Turning up her white behind,
 He beats upon it as a drum
 To call his monks to vespers home.
 When the monks behold that sport
 Unto the maiden all resort,
 And going all the wench about,
 Every one stroketh her white touts
 So they end their busy day (75).

The woman is at once a “maiden” and an anonymous “wench” identified as her “behind” more than anything else. The Abbot “beats” her bottom to call the young monks to the “vespers” they all must share, thus reminding them of their duty and brotherhood. They beat her bottom/drum to inspire unity and draw their attention away from “play” to the “work” now at hand of “stroking” her. Prayer becomes erotic, communal, and orgiastic when shared between all the men on one woman. To seal their masculine utopic union they all take turns with the common woman/woman-in-common. She fades into the scenery as a drum or pleasure tool but never Woman. Her “voice” is the sound of *their* hands on her flesh violently amplified, and any utopic (or

even erotic) pleasure she might garner from the Cokaygne is lost through their multiple and varied intrusions on her body turned upside down. Appropriately, the poem's carnivalesque qualities suggest sodomy here, as it is her behind that is bared for all to stroke, while other parts of her body are unremarkable. Hers is an ambiguous presence reminiscent of Cixous's Sabbat sorceress:

The sabbat is over. It began between heaven and earth, on a knoll, on a heath all lit up for the great feast of the people; the sabbat is over, with its Mass and universal revelry. [...] A mingling, a mixing of bodies, spatial confusion, disorientation: the body turned upside down, as in the hysteric's fantasy of the head-vagina. A body upside down like the rest of the festival (32).

How telling that for Cixous it began *between* heaven and earth, as if the liminal space between the earth/heaven division necessitated by gendered discourse can be realized, actualized, as utopia by a "mixing of bodies" and "spatial confusion" of vaginas where heads should be, of women's behinds where women should be. Man needs her to create it and realize its utopic potential, but cannot write her wholly out of it. In the Cokaygne, this revelry is actualized as a masculine utopia, instead of the feminine Sabbat, but the woman is relevant and present and creating the conditions for their other(ed) world. Without women, without the negotiation of gender, division, and the binary that binds society, their utopia is as unimaginable, or as "imaginary," as Woman.

However, she is only a "wench," after all, and the true citizens of Cokaygne sitting as foil to the monks would be the nuns, whose presence and presentation take on a marked fluidity in the poem. The nuns and their convent are introduced quite differently from the monastery with its abundant detail. In describing the convent, as it indicates the nuns themselves, only the sweet milk river surrounding it matters because it at once hints at a restriction of access to the women, and their conflation with the fluid associated with their breasts. The description begins with only the detail that it is "splendid," but any further details are minimal in contrast to the masculine abbey's description. Far more vital is the "sport" that commences because the nuns are never inside their enclosing (protective) abbey walls:

Another Abbey is near by,
 In sooth, a splendid nunnery,
 Upon a river of sweet milk,
 Where is plenteous store of silk,
 When the summer day is hot
 The younger nuns take out a boat,
 And forth upon the river clear,
 Some do row and some do steer
 When they are far from their Abbey,
 They strip them naked for their play
 And, plunging in the river's brim,
 Slyly address themselves to swim.
 When the young monks see that sport,
 Straightaway thither they resort,
 And coming to the nuns anon,
 Each monk taketh to him one,
 And, swiftly bearing forth his prey
 Carries her to the Abbey gray [...]

And teaches her an orison,
 Jigging up and jigging down.
 The monk that is a stallion good,
 And can manage well his hood,
 He shall have, without a doubt,
 Twelve wives before the year is out (76).

In this vividly lewd section, the nuns are associated with nature immediately. They do not “throng” the abbey as the monks do, nor do they have access to all the physical and commercial “goods” they might desire as the monks are described as having. They do not even need to unite for vespers in equal sisterhood, as the monks must, despite their role as nuns. Instead, they are awash in fluid and associated with nature, surrounded by milk (and silk) and are found swimming naked (as nymphs) in the river. When the women are alone before the monks arrive, they move away from the enclosing nunnery reveling in an active, expressive lesbianism as “some do row and some do steer” their boats along the river. Without the men around to do either, they do not adopt the passive sexual role as vessels. This image incites the “stallion” monks to hunt their prey and correct the women’s improper sexuality to resolve the masculine fear that lesbianism is what women might want (and have) as their utopia (a source of anxiety regarding cloisters). However, the monks are also equated with nature, which more or less blurs the representation of both genders.

Female monasticism offered women the possibility of a utopic space, but it also inspired tension and fear over what women did in the absence of men; this poem animates that tension. Through a deliberate hunting, seizing and raping, the wild nymph/nuns are yanked away from their freedom in nature and forced into the monk's abbey to "learn orison" while they are "taken" within their abbey walls. Prayer is both eroticized and the means by which the monks absorb the women's role in this utopia. In the end, if the monk does well enough in maneuvering his "hood," she will submit and (as required) shift from lesbian nymph to "wife," and that is (and must be) the last we hear of her. To exist in utopia, men must define her pleasure and place; she is restricted from the freedom, abundance and revelry the Cokaygne (or, indeed, the Convent) inherently promises when she is maneuvered away from that freedom to the more appropriate role of object or prey. Aside from administering the sacraments and other Church requirements, women in monastic life were almost wholly outside of masculine control, often governing every aspect of their lives and economies. For the male utopist, the biggest threat is the inaccessibility of the women, and the poet of the Cokaygne resolves this problem in order to attain and contain the utopia.

A.L. Morton, who anthologized the poem and identified it as "the first English utopia,"³⁹ wrote that the poem "describes an earthly and earthy paradise, an island of magical abundance, of eternal youth and eternal summer, of joy, fellowship and peace" (12). I doubt whether the woman used as a drum, and the stolen nuns, would exactly concur, but this early reading illustrates the persistent image of utopia, how utopia offered possibility for women, and how utopists needed women in order to find utopia. Utopia always resists. It manages to break free of rigid gender roles even with the utopist's attempt to suppress women, and that freedom may emerge only through

³⁹ Brenda Garrett argues that this "first English utopia" was most likely written in Ireland and "as such, rather than a demonstration of fourteenth-century English folk dissent [as A. L. Morten argues] it is likely an example of anti-Irish [language], colonialist discourse aimed at a diverse English audience in Ireland in order to quell the gaelicisation of the colonists" (2). The concern over English colonists' assimilation with the local Irish was prevalent because they would not speak their own language after some time, preferring the local Gaelic. Garrett continues by connecting several early Irish myths to the poem, which substantiates the notion that utopic concepts were negotiated in tandem with myth.

the utopist's unavoidable need to narrate the "reason" for the suppression, which makes utopia always transgressive. Morten also points out that the poem is trying to negotiate the constant dissonance between human desires, romanticized pagan myths of perfection and abundance, medieval religious doctrine, and dissent, through constructions of the carnivalesque. Much of this negotiation focuses on the place of women in this short poem, which is silly in its satire in one sense and brutal in another. It is an interesting example of a vernacular literary utopia that captures the burgeoning tension of colonialism (as Brenda Garrett argues) and gender in the utopian ideal.

As I leave my discovery of utopia as a concept, I must return to where I began with Louis Marin's *Utopics*:

It may simply be impossible to write and speak about utopia. Because both acts—writing and speaking—must be uttered or traced in the empty and white space-time I called the neutral, and thus they build semantic bridges between the 'relata' of the difference, endlessly conjugating them in order for them to be heard, read and understood (xx).

Many have attempted the impossible, so to speak, and have gone ahead to trace the empty and white spaces of neutrality in the hopes of discovering utopia between the "difference" that it both heads to and leaves from. A need (or desire) to see these bridges built, to try and define the name, place and concept (or whether it is, ever was, or always was, a concept) somehow facilitates the hopes of reaching understanding if not knowledge. Marin speaks not at all about utopia as it constructs gender, nor at any great depth about colonialism as it figured in the early modern, but he critically points to utopia's liminal existence in-between worlds, its location "somewhere" between the Old and the New, emphasizing the "other" spaces.⁴⁰ Marin's reading of the conceptual neutrality of utopianism, and its circularity (the literal circle on the page as island or form) and the repetition of that circularity (as ambiguity or simultaneity), complicates how we perceive utopia. The concept of the neutral within utopia (and Marin's circularity) informs the concept of (women as) lack and absence

⁴⁰ "As a limit between two spaces, such as the old and new Worlds in More's geography, the island of Utopia was born on this limit, within the window or framework that these spaces sketched out. It's very name calls up the spaces surrounding it by indicating that it is between them, in the separation it fills out by its imaginary presence" (Marin xxiii).

and defines how utopia can emerge necessarily feminized in the early modern and still express fluidity when figured in utopia. Circles and circularity are critical to the construction of women in feminist theory and discourse. From myths that repeat and privilege pagan circular chronology, to Thomas More's circular womb-like island, through the ages unceasingly to the present, circles continue to suggest utopia and Woman simultaneously. No better contemporary example of this circularity (as figured in utopia as Woman) can be found than Monique Wittig's complex and provocative *Les Guérillères* (1969) that begins, silently and loudly with only a large O on the page. Its primary, dominant voice is the circle, mocking an entire history of Woman figured as emptiness, as null, as zero, and employing a signifier/symbol as language/word within a discourse that refuses alternate signifiers. The emptiness expands, contracts, and the nothing as everything makes everything out of nothing. Wittig's novel is a utopia that refuses to explain itself, refuses to allow one into the circle, or release one from the circle: O is all you will get, and in that O is the name of every woman.

Complicit in this circularity, as Marin writes of *Utopia*, Hythloday "responds with a paradox that is none other than the paradox of decentering and of the relativity of points of view and speech. The New World is, for those who live there, an old world; the Old World is new for them" (48). If considered in circular terms with Utopia as the "new" center, where did this leave Europe? Is Europe outside the center, and if so, how does one progress in a circle? Around and around its periphery leading always back to the origin, these circles echo the moon and with its waxing and waning leading us through its phases of death and rebirth. The circle further represents contradiction, or rather, the circular logic that at once traps and realizes utopia. Wittig reclaimed this paradox, while Marin determined that circles/circularity are a form and movement so descriptive of utopia that the two emerge nearly synonymous. He metaphorizes this as the circle that is, for Marin, "an open mouth, an expiration of breath" and a whole that recalls the hole (xvi-xvii):

Utopia, in fact, never admits anything exterior to itself; Utopia is itself its own reality. The descriptive mode, seeing all in its gaze, demands that narrative unfold temporally, only to bring it back into a kind of circular movement. If the textual foundation is both at the beginning and at the end of the text, and if the intermediate narratives interrupt the visible descriptive surface only to sketch out or suggest this circular movement of a neutralization that affirms negation and denies the negative, then we can understand how the narrative finds or at least conditions descriptions (102).

As utopia traps its own reality, it cannot be anything outside the circle because it is always the neutral to the outside. It is always enclosed and inaccessible specifically because it allows for both positive and negative simultaneously inside the circle. The early mythic narratives expressed this fluidity through a utopic circular transgression; the poet of “The Land of Cokaygne” played with this fluidity. Later, More tried to stabilize the same fluidity to ensure proper order, and eventually, Wittig violently demands the recognition of the required fluidity.

The place of utopia may be limiting (as either/or) or expanding (as both/and) but it is always a circle that can either enclose or expand, and it leaves us again with a problematic definition that, as I will show, relies on perspective and location. Marina Leslie confronts this definition when reading *The Ambassadors* (1533) by Hans Holbein the Younger. Leslie argues that the painting (with its famous hidden skull that requires a physical shift of position and focus in order to see it) cannot possibly be both/and but that it asks the viewer to choose.⁴¹ More’s *Utopia* asks the same of its reader as will all utopias. Utopia’s circularity allows for the both/and, for the expanding circle (the element requiring control). Forcing the reader to choose would require relinquishing the possibility of neutrality, of n/either man n/or woman. The essence of utopia is the presence of this requirement simultaneous with the continued failure to accept a single choice. Lucy Sargisson calls upon us to preserve this refusal to choose, this inherent transgression: “We decline to accept a dilemma in which any choice between one of

⁴¹ “For one image to be legible, the other must be annulled. Indeed the poignancy of the image depends on the choice that this fact of perception forces as the viewer is moved—in a very literal sense—to choose between the two views. It is precisely the function of the painting’s anamorphism that requires these perspectives to be either/or; they cannot be both/and. More’s *Utopia*, however, has a much more complexly modulated surface. All perspectives are partial and simultaneous; none predominates, and none is entirely consistent” (Leslie 19).

two alternatives is necessary” because we must “transgress the binary position of either/or and say both, neither and more.” Only then, as Sargisson continues, can we “simultaneously accept and reject” the binary and create a “new space beyond binary opposition in which something else (the unforeseeable) can be foreseen.” For meaning and ideality to exist we must “neither (fully) accept nor (fully) reject” because the concept of either/or must no longer hold “a meaningful position.” Only then will society allow for the “more” (that Sargisson characterizes as “feminine”) as a new space, or new “profoundly utopian” position (95). We must accept the erasure of confining boundaries to allow the space that *is* absolutely feminine, as Sargisson asserts. The circle must grow so large that we no longer see, or sense, or feel confined by any boundaries. Sargisson names this feminine space “profoundly utopian.” To find utopia, or to find “the feminine space,” we need only dispense with binaries in all their forms. Indeed, when we consider utopia as constant movement, as progress itself, then the movement does not necessarily trap us eternally and infinitely in a circular path always on a periphery, or the origin we can never access. Utopia admits nothing outside of itself, allows for freedom *because* of the shape that myth, and subsequent re-figuration of myth as origin, assigned to it/her. Progress within a circle can be endless expansion outward or contraction inward. The circle expands to allow the other, or retracts to reclaim the self freely and seamlessly. Running forever along the edges with our gender assigned we will never find utopia, but freely expanding/contracting and progressing as self, and in the acceptance and withdrawing from Other, we are sure to find it.

Chapter Two

Thomas More's *Utopia* and the Discovery Accounts

A discoverie and no discoverie, of a world and no world, both knowne and unknowne, by a traveller that never travelled.

John Healey, *The Discoverie of a New World* (1608) translation of Joseph Hall's *Mundus alter et idem* (1605/7)

Sir Thomas More once said it would be better to burn *Utopia* “with his own hands” rather than ever see it translated.¹ “Despite its political instruction [and] the preference of communal property and shared labor,” as Marina Leslie writes, “*Utopia* was never intended as a popular, or politically instructive, text.” More was not writing for a popular audience, nor was he simply reconsidering the wisdom of the text given the Protestant Reformation. Instead, he was demonstrating a deep understanding and appreciation of the “profound change” that *Utopia*’s “political position” might inspire, and the “potential readership” that a vernacular translation would invite. It had the potential to transform utterly “the conception and reception” of his text. Indeed, as Leslie concludes, “*Utopia* offers the object lesson in how such transformations occur” (*Renaissance Utopias* 80). More’s threat demonstrates his profound foresight into how his evolving society would perceive the challenging world *Utopia* presented, but he could never have anticipated the extent to which the word has evolved into a framework for infinite worlds. *Utopia* granted utopianism a form and a place (a physical presence) that then substantiated the possibility of utopia’s existence in the real. More’s book narrates utopia’s progression to a location; no longer would utopia be limited to mythology, legend, philosophy, hope, or fantasy. Utopia could now be envisioned in the real world through real people like Vespucci, real places like Antwerp, and real concerns such as sea voyages in search of trade, or treasure, social

¹ In “The Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer” More writes: “Yf any man wolde now translate [Erasmus’s] Moria in to Englyshe, or some workes eyther that I haue my self wryten ere this, all be yt there be non harme therein/folke yet beyng (as they be) gueun to take harme of that that is good/I wolde not onely my derlynges bokes but myne owne also, helpe to burne them both wyth myne own hands, rather then folke sholde (though thorow theyr own faute) take any harme of them, seyng that I se them lykly in these days so to do” (*Complete Works* 8.1, 179).

and economic changes, and the increase in trade and colonization that accompanied the discovery. More used recognizable ideas and tangible details, such as personal correspondences, an alphabet, examples of poetry, and the visual impact of a detailed map, to heighten *Utopia's* realism. These details created what Stephen Greenblatt calls the book's "circumstantiality" (*Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 34). More's details coalesce to grant *Utopia* a rich verisimilitude allowing readers to feel more comfortable within a recognizable world in which nevertheless they simultaneously grow more familiar with Raphael Hythloday and more distant from More (as if utopia's ideal can only be realized through the steady loss of the real). Thankfully, *Utopia* was spared the consuming fires but it was still cast into an unforgiving world that would transform it, for good or ill.

Utopia's map, in particular, grants the book an extraordinary truth-effect that Louis Marin reads as demonstrative of Europe's growing interest in building empire. According to Marin, *Utopia's* map evolved from an "analogic model of its object" to a "double" for empire, or its "other":

This movement goes from representation to the utopia of representation; at the same time the represented object is converted to its simulacrum, unlocatable because it is the map in its complete correspondence to the Empire, yet different from it. Rather, the Empire is different from the map, because it remains, whereas the map is discarded. This gap is very strictly the place of the neutral. The practice of this difference is utopic (233-4).

The map fixed utopia in the neutral by seeming to locate the un-locatable at the critical point in history when the Spanish (and later English) empire-building was gathering momentum and unmooring the image of Europe in the contemporary worldview. The map in particular offers readers some "where" to point to when seeking utopia, and an imaginable ideal that More did not have to substantiate because it could remain a satirical projection of what *should* be.² In practice, the map was just an illustration to accompany More's philosophical exercise and should have been easily

² As a simulacrum in the Baudrillardian sense in which a thing bears no relation to reality, but still manages to appeal to it.

dismissed as such.³ After all, the ideal place, or the “utopia of representation,” is all it *actually* represents. Of course, the practice of utopia is the avenue to the neutral, as Marin reminds us, and the “gap” between a map that seems “real” and the fact that it is not, allows for the realization of utopia’s neutrality.

Maps are a visual and tangible medium used to idealize the real in contrast to the more abstract (and ever changing) narratives of philosophy, and myth. In the early modern, they also mitigated the otherness implied by the idea of utopia and the New World by granting the viewer/owner a sense of possession, of somehow knowing the unknowable, and of having the land always within reach (a quality that has particular consequences for women). Darby Lewes considers the related construction of women-as-land through maps in *Nudes from Nowhere* (2000): “Maps assuage the dread of accidentally confronting something unexpected and terrible, of being engulfed in wilderness. [...] A map orders the disorderly, controls the uncontrollable. [...] Even *terra incognita* becomes less frightening when a map defines its location and boundaries” (133). Mapping the threatening woman-as-land, cartographically and textually, pacifies her and suggests she is (paradoxically) a knowable *terra incognita*. Exploiting this ambiguous knowledge and possession by way of feminization, More’s map focuses the reader’s attention away from *Utopia*’s text, which was always already “nowhere,” and towards the specific details that are antithetical to utopia: property and ownership. Maps illustrate the boundaries of property through naming, categorization, and enclosure, and are able to enclose the totality of a land that has been conquered, claimed, and possessed. Considered from Marin’s perspective, More’s map exploits this contradiction because if the map is positive and the text negative, neutrality surfaces, and a utopic space emerges. Its map of a deliberately feminized,

³ According to Leslie, maps were curiosities until 1579 when the popularity of Christopher Saxton’s “Atlas of the Counties of England and Wales” gave people a physical image of the world: “Topographically speaking, Utopia graphically locates the discovery of the other as the discovery of the self at the very border shared by geographical and chorographical traditions” (37). The rarity of maps elevated the authority of More’s map and the image in conjunction with the text accentuated this effect.

womb-shaped island allows *Utopia* to be more easily consumable, divisible, exchangeable, and most importantly, cartographically containable. *Utopia*'s textual and visual ambiguity is also fostered by what Greenblatt argues is More's tendency to "return again and again to the unsettling of man's sense of reality." The destabilization makes *Utopia* a "playground with a shifting series of apparently incompatible impulses [that] can find intense expression without flying apart or turning violently on each other (*Self-Fashioning* 24-5, 56-7). A tendency to unsettle reality (not just because of the psychoanalytical implications drawn from any assault on reality) materializes in every utopia (not just *Utopia*) and creates the sense of play that is most relevant to this dissertation. Greenblatt recognized this effect in More's self-fashioning and simultaneous self-cancellation, and certainly *Utopia* displays a simultaneity of nonsense and "absolute order" that demonstrates More's efforts at resolving the "near-chaos" of contradiction through his organized, if elusive, ideal vision.⁴

More used *Utopia* as an outlet for his self-fashioning, but utopianism also granted him the conceptual substance, neutrality in form, and inherent ambiguity that ultimately rendered his self-fashioning so contradictory. Utopia was already ambiguous when More named it, and this quality led to his own self-fashioning through *Utopia*. I am not trying to imply a chicken-and-egg scenario, but these contradictions, which materialize (for More) as simultaneous self-fashioning or cancellation, reveal utopia's unavoidable ambiguity and demonstrate why Greenblatt reads *Utopia* as "at once the perfect expression of [More's] self-conscious role-playing and an intense meditation upon its limitations" (33). Within Greenblatt's reading is my own; his language describes *Utopia* as "perfect" but "limited" as he argues that it represents More's "incompleteness." The same lack that underlies all forms of imperfections, including

⁴ Greenblatt details the interplay between self-fashioning and self-cancellation by demonstrating how self-fashioning relied on cultural institutions as the means by which the self identifies with culture at the very moment of its apparent resistance. The self's power to shape identity is defined by "captivity" to the authority of various cultural institutions from which the self tries to fashion itself (See *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* 8-9).

incompleteness, animates utopia's ambiguous play to allow transgression and gender fluidity thereby establishing utopia as an imperfect space that must perpetually strive for perfection. More's self-fashioning is further defined by a friction linked to his desire to plant a utopian hope for perfection within an inescapable incompleteness of reality; *Utopia*, scathing and satirical on one level, humorous and thought provoking on another, emerged from the dissonant friction of this division. Ultimately, any discussion of incompleteness must be considered within the gender binary that designates Man as complete, and Woman as incomplete. Greenblatt concludes his reading of *Utopia* by noting that More's self-fashioning also rested on the "perception of all that it excludes, all that lies in perpetual darkness, all that is known only as absence" (58). *Utopia* does not fail to demonstrate friction over the gender binary; from its waterless water to its unknowable cities, *Utopia* is consistently defined by absence or lack, or described as containing nothing and located no-place.⁵

It may have been a satire intended for a specific, limited audience of men, but *Utopia* was also one of the first narratives to imagine England's hopes (colonial, utopian or otherwise) specifically in the New World. In *An Empire Nowhere* (1992), Jeffrey Knapp argues that *Utopia*'s implied location in the New World, when set in opposition to the Old, was based on the "otherworldliness that both places seem to share." More, as Knapp continues, "can imagine England a Nowhere only negatively, as a nation either isolated by its material distance from Christendom or internally devastated by materialist hunger for enclosed land" (8). The New World as Other World and England as otherworldly comprised a new binary that maintained a "continuum of reality" that set the spaces permanently in opposition to, but in conjunction with, each other. Continuums fuel a sort of circular reasoning, and circularity is a critical element of utopia; utopias could represent both the destination one moved towards *and* the

⁵ In Book 2, Raphael (whose own name is a three-way pun) describes Amaurot, the main city in Utopia (from the Greek, meaning "unknown or dark city") that sits on Anyder river (from the Greek, meaning "waterless") (*Utopia* 32-3, notes 1 and 7).

nostalgic origin one left behind, or as the ideal space that required enclosure for its realization. *Utopia's* circularity leads forwards (westward) in order to leave behind the real, and backward (eastward) towards the origin to regain the lost ideal sought in the Americas as a new, less divided, origin: "More, it would seem, wants England and America to share in an otherness that the Utopian island both demarcates and names," according to Knapp, and the construction of England as the impermeable Self and Spain as the Other fit neatly into the paradigm (35). Both nations had to be the unknown destination and the reclaimed origin, now controlled through an idealized "utopic" colonization, which only served to recreate the binary infinitely. Contradictory and circular as this analogy may seem, utopia emerges from within a new malleable, expanding world in which the other is absorbed into the self, and the unknown is refashioned as knowable. Embodying a tangible hope of actualizing perfection through the free movement of signification, utopia grew exponentially as it expanded circularly. By anchoring this ideal in real world concerns and discoveries, More fixed the word as he liberated it: Visually, through the maps that mocked its suggested shape, and conceptually through its representation as a womb that would allow it to hold and nourish just about any conception of the ideal. Humanity's ideal now had a familiar form to fit into, a place to point to, and a matrix to fuse itself to, in its becoming.

To realize Plato's philosophical ideals More's utopia had to be more than a dialogue and, since *Utopia* could be sailed into, More accomplished that goal. Louis Marin intriguingly describes the threatening, rocky inlet "welcoming" sailors into Utopia:

There is thus a sort of indentation hollowing out its edge, if not its center. It creates a large gulf filled by the sea, surrounded by terraced hillsides. [...] More explains that it is very dangerous to enter into the gulf. A Utopian pilot must accompany all who attempt it. And even he must carefully follow the signals from a number of landmarks erected on shore (102-3).

Access to utopia depends on finding a guide who already knows the way, or who has "known" her, or even one who may have lost her but hopes to regain the wholeness she

promised. Following the map's church spires directs travelers through the dangers of entering the virgin territory/womb of the New World and suggests that safe passage through this threatening, hazardous vagina only requires following man's divine buildings. Amy Boesky explores the unique historical moment of More's *Utopia* in *Founding Fictions* (1996) and argues that the development of utopian discourse was intricately connected to the increasing authority granted to several new "institutions" in the early modern nation-state: "Utopian discourse rose alongside the emergent institutions of the early modern state: the new schools, laboratories, workhouses, theaters, and colonial plantations that became crucial centers of authority as power shifted in England from the court and church to a widening aristocracy and growing bourgeoisie." *Utopia* demonstrated the increasing reforms in public education because More fostered a hopeful "simulacrum for reform" through these institutions (3). Of these several institutions, the most influential are represented by the church steeples poised like arrows at the mouth of Utopia on the map, and the new educational freedom that guaranteed Utopians the humanist education that More advocated throughout his writings. Unfortunately, the only access to the wonders of these newly reformed institutions was that threatening, rocky inlet. The route may be dangerous, but it feels achievable because of More's efforts at familiarizing his reader with the island through careful dialogue combined with a voyeuristic perspective that beckons the reader in with More's guidebook in hand.

In *Utopia's* prefatory letter from Erasmus to Ulrich von Hutton, Erasmus discusses More's organization of the book: "He published *Utopia* for the purpose of showing, what are the things that occasion mischief in commonwealths; having the English constitution especially in view. [...] He had written the second book at his leisure, and afterwards, when he found it was required, added the first off-hand. Hence there is some inequality in the style" (132). More "saw" utopia before he saw the "way" to utopia, or rather, the direction he needed to take his reader for them to "access" utopia. The incongruence between *Utopia's* two books has led to speculation,

usually over why the two books are ordered as they are, and why their tones, styles, and intentions seem so different. After all, More wrote the books in reverse order and may have considered each distinctly. This does not seem so odd given that the place had to be imagined before the way to the place could be conceived; utopia had to exist before *Utopia*. Once named, the place is easier to describe than the way to the place (a question More dexterously avoids). The letters prefacing the book foster intimacy that brings readers into the “joke” of Utopia by allowing them to eavesdrop into a casual discussion among peers. Readers join More’s correspondence with Peter Giles, and from there join Peter Giles’s correspondence with Jerome Busleiden, and so on around back to More and others, all before ever entering Antwerp, let alone Utopia. We gain Giles through More, and then Giles takes up the baton and introduces More (along with the reader) to the mysterious Raphael (and Utopia) whose foreignness fades as More (and Europe) grows more distant (*Self-Fashioning* 34-5). Utopia’s introduction is progressive and circles outward from epistolary intimacy to the familiar relatively familiar Antwerp in More’s company until, gradually, the narrative moves outward to unfamiliar discussions and descriptions. In Book 2, the reader arrives in Utopia in the company of Raphael who was so recently a stranger.

For Utopia to be believable and imaginable, it must be feminized, and if we can understand the circle as a feminized form within utopianism, this is precisely the journey *Utopia* follows. Book 1 begins as a correspondence (dialogue at a distance), then moves to a journey, and then to a dialogue between new friends, only to turn over the narrative completely to Raphael. He alone, whom the reader has now come to “know,” can take him or her to the Utopia the character has come to know. Even then, More does not take the reader to the island as it is, but as it was because his first description of Utopia begins with the island’s origin story. He combines their creation myth and foundational geography and establishes the island’s formation. The reader must travel to Utopia from the distance of ancient history so the transition will be less jarring, seem less alien, and foster less xenophobia. More does a far better job of

avoiding the awe and fear of the Other than the New World discovery accounts because he devises a foundational “original” similarity between Europe and Utopia. Approaching the island through the safety and distance of a similar history and geography normalizes Utopia through their new identifiable Greco-Roman origins. Raphael notes that Utopians share Roman and Egyptian origins with Europeans, and in Book Two he concludes that they must have descended from Greece because of their affinity for the Greek language (they learn it easily and their language shares linguistic similarities to it). Raphael connects the origins of both languages to alleviate the foreignness still further, an idea the New World discovery accounts echoed in their own descriptions.⁶ If you combine the empowerment gained from the foundations established by the map, alphabet, and the poetry of commendation, and add the progressive narrative movement, a reader begins to feel as if he or she knows “them” and is thus no longer facing a foreigner but meeting long-lost relatives instead; going to utopia then feels like coming home. More first mentions the New World in his prefatory letter to Giles. He immediately apologizes for his lack of specificity about the location:

Whether through my fault, or yours, or Raphael’s, I’m not sure. For it didn’t occur to us to ask, nor to him to say, in what area of the New World Utopia is to be found [...] for I’m quite ashamed not to know even the name of the ocean where this island lies about which I’ve written so much (110).

Vespucci is mentioned specifically in Book 1 when we are told that Raphael “accompanied Vespucci on the last three of his four voyages, accounts of which are now common reading everywhere” (5). He is mentioned again in the second letter between Giles and Busleiden: “Such a man as this has not, I think, been born in the last eight hundred years; by comparison with him, Vespucci seems hardly to have seen anything at all” (112). Raphael (who does not exist) is described quite truthfully as “a

⁶ Thomas Harriot in his *A Briefe and True Report of the New Found land of Virginia* (1588) included woodcut illustrations that depicted Native American peoples in direct comparison to the Picts (the ancient peoples of Britain). This very popular, elaborately illustrated, book went through several editions and included a dramatic frontispiece of Adam and Eve’s temptation which strengthened the New World connection with Paradise/Utopia. Curiously, Harriot described a Native America creation myth in his text that includes a woman created first by God, and then God begetting men through her (25).

man whose like has not been born,” but this implies that Vespucci’s accounts of the New World were fantastical. *Utopia*, a work of fiction, posits as “true” what it simultaneously negates or disavows, and insists, here, that Vespucci’s text that posits itself as truth is a fantasy.

Indeed, Utopia *seems* true, has maps and a history that suggest its existence, but it is also consistently described as “nowhere.” The critical piece of information—its location—is lost to history in the whisper or cough along with the reality that only “no one” has actually sailed there; although in Utopia, no one is someone:

For while Raphael was speaking of it, one of More’s servants came in to whisper something in his ear; and though I was listening, for that very reason, more intently than ever, one of the company, who I supposed had caught cold on shipboard, coughed so loudly that some of Raphael’s words escaped me (113).

Marin reads this moment as suggestive of the island’s space being erased by two passages of air (one quiet the other violent) and replaced by its form: “Perhaps because it had no other reality than breath itself. [...] During this passage something has been lost, irretrievably the island’s very place in the world; it is found again but displaced to another space, as a figure in the text” (86). Utopia takes shape in the tension between the surreal existence that results when an ideal world is linked to the real and the ability to meander freely between them becomes possible. The discovery of the fictional Utopia and the real New World depends on fluidity in form and language. Utopia’s actual location does not matter, after all, because More insists that his text will “contain nothing false and [omit] nothing true.” He does not want to include an erroneous location but wants to locate Utopia textually within the ambiguous formlessness of a New World whose discovery depended on error and wandering.⁷

⁷ Antonis Balasopoulous considers More’s choice of Vespucci as Raphael’s guide and argues that the discovery of Utopia (even without a specific location) echoes the discovery of the New World in a specific way: “More’s traveler becomes the genre’s paradigmatic means of articulating the interface between the two etymological vectors of *errare*: ‘erring’ and ‘wandering’ are congenitally linked. But their conjunction does not amount to an act of dismissing the truth-claims of those wandering in error. Like the ‘discovery’ of America by the erring Columbus, the discovery of Utopia by the careless Hythlodæus is an illustration of the paradoxical compatibility

The New World and Utopia both were discovered by mistake, or in error; this at once naturalizes error and recalls the Utopian definition of pleasure and natural law. They believe that true happiness must agree with natural law, and trying to find pleasure as what is “unnatural,” or what goes against nature, only leads to unhappiness. Utopians rigidly apply “law” to “nature,” and so slavery, if not death, is the punishment for seeking pleasure in what is unnatural. Absolute happiness, or what they term “bliss,” can be found only in the Utopian’s “heaven” because it promises unrestricted freedom of movement. Wandering led Raphael to Utopia, but once there, he would not be allowed to wander because citizens are prohibited from unrestricted travel; slaves are forced to serve and their movements are restricted, but travel is socially discouraged even for citizens in good standing. Everyone requires a travel permit that is difficult to obtain. How contradictory that the freedom of movement is so strictly regulated in a land that defines the ultimate divine reward as freedom of movement. Why would Utopia not offer freedom of movement as a basic right instead of classifying it as unnatural? The real world may have been troubled with increasing land enclosures that restricted movement, but it seems that there is no more categorically restricted space than Utopia. Indeed, only the afterlife promises Utopians as much freedom of movement as they could desire:

For they think that dead persons are actually present among us, and hear what we say about them [...]. Given their state of bliss, the dead must be able to travel freely where they please, and they are bound to want to revisit their friends, whom they loved and honored during their lives. Like all other good things, they think that after death freedom of motion is increased rather than decreased in all good men; and thus they believe the dead come frequently among the living (76).

Strange enough that they even imagine the “bliss” of heaven in utopia (a hyper-utopia, or a space more perfect than perfection), but death promises freedom of movement as

between peddling nonsense and offering knowledge, an example of the utility of disorienting error for the attainment of truth. [...] If the island of Utopia is without place, it is literally because the text makes no place for the questions the task of orientation dictates. In a milieu where the discovery of the new—both the real discovery of America and the fictional one of Utopia—seems to hinge on the semantic duplicity and apparent contagiousness of *errare*, the loss of bearings and its attendant risks has become as inescapable as a law of nature” (136-7).

a “good thing.” Freedom of movement is “good” only after death when “freedom of motion” is “increased,” at least for “good *men*.”

If the law can be understood as the structure of masculine hierarchy (here rigidly applied to categorizing “happiness”), and if nature is understood as feminized within that hierarchy, then the Utopian understanding of natural law illustrates the division and struggle to divide genders along a binary. Their “limited number of pleasures,” as Greenblatt notes, are “ranked hierarchically” because “pleasure is something located *outside* men; indeed there is scarcely any inside” (*Self-Fashioning* 45). *Utopia* is about division (defined through gender division) as much as it is about how that division emerges from the enclosure of England’s evolving economy. Despite the many freedoms offered to Utopian women, More’s *Utopia* is certainly a masculine endeavor. Women in Utopia have uncommon freedoms, but those freedoms are granted only according to the expectations of men:⁸ “Every person (and this includes women as well as men) learns a second trade, besides agriculture. As a weaker sex, women practice the lighter crafts, such as working in wool or linen; the heavier jobs are assigned to men” (37). Even pleasure itself is “outside of men,” because we can extend Greenblatt’s argument by removing the self (“men”) altogether and leaving what I think Greenblatt anticipates: an internal emptiness. If pleasure is located “outside,” then in utopia, one is left roaming freely out there in a “state of bliss” (like the Utopian dead). Certainly, what is “outside” depends on location. From inside utopia, one cannot know the real, and from outside utopia, the ideal utopia promises suggests all one might desire. The law of nature is the only law that applied to Utopians, and to defy this law and seek happiness in what they considered unnatural is to be in error, or to be un-Utopian. If we view Utopia through the cultural lens that drew Woman as

⁸ Filio Diamanti notes that the freedoms granted to women in utopia were still marked by the giver, the patriarchy, who dictated what constituted a woman’s utopia and what it should/would be for her: “Paternalistic attitudes are evident in most of the utopian thinkers [...] as women owe their emancipation to benevolent patriarchy. Men magnanimously give women ‘a world of their own’ without even seeking their opinion or consent” (137). The assumption that men know what women must want, or what they would find utopic, is part of the conflict raised whenever we consider if the Self can ever really know, or speak for, the Other.

nature, then their law is as feminized as their island. Utopia is “built” quite unnaturally by Utopos; his division of the island from the mainland was not an error, but intentional and undertaken for the “good” of the people he conquered. To create Utopia, so long as it is fitting for men, is acceptable, even if it is within a dialogue of error and through the materiality of Woman as “errors,” or incomplete men, coming from a womb that was simply not hot enough to produce a son. Error was monstrous, incomplete, and Other to perfection. After all, both Utopia and the New World were discovered in (and as) *error* and by wanderers.

More wanted to connect *Utopia* with the “real” New World, but also with the “ideal” of Plato’s *Republic*, the most familiar classical example of an ideal city: “[Utopia] is a place, known so far to only a few men, but which should be studied by many, as going far beyond Plato’s *Republic*” (112). It is directly compared to, and described as, going farther (evoking a physical, geographic movement) than Plato’s abstract philosophical dialogue, thereby concretizing the movement from concept to place. Utopia’s Book 1 is a dialogue like *The Republic* and prepares readers for the journey to Utopia, and also establishes the critical philosophical elements from *Republic* that More believed Utopia shares with the classical utopia:

Thus I am wholly convinced that unless private property is entirely done away with, there can be no fair or just distribution of goods, nor can mankind be happily governed. As long as private property remains, by far the largest and the best part of mankind will be oppressed by a heavy inescapable burden of cares and anxieties (*Utopia* 28).

Without the suspension of private property, without a cultural shift in society’s equity and authority in the laws governing ownership and exchange, “the best part of mankind” will suffer a burden of oppression. More did not insist that woman would belong to this “best part,” just as Plato considered female guardians the “weaker sex.” As long as women were subject to, and used as, metaphor and illustration for a system of exchange and private ownership as property, then their burden of oppression surfaces here as it did in Plato’s text. On this point, Greenblatt argues that “private ownership of property is causally linked in *Utopia* to private ownership of self,” and so

“to abolish private property is to render such self-conscious individuality obsolete” (*Self-Fashioning* 39). How does individuality and “ownership of the self” figure within a gender binary that implies ownership of women? Individuality is obsolete among the men of Utopia, but individuality for women was exceptional long before the removal of private property in Utopia criticized the growing preference for common ownership. Utopia presents the ideal within a world already predicated on a gender binary expressed as a violent duality requiring the oppression of women; *Utopia* attempts to resolve this oppression. However, in any discussion of property and exchange, power is fundamental, and women (and their bodies) represent property because relationships of power always denote gender.

The evils of private property are certainly presented as a serious obstacle to realizing social improvement in England, but there can be no doubt that Utopia was born of conquest and colonialism (like the New World), and central to the dynamics of colonialism is property and ownership. Utopia was the spoils of a bloody conquest and brutal oppression of “rude and uncouth inhabitants.” The indigenous peoples were “subdued” at the hands of civilizing Utopos before he “cut a channel fifteen miles wide where their land joined the continent and caused the sea to flow around the country” (31) to encourage their isolation. Furthermore, whenever Utopians need more land, their method of acquiring it is neither equitable nor fair. Either the peoples of the desired lands submit to their “superior” methods and laws, or they will deem it justifiable “to make war on people who leave their land idle and waste, yet forbid the use of it to others who, by the law of nature, ought to be supported from it” (41). It comes as no surprise that most of the conquered people discussed in the book submit readily to the conquering Utopians. The Utopian “law of nature” grants them the right to brutal colonization and war, a justification not unlike the one used in the colonization of the Americas. The central impetus behind Utopian colonization is the belief that it is acceptable to steal land if it is taken to prevent idleness and waste. More adopted the real world expectations of colonized worlds by following how the

Spanish focused on asserting ownership through divine right asserted by Papal Decree, but the English (like the Utopians) focused on colonial establishment through land cultivation. In her book *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World* (1995), Patricia Seed explains that the legal declarations of the validity of ownership and rights to New World lands were drastically different between European powers. One nation often did not understand, recognize, or accept another nation's methods for declaring their rights to conquered land. For instance, for Spain, ritual was primary; the formalized public reading of the *requerimiento* enacted their rights to any land. Upon landing, the requirement declared that all inhabitants must submit to the Spanish crown and Christianity or suffer violent consequences (never mind that it was always spoken in Spanish alone, and often only in the presence of Europeans). The witnessed act itself, not the comprehension, was legally binding and established full rights of ownership and governance. For the English, building, cultivation, and the continued good husbandry of the land defined those rights: "In English law, neither a ceremony nor a document but the ordinary action of constructing a dwelling place created the right of possession. The continuing presence and habitation of the *object*—the house—maintained that right" (19). The expression of rights and authority differed between nations, but each resulted in a unique form of conquest and the oppression of native peoples.

These examples, taken together, suggest that *Utopia* is more a colonial text than a treaty of social reform. After all, More confronts the English expectation that uncultivated land is, by right, up for grabs if only the conqueror maintains it and builds upon it. From its earliest colonial impulses in Ireland, England called its settlements "plantations" for this very reason (Seed 31). However, Timothy Sweet studies *Utopia* as a form of promotional literature and argues that More's inspiration was actually Columbus's discovery rather than the more popular Vespucci accounts. According to Sweet, More located *Utopia's* ideal political economy in the New World, but "showed little interest in the material specificity of New World environments" (403). I agree

with the inspiration and political aspects, but More shows great interest in at least one very specific “material” that is firmly connected to the goals of colonization: The New World gold, satirically derided in *Utopia* as the single greatest symbol of the European hope for wealth and resources through colonialism. Gold is useless in Utopia, except for making chamber pots and the shame-inducing chains of slaves. More sensed the drive for gold was destructive to the “utopia” of the New World as it contributed to establishing private property as the *primary* impetus for colonization and Empire.⁹ The myths of El Dorado (the legendary golden city) and the Fountain of Youth (popularized through medieval texts) fueled the westward efforts toward colony and gold for over a century. At once, *Utopia* criticizes the hunger for wealth accumulation, as it grants Utopia a colonial history and a colonial imperative to their treatment of land. However, the vast amounts of gold that the New World “promised” began flooding in to enrich and empower Spain’s Empire while England watched, failed, and pirated, and when More’s *Utopia* emerged, Spain’s Galleon Fleets had established regular trade routes only 30 years after the discovery.¹⁰

Whether it was meant as a critique or an homage (or both), More makes a colonial power of Utopia as an insular island; Utopos violently severs the island from its mainland to secure his colonial control through isolation. He reverses the image of the discovery as an opening or revelation that forged a bond (based on trade) between the isolated New World and the European “mainland.” Even with this overwhelmingly masculine utopic design, *Utopia*’s origin echoes the earliest mythological origin as well. Utopos, in a sense, kept his creation in/as a womb, refusing to share it with the greater world by ensuring it remained perpetually awash in protective surrounding waters, and a rocky harbor one must “know” to penetrate. More recognized that the New World would open the floodgates of trade routes founded on gold and other

⁹ More may have also been referencing the East, as opposed to the West, in *Utopia*. See Romould Ian Lakowski’s “Geography and the More Circle: John Rastell, Thomas More and the New World.”

¹⁰ “By the time of the accession of King Philip II (reigned 1556-1598), the Spanish [...] had been running a convoy system between Spain and the New World for three decades” (Konstam 6).

resources, and so by enclosing Utopia's borders, he ensured the same would not happen there. Utopos formed this island as woman-as-land in order to allow his newly conquered people to live his utopia; their creation story became man founding (and isolating) land-as-woman. Sweet, once again, argues that *Utopia* helped promote colonialism, and consequently, the New World emerged as utopic because of this contradictory dialogue.¹¹ The resulting vision fostered an image of the Americas as a *tabula rasa*, visualized as a space of waste and emptiness that was widespread and would contribute to utopias from literature to philosophy, and to various real-world utopian projects, from the discovery accounts and onwards. The New World offered the required space, while colonial efforts in the Americas offered the promise for a renewed socio-political hope, but mythology offered the narrative through which utopic perfection was imagined as attainable. The description of the New World as empty and available persisted as England, Spain, France, The Netherlands, and any other nation resolved to "civilize" the "waste" land and its inhabitants, came to see the Americas as a space of utopic potential.

There are many such connections between *Utopia* and More's social landscape, and between utopia as philosophy and genre. However, the one question bridging the many forms of utopian discourse is the consideration of whether utopia must be static to be perfect, and as such, will always fail as a blueprint for change. Indeed, More's *Utopia* satirically resists change at every turn; Utopia's cities are all identical, and the population of each city is strictly fixed. Furthermore, all children and property are held in common according to strictly outlined social expectations, and the laws governing such expectations are so perfect that no change is needed, and hence, no lawyers are

¹¹ "The Utopian economic base (which resembles that of agrarian England in important respects) is replicated on this 'waste' land. Such a view of colonization established an assumption that would become crucial in legitimating the appropriation of indigenous Americans' land: the natives are assumed not to cultivate the land. They can either join with the Utopians, who will make the land abundantly productive, or resist colonization, in which case they will be driven off by war. [...] More's passage on colonization registers the important characterization of New World land as 'waste,' even though inhabited, which was taken up by the late sixteenth-century promoters" (Sweet 403).

required. Of course, *Utopia* was never meant as a blueprint for “real” society, but many serious manifestos followed the book’s suggestions closely. Nevertheless, without change, utopia is unimaginable and therefore, the possibility of change, the moment of change itself, *is* utopia. Once a utopia stops changing, becomes “complete,” then it is no longer utopia. The varied dialogue that “utopia” inspires, and the way that historical dialogue allows for the continued revision of humanity’s ideal state over time and across eras, is testament to utopia as progress, even if *Utopia* demands stasis.

Whether it captures stasis or embodies progress only complicates utopia’s potential as a political tool for practical change. Many have believed in various utopic endeavors and have suffered criticism and complaints for their beliefs. *Utopia* never offered a practical path to the ideal, but the possibility that utopian plans *might* offer that ideal world is somehow sufficient. Jennifer Burwell considers this conflict as a “disconnect” between the possibility of the improvement utopia (rather than *Utopia*) promises and the reality that it fails to deliver:

To the extent that utopian constructions posit a self-contained and inaccessible ideal “elsewhere” where social contradiction has always already been resolved, they abandon a critical connection to contemporary conditions; to the extent that internal critiques confine themselves to negative hermeneutics of exposure, they fail to present a positive alternative. If internal critique must confront its inability to escape the social structures of oppression or do more than merely describe existing conditions, utopia must confront its disengagement—as a mere escape—from these conditions. In one sense, then, the limitation of the one impulse is precisely the absence of the other: without a utopian horizon, the critical impulse, the utopian impulse becomes totally disconnected from the historical conditions of its production (ix).

Burwell outlines how literary utopias stand against theoretical utopian concepts from the perspective of a critical “disconnect.” The two may contradict, as Burwell asserts, but the current conditions of literary utopias indicate that contradiction and ambiguity do not necessarily disavow their historical conditions. Utopias work as a flexible tool because their contradiction allows the truth of what is outside (the historical real) to move freely across boundaries (porous as they must be) and become imaginable. We could not imagine utopia unless it allows for the ambiguity and contradiction that seem to disallow its realization

Utopia's ideality requires contradiction, and it emerges in how the text negotiates private property, and by extension, women and gender.¹² A society based on private property strives for the infinite acquirement of more property, regardless of the consequences. Raphael insists that private property is the singular detail preventing the rest of the world from achieving the perfection of Utopia: “one single monster, the prime plague and begetter of all others—I mean Pride” (84). The exchange of private property feeds the growth of ego, pride, and Hubris (who demands that all things must be attained at the expense of someone else), and so Utopia’s “goodness” comes from its lack of private property. Woman emerges as both lack *and* the object of private property when Raphael names the singular sin leading to the need for utopia in the first place as Hubris (another “monstrous” mythological woman). The pleasure of possession, as Greenblatt notes, is at least in part, “the knowledge that someone else desires and does *not* possess what you do. In Utopia, pride of possession and pride of place are obliterated” (*Self-Fashioning* 39). Using terms like “desire” and “pleasure” to metaphorize these exchanges exemplifies the role of women in the critical literature as well. Hubris, in all her mythic, female presence, is the one true enemy; she is vilified and derided, and represents the root of all the misfortune barring the realization of utopia. Pride is not just a woman; she is the evil preventing good English men from achieving utopia:

Pride measures her advantage not by what she has but by what other people lack. Pride would not condescend even to be made a goddess, if there were no wretches for her to sneer at and domineer over. [...] Pride is a serpent from hell which twines itself around the hearts of men; and it acts like the suckfish in holding them back from choosing a better way of life (*Utopia* 84).

¹² Christopher Kendrick argues that contradiction is a required condition for the early modern utopia: “When there is a strong sense of entrenched, extensively damaging contradiction on the one hand, and of alternate social possibilities on the other [...] the (Renaissance) utopia bespeaks, and is tailored to provoke recognition of and reflection upon, a certain kind of contradiction, contradiction determined by (archaic) uneven development” (6-7). Kendrick’s reading also suggests that utopia emerged from the space between contradiction and possibility (defined as the liminal, or neutral, or metaphorized as a “threshold”). It is a troublesome space that requires the utopist reflect upon contradiction to allow his or her utopia to emerge from it, and then change it.

At once tempting snake and monstrous suckfish, Pride emerges as a new Eve once again in league with the snake to recreate Woman's role in the loss of Eden. It is not merely that the mythological Hubris reaffirmed as consuming (sucking) female substantiates this connection, but that Hubris is specifically empowered not by what she possesses, or by who she is, but through lack. She derives all her substance, power, identity, and "advantage" from "what other people lack." Women are defined by lack, but in utopia, that lack grants her fluidity. Pride is referred to through shifting pronouns that denote her as "she" and "her" (and even, in the role she rejects, as "goddess") only to elide her with the phallic serpent, and negate her powerful femininity leaving her a genderless objectified "it" preventing "the hearts of men" from choosing better.

The early modern allowed utopia to "become" by grace of this gender fluidity in both name and place, and this is far more important than where utopia "originated." To understand this complicated discovery I had to go back a little further and wander a bit farther than More's book. Utopia emerged with as many origins as myth itself, and during the early modern, many of these were renegotiated. Utopias of every stripe were vying for a space of unimaginable proportions thanks to the much circulated discovery accounts.¹³ In a way, More realized *Utopia's* own "self-fashioning" at this dramatic "point of encounter" What is produced "partakes of both the authority and the alien that is marked for attack, and hence [any] achieved identity always contains with itself the signs of its own subversion and loss" (*Self-Fashioning* 9). Utopia did not start with *Utopia*, and it continued to become, take on new names, nurture new concepts, and simultaneously represent the subversion and loss society used to imagine its own improvement. That potential took form at the point of encounter between

¹³ Vespucci's accounts of these voyages circulated widely through Europe after their publication in 1507, and did more to make him famous than the earlier and more substantial explorations of Columbus and Cabot (*Utopia* 5, note 1). John Cabot was an Italian navigator and explorer purported to have landed in Canada in 1497. Almost everything related to his voyage is speculative. He travelled under English authority, as opposed to Columbus, who had once asked Henry VII for support, but was unsuccessful (eventually finding support with Spain, England's competitor).

Utopia's two worlds: Between England and the possibility of *Utopia*, or between England and the Americas as utopia (or, between the name and the place).

More's self-fashioning, as Greenblatt notes, was reflected in how England and Utopia, as two worlds, "occupy the same space and are in an essentially unstable relationship to each other" (22). Simultaneity is intrinsic to utopia, as is instability (as any transgressive reflection upon the Self/Other must be). *Utopia* usurped the possibility of divine perfection through salvation from the Church by dispersing that potential among the varied imaginations of whoever might envision it. Salvation was no longer the only door to the promise of eternal perfection in an unknowable heaven: After the discovery, the seemingly knowable ocean now led one to a utopia of human proportions and accessibility (or, at least back to the foothills of Paradise found). Raphael did not wander with a fictional captain to a fictional land; he sailed with Amerigo Vespucci to a Utopia in a New World where fiction and reality blurred. He sailed with the very man whose name was given to "America," the feminized name of the father in the well-practiced tradition of naming land (along with continents and newly emerging nation-states¹⁴) after women. Following suit, Utopia is named after *her* father and his mythology, Utopos, who tore her away from the mainland to keep her enclosed in his womb.

Utopia's violent birth clearly confronts colonialism, but it also recalls the origin myths and related constructions of utopia. Once again, Louis Marin eloquently defines how Utopia's birth indicates its own profoundly vicious "creation myth" and reaffirms the same myths of violence against "the earth itself" (Gaia present, but silenced) that the colonial dialogue adopted. This is a rape "naturalized" as a method to access new lands, through a masculinized birth:

¹⁴ In *Imaginary Communities* (2002), Phillip Wegner argues that "the narrative utopia plays a crucial role in the constitution of the nation-state as an original spatial, social and cultural form" (xvi). Wegner asserts that narrative utopias emerging at this point of historical modernity allowed the concept of the nation-state to be more easily imagined and to be more readily attempted.

The island of Utopia, womblike matrix and mother, originates in a violent gesture aimed at the earth itself; its birth is the work of no less violence. The narrative produces a new tension or ambivalence as a result. On the one hand is offered to us the image of welcoming enclosed space, tranquilly situated about a center that is to be both vacuum and fullness. On the other hand we see war and violent aggression opening up space. It detaches and separates. Utopos is the male, the father; Utopia is the lunar island, enclosed and warm, the mother. This is a desire wrapped in contrary figures. It traverses them successively as if proof of itself (108).

The creator is no longer neutral Chaos or Maternal Gaia, but Utopos, the colonist who forms (and seals) his own womb through a violent “castration” of the land, and by invoking not creative chaos, but the mythic violence of the male gods. Utopia’s transgressive “tension and ambivalence” allow for fluidity that is born of the same “war and violent aggression” that installed the binary in the first place. More’s traveler, together with his description of Utopos and the origin of Utopia, build a rigidly patriarchal foundation for Utopia, but More also included himself in Raphael’s audience, transgressing the lines between fact and fiction, as only a utopia could allow him to do. The early modern English dialogue about the New World was, from the outset, fantastical, fictional, and difficult to concretize because it was a project of possibility in the ideal rather than the real.¹⁵ The ideal it offered seemed fleeting and was, therefore, ripe for *Utopia*’s mixture of place and non-place, of fact and fiction, history and myth, and of allowing the word to figure itself out and become what it would. Place, genre, and concept all coalesced for utopia to become. I have explored the origins of utopia’s ambiguous conceptualization and development as a literary genre and now turn my attention to the New World discovery that granted utopia limitless space for its possible realization.

The conjecture that filled the mythical accounts of “foreign” lands was once considered a reliable resource, but it was swiftly becoming insufficient because the development of scientific observation was growing in tandem with the exploration of

¹⁵ As Jeffrey Knapp writes, “the first references to the New World printed in England occur not in economic, political, or even geographical tracts but in imaginative literature, and then in association with idleness and folly” (22).

the world, the heavens, and the body. These advancements proved relevant to how discovery accounts acted as formal “observations” of the New World. In *The Body Emblazoned* (1995), Jonathan Sawday discusses the human body in Renaissance culture and how the discussions of the New World (like those of the human body) granted an increasing amount of authority to the “witnessing” that had been key to travel writing since the fourth century Christian pilgrimages. Mary Baine Campbell in *The Witness and the Other World* (1988) notes that Christianity was the first Western religion in which “the sacred territory is located emphatically Elsewhere,” and as a result “Christian pilgrimages are the first to lead pilgrims abroad on their religious travels.” This then intensified the “urge to bear witness”:

Beyond the practical and contingent reasons for the altered vision of the Christian travel writer, there is the fundamental metaphysical issue of ‘witnessing’ itself. Not only does the individual ‘witness’ assume a previously inconceivable importance, in light of the apostolic and evangelical origins of the new religion, but the nature of what the traveler is called on to witness has changed as well (18).

Columbus’s journals can certainly be categorized as travel writing, and if considered in light of his repeatedly declared desire to discover Eden itself, his journey might also be considered a pilgrimage in the same tradition Campbell explores. The fundamental difference between the early travel writings and the New World texts is, of course, the unknown. Sawday demonstrates the connection between the unknown land and the unknown body as two spaces requiring more substantial witnessing by addressing Columbus’s boast that his writings offered the only “true” eyewitness account: “Although there was much talk and writing of these lands, all was conjectural, without ocular evidence” (“First Voyage” 18). Columbus’s words capture Europe’s evolving expectations. The conventions for describing land in feminized terms would continue as explorations expanded, and as new advancements in anatomy would only add another inner space awaiting discovery, exploration, colonization, and feminized descriptions. Sawday’s argument rests between the twinned metaphors of the discovery of the New

World and the exploration of the Renaissance body.¹⁶ Reception of these two uncharted “worlds” was shifting through the increasing “discovery” of both. The demand was for specific, evidentiary descriptions that offered more detailed, elaborate sensory experience, something that Amerigo Vespucci’s accounts would deliberately emphasize, to popular success. His first description of the Americas assails all five senses:

After twenty four days we did *sight* land and we found that we had sailed about thirteen hundred leagues from the city of Cadiz, in a southwesterly direction. On *seeing* land we gave thanks to God, launched the boats, and with sixteen men went ashore, to a land we found so full of trees it was a marvel—not only the size of the trees but their verdure too, for they never shed their foliage, and the sweet *scent* emanating from them (for all are *aromatic*) was so *soothing* to our nostrils that it had quite a restorative effect upon us. [...] And we *saw* something marvelous in that sea: fifteen leagues from land, we found the water as fresh as a river, and *drank* from it, filling all our empty casks [...] and the song of the other birds [*sound*] in the trees was a thing so fair and so melodious, that many times we halted, seized by their *sweetness* [...] most Philosophers maintain that one cannot live within the Torrid Zone because of its great heat [...] indeed, on my voyage I found the contrary to be true: the air is fresher and more temperate [*touch*] in that region than outside it, and so many people live within it that they outnumber those outside it (4-8, emphasis mine).

Europe would not be satisfied with myth, fiction, or speculation; to describe the New World, each new discovery account had to offer a more physical, sensual experience than the last. They had to capture all the sensual details the New World and the “new” secrets of the body might offer. Colonization accounts regularly used the language of the body and gender to describe the encounter, and the idealization of both as utopic soon followed. Columbus’s descriptions (and the discoveries and fictions that followed) connected the female body to land and colonization because Woman had been conventionally defined through a language of property and appropriation that became fundamental to colonization, commodity, and ownership (romanticized through the sensual aspect of discovery). Sawday connects the “I” (eye) of discovery with the

¹⁶ The writings of Vesalius and his contemporaries urged the overturn of Galenic authority and “stressed the primacy of ‘ocular evidence’ in their explorations of the body. The important difference between their undertakings and those of classical authority, they continually claimed, was that [...] they had seen the body with their own eyes. For Columbus, in the realm of exploration of the macrocosm, [saw] what this new property might offer” (Sawday 26).

scientific directive, and argues that it is more indicative of the association between discovery and colonization than the body in general, but specifically with the female body as it is drawn, mapped out as both object to be seen and studied, and representative of the boundaries of Empire.

As Sawday concludes, he briefly mentions Joseph Hall's *Mundus alter et Idem* (1605/7), which offers me an important segue into the discovery accounts (it is fitting that in discussing utopia, one finds oneself examining linguistic thresholds, such as transitions). Loosely and satirically translated as *The Discoverie of a New World in 1609* by John Healey (and later as the more accurate *Another World and Yet the Same*), Hall's utopia satirizes travel through crude descriptions of an allegorical world containing worlds within worlds, each identified by a different vice and peopled by grotesque beings personifying whatever particular weakness led to that vice. Sawday rightly reads Hall's text as a utopic re-visioning of the body as "uncanny familiar," applying Freud's theory of the Uncanny to the body utopia.¹⁷ Freud outlined the Uncanny in an essay of the same name (1919) in which he includes an elaborate, detailed literary and etymological analysis (rather than clinical psychoanalysis) to expound the psychological experience of the uncanny:

The uncanny that we find in fiction—in creative writing, imaginative literature—actually deserves to be considered separately. It is above all much richer than what we know from experience; it embraces the whole of this and something else besides, something that is wanting in real life. The distinction between what is repressed and what is surmounted cannot be transferred to the uncanny in literature without substantial modification, because the realm of the imagination depends for its validity on its contents being exempt from the reality test. The apparently paradoxical upshot of this is that *many things that would be uncanny if they occurred in real life are not uncanny in literature, and that in literature there are many opportunities to achieve uncanny effects that are absent in real life* (155-156, italics original).

As Freud explains, fiction allows for what reality does not, allowing readers to experience the uncanny through literature. Indeed, I propose that this critical connection must be expanded: *Utopian* fiction, in particular, realizes the uncanny

¹⁷ Recall Lyman Tower Sargent's definition from my Introduction.

more effectively than any other genre. In fact, the uncanny effect Freud connects to imaginative literature (as opposed to dreams) could be defined by all the parameters of the utopia. It is not surprising that Freud used E.T.A. Hoffman's tales of horror for his purpose, considering the genre's affinity to utopia, fantasy and science fiction. Freud's untranslatable *unheimlich* identifies a sensation by which the self is disturbed through an experience of what is seemingly known and familiar as foreign, or vice versa.

Primarily, Freud conceived of the "uncanny" (as it has been translated) as a place/space that he equated specifically with the vagina:

It often happens that neurotic men state that to them there is something uncanny about the female genitals. But what they find uncanny ['unhomely'] is actually the entrance to man's old 'home', the place where everyone once lived. A jocular saying has it that 'love is a longing for home', and if someone dreams of a certain place or a certain landscape and, while dreaming, thinks to himself, 'I know this place, I've been here before', this place can be interpreted as representing his mother's genitals or her womb (151).

The womb is the *über*-origin, or the "where" in which "everyone once lived," and in psychoanalytic theory, it is the ultimate example of that which is simultaneously foreign and familiar. Freud describes the *unheimlich* as a home that is not "homey" and focuses (in overwhelming etymological detail) on the word's curious tendency to define itself and its opposite at once. The struggle to identify utopia, to rename it and refigure it for one's purposes, is just as insistent today as it was for Freud, who struggled to resolve the neurosis suggested by the simultaneous attraction and repulsion of the vagina as the origin/home (as precarious as it was for More before him). The duality of uncanny desire (of wanting to simultaneously return to and avoid our origin) leaves us in a transient state at best, and indicates that achieving utopia is reliant on maintaining progress and adaptation, or from another perspective, transgression.

Utopia must be a woman in the hope that it might be resolvable, even if only discursively. To that end, Freud must fuse the uncooperative vagina with figures like Medusa in order to settle the binary (body as woman, mind as man), define the strange fear as woman-as-origin (or the womb as a tomb), and illustrate what he considers "the

most uncanny thing of all”: The fear of being buried alive, or of re-absorption in the uncanny that is at once attractive and familiar, foreign and frightening. When utopia begins to form as a place before us that we sense and desire (approaching stasis), then we fear it. However, this fear, as Freud argues, affects only men because the female body to them is both home and not-home, both utopia and not-utopia. He grants insight into the utopic use of female genitals (along with her other orifices) in the Renaissance as the “entrance to the ‘house’ of the body” that opens into “a strange and secret place which is the body-interior.” The literary traditions encompassing the construction of the body-unit, as Sawday concludes, suggest that, if Freud is correct, the “relationship with ‘our’ bodies [is] continually ‘neurotic’ [and that] the body is familiar and unfamiliar—that which we know best and yet not at all” (161). The same effect that led Ovid and Golding to resolve the dissonance of the mythological cosmogony, led Wilde to look ahead to the shore on which one must never arrive. It also led Shakespeare to bring his characters to the precipice of resolution, and Cavendish to exploit the endlessly liminal gap of perpetual becoming to realize her utopia. Freud’s fear is forestalled, or endlessly sustained, by never allowing a utopia to reach stasis. *More’s Utopia*, on the other hand, seemingly defies the pull of endless progress, but in its neutrality, it negates the very stasis it proposes.

This is not a discovery of the body as place, but a discovery of Utopia, the New World, and the New World as a utopia that *must* consider the place as a female body. An uncanny effect, as Freud writes, “often arises when the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary, when a symbol takes on the full function and significance of what it symbolizes” (150). This may sound oddly close to being careful what one wishes for, but utopia must be understood in light of how the mythological symbols coalesced to create the dialogue of women as monstrous. The sickle (even though wielded by the son against the father) remained the monstrous, consuming crescent womb, and the monstrous woman was instrumental in constructing utopia in

the New World (and *Utopia*). In finding or describing the New World, the realm of the legendary, mythic, and imaginary suddenly appeared before men like Columbus, Vespucci and Raleigh (and many others, though I will focus on these). They confronted marvel and wonder, and translated it as the uncanny vagina/origins in order to forge the New World as a utopia. Their texts would strike awe and wonder into readers because they suggested that utopia (the uncanny) could be found in the New World. If utopia as the womb of the world, or as the uncanny Eden we all know, desire, and fear, was in the New World, then it was reachable. The New World encounters would forever bind the uncanny and utopia, and through that association, with Woman.

To confront what Freud described as the uncanny in literature is to discover the potential of utopia. As eloquently stated by Chris Ferns in his exploration of narrative utopias (in which he considers the absoluteness of utopia's inherent contradiction):

Although suffused by a yearning for the security of the maternal womb, [utopia] sets out to achieve that security by the imposition of a distinctively masculine order [...] if the earthly paradise constitutes an allegory of the womb, the utopian dream—at least as first formulated—is rather one of recreating its security by distinctively male means (47).

Utopia fails because it cannot maintain transgression within a gender binary. Within that conflict, that transgression, and that possibility, rests utopia. I complete my discussion of the origins of utopia by investigating three discovery accounts that contributed to the feminization of the New World through the varied elements outlined in this section that have revealed a transgressive, uncanny, picture of utopia. Christina Thürmer-Rohr's *Vagabonding* (1987) specifically considers Columbus's effect on utopia from a feminist perspective (by way of Ernst Bloch who saw Columbus's search for Eden as an example of utopian desire):

He does not mention that such a quest for paradise always initiated male campaigns of conquest and domination. The paradises of western men—and of their wives, mostly sent for later—are their colonies, large and small. Bloch describes them not as the site of robbery, of oppression, of presumption, of rape and murder, but rather as “geographic utopias,” earthly paradise, since heavenly paradise had proved unattainable (23).

Bloch's obsessive attention to utopian desire is "hopeful" and captures utopia's ideality as an actualized place. Paradise, as the reclaimed earthly origin, emerges as a worthy and possible utopic goal. Bloch's consideration of Columbus's endeavors as a questionable utopian dream, rather than as an oppressive and violent conflict, may have more to tell us than simply his failure to acknowledge that the paradises of western men were rarely utopic for women. Columbus became more of a myth than a historical figure when his discovery was rewritten as more of a civilizing liberation of an eager and willing people than a brutal conquest. Historians have had great trouble capturing Columbus as a historical figure in particular. Even his birthplace is uncertain, which has left several nations vying for "owning rights" to claim his discovery of America as "theirs" (Stavans 31-5).¹⁸ The resulting historical character is a consequence of what Robert Appelbaum terms the "Columbus topos" that, he argues, became "a vehicle for exploring the problem of hope [as] a means through which a hope for uncustomary things could be made acceptable. It was a trope through which writers could explore the idea of *alternative* hope, that is of hope as an alternative" (27, 34). Appelbaum defines the Columbus topos as almost utopic in its potential because Columbus did change the world (and the word) although more so with his adjustable, portable re-figuration as a character than with the lands he claimed for Spain. The name, after all, went to Vespucci and Columbus disappeared from history only to reappear later as a newly idealized, near-mythic, figure.¹⁹ Colonists saw value in his name and story, as did post-revolutionary Americans in need of a new origin myth

¹⁸ Of course, struggling to own Columbus and his encounter wholly discounts the substantial evidence that the Norseman Leif Erikson arrived in Canada 500 years before Columbus, Cabot in 1497, and perhaps others.

¹⁹ Robert Appelbaum defined the Columbus topos and its impact: "One of the hallmarks of the Columbus topos [is that] the figure is contestable; it can be a sign either of precocious courage or, as in Hall, of foolish and pointless audacity [...] or that the age of heroic enormity is permanently over, and the ambitious explorers and conquistadors of the day are condemned to the frustrations of belatedness.[...] At the time that Hall's satire appeared in print, preparations were being made for settling what would turn out to be Britain's first successful, permanent colony in America; and within a few years one of the colony's first officials would use the Columbus topos to justify the English colonial enterprise and appeal for public support. [...] The Columbus topos was adjustable and portable, founded though it was in incontrovertible fact: that a single obscure individual had [...] ended up changing the world" (26-27).

that would distinguish the nascent United States from Britain. It did not really matter who Columbus was because, as Greenblatt notes, he now represents “the move toward sovereign possession as the result of an act of interpretation, a deciphering of the native’s words and gestures” (*Marvelous Possessions* 13). Columbus forces us to *read* (through interpretation and decipherment) the New World and to possess it through that literary act, and just as *Utopia* is experienced as a literary event/space, so too would the New World (and Columbus).²⁰

History preserves Columbus as an iconic persona formed from multiple biographical evolutions that proved far more dramatic mythology than his own accounts. He evolved from a vague, unknowable figure of uncertain nationality to the “Admiral of the Ocean Sea,” the title of the immensely popular and influential 1942 Pulitzer prize-winning biography of Columbus by Samuel Eliot Morison that declares: “Never again may mortal man hope to recapture the amazement, the wonder, the delight of those October days in 1492 when the new world gracefully yielded her virginity to the conquering Castilians,” after all “*any land* looks good to seamen after a long and perilous journey and *every woman fair*” (234-36, emphasis mine). The new Columbus myth would be as grossly rewritten as the cosmogonic myth. Morison’s biography dramatically contributes to the Columbus myth because of his perpetuation of the conventional idealization of the discoverer and simultaneous feminization of the land.²¹ Morison writes the land as an anonymous virgin, as “any land,” and

²⁰ In a fascinating reading of the common utopic themes of seventeenth-century utopias, James Holstun claims one of these themes is that utopia must be born *ex libris* rather than *ab nihilo*, and that it must arise “not just from some concept or historical spirit but from reading an earlier utopia, or an earlier work as a utopia” (7). Similarly, Mary Baine Campbell writes in *Witness and the Other World* (1991): “The history of colonization is particularly open to linguistic study, as colonization is in part a linguistic act. At least it is by the linguistic domination of one culture over another that we have tended to define successful political aggression as conquest, colonization, or empire building” (199-200). We must “read” colonization and utopia in order to understand them both as linguistic experiences.

²¹ Morison, a celebrated Harvard historian whose statue sits on Boston’s Commonwealth Avenue Mall, was an Admiral in the US Naval Reserves and an avid sailor who personally sailed Columbus’s route as homage to the “original” mythic voyage.

simultaneously as “every” woman by invoking the ribald humor of a sailor’s quick “lay” of the land.

His immensely influential biography helped establish Columbus as more emblem than historical figure. Symbolically transcending his own actions, Columbus became as allegorical as the discovery accounts themselves once were. Following centuries of convention, Morison has no problem offering up America as a young virgin yielding her virginity willingly and sweetly, and the colonial process as one of gentle removal of innocence in order to capture the “amazement and wonder and delight” she offered those noble Castilians. The New World in Morison’s refiguring was a far more accessible woman, more utopic, in fact, than even Raleigh’s available, desirous Guiana (that he encouraged a taking by force). Morison also evokes a melancholy sorrow; regrettably, the world is now wholly discovered. What might “mortal man” now use to imagine utopia if there is no more new lands to take? New historians continue to stumble on this impulse to idealize Columbus; Ilan Stavans, for instance, takes a far more critical view of Columbus, but even he can’t help but refer to him romantically as “the mariner” while acknowledging that Columbus is “nothing but a collection of multiple disguises assembled around a set of historical facts” (xvi). Furthermore, he asks a poignant question of his reader: “What if he is only an invention of the human imaginations which like to play tricks, is fond of dreams, magic, and unreality, and gets lost in physical and intellectual labyrinths?” (4). Columbus’s “character” added fantasy to history and ultimately, fueled a new mythology; his history now conveys an idealized discovery through a dreamy veil that is impossible to remove. We are still reeling from this romanticized image of the New World discovery and its discoverers, and utopian literature is similarly subject to this idealized revision. America needed a new mythic origin to detach itself from the former Colonial powers, and so Columbus was rediscovered and rewritten to seed the refigured origin of the new nation that a future

theorist would one day deem the truest utopia ever attempted in the real.²² Utopia shares a linguistic existence—one of semantic duality—with Columbus who was more ideal than real as the man and his accomplishments blurred. He inhabits utopia as much as he prompted the vision of utopia through the New World.

Margarita Zamora's reading of gender and discourse in Columbus reminds us of the epistemological constructions of the ideal that Columbus carried with him to the New World. These constructions, along with his repeatedly self-professed search for biblical Eden, are connected to his many references to mythical explorers and their texts. Difference in the Indies and in the indigenous people, Zamora argues, is *always* gender difference, and she looks to Columbus's use of, and presentation of, difference in a way that reveals not only "dissimilarity perceived in passing but the very basis of representation" in his discovery texts (132):²³

The allusion to monsters evokes again the fundamental element of Columbian New-World hermeneutics—difference. But deficiency and dissimilarity are inextricably linked in the interpretation of New-World reality. The triad—monsters, Caribs, women—forms a complex metaphor for inferiority whose ideological source can be traced to Aristotelian notions of difference. [...] Aristotle maintained that the male principle governed the workings of the universe. Deviation from the male principle constituted imperfection. Thus, the less an offspring resembled its father, the more imperfect it was considered to be. Femeness was the first step toward imperfection, which in its extreme manifestations yielded monstrosity. The triumph of female matter over the male principle, although [...] not monstrous in itself, opened the door as it were to imperfection and consequently to the possibility of monstrosity. [...] Columbian usage of the term *monster* in this context should be understood to mean someone who does not conform either in appearance or behavior to the European norm (140-1).

From these foundations, the discovery (a term Zamora notes more specifically means *descubrir*, or an exploration in preparation for an endeavor) emerges as an endeavor by which the male principle is applied to feminized utopia. In other words, by trying to perfect imperfection (via subjection) one is attempting to create utopia by mitigating

²² Jean Baudrillard's *America* (1989) offers a study of the U.S. as the only actualized utopia.

²³ "When the Columbian texts of discovery are viewed as a unified discourse and not in isolation from one another, these tropes of difference reveal a hermeneutical strategy of feminization and eroticization that ultimately makes gender difference the determining characteristic of the sign 'the Indies'" (130).

the dissonance caused by that female imperfection. Zamora connects the Aristotelian philosophies endemic to Columbus's day with his New World representations, and then connects these further to More's *Utopia*. The New World had to be feminized (figured as imperfect) in order to be available for masculinization (perfection), but the process required confronting the uncanny as the marvel and awe that the potential utopic fluidity conjured. For example, Zamora refers to the moment in Columbus's text where he describes the native people's anthropophagy and "their long feminine hair," and argues that it is these details of the encounter that "strike Columbus as monstrous." Both attributes can be read as "symbols of difference and inferiority" that are coupled with his comparison of the Indians to beasts. Together, the two definitive attributes "complete the triad which according to Aristotle constituted the category of natural servant or slave—animals, women, and deficient men" (141). The indigenous people are not described as monstrous, but they are generally feminized: They "wear their hair long like women" ("First Voyage" 16), are described as a "beardless race" ("Second Voyage" 38) or as "people [that] have no hair" ("First Voyage" 16). Apparently, they have either too much hair, or not enough, but the overall effect is feminizing. Zamora also refers to Columbus's usage of *mancebo*, or "unfinished male adolescent," which endows indigenous men with both femininity and liminality.²⁴ This ambiguous description encourages a hope that their imperfection is actually only incompleteness, or rather, a matter of time and circumstance. Their gender ambiguity is made acceptable because the fluidity that makes them imperfect allows the utopic potential for improvement through future completion (although here it is a movement towards masculinization). For Columbus, this improvement also required the acceptance of Christianity, something he believed the Indians were "very inclined" to do ("First Voyage" 12).

²⁴ As Zamora notes, "while the choice of this term could be interpreted as serving an idealizing function, describing their youthful physical beauty, *mancebo* also has the important connotations of incomplete masculine sexual, intellectual, and moral development (137).

Columbus's descriptions of the indigenous peoples focus on gender and the dichotomy that feminized the New World (as utopia) because difference in the New World was always gender difference, and the reconstruction of the fearful New World relied on gender more than any other descriptor. It was not about the physical sex a native body displayed, but about how it was strategically gendered.²⁵ Utopia was a discursive act of gendering the native and the land with the required fluidity and the concomitant construction of the New World as Woman. That discursive act formalized the cultural economy the old world required to process the monstrous, dissonant difference that came to define the New World. For instance, he repeatedly notes that their population was so numerous as to be "without number" ("First Voyage" 4, 6) but even after discovering this infinite populace, they were still "nothing of importance" and their land "nothing but an island" (4). Furthermore, they "all go naked, men and women, as their mother bore them" describing them, collectively, as incomplete beings within the New World as womb. The New World is also "a land to be desired and, seen, it is never to be left" (12). As oddly gendered (and ambiguously numbered) as it might be, this newly discovered utopia evoked utopian desire fueled by a visual discovery for a purpose that demands one never leaves it to revel in its dangerous fluidity. Columbus's colonial imperative required that he see it, desire it, count it, take it, and never leave it.

Another myth rewritten in several New World accounts is the existence of Amazons, further indicating the place of gender in the Americas. The legendary warrior women had no need of men, and were a threatening possibility because they would be armed as well as monstrous in their gendered deformity (the myth evolved to include the detail that they willingly cut off a breast to enable their fighting). Still, their most

²⁵ "Columbian writing defines the Indians through a series of dualist oppositions that are gender-specific and hierarchized in Western culture-courage/cowardice, activity/passivity, strength/weakness, intellect/body. In activating these cultural dichotomies, it ultimately interprets difference in the Indian as gender difference not in the sense of biological sexual difference, but difference ideologized and inscribed onto a cultural economy where gender becomes fundamentally a question of value, power, and dominance" (Zamora 143).

dangerous attribute was their independence from, and persistent disregard of, men. The myth played a familiar role in the literature and mythic dialogue of Europe, even in allegorizing Queen Elizabeth I whose masculine role as “Prince” required a tempering metaphor. The Romans imagined that the Amazons lived in the East, but Columbus encounters the “women of Matinino” on “the very first island met on the way from Spain to the Indies, in which there is not a man.” These women, he writes “engage in no feminine occupation, but use bows and arrows of cane [...] and they arm and protect themselves with plates of copper, of which they have much” (“First Voyage” 16). What surprises Columbus is not that the women do well alone, but that they protect themselves with weapons and do not engage in “feminine” occupations, even though he notes elsewhere that the women of the New World work harder than the men (a point Vespucci’s account will echo). Their *actions* do not agree with expected gender roles, and so their *bodies* do not match an identifiable gender. Columbus’s final word about the women is about their “turning [...] to our holy faith” (“First Voyage”18). He establishes patriarchal law immediately by reminding the reader from that very first island (not surprisingly ruled by women) that he took “the royal standard in his hands, landed, with many men with him, and there took possession for their highnesses in form of law” (“Second Voyage of Columbus” 24). The masculine hierarchy will set all these gender ambiguities to right to ensure that any resulting fluidity will fade in the vision of utopia.

Another group of mythologized beings “discovered” inhabiting the New World were the anthropophagic Caribs, and in a later discussion, Columbus uses gender as the pivotal point of difference in his “cannibal” encounter.²⁶ He recounts a tale told to him by indigenous women who were captured by Caribs, and then “rescued” by Columbus:

²⁶ Columbus’s journals contain the first known appearance of the word “cannibal.” He is thought to have derived the Spanish form of the word, *canibales*, from the Caribs he encountered and described. The OED attributes the word, and thus the mythology that followed the word, to Columbus. However, there has been much discussion about the word’s etymological history as Peter Hulme so thoroughly argues in *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797* (1986).

These women also say that they were treated with a cruelty which appears to be incredible, for they eat the male children whom they have from them and only rear those whom they have from their own women. As for the men whom they are able to take, they bring such as are alive to their houses to cut up for meat, and those who are dead, they eat at once. They say that the flesh of a man is so good that there is nothing like it in the world. [...] They castrate the boys whom they capture and employ them as servants until they are fully grown, and then when they wish to make a feast, they kill and eat them, for they say that the flesh of boys and of women is not good to eat (“First Voyage” 32).

Considering the severity, the absolute taboo, of cannibalism, Columbus seems unusually preoccupied with identifying the gender and age of the Caribs’ “food” instead of the horror of the act itself. Confronting the same fear that Marco Polo discussed in his journals (which Columbus was familiar with), Columbus grants anecdotal (conjectural) “proof” to those fears in reporting the news second-hand (most reports of anthropophagy were recounted as second- or third-hand reports). Columbus granted substance to this “uncanny” fact of human desire leading one inwards towards the self and so the fact appears in terms of gender and gender roles. The women and boy, now fused as Zamora noted, are described as inedible; the boys must be castrated, or in some way emasculated, in order to remain outside of perfection and in the realm of the uncanny. Compared to the women, the inedible boys must be made consumable, as product or property, so that civilized Europe could assimilate them properly. They must somehow be imperfect and perfect simultaneously because to eat a perfect man would bring dissonance to this construction of a new (old) myth. Strangely enough, Columbus describes the taste of human flesh (the real taboo) in a way that foreshadows More’s utopian descriptions through the ambiguity that peppers the discovery texts. The meat is described “like nothing in the world” and that locates (for the morbidly curious) this “sensual” experience wholly beyond the real world, which idealizes what is otherwise forbidden; however, in this “other” world that Columbus describes, perhaps the meat is not like anything in *that* world.

As his voyages progressed, Columbus became more adamant in connecting the New World not to myth, fantasy or monstrous animals, but firmly and irrevocably to the

beauty, innocence, and renewal of Eden. He does so by making a direct connection of these lands to Biblical precedent in the third voyage: “And He spake so clearly of these lands by the mouth of Isaiah, in many places of his Book, affirming that from Spain His holy name should be proclaimed to them” (4). Later, he goes as far as professing that God himself gave him directions: “Our Lord gave me a fair wind and put into my heart the wish to navigate to the west” (28). Columbus intends to substantiate this divine affirmation, and to envision the land as less foreign, so even the offensive hair that feminized the natives earlier begins to fade in his later descriptions. Their hair is still long, but they are now equated with the Spanish instead of women: “Hair long and smooth, cut in the manner of Castile” (14). The men have now become more like Europeans, and so masculine, in mind (eager to be converted) and in body (like Spaniards). To make sense of the gender dissonance he encountered, and in order to formulate utopic Eden in the New World, Columbus had to rewrite the New World as a biblical Paradise that would be a far less transgressive utopia for Europe.

To complete his utopic re-visioning, the land must be feminized just as its people were, and so he describes Eden in exquisite detail like a breast.²⁷ On his third voyage to the New World, Columbus describes the Americas thus:

I have been led to hold this concerning the world, and I find that it is not round as they describe it, but that it is the shape of a pear which is everywhere very round except where the stalk is, for there it is very prominent [...] and on one part of it is placed something like a woman’s nipple, and that this part, where this protuberance is found, is the highest and nearest to the sky, and it is beneath the equinoctial line and in this Ocean sea at the end of the East. I call that ‘the end of the East’, where end all the land and islands (“Third Voyage” 30).

Columbus’s letters often avowed that his search was not for “new” lands but on the contrary, for the oldest land of all. The “pear” shape of the entire Earth evokes a womb, or a female body, as much as the heavenly summit suggests a breast. His

²⁷ Vespucci also discusses the location of the Earthly Paradise, but less extensively. His writings often echo Columbus’s, but he only briefly mentions that, if Eden still exists, it would be in the New World: “If anywhere in the world there exists an Earthly Paradise, I think it is not far from those regions, which lie, as I said, to the south, and in such a temperate climate that they never have either icy winters or scorching summers” (52).

physical descriptions negated the Ptolemaic perfectly spherical earth in preference for a newly understood utopic endeavor in the feminized New World. Columbus revels in his erotic vision's "feminine" roundness, its pear-like shape evoking fertility, but still insists that it is unreachable. This is the critical detail that allowed him to report it as Eden, but still offer a good reason as to why he could not substantiate it as Eden (the effect is similar to More's coughing sailor). Zamora, once again, argues that the eroticization of this key description of a space that Columbus suggests is accessible *only* by way of divine intervention, actually makes Eden accessible "in the discursive economies of appropriation and domination" where it becomes "acquirable" (144). Thus, Columbus indicates that his access to Eden was always barred by divine design. Eden cannot be recreated, or rediscovered, but through the language of negotiation, possession and economy, one *might* access Eden, because, as with *Utopia*, the mere possibility was sufficient to sustain the utopicity. However, by his fourth voyage, Columbus grows more desperate to substantiate his success and so ultimately claims that there *is* one way to access Eden: "Gold is most excellent. Gold constitutes treasure, and he who possesses it may do what he will in the world, and may so attain as to bring souls to Paradise" (104). The search for gold and the wealth of the East was always primary, but his desire for discovering Eden was more emphatic in the earlier voyages. However, here he states that the possession of gold allows access to Eden; utopia *must* be accessible and so Eden must be written as a woman, eroticized, and then, breached. How better to do that than to apply the parallel of woman as object and commodity, and to remove the divine restrictions barring access thereby granting himself that all-important connection to God as his navigator.

The eroticization of the land becomes more palpable through the centuries after each subsequent discovery account. Columbus offered the "ocular evidence" of the New World through his accounts, but it remains unknowable and uncanny. Further supporting his certainty that he has discovered lost paradise with Biblical proof, Columbus writes:

Holy Scripture testifies that Our Lord made earthly paradise and in it placed the tree of life and from it issues a fountain from which flow four of the chief rivers of this world. [...] I do not find and I have never found any writing of the Romans or the Greeks which gives definitely the position in the world of the earthly paradise, nor have I seen it in any world map, placed with authority based on proof [but] I believe that the earthly paradise is there (“Third Voyage” 37).

Outlining his research and asserting his beliefs, he concludes his repetitive validation by reaffirming that this is not a New World, but the oldest world of all. Closing the circle by going backwards in his assertion, the New World is no longer marvelous, or wondrous, or even “new” (Columbus was never sure he was not in the East); the utopic space he was recreating was *the* beginning, and as such was subsequently metaphorized as a womb, as the origin, and the uncanny, here rediscovered through his faith. At one point towards the end of his accounts, Columbus names the Americas another world altogether (*otro mundo*) setting it wholly apart: “No princes of Spain ever won lands beyond their borders, except now that Your Highnessess have here another world, where our holy Faith may be so greatly increased” (“Third Voyage ” 44). When he could no longer control the utopic fluidity, the New World was simply Other.

The sense of foreignness, or progressive Othering, in Columbus’s accounts was conveyed by an insistent use of superlatives that creates a tone of marvelousness that Stephen Greenblatt explores in depth. The “marvelous,” or *maravilla*, Columbus uses suggests, as Greenblatt argues, that the word makes a claim that “combines religious and erotic longings in a vision of surpassing beauty” (*Marvelous Possessions* 79).

Columbus struggled to define the indefinable unknowns of the New World, but more fundamentally, to name the unnamed. In effect, he undertook the truly powerful act of baptizing all the lands in the Biblical manner granted only to Adam by God. Several critics have focused on how Columbus evoked “wonder” and awe through “marvelous” language born of the visual evidence he elevated, but Greenblatt argues that this linguistic usage was connected to possession: “Everything in the European dream of possession rests on witnessing, a witnessing understood as a form of significant and representative seeing. To see is to secure the truth of what might otherwise be

deemed incredible” (*Marvelous Possessions* 122). Wonder emerges in the same way: It is a utopic term with an ambiguous definition with no clear antonym, as Greenblatt notes. Furthermore, he grants much credit to “wonder” for influencing the construction of the New World: Wonder is “the central figure in the initial European response to the New World” because it offered “a decisive emotional and intellectual experience in the presence of radical difference” (14). Greenblatt defines “wonder” by way of Descartes and Spinoza:

When we wonder, we do not yet know if we love or hate the object at which we are marvelling; we do not yet know if we should embrace it or flee from it. For this reason wonder, Descartes argues, ‘has no opposite and is the first of all the passions’. Similarly for Spinoza—in whose account wonder was not, strictly speaking, a passion at all, but rather a mode of conception (*imaginato*)—wonder depends upon a suspension or failure of categories and is a kind of paralysis, a stilling of the normal associative restlessness of the mind. In wonder, ‘the mind comes to stand because the particular concept in question has no connection with other concepts.’ The object that arouses wonder is so new that for a moment at least it is alone, unsystematized, an utterly detached object of rapt attention (20).

The similarity between Greenblatt’s reading of “wonder” and Freud’s Uncanny is in between this unknowable love and hate, or between what we are attracted to or desirous of, what is both familiar and foreign, and what might give us completion or madness if we knew how to “properly” react. To wonder at the New World, in which nature was nature, but unfamiliar, in which inhabitants were foreign, but familiar in their humanity, was fundamentally uncanny. The Cartesian view is one of wonder without opposition, of the word simply “being,” while for Spinoza, it exists without categories, with no association, unsystematized and detached, or “free-floating” in a sense. The several features that contributed to the “wonder” of the feminized New World also contributed to the construction of the early modern understanding of colonization, its parallel construction of utopia, and in the endlessly replicating dualisms critically attributed to conceptions of Self/Other. There is no opposite to wonder; it stands neutral, collapsing and transgressing categories and is, outside of the New World image, neither woman nor man. Greenblatt’s assertion that wonder relies

on the suspension, or failure, of categories and that this reliance leads to “a kind of paralysis,” indicates how utopia emerged from these collapsed categories.

At this paralysis, we find ourselves back at the fundamental question that utopia *must* be without change. Wonder is neutral, it is uncanny, and so, it is also utopic and so, inhabits the imaginary by demonstrating fluidity even while it is forcibly feminized.²⁸ Marin, once again, argued that utopia cannot acknowledge anything outside of itself, and it is its own reality because it is the concept that is not a concept and cannot make connections with other concepts. As “wonder,” it is a non-associative, free-floating absent referent. The object, subject, concept, name, or place that are imagined as utopia/utopic may be imaginary, but they are wonderful and through that “wonder,” command attention, observation, and negotiation of the very categories they refuse. Columbus hoped to enclose this wholly “other” world by focusing on the wonder and awe it inspired; truth was not the question, or the concern, but responding with wonder was the answer. He constantly balanced on the fine edge between truth and wonder because that was all he could do when faced with the uncanny wonder that left him unable to define utopia. Facing the lack of the civilizing European hierarchy in the New World, Columbus brought with him the necessity (and burden) of a long history of gendered division; in the end, Columbus offered wonder and utopia to make sense of the slippery fluidity. As Greenblatt notes, the marvelous “has little or nothing to do with the grotesque or outlandish. It denotes, to be sure, some departure, displacement, or surpassing of the normal or the probable, but in the direction of delicious variety and loveliness” (76). Indeed, Columbus’s accounts enclosed these sensual details and defined them as marvelous, and thus, utopic.

²⁸ Related to the simultaneity of this utopicity, Greenblatt writes: “Wonder effects the crucial break with an other that can only be described, only witnessed in the language and images of sameness. It erects an obstacle that is at the same time an agent of arousal. For the blockage that constitutes a recognition of distance excites a desire to cross the threshold, break through the barrier, enter the space of the alien” (*Marvelous Possessions* 135).

The negotiation of difference presented as the inevitable contradiction of conveying perfection through feminized forms that are otherwise considered monstrous (within woman-as-nature) granted man “a kind of perfection” as he wrote utopia from his position as the “universal norm.” Woman was the monstrous violation of that perfection, perhaps not blatantly grotesque, but certainly “delicious” (a common, if not monstrous, objectification, even outside of cannibal context). Columbus conveyed “a kind of perfection” that occupied a feminized space and he made use of utopia’s fluidity and named the resulting dissonance “divinity” by granting the discovery to God, and at once familiarizing and distancing the New World as Eden, or the womb of the world.²⁹ He struggled to assimilate the otherness the New World represented and, as Zamora concludes, “affinity and resemblance ultimately serve the articulation of New World inferiority.” Nature, for Columbus ultimately resembled an idealized Spanish landscape while “similitude, through the process of feminization and eroticization of the sign ‘Indies,’ becomes yet another marker of difference and consequently, again, of inferiority” (148). He rewrote the native Otherness as he rewrote an Edenic utopia, and this was no different from Botticelli leaving out the severed penis in his painting of the perfect woman, or the recorders of Biblical cosmogony leaving out the creative and chaotic maternal Earth.

Amerigo Vespucci’s discovery accounts seem brief and redundant after Columbus’s elaborate journals, yet it was his name given to the land. Vespucci’s accounts were widely disseminated, and later a powerfully iconic image depicting America as a native woman emphasized the impact of his accounts. “She” increasingly appeared in maps and images naked and in subjection to a civilizing force. In the image, the civilizing force is Vespucci himself bearing a flagpole and compass with his

²⁹ On negotiating the conflict between the expected monstrosity and the “well-formed” indigenous peoples he discovered, Greenblatt writes: “[Columbus] appears to be distinguishing then between monstrosities and marvels: the former are vivid, physical violations of universal norms, the latter are physical impressions that arouse wonder. [...] The marvelous for Columbus usually involves then a surpassing of the measure but not in the direction of the monstrous or grotesque; rather, a heightening of impressions until they reach a kind of perfection” (*Marvelous Possessions* 75-6).

great ships in the background as he wakes America from her slumber.³⁰ His accounts were more accessible than Columbus's as yet unpublished accounts, but they continue the European association of the New World with utopia through a more vividly erotic, feminized language. Vespucci's association with Portugal (instead of the rival Spain) may have contributed to More's choosing him for *Utopia* (as well as the popularity of his accounts), but Vespucci's accounts echo Columbus's in many areas. On two details in particular—cannibalism and Amazons—Vespucci's writings describe the New World with similar gender fluidity. He, too, names the male inhabitants effeminate and “beardless.” The primary difference in Vespucci's accounts is tone; he constantly presents his images in a more titillating, erotic language. His description of the indigenous piercing customs exemplifies this specifically:

If you were to see such an unusual and monstrous thing as a man with seven stones just in his cheeks or jaws or lips, some of them half a palm long, you would be amazed. [...] Beyond that, in each ear, which they pierce with three holes, they carry more stones dangling from their rings; this custom is only for the men: the women do not pierce their faces, but only their ears (49).

This description is less prone to instill wonder and awe, and more likely to estrange and instigate fear, but so specifically through gender is this fear wrought that it simultaneously instills an uncanny desire. Columbus may have found no monsters, but Vespucci did, and the pointed comparison between the male and female tendencies towards piercing leaves the men porous, pierced, and simply in possession of more “holes” than men should have. The image of an open, accessible man feminizes him while also easing the familiarity with the women who are pierced *only* in their ears (a far more familiar body piercing location for Europeans). The inhabitants of the New World of both genders are at once threatening and familiar, but both are easily

³⁰ The famous engraving by Theodore Galle after Johannes Stradanus, *America* (c.1580) shows Vespucci awakening an allegorical America as cannibals cook a human leg in the background and exotic animals look on. Vespucci bearing his banner and compass is standing above her holding a staff with his ships in the distance. According to Louis Montrose, who analyzes the image, “by the 1570s, allegorical personifications of America as a female nude with feathered headdress had begun to appear in engravings and paintings, on maps and title pages, throughout Western Europe. [...] The elements of savagery, deceit, and cannibalism central to the emergent European discourse on the inhabitants of the New World are already in place in this very early example” (3).

conquered because each is feminized (the familiar accessible women and hole-y feminized men).

Later, the women are made still more accessible through a sexual physical description. Vespucci describes the native women as familiar and recognizable, but foreign and dangerous:

Their women, as I said, although they go naked are exceedingly lustful, still have rather shapely and clean bodies, and are not as revolting as one might think, because being fleshy, their shameful parts are less visible, covered for the most part by the good quality of their bodily composition. It seemed remarkable to us that none of them appeared to have sagging breasts, and also, those who had borne children could not be distinguished from the virgins by the shape and tautness of their wombs, and this was true too of other parts of their bodies, which decency bids me pass over. When they were able to copulate with Christians, they were driven by their excessive lust to corrupt and prostitute all their modesty (50-51).

In one moment, the women are “shapely and clean,” and “not revolting,” which was, perhaps, the expectation, but in the next moment, they are “exceedingly lustful.” However, their bodies are of “good quality” and he suggests that they are somehow eternal virgins even with their exceeding lust because they do not carry Eve’s punishment (difficulty in childbirth) in this passage. Outwardly, the virgins are indistinguishable from the lustful mothers as they somehow retain their virginity (a point he mentions several times). These eternal virgins are excessively fertile and lustful at once: “These women are very fertile and their pregnancies do not exempt them from any work whatsoever; and their deliveries are so easy that a day after giving birth, they go out as usual, and especially to wash themselves in the river” (64). Unlike Columbus’s unreachable Eden, Vespucci populates his utopia with a multitude of prelapsarian Eves that are all eager to “copulate with a Christian.” There is no divine reverence for Eden in Vespucci’s New World, only a newfound Land of Cockayne offering unbridled lust and accessible, willing women. The emasculation of indigenous men was as important as the sexual eroticization and accessibility of the indigenous women.

Columbus focused on the land-as-woman (Eden as breast) and Vespucci on the woman-as-land (to be conquered), and they both inspired the development of eroticism in later New World accounts. In another famous scene, Vespucci describes a strange occurrence that he names “appalling”:

They have another custom that is appalling and passes belief. Their women, being very lustful, make their husbands’ members swell to such thickness that they look ugly and misshapen; this they accomplish with a certain device they have and by bites from certain poisonous animals. Because of this, many men lose their members, which rot through neglect, and they are left eunuchs (49).

At one stroke, the women are rendered lustful once again, but are also frighteningly empowered (vilified and wondrous at once) as witches possessing knowledge of devices and poisons that threaten and castrate. The men are thus made passive, inferior, and emasculated in contrast to the aggressive females that leave their penises at once “ugly and misshapen,” but also swollen to an unusual thickness that bestializes and overly-masculinizes them. They are reminiscent of the monks in the “The Land of Cokaygne,” who were also unable to control their lust, and both live in a utopic space where women are eager and readily available for taking in a space detached from sin or shame. Vespucci’s New World utopia did not reflect the expected gender roles, and expectations as his account deploy an exotic sexuality that works much like Columbus’s professed connection to God in the reader’s imagination. The New World may emerge as either Columbus’s Paradise or Vespucci’s Land of Cockaygne (or both at once), but it is *always* utopia.

Surely the most telling account to utilize these themes of sexuality and accessibility to convey utopia was Sir Walter Raleigh’s *Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Bewtiful Empyre of Guiana* (1595) written a hundred years after Columbus’s accounts. In the century that followed Columbus, Vespucci’s accounts, and many others, flooded Europe with images and descriptions of the New World (both positive and negative). Raleigh’s text (more overtly a sales pamphlet than a discovery account) perfected and exemplified the New World image that had been steadily building. Raleigh’s feminization of Guiana was blatant and overt; the land was a woman ready for claiming

with a “maidenhead” for the taking because the virginal New World was no longer a curious wonder but was now firmly rooted in the dynamics of property and sexual exchange from the Old World. Morison’s biography of Columbus echoed this sentiment of a virgin land ready for taking nearly 350 years later. Raleigh’s dramatic title included a subtitle that specifically mentions “the great and Golden Citie of Manoa (*which the Spanyards call El Dorado*)” (119). He does not discuss the “newness” of the world in his title but presents it immediately as always already an “Empyre” discovered even before it is conquered. Raleigh’s text was never about Eden, for the New World had been imagined as Paradise for the last century and was now to be considered more practically. The image of the New World Paradise was being slowly replaced with the growing confirmation of its resources and wealth (More’s Hubris arrives and slams shut the doors to a New World as Eden). Of course, in true utopic circularity and the related mythic resurgence, the Puritans would readopt the theme and (re)rewrite the New World as a millennial New Jerusalem soon after Raleigh’s text emerged.

Raleigh was so adamant *not* to designate the New World as Eden that in a later writing, *History of the World* (1614), Raleigh discusses the Golden Age as it applies to Eden and describes it as less divine and more mortal.³¹ Eden is unimportant in its divine state, and is not even a “utopia” as man would create it. It is a fact of history, of a common past, and as such may have been perfect but is now lost forever. He will not re-inscribe the New World as Eden because utopicity could not be found in the Eden that Columbus sought, or the Land of Cockayne Vespucci described. Eden was not worth looking for because it required the heavy penance of investing all one’s

³¹ “For Raleigh [...] the Golden Age provides a means to lament the corruption of a social and natural world far gone in successive cycles of sin and deprivation. It becomes to some extent a foil in his efforts to defend the historical reality of the Garden of Eden. Arguing vehemently against the view that Eden is ‘a figure or Sacrament only, or else [...] seated out of this sensible world,’ Raleigh insists that it is no ‘Utopia’ but ‘a Garden or Orchard filled with Plants, and Trees, of the most excellent kindes, pleasant to behold, and (withall) good for meate.’ Eden is a realm of abundant produce and virtuous consumption—the antithesis of a postlapsarian nature defined by economic hardship, war, and ecological devastation. [...] In part, then, to safeguard Eden against being read as a ‘figure,’ Raleigh turns the Golden Age into an elaborate metaphor for the cycles of postlapsarian history (Markley 821-2).”

imagination in an ambiguous, contradictory desire (like the Cokaygne). His concern was one of political and commercial profit, and for that, Eden was not the “perfect” space to recreate. However, Raleigh still harkened to mythology for the narrative material for his utopia: El Dorado and the Fountain of Youth. In *Voyages in Print* (1995), Mary Fuller describes Raleigh’s expedition as a utopic endeavor, arguing that his search was for an absent referent he might fill with the myths he *would* find (even if he found nothing):

Raleigh’s expedition is literally a search for the referent, a place to which can be attached the proper names *Manoa* and *El Dorado*. At the same time, there seems to be some considerable force in the text working against trying to close the distance between words, or fantasies, and things. [...] It isn’t that Raleigh does not find El Dorado [...] rather, at the moments when, on his own account, he comes close to a place where words might be tried against things, invariably both narrator and narrative turn away (66).

Fuller goes on to note how desperate hope mixed with arrogant assurance exemplified Raleigh’s tone in the text. Impelled by Queen Elizabeth’s waning interest after the failure of the Roanoke colony, Raleigh needed this account be successful (or at least taken as such) before he even set sail (or even *if* he set sail, as some rumors claim Raleigh’s trip was only pretense and that he was actually hiding from the Queen safely in Cardiff). In a way, Raleigh was searching for utopia as an absent referent to fill with precisely the specific myth he wished to conjure, as the discovery accounts that came before him had done with the indigenous people by estranging them in order to realize the absent, empty referent they required. Fuller’s reading also asks whether it matters at all if there was an El Dorado to find in the first place, or whether it was not more important for Raleigh to fan the flames of desire for the New World once again, instead of claiming exploration, discovery, or civilization as his impetus. That Raleigh was writing El Dorado into Guiana regardless of its actuality made it no less “ideal” to those who would read in the discovery text the possibility of its actuality. Utopia emerged in

the liminal space between what was truly in the New World for Raleigh to discover and what he created for readers to accept.³²

However, Raleigh's text does something unique that will take us to the close of this chapter. His account acts out the conflict between the New World as a woman, as utopia, and the multiple efforts to master it, but the constant friction throughout the text reveals a pointed negotiation between a thoroughly feminized New World that must somehow submit to the masculine efforts of colonization, and the authority of Raleigh's powerful, female monarch. How does he flatter and honor a Woman/Queen with a construction of the New World that relied on the subjugation of the feminized land and people to a masculine categorization and hierarchy? Most vividly, we find this in Raleigh's role in the text as a panderer of Guiana. He offers the land's virgin "maidenhead" (that he insists is ripe for taking) to a powerful Queen elevated to near divinity specifically because of her eternal virginity: England's virginity must be preserved, while Guiana's must be taken. Raleigh is in the precarious position of offering an accessible virgin woman-as-land to an impenetrable virgin woman-as-England. This dissonance results in the fluidity we continue to find in utopia and it sealed the fate of the utopic New World as a sexually available woman. Many critics have delved into Raleigh's familiar, well-practiced themes in this text that resonate with the traditions of New World discovery accounts. For example, Whitehead argues that literary scholars, particularly Mary Baine Campbell, have "focused on the liminal aspect of the *Discoverie* as a text that announces exotic encounters in the modern

³² Neil Whitehead's substantial introduction explores the historical and textual contact between Raleigh and the Spanish, and Raleigh's reliance on Spanish explorers for geographical and ethnological details of the supposed location of *El Dorado* (see Whitehead 17). Rather than the original supposed location in the *cordilleras* of the *Sierra Parima*, Whitehead notes that Raleigh's text follows the "Margaritan tradition that the Caroni river is the gateway to *El Dorado*" giving the myth a very definite location: "This firm local tradition as expressed through Berrio then also accounts for the prominence given the Caroni river in Raleigh's text and the certainty with which Keymis independently alludes to the mine, and continued to seek it.[...] Thus Ojer plausibly suggests that the identification of the lake on which the golden city of Manoa stood, with the flooding of the Rupununi savannas in the vicinity of Lake Amuku, and identified by Raleigh as *Cassipa*, as well as appearing in the map of Guiana attributed to him, was an identification made by the Magariteños" (18).

genre of travel writing, but with backward glances to the medieval form of ‘discovery,’ which encountered cosmological and biblical analogy in the marvels at the peripheries of the civilized world” (22). Whitehead goes on to rightly cite the “new form of motivation in English colonialism” that was based on commercial rather than spiritual interest in American” as a pragmatic priority likely derived on one level from the “anti-Spanish stance of the Elizabethan throne” (22). Stephen Greenblatt, on the other hand, as Whitehead notes, only minimally engages with the text itself preferring to focus on Raleigh’s use of marvel and how its use denoted the failure of maintaining boundaries, mostly between art and life (See Whitehead 24). Exploring the impact of Raleigh’s text on literary studies, and its continued consideration as a liminal text, for example, with V.S. Naipul’s use of the text as thematically representative of “the idea of pristine native Guiana whose loss signals the death of epic-romance and inaugurates the age of modernity” (28), Whitehead ultimately notes that Raleigh’s text has come to represent “a bridge between the deconstruction of one world and the invention of another” (28). There is a sense of reassessment in Raleigh’s text that inspires these liminal readings; they are based on the repeated presentation of the New World as utopic that has created of Raleigh’s text a signpost for how the New World’s utopicity would become more substantially connected to commodity.

If we consider Raleigh’s dedicatory epistle, he insists “there is a way found to answere every mans longing, a better Indies for her majestie then the King of Spaine hath any” (123) demonstrating the anticipation of the Golden Age as utopia from the first lines of the text. Later in the text, a curious episode animates this tension: He describes showing the indigenous people an image of the Queen, describing her as a “Great Cacique” and thereby negating one of the primary missions of Columbus’s accounts. He does not say that the people are willing to convert to Christianity, but that because of the great Queen’s virtue, they will adopt a new form of idolatry. It almost seems as if Raleigh’s purpose was establishing the cult of Elizabeth in Guiana: “I shewed them her majesties picture which they so admired and honored, as it had been

easie to have brought them Idolatrous thereof” (134). The tone is one of manipulation and instruction that insists the endeavor would be easy if the conqueror/Queen desired it. The contradiction between this and the earlier accounts that professed the more “noble” goal of civilizing lost heathen peoples with salvation through Christianity, or the later accounts of the Puritan colonies that would similarly insist on a religious directive (their own religious freedom and their certainty that the natives could be brought to salvation), forces Raleigh’s unique text into a singularly exact position. It is somehow the most truthful construction of the New World as utopia because it tried to convey “truth” as Raleigh saw it: A truth concerned with profit, not with souls, and with finding a route to the great wealth Spain had been thriving on for decades, not with Eden. In effect, Raleigh’s account is reversing the Spanish figuration of the New World, and rewriting it with clearly English ambitions that would eventually be rewritten, yet again, with the Puritan utopia. Raleigh conveys the limitless gold of the El Dorado that insists he will find, as well as the suggestion that the immortality promised by the Fountain of Youth is undoubtedly there, as the New World’s true utopia. Elizabeth, as an aging Queen, would have valued the possibility of its rejuvenation as much as El Dorado’s money:

The *Ingas* had a garden of pleasure in an Iland neere *Puna*, where they went to recreate themselves, when they would take the ayre of the sea, which had all kind of garden hearbes, flowers and trees of Gold and Silver, an invention, & magnificence til then never seene: Besides all this, he had an infinite quantitie of silver and gold unwrought in Cuzco (137-8).

Mixed in with the magical ability to “recreate themselves” in this newly envisioned “garden of pleasure,” is the repetitive reminder that all this is found amidst plentiful gold and silver, the possession of utopia must be bound to the requirements of property and exchange.

Curiously, the hunt for the mythic Amazons does not end with the earlier explorers, and because of the great Queen he was so eager to please, Raleigh grants far more attention in his text than his predecessors to the role of the Amazons that he also

discovers in Guiana. He delves into their description by emphasizing that, for them, daughters were more desirable than sons:

If they conceive, and be delivered of a sonne, they returne him to the father, if of a daughter they nourish it, and reteine it, and as many as have daughters send unto the begetters a Present, all being desirous to increase their owne sex and kinde, but that they cut of the right dug of the brest I do not finde to be true (146).

Whether or not Raleigh actually encountered a warrior group of women is not relevant. In fact, his story brings very little new to the well-worn myth, except for tempering their violence and self-mutilation. This text effectively rewrites the Amazon myth with specific respect to the New World and Queen Elizabeth. As a text meant to describe the New World attractively, it had to negate the real by constructing the utopic ideal, or rather, how Raleigh imagined Queen Elizabeth would envision that ideal. That Queen Elizabeth was most certainly an unwanted daughter, and that her wrongly gendered body contributed to her own mother's beheading from a violent father focused on having a son, was a powerful detail for Raleigh to invoke. Of all the details in the Amazonian lore to focus on, Raleigh chose the Amazon's sexual and reproductive traditions because they privileged girl-children.³³ He negates the mytheme that Amazons must mutilate their bodies to become the warriors that legend celebrated. Raleigh discovers other women rulers during his journey and describes them as well:

Upon the river of Caroli, are the Canuir, which are governed by a woman (who is inheritrix of that province) who came farre off to see our nation, and aske mee divers questions of her Majesty, being much delighted with the discourse of her Majesties greatnes, and wondring at such reports as we truly made of her highness many virtues (192).

³³ In *Sodometries* (1992), Jonathan Goldberg rightly points out that the sixteenth-century discovery accounts do not mention native sexuality, except for these points as derogatory references to homosexuality, or as eunuchs. They do discuss the availability and sexual prowess of the women (with Europeans) indirectly and Raleigh discusses the Amazonian conception practices in some detail. While not directly considering Columbus, Vespucci, or Raleigh, he discusses the discovery accounts from the perspective of the "sodomite" as figured in Cortés and Cabeza de Vaca. Both texts include a single statement referring to "all" the indigenous peoples as sodomites.

Guiana offers Queen Elizabeth everything she could ever desire: youth, wealth, a multitude of female rulers and women warriors that she might find kinship with, an easing of a childhood trauma, and not only acceptance, but preference of her gender.

The New World is accessible and available, and the Old, impenetrable and unassailable, but both are bound to women as accessible. Raleigh suggests that the Amazons recognize this connection with her:

And where the south border of *Guiana* reacheth to the Dominion and Empire of the *Amazones*, those women shall hereby heare the name of a virgin, which is not onley able to defend her owne territories and her neighbors, but also to invade and conquere so great Empyres and so farre removed. [...] I trust in Gode, this being true, will suffice, and that he which is king of al kings, and Lorde of Lords, will put it into her hart which is Lady of ladies to possesse it, if not, I wil judge those men worthy to be kings thereof, that by her grace and leave will undertake it of themselves (199).

Raleigh confronts the problematic gendering in this passage. In one instance, he praises Queen Elizabeth for her ability to take this land while warning her in a tone of admonishment that another (male) king will earn Raleigh's description as "worthy" by taking it for himself if she does not move to possess it. Raleigh's own good judgment of the Queen is suddenly in jeopardy; he is telling his powerful Queen (whom he has already insulted because of his secret, unsanctioned marriage to one of her ladies-in-waiting) to "be a man and take this land" and thus swaying precariously between praise and treason. His construction of Guiana as utopia relied on his perilous role as panderer of a female land to a Princely Queen. To make that equation sound he had to at once feminize the land, cast the feminized land as sexually attractive to a woman, and demand masculinity from his Queen so the erotic equation would hold. Guiana as utopia emerges from the inevitable transgression on either side of this dissonant reckoning between gender roles.³⁴ Once again reverting to the increasingly mythic descriptions of the first encounter with the New World, Raleigh saw Guiana as a

³⁴ Robert Markley argues that the construction of the New and the Old World for Raleigh was always one of reconstruction: "Writing at the beginning of the century, with his bid to reach El Dorado foiled, Raleigh perceives the decay of nature in apocalyptic terms because he cannot foresee any means to increase productivity in a circumscribed world. Once population pressures eased and new resources became available, it would be possible to reconstruct the natural world in the image of an endlessly exploitable Golden Age" (823).

“natural” world instead of a divine utopic paradise, but as a natural world, Guiana was already feminized. To see it (and sell it) as a utopia, Raleigh had to emphasize its femininity through its contradictory, ambiguous existence between the lands on both side of the circular journey.

Part II: William Shakespeare: Performing Utopia

Interlude: Doctor Who

But no perfection is so absolute,
That some impurity doth not pollute.
The Rape of Lucrece (1594) (853-854)

In 2005, the BBC re-launched its most successful and longest-running science fiction television series. *Doctor Who* premiered in 1963 and continued unabated until 1989, reaching cult status in every new market in which it was introduced. The series follows the travels through time and space of a mysterious man known only as “The Doctor” and his companion (most often a young woman). They travel in his TARDIS and fight evil throughout the universe with each new episode adding to a complex world of interconnecting past and future events.¹ The Doctor, who is a Time Lord (the last of the “oldest and most mighty race in the universe” who were destroyed in a cataclysmic war), can “regenerate” a new body that retains all the former’s memories and experiences, allowing the character to live forever (a convenient detail allowing the show to persist through new actors). The earlier series included bad special effects, stock villains, and formulaic plots, yet the show persisted and continued to gain viewers through the decades. The new series, produced by the BBC Wales, is hugely popular and answers to a new, younger audience that demands more involved story lines and more elaborate special effects. Currently in his eleventh incarnation, the Doctor is no longer played by the quirky middle-aged, iconic “British Professor” of the earlier series. As the youngest actor ever to play the role, Matt Smith is a handsome, far cooler (but still quirky) Doctor that speaks to legions of new fans.

Premiering in 2007, the third series of the new *Doctor Who* began with the introduction of a new companion: the beautiful, Afro-British medical student Martha Jones (played by Freema Agyeman) who eagerly joined the tenth Doctor (played by

¹ TARDIS stands for “Time and Relative Dimension(s) in Space” and is the iconic trademark of the *Doctor Who* series. Outwardly, the machine looks like a 1950s British police call box but it opens into a vast time travel machine.

David Tennant) on his adventures. On her first tour in the TARDIS, the Doctor takes her to London, 1599 where he welcomes her to “a brave new world” as they step into the charming muck of Renaissance London not far from the Globe Theater. The episode, titled “The Shakespeare Code,” follows the story of Shakespeare’s legendary lost play, *Love’s Labour’s Won*, said to have been written between 1594 and 1597.² In the episode, a trio of aliens called the Carrionites who look and act like witches (written to suggest a “source” for Macbeth’s witches) bewitch Shakespeare, and no stereotype is left unused. They are wrinkled crones who wear long black robes, threaten with ravenous teeth and cackling laughs, magically hide their appearance to seduce young men to their doom, fly high on broomsticks silhouetted against the full moon, jab puppets with needles to hurt enemies, chant incantations over crystal balls, and recite spells whilst throwing beastly things into a cauldron.

The Carrionites had been imprisoned in a realm of “deep darkness” until Shakespeare inadvertently released them from their captivity through a dramatic mixture of his emotional madness at the death of his son (what the witches call the “grief of a genius”) and what they consider the most powerful force ever known: “New words. New, glittering words, from a mind like no other.” They plan to free the rest of their race and “purge the pestilence” of humanity from “the fleeting world” in order to bring the universe back “to the old ways of blood and magic”; this can only happen at a specific moment they call “the hour of the woven words.” After a performance of *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, which the Doctor and Martha attend, Shakespeare acknowledges his audience’s disappointment at the unconventional ending and he promises them a sequel. The youngest witch magically forces Shakespeare to promise the sequel for the next evening. Unsure why he made such a promise, he sets to work on the play right away. Later, as he writes the play, the witch forces him to embed the sequel with a

² Listed as “Love’s Labour’s wonne” in Francis Meres’ list of Shakespeare’s plays in *Palladis Tamia, Wits Treasury* (1598), the play had been thought to denote an alternate name for *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593) (which was missing from Meres’ list) or a pure invention by Meres to grant symmetry to his catalogue. An additional handwritten list from 1603 (discovered in 1953) lists *Love’s Labour’s Won* and *Taming of the Shrew* together, which implies that the works were separate. It is generally accepted that the play existed, but was lost (Wells 81-2).

precise combination of words.³ When spoken at a precise time, and in concert with the specific dimensions of the Globe Theatre (also inspired by the witches), a portal will open to free the Carrionites.

When the Master of Revels threatens to stop the performance, the witches kill him, and the Doctor, recognizing their “magic,” remains to investigate. In most episodes of *Doctor Who*, a variety of worlds and peoples are saved from certain destruction by the clever Doctor’s science and knowledge. This time, Shakespeare’s words save the world, not the Doctor’s technology or genius. Apocalyptic fears often increased at the turn of a century, and here at the close of the 15th century, the Carrionites anticipate their utopia—the “millennium of blood”—through the destruction of the human world. Apocalypse and the ensuing rebirth of civilization is a common science fiction topic, but the Carrionites’ threat is predicated on the surety that words alone—and women’s words at that—are capable of physically creating utopia (a detail that proves most interesting to this dissertation). Initially disarming the witches by “naming” them, the Doctor insists that the Carrionites can only be defeated with words. He guesses their name because the fourteen-sided Globe reminds him of one of the hallmarks of their race. When he proclaims that “The power of a name, that’s old magic,” Martha protests that there is “no such thing as magic,” and with that the Doctor throws open the realms of possibility: “Well it’s just a different sort of science. You lot chose mathematics, given the right equations, the right string of numbers, and you can split the atom. The Carrionites use words instead.” Spoken words are suddenly endowed with the same physically destructive potential as math and science. Where better to imagine a utopia constructed of words than at the intersection between the

³ The words are nonsensical and are delivered farcically on the stage: “The light of Shadmock’s hollow moon doth shine on to a point in space betwixt Dravidian Shores and Linear 5930167.02, and strikes the fulsome grove of Rexel 4; co-radiating crystal activate!” The only other line from the lost play used in the show (“the eye should have contentment where it rests”) is taken from an episode of the 1965 *Doctor Who* serial “The Crusades” which takes place in the 12th century, but is written in decidedly Shakespearean language, a common tendency whenever a classic *Doctor Who* episode was set in “old” England.

Renaissance's idealization of poetry and our own theoretical interrogation of how words signify?

Women's words, specifically, are granted "monstrous" power; the Carrionites can harness the power of words as adeptly as humanity uses science and mathematics to build bombs. Yet, the episode does not celebrate this incredible potential. Instead, the episode focuses on the same historical assumptions that demonized "witches" as wielders of verbal powers through spells and charms. Women were excluded from positions in the church, government, or academy that would grant them verbal or textual authority, and worse yet, those who expressed an interest in gaining such power were at the least vilified and excommunicated, and at worst accused of "witchcraft," tortured to elicit confessions, or violently executed. The violence and anxiety surrounding such women was born of the fear that they might be able to manipulate the world with only their words. Shakespeare's comedic heroines were constantly granted brilliant verbal skills. Meanwhile, female writers stood precariously between respectability and the anxiety evoked by witches. Women such as Christine de Pizan and Margaret Cavendish often had their works/words used against them—they were scribbling women rather than skilled writers—in order to isolate and criticize them. If we can grant metaphoric influence to this episode's modern example, that the women-only Carrionite race had the ability to harness verbal power, then Shakespeare was forging a utopia on his stage where his ambiguous "women" could carve up the world that would demand their silence. It is little wonder that Gareth Roberts, who wrote this episode of *Doctor Who*, granted the cackling witches the opportunity to escape their bounds and free their kind in Elizabethan England when flourishing poetry and stagecraft idealized the art of words. Only in this historical moment when Shakespeare—the "wordsmith" and "most human human that's ever been"⁴—wrote so

⁴ The Doctor's words adhere to the universal iconicity of Shakespeare à la Harold Bloom's *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998), where Shakespeare is elevated beyond the greatest heights a mortal man can reach. Representing the finest literature in the world is a minor accomplishment compared to possessing the godhead of humanity: "He went beyond all precedents (even Chaucer) and invented the human as we continue to know it" (xviii). The

powerfully his words could be imagined to unintentionally cast open the doors to hell from a mere wooden stage.

The Doctor immediately understands that Shakespeare and the Globe are conduits for the Carrionites' plans, and he reflects on how "words and shapes [follow] the same design" and considers if the theater's fourteen sides might correspond to the fourteen-line sonnet. Shakespeare insists that it is "nothing but a theater," but the Doctor rejects this utterly: "But a theater is magic isn't it! You should know, you stand on this stage, say the right words with the right emphasis at the right times. You can make men weep or cry with joy. Change them. You can change people's minds just with words in this place." Thus, in the final scene, after the calculated lines are spoken, the witches rejoice at their impending utopia when a rift violently opens above the Globe and Shakespeare falters at the sight:

Doctor: Come on Will! History needs you!
 Shakespeare: But what can I do?
 Doctor: Reverse it!
 Shakespeare: How am I supposed to do that?
 Doctor: The shape of the Globe gives words power but you're the
 wordsmith, the one true genius, the only man clever enough to
 do it.
 Shakespeare: But what words? I have none ready!
 Doctor: You're William Shakespeare!
 Shakespeare: But these Carrionite phrases—they need such precision!
 Doctor: Trust yourself. When you're locked away in your room the
 words just come, don't they? Like magic, words, the right
 sound, the right shape, the right rhythm, words that last
 forever. That's what you do, Will. You choose perfect words! Do
 it! Improvise!

Shakespeare's self-doubt demonstrates the conventional anxiety over women's words that permeate this episode. The Carrionites require precise *women's* words (even if spoken by a male actor), and Shakespeare feels unprepared as he stands on the stage merely improvising. The Doctor believes that Shakespeare is the only "man" clever enough to do this, suggesting that women's words, so powerful in other worlds, are impossible to defeat except by the right man, and apparently, only from the stage.

worship of Shakespeare, termed "Bardolatry" by many, is unequivocal for Bloom. History has imbued Shakespeare with an aura of perfection in writing, theatre, and literature. Shakespeare is utopic, as much as he was a utopist, so when Bloom asks "Why Shakespeare?" his answer is most telling: "Who else is there?" (1).

Shakespeare succeeds, but only with the help of two women and their words: J.K. Rowling through Martha, who prompts Shakespeare with the final instrumental word that seals the swirling vortex: "*Expelliarmus!*"⁵ The portal closes, and the Doctor traps the trio of witches in their own crystal ball thanks to a woman offering the words of a woman writer-of-witches. Sadly, all the copies of the play are sucked into the vortex as it closes, and with that, the play is lost to history forever. However, "history" clearly needed Shakespeare; theater granted his words power and Shakespeare, as the "one true genius," wove them to make them "last forever." With the "will" to choose words perfectly, he granted those perfect words to his female characters (even if they were men dressed as women dressed as men). Shakespeare wields far more power than the demonized witches he defeats (or even the female helpers who contribute to that victory). The episode demonstrates how, with words alone, Shakespeare changed people's minds from the stage, and thus, perhaps changed the world.

Ben Jonson, Shakespeare's contemporary, insisted that Shakespeare "was not of an age, but for all time!" in his famous panegyric (1623) and we have continued to idealize Shakespeare ever since, even when it required rewriting Shakespeare himself. Following suit, perhaps this show was little more than a fun romp through the past filled with witty references and quotes from Shakespeare's works. After all, the Doctor peppers his speech with many of the most recognizable Shakespearean lines, leaving Shakespeare to respond with "I might use that." Shakespeare even bounces ideas off of the Doctor asking if "to be or not to be" might perhaps be "too pretentious." Roberts does not stop at the cleverly placed Shakespearean quotation,⁶ instead he includes multiple references at several levels that add to the overall metatextual effect. For example, Shakespeare is played as an incurable flirt, immediately exclaiming "hey nonny, nonny!" when the beautiful Martha enters the room and he struggles for a term

⁵ A word invented by J.K. Rowling as a disarming spell in the *Harry Potter* (1997-2011) series, which every fan of the series (a good portion of the show's audience) would immediately recognize.

⁶ In one instance, the Doctor recites lines from Dylan Thomas (a bow to the series' Welsh writers and directors) and then warns Shakespeare he cannot use them as they belong to someone else.

he might use to describe her by using different “Shakespearean” words for black women: “Blackamoor lady,” “Queen of Afric,” and “Ethiopian girl.” Suddenly, viewers are given an identifiable inspiration for the famed “dark lady” as Shakespeare recites the sonnets to Martha as if he were composing them to her in that moment. However, if the dark lady is present, Shakespeare’s homoerotic fawning over the “fair youth” must appear as well. Lingering sweetly with Martha, Shakespeare is hurried along by the Doctor, who demands: “Come on, we can all have a good flirt later!” Shakespeare then immediately shifts his amorous attentions to the handsome Doctor and asks him, with a coy smile, “Is that a promise, Doctor?” inspiring the doctor to yell: “Oh, fifty-seven academics just punched the air!” In much the same manner as Academy Award-winning *Shakespeare in Love* (1998), the episode includes several such details meant to glean a few knowing smiles and nods from those who notice references that a general audience might miss.

In this way, the episode both revels in and embellishes the Shakespearean character that modern history has come to “know”; where he deviates from this popular image he must become recognizable. Roberts creatively improvises in order to include the knowledge we maintain when recreating “our” Shakespeare as the ideal icon we recognize. For example, at one point the Doctor recommends that Shakespeare wear a ruff, and after a bump on the head, warns Shakespeare not to rub his head too much or it might leave him bald. Both details allow the character to conform to the Shakespeare of familiar portraiture. Reaffirming Shakespeare’s appearance in our minds is one thing, but Roberts also includes foundations for questions we may have of Shakespeare’s texts, as he did with the dual inspirations for the Sonnets and the explanation for the lost play. Towards the end of the episode the Doctor muses over a theatrical prop he finds at the theater (an animal skull of some sort) that “reminds him” of a Sycorax. Shakespeare responds with “nice word, I’ll have that off you as well” and unexpectedly we have a clear “source” behind the much debated etymology of the name of *The Tempest*’s own witch, but here it is removed from its

Shakespearean mooring as the name of an alien race the Doctor has fought before. Those familiar with the *Doctor Who* compendium know that Sycoraxes and Humans will be two among only three races that survive to the end of time.⁷ In the final scene of the episode, in front of Shakespeare's stage, Roberts conveniently defines one of Shakespeare's most troublesome words by projecting it into eternity and the end of the universe. The Sonnets promote the belief that poetry can grant eternal life and here that claim is suddenly proven true: "So long as man can breathe, or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee" (Sonnet 18). For Shakespeare, "devouring time" is "blunt" indeed (Sonnet 19) because his words do live (science-fictionally, at least) to the end of time. Eternity belongs to Humanity (and, apparently, to Sycoraxes as well) thanks to Shakespeare's words. Who else could more successfully upstage a Time Lord than immortal Shakespeare who is "for all time."

This episode offers an intriguing example of how modern audiences imagine their icons, their history, and their idols of perfection: Shakespeare is not just Shakespeare, but also "a mind like no other." His evolution as character and icon (like Christopher Columbus, as I discussed in chapter 2) is well documented, and I do not include this reading to explore Shakespeare's modern portrayal. More relevant to my goals is how the episode offers Shakespeare's words as a conduit for the world's salvation by grace of the theater's ability to transform worlds and how it simultaneously empowers and conquers women's words by that process. The final moment is, after all, an epic conflict between the witches' verbally precise incantations and the inspired, improvisations of *the* gifted poet. When words are empowered to conjure worlds (ideal or otherwise), we find the science fiction themes that utopian literature cultivated. When we imagine our past as utopia, and our historical figures as divine, then the chance of regaining utopia seems somehow more

⁷ It is noteworthy that the same series that begins so lightheartedly with Shakespeare and the Renaissance ends with an episode that takes place at the end of time. The first of the three-part episode (all written by Russell T. Davies) is titled "Utopia" (followed by "The Sound of Drums" and "Last of the Time Lords"). Each part includes a distinct utopic vision: the false utopia at the end of the universe in the first, the foundation of a fascist utopia in the second, and in the last, Martha undertakes a Christ-like journey where she spreads hope for a utopic revolution.

plausible; we had it then, so perhaps we can have it again. This locates utopia in the past and the future at once, in the Old and New World, as origin and destination, and it also leaves humanity always searching for utopia. Writers of science fiction have used utopia to express humanity's anxieties and desires more than any other genre. Utopia is so fundamental a theme to science fiction that, arguably, it can be found to different extents, and in some form, in *all* science fiction. *Doctor Who* alone, in its many incarnations, imagines utopias in alternate histories and dimensions, on multiple planets, from the perspective of good and evil beings with more episodes and novels, in more worlds and cities, than I could mention here (let alone science fiction in general).⁸ Shakespeare himself appears several times in *Doctor Who*, as do his plays and many historical leaders and famous authors.⁹ Suspending time and space allows the genre infinite possibility. Like the Doctor, the genre regenerates to allow utopia to persist always a little further on past the transgressed boundaries of the real.

Utopia progressed from More's name and location, to fuel the fantasy that Shakespeare staged most transgressively through ambiguous gender and form and influenced countless writers who followed Shakespeare. Margaret Cavendish's fantastical and scientific writings were directly inspired by Shakespeare's comedies, and Cavendish is only one of the many women who sensed that writing—her women's words—offered consummate freedom of utopia. As a philosophical and political concept, as a genre named and given location by Thomas More, and as a place somewhere beyond, utopia was marked by the negotiation of women and this followed suit into science fiction.¹⁰ Shakespeare's use of utopia on the early modern stage

⁸ For an impressive record of the *Doctor Who* compendium, see *The Doctor Who Reference Guide*, ed. Dominique Boies, 16 March 2011. <<http://www.drwhoguide.com/who.htm>>. A keyword search for "utopia" results in a staggering number of hits.

⁹ Doctors through the years have met such figures as Leonardo da Vinci, H.G. Wells, Albert Einstein, Mao Tse Tung, Richard the Lionheart, Wyatt Earp, Marco Polo, Charles Dickens, Agatha Christie, Queens Victoria and Elizabeth I, Madame de Pompadour, John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Adolf Hitler, and even Janis Joplin.

¹⁰ It is no coincidence that the first modern science fiction novel was Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (1818). A bit like utopia, science fiction (and perhaps even horror to an extent) is difficult to define,; it is usually distinguished from fantasy because it uses scientifically probable scenarios although certainly speculative science fiction imagines

illustrates how utopia progressed from a philosophical concept to an identifiable literary device before being reborn in politics and theory, and eventually becoming a goal for those who would attempt it in practice (in the New World colonies and future intentional communities). Each theme used to create utopia as a concept through its myriad ambiguous origins came to life on Shakespeare's stage and as I will show, most poignantly through his negotiation of gender and desire within those utopic themes.

possibilities, the genre generally respects the "laws of nature" and weaves scientific experimentation, philosophy, politics, and ethics into the story. Shelley's Dr. Frankenstein experimented with electricity, a principle gathering interest in the late 18th century. Earlier fantastical writings might also be considered precursors of the "modern" science fiction novel, and Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World* is certainly among these because the characters, mostly fantastical creatures, form scientific academies and debate the possibilities and limits of science and philosophy.

Chapter Three

Echoes and Enclosures: *Love's Labour's Lost*

Then thou, fair sun, which on my earth dost shine
 Exhal'st this vapour-vow, in thee it is.
 If by me broke, what fool is not so wise
 To lose an oath to win a paradise?
Love's Labour's Lost (4.3.67-71)

When one discusses Shakespeare's plays one generally assumes relatively wide audience familiarity, certainly so with the popular plays such as *Hamlet* (1600) or *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), and even, to some extent, with less commonly performed plays. If the language sounds "Shakespearean," then most would classify it as such, but *Love's Labour's Lost* is not the most recognizably Shakespearean play; if you summarize the plot, it sounds almost too simple. Much of its criticism emphasizes the play's exemplification of the uses and abuses of language or the challenge its verbal "fireworks" offers performers.¹¹ Editors, far more than performers, have had trouble reconciling the play to their expectations of Shakespeare. The two most prominent early editors of Shakespeare—Alexander Pope and Samuel Johnson—thought the play unworthy of him. Johnson, for instance, once wrote: "In this play, which all editors have concurred to censure, and some have rejected as unworthy of our poet, it must be confessed that there are many passages mean, childish, and vulgar: and some which ought not to have been exhibited, as we are told they were, to a *maiden queen*" (qtd. in Thompson "Feminism and Early Shakespearean Comedy" 92). Setting aside the notion that any editor could decide what is or is not worthy of an author, and the sense of ownership ("our poet") that justified his editorial decisions, Johnson's revisions led to the Princess's lines, in particular, being "much abbreviated"; evidently, the worrisome vulgarity that might dismay the maiden Elizabeth would be found in the Princess's lines. Irene G. Dash explores Pope's editorial influence and argues that he

¹¹ Although Shakespeare's later plays offer far more elaborate verbal sparring, Bloom offers this description of the play: "*Love's Labour's Lost* is a festival of language, an exuberant fireworks display in which Shakespeare seems to seek the limits of his verbal resources, and discovers that there are none" (121).

left “the remarkably outspoken Princess infrequently heard [and a] victim of eighteenth-century editing and bias against outspoken, independent women” (261).

According to Homer Swander, the play was so often subject to drastic editorial decisions that its reception was impacted for centuries; this textual interference, he argues, has effectively “hidden the play from modern readers, actors and audiences” (62). Swander painstakingly traces the play from the 1598 Quarto to the many modern editions based on the 1623 Folio. These differences, as he argues, reduce “the theatrical vitality of the play” and taken together lead to major textual losses. The “Rosaline-Katherine Tangle,” for instance, has led to confusion over the speakers in 2.1 and “at least seven different scripts offering, in a major sense, seven different plays.” Editors have untangled this dialogue inconsistently because of a desire for symmetry where “young men must enter and each take his place with absolute precision within the couples that the women have arranged for them.” Where *Love’s Labour’s Lost* seems unbalanced, as Swander argues, editors felt an overbearing desire to apply the “artificial charm” of symmetry to its chaos, but this resulted in a text that was far less pleasurable than it could have been, and far more artificial than it was (63).¹²

The play is verbally extravagant and surely represents Shakespeare’s first substantial foray into the comedic device of sparring couples and misdirected affections set within a minimal plot. The riot of words in this early play seems less successful in comparison, especially given the difficulty of keeping track of its many confusing exchanges: The doubled and redoubled asides in 4.3 that telescope outward from Biron’s initial recitation, the confusion over which courtier corresponds to which lady in 1.3 in which they woo each other while masked, play acting, or purposefully trying to misdirect each other. If anything, the play is overly preoccupied with the various forms that language takes. In lieu of dramatic action, the play contains long scenes that offer an unexpected variety of these forms as central plot points: a royal

¹² Swander notes: “in comments from critics, scholars, and editors, the two words most frequently generated by the received text [...] are—quite understandably—‘artificial’ and ‘symmetrical’” (51). Harold Bloom struggles with this detail by declaring it “elaborately artificial” thereby gilding the play’s heavy artifice with complexity (147).

proclamation, the Academe's schedule, legal communications, love letters, oaths, laws, lectures, rhetoric, poems, tongue-twisters, theatrical performances (both masques and plays), and songs. Whether written or spoken, physical or metaphorical, words are the focus of this play's movement. That so much of the play is relayed through a variety of messengers (a role defined by the conveyance of words) only supplements this theme. The play is a pageant of language that attempts to categorize words through the world of the stage.¹³ The play seems "aware" of how the power of words (and those who study them) can effect change on either side of the literary enclosure of the "little academe" (1.1.13). Consequently, *Love's Labour's Lost* is one of Shakespeare's most theatrical plays because it uses so little action and so much dialogue to convey the story, but it is precisely this overwhelming wordiness that facilitates its utopic potential. The play demonstrates how words can effect change in its characters and audience, and thus, how the stage can create utopias, enclosed on the stage, with words alone, or even if just with their echoes, as I will demonstrate.

As the play opens, Navarre describes how he will enclose the court with his four courtiers to participate in the founding of an academic utopia, and he invites the audience to come along. The Academe's primary goal is a devotion study in order to achieve fame; the four men must live in isolation from the world, and all the pleasures it offers, to build an ideal philosophical, ascetic haven. Plato's *The Republic* is a major influence to Navarre's Academe with Navarre in the role of philosopher-king. Hardship and deprivation are the keys to this enlightenment and glory, but for those accustomed

¹³ Eric Brown notes that the play was once considered a parody of language. Citing Frances Yates' 1936 study of the play, he writes: "All 'the various literary crazes of the day' come under fire: 'euphuism, arcadianism, Gongorism, Guevarism, Petrarchism and the sonneteering fashion, the mania for proverbs and for strange Latinate word.' In a sense, the play could be considered a parody of the many fads that were celebrated at court, and critically, the play has often been called a direct parody of Sir Walter Raleigh's coterie of intellectuals—particularly mathematicians, astronomers, and writers—who may have comprised 'the school of night' mentioned in the play" (21). The King's lines in 4.3 have been read as an allusion to an atheist intellectual society said to include Sir Walter Raleigh, Christopher Marlowe, George Chapman, and Thomas Hariot: four famous intellectuals grouped into a "school" once referred to as "the school of atheism" in a 1592 Jesuit pamphlet ("O paradox! Black is the badge of hell, / The hue of dungeons, and the school of night / And the beauty's crest becomes the heavens well" [4.3.251-253]). The symmetry of four historical figures corresponding to four courtiers is incredibly convenient, but the allusion has been discredited. Still, it does speak to the desire to reflect idealized historical figures into utopic spaces.

to the leisure and comfort of court, such labors are foreign (and downright un-utopian). The King's courtiers are not easily convinced of the Academe's goals, especially given the required separation from women. Dumaine questions the King, asking directly why "living in philosophy" requires discipline through mortification, but his question is never convincingly answered (1.1.28-32). As the play progresses, the Academe's utopian design is mocked as unrealistic, unnatural, and too stoic. Critics have also dismissed the Academe as a "doomed [...] all-male utopia" (Thompson 96) or as a "utopian scheme [...] discredited before it gets started" (Erikson 244). Indeed, the men undertake almost no philosophical study in the course of the play because they would rather indulge in writing poetry and acting in costume (incidentally, two activities that Plato explicitly bars in *The Republic*).¹⁴

The Academe's design demonstrates how early modern utopias were developing and filtering down to the popular imagination. By tracing how Shakespeare presents utopia in this, and subsequent plays, we can see how enclosures, and the negotiation of gender within them, became a standard theme in popular utopias. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, the King designs an ideal male-only space, but in practice, the courtiers discover they are not quite sure how to avoid women given that a truly ideal space cannot be without access to women. *Love's Labour's Lost* illustrates what men seeking utopia must do when women's presence simultaneously promises and threatens their utopia. Longueville expresses this sentiment while demonstrating the fleeting nature of the utopic moment (4.3.67-71). Women offer paradise, but only if the utopia represented by the oaths they offer the King is rejected. Comparing, or equating, paradise with the women becomes the focal point of much of the courtiers' poetry. The King questions their pursuit of women-as-paradise by using their own poetry against them: To Longueville, he asks: "You would for paradise break faith and troth," and then to

¹⁴ Debates over Plato's discussion of *poesis* are plentiful and stretch through the ages from Sidney's famous *Defense of Poesy* (1595) and far beyond. Most relevant to this point is Plato's discussion of drama in Book III. He proposes that theater would be detrimental to the Guardians because it imitates unworthy models. It is particularly telling that the men of Shakespeare's play do little else than write poetry and act. All the men, courtiers and servants alike, are almost entirely imitative or illusory throughout the play (the very failure Plato warns against).

Dumaine, "And Jove, for your love, would infringe an oath" (4.3.141-144). In their poetry, the women are paradise or heaven (4.3.58, 64) or goddesses they might worship: "Vouchsafe to show the sunshine of your face, / That we, like savages, may worship it" (5.2.201-202). This is expected of sonneteers, as is the poetic idealization of women in the play, but in the courtiers' poetry, they come to embody "paradise" to a far greater extent than the familiar Petrarchan "beloved" because their representations are specifically bound to the construction and maintenance of utopia.

Above all, the King of Navarre promises this endeavor will bring them an enduring fame that will leave them "heirs to all eternity" (1.1.7). To earn this immortal fame, they must stop the obliteration of "devouring Time" (1.1.4) and conquer death: "Let fame, that all hunt after in their lives, / Live registered upon our brazen tombs, / And then grace us in the disgrace of death" (1.1.1-3). Fame is metaphorized through militant and venatic language as a prey that must be captured, trapped, and forced to "live" eternally on their "brazen tomb," thus ensuring their eternal "grace" by conquering the "disgrace" of death. By requiring that fame "live" upon their tombs, and describing those tombs both vividly and actively as "brazen," the King's words animate death. "Brazen" captures death by enclosing it in unyielding brass denoting both heraldic sound and unyielding enclosure, while at once punning on the transgression of shameless actions. Fame embodies their goal for utopia and so it must be enclosed, for eternity, on their tombs. The play's final dramatic shift also invokes an Arcadian utopia. The tombs at the start of the play combined with the last messenger arriving with news of the King's death, define the play's structural expression of *et in Arcadia ego* (the moment of realization that death enters even the most idyllic utopia).¹⁵ The phrase appears in several Renaissance paintings and was originally translated as "I once lived in Arcadia," but the more ambiguous reading,

¹⁵ Though it is an uncertain origin, Theocritus is the most commonly recognized source for the pastoral, as adopted by Virgil in his *Eclogues*, the fifth of which describes a tomb with an inscription narrating the death of Daphnis; the moment interrupts the pastoral Arcadian idyll. A visual representation of that tomb inscribed with "*et in Arcadia ego*" would first emerge in a painting by that name, also called "The Arcadian Shepherds" (c.1620) by Guercino, and in two later paintings by Nicolas Poussin (one in 1627 and the second of 1637).

"Even in Arcadia, I exist," suggests that Death is reminding the inhabitants of Arcadia that one can never escape morality, even in utopic spaces. The courtiers' tombs at the start of their utopia "inscribe" (and thus enclose) fame in order to bring them eternal life. The Academe must strive towards idyllic immortality by capturing death in the tomb and not allowing it to wander in their utopia. When the women appear, they dismantle the men's utopia in several ways. First, by their presence, they demonstrate the failure of the already breached enclosure, and second, by bringing death (by messenger) into their midst at the close of the play. The courtiers lose both the possibility of their academic utopia and their "women-as-paradise" as both utopias fail because of the oaths that promised and denied their utopia at once.

As expected, the women are poetically idealized, but the King's first ten lines also invoke masculine ideals through the heroic chivalry as represented by the Nine Worthies (who are mocked in the final act) and the classical images of Time. These men do not strive to be gentle philosophers but "brave conquerors" that must war against enemies: Their "own affections" and the "huge army of the world's desire" (1.1.8-10). Time is personified through the classic image of "cormorant devouring Time," and is considered a threat, so the Academe will "bate his scythe's keen edge" to secure their own immortality (1.1.4-6). This offers another personification of Saturn who, by the early modern, was emblematically conflated with representations of Time, and identified by the ominous scythe that symbolized both the castrating phallic sickle and the crescent womb. The courtiers' here gender the enemy "his," but Peter Erikson argues that the Academe's "enemy" is feminized: "The essential impulse is to construct a haven for masculine purity based on the exclusion of women. By implication, women are associated with 'cormorant devouring Time,' the enemy originally named by the King" (243).¹⁶

¹⁶ The cormorant, for early modern England, symbolized deception and greed. It appears in Milton's *Paradise Lost* in Eden's tree of life as Satan himself taking refuge in the tree where he "sat devising death" (4.197).

Time and women are both cast as enemies to be conquered (just as “fame” is both prey and goal), but desire emerges as the only true threat and so dilutes the connection between women and time that Erickson posits. The true enemy is the men’s desire and comes from within the Academe, which *is* presented negatively from its inception. The exclusion of women suggests that the masculine ideal space is contingent on the absence of women, but the play genders Time (and Death) masculine and proclaims *him* the enemy long before any woman appears. The women appear and are described and treated as a conquering army. Maintaining the Academe will require the courtiers’ battle skills in their role as knights (not their skills as lovers or suitors) to fight their tempting armies of desire. The King demands that his men be armed and ready with his final words before they sign the contract:

That his own hand may strike his honour down
That violates the smallest branch herein
If you are armed to do as sworn to do,
Subscribe to your deep oaths, and keep it too (1.1.20-23).

Their union is fundamentally more martial than academic: They must be more chivalrous knights than philosopher kings, more Henry V than Hamlet (so to speak) to become a band of brothers, academic and militant, gallant and brooding. They fear violation from within, as Erikson implies, suggesting that once the women arrive, they are less of a threat to the utopia itself than the means that might drive the men’s motivation away from their desire for a purely fraternal utopia.

Through Biron’s reluctance to join, we are made privy to the finer details of the Academe’s rules, which are absurdly rigid even if only required for a defined length of time. For three years, the men must forgo women, must fast one day a week, eat only once on other days, and sleep only three hours a night. According to Biron, these are “barren tasks, too hard to keep” (1.1.47) and he insists that any knowledge they discover will prove fruitless and impotent (as their words and oaths will prove). As Biron equivocates on the specifics of his promise to the King, he questions each law and reacts most vigorously to the dictate against women as he struggles to find an

exception to his promise: "I only swore to study with your grace, / And stay here in your court for three years' space" (1.1.51-52). When called out on his complaints, he trivializes his own words: "By yea and nay, sir, then I swore in jest" (1.1.54).

Importantly, Biron's equivocation to escape the rigid rules allows for the Academe's only philosophical discussion in the play (occurring, oddly enough, *before* the Academe has officially begun). The King and Biron discuss the meaning and value of study:

Biron: What is the end of study, let me know?
 King: Why, that to know which else we should not know.
 Biron: Things hid and barred, you mean, from common sense?
 King: Ay, that is study's god-like recompense.
 Biron: Come on then, I will swear to study so,
 To know the thing I am forbid to know:
 As thus—to study where I well may dine,
 When I to feast expressly am forbid;
 Or study where to meet some mistress fine,
 When mistresses from common sense are hid;
 Or, having sworn too hard-a-keeping oath,
 Study to break it and not break my troth.
 If study's gain be thus, and this be so,
 Study knows that which yet it doth not know.
 Swear me to this, and I will ne'er say no.
 King: These be the stops that hinder study quite,
 And train our intellects to vain delight.
 Biron: Why, all delights are vain, but that most vain
 Which, with pain purchased, doth inherit pain:
 As painfully to pore upon a book
 To seek the light of truth, while the while
 Doth falsely blind the eyesight of his look.
 Light seeking light doth light of light beguile;
 So, ere you find where light in darkness lies,
 Your light grows dark by losing of your eyes. [...]
 Study is like the heaven's glorious sun,
 That will not be deep-searched with saucy looks;
 Small have continual plodders ever won,
 Save base authority from others' books.
 These earthly godfathers of heaven's lights,
 That give a name to every fixed star,
 Have no more profit of their shining nights
 Than those that walk and wot not what they are
 Too much to know is to know naught but fame,
 And every godfather can give a name (1.1.55-93).

Biron, the most eloquent of the courtiers, offers this contradictory lament comparing the enlightening pleasures of study to the stringent austerity of the King's proposed academy. He likens study to "heaven's glorious sun" in this light-filled speech, but then rejects his own words by describing study's ends as fleeting. Knowing too much leads to

“naught but fame,” like when a man who names the stars gains “no more profit” than enlightenment. Biron reveals the ideal goal of studying almost inadvertently: Knowledge for the sake of knowledge alone, rather than fame. The Academe *should* aspire to the ideal as Biron outlines it. The King insists that his desire for knowledge is to know the unknown, but Biron contextualizes the King’s declaration within the reality of the proposed Academe. One can just as well study, he suggests, while eating and having mistresses rather than hiding away from the knowledge “common sense” affords. That there is a knowledge “hidden” and “barred,” distinct from common sense, and that one must enclose oneself in order to receive it, suggests the existence of a paradoxical realm that must be penetrated to be discovered, covered up to be illuminated. However, as Biron points out, one could go blind from such enlightenment and he strives to bring common sense to the Academe’s plan through his resistance, and by pointing out that knowledge gained through such pain can only result in further pain. As the debate ends, Biron has rightly proposed that the King’s plan requires that the courtiers will only maintain an endless postponement of true knowledge; striving to be gods will not grant them the fame they seek because experience, as Biron suggests, is more enlightening than enclosed study.

The King declares his desire to know, not what he “does not know,” but rather what he “should not know”; the hidden truth are barred by the only authority transcending the King (like Eden’s forbidden fruit), but gaining that knowledge will remove the obstacle and grant him supreme authority, or “god-like recompense.” The courtiers’ declare the Academe’s goal, at first, to be studying in order to achieve fame, but then this shifts to studying the unknown in order to discover forbidden truths, and ends with their true goal: Deification, which they will assign the women. The loss of Eden was the loss of innocence (and ignorance) and the price of that knowledge was “won” at the cost of work, hardship, and mortality. This King-as-god will also require work and hardship in his utopia, but he promises an escape from mortality through fame. Courtly leisure with its abundance of “vain” pleasures is

already utopic in its own way, but the King hopes to create a post-lapsarian Eden offering full access to knowledge without relinquishing divinity and immortality. The construction of the Academe at the exclusion of women is the key factor because the King considers the women's presence the threat barring his Academe from achieving utopic immortality. In Eden, Eve chose knowledge instead of obedience and ignorance, and in Navarre, the women also require the men disobey rules to gain true knowledge as well. Biron ultimately signs the contract, but his resistance continues to the last moment, and in the process, he reveals two "items"—penalties for violations of the rules—that concern women and enclosure specifically. The first declares that if any woman comes within a mile of the court she does so "on pain of losing her tongue" (1.1.122-23). The second declares that men seen speaking to women will be subject to public shame in a manner determined by the rest of the court (119-131). If women are present, they would speak and be heard (the true threat, not just their presence). To prevent their dangerous words and presence, the punishment must be physical and specifically focused on her instrument of speech. For a comedy that celebrates words and regularly elevates women's words as more exact and sensible than men's words, it is surprising that so cruel a punishment would be required.

There is a poignant connection between this graphic punishment and Lavinia's dismemberment in *Titus Andronicus* (1593), which Shakespeare wrote just the year before. The extreme brutality of this seemingly minor detail gains context if we reflect on Shakespeare's Titus: A powerful General with an overwhelming, near-mythic masculinity. He is a conquering hero returned from war with the proof of his abundant potency in the form of twenty-one dead sons. As the epitome of a victorious military patriarch, he must now stoically conquer his grief over the loss of his sons and their shared brotherhood in battle. He mourns the loss of this utopic military brotherhood as much as he mourns his sons, and so demands all funerary honors for them. He hopes to maintain their brotherhood through immortal fame (like the chivalrous union of the Academe. Titus's obsessive focus on his sons' religious rites seems almost petty

considering he has lost so many sons at once. Only the presence of his daughter Lavinia, who is vibrant, desired, and (egregiously) still alive before his plenitude of fallen soldier-sons disturbs his conviction. Unlike his proud sons, Lavinia shames him with her wordless refusal of a political marriage leaving Titus, in his rage, to kill yet another son who protects her from their father's wrath. Lavinia can have no redemption, for her refusal to agree to a political marriage that she sparked the downfall of her family; her words must be disallowed and so she remains silent at the pivotal moment. As the play progresses, she is left violated and mutilated, with no tongue or hands she must scratch in the impermanent sand not her own words, but the myth she narrates—Ovid's Philomela—in order to recount her own rape and dismemberment. Titus did not listen to Tamora's words when she begged for her son's life, and Tamora did not listen to Lavinia's words when she begged for her own life. Lavinia and Tamora's unheard words set the play's revenge in motion and lead to the eventual death of *both* families (save for Lucius, the final son safely "enclosed" in his military exile as he builds a new force, a new band of brothers, to return and restore the world from the damage wrought by women's words). How should we read this brutal punishment hidden so innocently in the Academe's charter, especially when set against the comparatively benign, rather vague, penalty towards the men? Interaction with women does not threaten the courtiers because that infraction will not garner a physical punishment against the men. After all, losing her tongue for speaking to a man would disallow a woman's ability to speak again, but strictly physical (rather than verbal) congress would still be possible and would only result in mild penalties for the men. Costard's punishment for being with Jaquenetta in the next scene is nothing more shameful than fasting for a week with bread and water (a daily deprivation for members of the Academe). She may be there if she is silent (as the ideal woman should be), but her words must be violently prevented before they "breed" *active* women's words (rather than the men's "barren tasks").

This brutal image of women losing their tongues in a play that contains a great deal of sonneting immediately recalls the Renaissance convention of poetically dissecting women. Mark Breitenberg argues that early modern Petrarchan traditions of feminine idealization are central to the play and its expressions of masculinity. Shakespeare was party to this sweeping poetic tradition and enjoyed mocking the popular blazon in his sonnets and plays. Breitenberg argues that Shakespeare's participation in the tradition is particularly distinct in *Love's Labour's Lost*: "More than just a comic exaggeration of this popular literary convention: Petrarchism underwrites the economy of masculine desire that structures the play and shapes its action" (434). He grounds his argument on Nancy Vickers' influential article "Diana Described: Scattered Women Scattered Rhyme" that demonstrates the dramatic influence of Petrarch's use of *rime sparse*. In her article, Vickers argues that this "poetics of fragmentation" allowed male poets to construct a unified subjectivity through a lyrical dismemberment of the female ideal (or poetry as utopia and, as a consequence, women idealized as utopia). Breitenberg follows Vickers on this point by arguing that Petrarchism was "a form of male empowerment" because it represented the beloved as "dispersed" or as "the dismembered other against which the male poet can measure and retain his own 'coherent' unified identity." In this play, as Breitenberg writes:

Petrarchan poetry becomes the textualized form of the male gaze: it specularizes "woman" by way of anatomical hyperbole and thus creates only an idealization of women. [...] Within this view of Petrarchism, the play's refusal of linguistic and erotic consummation upholds a masculine structure of desire because deferral is the basis of the traditionally gendered subject/object economy in the first place. In other words, deferral and "frustration" sustain men in the active position of pursuit, of doing the representing, and women in the static position of being represented (437).

Desire may be "masculine," but utopia is feminine and it creates a different economy than Breitenberg indicates. The Academe requires physical dismemberment as the penalty for transgressive women thereby preventing their speech and "representing" them as static mute bodies. To achieve a masculine utopia that requires women, men must disengage women's *active* words from their bodies while still maintaining their

bodily presence in order to simultaneously postpone and promise access and penetration. This paradigm is reflected in the play's thematic rewriting of the mythological Echo of Ovid's "Echo and Narcissus" (*Metamorphoses* 3.398-642), as I will demonstrate.¹⁷ Shakespeare allows the women's words to flow so much more freely, actively, and effectively than the men's words in this play that it is difficult to recognize the "active position of pursuit" Breitenberg argues the men maintain. Indeed, the men are far more static and are trapped (or enclosed) in their repeated fruitless efforts with words. Women's "enlightening" words generate the play's wooing (words leading to an endless postponement of a physical union). As long as the language continues, the words and nothing more, the utopia is maintained (though not the King's vision of utopia).

Once the courtiers meet the ladies they do little else but tear them to bits with words of love. The courtiers willingly become traditional Petrarchan sonneteers (feminized because the excessive use of words), and their poetry and actions humorously illustrate how "words usurp (male) reason." Their utopic enclosure depends on their identifying the women's presence and words as threatening. After all, those are the only dangers specifically mentioned as punishable offenses in the decree. However, the women are also the promise of utopia, for it is their presence, resistance, and eventual dismantling of the Academe that leads to everyone's freedom (in favor of their own version of separate utopic spaces). The Petrarchan tradition defines a long history of "interpretation and internalization of woman's 'image' by both men and women" and, more importantly in this play, how "bodies fetishized by a poetic voice logically do not have a voice of their own; the world of making words, of making texts, is not theirs," as Vickers argues (434, 107). If masculine unity is secured by dismembering the female body in poetry, and the poet's emotional destruction scatters reason (rendering the beloved as physically scattered as Lavinia's tongue and

¹⁷ Lavinia's rape and dismemberment similarly "echoes" Ovid's Philomela thus demonstrating one of the many textual and aural echoes in this play as I will demonstrate.

hands), then any women who enter the Academe must be similarly scattered. However, the women do not stay in place, and are not silent; instead, they choose to scatter themselves by leaving on their own terms at the end of the play.

A *tragic* heroine loses her tongue and hands, and eventually her life, for the crime of her presence and speech. The presence and speech of *comedic* heroines are so threatening that the women (and their words) must be endlessly deferred (through wooing) to stave off the vague and ephemeral oaths that men attempt to exclude them with. This paradigm simultaneously exempts and preempts Woman in/as utopia. It is not long into the Academe's contractual deliberation when Biron points out that the King must break the injunction against speaking to women because the French King's daughter is due to arrive. The Academe is as easily set aside as Biron's nameless thing:

So study evermore is overshot.
While it doth study to have what it would,
It doth forget to do the thing it should;
And when it hath the thing it hunteth most,
'Tis won as towns with fire—so won, so lost" (1.1.141-145).

The courtiers' short-lived plan is likened to the contradictory act of war in which the prize is lost in the same moment it is won, demonstrating just one example of this play's constant vacillation. Shakespeare's contradiction illustrates how the ideals in gender and desire are inadequate on stage without transgression and slippage because utopia is active, present, and granted an identifiable place in theater.¹⁸ He is mocking the sonnetic idealization of women, but is also insisting that the women are both the threat and requirement of the men's utopic endeavors.

There is a powerful thematic enclosure in the play's overall structure, not just with the Academe. For example, the play's characters always maintain their rigid groups (with the important exception of the messengers as intermediaries). Members of one group do not speak alone on stage for any length of time with a member of another group (although they may speak aside, they are still in the company of their group).

¹⁸ Several critics have considered the play's contradiction claiming that Shakespeare must have been "of two minds" when writing it and that he was unable to complete the romantic comedy he intended but felt unable to abandon the project altogether (Lewis "Reckoning in *Love's Labour's Lost*" 245).

Groups and individuals mingling and then breaking off towards their cross purposes and misdirection, add to the merriment of later plays, but the rigidity with which the groups are maintained in this play dampens this comedic effect.¹⁹ Each group exits and enters the stage together adding its bits to the plot while their dialogues and goals remain more specific to the group than a single character. The play is organized into loosely connected, long-winded, acts that augment this sense of division. Erickson defines this grouping as a motif of separation and argues that, through these distinct groups, the play offers “units” separated by sex: “This separateness is emphasized by the way the men and women act in patterned units of four rather than as individuals” (251). The use of messengers (mostly Costard and Boyet) allows the play’s groups to remain distinct because they connect groups through words exchanged from one enclosure to another. Much of the humor comes from misdirected or ineffective messages, and inquiries made through mediums that lose something in translation; we see this in particular when Costard translates Armado’s letter for the courtiers in 1.1.188-302.

In a play so focused on words and wooing, one would expect there to be more substantial interaction between couples, and yet the courtiers meet with the ladies as themselves only twice: in 2.1, at their first meeting, and late in 5.2, during the play of the Nine Worthies. Otherwise, the men are masked and costumed whenever they woo the women who are not only masked as well, but are pretending to be each other. Furthermore, their second (and final) meeting is interrupted by a messenger who reroutes the play altogether by allowing the men and women to face each other honestly only right before they must separate. The play’s fruition, the goal of all these wooing words, is indefinitely forestalled to sustain the utopia. The intimate connection within the groups supports the thematic enclosure of the play, but in a utopic space, the boundaries between these groups are often tested and questioned. For example,

¹⁹ In *As You Like It* (1600), *Twelfth Night*, and most spectacularly, in *Much Ado About Nothing* (1599), but also in the redundantly twinned misrecognitions and exchanges of the earlier *Comedy of Errors* (1592).

the Academe is breached even before the reluctant Biron signs on (Biron mentions the Princess's impending arrival in 1.1.131-139 and he does not actually sign up until 1.1.159 after the Academe has already failed), and the Muscovite Masque meant to insulate the men is discovered beforehand allowing the Princess to cross their intent: "They do it but in mockery merriment, / And mock for mock is only my intent" (5.2.138-140). Finally, the women don their own masks, each other's names and favors, but each group remains intact; this blurs the individuals even while they interact. The women exert far greater control over these confusing exchanges within their own discussions indicating that fluid gender is the key to transgression in the play.

Armado's letter to the King follows the Academe's edict as the second written document in the play. Armado has arrested Costard after discovering him in the garden with Jaquenetta, and in the letter, he condemns them and offers a list of terms referring to the lovers that Costard amusingly translates for the court. Armado, a messenger for much of the play, has sent the letter via Constable Dull. The letter is read aloud, and Costard becomes both translator and messenger for a message, brought by one messenger and sent by an absent messenger, about himself. This produces a distancing and multiplicity that insulate the class groups from each other through a multi-layered misreading and superfluity of ambiguous and synonymous words that generalize rather than define. Armado's words, relayed through Dull, and translated through Costard, arrive at court through these many verbal filters, and Boyet will later play a similar role of messenger and translator between the ladies and the courtiers. The separation of words from their speakers (the justification behind the Academe's penalty of separating women's words/tongues from their bodies) is as persistent as the assertion of each character's connection with his or her group. Meanwhile, Jacquenetta acts as a female proxy twice over preparing the way for the ladies' entry into the play.²⁰ First, she appears textually in 1.1 through the excessive

²⁰ Jacquenetta's entire presence in the play amounts to only 13 lines, most in witty response to Armado's attempts to woo her and in connection to the letter she received of Costard in error;

descriptions of her in Armado's letter (coupled with Costard's more "common" translation) that introduce all the possible names of Woman to the would-be poets before they are in the presence of any woman, and then she appears physically in 1.2. This progressive introduction distances and insulates the women (as the letter did the classes) from the Court's decrees, and allows the audience to both mock the courtiers' expectations and reveal the arbitrary nature of their own poetic personification of the women.

Costard prefaces the content of the letter as being the "manner" of Jaquenetta, and the many meanings and homophonic suggestions of "manner" are volleyed between Costard and the courtiers. Costard interrupts the reading with translations through which he simultaneously defends himself while mocking Armado. This verbal volley is confusing and provokes the King to demand "No words!" in a play of nothing but words (1.1.225). Costard and Jacquenetta are caught in the King's park where knotted-gardens allow for enclosure through artificial walls. The letter's language diminishes and feminizes Costard in a stream of suggestive epithets: "base minnow," "small-knowing soul," and "shallow vassal" (all names that Costard admits refer to himself). Costard introduces the first alternate name for Jaquenetta confessing that he was caught with a "wench." Armado then follows Costard's "wench" with a catalogue of terms for women: "child of our grandmother Eve, a female, or, for thy more sweet understand, a woman" (1.1.253-255), only referring to Jacquenetta by name after the other names for women: "For Jacquenetta—so is the weaker vessel called—which I apprehended with the aforesaid swain, I keep her as a vessel of thy law's fury, and shall, at least of thy sweet notice bring her to trial" (1.1.261-264). That Costard is brought before the King without Jacquenetta suggests a respect for the Academe's boundaries, but it also serves to bolster the distinction between the gendered groups. However, Jacquenetta had, at the very least, access to the King's

her existence is as a proxy, or conduit, for misplaced and misdirected men's words. In effect, she has lost her tongue textually if not actually.

garden; the boundaries have already been breached because women are in the garden, and as Jaquenetta is namely "a child of Eve," Eden, and men's expulsion from the garden because of Eve, resurfaces. The biblical allusion is complicated through the gender fusion of Costard as "vassal" and Jaquenetta as "vessel." When questioned, Costard focuses on Jaquenetta's role as a vessel: she is wench, damsel, virgin, maid, and so forth. The ladies' impending arrival thus becomes a baseless concern because women are already in the garden where the King's vassals/vessels come along even before the King's "official" declaration of the Academe. Only *after* Costard is imprisoned (another failed male enclosure because Costard somehow continues to run around freely as messenger throughout the play), does the King proclaim that now, finally, "we, go lords, to put into practice that / Which each to other hath so strongly sworn" (1.1.293-294).

Faced with the arrival of the women, the King decides to allow them in, but only as far as his gardens. Boyet introduces the women to the play with a hyperbolic speech praising the "perfection" of "Matchless Navarre" and declares that Nature "did starve the general world" in order to give the Princess every grace (2.1.6-12). Following this extreme idealization, the Princess's first words to Boyet's exaggerated language are surprising: she rejects them and returns them (a habit in much of the Princess's dialogue). She takes him down several pegs by demanding he avoid what she calls the "base sale of chapmen's tongues" because she has no need for "the painted flourish of [his] praise" (2.1.14-16), or even the information he brings as she already knows the King's restrictions not to allow women into his "silent court" (although his court is never silent). She then asks Boyet: "Therefore to's seemeth it a needful course, / Before we enter his forbidden gates, / To know his pleasure" (2.1.26-27). The Princess needs to enter the forbidden space in order to "know his pleasure," playing the dual meaning of "knowledge" against the courtiers' search for knowledge: One is practical, the other abstract, but both are indicative of transgression (sexual or otherwise) and enclosure, and both are presented as locatable spaces. The King's

knowledge relies on enclosure, but the Princess's knowledge depends on the transgression of that enclosure. The Princess does not say "*if we may* enter his forbidden gates," but that they *will*. There is no uncertainty in this Princess's will and she demonstrates this when she tells the King that "will" alone will decide the value of words and the quality of action. Strategic and exacting throughout, the Princess even probes her ladies' past knowledge of the courtiers as research for her plans. From their first appearance, the women prove more direct and assertive, and far less excessive with their words. In effect, they act more as ideal men than the poetic, indecisive (feminized) courtiers do.

Boyet returns with the message that the women will not be welcomed in by any "dispensation," but that the King "means to lodge [them] in the field, / Like one that comes here to besiege his court" (2.1.85-87). The King's enclosure needs a military defense, as Boyet indicates here and as the King suggested in his first speech. Moreover, the King and Princess's relationship is entirely political, a tone they set from this first meeting. The women are housed in the field, indicating that their role in the play is as an opposing enemy leaving the King and Princess's discussion to come across as a parley: they discuss his diplomatic failures, her father's suit, payments for lands, and the spoils of war. There is no wooing, or even friendly courtesy, only business, and even on this concrete topic, the Princess negates the King's words from the start. The King's first word to her ("fair") she immediately returns (and tells him so), which forces the conversation away from his empty words:

King:	Fair Princess, welcome to the court of Navarre
Princess:	'Fair' <i>I give you back again</i> , and welcome I have not yet. The roof of this court is too high to be yours, and welcome to the wide fields too base to be mine,
King:	You shall be welcome, madam, to my court.
Princess:	I will be welcome then. Conduct me thither.
King:	Hear me, dear lady. I have sworn an oath—
Princess:	Our Lady help my lord! He'll be forsworn.
King:	Not for the world, fair madam, by my will.
Princess:	Why, will shall break it; will, and nothing else (2.1.90-99, emphasis mine).

The Princess repeatedly “gives back” the King’s words, precisely as she says she will. From her first “fair,” then twice with “welcome,” then “lady” and “sworn/forsworn,” and finally, poignantly, ending with “will.” Each word, when returned, drives home its falsity. Will alone, she insists, does not allow them at court, rather than any loyalty to an oath because the King stands there speaking to a woman in clear violation of that oath. It is in this verbal swaying that the play is most reminiscent of the myth of “Echo and Narcissus”; the women reside in the fields (like nymphs) and respond in echoes. They repeat the men’s words back to them while their physical bodies blend indistinguishably into their group thereby superseding their individual identities and granting added force to their words instead of their bodies.²¹ Importantly, this is not how the myth (in Golding’s translation) is usually read; the women’s echoing does not suggest that they lack words and so must use the men’s words *instead* of their own, but that by returning the courtiers’ words they strategically expose their emptiness.

If the women are like Echo, then the men are a great deal like Narcissus as they see only themselves and their ideal “image” of the women in the ladies’ mirroring eyes. Vision (and eyes), like words (and language), is another repetitive image in the play.²² The women’s bodies, idealized and emblemized, actually fade with their return to France, and all that remains to the courtiers are the women’s words to remind them of the promise required of them. The Princess’s attendants follow her echoing while she negotiates with the King. Rosaline echoes Biron’s lines so exactly that only a deliberate spoken emphasis would indicate who is speaking to whom:

²¹ In Book III of *Metamorphoses*, Ovid narrates the tale of Echo, a nymph that colluded with Jove to keep his wife, Hera, busy with idle chatter while he dallied with the nymphs. Hera discovered this and cursed Echo so that she could only ever respond with words spoken to her. In that state, she fell in love with Narcissus, a beautiful, vain youth who spurned all suitors out of pride and arrogance. Echo chases him through the forest and he rejects her; she falls into such despair that her body disappears altogether leaving nothing but her voice to answer involuntarily when others call out. As for Narcissus, when a young boy falls in love with him and is similarly rejected, the boy calls upon the wrath of Nemesis who answers him by cursing Narcissus to fall deeply in love with his own image in a pool, leaving him unable to leave the pool because he is so taken by his own image. Eventually, he too fades away and leaves nothing but his image in the pool and a flower the nymphs name in his honor. Two disembodied lovers: one nothing but a voice the other nothing but an image.

²² The word “eye” is used more than 70 times, the vast majority spoken by the men (courtiers and servants alike).

Biron (to Rosaline): Did not I dance with you in Brabant once?
 Rosaline: Did not I dance with you in Brabant once?
 Biron: I know you did.
 Rosaline: How needless was it then
 To ask the question! (2.1.113-117)

It continues, to different degrees, with each subsequent pair. The women overtly act as echo to the men, but echoing is a repeated pattern through the play. Words and rhymes echo between the men as well, but their echoing is far less effective and this creates contrast between each group's verbal acuity. Biron and Rosaline continue their exchange by echoing end-rhymes to each other: To his "tire" she follows with "mire," she answers with "ask" and he follows with "mask," and again with "covers" and "lovers," and finally "none" and "gone," two words that end an exchange that Rosalind strategically begins with "needless" words and ends with "none" (2.1.118-126).

Similarly, in 1.1 the men discuss the Academe through a four-way poetic composition where they complete each other's rhymes and create a unified voice that illustrates the intimacy between the men: To the King's "these" Biron answers "please," then Longueville's "rest" is answered by Biron's "jest," the King's "know" echoing Biron's own "know" that readily puns on "no" (1.1.50-56). Their words express a deliberate self-consciousness and a verbal intimacy. Dumaine says there is "in reason nothing" to which Biron answers "something then in rhyme" (1.1.98-99), which inadvertently reveals truth at the end of their exchange. For the men, at least, reason is nothing and poetry is all, and the foundation of their unity is nothing more than constant rhyming rather than allegiance to each other or their oaths. Shakespeare does this relatively often in his comedies as it adds to the comedic effect when one character poetically mocks another's words because it lightens the mood through sarcasm and allows for humorous punning.²³ However, in *Love's Labour Lost*, this echoes more than it parodies, and the courtiers' sonneting is far from successful. The majority of the play's humor emerges from the men (courtiers and servants alike) being unable to hear either

²³ In examples such as Romeo and Juliet's first meeting, the young lovers recite a sonnet by taking turns every few lines and ending the couplet in their first kiss; their poetic unity indicates a far more productive shared rhyme (*Romeo and Juliet* 1.5.92-105).

their own ineptitude or the moments when they unexpectedly discover truth: They hear their words thrown back at them, even by each other, and yet disregard them as one would an echo. This suggests, as Cynthia Lewis writes, that “the men, whose hackneyed love poems in 4.3 reveal that they are more in love with love than with individual women, cannot love the women because they do not know them” (“Reckoning in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*” 254). The men see in the women only themselves and the ideals they capture in their sonnets; it is not wonder that they can only identify the women by the favors they gave them when they arrive for the masque because they can only “see” themselves in the women.

Echo and Narcissus is but one of the mythic origins being “replayed” here. Along with Echo, the Princess also recalls Diana, and consequently, Queen Elizabeth, who was also associated with the virgin-huntress. Her own myth as Virgin Queen was developing, and the Princess will emerge from this play and unmarried Queen as well.²⁴ Diana was a much-used figure of chastity and ideal femininity, and her presence inspires images of gardens and fields, of *locus amoenus* or the pastoral (so often considered utopic). She inhabits oak glades and idyllic pastures, frolics with her nymphs, and goes hunting at will. Her androgynous representation through many powerful symbols emphasized her chastity, independence, and hunting skills: the phallic bow and arrow, the crescent moon upon her brow suggesting masculine and feminine attributes in one body, and a horned stag, which appears so tellingly in the Princess’s hunt. Through this confluence of ambiguous mythological associations, the

²⁴ Hans Eworth’s allegorical “Elizabeth and the Three Goddesses” (1569) is an unusual portrait of Queen Elizabeth that offers an interesting perspective on her association with mythology. In it, Elizabeth stands with two court ladies facing three Goddesses: Juno, Pallas-Minerva, and Venus. The painting offers an allegorical rewriting of Paris’s decision in the contest over the beauty of the three goddesses. Elizabeth stands for Paris, the judge, emerging victoriously. Visually, the portrait is starkly divided. Dark brick and straight lines frame the side in which Elizabeth and her court ladies wear dark, heavy, modest clothing. On the other side is a lush green field where Venus sits naked while the other goddesses are armed, or in scant, flowing clothing. They are visually active in contrast to the static court ladies, walking across the threshold and outwards (for a detailed reading, see Susan Doran’s *The Myth of Elizabeth* [2003] 174-76). The portrait visually compartmentalizes the two groups, but also suggests gender ambiguity in both. Queen Elizabeth is the female ruler who is also Paris (a soldier whose irrational passions for a woman caused the downfall of Troy). The visual contrast illustrates how gender was allegorized fluidly through myth, and Shakespeare captures this in the Princess at several levels.

play introduces several utopic themes simultaneously. The Princess can represent both Echo and Diana, and thus, introduce the mythic and pastoral into the play with all their paradoxical associations. On the representation of Diana in particular, Laurie Shannon writes: "Renaissance writers generally situated images of Diana and her company in the kind of private locale depicted by Ovid, a zone of feminine autonomy physicalized as the grove, the locus amoenus, the garden (indeed the spatialization gives female friendship an even more marked sense of place than idealized male friendship)" (83). As Shannon's reading indicates, the women are more intimately and physically associated with ideal places as locations, or as utopia, while the men's plan for their ideal place depends on the exclusion of women from the ideal. We can sense the pastoral of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as well, which is dangerous and violent as well as idyllic because of its transformative elements. The paradoxical potential of utopic spaces is at once freeing and transgressive, and Ovid's pastoral, like his characters, uses gender transformation to evoke its utopic pleasure.

The Princess's hunt in Act 4, her lodging in the fields, and her intimacy with her retinue of women create a Diana and her nymphs of the Princess and her ladies, and turn their world into a pastoral dream. The King may have wanted to house the women in his gardens to contain them, but the resulting pastoral (or Edenic) space is more of a utopic threshold than a rigid enclosure. The containment (and surveillance) of women is central to maintaining masculine utopias. Woman's bodies were considered excessive and grotesque, and so, had to be monitored. According to Peter Stallybrass, the three areas requiring monitoring were "frequently collapsed into each other": the mouth, chastity, and the threshold of the house: "The connection between speaking and wantonness was common to legal discourse [...]. Silence, the closed mouth, is made a sign of chastity. And silence and chastity, in turn, homologous to women's enclosure within the house" (126-7). The Academe's injunctions against women attempt to contain these areas by focusing on how a women must "lose" her tongue to contain her words (her mouth), but it also puns on "loose" to evoke the

anxiety/desire over “unchaste,” “wanton,” and “immoral” women (curiously, “loose” appears more often in this play than any other in the canon). The paradox of the ideal women as chaste and silent, and at once enclosed and accessible recalls yet another goddess: Venus was conventionally depicted at the threshold of her chamber or bower. Diana evokes the masculine freedom within a chaste body, while the transgressive Venus stands at the threshold to suggest the inside and outside at once. The women of the play, through these multiple mythic associations, are within and without the King’s enclosure as they embody these several idealized and transgressive women at once. The Princess has to possess the *masculine* qualities of the classical body to embody the ideal as “the enclosed body, the closed mouth, [and] the locked house.” From the perspective of these enclosures, Stallybrass explores how “woman,” unlike “man,” was consistently “produced as a property category” in early modern England and argues that, furthermore, woman “was articulated as property not only in legal discourse [...] but also in economic and political discourse. Economically, she is the fenced-in enclosure of the landlord, her father, or her husband” (127). All these entangled associations of threshold, of openings and enclosures, of chastity and access, revolve around women and their bodies and demonstrate the deep anxiety and contradiction central to the construction of gender ideals in and through mythology.

The contrast between these transgressive mythological women and the conventional “ideal” images of enclosed women, inevitably evokes representations of Queen Elizabeth as the impenetrable state, as the island England, and most vividly, as the closed virgin: “Paradoxically the normative ‘Woman’ could become the emblem of the perfect and impermeable container, and hence a map of the integrity of the state. The state, like the virgin, was a *hortus conclusus*, an enclosed garden walled off from enemies” (Stallybrass 127). Queen Elizabeth’s association with enclosed gardens is also connected with both mythology and utopia: “The enclosed body is valorized by contrast to the demonized grotesque. [...] But not only was Elizabeth the maker of that ‘paradice’ or ‘gardein,’ her enclosed body was that paradise (a word derived from

Persian *pairidaeza*, meaning royal enclosure)" (130).²⁵ Her reign was depicted in art and poetry as the new golden age, her body was gendered as ambiguously (and inviolably) as Diana, the virgin-huntress, and in much the same way as the New World was "mapped" out as a woman, possessed, purchased, enclosed and framed, she was written as an accessible, if paradoxical, virgin-as-land. It was not just any woman being associated with the substance of paradise, or utopia, but *the* woman as utopia; the play does the same with the Princess. The ladies have their own virgin warrior-princess in their Diana/Queen who rules over the threshold of the King's court enclosed on an open field allowing them autonomy, freedom of speech, and movement (transgressing the three enclosures—body, mouth, and house—ideal women should maintain). All the women are further associated with the moon and the sun in the courtiers' poetry, exemplifying, according to Maurice Hunt and others, another clear connection with Queen Elizabeth's own poetic representations as both stellar bodies at once. Hunt convincingly connects the King's sonnet descriptions of the Princess in *Love's Labour's Lost* as both the sun and the moon (4.3.24-40) to Edmund Spenser's similar representation of Queen Elizabeth in his "April Eclogue" (1579) and even Sir Walter Raleigh's "The Ocean, to Cynthia" (1592-1595). The Princess's political role, like the Queen's, is authoritative and autonomous and so must be figured as divine and celestial to be acceptable. The Princess arrives with no male relative to speak for her, chooses to remain unmarried, and leaves the play as Queen. She embodies a multivalent classical myth and mirrors the contemporary Queen as an appropriately malleable and eminently utopic character.

Along with myths, gardens, and paradises, *Love's Labour's Lost* offers another feminized utopic space for consideration because the play is bookended by cloisters and monasteries (recognizable, gender-specific, separated spaces). From the first scene, there is a touch of the monastic to the King's Academe because he envisions a

²⁵ The Queen was often visually connected to maps and globes in her portraiture, most powerfully in the Ditchley Portrait by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger (c.1592).

brotherhood within his court where he will strive for divinity through revelatory study in isolation from the outside world. He also takes possession of the fields outside his enclosure by housing and monitoring the women (a pastoral cloister in his gardens). Intense isolated study as a path to enlightenment is a monastic task. However, as the Princess says, “the roof of this court is too high to be yours” (2.1.92) reminding the King that the garden is not his but God’s, and so, he is not containing what he professes to control/enclose (utopia as no-place and containing nothing).²⁶ As the boundaries between their gender-specific spaces fail, the Princess offers a final answer to maintaining the spaces (and, importantly, their group distinctions) to secure the required enclosures for both groups. The men are required to “go with speed / To some forlorn and naked hermitage, / Remote from all the pleasures of the world” where they must live an “austere insociable life” (5.2.782-784, 787). The women set the price of their hands at a year in a monastery, and their actions follow their words because the Princess insists that she and her ladies will go to a cloister to mourn her father: “My woeful self up in a mourning house, / Raining the tears of lamentation / For the remembrance of my father’s death” (5.2.796-798).²⁷ The Princess’s final decision is far more complex than it seems. It does not suggest that the only means to utopia is the gender separation the cloister offer; instead, her commandment amplifies the failure of the King’s plan because if they want to succeed, the men must successfully enclose

²⁶ This recalls the “Land of Cockayne” where the monastery is resplendent in luxurious detail while the nunnery is vague and the nuns indistinguishable from their natural wilderness.

²⁷ Maureen Connolly McFeely’s explores the etymology of “cloister” and explains how they offered women freedom, authority, and autonomy. The word “cloister,” she notes, is etymologically connected not only to “enclosure,” but “garden” as well: “The concept of a cloister as sanctuary [...] is rooted not only in medieval practice but in the very definition of the word. Cloister derives from the Latin *claustrum*, ‘a bolt or place shut in.’ Its original purpose was as much to shut the world out as to keep its inmates in” (203). A cloister is both a welcoming and a restrictive space. It also indicates the recognizable architectural form of “an arched way or covered walk along the inside wall of a monastery [...] with a column opening on one side leading to a courtyard or garden,” but the connection between the physical space and utopia runs deeper: “like cloister, garden itself derives from a word meaning enclosure, the Old English *geard* or *yard*, courtyard or fence, from the Old Norse *garðr*, [or] enclosure” (204). The spaces connote ambiguous enclosures. Architecturally, it denotes a liminal space within a building that is simultaneously an indoor/outside space (a covered walk that is both outside and inside), thus a locked cloister and/or open garden are both accessible enclosures and denoting the various ambiguous freedoms of the classical, pastoral, medieval, and Christian traditions in which gardens and cloisters are often written as accessible/enclosed utopic spaces.

themselves, to correct their original failure. Her decision represents the play's grand "echo" by which the Princess returns the King's failed oath and plans back to him. The King's walls and words are insufficient and ineffective, but the women's words and walls will prove harder to resist, and harder to escape.

Perhaps the most powerful example of the allowance of fluidity prompted by the play's thematic enclosure and use of myth is the Princess at the deer hunt. She takes part in a hunt she decries as "playing murderer" (4.1.8) and after being instructed on how to aim perfectly, she chides the Forester: "I thank my beauty, I am fair that shoot, / And thereupon thou speak'st 'the fairest shoot'" (4.1.11-12) and continues to "poke" fun at him as she practices. The Princess inhabits a clever position in this scene because she simultaneously participates in the environment that associates her with Diana, the huntress, thereby affirming the mythological precedent of the chaste, desired woman, but is at once acutely aware of the power those symbols afford her. She is often described as having and wielding "pricks," in this instance of killing "prickets,"²⁸ and later more alliteratively when Holofernes describes the Princess at the hunt with this tongue-twister: "The preyful Princess pierced and pricked a petty pleasing pricket" rendering the Princess simultaneously "pierced and pricked" (4.2.56-57). She is both penetrable ("pierced") but also "pricked" as in possessing a prick. She assumes the descriptions even before naming the riddle's object—"a petty pleasing pricket"—to denote the men whose words are petty and aim to please. She hunts this prey in her ambiguous role as both "shooter" (of the pricket) *and* "suitor" at court as the words were homophonic in the early modern dialect (Addison Roberts 75-6). The Princess embodies two understandings simultaneously: The presenter of a "suit" at court and "suitor" in their wooing that designates her as a threatening "shooter."

From her first exchange with Boyet, the Princess complains of being praised for her beauty rather than her actions or qualities; in one of her last exchanges with the

²⁸ "Pricket" means both "a spiked candlestick" and "a young, male deer"; in the early modern, the word would have also referred to the deer's antlers specifically, "a young man," or, more generally, his parts.

King she refers to their love letters as “bombast” that do nothing more than “line time” (5.2.769). Flattery, she insists, is passive and empty. In the hunting scene she concretizes her verbal shots at the “men” with real arrows; her trophy will be their “pricks” (antlers and otherwise). She is not the monstrous, castrating female playing a man’s part, in this scene, but rather she adopts the qualities of Diana to the courtiers’ Actaeon because the men’s intrusion into her feminine space leaves *them* as prey:

The Princess: See, see, my beauty will be saved by merit!
 O heresy in fair, fit for these days!
 A giving hand, though foul, shall have fair praise.
 But come, the bow: now mercy goes to kill,
 And shooting well is then accounted ill.
 Thus will I save my credit in the shoot:
 Not wounding, pity would not let me do’t;
 If wounding, then it was to show my skill,
 That more for praise than purpose meant to kill.
 And out of question so it is sometimes,
 Glory grows guilty of detested crimes,
 When, for fame’s sake, for praise, an outward part,
 We bend to that the working of the heart;
 As I for praise alone now seek to spill
 The poor deer’s blood, that my heart means no ill.

Boyet: Do no curst wives hold that self sovereignty
 Only for praise’ sake when they strive to be
 Lords o’er their lords?

Princess: Only for praise—and praise we may afford
 To any lady that subdues a lord (4.1.21-40).

The Princess is torn between mercy for the prey and wanting to be honored for her skill rather than her beauty, because, she insists, praise given for beauty is unworthy. By connecting empty praise to fame (“for fame’s sake, for praise, an outward part”), she also diminishes the Academe’s central goal as baseless. Merit should be granted for her successful “shoot,” likely in reference to her political suit more than her romantic suit. Boyet points out that women seeking praise so they might “lords over their lords” makes them “curst” or shrewish. The Princess agrees that women seek praise, but in recognition of the social norms (as she stands there with a bow and arrow to pierce the pricket), she reminds us that a woman subduing her lord is so rare that she would deserve praise for such an accomplishment. The Princess insists that the women have a right to the same treatment and expectations even if their desire to seek praise (or

fame) may be for merit rather than beauty. This is another profoundly philosophical, even melancholic, moment in what should be a comedy.

She is a Princess (only a death away from Queen) and never a “wife” as Boyet’s example requires, or even certainly a “lover,” for the King and the Princess rarely speak of love to each other directly; their exchange is always a political agreement, and in this, the Princess plays the masculine role well. In her, the play offers a fully independent woman, and then grants that woman an entourage of intimate women, and a “prick” in word and prop (a phallus) to wield. This does more to facilitate homoerotic desire than if she had worn men’s clothes and made love to a beloved, or been made love to as a young boy in women’s clothes. Shakespeare’s transvestite heroines negotiate female-female desire, but the Princess is always a woman enjoying her time with other women, and she takes and wields her power before, and in spite of, the men. She requires them to be truthful and demands that they focus on her merits rather than her beauty and be true to their words, and while her ladies speak sweetly (and sharply in the expected give and take of wooing) to their prospective courtiers, the Princess herself always focuses on her political suit and strategy to keep the men honest. Her father’s death allows her the most powerful step of all: The ability to walk away and “lord over” only herself by leaving with her beloved maids so she can keep her group intact and beyond the King’s surveillance. However, the Princess’s “prick” violates the physical expectations for the feminine ideal, thereby allowing homoerotic desire and challenging gender roles as well. Early modern law strictly regulated women’s sexuality, as Traub reminds us. Women could never be penetrators, or wielders of the phallus, while “men can unnaturally penetrate beasts, other men (including boys), and women; and women can seek to be penetrated by either men or beasts.” Women, on the other hand, are “locked into a position of receptacle” and “cannot—in English law—penetrate another woman” (*Renaissance of Lesbianism* 165). The transvestite’s role complicated the expectation of woman as

vessel, but Traub cautions against considering the transvestite plays as the only representation of female-female desire.

The transvestite also complicated gender expectations because of what might (or might not) be hidden beneath his/her clothing, but a Princess armed with a prick is far more egregious because she holds and wields her "prick" assertively, liberally and openly while only ever wearing a skirt. It is not confusion or misrecognition over clothing, but her refusal to choose *only* the "female" role that sustains her fluidity. The Princess also consistently demonstrates a powerful intimacy with her ladies, which may have been titillating. However, she speaks far more lovingly and intimately with her ladies than she ever does with the King (the supposed object of her labor of love) who she more often chides, disciplines, and challenges. She proclaims "God bless my ladies!" (2.1.77) when she hears them speak excitedly about the courtiers and refers to them with terms of endearment such as "sweethearts" (5.2.1) and "my sweet" (4.1.103), at one point, she also refers to Katherine as her "mouse" (5.2.19), but she never once uses such a tender name towards the King. This indicates a very different motivation in this play that has little to do with the title or comedic expectations, and more to do with creating utopic possibility through female characters instead of transvestite heroines. The play's heroines are empowered through their fluid gender and desire within distinctly utopian spaces instead of male clothing.

The play may not need transvestite heroines to facilitate its fluidity, but the men (courtiers and servants alike) can, and do, cross-dress freely. Courtiers dress as foreigners and servants as virtuous worthies; clothing, it seems, is still the marker of difference in this play, but this time that difference is borne by the men. The Princess embodies the play's utopia through her maintenance of the play's transgression: it is subtle, but definite. The masculine plan fails at the play's end, but utopia succeeds because of the death of her father and her rejection a single gender role. In her earlier essay, "The (In)significance of Lesbian Desire in Early Modern England," Traub argues that the early modern lesbian's use of supplementation, or a prosthetic phallus (the

Princess's "prick"), informs the representation of female-female desire, and it certainly does so in this play. Whatever the sodomite or tribade might have used to supplement her body would have left her feminized body "masculine" in the gendered discourse. Taking issue with Stephen Greenblatt's influential "Fiction and Friction," Traub writes:

The terms by which such supplementation have been defined heretofore not only describe but *reproduce* gender ideology. [...] Within Greenblatt's rhetoric, as within the rhetoric of early modern authorities, the commingling of two female bodies is subsumed by a heterosexual, male-oriented narrative: female penetration signified an *imitation* of male (body and role-defined) '*parts*.' Whatever independent agency obtains in the performance of such erotic acts is rendered invisible at the same time as it is resecured into a patriarchal economy (154).

The Princess is (and is not) a transvestite; she is not a man dressed as a woman dressed as a man, but a man dressed as a woman owning womanhood. Her "prick" is (and is not) imitation because her *character* possesses the ersatz phallus even if the actor on the stage may have (had) a penis. The Princess is endowed not only with "pricks" as props, and very potent words and weapons to prick with, which render her quite difficult to "subsume" in the heterosexual masculine narrative. She realizes her agency repeatedly and progressively as the play continues, but never relinquishes control to a patriarchal economy. This play's suspends resolution more absolutely than any other, and no heroine in Shakespeare wields quite so substantial a Phallus (psychoanalytically possessing the language the Phallus promises) and the power her pricking suggests.

The use of such prosthetics in gender construction follows Jonathan Dollimore's "transgressive reinscription" of gender and erotic codes that are "at once repetition *and* transgression," as Traub continues. Such reinscription "displaces conventional understandings from *within* dominant systems of intelligibility." While Derrida uses "supplementarity" to describe "that which both adds to *and* replaces the original term" (becoming an instance of *différence*), Traub argues that "the supplement deconstructs the putative unity, integrity, and singularity of the subject, of its gender and its sexual desires, and registers them as always internally *different* from

themselves" (155). For early modern women, the prosthetic supplementation of their bodies could be considered "both additive and substitutive" or as a "material addition to the woman's body and as a replacement of the man's body by the woman's body" because "it not only displaces male prerogatives, but exposes 'man' as simulacrum, and gender as a construction built on the faulty ground of exclusive, gender difference" (155). The "unity" or "integrity" suggested by the gender binary is deconstructed and questioned through this supplementation. Interestingly, Traub continually returns to the suggestion of simultaneity, or when binary opposites existing simultaneously emerge as a defining aspect of how transgression is expressed in the performance of gender. The challenge is trying to understand the parameters by which transgression and contradiction are made possible. If masculinity is a cultural product, then gender itself becomes at once "repetition and transgression" in the hands of a woman, and in the Derridian sense, it is "additive and substitutive" and defines the female character's supplementation. These theoretical understandings refuse the definition of "man" or "woman" and leave the Princess's body "transgressively reinscribed" as it contains itself and its opposite at once to suggest the possibility of the wholeness and unity of utopia, while insisting on simultaneity as the means for its realization. Because the "prick" can so easily be played on her female body, Man is exposed as simulacrum, and gender fragments.

Similarly, the play's preoccupation with vision focuses on a closely related anxiety over how women can "prick" with their sight as readily as she does with words (or arrows), while also recalling the monstrous, threatening Medusa (grotesque as much for her bestial body and phallic-snake hair as for her dangerous, piercing eyes). Biron's repetitive visual themes introduce more binaries to transgress: knowledge and ignorance, dark and light. The obsession with vision is mostly meant to parody the Renaissance overuse of the popular metaphor, but when we consider how vision emerges in the play, as it rebounds freely between the men and the women, we notice

that these moments leave the men, specifically, blind, or rather, only seeing what they wish to see:

My eyes are then no eyes, nor I Biron.
 O, but for my love, day would turn to night
 Of all complexions the culled sovereignty
 Do meet as at a fair in her fair cheek
 Where several worthies make one dignity,
 Where nothing wants that want itself doth seek (4.3.229-234).

The essence of utopic desire, of wanting nothing because nothing is wanting except want itself, exists on her cheek, *on* her body where the “several” become “one” and woman becomes the “place” of utopic wholeness. Biron’s eyes are not eyes, and his identity—his name—is not-Biron, as much as day is not night. Biron then grants her eyes the power of restorative immortality: “A withered hermit, fivescore winters worn, / Might shake off fifty, looking in her eye” (4.3.239-240). The same immortal goal the Academe seeks is suddenly enclosed in the women’s eye, which is a critical observation given the subsequent lines:²⁹

For women’s eyes this doctrine I derive.
 They sparkle still the right Promethean fire;
 They are the books, the arts, the academes,
 That show, contain, and nourish all the world,
 Else none at all in aught proves excellent (4.3.325-329).

Shifting from his own eyes to the women’s eyes reflecting what he will, he notes that the women’s eyes offer the origin of the world, the ultimate goal, the substance of his enlightenment, the lifeblood “nourishing” the world: woman as utopia. Another powerful example is Boyet’s focus on eyes as the avenue of “infection” for the King’s love; his description of the exchange is highly sensual:

Why, all his behavior did make their retire
 To the court of his *eye*, *peeping* thorough desire.
 His heart like an agate with your print impressed,
 Proud with his form, in his *eye* pride expressed
 His tongue all impatient to speak and not *see*,
 Did stumble with haste in his *eyesight* to be.

²⁹ Patricia Parker argues that the play’s concern with eyes and vision is related to a similar preoccupation with continence and other scatological humor as seen in the play’s “relentless emphasis on the inversion of order and sequence, on the reversal of beginning and end, front and back, prior and ‘posterior’” where eyes and anus come to represent each other. Parker argues that these reversals are bound to the play’s gender role reversals. I would add that they also bind the play’s representation of gender with the carnivalesque in utopia as well (n.p.).

All *senses* to that *sense* did make their repair,
 To feel only *looking* on fairest of fair.
 Methought all his *senses* were locked in his *eye*,
 As jewels in crystal for some prince to buy;
 [...] His face's own margin did quote such amazes
 That all *eyes* saw his *eyes* enchanted with *gazes* (2.1.232-244 emphasis
 mine).

Elements of the visual overwhelm this passage; eyes emerge as the seat of love and reflect the image men wish to see, while a woman's gaze pierces them as violently as arrows. We can even recognize a sort of self-echo in Boyet's words because he repeats his own words, or repeats them in different form, or with near-meanings, again and again within the very same line: eye/peeping, print/impressed, proud/pride, senses/sense, fairest/fair, jewels/crystal, and in the last line eyes/eyes/gazes. The men are in love with the images invoked by their ideal words, or in love with the words that fashion the women as they would have them. Like Narcissus's beloved reflection in the water, the men's words reflect (echo) back an image they construct of themselves as poets in a synthesis (nearly an ekphrasis) of ideal images verbalized and dramatized.

As the only nameless character in the play, the Princess is referred to only by her title, a point that serves to augment the significance of her fluidity and the progression she makes from Princess to Queen. She maintains ambiguity through no requirement or expectation to choose either role absolutely because the stage allows her to become any role she wishes and earn fame through the merit of her words. Her skill with words resound with Greenblatt's argument in "Fiction and Friction" that Shakespeare used his well-spoken women as substitute for the sexual transgression that could not otherwise be played out on stage (a verbal exchange in place of sexual congress). Although she is not a transvestite character, the Princess exemplifies "the persistent doubleness, the inherent twinship, of all individuals" that Greenblatt connects to transvestites. These perceptions, as Greenblatt continues, "were almost always closely linked to belief in an internal power struggle between male and female principles." A successful resolution of this dissonant friction resulting from these "competing elements" has to occur for the character to achieve "proper individuation"

(78). The expected resolution, in practice, was bound to medical and theological writings because the expression of this doubleness on the stage allowed for the suspension of biology. Therefore, to follow Greenblatt's assertion, the stage allowed and maintained sexual tension through the Princess's language.

The Princess's verbal sparring also illustrates the "erotic" through what Greenblatt (and Biron) calls a "Promethean Heat" (the divine flame, light and heat granted to Man by Prometheus is wielded by the women). Greenblatt defines the heat as the expression of sexuality and Biron assigns that strength to the women. This heat, as Greenblatt argues, acted as "the crucial practical agent of sexuality in the Renaissance" because it represented what is "excluded from theatrical presentation," and this takes place internally, out of sight, in the privileged intimacy of the body (89). On this point, Greenblatt refers specifically to the "unrepresented marriages" of *Twelfth Night*, but *Love's Labour's Lost* introduces four marriages that remain far more uncertain.³⁰ The four marriages in this play are more than simply delayed until the appropriate clothing can be retrieved, as in *Twelfth Night*, they are postponed for at least a year and promised only on the condition that the men keep their vows. Because the men have proven their failure with vows, one wonders if the marriages in *Love's Labour's Lost* will ever be actualized (barring the apocryphal sequel), which would keep the Princess perhaps never "a wife" but certainly always a Queen. The diffusion suggested by "unmooring" generalizes desire and suggests that the door has been left open for the homoerotic (the cloister gate simultaneously enclosing and liberating) but also recalls Cixous theory that woman's sexuality is characterized as diffusion rather

³⁰ "But sexual heat, we recall, is not different in kind from all heat, including that produced by the imagination. Shakespeare realized that if sexual chafing could not be presented literally onstage, it could be represented figuratively: friction could be fictionalized, chafing chastened, and hence made fit for the stage, by transforming it into the witty, erotically charged sparring that is the heart of the lovers' experience [while] the unrepresented consummations of unrepresented marriages call attention to the unmooring of desire, the generalizing of the libidinal [...]. The representation of chafing [...] is diffused throughout the comedies as a system of foreplay. This diffusion is one of the creative principles of comic confusion. [This] friction is specifically associated with verbal wit; indeed at moments the plays seem to imply that erotic friction originates in the wantonness of language and thus that the body itself is a tissue of metaphors, or conversely, that language is perfectly embodied" (Greenblatt 89).

than penetration. By indefinitely sustaining this sexual diffusion, the play exemplifies how gender fluidity endlessly forestalls the achievement of desire.

Peter Erickson's essay on the failure of relationships in *Love's Labour's Lost* is one of the most thorough investigations of the gender interaction leading to its persistent fricative heat. He argues that Shakespeare's men exhibit an extraordinary "masculine insecurity and helplessness" demonstrates that their authority is "brittle and precarious from the outset" while female power is "virtually absolute." The disquieting effect of this gender reversal, and the inequality in their respective powers, creates "a gap between men and women that cannot be bridged." This "fixed gap" enables Shakespeare to explore, through drama, "the conventions of female domination and humility which had become established in love poetry" (243). Erickson defines the divide between the genders as rigid and purposeful in a play meant to have us face the dissonance of women in charge and all the pleasurable anxiety this scenario can muster. The poetry in the play represents the early modern psychology of male and female stereotypes exemplified in the Petrarchan conventions of the courtiers' poetry that creates a "barrier" keeping the men and women apart from each other (243).³¹ The men fall in love, as Erickson points out, but are always ambivalent in their love. I agree that the courtiers are ambivalent about love; after all, the sonnets in 4.3 demonstrate near-constant ambivalence as Biron argues with himself when his thoughts bounce from definitions, to excuses, to accusations, and finally, observations on the state of being in love (4.3.1-19), but this ambivalence is not indicated solely in their affairs with the women. It is a consistent aspect of their characters because they are ambivalent before they ever see the women. Erickson continues that the men's ambivalence in love, specifically, maintains tension "between irresistible attraction to the women and the apprehensiveness which made the King want to exclude women in

³¹ David Schalkwyk similarly argues that poetry is vital to the play's economy on several levels; in this play, as he writes, "the embodiment of the sonnet form" is, quite literally, "incorporated into the material space of the theatre" because "the corporeality of speaker and audience" cannot be ignored on the stage ("Embodiment, Textuality, and Silence in Shakespeare's Sonnets and Plays" 383).

the first place," and this then leads to "an impasse which is confirmed by the ultimate failure" of their relationships at the end of the play. Consequently, that failure leads to the ironic fulfillment of "the original desire to avoid women" by the "denial of the men's suit and by the administering of penances" (244). Indeed, the end of the play becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that renders the women inaccessible according to the Petrarchan conventions of their poetry, but Erickson does not address that the women are never inaccessible. The women ask, repeatedly and directly, to enter the court ("conduct me thither" 2.1.95), and they remain present and willing even when the King refuses their entry or attempts to deceive them.

The Princess, on the other hand, is never ambivalent about the reason for her visit, and eventually, about the path to her hand in marriage: speak truth, keep vows, be honest and we *may* be yours. The men's failure is contingent on their own inability to behave as required or even as they should (not just their ambivalence) suggesting that they will be unable to endure the year-long penance the women impose on them. Biron mocks their poetry as nothing but a gift of minstrels (4.3.146), and by the end of the play, nobody except the other courtiers hiding in the eaves hear their poems of love. Like Narcissus at the pool, they fall in love with their own, collaborative, poetic images because they consistently fail to *see* the women (as indicated by the many images of failed eyesight). The Princess adeptly embodies both male and female of Greenblatt's doubleness with no need for resolution, but the men seem stuck in the femininity of the Petrarchan sonneteer (with no "will" to act or decide) and so, remain not only ambivalent but unexpectedly ambiguous as well. The Princess's ambiguity comes from the acceptance of the possibility of fluid gender, while the men's ambiguity results from their refusal to allow the possibility of their own fluidity by not choosing. This lack of will in their own desire and sexuality affects all the play's men; after all, the Princess demands of Costard "What's your will, sir?" when he brings her the misdirected letter (4.1.52). Even so, the self-fulfilling prophecy Erickson offers is very intriguing, for indeed, if any of the men had acted willfully, allowed the women

in, or delivered their words potently or even correctly (as Costard fails to do) the utopic potential of the play would have been lost. The play allows for a masculine utopia that allows for homoerotic male intimacy and feminized sonneteering within a chivalric and martial Academe. In trying to succeed, the men secured their failure, but that failure fueled a transgression that refused to restrict the women, and ultimately, allowed utopia.

In a play whose title so alliteratively focuses on love, and the efforts that love requires, there is precious little love, or even substantial wooing, between the couples, as I noted earlier. The first of the two scenes that includes actual wooing is in 4.3 when the men write and recite their sonnets and discuss their love with each other (in absence of the women). In the second scene, the Muscovite Masque in 5.2, the men do not act or dress as themselves and, in fact, do not even woo the right women.³² In the first scene, the King's sonnet describes the Princess as both the sun and moon and then focuses on her eyes: She has "eye-beams" that "smote / The night of dew that on my cheeks down flows." In as much as five additional instances, the king refers specifically to his "tears" and "weeping", and in yet another to his "grief" (4.3.24-39); evidently, love has turned the King into a leaky, blubbering mess. He moves aside, as Biron did before the King's entrance, to grant Longueville the stage and the two men (standing aside) echo end-rhymes in a poetic unity that is laughably transcendent given that they do so without each other's knowledge and with a rather suggestive word choice (the King's "shame" is answered by Biron's "name," and Longueville's "prose" answered by Biron's "hose"). They compose poems glorifying vision and sight while they hide from each other's vision while discussing the exiled, absent, unseen, and obviously unnecessary women. Longueville's sonnet, to follow suit, goes straight for the eyes: "Did not the heavenly rhetoric of thine eye, / Gainst whom the world cannot hold argument / Persuade my heart to false perjury?" (4.3.58-60). Eyes are endowed with

³² Erickson argues that the second scene is critical because the women are present to respond, although to the wrong courtiers.

enormous power, can withstand a world of argument, and in this instance, the men's inability to remain true to their oath is blamed on the power the image they created holds over them. Longueville's hyperbolic sonnet takes on greater cosmic dimensions by first comparing his Lady to a goddess, her love to the heavens, and herself to paradise itself, at least three times, all while relegating their vow to earthly matters.

Their collaborative sonneting ends in an almost accusatory tone when Longueville insists that the oath being broken "is no fault of mine" (4.3.69). Biron pretends to be unaffected by love until he is caught by his fellow courtiers: "That you three fools lacked me fool to make up the mess" (4.3.204). The whole scene feels like a child's game, an "old infant play" (4.3.77) because they spy on, and tease, each other, and the game only expands and becomes more elaborate as the play progresses and they don costumes, perform masques, and exchange favors. Erickson, once again, reads the men's "playing" as Shakespeare's effort to force characters into the prescribed role of Petrarchan sonnets. He writes:

It is as if Shakespeare's drama reveals the crippling psychological implications of the 'pure idolatry' of women dictated by the sonnet mode. By creating dramatic characters who try to live out of standardized lyric assumptions about the respective roles of men and women, Shakespeare shows that this hierarchical conception of masculine and feminine roles is unworkable. The men are placed in a no-win situation, and the vital contact between men and women cannot take place. But there is nowhere to go from this discovery since it involves a demonstration that the conventions have rendered impossible relations between men and women. Hence, the frustration, humiliation, and anger felt by the men are a necessary underside to the humour of their exposure (250).

Erikson argues that the failure of gender roles stems from the poetic conventions that informed early modern gender roles, and he is quite right in suggesting that there is "nowhere to go from this discovery." The impasse is born not out of the continued failure of gender roles, but as I have shown, from the utopic development of fluid gender that liberates each character. The Princess is not a rigidly distinct woman written as the poetry would have her, nor a masculinized virago set against the courtiers as whimpering feminized sonneteers. The Princess is willing to rule and/or marry, but unwilling to do only one, or either/or. The men's resulting frustration and

ambivalence is necessary in order for them to maintain the utopic world they imagine; to realize their utopia would be to see the failure of their ideals. Consequently, the “psychological implications” of poetic idolatry *are* “crippling,” but not because the men and women try to live to the gender assumptions of poetic conventions, but rather because those rigid assumptions keep failing in utopia. The men are not forced into a “no-win” situation leading to their humiliation, rather, the “vital contact” between genders that renders their relationships “impossible” fails because gender ideals from within the binary emerge as rigid gender distinctions that failing social parameters define as “vital.” The men must remain in love with themselves, with the idols they created for themselves, staring infinitely into the “pool” of masculine virtue and ideals that (utopically) can never yield within the binary.

Ultimately, the most frustrating element of *Love's Labour's Lost* is its odd ending; it leaves audiences hanging, begging for completion, for the promise of happiness, union, and symmetry even in its refusal to allow it (this alone leaves it utopic and infinitely progressing by deferring desire and consummation). There is no resolution, no marriage, nor any true surety of marriage, for the women promise only to revisit it after a year of the courtiers' penance and the ladies' mourning. It is unusual for a comedy, but still more unusual because it ends in a death, like a tragedy, but it is an instrumental death because it critically levels the two key characters in power and authority. The Princess's decision at the play's end to require a year's penance from the men is not made lightly. The play's sparse action is an elaborate echo of the men's “courtship, pleasant jest, and courtesy” (768) and the final chance to prove themselves worthy will echo their grandest “bombast” of all: The failed oath of academic seclusion is ultimately realized as an oath of monastic penance. The women will not trust their promise, and will only reconsider through proof of the courtiers' actions. When she offers the ultimatum, the Princess does not even insist on a some form of surety and even leaves him an honorable escape: “If thou do deny, let our hands part, / Neither entitled in the other's heart” (5.2.799-800). For the Princess,

now Queen, the possibility of marriage is not an idle oath that is easily broken, but “a world-without-end bargain” (5.2.777). She is deadly serious when it comes to marriage. Irene G. Dash has noted that oaths in the early modern were more serious for women than men; an oath usually denoted marriage vows, especially for woman in authority because an oath could bind nations or stop wars. In *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, oaths link the men, and the women are the chief challengers of “the wisdom of such bonding”:

The extraordinary opening vow permits exploration of the values men and women place on oaths. Unlikely to strut across the stage with swords or magnanimously offer kingdoms for a pledge, women make seemingly colorless vows that lack bravado: vows of marriage. But they are timelessly binding, world-without-end bargains that will alter their lives. The women reject oath-taking as a method of confirming a temporary agreement, skeptical about the morality of vows too easily made and broken. [...] Marriage is a vow whose implication women know. It will inhibit their independence; it will tie them forever. [It] implies a sense of eternity, that which the King, in the first scene, had craved through learning. The phrase has grandeur beyond the confines of the comic world. If such bargains are not to be broken, by brilliant talk, ingenious reasoning, and clever turns of phrase, new rules for oath-taking must be found (259, 273-274).

Oaths are the most serious form words take, and in their directness, the ladies of this play respond to this severity by expressing a better understanding of the meaning and morality behind oaths, not elevated to poetic heights by the courtiers, or used as entertainment in play or masque, or even the extensiveness of Holofernes’s rambling pedantry, but rather they demonstrate how words bind, enclose, and change worlds. For words to affect change, they should be as serious as a world-without-end, and as infinite and timelessly immortal as the courtiers’ dreamed. The women’s words may lack “bravado” and may seem “colorless,” but they are effective and enduring; the space their words create leads to a space of infinite dimensions where they can demonstrate the “new rules” oaths must demonstrate in utopia.

To understand the extent to which the women of the play understand the power of words, it helps to revisit the play’s editorial history, which confronted the effect of the women’s words in the play. Homer Swandon analyzes a minor exchange between Dumaine and his corresponding lady, Katherine, spoken directly after the Princess has offered the King her conditions. In the brief exchange, Dumaine asks

Katherine "But what to me, my love? But what to me?" It is a singularly selfish, self-echoing question in its own right that casts Katherine immediately as a possession: "My love" (5.2.805). The single, two-word line that follows, "A wife?," is almost always assigned to Dumaine as a continuation of his question to Katherine after the Queen and King have agreed to the conditions (as it appears in the Folio). The Quarto, on the other hand, assigns this line to Katherine and not Dumaine, a change that first surfaced in the nineteenth century. Swandon argues that this change must have seemed "obviously required" to the editors who in "restoring the words to Dumaine" would have felt that this change followed convention more closely. This shift bars Katherine from speaking two words that affect her most intimately, and prevents the actor (or actress) from choosing how to best deliver it: as a question of surprise, as shock at his audacity, spoken quietly to herself with happiness or surprise, or sadness (she speaks earlier of her own sister's death brought on by love in 5.2.13-18), or even as a secret shared with her friends. As Swandon notes: "However the actress takes and plays the scripted question, it can, in an infinite number of ways, be one of those quick, deep, defining revelations through which Shakespeare brings very specific beauties into our lives" (55). This tiny shift does a great deal more to lessen the play than just granting the man the proposal, and does even more than Swandon suggests. Katherine demonstrates with this line several qualities that have belonged to the women throughout the play, and so the Quarto would be more in keeping with the play's utopic design. First, the line demonstrates the women's proven ability to preempt the men's words and actions: The women had heard of the Academe before meeting the King (2.1.23-29), and Boyet (their messenger) told them of the masque in time for them to prepare their strategy (5.2.120-122). It seems almost natural that Katherine would finish Dumaine's thoughts at this point and so is simply jumping in with the completion of his line. The line can also suggest a sort of pre-emptive echo, as if the men's words have become all but transparent, easily read and echoed even before they are spoken. Finally, it might even suggest a correction on Katherine's part that she will

not be “my love” as possession, but “a wife,” a more general role with no possessive article that might just as easily suggest marriage to another. The line also grants her the active voice of being the first to bring up marriage, or even to question him on the specifics of what he is suggesting. Is it a marriage he wants, or just “a wife” and all that society demands of that role? The line grants Katherine a freedom and authority that easily follows the unified front the women of the play have held. Moreover, it allows Katherine fluidity (like her Queen) as she clarifies the conditions that suggest the marriage may never occur. Her last words in the play remind Dumaine that the promise is contingent on his past actions: “yet swear not, lest ye be forsworn *again*” (5.2.813, emphasis mine).

As I have discussed throughout this section, and as Katherine further demonstrates in this example, there is a strong connection between the ladies and courtiers in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and Ovid’s “Echo and Narcissus” as translated by Arthur Golding. In his introduction to *Shakespeare’s Ovid: The Metamorphosis in the Plays and Poems* (2000), A.B. Taylor argues that Echo was traditionally associated with illicit sexuality.³³ Medieval readers took a stern view of her and saw her not as deliberate or measured in her participation in protecting Jove, but as a bawd instead: “Golding, a fervent Calvinist, fastened on the tradition when he dealt with Echo in the puritanical moralization of Ovid’s poem [...] ignoring all other possible interpretations of the nymph. [...] Golding makes her a common gossip.” Taylor continues by explaining that to the Elizabethans, Juno (the goddess who curses Echo) was associated with the air and was also thought to be Echo’s mother: “The apparently, simply, lyrical reference to Echo as ‘the babbling gossip *of the air*’ has resonant connotations of uncomfortable, sexual confusion at a profound mythic level.” (8-9). The influence of

³³ Taylor connects the myth to Viola and Olivia’s initial interview in *Twelfth Night* because Shakespeare uses a direct quote from Golding to evoke the famed “Cry out Oliva!” (1.5.263), where the cloistered Olivia plays Narcissus to Viola’s Echo by refusing any suitors at all, and after her encounter with Viola as Cesario, becomes enamored not with the woman, but with the image she imagines as Cesario. Taylor argues that Shakespeare then adopted Golding’s understanding of Echo and created of Viola a loquacious go-between as she clearly is trying to “procure” Olivia for Orsino (8-9).

mythology on the early modern is profound, but that this profundity emerges so often in gender confusion specifically is most telling, and Shakespeare relied on Ovid to convey these figures.

Myth allowed for gender fluidity in a way no other discourse did, and while I can easily sense Echo and Narcissus in *Twelfth Night* as Taylor posits, the myth is far more salient in *Love's Labour's Lost*. Shakespeare does use her as a "gossip and a bawd," because the Princess acts as a bawd for herself and her ladies before her father's death grants her the option not to marry. However, Shakespeare does not use Echo's story only as a cautionary tale against women's over-aggressive love; he saw far greater flexibility in the figure of Echo for the Princess. Ovid's Echo is an independent, brave woman who pursues Narcissus even after losing control over her words. Golding conveyed these qualities in his translation, which Shakespeare recognized when he wrote the Princess as an Echo-figure. Echo knows she can only answer back with Narcissus' words, but the specific words she *chooses* to echo back are stunningly accurate in conveying *her* desires by using *his* word; this is exactly what the Princess does. Their exchange, as Golding translates it, demonstrates Echo's strategy:

Now when she sawe Narcissus stray about the Forrest wyde,
 She waxed warme and step for step fast after him she hyde.
 The more she followed after him and nearer that she came,
 The hoter ever did she waxe as nearer to hir flame. [...]
 O Lord how often woulde she faine (if nature would have let)
 Entreated him with gentle words some favour for to get? [...]
 By chaunce the stripling being strayed from all his companie,
 Sayde: Is there any body nie? Straight Echo answerde: I.
 Amazde he castes his eye aside, and looketh roud about,
 And Come (that all the Forrest roong) aloud he calleth out.
 And Come (sayth she:) he looketh backe, and seeing no man followe,
 Why fliste, he cryeth once againe: and she the same doth hallowe.
 He still persistes and wondring much what kinde of thing it was
 From which that answering voyce by turne so duely seemed to passe,
 Said: Let us joyne. She (by hir will desirous to have said
 In fayth with none more willingly at any time or stead)
 Said: Let us joyne. And standing somewhat in hir owne conceit,
 Upon these words she left the Wood, and forth she yeedeth streit,
 To coll the lovely necke for which she longed had so much,
 He runnes his way and will not be imbraced of no such,
 And sayeth: I first will die ere thou shalt take of me thy pleasure.
 She aunswerde nothing else thereto, but Take of me thy pleasure. (3.461-489).

Echo's desire burns like fire, while her words, though "gentle," are focused on a specific purpose—to get favors—and are, therefore, more productive. The women's eroticism in Shakespeare's play follows Greenblatt's assertion that erotic tension is expressed as verbal mastery, but Echo demonstrates this skill as well. When the Princess and her ladies receive their favors from the courtiers she says: "Sweethearts, we shall be rich ere we depart" (5.2.143) acknowledging that the men have fallen for them and that their gifts promise a successful suit; her intent is the wealth owed her, and the favors are her means to that end. In Golding, Echo's choice is relevant not only for its strategy, but for its unpredictability and inconsistency. If she were truly restricted to a passive response, her deliberate and effective word choice could not have conveyed her meaning so accurately and would have been consistently predictable. Shakespeare recreates this intentional, emphatic Echo in his Princess. If we look at the dialogue between Echo and Narcissus, as translated by Golding, we find no predictable pattern in her echoes beyond her control, but rather a deliberate, purposeful, choice over which words to echo in order to convey her meaning. In their first exchange Echo returns but a single syllable ("I") to identify herself in answer to Narcissus's question, in the second, third, and fourth instances, she returns one word twice ("come") and then a two-word phrase ("Why fliste") as she directs his progress towards her. In the next exchange, she does not select words, but returns everything he says: three words ("let us join"). The final exchange is the most poignant for she chooses no single syllable, no single word, nor even his entire statement, but picks the five final words carefully from Narcissus's rejection ("I first will die ere thou shalt take of me thy pleasure") thus effectively reversing their meaning to valorize her intentions and demand her desire: "Take of me thy pleasure." She has spoken her desire without the control of her voice by choosing her emphasis so that his words become the substance for her intent. It is deliberate, intentional, and strategic; Echo may be a bawd, but she is neither silent nor helpless.

Similar to his translation of the gender chaos in the cosmogony, Golding could not undo the fluidity that comes from women refusing “appropriate” gender roles. Echo emerges less a bawd and more a woman determined to work with the obstacles before her, much as the Princess contends with the obstacles women in power face. As the myth continues, we find that Narcissus’s denial of Echo has little to do with Echo herself, after all, he does not know her, he only knows of her desire for him. He maintains an arrogant chastity and spurns all suitors in his own self-enclosure not unlike the courtiers of the play. He is loved equally by men and women as Golding translates: for both “trim yong men” and “many a Ladie fresh and faire” fell in love with him (3.439-441). He is the perfect androgynous figure and so the only mate that can ever measure up is himself. He falls in love with his own “upward mouth he riseth towards me / a man would think to touch at least I should yet able bee” (3.567-568). Much has been written of the connection between homoeroticism and narcissism, and at one point Narcissus cries in anguish at the impossibility of this love before he realizes the young man in the pool is only an image. He screams in frustration that even “the Nymphs themselves” have loved him (3.574), using the fact arrogantly and forgetting that he neither returned that nymph’s love nor was kind in its rejection. The courtiers feel frustrated at their penance because they truly love only the image they see with their oft-blinded eyes. Narcissus justifies his worthiness to love himself *because* of a nymph’s love that he neither earned nor deserved through actions or merit. When the men echo each other to complete each other’s sonnets, or when Costard echoes words in the letter to translate Armado’s esoteric rhetoric, and on throughout the overall structure of the play, the women continually use the men’s empty words to illustrate their falsity. This leaves only the women’s words echoing in the halls of the men’s always already failed utopia. The audience is left hoping that, in a year’s time, the courtiers may *hear* the women’s words after all.

Shakespeare’s cross-dressed heroines easily lend themselves to feminist and gender studies criticism. Clothing for Rosalind, Viola, and Portia, grants them as much

license as the boy actors playing women must have felt on stage. The transvestite plays are rich and vibrant in their feminism, a trait that is not as evident with *Love's Labour's Lost*, which (along with *Comedy of Errors*) has been all but ignored in feminist criticism. *Love's Labour's Lost*, according to Jeanne Addison Roberts, might even be considered Shakespeare's "most feminist play" because the Princess and her ladies "control the action from their first appearance to their last" (75). Roberts considers it less feminist than it appears despite this: "The sense persists that the play is actually not about women at all" as the women speak little compared to the men's overwhelming garrulity, and in fact "we are diverted with the pleasures of male bonding, male frailty, male pedantry, male posturing, male dullness, and male wit, but the woman remain fixed points to be reacted to [...] it is certainly about male reactions to women" (78). She argues that it can still be considered "a pioneer work" because of its "deviant comic structure," and because of how that structure "encourages a realization of revolutionary possibilities":

For ambivalent audiences, male and female, the ending of *Love's Labour's Lost* may well be a happy one—endlessly postponing the perils as well as the pleasures of consummation. [...] *Love's Labour's Lost* may not be a protofeminist play or a specifically satiric one, but in its violation of convention it has come to seem like an amazingly modern one. We might claim it at least as a forerunner of feminism (82).

Perhaps "protofeminist" is sufficient; the play's structure and flouting of conventions allows freedom in a play that is far less symmetrical than we might like it to be, and quite possibly less artificial as well. *Love's Labour's Lost* creates its own symmetry despite the best efforts of the wordy-men that struggled to edit away its unworthy "flaws." We can once again recall Irigaray's "old dream of symmetry" in the most desperate desire for aesthetic and actualized perfection that the courtiers strove for through their poetry, and in the freedom the women upheld in the end when they refused their masculine dream and maintained their feminist one: A "feminine" mourning cloister far away in France for their "masculine" monastic penitence in some

lonely hermitage.³⁴ These enclosures are both haven and prison turned inside out and back against the courtiers. The utopic stage, with its multiple spaces of transgressive possibility (whether as gardens or cloisters or enclosures at court) allows the vast potential that both inspired its utopic creation by transgressing any attempts at symmetry, and through that transgression, deferred, and thus echoed, its endless utopicity.

³⁴ There are many examples in which theater, gender, and utopia collide in theory. Luce Irigaray in *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974, 1985), for instance, considers the place of the feminine and the maternal in a suspension of space and time. Irigaray's "dream of symmetry" illustrates the utopic desire for unity that must remain veiled, enclosed, the product of repetition, of "infinite regression." These themes appear throughout Shakespeare's plays and are suggestive of the stage's core attempt to reproduce and recapture continuously.

Chapter Four

Playing with Utopia: *Twelfth Night*

If this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction.

Twelfth Night (3.4.128-129)

The first scene in *Twelfth Night* is wonderfully funny. Duke Orsino sighs pathetically to his court as he bemoans Olivia's continued refusal of his suit. The scene's music and poetry evoke a memorable beauty, but still, productions of *Twelfth Night* often transpose the first two scenes of the play (especially in film) in order to create a more conventional narrative continuity. In contrast to the courtly idyll, the second scene is all drama and mayhem and offers a more compelling beginning: A tragic shipwreck after a storm at sea, a young girl stranded on an unfamiliar shore with no one but the ship's Captain to defend her, the loss of her beloved twin brother, her uncertain future in a strange land, all leading up to her decision to dress as a boy. Orsino's heartache seems almost dull in comparison. The scenes successfully introduce the play's conflict—the impasse between Orsino and Olivia—from two different perspectives: The first from within the Duke's court, and the second from without as the Captain recounts the tale to Viola. Viola's grief and desperation evoke tragedy and sorrow, while the ennui of the love-struck Orsino and Olivia's unwillingness evoke comedy and romance. Consequently, transposing the scenes significantly shifts the play's mood indicating that it is a far more influential decision than it seems.

In his film adaptation, *Twelfth Night, or What You Will* (1996), Trevor Nunn not only transposes the scenes but he consciously amplifies the drama by including events from onboard the ship before the wreck. The extended scene generates a sense of danger and tragedy far greater than the play's text alone could; overall, it is a rather tragic beginning for a comedy. Still, it grants an added dimension to the story that the play could never offer. The "identical" Viola and Sebastian are on-screen together allowing viewers the opportunity to experience the intimacy between them before the

drama of the ship's foundering and their tragic separation. When the film opens, the twins appear dressed identically as veiled harem girls celebrating Twelfth Night with the other passengers. Their costumes harmonize them to the point where they are identical in clothing, gender, and identity. Together, they entertain at the party by singing and playing piano, and by performing a mirror-game in which each takes off a piece of the other's costume while the crowd laughs in merriment. First, each removes the others' veil, but that is not enough to distinguish them because beneath the veils are identical mustaches. The first mustache comes off easily, but then the ship's emergency prevents the second mustache's removal and we are left wondering if it, too, would have come off as easily.

Nunn makes several curious departures from the play, but by far the most intriguing is how Sebastian, instead of Viola, becomes *Twelfth Night's* first transvestite. The film capitalizes on the humorous potential of their interchangeability because the twins remain indistinguishable until the scene shifts. In the midst of the chaos, they somehow find the time to change into gender-appropriate clothing, and they reappear as themselves only moments before they are thrown into the sea where they float away from each other in the dark waters. Now stranded on a strange shore, Viola relies on the Captain and his knowledge of the country because the film provokes still greater danger by contriving a merchant war between their nations. This creates a sense of urgency for Viola that is absent from the play, and the resulting anxiety weakens the melancholy impact of her first lines:

Viola:	What country, friends, is this?
Captain:	This is Illyria, lady.
Viola:	And what should I do in Illyria? My brother he is in Elysium (1.2.1-4)

Illyria is aurally and textually malleable and blends with Elysium to evoke a dreamy sense of death amidst life, or of Viola's liminal existence between the life she knew and the life she must now recreate. The film glosses over the sense of geographic anonymity—the sense of being everywhere and nowhere at once—that the foreign-

sounding "Illyria" originally evoked. In granting Illyria a history and politics, Nunn diffuses the utopic potential Viola conjures with her first words. He does preserve Illyria's anonymity because it is still an imaginary country, but by introducing a military conflict (and the politics and history that accompany it) Nunn invents an origin for the imaginary country that offers a far more realistic and substantial history than the play.

The Captain and Viola hide from the soldiers in a cave where he narrates Illyria's tale. Of Orsino's court, he says, "'tis said no woman may approach his court." He then describes how Olivia has secluded herself from "the sight and company of men" following the death of her brother. Both houses are closed to Viola, making her situation more desperate and leaving her little choice other than becoming a boy because she can attend neither Orsino nor Olivia as herself. She yearns to serve the lady after learning that Olivia is also mourning a brother, but the Captain discourages her: "That were hard to compass because she will admit no suit. Not even the Duke's." Olivia has rejected the company of men, but neither the film nor the play addresses the possibility of Olivia admitting a noble lady as a companion or guest. The impossibility of a single woman in the court of a bachelor Duke is assumed in the play, but made concrete in the film, giving Viola no other recourse but to become a boy. On the ship, Viola and Sebastian *both* sang "high and low" and used their gender interchangeability as a spectacle for the festivities, but the film changes Viola's role in Orsino's court from the gender troublesome "eunuch" of the play to the far less provocative "boy" and thus gives visually in the first scene what it takes textually from the second (1.2.56). The film then invites us to witness her transformation far more profoundly than the play does; Viola not only decides to dress as a boy, but she salvages her brother's scattered clothing from the beach to become Cesario. In a scene of odd intimacy between the Captain and Viola, he accompanies her as she removes her trappings of femininity piece by piece: jewelry and corset are cast to the ground emphatically, her long blonde hair is cut roughly, and her breasts are bound tightly. Each detail is replaced with a masculine one, like a cloth tucked down the front of her

pants (answered by a knowing glance from the Captain). With a final impersonation of the Captain's gait, Cesario walks off to serve Orsino. The film thus offers a pianist in answer to the Duke's famous request for music when Cesario appears in the next scene as Orsino's court musician. Through this more conventional chronology, the scenes fall into place, and Cesario's origin and fate become less ambiguous.¹

That the scenes can be reordered so easily only illustrates the play's structural, textual, and ultimately, theatrical, fluidity. The two scenes introduce comedy *or* tragedy in turn, but *Twelfth Night: Or what you will* is a comedy if it is anything. Its structure circulates around three characters that are set against each other with carefully measured balance: Orsino in one corner, Olivia in another, and Cesario as the pivotal catalyst between them. The conflict within the triangle rests on the point that is shared, hermaphroditically, by Viola as Cesario and Sebastian. In "Gender Asymmetry and Erotic Triangles," Eve Sedgwick confronts René Girard's "schematization of the folk-wisdom of erotic triangles" and argues that Girard treats the erotic triangle as "symmetrical—in the sense that its structure would be relatively unaffected by the power difference that would be introduced by a change in the gender of one of the participants." The gender simultaneity implied by a single point shared by two beings confuses the balance of Girard's triangle in which the "male centered tradition of European high culture" would require a structure "in which two males are rivals for a female" (478). Disrupting the expectations of the male-male-female triangle leaves the already ambiguous Cesario coexisting with Sebastian (their simultaneous presence made possible by the utopic space). Viola's unique position allows her to choose her gender, but also to embody many genders at once. What occurs when the power, and hence the responsibility, is shared, borrowed, or temporarily transferred between the corners of the triangle? *Twelfth Night* is particularly concerned with how hierarchy and power manifest in men and women (and masters and servants), but the play also

¹ For a thorough reading of Trevor Nunn's adaptation, see Laurie Osborne's "Cutting up Characters: The Erotic Politics of Trevor Nunn's *Twelfth Night*" in *Spectacular Shakespeare: Critical Theory and Popular Cinema* (2002).

confronts how constructions of gender within these power structures are complicated by the disruption of binary gender.

The drama of the shipwreck and the encounter with a strange new land in this play demonstrate themes from the popular travel narratives and colonization accounts; the themes were growing more familiar and were increasingly associated with utopias. The first scene evokes a romantic, comedic mood as it establishes the one theme that appears in all of Shakespeare's utopias: enclosure. Orsino's language in the first scene goes further still by introducing a courtly idyll along with every manner of pastoral or Petrarchan pleasure thereby including additional utopic themes to the play's setting:

Orsino: O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets,
Stealing and giving odour. Enough, no more;
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.
O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou.
That notwithstanding thy capacity
Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there
Of what validity and pitch so'er [...]

Orsino: Why so I do, the noblest that I have.
O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,
Methought she purg'd the air of pestilence;
That instant was I turn'd into a hart
And my desires, like fell and cruel hounds,
E'er since pursue me. [...]

Orsino: O she that hath a heart of that fine frame
To pay this debt of love but to a brother (1.1.5-34).

Redundant, repetitive, long and short O's punctuate Orsino's obsessively self-indulgent alliterative language; when heard, his lines sound like a relentless, droning lament, but in another sense, orgasmic. Add his own name, his beloved's name, and the "sweet sound" of "violets" that foreshadow Viola, and he encloses the complete erotic triangle from the play's first lines. Orsino's languor verbally and emotionally elevates Olivia to her role as the play's objective, or rather, its prey; as we will discover, she becomes the hart that everyone in the play hunts. It is as if, with those superfluous O's, Orsino yearns to "cry out Olivia" but fails because his words (and will) prove ineffective (1.5.277). When asked if he would like to hunt to distract himself from Olivia, Orsino declines, turning his metaphor inwards (like the sound of his own O's) so that "the

hart" that puns so overtly on heart is himself. Olivia, because of her enclosure, becomes a fixed point in the play, and as such, the means to each character's utopia. Orsino recognizes in Olivia what he does not possess: steadfastness, certainty, and unyielding resolve. He describes Olivia's perfection as able to purify the air with her presence; the fixity of her purity defines the qualities of her ideality because her steadfast presence promises perfection. Viola, as ephemeral as the flowers she is represented by,² on the other hand, is anything but a fixed point. Instead, she demonstrates gender fluidity as the means to utopic perfection. She moves to "steal and give" as if dancing to the music her name (an instrument) implies; as Cesario, she will steal Orsino's love for Olivia and give her own love to Orsino, and in her mimicry of Sebastian will, in the same instant, take Cesario from Olivia and give him to Orsino while also giving Sebastian to Olivia. Viola transgresses spaces, gender, and forms of desire in this play, and thus, allows for a fluid utopic space as contrast to Olivia's enclosed stasis.

Olivia counters Viola's fluidity in the play with her fixity, but Orsino shifts between the women inconsistently (in a sense, a form of ambiguity) and this uncertainty is tangible from the first scene in his rejection of the pastoral and the failure of his Petrarchan language. Jami Ake, reading the dynamics of female-female desire in the play, argues that the general failure of its Petrarchan language creates a "curious dramatic space in which female characters negotiate and revise the scripts and conventions of the elite, if increasingly clichéd, Petrarchan poetry of Elizabethan courtiers" (374). The properties of this dramatic space are "curious" because they allow female characters a freedom of will, and license with language, that makes revision of convention possible through ambiguity. Between Orsino's "ostensibly heteroerotic Petrarchan discourse" and Viola and Olivia's poetics in 1.5 (particularly in

² Beverly Seaton in *The Language of Flowers* (1995) outlines the violet's history as a symbol of modesty and humility, but also mortality, in the earliest Western emblems where it, along with the lily and rose, were garlanded to "remind young lovers that their beauty is mortal" (45). Later, the violet would be compared to, and associated with, the Virgin Mary (45), and even later, with the name Elizabeth (99).

Olivia's self-blazon) there is an "interplay of discursive and erotic modes" that allows us to see "both the ways that female desire finds imaginative space outside the restrictions of a thoroughly masculine Petrarchan poetics and how newly forged languages of female desire find their way into action" (375). Importantly, Ake is referencing a space emerging on the stage *between* modes that allows homoerotic desire to materialize through "newly forged languages" (functionally, not very different from the *écriture féminine*). Olivia and Viola's desire defies the "fragmentation of female speech and bodies" of conventional Petrarchan subjectivity, which means Olivia's self-blazon becomes preemptive, or a way of dismembering "Petrarchan rhetoric in prose" before it can "dismember her in verse." Ake argues that this allows Olivia to subvert "the male social and erotic prerogative" that Orsino's language attaches to "the circulation of Petrarchan discourse" (378-379). In essence, the spaces that language creates outline the distinct desires that come into being because of (and within) those space because for utopia to emerge from these spaces (and allow for lesbian desire), the language that forges the spaces must be transgressive. Gender fluidity is, as I have shown, the critical signifier in the construction of utopia, and in this play, this fluidity is invested in (and allowed by) Viola. For instance, as Ake notes, Viola demonstrates fluidity in her appropriation of the pastoral as "a space for female, rather than male, homoerotic desire" that she realizes as "a realm for Olivia that promises real erotic reciprocity as its end—a union unrestricted by the social arrangements of rank and gender to which Olivia carefully conforms." Moreover, Viola's performance, through "strategic grammatical indirection" concretizes that textual space in their presence on stage. Though it may be an "imaginary, conditional space," it is a feminized (and utopic) space because it is realized through textual and linguistic misdirection in a play in which linguistic power is wielded by the women and in which the primary comedic device requires visual and textual misdirection" (381-2).

Viola, who is both “maid and man,” can facilitate the required transgression because of her access to the singular object of everyone’s desire—Olivia—whom she shares the space with (5.1.261). The play’s pastoral elements, along with Viola’s fluid gender, Olivia’s fluid desire, and the no-place of an Illyria reconstructed as a feminized space, together contribute to forging utopia. As the play progresses, this space expands, fuelled by Olivia and Viola’s verbal exchange, to enclose the whole of Illyria. Eventually, Orsino, despite his elaborately verbal introduction of the play, fades into the background and becomes like a soundtrack to the play instead of a central character.³ Orsino introduces the play’s circularity with his many O’s, but other examples, like the ring presented to Viola from Olivia through Malvolio (2.2), supports and expands this thematic circularity. Additionally, Orsino introduces the play’s erotic triangle to establish the power hierarchy that binds them to patriarchal expectations, but this triangle gives way to the utopic circle, and a new space circles onward and outward from the women of the play who design a utopia that dismantles the triangular hierarchy Orsino introduces giving way to fluidity in gender and desire, as I will show. *Twelfth Night* includes more recognizably utopian themes than Shakespeare’s earlier utopic plays. Overall, the play is far more in keeping with the utopias of the colonial dialogue than the classical and pastoral spaces Shakespeare had been recreating on stage. He was developing the utopic potential of the stage to include the new world frontiers that negotiated gender and enclosure, but from a colonial perspective. Still, perhaps the most profoundly utopic element of *Twelfth Night* is its dependence on interactive misinterpretation through elaborate textual (delusion) and visual (illusion) “seeming.” The play demands that audiences participate— that they play with the play—to realize the play’s utopic potential, as I will show.

³ Orsino asks for music, or refers to music previously heard, constantly. This famous first line sets the trend for the play. For example, in 2.4 he asks after Feste’s music three times (2.4.1, 14, 50) during Cesario’s tale of woeful love. Whenever we encounter Orsino, we hear music, stories of love, and poetry. As a result, Orsino becomes nearly invisible, or rather, inaudible, while Viola and Olivia woo each other actively, humorously, dramatically, and loudly.

As expected of a comedy, *Twelfth Night* accomplishes a great deal through poetry and punning, but it also employs, for instance, significant names.⁴ Its language is highly alliterative and fosters verbal harmony when the dialogue is spoken (or sung) aloud, and this musical language then combines with the context to amplify the effect. For example, the first time Olivia allows Cesario in she announces that she will “hear this divinity,” and this sets the tone of their private wooing with lofty, supernatural, words that must be *heard*, like a sermon that might include chanting. Her first words to Cesario follow this theme: “Speak to me; I shall answer for her. Your will?” (1.5.170). At once, she “others” herself beyond her veil (dividing herself from herself to allow in Cesario’s “will”) and then demands that she play the audience to interpret the worth of Cesario’s will. Cesario answers by immediately fusing their bodies and words to connect them in a profound intimacy focused on the particular physical quality Viola knows they share. After all, Viola holds “the olive” in her hand and so can demand to be left alone with her (212-213): “What I am, and what I would, are as secret as maidenhead” (218-219). Olivia seems to catch the clue and so allows Cesario’s suit to be heard tête à tête, and then shifts her demands from merely hearing his words to requiring the text: “Now sir, what is your text?” (223). Once they are alone they can share a physical exchange—the text itself—instead of fleeting words that are only heard. To further strengthen her demands Olivia repeats the request when Cesario fails to satisfy with a too-comfortable narrative: “A comfortable doctrine, and much may be said of it. Where lies your text?” (225-226). The text is now granted a mood (comfortable), a location (in Orsino’s Bosom, so as to acknowledge the erotic triangle), and a position (*where* it lies), and in that shared moment and space, Viola and Olivia’s “secrets” can materialize: The still hidden secret Viola furtively shares with Olivia, the universally recognized secret Olivia keeps enclosed, and the reality that both Viola’s

⁴ In an interesting reading of Viola’s multivalent name, Terence Cave argues that because of her transgressive characterization, Viola represents “a particularly fruitful violation of the laws of rational discourse no less than sexual decorum: the fact that her proper name echoes the erotic flowers and music of the opening scene, insidiously rearranges the letters of Olivia’s name, and comes close to naming the Violation itself, appears to be yet another of the verbal accidents to which the play is prone” (280).

and Cesario's text "lie" with Orsino (the now silent Duke), but their bodies are free to roam within their shared realm.

Their mutual desire to share Cesario's ambiguous text relies on his ability to offer the suit for himself and the Duke at once. Indeed, even Viola's transformation into Cesario required multivalent language and music because she decided to become not a servant, page, or messenger, but a eunuch (a role dependent on vocal skills):

I'll serve this duke;
Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him.
It may be worth thy pains, for I can sing,
And speak to him in many sorts of music (1.1.55-58).

A eunuch's androgyny already introduces physical ambiguity, but Cesario's ambiguity is expressed most effectively in his ability to *speak* (instead of singing or playing) "many sorts of music." His skill grants him the more complete ambiguity needed for delivering his text through a voice that echoes his body. This is a significant quality given that a voice is the one feature that *could* reveal gender when clothing or appearance is uncertain. After all, boys with higher voices would have played the female roles for that reason.⁵ Viola must *seem* to be both girl and boy, and her voice, as the source of her power, must sound as ambiguous as her body looks.

Viola and Olivia introduce significant confusion over gender and desire to the play, but its greatest source of mayhem rests with the twins, Viola and Sebastian. *Twelfth Night* is the second play in which Shakespeare used twins (and the confusion and misrecognition they instigate) as a comedic device. In *The Comedy of Errors* (1592) two sets of male twins separated as children—masters and servants—encounter each other later and incite disorder through many layers of misrecognition. *Twelfth Night* introduces a critical difference to this formula: The twins are of different sexes and the misrecognition that entangles the plot is predicated not just on misreading identity

⁵ Stephen Orgel argues that the play's Italianate setting, Viola's name (the Italian form both of the flower and the instrument), and the name and role she chooses for herself, Cesario, together indicate the increasing popularity of the European *castrato* opera singers. *Caesarius* means both "belonging to Caesar" and is suggestive of *caesus*, or "to cut": "Viola as eunuch, then, both closes down options for herself and implies possibilities for others—possibilities that were [...] illicit" (*Impersonations* 53-56).

(of taking one for another) but specifically on misreading one *gender* for the other. The audience must accept the twins as interchangeable, but must also accept when other characters do not see the “other” twin; the humor comes from watching the character see whomever that character desires to see. The repercussions of gender misrecognition are decidedly more profound, but they also complicate the artifice that early modern theatre required of its audience in the first place because it asks them to laugh at the very device they are supposed to accept without a thought: boys as girls on the stage. This leaves the device itself—the performance of gender—dismantled. Of course, opposite-sex twins identical to the point of perfect interchangeability are impossible. This would have been part of the comedic effect that Shakespeare was acutely aware, as John M. Mercer has argued:

Shakespeare knows all along, of course, that this exact likeness ‘is not’; rather, it is a dramatic device that generates wonder and amazement in the characters and amusement in the audience. Well aware that the actors in fact do not look alike, the audience takes delight in the artificiality of the convention (34).

In fact, as Mercer continues, theatrical efforts to make the twins look identical in modern productions (even using the same actor for both roles) may “undercut a potential source of humour” (34). Audiences surely delighted in the artifice, and in seeing through the disguises that the other characters seemed oblivious to, but there is an added level of complexity in this play. Early modern audiences had to accept the boys playing Olivia and Maria as women while simultaneously laughing at how the other characters are unable to see that the boy Cesario is played by the girl Viola, who is played by a boy actor. They have to choose when to allow the artifice, and when to suspend it, in order to enjoy the comedy. This process generates a unique utopic potential in this play that is wholly reliant on accepting the possibility of gender fluidity if one wishes to experience the play’s utopia. To achieve it, early modern audiences had to accomplish a feat of simultaneity equal to Viola’s own: To allow for utopia, they must simultaneously suspend and assert their “knowledge” of Viola. The audience and characters must join forces and agree to see and not see her, and as with

any utopia, individual perspectives influence the resulting utopic vision with infinite variety.

Identical or not, Viola and Sebastian must “seem” identical to successfully drive the plot; this is not (and could never be) accomplished exclusively through costuming or representation, but must be combined with suggestive language and dialogue. Because no two actors could be truly identical, the text includes the tools for them to “seem” so, which is central to the play’s purpose. The play’s “seeming” also extends beyond the twins since much of the play’s humor comes from the interpretation, or rather misinterpretation, of language conveyed through performative seeming. Theatre is a visual and aural medium that uses spectacle, costumes, and props in combination with dialogue, language, and music to convey a story, but *Twelfth Night*’s visuals greatly depend on the textual, and the two in tandem require participation from the audience (or reader) for its success. Elizabeth Freund studies how the participatory nature of *Twelfth Night* influences its interpretation. Meaning, she argues, sits between what the audience sees, what they know, and what they must interpret: “Meaning hinges very directly [on] presence of mind.” Addressing Feste’s reference to the familiar Renaissance emblem depicting three asses/fools in 2.3.16-17,⁶ Freund argues, “The very act of mind, the witnessing recognition, has the effect of framing the beholder and coercing him into asshood because the picture is interpreted only when the beholder concedes himself to be an ass.” The interpreter cannot win because his or her “freedom to be witty” traps him or her “in a symbolic order that declares his witlessness—a plight from which there is no escape other than an unconditional and genial surrender [...] to playfulness” (474-76). The dialogue requires that the audience recalls the image in order to interpret the line and participate in the comedy, even if that interpretation requires that they also acknowledge their failure to

⁶ The lines, “Did you never see the picture of ‘we three?’” at once recall the popular image of the fools and equate them with the play’s love triangle. On the famous image, Michael Hattaway in *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture* (2008) writes: “contemporary continental prints survive, but the closest English representative is a painting entitled *Wee Three Logerh(ea)ds* acquired by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust [...] which depicts two fools with ass-eared hoods, one carrying a ‘bauble’” (357).

adequately interpret what is before them: to see the foolishness, they must be foolish, just as to see Viola they must acknowledge that Viola is just as plausible as Cesario, and that Cesario is just as plausible as Sebastian. Being trapped in this symbolic order requires a suspension of the certainty that “winning” results in any single interpretation, and ultimately, a single gender. Losing, on the other hand, may mean acknowledging that success may be found only in not-winning (or not-ending), or for Viola, in not-gendering.

The interpreter’s position in this example is contradictory and multi-perspectival because the interpreter “is obliged to take a position both inside the frame and outside it, to adopt two mutually exclusive centers of reference that exist in oscillating and recursive interchange.” The interpreter must admit he or she is an ass to understand the image, because to fail to understand the picture leaves him or her an ass. In reading the picture, one distances oneself from the picture but also becomes the picture: “This supersession of perspectives triggers a reflective process that unseats and reinstates consciousness in a continuing dialectic: There will always be a sense in which to be outside is to be inside, but to be inside is to be outside (476). Freund’s hermeneutic reading of the interpreter’s position within this liminal moment can be expanded to offer insight into performance in general. This play, more than most, requires a greater leap from its audience because it needs them to both see and ignore the fractures and contradictions generated by a utopic space where a simultaneous existence inside and outside is imaginable. In that moment, the same transgression that threatens dissonance allows for the simultaneity utopia fosters, even if only for that singular moment. In a sense, Freund’s argument focuses on the *result* of the utopic effect: The generation of a space where one is enclosed and exposed at once as a “reflective process” that allows utopia in the moment it disallows it. The play tangles the story through misrecognition in general, but more definitively at the point of gender and through the resulting gender confusion that the final revelatory scene unravels. From Viola and Sebastian’s perspective, the revelatory scene realizes

the possibility of simultaneity, which Freund calls a “copresence of identity and difference” because “if the twins are identical they are not identifiable [and] Viola can never become Viola without her double, Sebastian, and without the mimetic disillusionment of the illusionistic semiotic puzzle to which Orsino refers toward the end of the play” (476). Freund presents the twins’ mimesis as a “counter-icon” of the image of the asses and argues that the twins offer the play a mirrored structure that is “an indispensable configuration for the mimetic viewer” because it “forestalls the imminent collapse of meaning” (476). Identity and difference (or self and other) must be experienced conterminously, and on stage, within Viola’s one body until the final scene just as utopia, in Marin’s reading *Utopia* must be read as positive and negative at once. Freund argues that Shakespeare’s use of the twins assumes that any two identical images must exist *between* the mimetic and semiotic, a possibility that invites several questions: Is Viola herself, or is she only Viola because she is not Sebastian? Similarly, do we describe our desires only in light of other’s desires, as woman is defined only in light of what she is not, or what she lacks? The “collapse of meaning” must remain imminent, must be “forestalled,” but never actualized. It is as if one is standing on a precipice in order to sustain the utopic moment because beyond it, meaning collapses, along with the moment.

This imminence in Shakespeare’s plays is a critical moment of utopic potential. William Dodd has identified this moment as what he calls a “brinkmanship” in Shakespeare’s plays. Shakespeare repeatedly takes the reader/viewer to the edge of collapse in meaning, as Dodd writes, and this involves “recurrently pushing the fictional characters to the edge of exposure.” However, Shakespeare takes audiences still further in this play to the point of a “suspension of perception” revealing, like Freund, how the play requires the audience to complete the utopic effect (153). One of the play’s most potent examples of Shakespeare’s brinkmanship, in Dodd’s reading, is the audience’s unique experience of Viola. The audience can indulge “in the thrill of brinkmanship” with her and “pleasure will be redoubled” by the way in which her lines

appeal to the audience's "knowledge" that Viola is not a "single undivided subject." Through Olivia's eyes "we see the boy-girl Cesario" and through our own "we see the girl-boy Viola." Whichever way we turn, we always find an androgynous image: "Focusing the sexual ambivalence of the protagonist, threatening yet deferring exposure" Shakespeare brings the audience "to the very brink of awareness of [...] the fantasy that a relationship can be simultaneously homosexual and heterosexual (155). Visually, we follow the actors on the stage, and textually we hear (or see) the language we repeatedly interpret, but every direction leads to the same destination: ambiguity. Viola and Sebastian's dual androgyny critically animates the simultaneity in desire as well as gender.

The play's potential depends on the suspension of perception (accepting the illusion) and on the disruption of certainty (giving in to delusion) that results in a constant utopic ambiguity. How certain are we of his/her gender or whom s/he desires? To answer this question with certainty would lead to a collapse in meaning as assuredly as it would to the destruction of utopia. We must remain at the brink of awareness to maintain the possibility of utopia. We must suspend any desire for a clear answer and choose, instead, to play with the play, or as Freund terms it, we can only discover the play's joy by "surrendering to playfulness" (476). In fact, even those most opposed to theater could not avoid recognizing this imperative. The audience knows the truth, and their knowledge is as much a part of the pleasure as it is part of the element that allows for sustaining ambiguity. The illusion is what grants the play its theatrical reality, sustains the ambiguity, and refuses to resolve (though always seeming to) the transvestite; that the audiences participate in this process allows them to prolong the utopia as well. Judith Haber in *Desire and Dramatic Form* studies one of the most familiar and virulent Puritan complaints against the theater in England—Phillip Stubbes's *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583)—and writes:

Its passages are marked by the insistent repetition of the word 'play' (and the action it denotes), which crosses linguistic and theatrical boundaries and erases distinctions between truth and fiction. This erasure is, moreover, repeated in

all the vices—sexual and otherwise—that ‘play’ encourages: they all have in common a perceived inauthenticity, an intrinsic ‘fictionality,’ if you will, that distances them from a ‘reality’ imagined as natural, moral, and true (3).

Playing with this play—as an audience member, as an actor, as a reader, or from any perspective or position—is a transgressive act that requires crossing boundaries and questioning the unstable distinctions that outline truth and fiction, and consequently, the ideal and the real. The twins conjure the illusion that fuels the play’s playfulness, but the play still relies on the audience—what is outside the text—for its success *and* its resolution.

This sense of play denotes a flexibility in theater that allows playwrights to draw audiences in and facilitate collaborations (and later adaptations), but it also initiates the utopic “transcendence” of theater, as I discussed earlier. In *Utopia, Carnival, and Commonwealth in Renaissance England* (2004), Christopher Kendrick argues that the early modern was a critical historical nexus of change through which playwrights, in particular, demonstrated a specific expression of social progress:

The situation of the playwright [...] accounts for the very informing presence of a utopian impulse, for the routing implication of basic questions of human happiness and the habitually strong sense of blocked possibilities, in plays that have little expressly utopian about them. The situation in its complex transitoriness helps to explain how Marlovian and Shakespearian dramaturgies could make the late Elizabethan stage itself into something of a utopian machine (199).

Utopia was a flexible tool of representation for the theater; in a way, “the stage was set” for the production of one utopia after another. However, Shakespeare’s plays, as Kendrick suggests, at times feel more utopian than *Utopia* because they have been written in a way that it is “easy to find what one wants in them” (199). Theater was in place to become a “utopian machine” because of the many elements that fostered transgression as fundamental to a functional utopia on the stages of early modern England; Shakespeare simply accomplished this more effectively and transcendently than most. The stage progressed to allow for an enclosed space of boundless possibility in which one can see whatever one wishes to see and in which rigid binaries blur even if only for a moment in the here and now.

Accordingly, audiences must play along in order to solve *Twelfth Night's* many puzzles. Malvolio's interpretation of the acronym signature in Maria's letter—the "fustian riddle" (2.5.110)—is the most elaborate word puzzle in the play not because of its difficulty, but because of its flexibility. The countless critical interpretations these four letters garner have more often distracted from the scene's intention (fundamentally, Malvolio's misinterpretation) than they have granted insight into the play (or the playwright). Readers have repeatedly tried to interpret "correctly" the textual detail that was, from its inception, meant to be misinterpreted. If Malvolio's own reading seems inaccurate, perhaps the cryptic "M.O.A.I" could indicate a simple acronym for "My Own Adored Idol" as a 1901 edition suggests (Howard Furness 168, note 102), or, as the current Arden edition indicates, perhaps it is "a sequence of letters expressly designed to make Malvolio interpret them as he does, thus prolonging the comic sequence." Maybe any attempts "to wring further meaning from them are misplaced" (note 109), as another editor indicates. Rather than prolong the comedic effect, many "misplaced" attempts at uncovering definite meaning in the letters have managed to fuel further attempts at interpretation built on earlier interpretations. Are all these attempts merely misplaced efforts to untangle a meaningless, random combination of letters, or is the device itself so brilliantly cryptic that it may never be understood? The letters manage to sustain the comedy to no foreseeable "end," as they offer no clear reading of gender or person, and demonstrate only a limitless potential for further interpretation (perhaps even commenting on literary interpretation itself). That critics have been drawn to interpret "what they will" in these letters is testament to the utopic effect of this play. The play's contrast is not as much between spatial worlds or social groups (as we saw in the earlier plays) as it is between the visual illusion and the text we keep trying to "wring" further meaning from only to find further delusion in its many illusions. At some point, every character is deluded through misreading, or through the illusory misrecognition that the twins prompt. Repeated illusions (being fooled by one's senses) that lead to delusions (being

fooled despite evidence to the contrary) through discursive devices such as letters, tales, or verbal proxies that lead unceasingly to further delusion, and so on, propel the play's circularity. Through varied mistaken identities and many references to the problematic interpretation of written and spoken language, the play highlights the fixed point of the text: Both *the* letter ("O") and the written letter Maria writes, as both provide the play's textual misrecognition and limitless interpretative possibility.

The play's textual and visual exchanges deliberate these power dynamics as they manifest in the women's wooing (or control through language, misinterpreted or otherwise). It then empowers and denigrates the women simultaneously because it strives to relocate the power to the men as it manifests the threat of social mobility (through disguise or design) in the exchange between masters and servants. Maria's letter is an example of both these elements because it inspires Malvolio's delusions of love and grandeur and his adoption of the illusion of social mobility through his costume. The letter encourages him to accept a wildly strained delusion and offers the impetus for his illusion at once: Maria pretends to be Olivia, while she woos Olivia for Malvolio in order to encourage him to socially transgress and woo Olivia himself while dressed to fit the part. Furthermore, the same omniscience that grants the audience knowledge that Cesario is Viola, grants them the knowledge that Maria is the author of the letter that demonstrates her power with written language. Women use language through increasingly fluid constructions (of gender and class) to obtain their desires. Every character takes a circuitous route (whether knowingly or not) to obtain the desired Olivia in whom each character's power—or "greatness"—manifests. Whether true or imagined, or whether gained through birth, achieved through efforts, or whether or not it has been "thrust upon them" (as the letter suggests), only Olivia promises them the potential to realize power in all its incarnations. In Illyria, all roads lead to Olivia, and while she remains cloistered, she keeps that potential to herself; however, the inaccessible woman must be made accessible. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, the men struggle to leave their enclosure to access the women, but in this play,

everyone struggles to enter the enclosure to access the woman. It does not matter whether one needs to break out of, or into, the enclosure, only that the boundaries must be transgressed. Each character's progress depends on their breaking through Olivia's enclosure in order to access her, and to do so, each will seem to be what he or she is and is not (whether through illusion or delusion) to foster the ambiguity required for that transgression.

Maria succeeds with her letter writing, and Viola succeeds with verbal wooing, but Orsino (through his courtiers) fails in his wooing. Viola's success is usually ascribed to the potent language that her masculine clothing allows her, but the women of *Love's Labour's Lost* display similar license while wearing dresses. In *Power on Display* (1986), Leonard Tennenhouse argues that power invested in women had less to do with transvestism than it did with Elizabeth I's reign, which made such powerful women imaginable.⁷ On stage, "patriarchal power" manifested most overtly in the command of language, and most commonly through the fricative wooing that kept resolution, sexual or otherwise, imminent. Shakespeare's heroines demonstrating such "masculine" freedoms constitute "one step in a double move which relocates power in the male by way of marriage" (62). In these plays, uncertain endings repeatedly leave marriage as a passive afterthought instead of the aim of all the wooing. Conventional marriages are never played on stage and are only referenced to after the fact, which sustains their possibility but not their actuality because the women are never completely relocated to the men through marriage, as Tennenhouse indicates. In *Twelfth Night*, the wooing is more elaborate, and is even doubled and trebled across the women: Cesario woos Olivia for Orsino, but must also woo Orsino for Viola, and also manages to woo Olivia for Sebastian. Meanwhile, Maria woos Sir Toby by wooing Malvolio, thus doubly wooing Malvolio in Olivia's name in the hope that her letter impresses Sir Toby and furthers her

⁷ "That heroines possessing the power of patriarchy should regularly appear on the stage during the 1590s and not later, obviously had something to do with the fact that a female monarch was on the throne. [...] During this period it became possible to imagine patriarchal power embodied in a female, which obviously opened up a whole new set of possibilities for representing power on the stage. Each of Shakespeare's heroines indeed enacts, problematizes and resolves the issues of how power was distributed in England" (Tennenhouse 61).

own wooing. If Sebastian had "lived" it would have been his responsibility to woo a wife for himself, as well as a husband for his sister in the absence of their father, but Olivia takes responsibility for her own wooing (as a noblewoman with no worthy male guardian), and so she woos, pursues, proposes to, and marries Sebastian/Cesario.

However, Viola's transvestism is generally understood as the source of her empowerment, linguistic or otherwise. Lisa Jardine, for one, argues that Sebastian and Viola's separation and mutual transvestism are necessary for the development of their self-reliance, which offers an important alternative understanding of the transvestite in this play.⁸ Circumstances require that Viola accept the responsibility of applying and mastering the Phallus through cross-dressing instead of remaining on the streets, and thus, sexually accessible.⁹ To avoid the prostitution denoted by her transvestism, she places herself in Orsino's employment to conceal her identity and prevent any disgrace, but she is accessible and so desires (and is desired by) Orsino.¹⁰ There is critical interdependence between Viola and Sebastian's simultaneous roles as transvestites that emerges when we consider the role of fluid gender and desire in this play. Viola regulates her sexual access in her role as Cesario, Orsino's eunuch, but at the same time adopts the role of available male in her wooing journeys to Olivia (for instance, Cesario is offered money and treasures several times during his travels). Sebastian, on the other hand, is always the boy out in the world who has already been paid for his company and does not even need to be present to woo his future wife. He

⁸ This, curiously, fits easily with Nunn's decision to make Sebastian the film's first transvestite.

⁹ "In the streets, the bodies of the boy and the unmarried woman elide as they carry the message of equivalent sexual availability—male and female prostitution represented textually (and probably fantasized communally) as transvestism. The boy discovered as a girl reveals her availability for public intercourse; the girl discovered as a boy reveals that intention to sodomy for financial gain. The boy who walks the street cross-dressed as the comely girl (whether in reality or in fantasy/grotesque fiction) does not, therefore, misrepresent himself—he conceals (and then reveals) the range of sexual possibilities available. The girl who enters the male preserve (ordinary, tavern or gaming-house) cross-dressed does not misrepresent herself either. She is, in any case, 'loose', and eases the process of crossing the threshold into the male domain—controls the manner of presenting herself in a suitable location for paid sex" ("Twins and Travesties" 28-9).

¹⁰ As Traub noted earlier, in early modern England male clothing worked as "external projections" and were the "theatrical equivalents of the cultural fantasy of the enlarged clitoris." Thus, cross-dressing "not only masculinizes but erotizes the female body" in drama. Like Jardine, Traub indicates that Viola's cross-dressing denotes "prostitution" more than mere "sexual availability" ("The (In)significance of Lesbian Desire" 155-6).

wanders aimlessly around Illyria (inexplicably choosing to sight-see after nearly dying in a shipwreck and losing his sister and perhaps other friends and family members) and is mistaken for Cesario, but he must remain available until the appointed time for his appearance, which will coincide with Orsino and Antonio's reintroduction. Sebastian's appearance to replace Viola as Cesario in the impossible off-stage marriage was fortuitous and balanced with the return of Orsino to complete the reciprocal pairing of the twins at the opportune moment. For Cesario's transvestism to foster fluidity, Sebastian had to remain always accessible somewhere in Illyria as a constant simultaneous threat and security to her persona. In Viola's skillful wooing as Cesario, Sebastian demonstrates both the freedom from wooing that Orsino bemoans, and the freedom of desire he finds in Antonio. Each twin's ambiguous presence depends on the other's to sustain a shared fluidity.

Viola as Cesario, in her transvestism, offers the audience the opportunity to access Olivia, or rather, what the entire cast desires but cannot reach. Thus, the moment of Cesario's entry allows Olivia to exist both within and outside of the confines of her vow, enclosed and accessible, attainable and secreted, silent and speaking, at once. In demonstration of how utopic enclosures rely on transgressive constructions of gender, Viola is also both outside and inside the enclosure at once. Each woman has the opportunity to mirror the other's simultaneity from both locations. Olivia represents the chaste, "virtuous maid" whose choice of cloistering strengthens her ideality, while Viola also represents the ideal, but for reasons that contrast with Olivia's "feminine" ideal because Viola is simultaneously the transcendent hermaphrodite and "poor monster" (2.2.33) who routinely speaks of herself as both genders:

What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love:
As I am woman, (now alas the day!)
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe? (2.2.35-38).

Viola realizes perfect physical ambiguity, while Olivia promises a similar spiritual perfection, and both incarnations of the ideal remain intact because of their mutually reinforcing presences. Viola enters beneath the veil because she is a woman, and Cesario follows because neither "gender" is relinquished before the other is adopted. Olivia's chastity, represented by her vow, is both threatened and protected by Cesario's nonexistent Phallus that is implied by her male clothing but denied by the many puns (the "little thing") indicating her body. More than the physical suggestion, the Phallus (expressed as the control of/access to language) is indicated through her successful wooing. These puns are contradicted by the several ambiguous descriptions of Viola in the play, which mark her as a hermaphrodite. Of course, on the stage, Viola as Cesario was played by a transvestite actor, not a hermaphrodite who implies more than it possesses. As I discussed earlier, Marjorie Garber's argument that the transvestite marks the entrance into the Symbolic, and that the stage was a "privileged site of transgression," and as such was an allowable space for culture, through transvestism, to enter the Symbolic and flourish (34-5). Viola, whether as the textually implied hermaphrodite or simply a man dressed as woman pretending to be a man on stage, existed in the space that allowed access to the Symbolic (and Olivia) because the space is realized as a utopic space.

Furthermore, hearing (and reading) "Viola" and "Olivia" together encourages a strong alliterative pairing of the women, or even a pull to (con)fuse or conflate them. The women's anagrammatic names offer textual, and not just auditory, harmony and so fit together more seamlessly than the more socially and politically acceptable pairing of Olivia and Orsino's many "O"s. In fact, Olivia's name blends far more seamlessly with either Viola's or Malvolio's names than with Orsino's. Stephen Greenblatt reflects on our desire to connect Orsino and Olivia in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988) and underscores Olivia's role as the "lady richly left" because she represents the "major male wish-fulfillment fantasy in a culture where the pursuit of wealth through marriage was an avowed and reputable preoccupation." Between

Orsino and Olivia, Greenblatt continues, there is “a powerful logic—social, political, economic, erotic—to the eligible perfectly independent, male ruler of the land taking possession of this eligible perfectly independent maiden prize” (69). However, Orsino is not able to take possession of her because his preoccupation with Olivia is as a “prize” to be won, and this consistently turns inward to melancholy commiseration with his proxies—first Valentine, later Cesario—over how this endless “hunt” is turning him into the prey instead; he is far too passive for hunting or wooing. Socially, conventionally, and heteronormatively, Olivia may be “meant” for Orsino, but the play’s other characters encircle and pursue Olivia more effectively than Orsino does. Her oath (or her “O” and everything that that circle and sound denote) will not be pierced because she uses her dead male relatives (more passive men) to allow for her self-determination. On this point, Jonathan Crewe has argued that Olivia’s “extended mourning” is simply a “convenient way to keep decorous control over her unruly household and keep unwanted suitors at bay,” which she devised because she feels “pressured from within and without her enclosure” (105). Access to Olivia allows the realization of utopia, and so each character attempts to secure that access, and to that end, she must be both inaccessible (so all can imagine the possibility of utopia) and accessible (so all can hope to achieve it). The “perfectly independent” male fails, but an allowable proxy succeeds with the most potent element in the play: words, or more accurately, women’s words.

In their first meeting, Olivia also introduces the “what you will” of the play’s subtitle, and thus, here as in the *Love Labour’s Lost*, “will” returns to allow (or require) the breaking of an oath of enclosure.¹¹ Olivia demonstrates her role as the

¹¹ Callaghan explores “will” in her study of the female body in *Twelfth Night* and writes of Olivia’s reference to her own will: “‘Will’ signifies both sexual desire and, literally, the legal document containing instructions about the disposal of her property. Command over one’s body consists of command over its representations, its reproductions—something that would have resonated with Elizabethans, whose queen carefully supervised the reproduction and dissemination of her authority by controlling the use of her image as stringently as she controlled marriage plans prepared on her behalf” (437). The word has a plethora of early modern associations and several appear in this play as they did in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. Suggestive, in poetic bawdy, of penis *and* pudenda, its “humour derives from the articulation of inappropriate

play's goal by voicing the play's secondary title with her first words to Viola, who answers, "I am not that I play," to Olivia's inquest (1.5.185). This punning answer opens a dialogue predicated on the possibility of what Olivia may have learned from Cesario's first statement to her. Viola drops clues to her identity throughout the play, but no one catches them (or at least, they do not *seem* to), and indeed, a questioning language of seeming pervades their dialogue: "Yet you began rudely. What are you? What would you?" Viola acknowledges Olivia's questions, but does not answer them. Physically and textually, Viola seems to be what she is and is not, and in this moment, her ambiguity allows her to bond with Olivia in their shared femininity, at least in this moment. She who has been idealized to the point of garnering the name "Madonna" should understand the implied divinity of the feminine space defined by (or even perhaps designed as) their "maidenheads." For a woman to be dressed as a man in anyone else's ears would sound profane (here again, the preference is for the verbal/aural quality than the visual) and leave Viola not free, but only the "poor monster" in a "wicked disguise" (2.2.26-33). Evil is set against good as profane and divine, and Viola inhabits that cautious space between them. As a man, as a woman, and as the embodiment of both at once, s/he shows how the ambiguous space between profanity and divinity allows for utopic desire either as a woman desiring a man, or as a woman desiring a woman, because she demonstrates both at once.

Why Viola hints at, but does not overtly reveal, her identity to Olivia in their solitary moment, or even later when their intimacy grows, is a thought-provoking question. At several instances in the play she might well have confided in someone, and why not Olivia whose sorrows echo Viola's own so intimately. Viola's soliloquy over her "wicked disguise" follows the moment when Antonio mistakes Viola for Sebastian. Cynthia Lewis argues that Viola's speech is particularly insightful in demonstrating her internal relationship with "Cesario" as her alternate persona, but also likens Cesario to

desire, especially female desire. Female desire is not clearly affirmed in this inverted world, just as in actual social sites of symbolic inversion such as carnivals, women were as likely to be sexually abused as given sexual license" (442).

Antonio, who is paired with Sebastian the same way as Viola is with Olivia, and from this comparison, we can glean further connections with other characters as well. The contrast between Viola and Antonio fosters a fear in Viola of losing control (which we also sense in Malvolio and Feste) and that a great deal of the play's "potential and actual destructiveness" comes from Viola's "refusal to expose herself openly to others—to give herself away." Viola's dedication to her disguise is "emblematic of her self-involvement" and that she harms others in the play through her disguised manipulations. Viola may be rationalizing her decision by insisting that her hands are tied in her soliloquy, but it is clear that she prefers to remain concealed. As Lewis argues, "the subtle play on 'not' and 'knot' suggests what Viola feels but is too self-protective to confess: that not to remain in disguise, whatever knot it creates, is simply 'too hard.' But to contend, as she does, that she cannot alter the course of future events is patently false" (*Particular Saints* 109-10). Whether or not Viola is being manipulative in insisting that she cannot be without her disguise, or being cowardly in suggesting it is too difficult to become Viola again, is not the point; the uncertainty in her soliloquy demonstrates her comfort in remaining ambiguous, and her desire to remain so. She fears the affection she incites in Olivia but also welcomes it, just as she hopes to be successful in her suit to Olivia on Orsino's behalf, but hopes to fail so she might succeed with Orsino on her own account, and finally, just as she hopes to be taken for Cesario, but wishes to remain Viola. From this position of ambiguity and androgyny emerges the realization of "what she will" in answer to Olivia's query. To do what she will *not* do ("drop her disguise") would disallow the utopic moment that time must eventually undermine, as Lewis notes. Indeed, Viola must know that relinquishing her disguise would immediately untie the knot, but to abandon the freedom would disallow the utopia and the pleasure it brings the audience, the characters, and herself. Lewis rightly indicates the troublesome effect of Viola's disguise on the plot, but I disagree that her willingness to woo Olivia for Orsino indicates a lack of

involvement with her disguise. Instead, it demonstrates her willingness to endure it as “patience on the monument” if it prolongs the utopic moment (2.4.115).

In this interview, Olivia and Viola dither between being and seeming. One must pay close attention to which of them knows what about the other from within their shared being and constant seeming in this exchange:

Olivia: I prithee tell what though thinks't of me.
 Viola: That you do think you are not what you are.
 Olivia: If I think so, I think the same of you.
 Viola: Then think you right: I am not what I am.
 Olivia: I would you were as I would have you be.
 Viola: Would it be better, madam, than I am?
 I wish it might, for now I am your fool (3.1.141-146).

Right before Olivia's aside, where she declares her love and intention to “woo” Cesario because “love sought is good, but given unsought is better” (3.1.156, 158), the uncertainty between the women is unrelenting. We are uncertain if they know the others' truths, and uncertain about what each desires in and from the other, or even what exactly one is asking of the other. The mutual desire is noticeable though not expressly stated (as we have come to expect with wooing). Valerie Traub argues that because Viola names herself a monster, her transvestism demonstrates the “dominant discourse of tribadism and sodomy” more than lesbian desire (157). In her, we find the “implicit power asymmetry that seems to constitute the homoerotic pair: the relative power of each woman is aligned according to her denial of homoerotic bonds” (158). Traub continues by pointing out that it is not the male, but the female, characters in the play who “by their silent denial of the other woman's emotional claims, position homoerotic desire in the past” and thus female homoeroticism is “figurable not only in terms of the always already lost, but the always about to be betrayed. And the incipient heterosexuality of the woman who is recipient rather than enunciator of homoerotic desire comes to stand as the *telos* of the play” (158). As I have argued, Olivia sits comfortably as the goal of the play and as recipient of this desire and that grants further ambiguity to her role as the center, or *telos*, of the play. There is unity and movement between the women and their desire emerges as one of the play's

central goals, as Traub indicates, but also suggests how the women's interdependence is much the same as the twins' interdependence, and ultimately, includes the play's other transvestites in the same exchange. The homoeroticism between the women is appropriately "figurable" not in any absolute form as present or absent, or as lost or imminent, but always on the brink, or about to be betrayed, and so, in transition, in motion, and as such, necessarily and appropriately transgressive. The women continuously, almost redundantly, remind us that one of them seems to be what she is not while the other seems to know what she does not. The imprecise, fluid language in this passage vacillates between identity and meaning, and importantly, rests on Viola's final word right before Olivia's revealing aside: Fool. This single word of clarity signals and warns against Olivia's subsequent aside in which she reveals her desire and plans, both of which will do more to deepen the play's chaos than resolve it. A moment of clarity beyond the play's illusory seeming reveals a singular "truth": This play is full of fools.

Because Olivia embodies the unattainable goal, the play's momentum moves everyone towards her, and its language encircles her. Feste, the clown, is exceptional, because he is the only person who has access to everyone. He masters Olivia as the allowed fool, and his effective wit sits in contrast to the other characters' persistent foolishness. Feste's brutal treatment of the imprisoned Malvolio comes as a shock given that he has been a rather honest, though mocking, character, so far. In fact, as Elliot Kreiger argues, "Feste's grudge against Malvolio develops largely because of Malvolio's attack on the institutions of 'these set kind of fools'" (56). The exchange Krieger mentions renders Malvolio a fool before Olivia, but the cruelty Feste inflicts is not the result of an argument he so clearly won because Feste was never in danger from Malvolio's ineffective rhetoric. Feste already shares a strong familiarity and affection with Olivia as is evident in his terms of endearment for her (she is his Madonna and mouse), and while Malvolio's does not share such overt intimacy with Olivia, he proves his loyalty and service through his actions. In some ways, the conflict between Feste

and Malvolio seems born more out of jealousy than love. The promise of realizing one's desires is threatened by another's desire for the same thing, which breeds jealousy over access to that desire. Each character moves solely to satisfy his or her will, desires, and ideals, and nothing threatens one's access to "what one wills" like the possibility that another may want the same thing. Feste moves as seamlessly as Viola in and out of everyone's circles, but, oddly enough, it is unclear if he has anything to do with devising the plan against Malvolio. He appears party to the device *after* Malvolio has been locked away by donning the third disguise of the play and appearing as "Sir Topas" to befuddle the imprisoned man. One would imagine that so flexible a fool would surely be involved in such an elaborate folly, but he is absent during the initial machinations.¹² He helps blur the boundaries in the play because his wit speaks with somber reality to both "love" and "identity" to hold fast to the "truth" that seems to escape the rest of Illyria's fools even when they speak the word as often as they do.¹³

Feste's words offer knowledge and wisdom in a play that too often seems a dissonant song played against a maddening cacophony; after all, he is a musician in a play that is dissonant even though its humor depends on the harmony and alliterative possibilities of language. He sings songs that offer far more insight into love, identity, and even the play itself, than the rest of the dialogue of mad, confused wooing ever could. In his answer to Olivia's request that he care for the drunken Sir Toby, he proves more prophetic than conceding: "He is but mad yet, madonna, and the fool shall look to the madman" (1.5.138-139). In the same scene, Feste compares the progressive stages of drunkenness as fools, madmen, and the drowned. And to follow this truth, the play will go on to glorify fools, taunt the imagined madmen, and idealize the supposed drowned man (Sebastian). By looking to the madman, Feste offers an early

¹² As Lewis argues, "Feste's manipulations of both language and disguise have the power to enrich his service, which, just as Antonio's 'pure' expression of 'love' reveals the truth. More specifically and in accord with the theme of Epiphany, Feste wears down false barriers to love and identity" (*Particular Saints* 97).

¹³ Indeed, of all of Shakespeare's plays, the word "fool" is used more in *Twelfth Night* than all the others save for *King Lear* (1603). Moreover, it is not just a slight difference; the word appears more than twice as often in *Twelfth Night* than the play with the next most instances, *As You Like It*.

indication of the rivalry between himself and Malvolio that peaks with Feste's "foolish" Sir Topas "looking to" the "madman." When Malvolio tries to position himself between Feste and Olivia by "attacking the institutions," Feste has already established his adeptness and importance to Olivia because he has succeeded in proving Olivia a fool:

Clown: Good Madonna, give me leave to prove you a fool.
 Olivia: Can you do it?
 Clown: Dexterously, good madonna.
 Olivia: Make your proof.
 Clown: I must catechise you for it, madonna. Good my mouse of virtue, answer me.
 Olivia: Well sir, for want of other idleness, I'll bide your proof.
 Clown: Good madonna, why mourn'st thou?
 Olivia: Good fool, for my brother's death.
 Clown: I think his soul is in hell, madonna.
 Olivia: I know his soul is in heaven, fool.
 Clown: The more fool, madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven. Take away the fool, gentlemen (1.5.55-70).

Olivia is mistress and, almost obsessively, "madonna," then she is "mouse of virtue," but in the end she is only a "fool." Feste strengthens Olivia's association with virtue by naming her "madonna" five times in this one exchange; after all, like the Madonna, Olivia mourns and is chaste. Everyone involved, including Feste, contributes to her unattainability even as the text increasingly involves her in a questionably close allegiance to her lost brother and ambiguous attraction to Cesario. Olivia is proven a fool because of the dedication to her oath, yet, it is precisely because of her vow that all involved seek her in the first place. She is the unattainable "O," the Other in ways than Viola and Sebastian cannot be. Viola and Sebastian are either accidentally, or too-easily, attained, but Olivia, in her unattainability, remains always out of reach. Illyria (more utopia than ancient Italian city) is where everyone seeks to know and obtain the only textually proven fool in the play. Fools abound in action and deeds, but Olivia is the only *proven* fool, and their only means to access her is Viola, the unknowable being. Feste, on the other hand, is the only *named* fool, and as expected, proves far wiser than the rest. In Illyria, it would seem, everyone is eager to strive towards

foolishness, perhaps as the Epiphany allows, but perhaps also because to call it foolish makes the transgressions seem less dissonant.¹⁴

The uncertainty and seeming between the characters makes one yearn for the more pleasing symmetry in class, rank, and social expectations that Orsino and Olivia suggest. They *should* end up together because, after all, Olivia and Orsino's union is "blocked only by a vow that must be broken in the interest of both the political and natural order of things" as Greenblatt writes in *Shakespearean Negotiations* (68). Olivia's vow, Greenblatt argues, is "absurdly ambitious in its projected duration, comically ritualized, perversely wedded to misery" and so Olivia's "swerving" from the vow is "entirely predictable" (70). However, has Olivia swerved? Greenblatt argues that the play's tendency to "swerve" is one of its "central structural principles" (68). I agree that Olivia's vow is extreme in its length and severity, a point belabored by many of the characters (although its requirements fall only to her and thus are far less extreme than Navarre's Academe that required the hesitant courtiers' adherence), but the vow is broken the moment Cesario gains entry with his suit, and yet, because Cesario is at once Viola, the vow is kept as well. The reason for her vow is to honor "a brother's dead love" (her brother's name is not mentioned), so logic would dictate that reinstating "a brother's dead love" would negate the need for the vow (1.1.31). Yu Jin Ko notes that Olivia is searching for a lost brother (like Viola), but warns that the speed with which "she transfers her longing from her brother to Cesario suggests that she has found a substitute" (401). Olivia ultimately finds release from her vow in Cesario/Sebastian (himself a once dead brother) and that reinforces her constancy to her vow. Viola's transvestism—her self-enclosure in male clothing—was inspired by a loss similar to Olivia's and her constancy to remain Cesario has the same effect. Viola hopes to keep her dead brother alive in much the same way, which further

¹⁴ In the introduction to her article on the suppressed incest themes of the play, Masazumi Araki explores the etymological roots of the epiphany ("to show forth") and argues that the play's dual title conveys both the Christian and supernatural themes of the feast of epiphany, and results in a text that "holds indeterminate what it promises to show forth" (29). This indeterminacy, of being unsure what one is being shown, is seminal to this play's motivation.

substantiates their tangled interdependence with each other. Thus, Viola as Sebastian, instead of Cesario, fosters simultaneity not only of gender, but of brothers.

As Sebastian, s/he fills the loss, absence, and lack that created the need for Olivia's vow and enclosure in the first place. Viola implies several times that she is replacing her brother: "I am all the daughters of my father's house, / And all the brothers too" (2.4.121-122). And later, very specifically, she says:

He's nam'd Sebastian. I my brother know
Yet living in my glass; even such and so
In favour was my brother, and he went
Still in this fashion, colour, ornament,
For him I imitate (3.4.389-393).

She makes an effigy to her brother of herself, revealing what Mercer terms her "greatest tribute to her affection for her twin" because she has "kept him alive through her disguise" (29). This might suggest merely that Viola is affirming her physical likeness to Sebastian, but there is another more morose suggestion that implies he is still living because of their similarity. This possibility recalls a simultaneous narcissistic and incestuous love: In death, he is "living in [her] glass." That her lost brother is alive, but enclosed in her (as a) mirror, is an illusion, but her gender fluidity succeeds in keeping Sebastian alive for Olivia, and because that brother's love is dead no longer, she maintains her vow. Olivia's idealization (further protected by her veil and her initial adoption of the "other" self in her meeting with Cesario) then eases the substitution of her own brother's love for Sebastian. Both brothers are suddenly "living" through their sisters. The wooing scenes also afford Cesario the opportunity of un-veiling because s/he at once imitates and allows the dead brother's presence. On the resulting deception, Lorna Hutson argues that Sebastian and Viola twinning (and Viola's femininity) occurs not just for the sake of "resolving and erotic impasse by offering a means of gaining access to a cloistered woman". Instead, it foregrounds "an outrageously improbable *hypothesis* about the possibility of combining fidelity in service with rhetorical *oikonomia*—that is, the heroic exploitation of rhetorical opportunity, which typically achieves both economic security

and erotic gratification" (164). When Sebastian appears in the flesh—the true dead brother—he replaces both the love Olivia lost in loving Cesario and the love she promised her own dead brother. Orsino's wish to attain the unattainable Olivia must be similarly resolved; he can only access Olivia by way of Viola as Cesario, who is at the same time, Sebastian. Viola's presence as both herself and her dead brother promises the play's resolution because only through his marriage to Viola can Orsino access Olivia, a goal he may accomplish only by marrying Sebastian's sister to become a brother (in law).

It is interesting that in the span of years between *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Twelfth Night* the enclosure adopted under an oath expresses such steadfastness (when grounded in women's words); cloistering becomes a viable choice after the death of male relatives. It is as if Olivia represents both the masculine and feminine qualities of the earlier play: Like the men in Navarre, she denies access to the opposite gender, but like the Princess, she sees the opportunity for independence in choosing her own cloistered exile. The critical difference is that Olivia keeps her oath, unlike the courtiers of Navarre. The introduction of Sebastian, a brother raised from a salty death at sea (in the salt and brine of tears) is perfectly convenient:

But like a cloistress she will veiled walk,
And water once a day her chamber round
With eye-offending brine; all this to season
A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh
And lasting, in her sad remembrance (1.1.28-32).

When Olivia believes she has married Cesario in the final scene, she must accept Sebastian as a substitute in order to reconcile the dissonance of the suggestion of incestuous love for her dead brother and lesbian love for Viola as Cesario. Olivia's vow is textually fulfilled because her seclusion is promised to honor "a brother's dead love," which suggests that while the brother's *love* is dead the brother's life is uncertain. The more syntactically regular "a dead brother's love" would have more clearly suggested the oath was made to honor the dead brother. Shakespeare's word order is creating a loophole. Given the superfluity of sibling love Olivia gains in the end

(including a sister), her oath is not so much broken as it is negated by the absence of its original cause: "A brother's dead love" does not exist because all the brothers (and sisters) of Viola's house offer her a love that is far from dead. Further, this resolution depends on word order, which returns us to the play's fixation on misreading. If, as Greenblatt argues, the symmetry of *Twelfth Night* could be realized by the breaking of an oath, so too would the symmetry of *Love's Labour's Lost* have been eased by a willful choice to break their oath. It was not to be in both cases because of the fluidity of women's words and those words' ability to forge utopia. Their oaths stand fast in their efforts to maintain enclosures and gender fluidity as the utopic promise.

The play's other woman of words, Maria, is the one character to rise socially in the play, but she is absent from the dramatic final scene, perhaps implying the social unacceptability of her own pairing (necessary because Sir Toby feels responsible for asking her to write the letter). Viola grants us access to Olivia through her spoken words and fluid gender, Maria, on the other hand, grants us access to Olivia through her written words and fluid class. Malvolio, the unwitting tool of her transgression (the role Sebastian plays for Viola), is present in the final scene where she (like Viola) is not, but Malvolio is left humiliated and raving while she will marry. His gullibility and subsequent madness exemplify the play's anxious support of gender fluidity because Malvolio (like Viola) complicates the play's gender as a man, instead of as Viola's androgynous twin. Dymrna Callaghan considers Malvolio's gendering in Maria's strategic letter:

[He] has become "liver and all," feminized, ridiculed, and castrated; his corporeal being in its entirety has been reduced to the most denigrated body part—a "cut." [...] His denigration into femininity is a reversal of the transformation from female to male, thought biologically feasible in the Renaissance on the grounds that nature strove toward perfection. In short, Malvolio's gender constitutes an unnatural act. Thus his social ambitions implicate him, albeit inadvertently, in a species of deviance far more dangerous than Viola's deliberate transgression (436).

As Callaghan argues, it is far more "unnatural" to depict a feminized man than a masculinized woman, and this play manages to do both. Callaghan is following Orgel,

who argues that this moment is an explicit realization of the castration fantasy (55), and Lacquer, who argues that maleness in the early modern was the state all beings strove toward. Viola's choice to cross-dress is natural and plausible since she is an imperfect female and so must strive towards masculine perfection. Callaghan builds on the correlation between gender and class transvestism by outlining how Malvolio's cross-gartering (inspired by Maria's letter) is "structurally and symbolically related to gender inversion, and it is no further removed from anatomical inscription than is Viola's disguise" (433). By enacting both forms of transvestism, the play invests in a "significant corporeality" and expresses a "feminized carnal excess" normally defined by aspects of the carnivalesque that Malvolio "notoriously disrupts" with his threats of revenge (434). After all, Malvolio turns this wacky comedy into a revenge tragedy with his final words: "I'll be reveng'd on the whole pack of you!" (5.1.377).

Malvolio's class, instead of gender, transvestism is "central inversion of the play" and that it is "closely related to the play's representation of femininity, as well as bawdy humour [because] female genitals are at the heart of Malvolio's gulling" (436). Callaghan is referring to the other word puzzle of the play: Sir Andrew's comment on whether or not Malvolio will recognize Olivia's "hand," and how that recognition would suggest that Malvolio may recognize her C's U's, and T's. This "scandalous pun" is spelled out in "slow, excruciating detail: cu[n]t" (436). Sir Andrew insinuates the genitals and hands of a woman (in parts) to textually signal the monstrous and carnivalesque and the Petrarchan blazon. The pun specifically indicates two interrelated points, as Callaghan argues: First that Malvolio already possesses intimate knowledge of Olivia and so could recognize her genitals (suggesting a sexual service), and second that he, too, is now subject to the "cut" and is thus castrated like the eunuch Cesario only seems to be. Add to that that the words "cunt" and "Count" were likely homophonic in Elizabethan English and even his assumed role as Count Malvolio makes a "cunt" out of him (436). As Olivia's steward, he is already inferior, but his service to her is defined by the tasks he performs for her in the play. Of these

tasks, two confront gender directly: his initial description of Cesario that corroborates his gender ambiguity, and his "return" of Olivia's ring to Cesario (in effect, he is handling Olivia's "O" as a physical representation and commodification of her genitals). In many ways, these scenes define the rules of access to the prize by participating in the construction of Viola.

Maria's social ambition, and the effectiveness of her letter in inciting similar class striving in Malvolio, is an example of another related element in the play. There is a symmetrical reciprocity between love and service that touches every character, and both ideal love and ideal service are expressed, and contingent upon, expressions of fluid gender. As David Schalkwyk has argued, the desire for symmetry in the final scene exists in a similar pull towards symmetry between servant and master. Both relationships rely on "intimacy and reciprocity" and are "predicated on inequalities of power," which Schalkwyk argues exemplifies Shakespeare's interest in "how social institutions are transformed into more psychological and emotional ties of reciprocal affection. The ideal of reciprocity was always there, even if it did not commonly take on an erotic dimension" ("Love and Service in *Twelfth Night* and the Sonnets" 77-8). From within the play's circularity, the pull towards symmetry leads instead to reciprocity. Viola can access Olivia as Cesario because of his ambiguous gender, in much the same way as Malvolio can access Olivia through his service. Malvolio is feminized in all the ways Callaghan describes, but also because of his gullibility, his willingness to cross-garter, and most vividly, in his assumption of the clothing of a count. Each element contributes to Malvolio's ambiguity, but each is also, essentially, dependent on Viola's transvestism because she is the true means to Olivia. Class transvestism is perhaps not the play's "central" inversion as Callaghan indicates, but it does grant the play a bawdy carnivalesque that, like utopia, requires the feminine body. More accurately, gender and class transvestism work in tandem as the play's dual structures and thus, in the critical final scene, neither Viola nor Malvolio is wholly realigned. In fact, so closely related are they that the resolution of one is dependent

on the other. If Malvolio does not return to service and sanity by acknowledging his misguided delusions of grandeur, Viola will not get her clothing and must remain Cesario. Both remain in constant progress, which is exactly where they must be to maintain the play's utopia. Love and service also imply commodification in its association with courtship. Money is absent from the women's wooing, but on several occasions, Cesario (and Sebastian) is offered and expressly denies money as payment for his/her services. In fact, when Antonio demands his purse of Cesario (thinking Cesario is Sebastian), she eagerly offers him money for his service, just as she does to the Captain to keep her secret (both Olivia and Viola, in a sense, are in positions of control over money). Cesario cannot provide Antonio his true purse because it is, at all times, in Sebastian's hands, who *is* wandering the street with access to, and perhaps the use of, Antonio's purse. The pitfalls and implications of using money, instead of words, in love are far more salient to women being wooed than when they are wooing.

Maria and Viola are both servants to Olivia and Orsino as masters of the play. Once she falls for Cesario, Olivia has less need for her servants and begins to woo him independently: She expresses her love for him, blazons herself, proposes to Sebastian, and insists he marry her immediately. In her absence, Maria is free to serve Sir Toby, and Malvolio is free to be gulled. Meanwhile, Viola worries about the effects of her verbal wooing on Olivia (and Orsino), and Maria—the play's love letter writer—worries over the sufficiency of her written wooing. Maria's strategy is to duplicate Olivia's handwriting so that her mistress's "hand" can stand for her mistress's presence as she attempts to win Malvolio to gain Sir Toby for herself. She projects her own desire for social climbing in Malvolio and harps on that weakness by inspiring him with the catchy, oft-quoted lines that capture the play's endless "seeming":

In my stars I am above thee, but be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em. Thy fates open their hands, let thy blood and spirit embrace them, and to inure thyself to what thou are like to be, cast thy humble slough, and appear fresh. Be opposite with a kinsman, surly with servants. Let thy tongue tan arguments of state; put thyself into the trick of singularity. She thus advises thee, that sighs for thee (2.5.143-152).

Maria deftly fosters uncertainty in the letter in order to allow Malvolio the freedom to read into it whatever he wishes, but with a clear focus on exploiting his vanity and desire for social mobility. This clever, much deliberated, “trick of singularity” tells him directly to adopt the image of nobility for himself, suggests the cross gartering, and further communicates the “hope” that he should adopt a surly attitude with the servants. Maria is at once blurring the boundaries between love and service, and class and gender by encouraging him to believe that the “greatness” of his service might lead to love. His greatness is not inborn, although he believes it is achieved through his loyal service, but the letter is the device that now, definitively, thrusts greatness upon him. Every character strives towards a “greatness” that the play insists only Olivia can provide. Moreover, each character follows at least one of these three avenues leading to greatness depending on their social spaces. Olivia and Orsino are both born to greatness, and Viola and Sebastian are similarly high born, but Cesario is a servant trying to achieve greatness while Sebastian’s nobility is opportunely mentioned as surety that Olivia has not married a boy off the streets. Viola is unique in that she inhabits all the paths to greatness at once: She is born noble, in her guise as a servant she embodies someone not born to greatness but who achieves greatness through her successful service, and finally, Olivia’s love and desire thrusts greatness upon her:

Alas, it is the baseness of thy fear
That makes thee strangle thy propriety.
Fear not Cesario take thy fortunes up
Be that thou knows't thou art, and then thou are
As great as that thou fears't (5.1.144-149).

And yet, Olivia speaks to Cesario as a master would a servant: “Cesario, husband, stay!” (5.1.141). She thrusts (with her powerful women’s words) her love upon one she believes is but a servant to Orsino, allowable only because the audience will learn of the twins’ nobility: “Be not amaz’d, right noble is his blood.” (5.1.262). Maria and Malvolio both strive for greatness, but only Maria achieves it through marriage (at Malvolio’s expense), while Malvolio in his striving fails utterly in a fit of vanity and

delusion just as Orsino fails in his passive melancholy. Perhaps Maria's successful wooing for herself and her unsuccessful wooing (but successful gulling) of Malvolio sustains the idea of women as the only truly empowered beings in the play (at least in light of her social mobility). For while achieving greatness is acceptable, and having greatness thrust upon one is acceptable if it comes from someone above, only those "born great" remain so despite all delusion or illusion.

More vulnerable to class dynamics, the minor characters reflect this desire for greatness more poignantly. For instance, Sir Andrew unsuccessfully strives for marriageable greatness in terms of the money Olivia represents, while Antonio is loyally serving Sebastian (who is noble, but until revealed, no more than a stranded boy) with a devotion of service as intense as Viola's devotion to Orsino: "If you will not murder me for my love, let me be your servant." So devoted is he that his lines convey a near desperation that his service will not be accepted: "Come what may, I do adore thee so, / That danger shall seem sport, and I will go" (2.2.34-35, 46-47). Sebastian expresses a similar sentiment towards Antonio, but his lines denote *his* need and expectations rather than submission: "Antonio! O *my* dear Antonio, / How have the hours rack'd and tortur'd *me*, / Since *I have lost thee*" (5.1.216-218, emphasis mine). Shakespeare's male characters generally extol close bonds, but "adore" is a strong word that, even in Shakespeare's usage, tends to be used in contrast to "abhor" in the sense of adoration in divine worship. For Antonio, particularly within the context of their relatively new relationship, it suggests a divine idealization similar to what Orsino sees in Olivia and then Cesario confides in Olivia. Sebastian and Olivia are both elevated to inaccessible heights, and idealized in a foreshadowing of their eventual pairing. No one can access Olivia, save for Viola as Cesario who is also Sebastian, but Olivia and Sebastian are both objects of adoration. Antonio's extreme adoration and dedication to Sebastian far surpasses Orsino's dedication to Olivia; Orsino's passivity dampens his words while Antonio risks all for Sebastian. Here again, love is measured through service, and if Antonio's active adoration is comparatively more feminine, then

the homoerotic measure of his affection for Sebastian would also come across as more substantial.

The two homoerotic pairings demonstrate the play's ambiguity: Viola and Olivia, and Sebastian and Antonio. Casey Charles studies gender in the play and argues that Viola's "staging of gender imitation" frees the twins to express fluidity in desire as well as gender. Viola's disguise and her identity with her brother act as vehicles to demonstrate that "erotic attraction is not an inherently gendered or heterosexual phenomenon." Through "homoerotic and cross-gendered disruptions," the play demonstrates how the "phenomenon of love" operates as a "mechanism that destabilizes gender binarism and its concomitant hierarchies" (123). Homoeroticism, as Charles notes, functions in the play "neither as an uncomplicated promotion of a modern category of sexual orientation nor, from a more traditional perspective, as an ultimately contained representation of the licensed misrule of saturnalia." Instead, it emerges as "a means of dramatizing the socially constructed basis of a sexuality that is determined by gender identity" (122). Imposing modern understandings of homosexuality onto the characters is not necessary to illustrate the play's utopic freedom. Instead, the play's homoerotics are a natural expression of how gender is socially constructed, and how the twins' gender erases the boundaries we use to try to use to categorize the play's relationships. Antonio and Sebastian's relationship must be considered in light of Viola's relationship with Olivia because she is Viola and Cesario at once with both her lovers, Olivia and Orsino. Viola's relationship with Olivia remains imminent, promised, but unrealized, while her relationship with Orsino is allowable because of what she lacks, but halted by the very clothing—the suit—that allows her access to Olivia. Viola's ability to "seem" allows her perfect presence, and through this seeming, she embodies lack and fulfillment, access and enclosure, and by extension, female and/or male, in perfect fluidity. S/he represents the feminine and the realization of utopia that allows us to sense her manifold connections with Olivia, Orsino, Malvolio, Sebastian, and even, to some extent Maria, at the same time.

Because she is central to the play's presentation of gender and desire, Viola's relationships with her lovers expresses an ambiguous eroticism that suggests heterosexuality and homosexuality at once, while Antonio and Sebastian's relationship is less direct, more homoerotic by implication than action, and is discussed more concretely and in clear association with money. Viola, on the other hand, never accepts the money or treasures she is offered along the way. This point recalls Jardine's argument about how young boys in the streets suggest male prostitution. We can assume that Sebastian is young because of the androgyny required for the actor playing Viola's twin and the descriptions in the play. Furthermore, Sebastian's words undoubtedly point to a relationship of sexual service that indicates commodity as well: "It were a bad recompense for your love" and later "you will not extort from me / what I am willing to keep in: therefore it charges me in manners" (2.1.7, 12-14). That the twins' reunion is coupled with the confusion over the purse reinforces this monetary association and has the added effect of grounding Antonio's love and service (sexual and otherwise and reciprocal or not) in commodification as well. Moreover, Antonio's role as a dedicated servant is influenced by his salvation of both twins at different points in the play. Unlike the other men, it is through his actions instead of his words that Antonio has achieved greatness in his service to his master (and inadvertently his master's sister). Sebastian remains the master born to greatness and Antonio his servant attempting to achieve greatness, but alas, he is destined only to strive for what his status (and gender) prevents him from fully achieving. Antonio's words, perhaps as effective as women's words in the final moment, best capture the fluidity the twins visually represent: "How have you made division of yourself? / An apple cleft in two is not more twin / Than these two creatures. Which is Sebastian?" (5.1.220-222). Eden's apple is both implied and altered and is no longer the cause of the Fall, but rather the hope for utopic perfection; after all, Antonio cannot tell which is his beloved Sebastian and which is the hidden, ambiguous girl.

Viola is so consistently ambiguous that she is also difficult to pin down critically, and her multivalent roles have inspired much consideration. As a messenger, she has a vital role between two households, she is young and naïve but also mature and clever, she imitates her lost brother but also herself as a lost sister, and she is at once eunuch, suitor, and eligible maiden. Among the many critical voices offering perspectives on the troublesome Viola, Catherine Belsey argues that she formulates both “enigma and promise of closure” and notes that Shakespeare takes “remarkable risks” with Viola’s identity because of her constant “seeming.” Belsey refers to Viola’s line “I am not what I am” and argues that Shakespeare could have easily had her say “seem” instead of “am” in order to “preserve the unity of the subject” (“Disrupting Sexual Difference” 189). This example only further demonstrates how the play’s syntactic fluidity intentionally inspires ambiguity. Viola’s language ensures that we can never be certain of her ever being one thing or another because she is at once a blank slate and excess. Jonathan Crewe has similarly read Viola’s role in the final scene as producing “dangerous excess” (similar to Garber’s reading of the transvestite) and he argues that in the same scene she is “assigned a crucial if paradoxical function [as] a highly improper, gender-ambiguous object of desire” and is then expected to “direct desire ‘to its appropriate objects’.” Indeed, Viola can be considered excessive because she complicates, rather than resolves, the “the conjugal plot” (103). Meanwhile, Martha Clare Ronk has argued that Viola is less a substantial character than an abstract emblem and argues that her singular role is to maintain the play’s momentum while remaining static: “[Viola] must propel the play forward urging her love on the Duke while fending off Olivia, [and] must also keep herself exactly as she is” (386). To demonstrate Viola’s contradictory role, Ronk highlights the contrast between Viola’s two ekphrastic speeches: The monument speech to Orsino (where her image is frozen) and the willow cabin speech to Olivia (where her image is enclosed in the cabin). Ronk argues that the speeches are keys to her function in the play: Viola is “caught between modes and between the past and present,” and as such, she is “a cipher or ‘blank’

partially missing, always in part of what she is not. Like a character coming into being on a blank sheet of paper but never quite coalescing." Viola lacks "dramatic character" because, as Ronk notes, she continually "draws attention to her own abstraction." In comparison to the more substantial Rosalind of *As You Like It*, Viola "seems protean" because she keeps "forming and unforming in the course of the play, perhaps (as the ending suggests) never quite forming at all except as a momentary image" (387).

That critics have come to understand Viola in such a wide variety of ways only demonstrates the contradiction that emerges from the desire to play with Viola's character as one does with the play itself. Indeed, Viola creates excess in the play, but so does Sebastian, and their excess is not as integral to the play's resolution as their twinning. After all, the imperfect symmetry of Olivia and Orsino would have left Viola as Sebastian within a *truly* imperfect union, their presence was the only way to open the enclosure, gain access to Olivia, and untangle the couples with more appropriate pairings. Cesario (if not Viola) is left a blank slate on which the play can conjure the needed illusion to drive the plot. Viola does not draw attention to herself as an abstraction, but to the fluidity, she embodies (and enjoys) and in this, she *is* protean, but as substantive possibility not abstraction and lack. She is caught between many modes because she must act as the willing cipher to facilitate access to Olivia for the rest of the characters, but must also follow her own agenda as well. In Ronk's argument, Viola is at once emptied of her substance and then granted an excess similar to Crewe's reading of Viola as pure allegory. Represented by the root of the word itself—of *allos*—as other, Viola is an allegorical character because she "represents surplus value; like the root word *allos* (other) she/he invites the contemplation of inversions, including, of course, sexual inversion." Crewe describes the impact of this potential as Viola's "reach" in the play, by which "the invisible can be made visible, the nonexistent existent" so that s/he may truly "come into being." First excess, and then allegory, Crewe moves Viola further still to emblem: "It is as if she must construct some higher order [...] even to approximate ordinary being (character), and even then

remain semi-vague, semi-formed. [...] It is by virtue of her status as emblem of gender confusion that she has the power to affect the world of Illyria (388-9). I am intrigued by how Viola invites such critical vacillation and by how she can be read as both the thing and its opposite at once. That she is liminal is clear enough, and her representation of different categories is part of this. Crewe describes it as Viola representing “an implosion of categories through which all things might become possible” (109). She allows the contradictory through her ambiguity and, thus, is far from a “blank” slate. After all, her decision to cross-dress, her elaborate and effective wooing, and her concern for her role from the in-between that she inhabits, grants her a powerful presence that is far from unsubstantial. Hers is a presence that refuse to remain static or categorical and must be purely fluid.

Viola remains consistently ambiguous to the end, even when faced with Olivia’s aggressive wooing, as she states at the end of their discussion in 3.1:

By innocence I swear, and by my youth
I have one heart, one bosom, and one truth,
And that no woman has; nor never none
Shall mistress be of it, save I alone” (3.1.159-162).

Viola swears by her innocence and youth, but also by the singularity of “one” heart, bosom, and truth, and then by a strange double negative, “nor never none,” to drive home the moment of ambiguity. To remain “I alone” she will invite no women, or “nor never none” and that suggests that indeed, some, or maybe one, *might* “know” that singular truth after all. However, the language of seeming does not stop with Olivia and Viola, or even when the play attempts to resolve the confusion in the final scene.

Orsino’s equivocation after the twins’ revelation is at once concealing and illuminating and echoes Viola’s earlier lines to Olivia almost perfectly: “One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons! A natural perspective that is, and is not!” (5.1.213-215).

Orsino’s lines mimic the general tenor of the earlier wooing scene specifically, and the play, generally. His language attempts to resolve the confusion, but manages to remain just as elusive. Instead of revealing or clarifying, Orsino’s words follow the play’s

pattern of ambiguity. Equally consequential are the exchanges between Orsino and Viola that avoid the enclosing language of seeming that Viola and Olivia share. Instead, they convey lack, or the empty space within the circle figured as the lack of words or voiceless voices that speak the unspoken: "She never told her love / But let concealment like a worm i'th'bud / Feed on her damask cheek: she pin'd in though" and later "We men may say more, swear more, but indeed / Our shows are more than will: for still we prove / Much in our vows, but little in our love" (2.4.111-113, 117-119). Endowed with the power to woo Olivia, Viola is muted into a lack of language with Orsino. She is more certain in her suggestions to Olivia than she is to Orsino because she must speak for the "sister" she lost when she became Sebastian. She is herself and not herself in this moment, but with Orsino, she is ambiguous because what is lacking is herself. When she is with Olivia, she can be Viola and Cesario at once, and while she is with Orsino she can join "we men" (as readily the audience joins "we fools") and "say more." The one thing she cannot do is definitively speak what she is lest her own "damask cheek" be food for the worms that may reveal her comfortable "concealment."

Twelfth Night's ending seems as if it should offer a grand spectacle of conventional resolution by appropriately realigning the couples in pleasing symmetry. However, Cesario, rather than Viola, remains present to the end because Viola (as we have seen) desires to remain a fluid being and will not be made to choose one gender or the other. This conspicuous detail is reiterated several times: Orsino insists that he will call her Cesario until she can wear her "maiden's weeds" (5.1.253). And later, he says: "Cesario, come; / For so you shall be while you are a man" (384-5). Even after it is clear that Cesario *is* Viola, no matter how "she" is dressed, Orsino still calls him "Cesario" (384) and "boy" (265) after they are paired, and hinges their future ("But when") on the uncertain return of Viola's clothing: "But when in other habits you are seen, / Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen" (386-7). Viola remains within her "masculine usurp'd attired" (248) and insists that she not be embraced as Viola "till

each circumstance / Of place, time, fortune, do cohere and jump / That I am Viola” (5.1.249-251). Cesario, not Viola, is on Orsino’s arm in the final scene, and she insists that she will remain Cesario. Meanwhile, the Captain (who alone holds the clothes) is under the key of the vengeful and “madly-used” Malvolio (310). His dramatic exit expresses such finality that Viola’s return seems indefinitely deferred:

The captain that did bring me first on shore
Hath my maid’s garments; he upon some action
Is now in durance, at Malvolio’s suit,
A gentleman and follower of my lady’s (272-275).

Furthermore, when Malvolio leaves for the last time they make it a point of mentioning that “he hath not told us of the captain yet” (380). Viola’s presence would immediately resolve the play’s gender confusion, but such a reunion depends on the peculiar requirement of access to female clothing (and not Viola herself), and is further contingent upon the one servant (and transvestite) most egregiously wronged in the play. Malvolio’s angry exit indicates the uncertainty of whether or not he will take them to the Captain so that everyone can marry. This expansive, one-scene act leaves each character either not whom they seemed to be, not in possession of what they wished to gain, or not knowing what they thought they knew, but each is guaranteed the fluidity to become or desire whatever or whomever they wish in order to resolve the dissonance from the gender and class seeming, or at least, what will *seem* to resolve it.

The play’s ending lacks a definite resolution because the simultaneous presence of the twins is both problematic and problem-solving in the same moment. Antonio and Orsino’s descriptions demonstrate the conflict between the reality of the *two* beings everyone sees before them, and the text that continues to describe them as either a single apple cleft in two or a single being with one face, one voice, and one habit. In other words, their descriptions do not offer clarity to the confusion they only add further curiosity to the hermaphrodite/s before them. Hermaphroditism is implicated because it does not define “male and/or female” as much as it confronts

and highlights (to paraphrase Greenblatt) the space (and friction) between them, most obviously, in the confusion between negotiating what is at once either/or. Viola is more androgynous than Shakespeare's other transvestite heroine because she has an identical, regularly interchangeable, opposite gendered being in Sebastian (who emerges equally "cleft" from the same being). Viola is mistaken for Cesario or Sebastian, and Sebastian is mistaken for Cesario in their dual existence (although no one is mistaken for Viola) and both reflect the Hermaphrodite that captured the early modern imagination. Orsino's descriptions of Cesario (and the punning of Viola's own self-description) best illustrate the play's connection to Golding's translation of Ovid's Salmacis and Hermaphrodite (Book 4 in *Metamorphoses*). In the play, we can sense how the mythological idealization of body and form influenced Shakespeare's construction of gender ideals. Orsino describes Cesario thus:

That say thou art a man; Diana's lip
Is not more smooth and rubious: thy small pipe
Is as the maiden's organ, shrill and sound,
And all is semblative a woman's part" (1.4.30-34).

Malvolio's description to the curious Olivia follows swiftly thereafter in the very next scene and offers this image of Cesario:

Not yet old enough for a man, nor young enough for a boy: as a squash is before 'tis a peascod, or a codling when 'tis almost an apple. 'Tis with him in standing water, between boy and man. He is very well-favored, and he speaks very shrewishly. One would think his mother's milk were scarce out of him (1.5.158-164).

Both descriptions follow each other, and both contribute to the sense of humor that inspires the audience's pleasurable knowing at every sexual pun. Furthermore, a subtlety in the descriptions demonstrates how each account reflects the *speaker's* desire. Orsino's description highlights what is feminine in Cesario, while Malvolio's renders Cesario neutral to Olivia thereby securing her vow remains un/kept: Cesario is not boy nor man, not squash or peascod, not codling or apple, and at once well-favored and shrewish. Two descriptions of Viola follow each other closely, which begs the question of why Shakespeare felt the need to provide such vivid descriptions in his

dialogue at all, especially if we recall Mercer's argument of how the twins' interchangeability should be understood as a dramatic device. Shakespeare feels no need to describe anyone else in the play in such detail (except the other transvestite with Malvolio's wild dress), and yet these specific descriptions result in the audience "seeing" Viola just as Shakespeare wants them to, and by default, Sebastian as well. Audiences may see non-identical boys playing identical opposite-sex twins standing on stage, but what they see *must* be ignored and give way to the descriptions that tell them what to see in order to participate in the illusion the text requires. Malvolio's description conjures the most creative visual of Cesario's hermaphroditic presence of the play. The first few lines allude to his masculinity with words such as "man" and "boy," while a physical reference—a "squash"—in combination with the transposed codpiece in "peasecod" suggest a phallus. Biologically, the description's many associations with nature and fertility are feminized, but these are consistently set in opposition to physical images that suggest masculinity: along with the fruity, round blushing apple we get the elongated squashes and peascods, just as we saw with the "small pipe" set against "Diana's lips" in Orsino's description. It is also significant that the one person Shakespeare continually describes is also the one who should require no description at all given that she is on stage more often than any other character. Through these descriptions, s/he emerges a hermaphrodite both visually and textually because Viola must encompass both sides of the gender spectrum simultaneously to properly allow the utopia. At the height of confusion, the twins must indicate that physical division is possible, and so Sebastian replaces the hermaphrodite that Cesario has been playing, or *seeming* to be.

The cultural and historical connections between the transvestite and the hermaphrodite are plentiful. I would like to look briefly at Golding's translation of Ovid's tale to note its connection to this play, and to consider how Shakespeare's construction of Cesario reflects Golding's translation of Ovid's hermaphrodite as it did the images of Echo and Narcissus in *Love's Labour's Lost*. To start, Malvolio closes his

description of Cesario by noting how he is in “standing water” to illustrate that he is between boy and man, which echoes the fountain waters that forged Hermaphroditus in Ovid’s famous retelling. The myth of Hermaphrodite and the nymph Salmacis appeared only marginally before Ovid. Named specifically for its tales of transformation, *Metamorphoses* includes many figures that change gender, sometimes willingly and intentionally.¹⁵ However, Hermaphroditus does not simply change, he is the only figure in the stories that is simultaneously male and female, and this made all the difference to the hermaphrodite’s cultural history. Like the twins, Hermaphroditus meets danger in the water while travelling. He stumbles across a clear pool guarded by Salmacis, a nymph who refuses to hunt with Diana (as nymphs should do). She is exceedingly vain and more concerned with her clothing and her beauty than her chastity as she is also sexually aggressive, and as such, Salmacis is characterized as possessing all the dangerous qualities of women in a sort of hyper-femininity. One might expect the myth to balance Salmacis with a hyper-masculine Hermaphroditus to level the coming union between them so that equal parts male and female qualities comprise the resulting being, but Hermaphroditus is overly feminized. Instead of masculine and feminine in balanced symmetry, Golding used the contrast between the ideals of good and bad femininity to combine them in the one unnatural being. Hermaphroditus is young (between boy and man), blushes continuously, is lily white, and appropriately, running away from desire to protect his chastity. Apparently, a chaste boy makes a better woman than a vain, sexually aggressive, woman.

The narrative begins at a distance as a tale retold by a daughter of Minyas; like Salmacis, she defied social expectations by refusing to serve Dionysus. She introduces the story by first stating what her tale will *not* include: She will not discuss how “Scython variably digressing from his kinde, / Was sometime woman, sometime man, as liked best his mind” (4.339-340). Scython can shift gender at will, but she starts her

¹⁵ Luc Brisson’s *Sexual Ambivalence: Androgyny and Hermaphroditism in Græco-Roman Antiquity* (2002) offers a detailed reading of the classical history of Ovid’s tale. Brisson outlines the many gender transformations within *Metamorphoses* and offers thorough etymological sources for the characters’ names (45).

tale by indicating that there have been several such beings; for instance, some men who have turned to flowers, but she will not recount their stories either. Instead, she begins where Malvolio ends—in standing water: “The fountaine Salmacis diffamed is of yore, / Why with his waters overstrong it weakeneth men so sore / That whoso bathes him there commes thence a perfect man no more” (4.347-349). From the first detail, Golding’s translation is far more preoccupied with gender than newer translations as he genders both the fountain and the waters male while newer translations leave the fountain logically neutral. Golding masculinizes the fountain because of its transformative power, even if that power must ultimately result in feminization, and then emphasizes the loss of perfection instead of a celebration of unity. Bathing in the pool results in one becoming no longer a “perfect man,” but the less connotative, but more frightening, “weak and feeble” man of the newer translation.¹⁶

Hermaphroditus, the son of Hermes and Aphrodite, is initially described by way of establishing his heritage: “Begot on Venus, in whose face such beutie did abide, / As well therein his father both and mother might be knowne” (4.353-355). His presence is already one of such extreme beauty that it denotes duality in the perfect combination of his ideal parents: His name, a portmanteau of his parents’ names, is etymologically hermaphroditic. However, Golding does more to feminize than masculinize him. When Salmacis offers Hermaphroditus her love, she compares him to a god and praises the women in his life: mother, sister, nurse (women intimately connected to his body). Salmacis’s connection of him to his women, combined with Golding’s description, figures Hermaphroditus as a perfect representation of an ideal *woman* by association, but also because he is white and pure, blushing and moonlike in a balanced mixture of passionate lush reds and pure whites:

This sed, the Nymph did hold hir peace, and therewithal the boy,
To see it how exceeding well his blushing him became.
For in his face the colour fresh appeared like the same

¹⁶ “You are going to hear the story of a fountain, / Salmacis, with an evil reputation, / Because its waters make men weak and feeble, / Whoever goes bathing there. The cause is hidden, / The fountain’s enervating power well known.” (Humphries 4.283-287).

That is in Apples which doe hang upon the Sunnie side:
 Or Ivorie shadowed with red: or such as is espide
 Of white and scarlet colours mixt appearing in the Moone
 When at the last the Nymph desired most instantly but this,
 As to his sister brotherly to give hir there a kisse
 And therewithall was clasping him about the Ivorie necke (4.402-412).

Not only is he young, described as a "childe and free" (4.419), but he has "tender skin" (426) and his purity is mentioned several times. He blushes as a modest girl should, and is compared with apples, and the Moon (classically a female figure, and symbol for the same Diana that Salmacis egregiously denied). He has all the qualities of the ideal, chaste woman that Salmacis *should* embody, while Salmacis is disparaged. She demonstrates vanity, desire, aggression, looseness, but most potently, an extreme gift of persuasion through words (like a Shakespearean heroine). At one point in the narrative she even suggests that she would accept loving him as a sister would a brother (the same way Cesario and Olivia will come to love each other, and subtly suggestive of Viola's hermaphroditic fusion with Sebastian), but that is rejected as an unacceptable form of love. Golding's descriptions suggest that only a man can "represent" (in myth, narrative, or fact) the ideal woman correctly: The ideal woman is man-as-woman. We can see this in Golding's description of Hermaphroditus entering the water: "Through which his bodie faire and white doth glisteringly appeare, / *As if a man* an Ivorie Image or a Lillie white / Should overlay or close with glasse that were most pure and bright" (4.438-439, emphasis mine). Golding seems to be investing the potency of the image in the man's body even as he describes it with feminine qualities. Though ivory and lily white, he is "as if a man" when "overlaying" and "closing" what is most "pure and bright," and thus embodies the gender ideal "through his body," but always "*as if a man.*"

As Golding translates the rape scene (for it can be described as nothing else), Salmacis is beautiful, but so vain that even her insatiable desire for Hermaphroditus does not prevent her from pausing to beautify herself first:

But though she thought she stooode on thornes until she went to him:
 Yet went she not before she had bedect hir neat and trim,

And pride and peered upon hir clothes that nothing saw awrie
 And framed hir countenance as might seeme most amrous to the eie (4.385-388).

She is aggressive and dangerous, with eyes that “sparcle fire” (430), and she engulfs him in her arms, grabbing at his naked breast and kissing him against his will as he resists in proper modesty:

She held him still, and kissed him a hundred times and mo.
 And willed he nillde he with hir hands she toucht his naked brest:
 And now on this side now on that (for all he did resist
 And strive to wrest him from hir gripes) she clung unto him fast:
 And wound about him like a Snake” (4.445-449).

Golding’s associations begin at the familiar snake, and then continue by connecting her with birds of prey, chocking ivy, and a crab-fish (denoting the Kraken, the legendary tentacled sea-monsters similar to a giant squid or octopus) that both “presses” and “cleaves” against him (4.458). Salmacis grabs at his breast and refuses to release him, and then she begs the gods for their inseparability. She comes away less a beautiful nymph than an evil monster, while Hermaphroditus, the masculine blushing apple, is her ill-gotten prize for giving in to temptation. There is no male in these two figures, only dangerous and ideal femininity in opposition to each other, and both feminine sides will be bound inextricably because of Golding’s empowered, masculinized waters, while the resulting transcendent being—the embodiment of utopic wholeness—is at once monstrously feminized and ambiguous. Salmacis begs the gods never to part her from the “wilfull boy” (461) and the gods, in answer, fuse them:

The Gods were pliant to hir boone. The bodies of them twaine
 Were mixt and joined both in one. To both them did remaine
 One countenance: like as if a man should in one barke behold
 Two twiggess both growing into one and still together holde.
 Even so when through hir hugging and hir grasping of the tother
 The members of them mingled were and fastned both together,
 They were not any lenger two: but (as it were) a toy
 Of double shape. Ye could not say it was a perfect boy
 Nor perfect wench: it seemed both and none of both to beene (4.462-470)

At first, their bodies are “twaine,” independent of each other and then are joined “both in one.” The potency shifts between them as the simile grants the power of grafting to “a man” only to shift it in the next line to “hir hugging and grasping,” and

finally moving from the metaphoric and descriptive to the point in the passage when the genitals mingle. This moment is problematic and conjures anxiety over unity and perfection in form, and of the possibility of existing truly complete, without lack in a dream of continuous, self-sufficient, sexual coupling. It is a supreme moment of surrendering control, and of momentarily being both woman and man and thus free of requiring an Other for completion because the Self and Other are simultaneously present but indistinguishable. However, the moment is brief, for Golding takes this transcendent moment and immediately trivializes the hermaphrodite as “a toy / of double shape.” S/he is doubled, not whole, and for Golding, this is a story of loss rather than fluid creation, because the perfection in boy and wench results only in negation “both and none of both.” He feminizes Hermaphrodite as an emptied vessel rather than a new fluid being, and while he cannot help but shift to the pronoun “it” at this crucial point, within two lines, the masculine pronoun returns to absorb Salmacis utterly leaving us with only the god’s “doubleshaped *sonne*” (4.480):

Now Hermaphroditus saw how in the water sheene
 To which *he* entred in a man, *his* limes were weakned so
 That out fro thence but halfe a man *he* was compelde to go,
 He lifteth up *his* hands and said (but not with manly reere) (4.471-474,
 emphasis mine.)

The new being is not granted a new name, for its name was already a combination of masculine and feminine divine perfection. Hermaphroditus maintains his name and pronoun after the union, while the fountain waters are now accursed because they will leave any man who enters “but halfe a man” (4.478). Of course, nothing is said of the fate of any women who might enter because any women might well want to be half a man rather than a whole woman.

Hermaphrodite was a familiar figure to the early modern, and the myth highlights the different ways fluidity, or unity from duality, were imagined. Hermaphrodite represented monstrosity in the same moment that it suggested the possibility of perfection and unity emerging from two forms of ideal femininity in Golding’s translation. Striving for utopic perfection in any form must necessarily use

the feminine. Even if the hermaphrodite emerges as masculine in Golding's narrative, it still manages to inspire Viola's possibility (the dangerous masculine woman), Olivia (the chaste ideal woman), and Sebastian (the feminized man). Each aspect of the myth's potential—from transcendence to monstrosity—is realized in Shakespeare's play (even in the fact that Viola is absorbed in her transformation to the hermaphrodite Cesario because she never reappears at the end of the play). Once again, Shakespeare understood the potential of Ovid's tales within Golding's translation. On Golding's moralization of this tale, Jonathan Bate in *Shakespeare and Ovid* (1993) writes:

At one level the story is meant as an etiology of the Hermaphrodite. Hermaphroditus gets the last word—just as he, not Salmacis, gets to keep his name—and the final image is of enfeeblement, of the waters in which the union took place having the power to convert a man into a half-man. This is the basis of Golding's moralization in terms of effeminacy. The description of interpenetration, however, with its wonder-filled sense of total coition, suggests not halving of strength but doubling of perfection. As so frequently in Ovid, the moment of wild passion paradoxically seems to outlast the subsequent stasis. This, we feel, is an image of how sex should be. So it was that the Renaissance did not always read the hermaphrodite as a transgressive abomination. An alternative interpretation made it into an image of the complete union and interpretation. [...] He/she represents the re-creation of the original unitary gender imagined by Aristophanes in his account of the origins of love in Plato's *Symposium*" (62).

It is absolutely an etiological story of trying to discover, or recover, the lost unity of mythic origins, but it is also the birth of Hermaphroditus, not Hermaphroditus-Salmacis. The resulting being demonstrates absorption rather than union in Golding's translation. As I noted earlier, and Bate indicates here, the moment where their "members" mingle suggests "interpenetration" and that forces Golding to confront the fluidity and so he refers to the being as "it" when this union (of two *feminine* forms) results in a figure of utopic perfection. The union can then "outlast" any resulting stasis, as Bate argues. This moment, of course, is seemingly utopic because it is trumped by the "it" that is either/or. Bate concludes by referencing Aristophanes' writings in Plato's *Symposium* that offers an origin tale of perfection describing a being that was peacefully united until it was divided into male and female by the jealous

gods.¹⁷ Aristophanes' narrative privileges unity, rather than gender binary, at the beginning of the world and thereby rewrites the fall before the Fall. Perhaps it is not so strange that Ovid's origin of perfect unity is feminized because two women (like Olivia and Viola) were united, and the lost origins emerged as the utopic dream where the feminine was posited as the *only* means to achieving utopia. In their article "Fetishizing Gender: Constructing the Hermaphrodite in Renaissance Europe," Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass argue, "Hermaphroditus [...] is turned by the nymph into the object of desire while she herself becomes the desiring subject" (96). In this reversal of desire, an "in-between" is formed that best captures the possibility of utopia because it allows for transgressing roles so easily, and allows the being to become by avoiding stasis. Viola and Sebastian are never, but always *seem* to be, each other throughout the play. The language of being and not being, of mistaken identity in language and action, perpetuates itself and emphasizes this connection because Cesario is ever the feminized "willful boy" even as Olivia is the aggressive Nymph.

Before I leave this play, I would like to unite the playing and seeming that I have argued has kept it moving towards a utopia of fluid gender and desire. Word puzzles are used to woo indirectly throughout the play through textual misdirection. The highpoint of the subplot is the interpretive moment of the anonymous signature in Malvolio's letter. The letters—M.A.O.I.—provide a word jumble that is steeped with implications and begging for signification just as much as it might be utterly random and nonsensical. Maria's device allows Malvolio to see himself in the letter, but Sir

¹⁷ Aristophanes' writing of Plato's *Symposium* includes an origin myth where "our nature" was originally not binary, but a triad of separate beings. Instead of a single dual-gendered race, we were man, woman, and a union of the two ("androgynous") whose "name still remains, though it itself is vanished" and further that man was a child of the sun, woman of the earth, and the third a child of the moon which is made of sun and earth. They "were globular [...] like their parents," as the narrative continues, and the gods divide the beings and make them "weaker" in order to avoid their threatening the gods' divinity. Humans are thus made dependent on sexual reproduction by realigning their genitals to physically "match." This division weakened humans because it led to a constant, impossible search for a lost half: Those divided from the androgynous race can only endlessly search for his/her "other" and end up as unsatisfied, hypersexualized, adulterers; the other two races, the men and women, search for themselves through homoeroticism and, specific to men, through pederasty as well. Thus, only the children of the hermaphrodite remain always in search of what will complete them, for perfection in gender unity, or, for utopia (19-20).

Toby, Sir Andrew and later Feste (party to Maria's device) contribute to highlighting Olivia as the focus of the word puzzle. On this point, Elizabeth Freund offers a cautionary, but ultimately unrealistic, argument:

Malvolio's despotic way with the text digs its own hermeneutic grave and should stand as a warning to all interpreters who practice the self-deception of believing in the text's penetrability and would force the letter to yield its occult secrets by manipulation and cunning (481).

On the contrary, Malvolio's close reading acts more as a challenge than a warning because *Twelfth Night* begs readers/viewers to take on exactly this self-deception. One cannot read the text without wondering if we, like Malvolio, might wrench *the* (static) truth from those cryptic letters. Or, as Laurie Osbourne has argued, "M.O.A.I. is one particular signifier that resists all interpretation, ours and Malvolio's, yet insists on interpretation as well" (*The Trick of Singularity* 141). Shakespeare's language in this play can be understood on two interrelated levels: The "play" in the text, and the play involving the audience in "playing." The audience is an integral part of the utopic potential the stage offered, and as such, readers or viewers (or both) must "play" with this play to realize its utopic potential.

The play's circularity encloses audiences within its circular language; it asks for our interpretation, knowing that such interpretation may result in *everything* emerging with some semblance of validity, no matter how strained. The play allows precisely "what we will" by encouraging readers to write utopia into the words before them. Like Olivia, readers want the text precisely as they would have it. The play's title suggests a celebration of the Epiphany, and the start of the Saturnalia and Carnival, because at such a time when all things are possible, anyone can read what one wishes in M.O.A.I. *Twelfth Night* is just random enough, neither absolutely this nor that, feminine or masculine, and in a very real sense, neither comedy nor tragedy, and yet, it is one of Shakespeare's most infinitely satisfying plays. Malvolio, alas, takes his reading far too seriously and, as a result, is easy prey for the gulling. Feste, in contrast to Malvolio, takes nothing seriously, and is the willing representation of a pure wise

fool. "What you will" is the play's expectation, all the characters desire a fool, and gender moves dynamically and unceasingly along an erotic triangle where power is readily exchanged and shifted, where the inappropriate is made appropriate, and where the unattainable is promised but endlessly delayed in utopic circularity. Ultimately, everything is achieved with a slippery, all too-easily interpreted, "trick of singularity" (not duality, but singularity) achievable only through simultaneity.

Indeed, the additional title "or, what you will" has delighted the critics almost as much as the elusive M.O.A.I. Will, as we have seen, is in feminine hands in Illyria just as it was in Navarre (the connection with sexuality not lost on their role as suitors and wooers). The women are willful, the men passive, and given that passivity nothing at all result from their wooing. As Greenblatt suggested, for the play to continue, Olivia's veil *must* be pierced (and so it is pierced, but not really). Shakespeare encumbered Olivia's enclosure with the necessity of a lost brother's love as the means for the resolution, and a lost sister assumes the place of the lost brother and allows Olivia to emerge unscathed from the confines of her oath, while still enclosed safely within it. The unattainable "O" (both physical and metaphoric) that Olivia represents remains intact, which would have been in question if she had readily and predictably broken her oath. Her virtue is assured, and she is free to court Viola as Cesario or Sebastian, a prospect that secures her chastity because Viola does not (conventionally) threaten her "O." The key to attaining her is in the paradox of the entry allowed only to a woman, and only in the name of the dead brother that Cesario/Sebastian became. The solution is not just Sebastian, but Viola as Cesario, both empowered and not, with the strength of language and the law of the father she does and does not possess. Viola represents what is and is not, and thus is the only unobstructed road leading to the utopia Olivia promises. The play is ruled by the word that must be "cried out"—Olivia—to forge a textual obsession like no other, or as Geoffrey Hartman writes: "These people seem in love with words rather than with each other. More exactly, the embassy of words and the play of rhetoric are essential tests for both lover and object

of love" (29). Perhaps this "essential test" reaches the audience's seats through the play's words. Certainly, the "play of rhetoric" could not exclude the audience who "play" lover to the "objects" on the stage. Each character moves towards Olivia and the play encloses everyone (including the audience) in the circle of language it forges.

Twelfth Night begins and ends in music, with the voice of the humorously forlorn and ultimately sated Duke taking us first into and then out of the pleasant melody. By professing a momentum of infinite circularity, the play *must* end as it began in order to close the circle of language with a tune that offers a maddening melody of insights into how the text can alter and shift our understanding as nimbly as it does our expectations of men and women, or servants and masters. Like notes upon a scale, each truth we thought we understood builds upon the other to form a rhythm, but emerges in each scene as simultaneously discordant and harmonic. The play crests in a frenzy that must resolve itself in a chaotic, but acceptable, resolution. From Orsino's first O's, the play's preoccupation with obtaining access to Olivia begins. Her name suitably rhymes with "Illyria," but in keeping with the rhyming that engulfs the play, Illyria sounds like many things. Our first association of Illyria is with Viola's Elysium, which renders it fantastical at once; it is as "unreal as utopia—a literal no-place, and in utopian fashion Illyria sounds like 'delirium', perfect nonsense" (Lewis *Particular Saints* 114). The acceptably harmonious resolution requires that Orsino's words and final appearance eventually stop the folly as assuredly as he started the music at the play's beginning. In a world of "delirium," where everything seems to be, then suddenly is and is not, we must not forget the true goal of theatre is "what you will," as Feste's final words promise: In this utopia, at least, the players will "strive to please you every day" (5.1.407).

Chapter Five

Brave New Worlds: *The Tempest*

I would with such perfection govern, sir,
T'excel the Golden Age
The Tempest (2.1.167-168)

The wonderfully protean Viola has come to embody far richer utopic themes than gender fluidity alone. In one example of this flexibility, Lorna Hutson observes that Viola reflects “the same linguistic reticence and latency of meaning which allows us, in the 1990s, to read *Twelfth Night* as a celebration of the polymorphous potential of desire [...] equally enabled Anna Jameson in 1832 to find in Viola a paradigm of the sexual self-control that qualified women for access to education and political life” (156).¹ Perhaps the most dramatic example of this flexibility is Shakespeare’s fictional muse, Viola de Lesseps, in Tom Madden’s *Shakespeare in Love* (1998). The film offers all the usual cross-dressing mayhem of the Renaissance-stage, but the theater-loving Viola reverses the theatrical conventions of boys dressed as girls on the stage, by dressing as a boy for the opportunity to act. Her passion and skill get her in, but Shakespeare discovers her, they fall in love, and she becomes the muse (and lover) he was seeking. In the end, when the completed play is about to be performed, Viola steps in to replace a boy whose last minute voice-change prevents him from performing. She goes on stage to perform the role she inspires: Juliet. That is, until Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels, exposes her and stops the performance by crying out: “That woman is a woman!” In an uproarious move, Queen Elizabeth, who has been secretly watching the performance, acknowledges the injustice of “a woman in a man’s profession” and uses her presence and authority to sustain the gender Viola is playing: The Queen calls Viola “Master Kent” and tells Tilney that “the illusion is remarkable and your error, Mr. Tilney, easily forgiven.” With that, she dares anyone to suggest the

¹ Hutson is referring to an 1832 political criticism of Shakespeare written by Anna Jameson, a friend of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who wrote that Viola was “exquisite” and “fitted to her part, carrying through her ordeal with all inward grace and modesty!” (as qtd. in Hutson 151). For Jameson, Viola was paragon, and for those seeking a fluidly gendered figure that refused identification, she was that as well; not an empty icon, but a rich protean presence.

Queen would attend “an exhibition of public lewdness” by contradicting her. Viola is at once herself, Master Kent, and Juliet, and all these selves are validated by a Queen who spent a lifetime navigating her own equally androgynous political role. Viola brings more to this final scene by becoming Shakespeare’s muse as well as the inspiration for both the tragic romance they have just played and the coming comedy the Queen commands for *Twelfth Night*. She will also become, in Madden’s view, the reason why Shakespeare continues writing at all because she ultimately becomes a catalyst for the whole of the canon from *Romeo and Juliet* onwards.

Alas, Viola must marry Lord Wessex who is bound for Virginia and she must part from Shakespeare forever. To honor their love Shakespeare immortalizes her as a muse who “will never age [...] nor fade, nor die.” She is eternally fixed and unchanging as the embodiment of Shakespeare’s skill; their love ultimately inspires *Romeo and Juliet* as the play develops, scene by scene, along with their love affair. When they must finally part, Viola helps him with the frame of a new play that will contain the “saddest wretch in all the kingdom, sick with love” (whom Viola names “Orsino”) and a heroine “sold in marriage and half-way to America.” Viola imagines a heroine shipwrecked on a “vast and empty shore” that is “fearful of her virtue” and so is forced to dress as a boy to meet Orsino. They part with her final request: “Write me well.” Finally, Shakespeare’s quill can move freely, if inaccurately, and he writes, “*Twelfth Night*, Act One,” its location as “a sea coast,” and then, Viola’s first words: “What country friends is this?” It seems that even in a fictional vision about Shakespeare’s life the first two scenes of *Twelfth Night* are transposed as if to suggest that Shakespeare *must* have meant to begin his play with the shipwreck instead of the lovesick Orsino. This scene alone would have satisfied the cinematic yearning for the romance and anguish of lost love, but when Wessex asks the Queen “How is this to end?” and she replies (with one of the more quotable lines in the film): “As stories must when love’s denied. With tears and a journey.” Shakespeare narrates the final scene describing the play yet to be written that releases Viola from her marriage. The scene shows a shipwreck in which

many people perish in murky waters (visually reminiscent of the opening of Nunn's *Twelfth Night*) except for the immortal Viola "whose spirit is stronger than the sea." In the film's final shot, Viola walks alone, but confidently, towards the new world on "a stranger shore" empowered in her widowhood. This scene invites the question of whether the shipwreck is meant as a continuation of the film's narrative, or as a dramatization of Shakespeare's vision for the scene from *Twelfth Night* he is writing. Just as Viola embodies gender fluidity in both the play and film, so Illyria lends itself as beautifully to the New World, and as Prospero's island as well. Given the surprising flexibility of Shakespeare's plays, it is no wonder that they continue to entice artists, writers, and directors to recapture their utopic potential.²

Madden's film is unique in dramatizing a clear origin for several of Shakespeare's plays and creatively connecting them together with biographical and historical details. When it comes to the film's connection to *The Tempest*, John Blakeley argues that Madden's film demonstrates the continuing Americanization of Shakespeare, a custom he associates with the traditional placement of the play in the New World. He argues that this fundamentally demonstrates the desire "to connect the writing of the works of Shakespeare with the founding of the United States of America; two historically and culturally momentous occasions, hitherto largely disconnected." Madden's film creates a "Mrs. Shakespeare" (at least in spirit) of Viola, hands her the founding of America, and thus binds the quintessential English icon to the New World's foundation (250). More's Utopians shared ancient Greek origins with Europeans, and the film devises a similar source of inspiration for Shakespeare's utopias re-imagined through a familiar medium that blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction. The very colonies that would later shake off the English are rewriting their origins by

² Flexibility in *The Tempest* results in a dramatic variety of adaptations that, not surprisingly, often explore constructions of gender and desire. For instance, Fred Wilcox's *Forbidden Planet* (1956) is a classic science-fiction film that reimagines the story on a distant planet, Derek Jarmon's homoerotic *The Tempest* (1979), which changed much of the original play, includes several grotesque and pornographic scenes, Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991) combined music, opera, dance, and special effects for a highly abstract film, and most recently, Julie Taymor's *The Tempest* (2010) re-genders the role of Prospero by casting Helen Mirren as Prospera.

appropriating the English literary icon as their own. The final scene in the film, as Blakely argues, is significant for another reason. Madden's original concept for the final scene included a far more concrete connection with colonial America: A ghostly outline of Manhattan in the distance foreshadowing the strange country's future, and Viola approaching two people (an African- and a Native-American) to pose her famous question to them: "What country, friends, is this?" To which they would have answered with "America." Madden's original version would have more plainly answered the question of whether it was a narrative of Viola's voyage in the film, or Shakespeare's imagination in writing *Twelfth Night*, or even *The Tempest* (250), but it also illustrates the complex imbrications of fiction and "fact" that accompany utopias even in adaptation. We cannot be certain which of the film's details are elements of its fictional narrative, historical facts, or details attributable to the "fiction" of the historical figures. Perhaps the effect is similar to the way that early modern readers might have imagined that More's island was truly somewhere out there. Keeping us uncertain of what to believe and what to enjoy as fiction is part of utopia's transgressive effect. Viola is "the connecting figure" who brings together "the writing of the works of Shakespeare with the founding of the United States of America" and, as Blakeley notes, "Shakespeare remained the most obvious signifier of a residual cultural superiority" (253):

The ubiquitous reach of American culture, exemplified by the globally dominant output of Hollywood's studios, could always be countered by the unique worth of Shakespeare's works. And while rejection would have been an obvious and understandable response, Americans could never ignore Shakespeare entirely; there is just no escaping his cultural importance to speakers of the English language. Consequently, a profound ambivalence has characterized Hollywood's relationship with Shakespeare, manifested by a preference for oblique rather than direct realizations of his work (251).

This "oblique" approach to Shakespeare's work is quite pronounced (and most entertaining) in Madden's film and the film's dramatic success only reinforces the popularity of this approach. One can dissect or ridicule a film that claims historical truth or textual faithfulness, but not a fictional story that does not profess truth but

only re-casts history as it could have been, and, perhaps, as many wish it should have been. After all, the greatest English love poet should have had a heart-breaking romance to inspire him.

Popular culture lends itself readily to utopically re-imagining history (and literature) through “what if” scenarios. The critical dialogue over the equally oblique connections between *The Tempest* and New World colonialism illustrates the same sense of reading from the margins common to utopian writing. To blur the boundaries between the several plays, Madden uses language and details of the storm and shipwreck scene from *The Tempest* in a voice-over during which Shakespeare is meant to be writing *Twelfth Night* with Viola arriving on the New World shore (Blakely 254-55). Madden’s film is just one contemporary example of how *The Tempest* has come to be commonly recognized as Shakespeare’s “American” play because of how its particular critical reception has seeped into the popular understanding. The film combines the fictional Viola made real, several of Shakespeare’s most beloved plays, and the ready contrast between England and America to create a background that viewers are all too eager to accept. Why argue over the film’s truth or accuracy when it offers such an enjoyable (if convenient) “history”? Viola becomes Master Kent, and then plays the famous Juliet, and as she becomes more familiar, we eagerly accept her as a founder of new worlds (unprecedented for a woman) as well. Because of that journey, she effortlessly assumes her most vital role as Shakespeare’s inspiration for *Romeo and Juliet*, then *Twelfth Night*, all the way down the canon to *The Tempest*. Madden’s Viola emerges from water and tragedy at sea to arrive at a distant new world where she becomes the wondrous Miranda and reverses Viola’s voyage from the “stranger shore” back to claim the literary authority of the Old World. This becomes a circular voyage through the pages of the canon led by a character muse, turned boy-actor, turned lover, turned wife, then explorer turned female colonist, all dramatized in the idealized world of a very popular Hollywood film.

The Tempest is as troublesome a play as the others I have considered, but in quite a different way. For one, it is another of Shakespeare's source-less plays, and so exists as pure invention rather than adaptation, which means it lends itself more readily to interpretation rather than comparison. It defies easy classification as comedy or tragedy, falling instead into the catch-all "romance." Initially read meta-theatrically with the aging Prospero said to parallel an aging Shakespeare nearly retired from theatre, *The Tempest* has been increasingly read as a dramatization of England's early colonial endeavors. The critical tradition indicates that the play is usually considered "obliquely," or as Blakeley concludes, in the "common imagination" the play "engages ideas both of the culmination of the Shakespearean canon and of the incipience of America. And both of these ideas underpin the deployment of *The Tempest* in *Shakespeare in Love*'s concluding scene, in order to convey its intertwined notions of finality and beginning" (255-256). These "notions" tie together the beginnings and endings that follow each other in infinite circularity. In Viola's immortal existence and perpetual progress towards the other shore—strange as it may be—Madden envisioned the simultaneous moment of Shakespeare's end *and* immortality. Thus the two narratives serve both "to suggest an end and a beginning, connecting the completion of the works of the historically and culturally decreed greatest writer of all time with the founding of the modern world's greatest superpower" (256).

I will not fully confront whether or not Shakespeare meant to write the New World in *The Tempest*, as so many critics have argued. Early colonial discovery accounts and related texts certainly resonate contextually in the play, but Shakespeare was familiar with the dialogue of the New World discovery and could have easily made the connection to the New World far more explicit. Caliban, for instance, could have been written as a Native-America without much strain on the character given how the discovery accounts described indigenous peoples. They were as wild and dangerous, as threatening and foreign, and as monstrous and simultaneously compelling as the Caliban Shakespeare wrote. In fact, the anxiety over Caliban's potential miscegenation

with Miranda would have been firmer still with an unambiguously native origin, instead of Sycorax's foreign, but recognizable, nationality. Similarly, the island itself could have exhibited all manner of exotic details to convey the popular New World myths because only a few, easily included, textual references would have made the play explicitly American. For instance, Stephano considers the possibility of taking Caliban back home to Naples to display him for profit, as a "present for an emperor" if he could be made "tame" (2.2.69, 75) like the "savages and men of Ind" (2.2.57) who were displayed like the treasures of America. Moreover, the Americas had already appeared in one of Shakespeare's early play (cartographically, and as a woman, like in the discovery accounts), *The Comedy of Errors* (1592) in which we find his singular certain reference to it.³ Why not repeat the reference in the later play, especially given the increasing recognition of the New World's potential for colonization. It is quite likely that Shakespeare had the "Americas in mind," as Stephen Orgel so famously put it, and these details only added to the play's multiple oblique allusions to the New World (Oxford Edition, 33). The colonial dialogue was familiar, so he did not need to transport his characters across the Atlantic to dramatize colonial oppression because it had already existed for centuries across Europe, Africa, and Asia, and even actively in his day just across the sea in Ireland.⁴ After all, Caliban's gabardine presents a ready connection to Ireland (2.2.37, 109). Perhaps this is why some locate Prospero's island in the Mediterranean between Africa and Europe, and why the island's

³ Dromio of Syracuse divides a kitchen-wench's body into regions of the world using the discovery text conventions. He mocks specific nations by locating them on telling parts of her body. To Antipholus's query, Dromio answers: "And where America, the Indies?" (3.2.133). After locating Spain at the hot breath of her mouth, he responds: "Oh, sir, upon her nose all o'er embellished with rubies, carbuncles, sapphires, declining their rich aspect to the hot breath of Spain; who sent whole armadoes of caracks to be ballast at her nose (134-137). The Americas belonged to Spain, and so they stood out physically (like a nose) because of their arrogant wealth. The utopic promise of colonial America was in the wealth her body as land contained. Shakespeare refers to "the Indies" (either east or west) several times, but usually in reference to commodity or trade. The New World, on the other hand (and colonialism in general), signified commodity, which was itself routinely conveyed through the female body; utopia was less about commodity and more about gender fluidity in Shakespeare's plays.

⁴ "We close our eyes and ears to much of the meaning of *The Tempest* when we restrict the geographical and temporal bounds of colonization to New World colonizing in the early modern period. Colonizing began in prehistory and [...] stretched from Carthage and beyond on the Western end of the Mediterranean to the Black Sea and beyond in the East" (Mowat 36).

inhabitants (except Ariel who may be the only true native of the island) all have Old World origins.

However, Shakespeare was far more interested in creating a new world instead of *the New World* in *The Tempest*. Crystal Bartolovitch argues that *The Tempest* is “singular in its insistent spatial ambiguity” and explains that Shakespeare’s other plays “spread themselves out on a more or less familiar Old World map, even if the details are a bit hazy or fanciful” (18). The spatial dynamics of *The Tempest* are more insistent and Bartolovitch connects the play to several classical utopias in the same tradition: Like Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* and More’s *Utopia* the play unfolds “nowhere” and this “encourages the imagining of anywhere as one’s own proper place” (19). Extending her argument, Bartolovitch suggests that there is an important parallel between London’s markets and playhouses as public spaces, since both are transgressive and involve the “nowhere” conjured in the playhouses.⁵ At once suggesting unbounded transgression, this connection indicates that Shakespeare was creating performative and textual spaces with Illyria and Prospero’s Island. Bartolovitch indicates a concrete connection between the playhouse and adjacent transgressive city spaces.⁶ These spaces allow for imaginative reflection and critical

⁵ Similarly, Steven Mullaney focuses on a *locus*, or physical space, as a requirement of utopia and argues that the physical location of early modern English theaters amplified theater’s transcendent effect. In London, theaters were located at the edges of the city. The city itself, when read against its margins, is constructed utopically as “a casting of ideals and ideologies into concrete form and inscription of cultural practices and contradictions in the very landscape of community.” The theatricality of royal and governmental processions in London, for example, is an expression of constructed ideals imposed on its citizenry (19). Mullaney combines the two themes by considering how the theaters’ physical proximity to the city’s other fringe locations and industries (such as the gallows, prisons, hospitals or brothels) led them to embody contradiction because they stood, along with other fringe elements, at the “margins of the city.” This liminal placement “served as a more ambivalent staging ground” allowing the space to become “a place where contradictions of the community [...] were prominently and dramatically set on stage” (21). The porous boundaries between these fringe elements thus fostered a contradiction of purposes at the city’s margins. The theaters “played” life, death, illness and punishment on the stage, while the gallows and hospitals were rendered surreal and theatrical. Their proximity to each other at the liminal spaces of London’s fringe infected them with theater’s blurring transcendence.

⁶ Constance Relihan, on the other hand, reads the same spaces more fluidly. By using Illyria, Shakespeare “discourages readers from linking the scene of the play with any geopolitical reality common to early modern English experience” (80) and the result is that Illyria suggests the East with as much abstract ambiguity and simultaneous possibility as Prospero’s island suggests

consideration of both abstract and concrete associations at once. Illyria, with its romantic “foreign” name evokes several tangible locations, while Prospero’s island is far less locatable. Even so, *The Tempest* goes further in indicating a specific region for its island than *Twelfth Night* does. Viola and Sebastian never mention where they come from, where their intended destination was, or even the reason for their voyage before their ship wrecks in Illyria, but in *The Tempest*, we know Claribel was just delivered in marriage to Tunis and that the ship is on her way to Milan when Prospero’s tempest brings them ashore. These details bring a specific origin *and* destination to *The Tempest*, which Ariel and Caliban supplement by narrating the island’s history and origins. The earlier play has no similar origin story, and no specific references to locations, neighboring countries, or oceans. Curiously, *Twelfth Night* conveys ambiguity outside of Illyria and maintains that uncertainty, while *The Tempest* reverses this to conjure its ambiguity within the enclosing space itself leaving the familiar, recognizable details of the outside world intact. The result is a more dramatic contrast between worlds that demonstrates the more purposeful ambiguity of Prospero’s Island. *Twelfth Night* offered the infinite fluidity of Illyria with the “fool” Olivia as its only anchor, but in *The Tempest*, knowing where the real world is somehow sharpens the utopic ideal of Prospero’s island, and the progression between the plays suggests a far more intentionally utopic endeavor with the latter play.

Geographically, Prospero’s island must be close enough between Milan and Tunis to have allowed Prospero to trap them, but near enough to the Americas to allow Ariel, at least, access to the New World. When Ariel tells Prospero that he has safely hidden the tempest-tossed ship, his ambiguous reference to the Bermudas is considered an indication of the play’s New World location:

Safely in harbour
Is the King’s ship, in the deep nook where once
Thou called’st me up at midnight to fetch dew
From the still-vexed Bermudas; there she’s hid (1.2.226-230).

America, but both easily allow for utopia because of a clear disconnect from the reality of the early modern experience.

Considered the play's one direct reference to the New World, these lines are flexible enough to denote everything from the mid-Atlantic Bermuda islands to a dodgy section of early modern London.⁷ The reference's ambiguity and Ariel's language allows it to be many spaces at once and to be understood at many levels. Ariel specifies a "deep nook" as the location where the boat is hidden, but his phrasing about the location of the nook itself is vague. All we know is that Ariel hid the ship; whether or not the ship was hidden in the Bermudas where the dew is found, or in the nook where Ariel was the moment when Prospero called to ask Ariel to fetch the dew, is vague. The only certainty is that Ariel, at least, has been to the Bermudas. Both possibilities are equally feasible but neither categorically locates the island in the Bermudas. Prospero regularly calls Ariel to him from a distance, indicating that the space is one that Ariel, at least, can access. The reference is significant on another level. Of the wealth of sources in support of *The Tempest's* New World location, no source is more convincing than William Strachey's letter describing the shipwreck of the *Sea Venture* in Bermuda.⁸ The description of the tempest and shipwreck in the play echo the letter closely, and together with Ariel's reference, suggest it was a likely resource.

Indeed, Shakespeare may have adopted the details of the storm and shipwreck, along with the anxiety and threat over the leveling of class and rank that the colonists experienced while stranded, and the resulting suggestion of utopic freedom, without necessarily adopting the exact location for his play. Stephen Greenblatt argues that Strachey's shipwreck was a "levelling force" that led to an "immediate collapse of the distinction between those who labor and those who rule" (*Shakespearean Negotiations*

⁷ Some arguments suggest that this was not, in fact, a reference to the New World islands at all, but the "Bermooths," a section of London known to harbor thieves and prostitutes that was itself named for the islands. Like the New World, the area attracted fugitives (Arden note 229).

⁸ The original letter was written around 1609, was addressed to a "noble Lady," and later published by Samuel Purchas in *Purchas His Pilgrimes* (1625) as "A true repertory of the wracke and redemption of Sir Thomas Gates Knight; upon and from the Ilands of the Bermudas: his coming to Virginia, and the estate of that Colonie then, and after, under the government of the Lorde La Warre, July 15. 1610. Written by William Strachy, Esquire." Shakespeare likely had access to this letter before its publication, an exchange that Greenblatt argues "signals an institutional circulation of culturally significant narratives" (149).

149). Greenblatt is referring to the letter's class conflict as it is reflected in *The Tempest* in which the confusion over the leadership on the ship during the storm led to the nobility's repeated desire to reaffirm authority: "Where's the master" (1.1.9, 11) is answered by the seamen's famous line "What cares these roarers for the name of king" (16-17). The transition from dynastic control, to submission, and to a more "natural" rule, is seamless in the violent journey to utopia because nature itself is the leveler. In *Shakespearean Negotiations*, Greenblatt reflects on the details of the Bermuda colony accounts and their description of a utopic "land of plenty" (reminiscent of the classical Land of Cockayne) and argues that the account negates the usual fears of the early colonial discovery accounts:

To seventeenth-century voyagers, whose ordinary condition was extreme want and who had dragged themselves from the violent sea onto an unknown shore with the likely prospect of starvation and death, such extravagant abundance must have seemed the fantastic realization of old folk dreams. [...] In this Land of Cockaigne setting, far removed not only from England but from the hardships of Jamestown, the authority of Sir Thomas Gates and his lieutenants was anything but secure. For the perception that Bermuda was a providential deliverance contained within it a subversive corollary: why leave? Why press on to a hungry garrison situated in a pestiferous swamp and in grave tension with the surrounding Algonquian tribesmen? (151).

Indeed, when the unknown land offered not only plentiful resources but freedom from the restrictive hardships of dynastic law, "why leave?" might just as easily have been extended to "why leave *this utopia?*"⁹ We discover that, later, on their return to Jamestown, the group of castaways shipwrecked in Bermuda passed from "dreams of absolute freedom to the imposition of absolute control" (154). Greenblatt goes on to describe how Shakespeare chose certain points to include or exclude from the letter in his play. Greenblatt attributes this to the same swerving he finds in the earlier plays: "The swerve away from these materials in *The Tempest* is as apparent as their presence" (154). This swerving, thus, is structural as well as thematic because the same absent presence Greenblatt notes in Shakespeare's sources we can also sense in the

⁹ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's first chapter in *The Many-Headed Hydra* (2000) provides a detailed reading of the history of the Strachey letter and the colonists' time in Bermuda. Their historical contextualization offers great insight into the construction of the stranded colony and what they call the colonist's "brutal pursuit of a utopia of their own" (26).

play's absent present women. Strachey's landing and utopic endeavors may have happened in Bermuda, but Shakespeare saw the value of the themes as translatable to any moment when a new space offers the promise of freedom from social restrictions. Furthermore, he does something similar with Golding's translations by gleaning the most fluid elements in order to enable his dramatic utopias. He creates allowable, class-leveling spaces in many of his plays, but *The Tempest* also includes the mechanics of exploration and colonization, the romance and adventure of sea voyages, and the challenges of an ideal society at the mercy of nature. All these details tie this play to the New World colonization as constructed through the discovery texts that brought it to Europe. Of course, classical utopian literature is sometimes awash in the romance and anxiety of shipwrecks and mysterious lands as well, but the Strachey letter is a distinct example of how the discovery accounts conveyed a utopic earthly paradise.

Shakespeare refuses to allow Prospero's island to emerge as either perfectly paradisiacal or perfectly hellish (no more than Illyria was perfectly utopic either). Instead, it is ambiguous because it is utopic and utopic because of its ambiguity. Thomas Bulger explores the utopian dialogue of the play and argues that Shakespeare constructs the island as "neither ideal nor idyllic" and instead offers it up with "a heavy doses of irony" (39), including several descriptive discomforts that include "horse-piss" (4.1.199) and "toothed briars, sharp furzes, pricking gorse and thorns" (4.1.180). Prospero even brings physical torments to the island through torture and enslavement:

For this, be sure, tonight thou shalt have cramps
Side-stitches, that shall pen thy breath up; urchins
Shall forth at vast of night that they may work
All exercise on thee; thou shalt be pinched
As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging
Than bees that made 'em" (1.2.326-331).

And later, "I'll rack thee with old cramps, / Fill thy bones with aches, make thee roar,
/ That beasts shall tremble at thy din" (1.2.370-372). Caliban receives the brunt of the physical abuse, but even the noble Ferdinand is not immune to the abuse:

I'll manacle thy neck and feet together;
 Sea water shalt thou drink; thy food shall be
 The fresh-brook mussels, withered roots, and husks
 Wherein the acorn cradled (1.2.461-464).

The discovery accounts recreated the New World and reflected the themes of classical utopias, while More followed suit by applying the conventional themes *and* the colonization accounts to his *Utopia*; *The Tempest* includes many of the same themes, but it does not stand comfortably as a progressive image in the same tradition. Instead, it demonstrates the first tangible movement towards a contemporary understanding of utopian literature. For instance, Gonzalo's commonwealth utopia in 2.1 is at once a precursor of the popular commonwealth utopias to come, but at the same time is closely associated to Michel de Montaigne's essay "Of Cannibals" (1562, Florio 1603).¹⁰ Caliban's name is often considered an acronym for "cannibal," and the reference is palpable, but it is also "ghostly" and fosters the ambiguity, "obliqueness" (and Greenblatt's "swerving") that the play needs.

The play's New World connections have also thoroughly made a "native" of Caliban and he reflects many of the tropes conventionally assigned to indigenous peoples: He benefits from a "civilizing" European education, becomes a "noble savage" that speaks as beautifully as his master, threatens violence towards the white woman, deifies Europeans, and ultimately, subverts the knowledge meant to civilize him. Shakespeare's characterization of Caliban establishes the image of the indigenous peoples that the discovery accounts began, and that image would continue to develop through the seventeenth century to increasing popularity. David Scott Kastan offers an intriguing perspective by way of Caliban's characterization. He argues that critically locating the play in America has had the same insidious effect that the discovery

¹⁰ Of this famous connection to the play, as Richard Halpern writes, "the passage from Montaigne offers an idyllic or Golden Age description of the life of the Tupi Indians of Brazil. [...] Shakespeare's audience might not have recognized the specific borrowing from Montaigne, but such Golden Age descriptions of the New World had become a kind of set-piece in colonial writings and [...] hence would have been instantly recognizable as a genre (268). Halpern concludes that the play reflects an "ideal commonwealth [...] peopled by Europeans and modelled on Ovidian and Virgilian descriptions of the Golden Age. All explicit reference to the New World vanishes through an implicit and ghostly reference still inheres in the Arcadian genre itself" (268).

accounts have had on indigenous cultures, which suggests that the same dynamics of idealization are at play in the construction of the native. He considers the play's role in history and argues that "the Americanization of *The Tempest*" is "an act of cultural imperialism":

Part of the desire to locate the play within the discourses of early colonialism, to return the play to a historical moment, is evidence of the degree to which the imagination of the past now enthralls us as once we were enthralled by the imagination of the future, and seems worthily motivated by the felt need to rescue the play from the banality of moral claims made for it in the name of its putative timelessness and transcendence (Graff 188, 231).

That the play is malleable enough to offer inexhaustible possibility is likely the only quality most critics agree on because the play has inspired a surprising variety of adaptations. For Orgel, the play is (not unlike Viola) "endlessly malleable" (76) and the Vaughans phrase it as "uniquely adaptable" (73). Such descriptions continue in this pattern across a wealth of critical resources, but as Kastan notes, the desire to locate the play in early colonialism, as a way to recreate the past (or the future) seems to come from related desire to "rescue" the play from the "timelessness and transcendence" generally ascribed to it. Indeed, if we project it into the past (or the future) it keeps moving even as it becomes more fixed in time. This also applies to any need to rescue it because it fits easily between the past (as the multiple back-stories suggest) and the future (the entire impetus of the play is eventual restoration), but Kastan rushes by an important detail in his reading: The "desire to *locate* the play" not just in early colonialism, or a specific time or place, but *anyplace* or *anywhere*. The play is not so much timeless as it is fluid and simultaneous because it is colonial, it is Old World dynastic, it is the private reflection of Shakespeare himself, it is a royal wedding masque for a young princess married to a foreign king, and all the while it is also Peter Greenaway's surreal, meta-theatrical, postmodern *Prospero's Books* (1991) and Robert Browning's lyrical "Caliban upon Setebos" (1864) and on and on through the countless silly, profound, powerful, diverse, or provocative adaptations of this one play. In fact, since the Restoration, the play has actually been more popular in

adaptation than in its original form (Vaughan 76-77). Give us an island, and we want to make utopia out of it, give us an anonymous island and we *will* make utopia out of it. In the case of *The Tempest*, the island as America, offered modern readers the opportunity to give voice to the Other, to allow the subaltern to speak through the “discovery” of colonialism with Shakespeare as the iconic representation of hegemonic literature.¹¹ In other words, if Shakespeare wrote about colonization in sympathy with the oppressed indigenous peoples, it vindicates the current post-colonial discourse in the past and suggests another impetus to establish a New World connection.

More used the New World as a possible space for *Utopia* that indicated an empirically “real” space that was still unknown enough to foster an idealized philosophical exercise, and *The Tempest* follows suit. Both utopias provide a somewhere to “point to” (never mind whether anyone was pointing in the right direction or not). Richard Halpern makes an important observation on locating *The Tempest* in the New World that considers the mechanics of realizing utopic endeavors, especially in America:

What the deictic function of America adds to the elements of its social thematic is the fact that one can look and see them—“point” to them in the world. It thus invests Utopian thought with the empirical force of the real, which fictional or philosophical polities will necessarily lack. Here visibility is a simple function to embodiment, contrasted with a textual abstract. At the same time, however, this looking or pointing at is also a looking or pointing away from—specifically, away from the egalitarian social forms which also existed in Europe, but which were irremediably marked as forms of class existence (290).

The play’s “textual abstract” was neither purely fictional, nor purely factual, and so was a purely ambiguous destination, as Halpern notes, but also proposed an ambiguous origin. Linguistically, and in another way logically, the deictic function of America

¹¹ *The Tempest* has been a particularly rich play for postcolonial criticism because of its ambiguous presence in early modern colonial literature, and the dynamics between Prospero and Caliban. Woman has always sat ambiguously within the “space of difference” that the “subaltern” creates because of the concomitant implications of race and class to the role of the oppressed. However, Miranda’s presence as the “required presence” allowing the self-definition of the majority group and simultaneous power to subvert that authority indicates that she acts a subaltern in this play if we consider that space more than simply Other, as Gayatri Spivak has defined it (de Kock 45). See also Homi Bhabha’s “Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism” in which he defines the subaltern’s simultaneous role as the means by which the hegemony defines itself, and the means by which that hegemony can be subverted.

works for Prospero's Island in the other direction. To point in one direction is to point away from another, which usually results in the "real" and "ideal" binary, but the location of each point is dependent on the pointer's perspective and position. One could point to America far more easily than one could point to Cokaygne or Prospero's island, and by so doing, it made the indication of the woes of England far less subversive. In their Preface to *The Tempest and Its Travels* (2000), Peter Hulme and William Sherman describe the play's role as a "touchstone for critical, political and creative work throughout the modern world—especially in countries formerly under British rule." This allowed, as they argue, the play to be "classified as every genre, and no genre, located in every place and no place, and enlisted in the support of colonial, and anti-colonial and apolitical views." They then ascribe the flexibility of its classification to "the power and mobility of its language and its themes" that have allowed it to become "a renewable resource like few other texts" (xi).¹² Most curiously, and despite this ability to contain so many different sources, Hulme and Sherman argue that the play seems "unfinished" or "full of blanks" in a way that "tempts us to fill it in" (xiii).¹³ Here again the utopian text offers an open space that "tempts" us with respite as it did to each of its subsequent waves of immigrants (Sycorax and Caliban, Prospero and Miranda, and those aboard the ship). Each sees precisely what s/he desires in the island, just as we do, and each seeks their own utopia there, as will we. It is no coincidence that "tempest" suggests "temptress," not just in how it "tempts" us to point "there" from "here," but how it feminizes the "temptation" of utopia.

If we set aside the question of where, exactly, Shakespeare intended to set the island (a detail we may never know), we discover that the play's structure also offers a

¹² Trevor Griffiths argues that *The Tempest* has "acted as a barometer of changing fortunes and particular relevancies, resonances, critical, social, political and theatrical" of themes such as "colonialism, imperialism, evolution, and democracy" (150). Even outside of its contemporary context, the play has lent itself to a myriad of subjects because of its structural malleability. As "touchstone," or "barometer," it is a useful play for calculating the tenor and breadth of Shakespeare's utopic skills and for any author that needs such a vehicle.

¹³ Vaughan and Vaughan in their introduction to the Arden edition also argues that the play seems "naggingly unfinished" and that it almost invites completion through its "elliptical" action: much happens before the play, much will happen after the play, but the play itself, awaits (75).

wealth of utopic detail and exemplifies the essence of Shakespeare's influence on the early modern utopia. *The Tempest* applies all the elements of his earlier themes through several individual visions of utopia. Each utopia relies on Miranda, the singular woman in the play, as the simultaneous representation of temptation (the temptress at the center of the tempest) and the promise of perfection. It is the only play in the canon with only one woman among the characters; Miranda, in her isolation, embodies the potential on which the play's utopia is conceived, and will prove the means by which the utopia will be dismantled (recalling the role of the subaltern). She is, at once, as fixed as Olivia and as fluid as Viola (also considered allegorically) even though she is a fluid a character on her island. In *Twelfth Night*, Viola must be boy and girl simultaneously to allow access to utopia, while in *The Tempest*, Miranda must be as chaste and enclosed as Olivia, but as desired and accessible as Viola, to embody the possibility of the utopia. Shakespeare might well have been considering colonialism in this play, but the power dynamics that accompany colonial dialogues do not emerge solely through *The Tempest's* location and hierarchical relationships, but rather through the play's fluid gender and desire fundamentally associating it with utopian literature. The play's ambiguity and versatility are part of its utopic possibility. Its New World readings are just as valid in a post-colonial world as the allegorical or meta-theatrical readings (just as Viola can be ambiguous hermaphrodite or lesbian heroine in one age and chaste role model in another). *The Tempest* is Shakespeare's most utopic play on all these levels because each character expresses his or her own view of utopia in the course of the play and each individual utopia is contingent on the female body. Utopia was fashioned as a woman, and that fashioning allowed women unprecedented access to utopia as a powerful medium of possibility and gender freedom (as I will show in Margaret Cavendish's works). Utopia remains imminent and figured as a woman, and is accessible only because of Miranda's presence. Her solitary existence, in absence of the other women, serves to emphasize the connection between women and utopia further. The absent women are recognizable as we wander with the wondrously

ambiguous Miranda on the utopian island, and just as the lands we know and recognize outside the enclosure grant the island utopia the needed contrast, so to do the absent women demonstrate Miranda's utopic presence.

The earlier plays constructed utopia through enclosure and myth as the ideal and *The Tempest* applies their themes, expands them, and then questions their ability to sustain utopia. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, Navarre hoped to establish an all-male Academe of ascetic philosophical study (a king rejecting his political responsibilities for the love, or glory, of study), but for Prospero, the same desire is played out to its conclusion because his downfall is predicated on his self-enclosure into studious exile and ends with the success of his simultaneous enclosure and release. His choice to lock himself away with his books from the world of politics opened the door for his brother to take Milan, and ultimately, led to Prospero (along with Miranda) being cast into the sea. For Prospero, his "library / Was dukedom large enough," (1.2.109-110) because his desire for the "liberal arts" were "without parallel," (74-75). Despite his anger at being cast out to sea) it was *he* that first "cast" upon his brother the responsibility for the dukedom: "He, whom next thyself / Of all the world I loved, and to him put / The manage of my state" (68-70). There is a sense of both physical progress ("being *transported*") and transgressive social progress ("my *state* grew stranger") in how Prospero describes his desire for "secret studies" that reiterates, from a wiser perspective, Navarre's desire to know hidden truths through his Academe (76-77).

The island allows Prospero to remain in his private utopia that, during his exile, progresses from his self-imposed philosophical (ideal) insularity in Milan to his forced physical (real) insularity on the island.¹⁴ He can retreat into a real world that need not be divided into private and public, and need not be absolutely identified as America or any another known location because he takes his utopia with him. Prospero demonstrates this connection when he defines his insularity:

¹⁴ Jeffrey Knapp has defined the progression from Prospero's self-study to the island as "banishment to an island nowhere [that] literalizes his original insularism in Milan" (234).

I pray thee, mark me.
 I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated
 To closeness and the bettering of my mind
 With that which, but by being so retired,
 O'er-prized all popular rate, in my false brother
 Awaked an evil nature, and my trust,
 Like a good parent, did beget of him
 A falsehood in its contrary as great
 As my trust, which had indeed no limit,
 A confidence sans bound (1.2.88-97).

Despite the dramatic revenge, he is plotting against Alonso and the brother he calls "perfidious" (68), Prospero blames himself for Antonio's usurpation and indicates that his own devotion to pure study is what woke the "evil nature" in his brother. The cause of their exile is never blamed completely on either brother, in fact, Prospero's desire to dedicate himself exclusively to seeking knowledge (which his isolation on the island facilitates) almost comes across as the greater evil.¹⁵ Miranda's life has revolved around her father and his books, but she is curiously immune to the "evil" of the desire for knowledge. Prospero is her teacher and she is Caliban's, and the exchange of knowledge, as representation of Prospero's central utopic tenant, goes through Miranda as a conduit for Caliban's utopic desire. Prospero has taught her and raised her, and she has taught Caliban, which allowed Prospero his utopia of pure study and Caliban's utopia of familiarity (as I will discuss later). Miranda proclaims that acquiring knowledge was never her primary desire ("More to know / Did never meddle with my thoughts" [1.2.22-23]), a point she declares may have resulted from Prospero always stopping her questions and leaving her with only "bootless inquiries" (35-36). In this instance, Miranda affirms her own desires. She rejects the utopia her father sought in his books, and the responsibility he left behind in Milan. She wants for no more

¹⁵ James Kearney notes that Martin Luther, in his lectures on Genesis read "the injunction to abstain from the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil as the first preaching of the Word. For Luther, this initial prohibition does not mark off the boundaries of Paradise but is itself the constitutive element of Paradise. [...] This first commandment establishes the ability of humanity before the Fall to hear the divine Word directly and to understand and obey it perfectly. Disobeying the Word, Adam and Eve are exiled from the perfect world of direct communication with, and a knowledge of, the divine to a fallen world of material signs, the fallen world of the letter" (449). Prospero's access to knowledge, including the supernatural figured as Paradise, suggests a desire for existing simultaneously before and after the Fall. This utopia allows for access to knowledge despite the Protestant injunction against attempting to achieve paradise through human endeavor.

knowledge and will later similarly reject ambition when she declares her satisfaction with her future husband: "My affections / Are then most humble. I have no ambition / To see a goodlier man" (1.2.482-484). Given that she learns that Ferdinand is the King of Naples ("Myself am Naples" [435] and later "A prince Miranda; I do think a king" [3.1.60]) she comes to understand that she need strive to no greater ambition than becoming a Queen. When coupled with her later proposals of marriage ("I am your wife, if you will marry me" [83] and again "My husband, then?" [88]), Miranda is deftly maneuvering herself towards her desires and she often declares those desires assertively (even though they coincide with her father's plans). Her disobedience and assertion of her contrary desires suggests she is an active agent far more than an empty allegory responding to Prospero's maneuvering. Miranda gains her knowledge in the manner Prospero dictates, but she also chooses not to fully participate in the academic utopia she herself allows.

Caliban grows up and learns in tandem with Miranda. His equal education allows him to speak actively and dramatically, and to name and "know" his "own meaning" (1.2.332-360) but ultimately, his knowledge and desire threaten Miranda, and consequently, threatens his own utopia. His education is far less epistemological than linguistic because he already has complete knowledge of the island when Prospero arrives and only needs "civilized" words to express that knowledge. From Prospero's academic utopia to Caliban's island utopia, the play's several ideal spaces emerge with each new character. For Caliban, Miranda is the avenue to establish his utopia of populating his island. Caliban does not require Miranda, specifically, because he is willing to hand her over to Stephano and Trinculo in service to them when he believes they might remove Prospero. The desire for greater knowledge and focused study unbounded by responsibility is Prospero's alone; he is an Academe unto himself with Ariel, Caliban, and Miranda each necessarily reflecting an aspect of his utopic plans. The construction of a space dedicated to study—for gaining forbidden knowledge—creates a prelapsarian world of the island. In the final scene, Prospero drowns his books

to symbolize the end of his utopia and signal his (re)surrender to the fallen world. He succeeds at forming his Academe (and spirits of his own conjuring) and maintains it until the end of the play (unlike Navarre). Gonzalo provides him with his books (the tools of his self-exile in Milan) granting him the resources to maintain the same enclosure on the island, and his utopia is achieved. Prospero may have been unwillingly cast into the sea, but his island exile, even in his own description, is ambiguous because he describes it as both "blessed" and "foul play" in answer to Miranda's observation (1.2.62-63).

Meanwhile, Ariel, as the other critical means to Prospero's utopia, has no clear origin, but offers Prospero coveted knowledge of the island's history, and the power to wield the island's enchantments and escape its boundaries. Sycorax locked Ariel in a "cloven pine," and thus, a tree holds the spirit and knowledge (and power) of the island that Prospero desires. By freeing Ariel, Prospero metaphorically reaps the knowledge and power of this animated "tree of knowledge" and it allows him to live in a new prelapsarian world with full control of the forbidden fruit he gained from Ariel's service. He controls Miranda as the island's potential and temptation, and Ariel as the realization of the very goal that Navarre sought: To be god-like (*Love's Labour's Lost* 1.1.57). Caliban shares his knowledge of the physical "real" properties of the island through his new language, but also speaks the unspoken in refusing to let Prospero forget that it is not his island to rule. Caliban is thus the "real" that perpetually hinders Prospero's "ideal." In that tension, Caliban embodies the obstacle to utopia that Prospero cannot do without because even after Caliban attempts to rape Miranda, Prospero acknowledges a "real" need for his presence: "We cannot miss him; he does make our fire, / Fetch us our wood, and serves in offices / That profit us." (1.2.312-314). From Ariel, Prospero gains the "ideal" magic and insight, and from Caliban, the needful materials of the "real" he cannot fully relinquish, but it is Miranda's presence alone that maintains the island's progress, keeping the utopia never static and always transgressive.

The play's connection with *Love's Labour's Lost* does not end at the studious exile of Prospero's own Academe and the successful recreation of a utopic, prelapsarian world. Russ McDonald has argued that repetition is central to *The Tempest's* structure in much the same way as echoing was in *Love's Labour's Lost*, only greatly expanded and complicated.¹⁶ Less like the repetitive echoes of the earlier play, repetition in *The Tempest* has a more methodical effect and helps maintain a tone of magical incantation in the dialogue reminiscent of *Twelfth Night's* musical language. People repeat themselves instead of each other's words while considering their strange environment, or nostalgically underlining their ideas: "Twelve years since, Miranda, twelve years since" (1.2.54), or even through a great deal of punning, like when Prospero in two consecutive speeches to Ariel defines Sycorax: "This *damned witch* Sycorax" (1.2.263) and later on "To lay upon the *damned, which* Sycorax" (1.2.290) when "damned" follows both "witch" and "which." There is a sense of diffusion in this pointed repetition; it emphasizes Sycorax's damnation, but the transgressive "witch" is diffused and defused into the indeterminate "which." McDonald observes that the play's repetition of sounds and words "is only one type of larger and more frequently discussed modes of iteration" that are, in a way, "echoed" in the play's repeated treasonous actions in the aristocratic plot, such as usurpation and assassination, are mirrored in the servant plot.¹⁷ There is a general repetition of sounds and words, but repetition seems to be a structural element of the play as it creates a thematic and textual circularity that is more emphatic than in *Love's Labour's Lost* or even the "foolish" textual play of *Twelfth Night*. The play's repetition is further reflected in other forms, most notably, biological, political, and aesthetic because the play "raises

¹⁶ "Repetition becomes a prominent figure in Shakespeare's late style generally, and *The Tempest* in particular derives much of its poetic power from phonetic, lexical, and syntactical reiteration. From the confused echoes of the first scene ('We split, we split!') through Prospero's re-creation of the past ('Twelve year since, Miranda, twelve year since') to the pleasing assonantal chiming of the Epilogue, aural patterns impart a distinctive texture to this text. And yet *The Tempest* is something of a stylistic paradox, being simultaneously one of the most pleonastic and one of the briefest plays in the canon" (217).

¹⁷ There are also further repetitions in the allusions and reproductions of "major motifs from *The Aeneid*, the creation of a masque within the play, and Shakespeare's representation of some of his own most familiar dramatic actions and topics (217).

disturbing questions about the act of reproduction, not only the genetic possibilities ('Good wombs have borne bad sons') but also the difficulties of recreating society, beginning afresh, repairing in the new world the errors of the old, and it does so in a style that refuses to cease recreating itself" (227). The effect of such pervasive, repetition is a circularity that indicates a yearning to reiterate and re-approach, again and again, not only the original desire but the effort to achieve betterment (even if only as textual clarity) as a central point of utopic endeavors. It seeps into every level of the play in a sort of desperation to sustain utopia through circularity.

Utopia must contend with the unavoidable realization that repeated efforts will lead to repeated failures with each subsequent attempt no matter how perfectly executed, and yet attempts must persist to maintain hope for utopia. Barker and Hulme suggest any reading of this play requires a need to "comprehend both the anxiety and drive to closure it necessitates" (208). As I have argued, utopia demonstrates a repetitive impulse towards circularity and enclosure with the consequent rejection of the utopic position within and without the very enclosure utopia creates. To an extent, this circularity might be a sort of structural echoing, where themes, language, and narrative elements "bounce back" to where they began. For Prospero to gain his utopia, he had to escape the social "enclosure" of his "real" dukedom and enclose himself within the "ideal" island. Miranda's presence necessitated and sustained that requirement and so she remains within his utopia until they escape the island in great part because of the marriage he orchestrated for her. Enclosure is often the answer to an exposure that may take the form of a universal "real" world in need of betterment. Thus, enclosure is followed by a persistent desire to return to the former spaces (nostalgically reimagined), or the origins left behind before the original exposure in the first place. Their return to Milan at the end reverses Prospero's exile from Milan with proper circularity. Utopia can only be transitory because it must sustain progress between worlds in circular repetition. It can never posit a clear destination from a specific origin because that would fix the enclosure and

disallow the utopic desire for the other space. The earlier plays promise marriages they never deliver and allow for the fluidity that realizes utopia, and this play promises a return to Milan that it similarly never delivers, both potential resolutions foster a sense of perpetual progress and continuity. The island is always a holding place that maintains transgression in the progress towards an unreachable destination. As a utopia, it has to succeed through failure by ending right when it began in utopic circularity. The effect, McDonald observes, "is to place the auditor in an intermediate state, and that region of indeterminacy is a version of the various other kinds of liminality associated with this text" (228).¹⁸ The island becomes the space where the narrative is always between what was and what will be because the viewer or reader must be kept in progress to experience it to participate in a world of utopic liminality, or its "marginal existence." Ariel embodies the island's ambiguous presence most readily because it is always either body *or* spirit as the only fluid being in the play with no clear origin or gender, and one identified with no location other than the unknowable island.

Shakespeare moved closer to the realization of utopia on stage through the anonymity of Illyria, and Viola's pronounced fluidity in *Twelfth Night*, but *The Tempest* carries it further, indicating a thematic progression across all his plays that build towards a resolution in *The Tempest*.¹⁹ Much of the argument for a meta-theatrical *Tempest* comes from the backward glancing in the play, in its thematic repetition for instance, but perhaps this emerges most definitively in Shakespeare's use of myth, both classical and reconstructed. Prospero's mythological masque is brief and

¹⁸ "The island is located midway between Africa and Europe; it apparently partakes of, or is hospitable to, the natural and supernatural realms; Miranda stands between childhood and maturity, Caliban between demon and human, Prospero between vengeance and 'mercy.' [...] It is a marginal condition between expectation and understanding, affirmation and scepticism, comedy and tragedy (McDonald 228).

¹⁹ Meredith Ann Skura argues that *The Tempest* is linked in many other ways to the rest of the canon: "It is revealing to see how, in each case, the non-colonial structures become associated with colonialist discourse. Indeed, the very details of *The Tempest* that revisionists see as marking the 'nodal point of the play's imbrication into this discourse of colonialism' are reworkings of similar moments in earlier and seemingly precolonial plays (60). Tracing the historical dialogue of the play, Skura notes that the details made salient by critics were apparent much earlier and the connection with colonialism is less direct than it is oblique.

interrupted, but audiences do not witness simply a form of entertainment within a play, they are confronted with a story within a story requiring a back-story (or a mythic origin) that will grant them insight into the play's fundamental dynamic. In the masque, the goddesses take a great deal of time discussing why Venus and her son Cupid should be banned from attending what by all rights should be a celebration of love. To understand the exclusion we must know the story of Ceres' daughter Proserpina,²⁰ and recognize the ideals not of love and beauty that Venus and Cupid represent but the temperance and chastity that the other goddesses idealize (mythic women and the ideals they personify reconstructed to realize this masculine utopic vision). One must be familiar with the mythic narrative because the masque repeats the play's structure and so sets the utopic present against the mythic past in order to realize the desired utopia. The masque uses the more temperate goddesses as a means to acknowledge the notable absence of the play's transgressive women, but because of their absence they are more actively present (a more oblique approach as access to the uncanny they promise). Women are left out of the masque, so it is no surprise then that the absent presence in this play is built most profoundly, as many critics have noticed, on the several absent mothers and daughters who are regularly discussed, and derided or defended in equal measure. Myth, as I have shown, was a critical vehicle for utopia because of the characters that Shakespeare could reimagine.

Perhaps more importantly, the mythification and utopicity so integral to these plays always require women, both absent and present, to facilitate that access. In the "Exotic in Shakespeare," John Gillies argues that myth is far more than just a resource in this play. He defines how its use as a tool to describe the narrative character of three recurring moments in the island's original "natural and moral history." These three geographic moments unfold poetically to distinguish the play's narrative progression and correspond respectively to the "voyages" of Sycorax, Prospero and

²⁰ Proserpina's abduction, according to Golding's *Metamorphoses*, left the world in a state of desire, or wanting: "The worlde did wante" (5.578), and this agrees with the masque's sense of always "almost" achieving. The foundation of the masque perpetuates the play's structure of both requiring origins, and keeping resolutions, and temptations, at bay and in progress.

Alonso (195). Each moment presents a generation, as Gillies writes, with its "identity and tropology":

The original moment [...] is a species of dispersal myth, governed by the trope of 'confusion'. The second moment is a species of 'plantation' myth, governed by the trope of separation. The third is a species of 'renewal' or regeneration myth, governed by the figure of *discordia concors* (and the emotion wonder) (192).

The play forges its own mythic narrative to create a sort of enclosed foundational text that applies the dynamics of colonialism in order to attempt to recreate the ideal in a new world. The complicated exchange of mythic narrative in Shakespeare's utopias is one of the reasons why *The Tempest* is considered more of a masque than a play, given that myths represented in masques were very popular in the Jacobean court. *The Tempest* was performed at Whitehall at least twice, the second time for the celebration of the marriage of James I's daughter, Elizabeth.²¹ The popularity of mythological masques is understandable given that James I's reign was captured in popular iconography as a golden age restored.²² Queen Elizabeth I, whose own reign had been similarly allegorized with her as a Faerie, or Virgin Queen, had to be reimagined when James, the new "foreign" king, came to the throne. Elizabeth built her myth by idealizing her own virtue and chastity, while James had to build his image by dismantling hers.

James had to be seen as reestablishing patriarchal authority through the restoration of conventional order, and this "restoration" is dramatized in the dynamic between the fallen Sycorax, and the incoming Prospero as patriarch. If Sycorax was her equivalent, Queen Elizabeth's mythos was expanded (and perhaps shattered) by that characterization: An exiled "witch" who failed to reproduce a legitimate heir while ruling over an island led only to the birth of monstrosity. Melissa Sanchez has read the

²¹ It was performed at Whitehall first in 1611 and then again later in winter 1612-13 (Vaughan 6).

²² According to Thomas Bulger, the "courtly masques of James I celebrate his monarchy as the apotheosis of the golden age restored. [...] James not only encouraged the comparison, but appropriated the myth as part of the official Stuart iconography. But by the time of *The Tempest's* performance, the court of James had become notorious for its excesses, including its drinking revels. The Stephano-Trinculo plot exposes this gap between the stated noble aspirations and the actual sordid practices at court" (41).

Elizabeth/James dynamic in *The Tempest* as a commentary on the requirements of Prospero's two servants, Ariel and Caliban. She argues that the memory of Sycorax "addresses the issue of sexual hierarchy that so frequently figured political order" and that "Prospero's vitriolic outburst in response to Ariel's demand for liberty may focus on Sycorax because for many, female rule signified an inversion of the patriarchal order on which Prospero's power rests" (60). Through Sycorax, Queen Elizabeth (who is also no longer present) is chastised for her failure to marry and bear children (a highly subversive decision for a reigning monarch). Sycorax is also the mother of an illegitimate monster whose own right to rule was questionable, which further implies this connection. Sanchez rightly points out that Sycorax's potential to reproduce was more threatening than the anxiety over the possibility of her sexuality outside of masculine control. Sycorax, whose presence is stronger in her absence than if we were to have met in her the course of the play, connects neatly with the unyielding social and cultural expectations of the chastity of the two Elizabeths: The absent Queen Elizabeth as her own mythology captured her, and the Princess Elizabeth for whom the masque was performed.²³ Prospero's anger at Ariel's request for liberty reflects the tension over Prospero's own tenuous authority over the island, as both the new King and the old Queen had troublesome mothers that offered them only an ambiguous right to rule England. The legitimacy of both their reigns rested on questions of gender and the role of the maternal in the patriarchal order. King James restores a better, truer Golden Age than the last because he "cast out" Elizabeth who inverted the natural order as an unmarried Queen and, furthermore, imprisoned and ultimately executed the good mother (Mary). After all, James I's spiritual treatise *Dæmonologie* (1597) supported the violent eradication of witches (which inspired Shakespeare to use the

²³ Sanchez further adds that Sycorax's pregnancy strengthened this connection because it "manifests a sexual liberty that refuses to submit itself to the controlling influences of husband or father, even as it evinces the reproductive capacities that Prospero lacks. Prospero's need to see his own legitimate rule reflected in purportedly natural gender roles may help explain his curious command to the newly repentant Ariel" (60).

King's interests in this play, and of course, in the witches of *Macbeth* (1611) that appeared at about the same time as *The Tempest*.

This connection is further complicated through the ambiguous origins of James's own authority over England that derived from the same two troublesome "mothers." His mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, spent 19 years in captivity and was labeled as seductive and bewitching, was accused of witchcraft, and was vilified for her Catholicism. His cousin, Queen Elizabeth, was the powerful and far more influential monarch on their shared island, and she regularly suggested the possibility, but never the certainty, of his succession. When he gained control of the Scottish throne in 1581 his mother, the legitimate Scottish regent who had a familial claim to the British throne, was alive but held in custody by Elizabeth. James's power emerged uncomfortably from between these warring queens: One whose treason and religion threatened his authority in Scotland, the other whose withheld choice would decide his future. Stephen Orgel considers this connection as reflecting the conflicting maternal image that engulfed not only James, but Elizabeth before him, between a chaste mother and a sensual witch: "For James, as for Elizabeth, the derivation of authority through paternity was extremely problematic" given that James's claim to the throne depended on Elizabeth naming him as such. Orgel then connects this detail to Prospero doubting Miranda's legitimacy, which Prospero accepts based on her mother's word alone. James understood that Elizabeth's hold on him was a "continuation of the protracted negotiations between Elizabeth and his mother," and this only added to the questioning of his legitimacy which was "derived from two mothers, the chaste Elizabeth and the sensual Mary, whom popular imagery represented respectively as a virgin goddess ('a piece of virtue') and a lustful and diabolical witch. James's sense of his own place in the kingdom is that of Prospero, rigidly paternalistic but incorporating the maternal as well (24-5).

Elizabeth's authority was ambiguous for surprisingly similar reasons: Her father divorced a legitimate queen in order to marry her own bewitching, troublesome mother

who was, like Mary, eventually executed. Elizabeth dismantled her mother's image by casting herself as the personification of chastity (the virgin Queen to her mother's adulterous traitor). Meanwhile, Elizabeth imprisoned and eventually assassinated James' mother (just as her own father did her mother) provoking James to revise history yet again to establish his own re-idealized authority. There are far too many parallels between James and Elizabeth's maternal heritages for this dynamic to be coincidental. The two monarchs during Shakespeare's career followed each other in their efforts to create utopias of their reigns by reinventing their maternal origins in order to assert their rights to authority and inspire hope that their reigns would prove utopic, or at least seem so to history.²⁴ Consequently, both monarchs had to incorporate the troublesome maternal and forge utopic allegories from that necessarily feminized space, but I would add that it was less an "incorporation" of the maternal, as Orgel suggests, than an absorption of the maternal as a means to the uncanny that has so often signaled utopia. Sycorax is vilified, but her absent presence expresses greater power and influence over the play's structure than Miranda's "good mother," whose name we never hear, but whose virtue is both celebrated and doubted in a single line: "Thy mother was a piece of virtue, and / She said thou wast my daughter" (1.2.56-57). In the wedding masque, Prospero conjures Ceres and Juno that were, as Orgel terms them, "two exemplary mothers," to preside over the masque ("Prospero's Wife" 55). The desire is to create a utopia within a utopia that will use the feminine to recreate the origins and form a more utopic ideal according to the patriarchal

²⁴ The unique complications and politics of Tudor and Stuart rule during Shakespeare's lifetime are reflected in *The Tempest* in several ways. Patricia Seed's "Caliban and Native Sovereignty" explores the early modern inheritance system that allowed for equal bilateral inheritance from both parents, which would have rendered Caliban's right to authority over the island "totally unexceptional," but in England, the system was "determinedly patrilineal." This would have been equally valid economically as biologically. The play's presentation of matrilineal inheritance both normalizes the transgressive reality of James' authority and, as Seed continues, "only in the counter-culture of Shakespeare's day [with] the culture of witches, was there a widely-known counterpoint to the dominant matrilineal system with a system of bilateral inheritance of traits. For English folklore acknowledged that witches could pass their gifts on to both female and male off-spring. Caliban's claim to inherit through his maternal line is illegitimate according to English understanding, but consistent with that maternal ancestor allowed Shakespeare—or at least Prospero—to produce a recognizably illegitimate female claim that could be easily dismissed by English audiences" (210).

requirements. In the masque, lack comes to center stage because the good mothers do not celebrate love or the upcoming virtuous marriage, but instead why Venus and Cupid, the bewitching mother and her son, *must* be excluded from the masque. In echoing the problem of absent women, even the utopic masque is fixated on who is not there instead of who is. The absent goddesses sustain the masque as the transgressive figures that should be there, but are not.

This trouble with mothers does not stop with the social reflections in the play's context. As the children of the island, Miranda and Caliban are both haunted by absent mothers who bind them to each other and the island. Miranda acting as Caliban's teacher only strengthens this connection.²⁵ The now familiar pattern of colonial dialogues equating newfound lands with the female body (and the social realities that would require her eventual availability), results in an emphatically utopian new world. Because they have always been part of utopia, Caliban and Miranda do not discuss their two absent mothers, nor do they voice a desire to return to the maternal, or regain the idealized origins that the maternal indicates. Miranda does not express sorrow or yearning for her lost mother, and Caliban calls upon his maternally derived right to the island, but does not wish for the days of Sycorax, or even the days before Prospero usurped his mother's rule of the island. The focus of his greatest utopic yearning is the time when he felt part of Prospero and Miranda's family. Jeffrey Knapp has argued that Caliban and Prospero's troublesome relationship is rooted in their problematic association with the authority over the island because both visions are fundamentally utopic because both "dream and control," but essentially are "lords of nothing and no-one." As Knapp continues, Caliban rules over "an island he does not know what to do with, and which has no women for him to populate with except for Miranda who is unattainable" and "Prospero, is lord and magus, but of air and ephemeral beings and

²⁵ Caliban was born on the island, and both were educated and spent their critical years together in a semi-sibling relationship, as Denise Albanese writes: "Miranda belongs to that island; indeed, given her extreme youth at the time of her father's exile, she belongs to it at least as much as she does to the world of the court [...] the representational practices of the European Renaissance position her as that island, and the social practices ensured that she did not remain uncolonized" (79-80).

magic" (225). Both rule over nowhere and command nothing, after all, Prospero's epilogue admits that what is overthrown is ultimately, only his "charms." Caliban strives for the authority his origins promise him, but he does not wish to return to the island under Sycorax, or before Prospero's arrival, but to *his* own prelapsarian days before his violent act (his own Fall) led to his enslavement. Prospero never even knew Sycorax, after all, and Caliban yearns for the Prospero of his discovery and speaks nostalgically of the time when he eagerly showed him all the "qualities o'th'isle" (1.2.338). The political concerns over maternal rights to authority are prevalent and reproduced in the play to honor the appropriate regent in order to rewrite the recent past for each regent's utopic purposes, as with both absent mothers whose authorities are rendered ephemeral, uncertain, and most importantly, in the past.

Women (either Queens or Witches) were as integral to the figuring of the colonial dialogue as they were to utopia, and their deprecating association with the supernatural and witchcraft was a part of the dialogue that instilled them with the transgressive qualities that needed to be "exorcised" if patriarchal order was to be restored. Sycorax is a transgressive figure, a powerful ruling woman in her own right, but in an effort to reaffirm masculine rule, her transgression is denounced as witchcraft. Ania Loomba, on the other hand, considers Sycorax as an Other to Prospero himself instead of an analogue to Elizabeth because of his "repeated comparisons between their different magics and their respective reigns of the island" which, she notes are used "to claim a superior morality, a greater strength and a greater humanity, and hence legitimise his takeover of the island and its inhabitants." Yet his reign over the island remains uncertain, and his repeated comparisons betray his anxiety that Sycorax's power has not been fully "exorcised" because the connections between witches and transgressive women, between witch-trials with the process of capital accumulation, and between the economic, ideological and sexual subordination of native women by colonial rule, are significant (145-146). Loomba's argument demonstrates how the play's evident colonial dialogue is only one of the ways it

conveys a complex social and political dialogue that confronts the anxiety over otherness. The play settles the threat of "otherness" on everyone from Stephano and Trinculo as "masterless men" to Miranda as the singular woman, and most emphatically on Caliban in his monstrosity, as Deborah Willis argues (277). In the play's exchange of otherness, the "core is played against the periphery," and Miranda as its singular "other" gendered being—the only woman—draws the several utopias inwards from the outside by representing the several absent women who stand at the play's periphery. She allows for the island's central utopic possibility as well as the peripheral restoration the play promises, or as Willis observes of the colonial dialogue of otherness: "The play should be understood as an extremely successful endorsement of the core's political order" and at the same time recognized for how it "registers anxiety about the legitimacy of peripheral colonial ventures and their ability to further core interests" (279). In the progression from Elizabeth to James, England grew to expand its boundaries, and this idealized insularity is reflected in Prospero's island.

There may be a great deal of the Shakespeare's political and social reality reflected on the island and its characters, but at the same time, there is also a fundamental otherness to the island that is most substantially felt in the play's negotiation of enclosure. Prospero's island, in its anonymity, is a more utopic space than Illyria. Shakespeare did not invent a name for the island, or even reach into antiquity for an exotic name. Like the islands in conventional utopias before and since, this island is uncharted, and once discovered, is described in great part by outsiders. Prospero twice refers to it as a "cell," suggesting not only enclosure in general, but a monastic dwelling in keeping with his original self-cloistering. The more conventional meaning in early modern usage was "a small room or apartment," which appears several times in reference to Prospero's private rooms. Prospero's initial uses of "cell" (both to Miranda) are expansive and encompass not just his private study chamber but also the whole island (1.2.20, 39). This grants the island simultaneous insularity and enclosure, and a contemplative atmosphere. The contrast between the two different

usages also grants the island a decided spatial flexibility by which it expands and contracts at Prospero's bidding. We cannot be certain that this island exists firmly in a physical sense, or if it is moveable and malleable depending on desire or need, a point only strengthened later when the castaways discuss Claribel's marriage, and Antonio asks, "What impossible matter will he make easy next?" Sebastian then answers, "I think he will carry this island home in his pocket and give it his son for an apple" (2.1.89-91). The "cell" stretches to become the island, shrinks to contain Prospero and his books, and even fits easily into a pocket as "impossible matter" made possible (and as an apple, consumable). It contains Prospero's utopia as easily as Gonzalo's, and similarly, moves from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean with comparable ease. Prospero's first word about the island conveys its enclosure but does so in a way that expands the potential of what the island might contain, the most relevant detail for his utopia is one of infinite knowledge.

When the lords discuss the island at the opening of 2.1 they assign the new land still greater utopic markers acting as the colonists they are. Adrian both idealizes and feminizes the island in much the same language as the discovery accounts: At first he empties it out, calling it a "desert" (37), then "uninhabitable and almost inaccessible" (40), the "almost" suggestive of its enclosure but also the treacherous passages described in discovery accounts to the New World, and recalls More's *Utopia* that could only be accessed by one who had been there before. The others disagree with Adrian's description, and each in turn adds his details to the description, some through bawdy and others through practicality, but each conveys a unique personification of the island:

Adrian:	It must needs be of subtle, tender, and delicate temperance.
Antonio:	Temperance was a delicate wench.
Sebastian:	Ay, and a subtle, as he most learnedly delivered.
Adrian:	The air breathes upon us here most sweetly.
Sebastian:	As if it had lungs, and rotten ones.
Antonio:	Or, as 'twere perfumed by fen.
Gonzalo:	Here is everything advantageous to life.
Antonio:	True, save means to live.
Sebastian:	Of that there's none, or little.

Gonzalo: How lush and lusty the grass looks! How green!
 Antonio: The ground indeed is tawny.
 Sebastian: With an eye of green in't.
 Antonio: He misses not much.
 Sebastian: No; he doth but mistake the truth totally (2.1.44-59).

The descriptions of the island shift radically between them: It goes from "desert" to abundance ('everything advantageous to life'), from "temperance" to excess ('lush and lusty'), and also contains both verdant "green" grass and "tawny" ground, it smells "sweet," but is also perfumed of "fen" and breathes with "rotten" lungs. All these conflicting, contradictory visions are simultaneously contained within the body of a land as delicate wench (as if each man is seeing something different at the same time). The island is personified and, as expected, feminized and colonized through descriptions that focus on substantive details. Utopian literature usually includes descriptions of the space, even when that space is on a stage and so would always already allow the audience their own vision. Recalling Viola's repeated descriptions despite her near constant presence on the stage in *Twelfth Night*, the island's repeated descriptions stimulates the senses much like Vespucci's description of the New World (see chapter 2).

One detail that carries over directly from More to Shakespeare is the need to create the utopic space as an insular and enclosed island that could reflect *the* island. Roland Greene has explored Shakespeare's use of the island in his article "Island Logic," and argues that *The Tempest* is "not only a function of insularity but a play of encounters" (139). Insularity and repeated encounters seem contradictory, but the play cleverly allows this contradiction by presenting a space that is at once isolated as it offers, in almost every scene, repeated encounters and reencounters. The construction of Prospero's island as "no-place" is a device for textual "worldmaking," according to Greene, through which "Shakespeare posits a plurality of worlds" through the play with Prospero (and perhaps Shakespeare-as-Prospero) acting as "worldmaker." On the island, the play "delivers a sequence of staged encounters among these worlds where encounter itself [...] is the business of drama." The New World discovery was also an

"encounter" because of the close parallels between world-making, insular enclosure, and encounters that are the business of drama, colonialism, and utopia as well. Of course, Prospero manipulates these encounters for his personal desires, but he seems much less in control of his place in the world than the "islanders" do. Ariel travels freely to and from the island (at least his journey to Bermuda suggests so) and is bound to Prospero (perhaps out of obligation for Prospero saving him). Caliban is tied to the island less ephemerally and more physically than Ariel because he is the only being we are certain was island-born, and there is no suggestion that he has ever, or will ever, leave because he lacks Ariel's magic, and apparently, his mother's powerful dark witchcraft. Prospero and Miranda, both from Europe, seem to be always in progress to elsewhere. Prospero controls the island and lives his ideal utopia in the play's here and now; Miranda is his ticket back home to the real, and the progression of the play performs that movement because the island itself must remain in progress.

Gonzalo presents the play's most recognizable example of a conventional utopia, which itself varies and shifts as often as the initial description of the island. For Gonzalo, it is both "plantation" and "commonwealth" (144, 148), which were two powerfully political terms that indicated the colonial efforts in Ireland, and the Tudor and Stuart politics defined by developing concepts of nation and political state. Both terms were deeply loaded for a royal servant to use about a land he imagines he could be master with no need for nobility or regents, or even private property because he could easily "feed [his] innocent people" with no need for labor or reward (165). The men make fun of his utopia, and while Gonzalo insists that he could govern the island as the Golden Age, Sebastian and Antonio conclude his tale by crowning him regent despite his pointed exclusion of "sovereignty" from his utopia (156). Sebastian proclaims mockingly: "Save his majesty!," and Antonio follows with, "Long live Gonzalo!" (169-170). In the face of such abstract utopic desires, it is the concrete that must be clarified and so it falls to the only true king amongst them, Alonso, to stop the discussion, which he does with this much-debated reference:

Alonso: Prithee, no more.
 Thou dost talk nothing to me.
 Gonzalo: I do well believe your highness, and did it to minister occasion
 to these gentlemen, who are such sensible and nimble lungs
 that they always use to laugh at nothing.
 Antonio: 'Twas you we laughed at.
 Gonzalo: Who, in this kind of merry fooling, am nothing to you, so you
 may continue and laugh at nothing still (2.1.172-179).

Alonso's first line has often been read as a pun on "More" (as in "Prithee, no *Thomas More*")²⁶ a reference said to be reinforced by the lines that follow as it debates the quality and humor of the "nothing" that is the central pun of More's *Utopia* as a no-land that is no-where and run by no-people (after all, Gonzalo, as a servant, would have been, socially speaking, no-one). Gonzalo's commonwealth changes the instant he imagines it, which makes it utopic, but the ill-mannered lords continue to mock Gonzalo about the constant progress that makes Gonzalo's utopia utopic: "The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning" (158-9). The court would have recognized this as "a kind of merry fooling," while "laughing at nothing" would have made it still more suggestive of the popular tangle of terms indicating *Utopia* in which the colonial, the political, and the social collided. The King equates Gonzalo's class-striving dream to "nothing," which is a particularly interesting given the way this play allows for utopic constructions by remaining in perpetual progress. It also supports the truth of the More reference especially given that including Thomas More, a Catholic champion, would have been an acknowledgment of King James' maternal origins and of the many divisive religious conflicts that plagued his (and Elizabeth's) reigns.

Shakespeare inherited the dialogue that granted More's *Utopia* its foundation, and as I have shown, he also included elements from the wealth of colonization accounts as a foundation. Each utopic theme influenced the construction of utopia as a place that More originally granted a name. Whether it is a constructed island given a map and language, or a flexible, allowing stage, there must be a "there"—a location—

²⁶ John X. Evans argues that the "quick and well educated playgoers in Shakespeare's audience might well have detected [this] play on words [and] the words 'merry fooling' may be an extension of the wordplay—fooling as a play on More's name [and] merry as an appropriately descriptive word for More's wit" (81).

to point to, even if it is nowhere. Robert Appelbaum explores the details of Gonzalo's commonwealth utopia and how it relies, fundamentally, on the perspective of the utopist and his or her interaction with utopia:

In order to want to occupy the position that Shakespeare shows Gonzalo wishing to occupy—one must first of all not be in possession of it. An ideal commonwealth can only come into existence—in the imagination, of nowhere else—because it is already not in existence. It is Not Here. It is Not Yet (48).

A utopist invents a utopia because of the absence of a space that is better than the real, and through the action of inventing that space the utopist “invents oneself, or at least re-invents oneself” by projecting outward the mastery of that ideal. In this scene, Appelbaum notes, as Shakespeare suggests, “the utopist inevitably confronts an insuperable gap between his creative practice and the object his practice has created.” In other words, Gonzalo believes he can move from outside the utopia he imagines, to inside the utopia as he imagines it, and once there, he can become the king of his ideal commonwealth. Appelbaum argues that the two positions Gonzalo wants to inhabit (outside and inside the utopia at once) are “logically incompatible: not only because in this particular case a king is being placed to rule over a republic without any kings, but more fundamentally because designing and founding an ideal society is incompatible with living in one.” Gonzalo's dream of power will be “inevitably alienated from itself” because “it cannot be both the creating subject of utopia and one of its created objects (48). The problem is not Gonzalo forgetting how he begins his commonwealth that creates a contradiction (what the other men laugh at), but that his position in relation to the commonwealth he defines leads to a dissonance that prevents the other men from accessing his utopia. After all, only a utopia could demonstrate the flexibility that would not fall apart because of contradiction. Appelbaum is recalling the *hic et nunc* that is critical to utopia and applies it to Gonzalo and his imagination. Shakespeare brings audiences to the precipice that must be endlessly approached, but never reached, or the “insuperable gap” at the end of his “brinkmanship,” as we saw earlier.

Similarly, Miranda has to be within the island, and *of* the island, so that those coming into the island can find their utopias, but she has to be of Europe at the same time. Miranda is the crux of this play's utopic potential; her presence in the ideal space allows for the utopia of everyone on the island, but she must be of the real world as well, or the utopia would not be possible. She must be its beginning and its end simultaneously to sustain the here and now of utopia. Olivia may have promised utopia was accessible because of Viola, but Miranda's presence alone allows utopia because she completes the circle and ensures its perpetual movement as both mirror and object. She is everyone's means to utopia, and her removal from the island will result in the loss of utopia. Moreover, Prospero faces much the same problem as Gonzalo.

Returning to Roland Greene's study of the island in *The Tempest*, he writes:

[Prospero] can be depicted only within and from the horizon of the island. A mainland Prospero would challenge representation: he would be power itself, seen without shadings or perspectives. Accordingly, *The Tempest* uses the vantages of encounters and islands to offer predictions about the magic of early modern worldmaking (139).

The audience enters the play on the island, along with the sailors, and never leaves. For the stage to maintain the utopia, the audience must not be anywhere but the island in the here and now. To achieve its utopia, the play must be maintained *in media res*, and so the characters spend most of their time recounting the history that brought each of them to the island, what they *plan* on doing on the island (instead of actually doing it), what they hope to do in order to leave, or when they will leave; the island is always "almost." Critically, the singular character with no concern for what came before or what is to come, is Miranda, who must remain always present and focused on the persistent fluidity she brings to the play. Miranda is associated almost entirely with what her eyes see because her will and desire progress through the new experiences she witnesses along with the reader/audience. When we meet her, her concern is for the ship she sees dashed by the storm, then for the story told to her, then for the reality of Caliban's presence (it is not she who mentions the attempted

rape, but her father). In that moment, she does not discuss what happened because of the attack, but her reasoning *at the time* she taught him to speak:

Being capable of all ill; I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or other. When though did'st not, savage
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purpose with words that made
them known (1.2.354-359).

She does not speak of the past as moment in the past, but discusses her reasoning at the time and only as explanation for his current imprisonment. As the play continues, Miranda discovers Ferdinand and describes him first as a wonder and later as a suitor when she visits him while he works. Her final appearance in the play is in the conclusion when she evokes the brave new world before her. Miranda is completely in the moment, and progresses from one moment to the next; she never reaches fulfillment, but is also never static. Unburdened by either the oppressive real of the past or the fleeting hope for the future, she is free and unmoored, fluid and progressive, and able to grant the island the movement it requires to remain so by following her. The men, on the other hand, are always stuck waiting for another time and another place. Caliban, for instance, came to the island in his mother's womb, but his utopia requires taking possession of the island through Miranda because he failed to possess it through Sycorax. The difference is that there is never an indication that Caliban is ever leaving, and his description as not being "honoured with / A human shape" (283-384) suggests that all that result from remaining static on the island is monstrosity.

Prospero's island, then, is a tool with which we could reflect on world making instead of a space that could be exclusively absorbed as the Old World would the New World. Colonial efforts made and destroyed worlds, and often struggled to remake them again as history demanded. Encounters resulting from the discovery were the focus of the accounts because when the familiar and the foreign collided, "wonder" ensued as the central distinguishing medium. Greene outlines encounters as a two-

staged event in which something is first “counted, recounted, and then interpreted” as if the back-stories are (re)counted as they are commodified in their interpretation. The story is also bound to the “making of identity” because it must take place between opposing agents like the self and other (139). Prospero’s island takes advantage of the specific qualities in islands that shift the viewer’s perception from “wonder” towards “utopia.” Islands were able to sustain the anxiety of the unknown and over the control of/or possession of the land (as woman). This quality drove Utopos to make an island out of Utopia by dividing it from the mainland, and Shakespeare conveyed this in the play. Greene further argues that More’s text “establishes insularity as an early modern vantage: it introduces a way of thinking that is properly called utopian, and opens the prospect of a more dispersed and multifarious phenomenon,” what Greene calls “island logic” (140). To think utopically requires an insularity that can facilitate enclosure. The discovery accounts participated in this dialogue and applied utopia to the New World recalling many of the same themes.²⁷

The Old World struggled with instability of national borders because of conflict over power and possession of land, but felt secure in the knowledge that nations shared borders. Regardless of where one drew that border, it was always locatable. However, an island’s borders gave the comfort of enclosure, but conveyed anxiety over the foreign unknown that its insular detachment suggested. Islands were also self-supportive, which indicated that the inhabitants, no matter how “savage,” had no real need of the West to “civilize” them. For Shakespeare to so radically dismantle and attack the power structures and economic institutions as he does in this play, even if

²⁷ “Islands make possible the observation of their own constructedness, and the constructedness of other measures of the world, because they enforce certain clarity: they have definable borders, they are conceptually autonomous from the world at large, and they encourage attention to the conditions of indigeneity and importation. In this last-mentioned dimension especially, islands often undermine some of the mystifications of capital and power. Suddenly, in the light of island logic, the exertions with which capital fashions a world according to its own unquestioned values come to look like exertions; we are encouraged to notice the trail of investment that furnishes the island with people and materials, and quite simply—those whose power is untraceable and natural elsewhere are much more easily questioned. When Shakespeare chooses his first and only island setting for an entire play, then, he is finding his own way through a trope that reliably undoes the world as his audience knows it” (Greene 140).

he restores order to the same dynastic powers, he had to move the players into a space that allowed for the social leveling; an island was the most specific, familiar, trope for a space of allowability and was, therefore, increasingly equated with utopian literature. What remains are questions regarding the construction of the island as utopia, and how that utopia is dismantled in preparation for the return, or restoration of the real? Critical to this thought process is how everyone on the island, save for Caliban, leaves for somewhere far less insular. Prospero and Miranda, and those that filled the ship, foresee a return to Italy while Ariel will return to "freedom" in the spiritual sense that his character embodies and personifies (although where and what form that freedom will take is never described). For Caliban, there is no return; instead, there is only stasis and indigeneity (although there is a restrained concession in his final appearance, he is never wholly redeemed or considered worthy enough to bring home as family). He is what is native and wild in Greene's "island logic" because he represents neither progression nor return. He was born on the island of a foreign mother and has no other claim to any less insular space. The island nurtures all that is monstrous and threatening in Caliban, but also safely encloses him. If Miranda facilitates the utopic potential of the island, then Caliban hinders it from fully becoming, which captures both in a tug and pull that must remain in perpetual simultaneity to sustain the utopia.

More granted his island a nameless name, imagined it in overwhelming detail in terms of shape and social organization, and even granted it a map, language, history, and government, but he hid the final clue of its location. Shakespeare, on the other hand, manages to give us both less than and more than More (if viewed directly, but from the corner of the eye). In part, we fail to discover the location of *Utopia* because every tale leading us to the island is recounted second-hand, or rather, obliquely. Unlike More who remains the utopist outside his utopia, Shakespeare disregards the problem of perspective and leaves his island positioned obliquely because he leaves one always on the island as it is played before us. We only follow its immigrants as they

tell the tale of the “real” world off the island, and thus, the real feels just as unreal as the ideal space of the play. This recalls, once again, the uncanny. Shakespeare’s island shares a sense of the uncanny because Prospero’s island is “uninhabited and almost inaccessible” (like More’s womb-island). Confronting the same detail, Crystal Bartolovitch considers how the no-place of the play is demonstrated in contemporary performance (it is nowhere, but it is somewhere because it was performed in London). In Bartolovitch’s reading, London is “understood as a world city,” and associating *The Tempest* with London indicates how *unheimlich* it had become: “In other words, what is ‘most local’ about the play is that ‘the local’ in which it is performed has been irreducibly undermined, such that its location is in certain respects as indeterminate as Caliban’s island” (21). Freud associated the uncanny as an effect of experiences with “infantile beliefs,” such as animism and magic; a “rational adult” must reject those beliefs. In this context, the uncanny is discovered in the unexpected moment when the irrational seems rational, and then complicates and questions the boundaries between the two understandings. To this, Bartolovitch adds, *The Tempest* is more “set” or “unsettled” in London and this captures what she calls the “open-endedness” of the play’s “indeterminate location, its familiar-unfamiliarity.” For a play so heavily concerned with distance, she continues, “its island is also a place where distance is collapsed” (24). The uncanny effect emerges in utopia, according to Bartolovitch, as a psychological illustration of the impulses that force one to transgress boundaries; utopia promises the possibility of improvement upon the reality that inspired the formation of those boundaries in the first place. Spatial dimensions are essential to the conception of the uncanny in utopia.

The sense of drawing new worlds, *any* new worlds, as the origin is uncanny, but the process is recognizable in several utopias that recreate or reclaim origins. Meredith Ann Skura considers the diverse utopias that emerge in *The Tempest* in light of the discovery accounts that posited the New World as a classical golden age or prelapsarian

world:²⁸ “We take for granted the historical conditions generating utopian visions [...]. What the example of Caliban’s childish presence in the play suggests is that for Shakespeare the desire for such utopias—the golden worlds and fountains of youth—has roots in personal history as well as in ‘history’” (67). This is clearer in *The Tempest* than in any of Shakespeare’s earlier plays, as Skura argues, because many of the characters’ utopic visions are, indeed, “infantile.”²⁹ The play’s interruptions and failed infantile utopias also dramatize the limitations of binary constructions. These limitations connect to Shakespeare’s dramatic borrowings from the New World accounts and indicate the simultaneous transgression of those binaries. The two inspire equally conflicting visions of reality vying for expression in the theatrical space of allowable access to the uncanny origins, and the easy slippage between binary infant desires (the maternal for Caliban, social freedom for Gonzalo, or dedication to the study of mythic origins for Prospero) and the “real” rationalization that prevent them from realization. Skura emphasizes the sense of uncanny access to maternal origins by indicating the possibility of incest in Prospero’s relationship with Miranda. According to Skura, Prospero must repress any sexual desire he feels toward Miranda and then seamlessly project those feelings “onto the fishily phallic Caliban [as] a walking version of Prospero’s own ‘thing’ of darkness” (60). Caliban is thus less a native cannibal savage, and more of an equal to Ariel who is a spiritual extension of Prospero as much as Caliban represents his material presence. There is no overt sexuality between

²⁸ David Norbrook argues that each character in the play strives for their individual utopias, and writes that “utopian discourse pervades the play” and that “every character has some kind of vision of society that would transcend existing codes and signs” (168). He further argues that “all of the play’s Utopian ideals, not excepting Ariel’s, come up for ironic scrutiny in the course of the play, precisely because of the idealism that refuses to recognise the material constraints of existing structures of power and discourse” (172).

²⁹ “Caliban’s utopia [...] draws most directly on the infantile substratum that colored Columbus’s report when he returned from his third voyage” (when he was convinced that the new world was shaped like a breast). The play’s “other utopias” draw on it too, as Skura continues: “Gonzalo’s utopia is more socialized [...] Prospero’s pageant utopia is more mythic [...] but, like Caliban’s, their utopias recreate a union with a bounteous Mother Nature. And, like every child’s utopia, each is a fragile creation, easily destroyed by the rage and violence that constitute its defining alternative—a dystopia of murderous vengeance; the interruption of Prospero’s pageant is only the last in a series of such interruptions. Each is the creation of a childish mind that operates in binary divisions: good mother/bad mother, love/rage, brother/Other” (Skura 67-8).

Prospero and Miranda, Prospero (and Ferdinand's) obsessive concern with her chastity, and his violent response to Caliban's threat to it, punctuates this anxiety over sexual access to Miranda that reveals the conflict over a "desire" in him that might have proven too easily gained.

Miranda is most precariously positioned between accessibility and closure because, on the island, social conventions governing the role of women have not (and do not) apply. Just how far must one transgress before such conventions progress to the ultimate taboo? R.E. Gajdusek explores the dynamics of the incest taboo in *The Tempest*; he writes that there is an "incestuous base" to the image of a father alone on an isle with his daughter, especially given that Prospero "finds a way at last of displacing to the son of his friendly surrogate brother [the] care for his daughter." Gajdusek notes that Prospero redeems the future from the past by freeing his daughter "from the fate of the mother" by which he also rescues humanity itself from "incestuous introversion." The effect of Prospero's redemption is a frustration of the "historical challenge" of Sycorax who is a "cyclical goddess who would through her son Caliban bring again chaos." Ultimately incest becomes a metaphor for "the dissolution of consciousness, the breakdown and yielding of the ego to the primal material from which it once emerged" and furthermore "is the fundamental pan-humanistic metaphor for regression to the original state of undifferentiated unconsciousness in oroboric introversion in the womb of the Great Mother" (158). Once again we (re)encounter the circular structure of utopia, the reality that a desire to return to the origin, maternal or otherwise, is expressed as a desire to regress to an original state that conflates the beginning and the endings and leads into images of endless circularity, here the endless O's of Oroborus that leads only ever back again to the accessible womb. Gajdusek's metaphor for incest illustrates utopic completion and dystopic self-consumption in perfect, balanced, circularity. The Oroborus of Platonic and allegorical, alchemical and emblematic fame was one of the many original mythological beings: An immortal, perfectly constructed, circular snake that ate its own tail into infinity. Plato described

it in *Timeaus* as “a figure that has the greatest degree of completeness and uniformity, as he judged uniformity to be incalculably superior to its opposite [...] its creator thought that it was better for it to be self-sufficient than dependent on anything else” (45). This mythic figure of perfect unity, far more perfect than even the cosmogonic tales of singularly or multiply gendered beings suggest, represents utopia as perfectly simultaneous, both having Miranda and keeping Miranda un-had. Oroborus, usually allegorized as a snake, is not a binary being in conflict with two gendered sides, but a creature of such unity it has no need for eyes because it does not need anything outside of itself. Like the audience, we will need nothing more than Miranda’s eyes on the stage. The possibility of such perfect unity is the anxiety evoked by the threat of incest, or of truly returning to the maternal origin. Prospero had to resist this potential if he hoped to reinstate the society (and its taboos) that the real world required to restore the dynastic order and the surety of binary gender division.

The Tempest is thus structurally and thematically utopic, not only in how it constructs ideal spaces (although it does that), and not only through the less obvious allegorical themes like masques and tableaux, but in its overall construction, development and resolution. Shakespeare did not need to mention utopia, but More was on his mind more than the specific dynamics of the New World, something often forgotten in the play’s Americanization (as is the occasion for which it was written): A festive royal engagement defining a dynastic contract, fairly intimate to the King’s family and political to his regency.³⁰ After all, the play begins and ends with the political marriages of two royal daughters: Claribel who married before the start of the

³⁰ Vita Fortunati notes that “The real utopia is not that described in Gonzalo’s speech, but the Court of Naples, when the legitimate rulers will be restored to the kingdom. [...] Shakespeare shows that he is well aware that More’s Utopia could not be tolerated by James I who, as well as promoting the principle of divine right, also demanded total obedience from his subjects. [...] Shakespeare, like other Court poets and writers of masques, never uses the word utopia: in Gonzalo’s speech this is in fact substituted with the terms ‘commonwealth’ and ‘plantation.’ This gives an idea of the extent to which, in Shakespeare’s times, the word utopia already carried ambiguous and politically threatening connotations. “Utopia” could in fact be used to refer to a no-where, an imaginary and fantastic land which could become an easy target for satire, alternatively it could also refer to a place ‘other,’ where political experiments outside of what was deemed as normal, could be carried out” (100).

play, and Miranda who will be married after its end; we experience neither marriage. *The Tempest* is, in a sense, “an authentic masque which celebrates not merely a real marriage, but also an allegorical marriage which refers to a political bond aimed at restoring a ‘legitimate’ dynastic order previously threatened” (Fortunati 99).³¹ These two “absent” marriages, along with the suggestion of the restoration of the former order (in James replacing Elizabeth), are acknowledged in the play’s masque. After all, masques were liminal and categorized as a genre “in-between” different forms (consider its Italian theatrical equivalent the *intermedio*). Shakespeare would have been aware of the play’s audience and greatest patron, and the well-established history of the masque. In the same breath that Shakespeare considers the transgressive possibility of utopia (or *Utopia*), he must restore order for the sake of the real world that cannot contain (or enclose) the critical transgression utopia demands. The restoration of the dynastic order had to be suggested, and yet, the critical difference is that we can still imagine all manner of alternative utopic possibility in *The Tempest*.

Miranda, whose name evokes a form of “wonder,” and whose entire presence in the play is predicated by visual encounters, allows us to see the real (Old World) from the perspective of the ideal (a new world, or the New World). Her presence both signals the play’s utopia and facilitates the others’ individual utopias. John Gillies considers the thematic place of wonder in the play from its colonial context and argues that Miranda represents the “idiom” of wonder in multiple senses, both as its pathos and ethos. He writes that her name “represents a gerundive form of the Latin mirror/*mirari*, thus ‘fit to be wondered at’” (182). In name and action, she is both the “mirror” and the object seen, and embodies the uncanny simultaneity these plays strive for because wherever and whenever Miranda appears, she introduces an encounter and the wonder that accompanies it. This play *does* begin with the shipwreck, as so many adaptations of *Twelfth Night* tried to allow for, but Miranda’s

³¹ For a detailed reading of the royal wedding in the play, in contrast to the New World dialogue, see Richard Wilson’s “Voyage to Tunis: New History and the Old World of *The Tempest*”.

observation and words alone convey our encounter with the island, and Prospero's powerful hand in the magical tempest. She is the first inhabitant we meet, and even more so, we see the tempest through her wonder, and we feel her desire that Prospero stop: "If by your art, my dear father, you have / Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them" (1.2.1-2). Far less than always doing what she is told, or being manipulated to act as others wish, Miranda demands from the start her vision and intention: *If* you are doing this, then *stop!* That these are her very first words on stage introduce this play, immediately, from the position of *her* frame of mind. She will speak against her father's desires, and even when her father wills her to sleep, she is disobedient when she sees fit. Her father introduces her to Ferdinand, and *her* wonder *at him* is the medium through which we experience the moment:

Prospero:	The fringed curtains of thine eye advance, And say what thou seest yond.
Miranda:	What is't, a spirit? Lord, how it looks about. Believe me, sir, It carries a brave form. But 'tis a spirit.
Prospero:	No, wench, it eats and sleeps and hath such senses As we have—such. This gallant which thou seest Was in the wreck, and but he's something strained With grief (that's beauty's canker) thou mightst call him A goodly person. He hath lost his fellows And strays about to find 'em.
Miranda:	I might call him A thing divine, for nothing natural I ever saw so noble (1.2.409-419).

There is an immediate focus on seeing, or on vision as the conveyer of description, not allowing what the audience perceives before them on the stage, but instead insisting that we see what Miranda sees. It is her wonder, and her role as wonder (her place as the mirror for what we will see, and her role as wondrous) offering the ideal and the real at once. Prospero does not say, "Do you see that man over there" instead, he asks her "What do you see?" Our access to this new world requires Miranda's body—her eyes—and her representation of its possibility and her description for it to become ideal. Miranda answers with a question logical to her position on an island normally peopled only with spirits, her father, and Caliban whom they have just left. Prospero

then follows her remark by offering more information on what is still an “it” and “a gallant,” before he names him a “he.” The momentary presence of Ferdinand as a spirit in this initial introduction suspends him above gender, keeps him “spirit” and “it” until Prospero grants him the appropriate gender. Ferdinand remains in the realm of the visual and is described in the act of seeking his lost friends. Miranda accepts his gender, but refuses his corporeality maintaining that he must be divine and supernatural.

This moment exemplifies a dynamic in the play that centers on Miranda as conduit for utopic possibility. Miranda here (and elsewhere) displays a very subtle determination in writing her own vision of the world, despite her father’s persistent manipulations. Prospero may want to use her to restore the lost order and break the bounds of the island, and in truth, requires her if he wishes to do so, but she will not go quietly. She will name Ferdinand divine if she so wishes, despite his human self, just as she will correct Ferdinand when he couples her with divinity and wonder:

Ferdinand:	Most sure goddess On whom these airs attend! [...] My prime request, which I do last pronounce, is (O, you wonder!) If you be maid or no?
Miranda:	No wonder, sir, But certainly maid. (1.2.424-429)

She is no goddess, and not a “wonder” but a maid (a quality she claims with certainty). Historically, Miranda was seen as an emblematic goddess because of the tendency to listen to the men around her and, through their descriptions, embody the artistic and emblematic figures that captured women within patriarchal ideals: She is “goddess” to Ferdinand and “cherubim” to Prospero. Only she insists that we ignore their descriptions and listen to *her* words about herself: She is “no wonder.” Earlier, she makes sure to note that if she had her father’s “divine” powers, she would not play with others in such an irresponsible way:

Had I been any god of power, I would
Have such the sea within the earth or ere
It should the good ship so have swallowed and

The fraughting souls within her (10-13).

She resists their emblematic divinity repeatedly, and insists on her real existence rather than as the ideal they would have her become, but she still inhabits the position as both her own real and their masculine ideal. Utopia relies on her, she inhabits it, and as such, it is hers to command. Still, she never ceases to insist upon herself by defending Ferdinand from her father's libel, and disobeying his uncivil enslavement of Ferdinand to uncover her name to him. Prospero may have maneuvered the two together, but Miranda grants the active visual effect of both wonder and mirroring to the lovers: "At first sight / They have changed eyes" (441-442), suggesting an even exchange not only of love but of perspective and vision, and of constructing ideals within the real: they have become wonders through, and to, each other. The moment depends on Miranda's present vision because she saw Ferdinand for what he was and instigated the exchange; she sees him first, and watches him without his knowledge. By changing eyes, Ferdinand has managed to stare at his own ideal, and to allow his paradise, his utopia, to be facilitated and embodied through her eyes: "Let me live here ever! / So rare a wondered father and a wise / Makes this place paradise" (4.1.122-124). "Wonder," granted to the father, frames the final access to his paradise, a newfound father to inspire wonder.³²

As the play progresses past 3.1, in which the lovers discuss Ferdinand's labors, their mutual affection, and eventual agreement to marry, Miranda becomes silent until her next appearance in 4.1 when Ferdinand and Prospero discuss the surety of her chastity. She is silent, but present, as they discuss the wonder of the feminine mythical masque. Aside from her brief concern for her father's temper (4.1.144-145), the next

³² There is a long debated analysis of Ferdinand's "wise" in this quote, as many editions assumed a typesetting error that turned "wise" to the more inclusive "wife." The closest inspection of the original Folio seems to indicate it is "wise" (Vaughan, Introduction 136-138). The suggestion is, of course, whether Ferdinand would have included Miranda in his view of Paradise, or only his new, powerful, authoritative father-in-law as a replacement of his lost father. This would then render his paradise dynastic and predicate the island's ideality on his marriage to Miranda. My reading suggests that each man's utopia relies on Miranda, and Ferdinand's paradise needed the "wife" before he could reach the "wondered father and a wise" in any case. Nevertheless, the connection to "wondered" would include Miranda as the wonder of his utopia in either case.

time we hear from Miranda is at the point of two major encounters of wonder, once again, facilitated by her presence and predicated on a two-way vision of her as simultaneous subject and object. The first, when Prospero uncovers Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess before the shipwrecked people creating a tableau of the lovers upon the stage, and second, with her final lines in the play. From the onset, she was written as wonder, but her final lines suggest that she has willfully shifted the focus at this final point from her *as* wonder, to her *own* wonder through which we can access the ideal: "O wonder! / How many goodly creatures are there here! / How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world / That has such people in't" (5.1.181-184). We must, once again, consider the old world from within the utopia, and from Miranda's perspective through which the old and new worlds fuse. Prospero's answer restores the desired patriarchal perspective: "'Tis new to thee" (184), and in one fell swoop not only silences her wonder but restores the real to the ideal we are all experiencing.

From Miranda's final declaration onwards, every story and rebellion is restored. John Gillies has studied this final exchange in "The Figure of the New World in *The Tempest*" in which he argues that Miranda's observation of the Europeans alters the perspective of the colonial expectation through which the native observes the European as "gods" because she sees them not as divine, but as "mankind," and in reversing the perspective, they do not see her as native "other" but rather as one of themselves. For Shakespeare, the colonial encounter "is exclusively a European affair" (181). Of Miranda, Gillies follows convention and reads her as "an embodiment of wonder and exemplar of renewal" that implicates her "feminizing and sexualizing" the New World themes. In his critical discussion of her final lines, he focuses on Miranda's perspectival position:

Raised in isolation [...] Miranda looks on human beings as a species for the first time, recognizing in them a "world" of beauty, goodness and Utopian possibility. Miranda experiences no direct experience of "human" (as distinct from native) depravity, she misses what Prospero sees: creatures whose potential is perpetually cancelled by their history (194).

This moment between Prospero and Miranda is a “stand-off” between two visions—one of wonder the other of irony—that could only ever “disallow each other.” However, neither vision is privileged because wonder is “an emotion which Renaissance artists associated not merely with children but with poetry as prophecy” and irony, as Prospero uses it here, as “the ‘knowing’ response to history of being perpetually consumed by it” (180). Gillies still privileges the “knowledge” of the real world, its failures, and its people that Prospero possesses and Miranda lacks, and he sees this disparity as Miranda “missing” the real because of her privileged location in the ideal. Alternatively, this can suggest that Prospero, tainted by the real, is missing the unity and ideal that Miranda immediately recognizes. Gillies argues that these perspectives cancel each other out, but his argument privileges Prospero’s “real” rather than Miranda’s “ideal.” Both exist simultaneously, are filtered through Miranda, and both “define” and “disallow” each other at once in an illustration of her power in the play and her position from (and as) utopia.

Like Viola among the critics, Miranda has been simultaneously idealized and devalued. She has been described usuriously as “a pawn,” conceptually as “walking emblem,” (Leininger 228), or as Jessica Slights has summarized: “Miranda appears either as an archetype of pliant womanliness or as an allegorical, sentimentalized figure for the tender and fecund aspects of untamed nature” (360). Slights goes on to insist that Miranda must be read actively, “as a moral agent in her own right” (376) and that her romance with Ferdinand is evidence of “a crucial opportunity for Miranda to derive a sense of herself as an agent in the world” (364), even with the reality that “her world is dominated by powerful men whose overwhelming preoccupations with questions of lineage necessarily limit her choices” (376). Despite the real presence of patriarchal dynamics that would (and still) use her for their own ideals, Miranda is a recognizable, and an *admirable*, presence in the play. Miranda is the axis upon which every utopia rests because each utopia required her (using much the same language as colonialism). The fact that she is the only woman on the island only makes her gender

the central significant quality of her presence. However, her presence demonstrates fluidity, and that inspired Ann Thompson to ask if the play would have worked the same way if Prospero had had a son ("Miranda, Where is your Sister?" 158). From a related perspective, as Frank Kermode observes, "there is nothing in *The Tempest* fundamental to its structure of ideas which could not have existed had America remained undiscovered" (xxv). Here is the key to *The Tempest's* role as a utopia, and to utopia's reliance on the Woman. Without America, *The Tempest* would have been feasible, but without Miranda, it would have been impossible. Prospero's son could have easily fallen in love with a daughter of Milan, but each man's utopia requires an accessible woman that is also inaccessible. When Miranda leaves the island, she must marry and relinquish her power; with the restoration of dynastic order and the gender binary it demands, utopia fades.

Furthermore, Thompson focuses on the play's obsessive concern with themes of chastity and fertility that emphasized Miranda's role as representative of woman and the many themes that are often "specifically associated with female sexuality." She compares them to several tropes: From the failing feminized "leaky" boat, to Antonio's treachery being born of Prospero's failures (158).³³ Miranda's presence as both powerful and passive is essential because she plays a crucial role in the power dynamic, but is so enclosed she has "no way out." As I have argued, Miranda speaks to her progression in the play while still participating in the dynamic that would both use her as utopia and enclose her within that utopia. She speaks to her future outside of the island even while not yet seeing how it will come about because she must be "dependent" in order to express and gain her independence. Through it all, in her pointed isolation, Miranda is no pure allegory (Viola, as I have noted, was also considered an empty allegorical presence). Instead, she becomes (like the play itself) a

³³ "On the one hand [the text] seems to deny the importance—and even in some cases the presence—of female characters, which simultaneously attributes enormous power to female chastity and fertility. [...] Prospero must control Miranda's sexuality before he hands her over to Ferdinand. Alonso [...] formerly controlled Claribel's sexuality, but the play is ambivalent about his decision. [...] Men are seen as capable of controlling the fertility of nature, and Prospero even controls Ceres, the goddess of harvests" (Thompson 161-4).

“touchstone,” as Melissa Sanchez writes: “Miranda’s isolation is neither inconsequential nor entire; in actuality, she is the touchstone for the women who enter the play via its tissue of allusions and whose presence makes legible a contemporary political discourse that likened the relation of sovereign and subject to that of husband and wife” (50).

Central to the masculine utopias that would enclose her, but as an anchor for the absent women, Miranda’s presence depends on the masculine ideal of the play. As Sanchez continues, “Prospero’s restoration hinges on her marriage. [...] Miranda’s spontaneous attraction leaves no doubt that she is entering into this union willingly—so willingly, in fact, that she begins to echo Ariel and Caliban’s defiance of Prospero’s authority” (66). We could read in Miranda’s defiance (like Ariel and Caliban’s) the seeds of her own utopic endeavor of asserting her position and presence from within the structures that would define her because the ending, the restoration, “hinges” on her just as it has on revealing heroines in the earlier plays. No matter where the play locates Miranda, she is always at its center, and it migrates around her whether through access to her, or in protection of her. The island is a utopic space, and she is far less an empty allegory than the play seems to be saying. She has the freedom of an education, and of critical connection with the foreign that leaves her outside the conventions of social expectations for a woman of her class, and in that “natural” state, she can enjoy the freedom utopia offers to her (and women in general) by the very grace of utopia existing through her.

Utopic simultaneity is always coupled with gender fluidity, and so, aside from Miranda, the other two satellites to Prospero’s strategies towards restoring the real from within the ideal are Ariel and Caliban. Both characters sit at very different positions in the play, and each complicates gender in equally diverse ways. Prospero also inhabits, in keeping with the play’s utopic structure, a simultaneous position as “both the incarnation of the problem and the source of its solution” because he recognizes the play’s subtle truth that “the potential for equality and community

cannot be divorced from the structures of domination in which it is rooted" (Ryan 47).³⁴ No character can settle down while in utopia, but Prospero's position requires that he contend with Caliban who inhabits a physically real position in conflict with Ariel as his elusive spiritual ideal. Caliban is most profoundly feminized through the master-servant dynamic, but also through the paradigmatic carnival grotesque. Caliban introduces the grotesque to the play; his close association with his mother also connects him to her witchcraft. No one discusses him in the play without adding a reference to his mother, and even he repeatedly refers to his right to the island because of his mother. Prospero refers to Sycorax when he is discussing Caliban even when Caliban is not present: Whatever he has been to Prospero and Miranda, he is always the child of a witch.

The island is acknowledged as a feminine space repeatedly, whether through its utopian dialogue, its colonial echo of a New World as woman, or through its use of mythological origins, and it is also transformative, but more magical than grotesque. If the grotesque is present on the island, it is through Caliban who has no need for metamorphic transformation. Witchcraft is his inheritance, and the magic of transformation is a critical part of this. Marina Warner considers this connection to the feminine grotesque and associates Sycorax to the mythological Circe.³⁵ The grotesque in *The Tempest* emerges as more transgressive (and utopic) than one would initially sense because of the island's magic, or as Warner describes it, the grotesque is "the aesthetic genre that obeys no principles, only whims, just as witchcraft is the practice of power that disobeys nature's laws of propriety." Through that potentiality, it also

³⁴ On Prospero's role in the play, Robert Pierce argues that "he is the chief giver of freedom in a play that glorifies freedom, but he can play that role only because he is also the chief enslaver, as is vividly dramatized in the enslavement of Ariel and Caliban and the mock-enslavement of Ferdinand. Prospero is a complex character—irascible, manipulative, and occasionally forgetful—yet to most readers and viewers he is on the whole likable, even admirable [...] because his project seems aimed at benefiting everyone" (384-5).

³⁵ "It revisits a Circean realm of grotesque transformation, but whereas in Homer and in Ovid the enchantress's world belongs in the divine perspective of eternity, the play closes with the renunciation of magic by Prospero, and of the metamorphoses and mutations consequent to its processes. [...] Ariel does not change into a sea-nymph or a harpy simply for the purposes of entertainment; the island domain of Sycorax is also a feminine space, and its aberrations—its rough magic—are implicitly effected by the suppressed witchcraft that is Caliban's inheritance" (112).

allowed authors to express “contemporary inventions” because it “combined the newly discovered with the newfangled to produce hybrids and monsters” and could also “communicate the splendours, the savagery, the sheer whimsical novelty of the brave new world” (113). Invention, discovery, hybridity, splendor and savagery, and whimsy and novelty are all liminal and transgressive elements that ultimately encourage utopia. Caliban brings the grotesque to the play, but does not physically transform because his body, like his knowledge, is static. The breadth of Caliban’s knowledge focuses on the material goods the island offers as demonstrated by his description of the island’s physical qualities; he knows the secrets of the island’s wealth of material resources (the central goal of European colonialism). Ariel’s magic, on the other hand, is more extensive and integral to the island, and as the most adept wielder of the island’s transformative magic, he is its most fluid character and undergoes continual transformation during the play.

As the grotesque element in the play, Caliban demonstrates transgressive femininity in combination his with aggressive masculinity. He offers unyielding, static contradiction in his simultaneous desire to rule his island and serve the unworthy Trinculo and Stephano as a slave, and as such, he introduces the aspects of utopia that make it impossible to achieve. According to Hiewon Shin, it is the domestic work Prospero assigns Caliban that most dramatically feminized him: “Prospero [...] feminizes Caliban by assigning him domestic tasks unsuitable either to a son or to a male servant,” which is further emphasized by how Prospero is “teaching ‘masculine’ assertiveness to his daughter” (379, 389). Alternatively, much of the critical dialogue focuses on Caliban’s ownership of the island, which has also made him a “prototype of a male revolutionary” or even “a convenient, homogenizing symbol for decolonization,” as Jyotsna Singh writes. By perpetuating that characterization, as Singh continues, writers reject “that their focus on Caliban ‘generates a self-conscious, self-celebrating male paradigm’ that often posits a utopia in which women are marginalized or missing” (209). The utopian Tempest-effect is carrying over to the

play's critical dialogue at the point of Caliban's gendering. Caliban can be feminized "native," noble savage or masculine revolutionary at once, because all these characterizations question gender as well as power; thus, he is the play's true static allegory, rather than Miranda.

Considering the torture Caliban endures, it would seem that he is wholly subject to Prospero's control, but their relationship is more complex than the patriarchal hierarchy that the master-servant dynamic indicates. His would-be rape of Miranda, and his consistent bestial and violent characterization, constantly clashes with the beauty of his words, which equal no other character's, save perhaps Prospero's. Linguistically, Caliban is nearer to Prospero than any other character. This may be attributable to the education Prospero and Miranda gave Caliban, but there is also an unparalleled sensual poetry to his language.³⁶ Caliban's utopic desire is not for freedom (what Ariel dreams of) but for possession, and I would add, familiarity. He wants his island back, and for Caliban, Miranda is only a conduit for more of himself on the island; his greatest desire is to force the peopling of "the isle with Calibans" not Miranda's affection (1.2.352). He does not look upon the time before Prospero's arrival as particularly utopian, but focuses on when he was part of the family:

When thou cam'st first
Thou stork'st me and made much of me; wouldst give me Water with
berries in't, and teach me
To name the bigger light and how the less
That burn by day and night. And then I loved thee
And showed thee all the qualities o'th'isle: [...]
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king; and here you sty me
In this hard rock, while you do keep from me
The rest o'th'isle (1.2.334-344).

³⁶ Kevin Pask has observed the connection between them in the context of Caliban's claim to the island and from the perspective of David Norbrook's study of Caliban's language:

"Caliban's original—and dynastic—claim to the island remains undisputed; he is, like Prospero himself, a usurped ruler. Regal language ('mine own king') belongs to Caliban as much as to Prospero. [...] Norbrook has noted the use of the familiar 'thou' in the first part of Caliban's speech, arguing that it 'takes on the overtones of a recollected solidarity and mutuality.' In the context of Caliban's dynastic claim to the island, it is also Caliban's aristocratic punctilio, his insistence on the equality of his status with Prospero's. Caliban's dynastic claim comes from his mother Sycorax—a claim founded on Sycorax's magic. Prospero's new claim is based no less on magic ("Caliban's Masque" 391).

Caliban's tone in this exchange is nostalgic, and, as James Kearny argues, is indicative of the dynamic between Prospero and Caliban, which Kearney argues replays the Fall. He suggests Prospero's own desire to access the "knowledge" is yet another re-imagined prelapsarian utopia: "Sun and moon, Prospero and Caliban, Creator and Creature, king and subject: the image of the two lights inserts an unequal couple within the apparent innocence of the recollected lesson." Caliban is looking backwards to the lost utopia in which he had access to family and education, and by 2.2.129, he still does not understand that "mooncalf" has now been "inscribed" into the "Christian cosmos and European social order in which he is granted a fallen humanity that condemns him to a life of subservience and labor" (452-453). His second lesson, of course, discusses his attempted rape of Miranda that led him to his current enslavement: "I must obey; his art is of such power / It would control my dam's god Setebos, / And make a vassal of him" (1.2.373-374). He is Prospero's unwilling servant, enslaved by a power Prospero yields mostly through Ariel, his other servant. Caliban sets this power above his own deity, making Prospero divine, and himself, sacrilegious. Prospero seems a more ideal, divine being than Miranda to Caliban, and that he tries to deify the drunken Stephano and Trinculo only further underlines that it is the loss of the father that Caliban mourns: "Hast thou not dropped from heaven?" and later "I prithee, be my god" (2.2.134, 146). The utopia of the time before Prospero is lost in the rewriting of their encounter as a time of nostalgic familiarity when Caliban was living with the family instead of enslaved, as Prospero reminds him: "I have used thee / (Filth as thou art) with humane care and lodged thee / In mine own cell" (1.2.345-346). Caliban shows no remorse or regret for the attempted rape, but in the text, the blame falls just as much to Prospero for not seeing Caliban as a threat and allowing him into his home (like Prospero's decision to retreat into study and leave his brother with his political responsibilities). Prospero demonstrates a yearning for the elements of the real that he could never wholly excise from his ideal. Caliban becomes the

representative of the lecherous, the bodily, and most often, the monstrous, or everything that Prospero understands as an obstacle to his lofty goals of an academic utopia (and all transgressive, often feminized, elements).

In the final scene of the play Prospero concedes to the failure of his ideal, although he succeeds at restoring the real, and acknowledges the representation of what he sees as the obstacle to his ideal, he ultimately reclaims Caliban as his own: "this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine" (5.1.275-276). His final act with Caliban is to acknowledge him, not as a person, but as a thing that is his to own. In effect, he owns the dark elements of the real that he can no longer enslave in an effort to preserve the island (he takes his responsibility back again). What follows Prospero's acknowledgement is a poignant detail of the change in Caliban after this critical moment returns him to his ideal moment of familial inclusion. After Alonso comments on what a "strange thing" (290) Caliban is, Prospero and Caliban seemingly reconcile later in the same scene:

Prospero:	He is disproportioned in his manners As in his shape. Go, Sirrah, to my cell; Take with you your companions. As you look To have my pardon, trim it handsomely.
Caliban:	Ay, that I will; and I'll be wise hereafter And seek for grace. What a thrice-double ass Was I to take this drunkard for a god, And worship this dull fool! (5.1.291-298)

Directly after his acknowledgement of Caliban, Prospero no longer uses the angry, derogatory terms he has used towards with Caliban throughout the play (i.e., "poisonous," "lying," or "abhorred" "slave" to "hag-seed", "freckled-whelp," "demi-devil," and "misshapen knave"), and in this one line suddenly calls him "Sirrah."³⁷ This term expresses contempt, but is far more familiar, as if with a child or someone affirming authority over another. In this moment of acknowledgement, Prospero becomes parental (and patriarchal) to Caliban once again. Certainly, it is more

³⁷ The OED defines "sirrah" as "a term of address used to men or boys, expressing contempt, reprimand, or assumption of authority on the part of the speaker; sometimes employed less seriously in addressing children."

endearing than the terms he used previously and, in response, the formerly aggressive and unforgiving Caliban changes his mind from murder and usurpation to sobriety deciding to be "wise hereafter" and "seek grace." Caliban has regained his utopia, but considering we never hear what will happen to him once Prospero leaves the island, it may be that he regains his island if not the family he once enjoyed. In one moment, Caliban's utopia is gained and lost, and so he remains static.

Caliban is feminized in his labor and grotesque presence, through his aggressive sexuality and even in his eloquent speech (he is as eloquent a speaker as Shakespeare's comedic heroines). Yet all this femininity is realized in an overly male body that physically threatens the ideal, although equally ambiguous, female. Prospero's tendency to distinguish between Ariel's spirituality and Caliban's physicality is a critical element of the play's theatricality.³⁸ Just as Prospero protects the ideal island from the physical real that Caliban will not let him forget exists (what hinders his utopia), so Shakespeare expresses a similar contempt for the restrictive elements of the body that did not allow the full realization of the utopic stage. Ariel is metamorphic and a "shape-shifter" who is not restricted to a prescribed gender or desire, and thus embodies the actualized gender fluidity that the earlier plays conveyed through transgressive women or cross-dressed heroines in order to challenge our understanding of gender constructions. Ariel embodies theater's utopic potential, and is indeed Shakespeare's "ideal" solution to expressing the possibility of utopic performativity. Ariel has led to an incredible variety of gendered adaptations throughout history, as Katherine Steele Brokaw writes:

Since its earliest performance, which likely featured an adolescent male actor as Ariel, both male and female actors of all ages, races, and sizes have used their bodies and voices to create, or author, new Ariels. Ariel was a "coveted

³⁸ As Nora Johnson writes, "Prospero's blatant strategy of distinguishing Ariel from Caliban suggests a desire to protect theater from association with the physical. Prospero continually associates Caliban with his mother Sycorax, so that Caliban becomes the embodiment of a kind of physicality that seems to have no place in Prospero's new stagecraft. True, Caliban acts for Prospero, bringing him wood and reluctantly obeying orders, but it is Ariel who performs real theater in the play, who stages tempests and provides musical interludes. Ariel is the shape-shifter here, and his status as pure spirit sounds like the ideal solution to the problem of eroticized theatrical role-playing" (690).

female role” from the eighteenth century until well into the twentieth century, but has been played primarily by men or sometimes boys, with notable exceptions, since the mid-twentieth century. [...] The First Folio’s dramatis personæ defines Ariel as an “ayrie sprit” and lists the role not with the men but after Miranda and before the spirit goddesses of the masque. The text gives complete freedom to anyone casting Ariel—the actor may be male or female, young or old, tall or short, beautiful or ugly—it really doesn’t say, and performance history attests to this ambiguity. Ariel refers to himself as male in his first entrance [...] but this remains the only gendered pronoun used to describe Ariel in the play. Ariel is spirit, not man, and most of his shapes throughout the play are distinctly female (24-26).

If we recall how much detail Shakespeare required to convey Viola to us through textual description in dialogue, and even the specific description of the island in this play, the complete absence of *any* textual guidance for Ariel demonstrates the extreme shift in how these plays strove to capture fluidly gendered beings. In *Ariel*, Shakespeare profoundly illustrates the potential of gender fluidity at its most utopic by relinquishing the troublesome body that hindered his previous characters.

Ariel interacts with the other characters in a very decided way. He is at the service of Prospero and becomes whatever gendered figure he (or she) wishes to be, or is asked to be. He does not speak directly to Miranda or anyone else as Ariel, the spirit, but only by singing and speaking as the beings he becomes in order to actualize the magic that will guide the others to Prospero’s intentions and Ariel’s own eventual freedom. On Ariel’s first appearance, Prospero puts Miranda to sleep before calling on him, and tells him to leave before he wakes her up again. Ariel seems to be Prospero’s alone, the representation of the possible ideal and a spirit of utopia that must be released to realize the real. Exploring Ariel’s stage representations, Christine Dymkowski writes:

Shakespeare wanted to unfix the spirit’s sex: self-defined as male at his first appearance, where he both defies and submits to Prospero’s will; siren at the next, luring Ferdinand to the yellow sands with seductive song; then fearsome female monster, snatching away the banquet; and subsequently goddess of corn and fertility, blessing the union of Miranda and Ferdinand in Prospero’s masque. Shakespeare’s treatment of Ariel seems designed to remove the spirit from the human world, to make the character a sexless shape-shifter, an ‘it’ rather than a ‘she’ or ‘he’ (35).

The initial inclination is to accept Ariel as sexless, but the characterization of “shape-shifter” suggests far more than “she *or* he” because the “it” does not necessarily suggest no gender at all, but can suggest both. Ariel is not perfectly androgynous, s/he is malleable, and that is the confirmation of his/her utopic potential. He can simultaneously be Ariel, the spirit that declares himself a “he,” and in that fluidity, can also be a genderless tempest, a nymph (1.2), a harpy (3.3), or a goddess (4.1) of the masque, all while still being the boy-actor on the early modern stage, or the countless adaptations that have envisioned the character through various gender combinations. In Ariel, Shakespeare did in fact “unfix” sex, but not by suspending gender altogether, but rather by freeing Ariel to express gender fluidly. Ariel is without body, location, origin or destination and is singular in but three things: he is bound to the island, can express gender fluidly, and he has only one desire: The liberty to continue to do just that (just as Viola maintains her disguise). It is never clear who is the true possessor of the island’s magic: Does Prospero endow Ariel with magic, or does Prospero enslave him and require Ariel to use his powers in service to him? We are unsure of the true dynamic between Prospero and Ariel because Ariel gives us very little to go on. Sycorax’s power was stronger than Ariel’s, or he could have escaped from the tree-prison on his own, and somehow, Prospero’s arts were able to free Ariel, but he still requires Ariel to perform his magic for him.

The Tempest is a utopia; it fits easily into the genre’s classical and modern tropes, and lends itself readily to adaptation and reinterpretation. My intention here was to demonstrate the progression of utopic themes in Shakespeare’s plays that use enclosure and the wealth of mythological and colonial traditions burgeoning in the early modern to convey fluid gender and desire. This play has intrigued generations of writers and critics, readers and theatergoers, if only because it feels so exquisitely Shakespearean. It is like the earlier plays, but more so. Its flexibility renders it identifiable and endlessly mutable at once. Its beginning happens much earlier than the play’s action and its ending is never realized. The final word in the play does not

return us to the ship in newly calmed seas with the Boatswain and Captain now attending in properly restored hierarchy, and we do not attend the wedding of Miranda or Ferdinand any more than we attended the wedding of Claribel in Tunis. Yet the play insists that we “wonder” about what came before, and what will come after. We must consider the play only in light of the events that it refers to obliquely, and uncannily, and thus, we arrive in utopia only with the express knowledge that we will never be able to keep it because we will not know how we got there, and we will not know how we left. *The Tempest* is more than utopic, it is paradigmatically utopic, because Shakespeare was working with utopic themes that he had used before.

No better representation of an early modern utopia could have been staged because the stage makes it utopia. Robin Kirkpatrick considers the final act of the play an important point of contemplation for the audience:

The concluding act [...] encourages us to contemplate, at the very point where unity seems to be achieved, disintegration not only of space and time but also of action. Witnessing the centrifugal flight from the island, attention is drawn to stories yet to be told, on events and consequences which the audience itself has only partial knowledge (90).

Even with the stories we are told in the play, we understand and are asked to acknowledge what we have not been told, and the reality that we may prefer not to know (our own “dark thing” to acknowledge) that will allow us to live in the real while still experiencing the ideal. We move in circles with the action of the play, “centrifugally” with Miranda as the focal point allowing for movement and refusing to move. She defines possibility in the play by her presence on the island, but its resolution depends on her leaving the island. This unity is unsatisfying, it has already allowed the fracture of time, space and action, even as Prospero begs for his own unity in distinguishing his own powers and real world responsibility from the ideal of the island in his epilogue: “Now my charms are all o’erthrown / And what strength I have’s mine own” and later “Let me not, / Since I have my dukedom got / And pardoned the deceiver, dwell / In this bare island by your spell” (Epilogue 1-2, 5-8). The fluidity inherent to the island can no longer hold him, his books are destroyed and his staff is

broken, and he now begs the audience for the same freedom Ariel and Caliban had asked of him, and the action moves out from its center to the real world from the stage. The island the men described as bare, which they easily filled with individual and contradictory utopic visions, is in the end a "bare island" once again. Gillies, once again, argues that the construction of utopia in the play presents an effort to "raise human nature to some prelapsarian yet millennial status is exposed as utopian," and this is part of the interchange of the play that he calls the "building-up and emptying-out of utopia." This process, as he argues, indicates an inability to return to the island: "there is no going back. The dream of renewal, once entertained within history - that of Prospero's island or Caliban's nature or the New World - is irreversible. The haunted Utopia is still Utopia. The ground once having been cleared will never revert to forest. The New World, once having been conjured forth, will never collapse back into the Old" ("The Figure of the New World in *The Tempest*" 200). There may be no going back from our perception of the play as the New World, to some extent, or from setting it overtly or subtly in subsequent periods through adaptations, but the possibility of going back is integral to utopia on stage, and that allows us the flexibility to continually go back to the bare island, see it grow before us utopically even knowing full well that the final magic will fade and leave us with the bare island-as-stage once again. Still, even at this end, the utopia we imagine will be precisely as we like it, or what we will, and our "indulgences will set [us] free" (Epilogue 20) even if we must wait until the next performance.

I wish to leave this chapter, and Shakespeare, with a final thought on Ariel's role as the "airy spirit" that so elegantly demonstrates the play's utopic potential. Ariel's creation as a spirit (unprecedented in Shakespeare save for Hamlet's ghostly father) most poignantly promises utopia, and it is a potential freedom that Margaret Cavendish recognized as the key to expressing the feminine utopic in her writings. Katherine Steele-Brokaw gives us a detailed description of the early modern meaning of "spirit" in her article "Ariel's Liberty":

[Spirit] came into the English language in the thirteenth century, taking the Latin *spiritus* for the Bible's Greek *pneuma* [and] by the early seventeenth century, the word had a variety of related meanings. For Shakespeare, the word frequently means the principle of life, the vital breath, the soul that lives on after death. [...] In the early seventeenth-century, "spirit" could also mean an immaterial state. [...] Ariel is this kind of spirit; he is, or was once, bodiless. [...] Ariel is a spirit who was once ghostly and is now, on stage, a body (27).

Far more than simply a mythical shape-shifter, Ariel is the manifestation of the utopic dream of somehow transcending the physical, the natural, the real, and altogether realizing a gender-free ideal by relinquishing the gendered body that divides society by breeding difference. Cavendish was likely the first woman ever to publish an analysis of Shakespeare's works; in letter 123 of *Sociable Letters*, she wrote that he was both transformative ("one would think he had been transformed into every one of those persons he hath Described) *and* metamorphic ("one would think that he had metamorphosed from a Man to a Woman"). Cavendish's writings, as I will show, demonstrate her acknowledgement and recognition of the potential in Shakespeare's utopic "spirits" to define and characterize utopia, and to convey that utopia as a freedom from the constraints of the physical, and as an expression of formless, fluid presence.

Part III: Creating Utopia: Margaret Cavendish

Interlude: Virtual Worlds

Fictions are an issue of man's fancy, framed in his own mind, according as he pleases, without his mind or not; so that reason searches the depth of nature, and enquires after the true causes of natural effects; but fancy creates of its own accord whatsoever it pleases, and delights in its own work. The end of reason, is truth; the end of fancy, is fiction

To the Reader, *The Blazing World*

The internet has influenced society in more ways than anyone could have imagined, and its use has grown more swiftly than anyone could have expected.¹ It now offers limitless opportunities for research, and perhaps most dynamically, instantaneous communication through a flurry of social-networking sites. Exploring the endless sites can feel as if one is entering rooms filled with people of different opinions and perspectives and varied levels of education and experience, and they are all accessible from one's computer or mobile device. One of the most familiar social-networking sites, Facebook, currently has more than 845 million active users; any single space, virtual or otherwise, with so many people can easily be considered a virtual nation.² Information reigns in this nation; it can be minor and irrelevant or critical and engaging, can be gleaned from established journals or fringe publications, or it can be published in reputable news sources or in self-published blogs. Details from the most private social affair to a public or political event, in any format, can be "shared" from friend to friend, and then onwards to friends of friends, and so on, until meme after meme has travelled across the world spreading swiftly and exponentially, and mutating into infinite versions of itself along the way. Communication has never been so immediate, nor so unregulated and volatile. What began as a simple way to exchange information has become an increasingly influential force for fostering awareness, distributing critical information, and facilitating freedom of speech and

¹ As of 2011, more than 2 billion people use the internet regularly (compared to only 300, 000 in 2000) accessing nearly 350 million websites. <<http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>>.

² As of December 2011, there were 845 million monthly users; approximately 80% are outside the U.S. and Canada. Of those users, 483 million are active daily. Facebook is accessible in over 70 languages worldwide. Facebook reports user statistics at <www.facebook/press>.

expression. Networking sites, in particular, are uniting people based on friendship (whether they began virtually or not), by way of personal and professional networks, or simply through similar interests or concerns rather than the randomness of citizenship, culture, ethnicity, nationality, or religion alone that have traditionally united people. Millions of people inhabit these virtual nations that are taking form, dissolving, and reforming within the no-place of the internet; this has dramatic implications because it represents a shift in the way we negotiate society and the nation-state.

The most powerful consequence of sites like Facebook is how they erase distance by establishing an individually customizable space for communicating quickly with many people at once. This unique space allows one to maintain friendships and family connections *despite* distance by gathering people from different times in one's life, and from the various worlds one inhabits, into a single space that those people may or may not share with each other; one can then move between many spheres at will, or explore them all at once. However, virtual spaces are often disparaged as a waste of time, and online communication is thought to be more complicated than it needs to be and less substantive than it used to be. Detractors believe that our increasing reliance on virtual communication is actually leading to an alienated, instead of a connected, society.³ However, focusing on the internet's negative consequences might deter from its most distinctive ability: to evolve continually. Users are the internet's single most powerful resource. No other medium has ever been so sensitive to user input or so reliant on user satisfaction. On the web, nothing stays the same for very long.

³ There are a wealth of current discussions and studies on the topic, including many of which consider the physical and mental impact of internet addiction and resulting health complications. The most salient negative aspect of the internet would be the overwhelming amount of data users must wade through because each link leads to infinite subsequent links. It is precariously easy to lose oneself in the information. On internet addiction, there is a rich collection of articles in *Internet Addiction* (2011) by Young and Nabuco de Abreu, and on the internet's impact on society Christian Fuchs's "Cyberculture: Socialization or Alienation?" in *Internet and Society: Social Theory in the Information Age* (2008) offers important insight on the many ways digital communication is changing social dynamics (327-332). In addition, Azy Barak studies internet addiction in *Psychological Aspects of Cyberspace: Theory, Research, and Applications* (2008).

New virtual locations are emerging in the inconceivable space previously prohibited by distance, and the time that surmounting distance requires. In that space, a peculiar intimacy emerges defined by constant change, an increasingly frenetic pace, and a decreasing need for physical contact. In his pioneering anthropological study of the cultural development of one virtual world, *Second Life*, Tom Boellstorff writes:⁴

Too often, virtual worlds are described in terms of breathless futurism and capitalist hype. Above all they seem new, and this apparent newness is central to their being interpreted as harbingers of a coming utopia of unforeseen possibilities, intimations of looming dystopia of alienation, or trinkets of a passing fad. Yet the fact that millions of persons now regularly enter virtual worlds, adapting to them with varying degrees of ease, indicates that something is staying the same: something is acting as a cultural ground upon which these brave new virtual worlds are figured. Because virtual worlds appear so novel and in such a constant state of change and expansion, understanding their history can be difficult (32).

Boellstorff's in-depth study, *Coming of Age in Second Life* (2008), traces the development of virtual worlds and focuses on *Second Life* as a prime example. Virtual spaces form unique societies and cultures that develop within, but separate from, "real" life (just as the Facebook "nation" has created a unique cultural entity). However, *Second Life* is a far more complex space. Encountering virtual worlds inspires images of utopia and dystopia, of alienation and futurism, and as Boellstorff notes, these "brave new *virtual* worlds" are noticeably in "a constant state of change and expansion." The same qualities that create a near-constant state of flux in these worlds make them disorienting on one hand and comfortably freeing on the other. As we have seen, constant change, as metamorphosis or as an infinite variety that nurtures the possibility that defines utopia because utopia thrives in the gap we simultaneously resist and crave, and where the uncanny synthesis of real and ideal can exist at once. Virtual worlds encourage and require this flux, so they *can* lead us to utopia, though not the pejorative, static "utopia" of Boellstorff's warning.

⁴ Launched in 2003, *Second Life* is an online virtual world developed by Linden Labs of San Francisco. As of 2011, it had about 1 million active users, according to its website.

There are virtual spaces of such richness and intricacy that one could lose hours, or days, exploring, playing, or world-building.⁵ Second Life is unique in its efforts to reflect the “real” world more substantially, and this is, perhaps, why it has garnered a burst of critical attention. More relevant to my purpose is how virtual worlds are facilitating a “real” presence in ideal spaces, and thus, redefining our understanding of utopia and its potential. The way one interacts with Second Life’s virtual space allows us critical insight. For example, avatars can “actively” participate in or change any environment at will (with a click, night turns to sunrise or midday), participate in conversations with a choice of text, voice, or physical gesture, and build, purchase, or change private homes or new worlds that defy “reality” on every conceivable level.⁶ The possibilities are limited only by your imagination, and the amount of time (and money) you have to spend within the world. One Second Life resident (for so users are called) in Boellstorff’s study stated: “The fundamental rule of Second life is that everything changes constantly” (82). Once again, we encounter a utopic space defined only by the refusal of stasis and the demand for perpetual transformation. If one cannot find a space that fills his or her needs, one can create it and invite others to share in it, unhindered by space or time, or by physical, social, political, and even moral or ethical restrictions. The only absolute is change because users will keep trying to close the gap between the virtual and the “real” by always moving towards (virtual) perfection.

Virtual spaces like Second Life stand apart from the text- and image-only forums because you experience them with a greater dimension of sensuality. Exploring Second Life is a “physical” experience; your avatar moves through animated worlds by

⁵ The most common spaces are MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games) where users play characters in fantasy or science fiction based games such as the immensely popular World of Warcraft (an adaptation of role-playing games like Dungeon and Dragons which, as of September 2011, had 10.3 million subscribers world-wide, with a highpoint of 12 million) and MMORLGs (massively multiplayer online real-life games) where users interact in virtual worlds that echo real-life environments, like Second Life.

⁶ A stereo effect allows voices and sounds to change in volume and direction according to an avatar’s movement so one can tell where sound is coming from and either move towards or away from it as one desires. Similarly, ambient sound is programed to conform to “real” environmental influences. For example, if your avatar is indoors, outdoor sounds are present, but muted.

teleporting, walking, jumping, swimming, sitting, running, and flying. Interaction with others is enabled by standard or self-designed gestures, or “programs” (designed by residents and installed throughout the world) allowing your avatar to move in a variety of ways such as dance, yoga, tai chi, and of course, endlessly entertaining sexual positions. If one wishes to move in some other way, one can design an animation and add it to the world for others to use as well. Creating virtual environments requires the same sense of “place” that is critical to utopia because successful virtual worlds must engage on multiple levels. Boellstorff argues against seeing the long history of “placemaking” as antithetical to “virtual” and notes that “other philosophical and empirical work” has shown the “salience of place and sensory experience online.” He approaches virtual worlds as places, or field sites, which make them feasible locations for ethnographic study. Boellstorff rejects the assumption that the virtual is inaccessible to the senses or that “place” and “virtual” cannot coexist beyond the metaphoric. If we recall how Vespucci played upon the senses when he described the New World, or how Shakespeare described Viola repeatedly in *Twelfth Night*, it is not difficult to understand why the most successful virtual worlds stimulate users sensually, spatially, and visually. The virtual sets these worlds apart from the “actual” in much the same way the ideal is recognized in contrast to the real in utopian literature. Not surprisingly, Boellstorff focuses on the gap between virtual and actual in his study, and insists that the two spaces are not “reducible to each other.” The gap between them prevents our “cultural logics” from crossing over, and then filters any restrictions that would prevent our world from realizing the virtual world’s utopic potential (*Coming of Age in Second Life* 91).

To study this gap, Boellstorff gathered data from within Second Life exclusively, and studied the virtual space as a “place”; Second Life became as much a location for observation and participation as any “real” field site. Boellstorff’s scientific approach also confronts the difference between “space” and “place” that has informed utopia throughout this dissertation (as it will the continuing development of virtual worlds).

The two terms are closely related, but their relationship is also “complex” and “contradictory” because “place” is a “static location” governed by the rule of the “proper,” while “space” is an effect of “active operations that intersect within a place to actualize it or mobilize it in a range of different ways.”⁷ Most importantly, the elasticity of the terms allows for the “analysis of multiple levels of signification” (Findlay 3-4). The difference between the terms echoes the familiar debate regarding utopia: Is utopia a static, unmoving, governable *place*, or a transgressive, mobilized *space*? Contradiction and problematic definitions follow, but virtual spaces have changed the game because they bridge the divide between the two understandings of utopia. After all, a person engaging “physically” in a virtual space is simultaneously in a sitting in static place in his or her “real” world; he or she can explore a dynamic space-as-place because one actualizes and mobilizes its possibility in a wholly new, and continually changing, way.

To make sense of the contrast between the two understandings of “utopia” as they are reflected in virtual worlds, Boellstorff draws our attention to the need to rehabilitate and redefine the term “virtual” in order to comprehend the dynamic cultures these new worlds foster. He explores the history of the term and notes that its etymological connection to *virtus* suggests themes of manliness and notions of virtue, virtuosity, and virility.⁸ Boellstorff intriguingly equates “virtual” with “potentiality”; the “virtual” of virtual worlds locates them in/as “potential,” or in the “almost” of perpetual becoming that we find in utopian literature from its earliest examples (not surprisingly, the creative potential of technology has generally been dominated by men, and is still considered a “masculine” field). If the virtual can be considered a source of potentiality, then it can be said to exist “whenever there is a perceived gap

⁷ In *Playing Spaces in Early Women’s Drama* (2006), Alison Findlay explores the influence of space and place on the early modern theater from the perspective of Michel de Certeau’s theories of spatial practices as he defines them in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980, 1984).

⁸ “Notions of the virtual draw from longstanding oppositions of mind versus body, object versus essence, and structure versus agency among others. In colloquial contemporary English, a prominent meaning of ‘virtual’ is ‘almost.’ [...] The [OED] phrases this meaning of ‘virtual’ as referencing something ‘that is so in essence or effect, although not formally or actually’” (19).

between experience and 'the actual'." The perception of this gap is the defining element of virtual worlds because it implies "approaching the actual without arriving there." Furthermore, the gap is critical to understanding the utopic effect of virtual worlds because "were it to be filled in, there would be no virtual worlds, and in a sense no actual world either (19). An un-fillable, liminal gap emerges to ensure the existence of both worlds by permitting infinite approach without arrival (like Oscar Wilde's unreachable shore). Boellstorff supplements his etymological study of the term with a historical summary of "virtual reality" that does not begin with the advent of computers as one might think, but with one of the earliest philosophical models of being: Plato's Allegory of the Cave, where the shadows become the real world to the "virtual" cave dwellers. As Boellstorff explains, far from these computer worlds alone, anything devised specifically for "losing oneself" can be considered a virtual reality because each represents an attempt to transcend (or escape) the real: drug-induced hallucinations (like peyote visions or Dionysian stupors), performing rituals (religious or secular), interpreting dreams, personal experiences (like reading or imagining) or shared experiences (like theater), and even simply conversation (33-4).

To define the collaborative creation of the "virtuality" of virtual worlds more precisely, Boellstorff connects the virtual to the concept of "techne" to explain the effect. He stresses that one must conceive of "the human" within the virtual because they are co-dependent:

Techne refers to art or craft, to human action that engages with the world and thereby results in a different world. Techne is not just knowledge about the world, what Greek thought termed *episteme*; it is intentional action that constitutes a gap between the world as it was before the action, and the new world it calls into being. [...] Techne not only makes silicon and ideas into a virtual world; techne can take place within that created world itself. In virtual worlds, techne produces a gap between actual and virtual in the realm of the virtual. Swallowing their own ontological tails, virtual worlds for the first time allow techne to become recursive, providing humans with radically new ways to understand their lives as beings of culture as well as physical embodiment (55).

We have encountered the Ouroboros metaphor in reference to utopia several times in this dissertation, and Boellstorff uses it here to illustrate how we interact with the

virtual in a sense of perpetual creation. His explanation also indicates the vast multiplicity of spaces that constitute the virtual because a virtual space is a creation that simultaneously requires and facilitates the creation it contains. Within the virtual, one can experience a space outside of the physical and so create (without material limits) while embodying an expression of the self (despite one's physical presence). This potential does not "herald the emergence of the posthuman" (an image that fuels many concerning visions of dystopic futures). Instead, as Boelstorff insists, it is in becoming "virtual" that we are human: "Virtual worlds reconfigure selfhood and sociality, but this is only possible because they rework the virtuality that characterizes human beings in the actual world" (29). In other words, the virtual mimics the real, but with a difference that sustains a gap between the worlds in order to maintain the virtual world's creative potential and the actual world's stability. Ultimately, as Boelstorff concludes, "what makes virtual worlds different from all hitherto existing forms of virtuality is that *techne can take place inside of them*, rather than solely in the actual world" (58, italics original). Creation in virtual worlds occurs from within the world as it is created, and in the same moment as the creator experiences it. This destabilizing potential is a dramatic leap over how utopian literature has described utopia, or performed utopia on the stage. The virtual is not isolated from, but integrated into, the real while it also remains independent. Thus, the conceptual interchange illustrating our participation with either world exists because of that all-important gap between them, and only an *intentional* creative act brings about the change that allows this gap. One must act upon utopia, must create utopia, if utopia is to be (virtually) realized. Like Boelstorff, we must focus on this liminal gap, and the boundaries that (fail to) fill it, if we are to understand the social impact of creating virtual worlds as utopias.

Unfortunately, virtual worlds, like utopias, potentially reinstate the very binaries they should disrupt. Virtual worlds are bound to the real world, and so, may suggest a virtual/real or ideal/real binary. However, binaries fail in virtual worlds just

as they do in utopia. Utopic spaces require gender fluidity as I have shown, and virtual worlds are no different. In Second Life, for instance, an avatar can transgress every imagined boundary of identity and self. As Boelstorff records, "some Second Life residents spoke of their virtual-world self as 'closer to' their 'real' self than their actual-world self" (102). When one joins Second Life, one can choose "male" or "female" from several ready-"gendered," avatars, but one begins with a blank avatar that can be modified however one wishes (and in truth, one is expected to as some Second Life residents refuse to engage with stock avatars believing them less "genuine"). Modification allows for mixing and matching even the most minor physical attribute, including having gender-specific genitals, none at all, or maintaining a mixture to choose from and combine so that one's avatar can be male, female, neither, or anything in between. One can also switch between different avatars, gendered or otherwise, at will. One could even dispense with human forms altogether and appear as a cartoon, fictional character, or an animal, plant, or object. One of the most fascinating possibilities is that users can create one or more *alts* (alternate avatars); any number of alts can interact (indeed, even interact sexually) with each other (and others) within the same virtual space and time. Alts allow for the possibility of being, speaking, and interacting with oneself; the idea might suggest notions of psychological dissonance where one's divided psyche breaks with reality, except, in virtual worlds, alts become reflections of a divided avatar-self and allow this peculiar exchange with little dissonance.⁹ The fluidity that utopian literature requires is feasible in virtual worlds because users can make worlds that ignore socio-cultural expectations (and obstacles) of self and identity.

The potential to embody several beings simultaneously has few parallel in the real world, save as pathology, and its possibility introduces an unexpected facet to how virtual worlds redefine social interaction. Boelstorff considered the unique potential of

⁹ Margaret Cavendish was often accused of "madness," and there are several examples of her holding complex dialogues with herself in her writing. Recall the Manuel's singular passing reference to *The Blazing World* in *Utopian Thought in the Western World* (1979): "There are utopias so private that they border on schizophrenia" (7).

alternative avatars by observing how alts interacting with each other influenced subjectivity, and argues that, for most residents, “having alts was not cognitively dissonant, despite the lack of any real parallel in the actual world (where it is rare indeed to have multiple embodiments, each with independent social networks).” In embodying multiple alts at once, users instantiate “a discontinuous self” that creates “a clear gap between where one alt ends and the next begins, a gap that can be temporarily narrowed but not erased by having sex with oneself or keeping oneself company.” The resulting gap is the same liminal gap we keep encountering in utopia, except in worlds such as Second Life the gap is perfectly comprehensible because virtual worlds are always already “constituted by the gap between actual and virtual [and] such a gap is the product of techne, a precondition for homo cyber, the virtual human” (150).¹⁰ The gap allows limitless creativity, and allows one to redefine the self in simultaneous unity and fracture. Several other defining elements of self and identity shift as well (such as age) because even time slips in Second Life; age is not determined by chronology, but by when one joins, so that one’s age can be reset by rejoining or creating a new alt, allowing a Second Life expert to rejoin the world as a “newbie” any time he or she (or it) wishes.

It is a self-fashioning like no other; in these worlds, you are whatever you wish to be and can desire whatever you wish to desire, in whatever space you wish to create. Anticipating our digital virtual worlds, Margaret Cavendish, the Duchess of Newcastle, reached into the ether of her imagination to forge a world where she might interact with others. She tried every method, form, and genre of writing she had at her disposal, and realizing their limitations, combined forms, or invented wholly new forms when what was available would not suffice to create the worlds she foresaw. Her textual worlds offered her a space where she could reflect on herself and her writing,

¹⁰ “Alts operationalized the gap between actual and virtual into a resource for fractal subjectivity, into a kind of ‘dividual’ (rather than ‘individual’) selfhood. [...] Perhaps the most glaring examples of such dividual selfhood appeared when residents embodied more than one alt at once. [...] This permitted forms of fractal subjectivity. [...] What theory of intimacy is in play when a resident logs in two alts to have sex with herself?” (150).

and escape from the reality of her tumultuous life. Cavendish's texts are eminently virtual; she wrote letters to an imagined cadre of women that she answered herself and wrote plays she performed only for an imagined reader/audience on the stage of her mind. She combined identifiable elements with wholly new forms, such as fantasy and science fiction, to create virtual worlds in which she could locate herself within a text she wrote to herself as if she was conversing with an *alt*. If her contemporary audience did not appreciate her, then she was confident future readers would: "I regard not so much the present as future Ages, for which I intend all my Books" (Shaver 273). Our development of digital virtual worlds has just begun, but the limitless possibility of Cavendish's texts still offer literary worlds that are just as rich and malleable. Every user of Second Life contributes to changing the world, just as readers must continue to take up Cavendish's call for world creation: "I have made a world of my own: for which no body, I hope will blame me, since it is in every one's power to do the like" (*Blazing World* 124).

Cavendish's creativity and flexibility come as a surprise because they are paired with her stalwart social reticence and political conservatism. That paradox may seem to be a failure in her reason, or simply a contradiction, but in her utopias, variety is celebrated: She could express one opinion and then the other, build a community that may have contained only herself, establish a women-only space, or imagine a wholly new world that defied not only convention, but even logic and science. She wrote each text with an expectation of contradiction, and the resulting worlds offered such overwhelming variety that they inspired confusion of categorization for generations of readers. Hero Chalmers argues that Cavendish's preference for invention over imitation "cannot be reduced to the feminine rejection of rule and method," and that instead, Cavendish's writing represents "unrivaled potentiality," which I will demonstrate is surprisingly similar to the virtual. Her writing was rooted in an endless variety that demonstrates how her worlds were "constantly making and unmaking" themselves "subject to the reader's interpretation" ("Flattering Division" 139). Is the Second Life

landscape that constantly makes and unmakes itself because of its users, so distant from the worlds Cavendish wrote in which she demanded reader participation? Cavendish's creative imperative echoes the "clearly discernible sense of the importance of invention in both classical and Renaissance thought" (132). She created worlds that were simultaneously hers and whatever worlds her readers made of her worlds; the result was the collaborative invention of worlds of limitless creative possibility. In the same tradition, Second Life residents can make and unmake themselves, and the worlds that others make, which means that two avatars can experience the same space differently at the same time. Cavendish made and unmade herself as woman, man, or genderless spirit in her worlds. She addressed Cambridge professors and the King himself with no need for an invitation or formal audience, she exchanged intimate letters with herself if no one listened, or she could do all of these at once. Most importantly, she demonstrated a profound understanding of the potential that utopic spaces offered. Her writing demonstrates the stark contradiction between the quiet of her private life and the violence of the transformative historical moment she lived through.

Chapter Six

Chaos and Community in Gender and Genre: Prefaces and *CCXI Sociable Letters*

Yet you will find my Works like Infinite Nature, that hath neither Beginning nor End, and as Confused as the Chaos, wherein is neither Method nor Order, but all Mix'd together without Separation, like Evening Light and Darkness, so in my Sixteen Books is Sense and No Sense, Knowledge and Ignorance Mingled together, so that you will not know what to make of it.

CCXI Sociable Letters (1664) Letter 131

Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, wrote a lot about herself despite warning readers in letter 73 of *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1664) that “Writers should never speak of themselves, but in Prefatory Epistles or in a History of their own Lives, wherein they may freely declare their own Acts and Opinions” (85-6). Just as she suggests a writer should, Cavendish wrote a wealth of prefaces (as well as a brief autobiography) in which she talks about herself and her husband only to disregard her explicit “never” everywhere else. She considered topics as grand as science and philosophy and as intimate as marriage and friendship, but no matter how epistemic, philosophic, or personal her subject across her wide oeuvre, she took every opportunity to include herself in detailed explanations, or in defense of the faults, she anticipated readers would find.¹¹ Through asides, digressions, examples or notes offering her experiences, clarifications, or examples, Cavendish intruded upon her texts constantly. In letter 79, for example, she is subtle in her complaints of the hypocrisy of a French author who “Condemns those that set their Images before their Books, or that suffer their Friends to give their Opinions of their Books in Epistles, or that do write many, or some, or few Epistles before their Books, whereas himself writes so Long an Epistle, in finding Fault with Others, and civilly Applauding Himself” (91). The letter begins as a complaint, and then celebrates her own use of the specific methods he scorns (prefaces and frontispieces).¹² She insists she is “indifferent” about gathering a large

¹¹ Her texts appeared in 16 folios containing over 8000 pages (Cottegnies and Weitz 9).

¹² Katie Whitaker’s biography of Cavendish, *Mad Madge* (2002), includes detailed readings of her elaborate frontispieces along with their histories.

audience, but then dramatically expands their numbers: "I am so far from that Noble Persons Opinion or Modesty, that I wish, whereas I have One Friend to Praise my Works, although Partially, I had a Thousand, or rather Ten thousand Millions, nay, that their number were Infinite, that the Issue of my Brain, Fame, and Name, might live to Eternity, if it were possible" (91). Cavendish's backhanded boasts, and poetic embellishments, demonstrate that the truth of her vision comes with constant contradiction just as she demonstrates modesty and lack of interest, and exaggeration and desperation, in one letter. The "infinite" praise she seeks begins with a projection of "modesty" and then drowns out the single friend by multiplying him or her into infinity.

Cavendish frames conflict within modesty in order to deflect any transgression indicated by her dissent. She self-styled her writing as "chaotic," and in truth, the experience of reading her is not unlike the disorientation some users might feel in a virtual world in that it is unfamiliar, and perhaps even uncomfortable, but ultimately liberating. Cavendish's method was singularly unmethodical, and she professed a disorderly order that used boundless extremes, hopeful exaggerations and circular reasoning to validate her arguments. These arguments often end in an apologetic tone of poignant foreboding through which she both criticized and celebrated her infinite variety. In the epigraph to this chapter, she demands that readers confront this glorious chaos by posing a specific challenge that assumes failure from the onset: "You will not know what to make of it." She *impels* us to make something of it knowing that allowing for the chaos is the only way we can make something of it. In this section, I eagerly take up Cavendish's challenge, follow her chaotic path, and join the community of women she established. I begin by confronting the critical debate her "chaotic" writing has inspired and its influence on expressions of gender in the development of the early modern utopia. No discussion of Cavendish can begin from a mutually satisfactory common ground because she fosters disagreement at every turn. Perhaps more importantly, her critical reception is fundamental because we have come

to know her and her works not from a long history of celebration and beatification as with More and his *Utopia*, nor from a tradition of adaptation and adoration as with Shakespeare and his plays, but through the literary analysis of her critical recovery. In a way, this lessens the burden of history, but it requires that I first confront her shifting presence in the critical dialogue, and the influence of her social and cultural environment, to understand her profound influence on the development of utopia. From the perspective of this critical foundation, I will focus my attention in this chapter on a few of her prefaces and, more substantially, on *Sociable Letters*, a seemingly conventional epistolary collection that offers a provocative construction of a “virtual,” but certainly utopic (if chaotic) community, as I will show.

Cavendish’s was undoubtedly an inveterate experimentalist, but she was also desperately self-conscious. Each text includes examples of a profound, almost blind, confidence with her subject matter, coupled with contradictions and constant uncertainty. Sara Mendelson offers a good example of this dichotomy in Cavendish’s biographical and autobiographical texts in her article “Playing Games with Gender and Genre.” She notes that while Cavendish eagerly used a variety of modes in them, she also adamantly insisted that only personal experience and observation qualify someone to write history at all. In her biography of her husband, and her autobiography, Cavendish purposefully ignored the expected “linear narrative,” and that decision enabled her to explore the various ways she could “construct a series of parallel selves whose attributes were not restricted by the limitations of autobiography as a genre.” From this “chaotic” variety of literary modes, Cavendish found “unlimited scope for experiments in autobiographical self-fashioning” and consequently, could experiment with a “mixture of genres to rewrite her own past, present, and imagined future” (203). Cavendish dared to write about subjects women did not write about and in genres that women had yet to approach, and while her style and methods may have been unusual and experimental, they were precisely what she required to realize her goals. She established a place for herself in the dialogue not by thwarting conventions

but by ignoring the boundaries that restricted her vision. There is freedom in such self-proclaimed authority because it emerges through a textual voice she splits and ventriloquizes into many characters and many selves, and it emerges, clear and strong, through the chaos of her writing.

In an effort to moderate the chaos readers would inevitably discover, Cavendish adopted a popular tradition of progressive familiarization and then expanded and adapted it to fit her goals. The practice of including a variety of pre-texts was common enough, but the sheer amount of writing Cavendish included solely to prepare readers for reading her writing is startling. Her prefaces are usually addressed to her readers, or a specific group, or (more rarely) to a friend. If we recall the effect of the prefatory letters to Thomas More's *Utopia*, there is a similar desire for gradual familiarization to an unfamiliar space in Cavendish's prefaces. Her desire is coupled with a clear need for (self) validation expressed through redundant definitions, explanations and clarifications. The prefatory letters to *Utopia* reflected his understanding that there might be resistance to *Utopia*'s political satire, but Cavendish sensed a different kind of resistance to her writing. More's letters invite readers into a conversation between members of his humanist circle (an academic community of men), but Cavendish assumes that her texts require validation. Her prefaces were written almost exclusively by herself or her husband, in praise of herself or her husband; instead of merely welcoming readers to come and see her new world, uncomfortable or unusual as it may be, the prefaces volley between self-celebration, cautious instruction, and reader-orientation. She usually begins with a dedication to her husband,¹³ after which she addresses readers directly demonstrating a clear sense of familiarity, often in multiple

¹³ In a few exceptions, she honors Sir Charles Cavendish (her brother-in-law and a great inspiration for her scientific and philosophical interests), Charles II, Lady Elizabeth Toppe (her former maid-servant and life-long friend who answered Cavendish's dedication with a letter of her own), and John Rolleston (a devoted servant to William Cavendish). Except for Charles II, her choice of dedicatees demonstrates how deeply she valued loyalty given that, aside from her family, she granted the honor only to loyal friends.

letters that follow one after another.¹⁴ She addresses readers in a variety of ways from the more general “Noble Reader,” “Censorious Readers,” or “Natural Philosophers,” to the very specific “University of Cambridge” or “Professors of Learning and Art.” In one instance, Cavendish addresses neither the reader nor a specific person and instead opens a dialogue with various personifications. *Philosophical Fancies* (1653) is not dedicated to her husband but to “Fame,” which is then followed with a long string of “Epistles” addressed to Time, her Brain, her Troubled Fancy, Contemplation and several letters to a variety of her own Thoughts (“Muse-full” and otherwise). She used a variety of genres and forms in her prefaces as well and, in one instance, even includes a dramatic scene— “An Introduction” —as a preface to *Playes* (1662). Cavendish compels readers to follow her to understand the “reason” behind her reasoning before they begin the text itself. If the reader wishes to arrive at the subject, he or she must never lose sight of Cavendish.

Her prefaces appear in a variety of forms and genres, and they introduce readers to a variety of texts: poems, plays, treaties, philosophy, science, fiction, biography, autobiography, and letters (as well as the occasional expanded version of previous publications). Cavendish’s publication rate is perhaps even more unexpected than the surprising number of prefaces those publications include. In his article “The Drama of Margaret Cavendish and the Disorderly Woman,” Andrew Hiscock has argued that publishing granted Cavendish an absent presence in dialogues to which her gender did not allow her access outside of the text, and he argues that Cavendish “appears to have been fascinated by the ways in which the printed word allowed her access to the stage of oratory without necessitating physical performance or presence” (411).

¹⁴ In *Playes* (1662) Cavendish includes *nine* separate letters all addressed “to the Reader,” following a dedication to William Cavendish. Given the popularity of plays, and the influence and development of drama during the Renaissance, Cavendish must have felt particularly vulnerable writing herself into such a popular, and almost exclusively masculine, tradition (that included her husband). Before Cavendish, the only women who had published plays were Elizabeth Cary (and perhaps Mary Wroth) and her stepdaughters Jane and Elizabeth Cavendish who had co-written a pastoral masque (a fact not without familial tension). The genre’s history weighed heavily on her conflicting desires for variety and validation, and these many letters reflect that anxiety.

Publishing made it possible for Cavendish to secure her presence, through the physical book (and the comfort of her writing desk in the country or from her exile) because she was at once validating her ideas, authorizing her knowledge, and granting herself relevancy through their printed, material presence in place of herself.¹⁵ Moreover, according to Anita Pacheco's introduction to *Early Women Writers 1600-1720* (1998), the "dominant discourse of gender production" supported a construction of ideal femininity "which made writing and especially publishing one's work deeply transgressive acts for a women." Cavendish's publication confronts the discourses of gender that were never, as Pacheco argues, "static, seamless wholes" but rather "changed shape as they interacted with other determinants of identity, like class, religion and politics." Her participation in these dialogues suggests she understood that there was nothing truly static or "whole" in conventional gender distinctions. She published against this "complex cultural matrix" through which "meaning was not so much imposed as produced" only to create a "space for resistance" within her "internalization of dominant cultural codes" (7). After all, she seems to have been quite stubborn in her insistence to publish everything she wrote with little regard for sufficient revision to maintain her voice in that discourse.¹⁶

This "will-to-publish," as Hiscock names it, was even more outrageous given Cavendish's noble rank, which garnered far greater condemnation among her peers for her publication than her gender alone did: "In an age when noblemen were still found to be frowning on such measures as vulgar" her publication output "would be significant in any age for a woman writer, but most especially in the seventeenth century when there was limited access to print culture" (404). Given her social and cultural environment, it is impressive that Cavendish published so abundantly. She

¹⁵ Discussing the role of the printed text in the early modern, Mary Baine Campbell has argued that "it was not only a voice that print replaced, but the bodily experiences of memory and fantasy, both of which have come to seem far less bodily over time" (*Wonder and Science* 190). In a way, the printed book became Cavendish's prosthetic for the social exchange she yearned for and worked to create for herself.

¹⁶ In one preface, she apologizes for the publication given that she had promised readers she was done publishing in a previous publication. See "Epistle Dedicatory" in *Playes* (1662).

repeated these transgressive acts out of stubborn determination to discuss and publish topics that offered women alternatives to marriage and domesticity. Erin Lang Bonin argues that Cavendish's plays, in particular, demonstrate an essential utopic transgression because her separatist spaces "accommodate inscriptions of 'feminist' political systems that are unthinkable or unrepresentable in other early modern contexts." Her plays construct "ideal spaces," in the same moment that they insist that "no space, even an imagined, separatist utopia, is ever really 'blank'" (351). However, utopia must represent the un-representable, and Cavendish's separatist utopias imagined spaces that were at once the impossible, blank "no space," and the realization of that impossibility. Her women were free, but enclosed within a constraining frame that was a blank space and a transgressive, inhabitable no-place. To participate actively in the production of a space of resistance, Cavendish had to internalize these cultural codes. For instance, she often characterized women with the same empty descriptors that routinely rendered them voiceless, vain, and vapid, and was adamantly supportive of rigid class structures (despite the fact that her marriage to a much older nobleman dramatically elevated her own class). To Cavendish, affirming conventions was more of a distraction than a demonstration of compliance because she used those conventions as stepping stones towards a far more transgressive position. She cautiously welcomes readers into familiar ground, but before too long, the reader finds him- or herself in a space of far greater freedom, and even dissent, than Cavendish's prefaces indicate.

The tone and mood of Cavendish's prefaces suggest that it was her writing (more than her ideas), with its disorienting organization, hybrid forms, and mixed genres, that she believed would challenge her readers most. Perhaps, as she often explains, her unpolished style can be ascribed to her inadequate education, but remaining outside the bounds of academic authorities, their expectations, and the genre and forms those authorities established, also allowed her inordinate freedom to experiment. We must recognize that her style is not simply the result of failure or lack

of skill, but rather demonstrates a strategic and deliberate challenge of convention and the simultaneous deployment of the conventional influence she wielded through her husband's wealth and status. Moreover, I propose that her unique style is precisely what enables her utopia. Gisèle Venet argues that Cavendish particular style in her drama influenced her complex utopic methodology of "fragmentary modes of thought," which should not be considered a failure "to produce well-made plays sustained by conventional logic or well-organized succession of theatrical moments." As Venet insists, Cavendish must be recognized for embracing an "aesthetics of fragmentation"; her entirely new approach *required* fragmentation "as a means of breaking away from conventions and of staging new attitudes towards others or a new conception of the self" (213).¹⁷ As complex as it is unconventional, Cavendish's writing demonstrates utopic themes on several levels at once. We find conventional utopias in the separatist spaces of her drama and in the imagined world of *Blazing World*, but her writing style adds a further dimension to her utopias because it is inextricable from her other habits, such as her tendency to reference her life, or include versions of herself, in her textual worlds. Indeed, several critics have identified her fragmented self-fashioning and its influence on her peculiar style, which in combination with her constant intrusion into her own texts, complicates our understanding of her subjectivity.

Cavendish's writing and publication, then, are a dramatic form of dissent against cultural and social conventions. Her writing was not a weakness, but a means of advocating specifically for "fancy and adornment." Her adoption of such a style was "an informed decision" that offered her a means of dissent against "her age's escalating positivism," in which the advancement of the scientific method touted discipline and organization above all (Stark 264). Utopias such as Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1620) and Henry Neville's *The Isle of Pines* (1661) would help establish an emerging tradition in utopian literature offering strict "scientific" hierarchy in

¹⁷ Karen Raber discusses one of Cavendish's early critics, Alfred Harbage, who complained that Cavendish's plays were inferior precisely because of their "fluidity and lack of formal constraints" (as qtd. in "Margaret Cavendish's *Playes* and the Drama of Authority" 465).

government and civic organization. Cavendish's textual worlds of chaos and disorder clashed with the tenets of the developing genre. She was confident that science and history could employ the same metaphors and adornment that had been associated with "women's writing." She embraced, celebrated, and in a way, redeemed that association by stubbornly ignoring what was expected, and writing against the calls for "purity" of style that had "damaged the idea of women's writing." Such writing, as Ryan John Stark argues, was presumed to be more decorative, and thus "less pure, reasonable, and epistemically viable." Consequently, "calls for plainness became an imperative against the 'mists' of the 'feminine' imagination and this implication thrives in the common early modern trope personifying excessiveness in style as an immoderately dressed woman" ("Margaret Cavendish and Composition Style" 266). Cavendish was not writing against, or in support of, "women's" writing, but against the assumption that *feminine* writing (or "excessive" writing) was somehow less able to capture reason.

It was this "excess," in fact, that granted her the substance to facilitate generic variety through fragmented forms that could be re-arranged at will by author or reader alike. As a result, her feminine "mists" did more to envelop, nurture, and fuel, than obscure, reason. Increasingly, interest for the plain style was, as Stark concludes, "enthusiasm for the idea of epistemic certainty." Conventional utopian literature was written under the assumption that such certainty—like perfection—was possible, but Cavendish questioned that assumption through her determined, if chaotic, textual multiplicity (268). Her writing demonstrates her certainty that no single method, identity, or truth could ever prove as "perfect" as fluidity, which allowed one to choose to shift away from, or draw closer to, imperfection. Cavendish's curious self-dialogue in *Sociable Letters* is a particularly skillful example of her confidence in the potential of multiplicity; Melissa Hill argues that Cavendish was determined to construct "not only her own persona as a confident writer but also the persona of a competent female reader" (140). She imagines and then becomes this dual self in

Sociable Letters where she is a writer and reader, or speaker and listener. However, she wrote herself, or versions of herself, into all her texts, or included thinly veiled personal details and events of her life; she was willing to transgress any boundary, textual or otherwise, if doing so served to unfetter her worlds. Moreover, her celebration of “fancy and adornment” was not limited to her writing, but appeared in her frontispieces (in which she appears as goddess and icon) and in her prefaces (in which she is often the central poetic subject), and even in her infamous clothing design. Her multiple personas are neither wholly consistent nor entirely recognizable, but are always chaotic and varied, or fragmented and ambiguous. Cavendish routinely rejected, dismantled, and disrupted, any semblance of “wholeness” or “completeness” of self, gender, and even nature that the prevailing “plain style,” declared was an attainable “certainty.”

Any critical discussion of Cavendish inevitably confronts the problem of categorizing her writing; in particular, there has been much written on the problematic definition of her style as “women’s writing” in contrast to the supposed order and discipline of “men’s writing.” Sylvia Bowerbank’s insightful, and now foundational article, “The Spider’s Delight: Margaret Cavendish and the ‘Female’ Imagination,” confronts the challenge of assessing her writing. She warns that when we make an exception of Cavendish’s writing, we are creating a “literary ghetto” of the “female imagination” by claiming that “anarchic formlessness” is its “characteristic style of expression” (407). This both limits the potential of women’s writing and restricts it to a single understanding and expectation, as Bowerbank asserts. Cavendish’s deliberate “defiance of method” is specifically what justifies her “lack of method” because she claimed that chaos recreated “pure nature” and imitated “fecundity and originality,” and as such, was the gift of her “true wit.” In this, she was “a defender not of her sex, but of self and self-expression” (393-96). Cavendish did not set out to defend or elevate women or femininity, although her writing clearly advances self-expression, but there is greater gender complexity in her style than Bowerbank allows. She

ultimately describes Cavendish's writing as "muddled and indecisive" and concludes that the effect of "letting contradictions stand" undermines any "authoritative stance" she might have achieved. She resigns herself to wishing Cavendish would have been "a more disciplined writer" and hoping that her place in literary history will act as "a cautionary tale for those of us who would suggest that craftsmanship and order are masculine," after all, as she concludes, "style has no sex" (407). In a way, Bowerbank is reasserting Virginia Woolf's complaint that Cavendish's life should serve as a warning for how women should *not* act.¹⁸ While I agree that we should not construct yet another binary segregating (or privileging) Woman into chaotic formlessness and Man into order and discipline, I disagree not only that style is without sex but that Cavendish's writing exemplifies any *singular* style whichever way one might "sex" it or not. If anything, Cavendish insisted that every reader has it within his or her power to write precisely as he or she would.

Cavendish's chaos thus demonstrates her deliberate confrontation of the predominant style considered the only acceptable form. Her writing suggests that she believed her "singular" method was better suited for conveying fluidity than the "masculine" forms at her disposal. Formlessness could realize a utopic space more adeptly, and her texts demonstrate that the elements of her writing that were considered "feminine" (which were always already relegated to a "ghetto" by patriarchal conventional) could be normalized in (and through) utopia. To allow for the freedom of expression in style, logic, and form (and ultimately gender) that convention would always label "chaotic," required a transgressive space. Indeed, Judith Haber has also recognized that Bowerbank's argument did not allow for Cavendish's greater complexity in invoking the "feminine." In Haber's reading, Cavendish presents herself as simultaneously exceptional and conventional while employing that contradiction to

¹⁸ See Introduction, footnote 16

critical advantage, which demonstrates the transgressive potential of contradiction.¹⁹ It is not just that she should (or even could) have been more disciplined as Bowerbank wishes, or that she truly believed herself to be both exceptional and conventional as Haber points out, but that her “singularity” highlights the gendered distinctions she could not help but convey.

We must take up the utopian call to suspend these failing categories and try to view (and continually review) Cavendish’s work from the perspective she facilitated for us. For the early modern utopist, “masculine” logic, form and desire (as Haber argues) were integral to imagining a utopia where women, and the chaos that accompanied them, could be moderated. Cavendish’s wrote utopias using a decisive style—a “utopian writing”—by which she challenges and transgresses generic convention with little concern as to whether the resulting vision is a “proper utopia” or not.²⁰ Genres could be freed of restrictions, and Cavendish’s continued exploration of, and experimentation with, generic freedom materialized in new forms of gender and desire. Her refusal to limit form and content was already “utopic,” but her disruption of forms of desire, along with gender, allowed her to access the untapped potential of “utopian desire.” It is as if she viewed her writing, and all that her writing could accomplish, through a lens of utopia; desire, and the attendant constructions of gender, were the vehicles through which she conveyed utopia’s potential. According to Alison Findlay, this “utopian desire” manifests most powerfully in Cavendish’s drama. Her dramatic female communities, as she writes, “are a tangible manifestation of a shared desire for such alliances, a desire that is utopian: the search for a home beyond

¹⁹ “Cavendish sometimes argues [...] against a strict division of gender roles, and other times imagines herself as an exceptional woman free from the foibles of her sex.” Then again, as Haber continues, she also mimes “stereotypical female qualities” to deploy them to her advantage and seems “to be criticizing what she sees as ‘masculine’ logic, form, and desire, and attempting to replace these with something new” (120-1).

²⁰ The distinction between utopias as Cavendish imagined them, and utopian literature as it was developing throughout the early modern, can be understood through Kate Lilley’s summation that there is greater flexibility in the category “utopian writing” than “the notoriously unstable notion of ‘utopian’ proper.” Especially given the problematic “generic propriety or classifiability of women’s writing in the seventeenth century” (“Blazing Worlds’: Seventeenth-Century Women’s Utopian Writing” 105).

patriarchy" (*Playing Spaces* 147). Cavendish's search for community led to her establishment of utopias outside of (but within view of) the institutions that restricted women, allowing for her boundless "utopian desire" within that space. The impact of Cavendish's unique writing style critically transforms the subject position, and furthermore, anticipates and alters "utopian constructs" in interesting ways, one of which is that in Cavendish's texts "utopian desire is depicted as a dynamic process as much as an achieved state" (Khanna 16). Cavendish's vision was progressive, and it promoted continual progress instead of an end-goal of "utopia." If utopia is a progressive state that must remain in flux, or in motion, to maintain its transgressive potential, then Cavendish's "utopia" is not actually a community of women, but the liberating chaos of her writing style itself through which she continually imagines and re-imagines the potential for community.

I would like to add Tobin Siebers's profound statement on politics and the postmodern utopia from his introduction to *Heterotopia* (1994) because his reading of a similar "utopian desire" in the postmodern brings an important perspective to Cavendish's utopias:

Utopianism demonstrates both a relentless dissatisfaction with the here and now as well as a bewilderment about the possibility of thinking beyond the here and now. *Utopianism is not about being "no where"; it is about desiring to be elsewhere.* This fact means that utopian desire has both hopeful and pessimistic sides: it yearns for happiness but only because it is so unhappy with the existing world. And if this is true, attempts to distinguish between utopian and dystopian thinking are ultimately bound to fail. *Utopian desire is the desire to desire differently*, which includes the desire to abandon desire. [...] Postmodernists, then, are utopian, not because they do not know what they want. They are utopian because they know that they want something else. They want to desire differently. What distinguishes postmodernism ultimately is the extremity of its belief that neither utopia nor desire can exist in the here and now, and yet, paradoxically, this belief makes postmodernists want them all the more (2-3, emphasis mine).

Cavendish's style has been compared to the fragmentary aesthetics of the postmodern elsewhere (as it is elsewhere in Siebers's collection).²¹ Resistance is integral to

²¹ Beverley C. Southgate's *Postmodernism in History: Fear or Freedom?* (2003) is particularly insightful as is Line Cottagnies's "The 'Native Tongue' of the 'Authoress': The Mythical Structure of Margaret Cavendish's Autobiographical Narrative" in *Authorial Conquests* (2003).

postmodernism, but it curiously echoes the resistance to Cavendish's style and form. For instance, Nicole Pohl traces the political and cultural definitions of utopia and points out that postmodernism was often considered "another nail in utopia's coffin since utopia's supposedly homogenizing and limiting quest for unity, stability, and collectivity, runs counter to the postmodern matrix" (*Women, Space, Utopia* 11-12). If we define utopia as convention established it, the postmodern would have certainly ended utopia's potential. The theoretical "here and now" in which utopia exists requires a progression that Cavendish deftly delivers in her writing. It may seem as if I am indicating an anachronistic connection of Cavendish to the postmodern, but I will demonstrate that this connection is not only relevant but also clearly indicative of her vision as a utopist. I am not suggesting that Cavendish was proto-postmodern, or proto-feminist either (although possibly post*early*modern), but that her vision was so distinctly utopian that the similarities transgress the centuries; when it comes to utopia, the search was, and remains, unfulfilled. Cavendish applied utopia precisely as utopia would come to be defined. After all, our current understanding of utopia developed in no small part because of the influence of feminist theory. Feminism relates to the postmodern in similar ways, and it, too, is riddled with expressions of utopia and the search for origins. Each dialogue blurs boundaries, disrupts conventions, complicates origins, questions and confronts forms of desire and gender, and each is, consequently, poignantly self-aware. Not surprisingly, one can sense the same disruptive qualities in Cavendish's texts that one finds in both postmodernity and feminism. Her utopias demonstrate the indecisive contradiction Siebers suggests is an element of postmodernism and utopianism, most profoundly in the expression of utopian desire as a "desire to desire differently" (similar to utopia's desire not to be gendered, or rather, to be gendered differently, as I demonstrated in chapter 1) and in the "desire to be elsewhere" that defined much of Cavendish's life as her own utopian desire. Cavendish was restricted by a society that told her women could only desire what men told them they should, and in the ways that men defined, but in utopia,

anyone can desire differently, or the same, or not at all. Cavendish only had to write differently in order to express that different desire, or to imagine herself “elsewhere” to the near-constant dislocation she lived with in exile.

Utopia holds unequalled potential for women writers, and consequently, feminist authors and theorists (and gender and queer theorists) use utopia because it has proven to be a versatile metaphor to convey transgressive concepts (such as varied forms of sexuality and desire). The transformative change, blurred boundaries, and other forms of ambiguity that emerge in utopian literature, and from the negotiation of utopic spaces, are the specific elements male utopists attempted to control in their perfect commonwealths, on their ideal islands, and their conquest of new worlds, or in their scientific discoveries. Carol Thomas Neely offers an important perspective in her exploration of the similarities between utopia and the fetish. She notes that women’s traditional role in both discourses has been marginal and was often discussed only in terms of the need to produce more utopian citizens. Utopia in literature requires women as a material presence, while the fetish also requires women’s bodies (or apparel) as fetishized rather than fetishizing: “Indeed fetishes, especially the psychoanalytic sort, and utopias, especially classical ones, are constructed to disavow (while requiring) women’s bodies and sexuality, their productive and reproductive labor, their political authority” (61-2). Woman in (as) utopia (and fetish) is perpetually on the fringe; the simultaneous need for, and desire to control, Woman (integral to the fetish) demonstrates, as I have argued, the inability of utopias to succeed within the structures of the gender binary. If one wishes to explore the possibilities of utopia, he or she must ultimately negotiate the fluidity that utopias require. Cavendish will not be kept on the fringe (or fetishized) in her utopia because she will be both its author and its inhabitant. By recognizing utopia’s potential and braving her substantial critics (even across time), Cavendish shattered the problem of perspective that barred utopia

from the utopist (perspective, after all, was shifting along with new constructions of space).²²

Queer readings of how the gender binary restricts and limits utopia also closely echo Neely's reading of utopia and the fetish. Of these readings, Theodora Jankowski's effort to clarify the potential of the early modern gender binary is particularly insightful to this dissertation and to Cavendish's work in particular. In *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (2000), Jankowski complicates our understanding of early modern gender constructions. To better understand the structure of early modern sex/gender systems, as Jankowski points out, we must recall that the system of medieval England and Europe was not as restrictive as it would become under Protestantism, in fact, as Jankowski defines, Catholic Europe actually offered "a more fluid system" that was "closed down as a result of theological decisions essential to the Reformation." The recovery of "non-normative gender positions for women" disrupts the "regime of heterosexuality" and opens up the "restrictive male/female binary of the early modern Protestant sex/gender system to the possibility of multiple sexual/erotic combinations" (10). The contrast between Protestant rigidity and the more fluid Catholic system that preceded it, informs Cavendish's decision to "privilege" places such as convents (and other exclusively female spaces) as utopic spaces given the female intimacy of her writing:

Gender was not only organized around the traditional man/woman binary, but around the theological virgin/not virgin as well. Such an organization makes gender more difficult to analyze but also allows more options for exploring gender positions. The idea that women were considered as capable as men of maintaining their physical integrity allowed both genders a socially and culturally acceptable alternative to marriage (10).

Cavendish was aware of the influence and structures of Catholic Europe given her service to the Catholic French Princess Henrietta Marie and her exile in France and the

²² Recall Appelbaum's reading of Gonzalo's commonwealth in *The Tempest* in which he describes perspective in utopia and how conflict arises when a utopist attempts to describe a utopia and exist within it at the same time (just as in virtual worlds in which techne can take place). Sawday also reminds us of how perspective was shifting in the early modern: "The organization of space [...] carried with it a philosophical dimension which bore directly onto the work of the anatomists [...] the effectiveness of perspectival systems of representation depended upon the viewer's relationship to the picture plane" (86).

Netherlands. She acknowledged that the gender expectations of virgin/not virgin left Protestant women with little choice other than “wife,” but she rejected this assumption. Women had alternatives, and she would discuss them. This assumption was so integral that the “man/woman gender binary” in early modern England could be as easily rendered “husband/wife” because the “acceptable exceptions to this binary or paradigm were few”; Marriage was “the ultimate social destiny of all women” because it ensured that they would become “the sexual property of men” (11). Cavendish railed against this assumption by insisting that education was an acceptable choice for women, and in her texts, she opened up spaces that allowed women options: schools, convents, other worlds, or as in *Letters*, in intelligent exchanges dedicated to unhindered discussion and debate.

Primarily, Cavendish wanted to discuss the potential these alternatives held, but at the same time, she was also greatly concerned with virtue and chastity and often described them as women’s greatest attributes.²³ She was adamant that education and pleasure were virtuous choices, and several of Cavendish’s characters maintain their virtue without an authoritarian male relative, or an oppressive patriarchal church, ensuring they would. Maintaining virtue indicated ensuring one’s “physical integrity” as Jankowski noted, or rather, self-enclosure (the now familiar concern in utopia), but enclosure was a more positive concept for Cavendish than the term’s history implies. In “Reading the Stage,” Marta Stranznicky argues that enclosure was “not necessarily synonymous with ostracism” for Cavendish. She believed that enclosed spaces were admirable if they included, rather than rejected, “the world” because she believed that “the solitude of one’s study, far from shutting out the external world, is the ideal space in which to engage with it.” Cavendish’s dramas allow her to bridge “solitude

²³ Cavendish was highly critical of women’s shortcomings and saved her most vitriolic attacks for “un-virtuous” women. In letter 30, for instance, she discusses Plutarch’s “Life of Pericles” describing his great wisdom in all things except in marrying a Whore, for the “Lewdness of her former Life could not but be a great Blemish to him, as to marry the Dregs and Leavings of other men” (43). An anonymous critic once named her “Welbeck’s illustrious whore” (See Whitaker 348), suggesting that the word and its connotations must have struck a personal chord with Cavendish.

and society, contemplation and conversation, melancholy and mirth" in ways that Shakespeare's cloistered women, members of his Academe, or even his self-isolating Prospero, could not (377). Indeed, Cavendish's plays were meant to be enjoyed "neither in solitude, nor with the multitude, but in a space between the two" because utopias always materialize in that now familiar liminal space (381). In confronting Cavendish's enclosures, we find ourselves once again at the infinite gap—the liminal threshold—that best allows the utopian promise and here connects Cavendish to the utopian tradition Shakespeare helped establish.²⁴

Cavendish's social and cultural environment also significantly influenced her writing. Her dramatic communities of women, for instance, were a response to the Civil War that left many women without male guardians (fathers, husbands, brothers, or other accountable male relatives). Exiled Royalists, men and women alike, had been greatly weakened by the loss of their power, authority, status, and wealth, but noble men, in particular, were left powerless and, thus, feminized. Rebecca D'Monté outlines how gender roles shifted and became more fluid in the wake of the war, and this freed Cavendish to apply the "different geographical, cerebral, and emotional spaces" that would influence her textual spaces ("Mirroring Female Power" 94).²⁵ Her destabilizing experiences at home, at court, in exile, and eventually, in returning home to a dramatically different country, could not help but influence her vision for ideal spaces. Her utopias were elaborately metaphoric, but they also reflected this turmoil and conflict. The highly public and socially demanding life of a Duchess (despite her repeated, if perhaps insincere, assertions of a preference for isolation) left her

²⁴ Jeanne Addison Roberts has marked the difference between Shakespeare and Cavendish's approach to enclosure and has noted that while "both draw out the pleasures of amorous delay" through forms of enclosure, Shakespeare ends his plays by denying closure and Cavendish by "redefining the terms" of the enclosure (87). The terms allow the possibility of different forms of desire in Cavendish's plays, but both dramatists show such signs of "incipient feminism" (88).

²⁵ "If Cavendish's plays define the household [...] as potentially dangerous [...] she shows how it then becomes necessary, even desirable, for women to redefine their own spaces. To find new locations to inhabit—the cabal, the academy, the convent—and the resultant renegotiation of space thus becomes a way for writers such as Cavendish to redefine women's position within the family and within the wider political spectrum" (D'Monté 94).

constantly negotiating spaces.²⁶ Cavendish's social climate rigidly gendered public and private spaces, and for Cavendish, this conflict emerges in how spaces materialize in her texts. As the Renaissance led to the Interregnum and subsequent Restoration, the reconsideration of spaces, both inner and outer, or vast and minuscule, also became part of Cavendish's diverse cultural dialogue. The influence of space and place on utopia emerged in part from Europe's increasing influence in the colonial Americas (as it was with utopia on stage and utopia in theory). However, the utopic potential the New World had offered since its discovery was now evolving as the growing colonial expansion turned the colonies into smaller versions of European nation-states. Gradually, the colonies were establishing familiar conventions to replace the utopic potential celebrated by the discovery accounts; they were becoming recognizable places instead of utopic spaces. At the same moment that the utopic freedom of the New World dwindled, the realm of science was expanding with new concepts of physical and spiritual *inner* spaces. Cavendish was more intrigued by science than the potential of the New World as she wrote extensively about the vast potential science could offer the world. Her scientific discussions were not restricted to her scientific publications; she includes scientific questions, discussions that detail her own (and her husband's) physical ailments and medicinal trials, her thoughts on the mysterious workings of the body, her consideration of the dimensions and substance of the spirit those bodies held, and the boundaries between them, throughout her body of work. She was re-imagining the presence of the author in the text-as-space by considering how space could contain and enclose the physical, could animate the theoretical, and

²⁶ In "The Politics of Feminine Retreat," Hero Chalmers writes, "the exclusively female constitution of Cavendish's secluded communities may be seen as a metaphorical reflection of the predicament of both male and female Royalists during the Interregnum. Deprived of their rights to property, excluded from public office and physically limited in various ways, Interregnum Royalist men were not only forced increasingly into the conventionally private sphere but feminised, taking on crucial elements of the female condition as defined by law and long-standing social custom" (88). The plays in particular reflect the literary, social, and political environment of the Interregnum and were significant in enabling the "positive portrayal of retreat from conventional society into a self-sufficient feminised space. The authority and self-sufficiency of the women in Cavendish's retreats may be linked to the Interregnum Royalist need to promulgate the notion that the feminised space of retreat is in some sense the centre of power" (88).

the paradox of how that containment might liberate the spiritual. The physical dimensions and parameters of the body and the spirit particularly intrigued her, and she often discussed how the two might be inextricable, divisible, sensible, or gendered.

Reflecting this evolution of space and place, Cavendish's prefaces act as foyers leading into the many rooms, or worlds, her texts introduce, and they reflect the shifting cultural negotiation of space and place of her age as well. Usually, her prefaces are read as an anticipation of criticism, and in an ironic realization of her fears, (once and future) critics have poured over Cavendish's "peritextual material" with almost greater zeal than they have the texts themselves (Quinsee 96).²⁷ Emma Rees considers how Cavendish slips between her texts and peritexts and argues that she creates a "liminal zone of contact" between (and for) herself and her readers. Cavendish's prefaces, as Rees argues, are "manipulative of her readership" but her maneuvering between the two textual spaces reflects her life in exile: "In her intratextual generic interventions, Cavendish does not altogether exile [her] peritextual voice. There is a slippage over the threshold, the effect of which is analogous to the inroads [she] attempts to make in her act of publishing out of exile." In this exchange, as Rees argues, her voice "does not remain in the liminal confined spaces of the peritext, but seeps into the main body of each publication" (30). It is not surprising, perhaps, that one of the most common critical responses to Cavendish's textual structure is to discuss her texts through spatial metaphors, as I will show. Cavendish herself constantly compared abstract concepts to spaces or places, and studies of her language rely on expressions that acknowledge her desire to create textual spaces as habitable *places*. Cavendish stands poised at a threshold, forestalls the collapse of meaning on the brink of a precipice (like Shakespeare), claims a presence on a "stage of oratory" (as Hiscock writes), or finds "new locations to

²⁷ Critics often focus on Cavendish's introductory prefaces, epistles, and even her intratextual additions for good reason, as they are substantial. Even when reading her plays, poetry, or prose, critics tend to spend considerable time reflecting on how a text is introduced, and I will follow suit because, after all, Cavendish demands it. Among others, see Emma Rees's article as well as Sara Mendelson's "Playing Games with Gender and Genre: The Dramatic Self-Fashioning of Margaret Cavendish" and Jeffrey Masten's *Textual Intercourse*.

inhabit" in which she "redefines her own spaces" (as D'Monté writes). She seizes discursive power through a constant "explicit presence" in "confined spaces" and "slips over thresholds" to forge a "liminal zone of contact" (as Rees writes here). Critics seem inclined to use the language of physical movement, place, and space creation to describe Cavendish because her writing (as with most utopias) relies on interactivity. Participants in her textual exchange share a *space*, they must be in contact with each other, must be in each other's presence, and will always be found lingering in the gap, or the liminal threshold, between text and preface. Moreover, Cavendish applied the metaphor to herself long before critics rediscovered her: her mind is always a land, or a world, or a stage, or a commonwealth populated by thoughts, ideas, or personified virtues. Cavendish unfolded her intentions, room by room, like the nesting boxes of her poem "Of *many Worlds in this World*" (1653), to illustrate her worlds within worlds (spaces within spaces) that required nothing more than the space of a woman's earring (so close to her mind) to encompass infinity (an important indicator of the utopicity in her writing). Her prefaces, then, demonstrate her desire for an unregulated, uncategorized textual space where she might linger free from the judgment that would arrive once readers begin the text proper.

Cavendish's elaborate prefaces open a door to texts of equally elaborate variety in genre and form. This "infinite" mixture has become her literary (and critical) signature, because, for Cavendish, genre did not contain and could not clearly distinguish. *Sociable Letters*, as Heather Kerr argues, is one of Cavendish's most "experimental" texts because her form affects a "play of voices" that she regarded as a "more or less arbitrary substitute for the play-text."²⁸ *Letters* demonstrates how her use of genre allows her to have it "both ways" as she notes in the Preface: "The truth is, they are rather Scenes than Letters" (225-6). She need not relinquish one form in

²⁸ Heather Kerr argues that Cavendish approached genres as "technologies for literary subjectivities" because she seemed "uninterested in reconciling any contradictions that might arise along the way." Her famous "textual hybridity" demonstrates a way to manage the resulting "contradictoriness" through her "two characteristic models of hybridity: mixing and joining" (222-23).

order to attempt another. Cavendish wrote as if her works *could not* exist in a single category, and as her preface notes, she chose the epistolary form in *Letters* because she “saw that Variety in Forms did Please the Readers best” and believed that a play required more of a reader’s time and attention than the “Personal Visitation and Conversation” these “two Ladies” shared (9). Perhaps if she had written letters alone we would have accepted this reasoning, but the letters themselves include orations, poems and anecdotes, and, of course, she wrote plays before this collection of letters and would go on to write more plays after them. Indeed, her textual hybridity extended beyond “joining and mixing” because she defined herself as an author and defined her genres with little regard for how society’s definitions might contradict. Her hybridity also demonstrates her engagement with early modern authority and authorship in her efforts to assert her authorial relevancy. The fixity of early modern authorial expectations fueled Cavendish’s experimentation. It is a paradox, as Emma Rees writes, “that a culture which views genre as fixed or prescriptive actually encourages precisely the kind of innovative generic play that is manifested repeatedly in Cavendish’s writings” because, when one questions genre, one can access, as far as can ever be possible, “authorial intention” (26-7). Patriarchal conventions may have insisted on the rigidity that barred Cavendish from demonstrating hybrid genres and forms, but she negotiated them in a space she created outside of that authority.²⁹ If society had truly invested her with the authority she professed to have, Cavendish may have been subject to the criticism and editorial influence that could have hindered this hybridity. She was creating herself as an author entirely independent of the very authorities she wanted to influence, and as her writings did not neatly fit with convention, her self-affirmed authority was established through her defiance of

²⁹ In an interesting consideration of Cavendish’s assertion of authority, Mihoko Suzuki argues that Cavendish “adopts Shakespeare as a literary parent, inverting the usual adoption of the offspring by a father. This assertive reversal enables Cavendish to choose her own literary heritage across gender lines; it is significant that she does not limit her filiation to foremothers—women writers who preceded her” (105). Cavendish refers to herself interchangeably as both “author” and “authoress” and “creator” and “creatoress.” However, she is a writer as often as she is a woman writer and seems to consider the gendering of these designations unreliable.

expectations in genre.³⁰ *Sociable Letters*, for instance, was not a collection of “lady-like” letters, but a discussion of topics over which she could claim authority. Whether or not any woman had ever wielded that authority before did not matter because the “space” was still open for her to establish that authority herself. If a topic interested her, she saw fit to write about it, even if she could enter the dialogue only by imagining (or textually creating) the space in which to do so. Furthermore, those dialogues may have included only herself in that “space apart” (for lack of another woman to follow). Cavendish at once embodies the multiplicity of material nature and the singularity of spiritual intellect that she required, and from that paradox, she asserts her authority, even as she denies and dismantles it through her chaotic form and style.³¹

She may have been a dutiful servant of her Catholic queen, and later a content wife to her noble Protestant husband (and she certainly used both roles, to her advantage), but Cavendish’s writing demands that alternatives for women were possible, and sometimes even preferable. She imagined her communities on the presumption that there were other paths to women’s self-determination and that these paths could overlap: Women need not be only wife or scholar because they could be both. She maintained her role as noble wife and still entered academic and philosophic dialogues with little regard for who might prevent her. However, she had an obsessive desire *to be read* that contradicted drastically with her insistence that she was writing *only* for her own pleasure and fancy. In part, this extreme desire led to her excessive prefaces. She could be wife and scholar in the real world, and herself as author and character within the text, by writing from these several positions at once all in an effort to ensure against misunderstanding. She adopts every role because she never

³⁰ Angus Fletcher has argued that Cavendish embraced irregularity and authority as “mutually reinforcing principles,” and writes: “Cavendish’s distinctive view of irregularity should be traced not to a desire to reject hierarchy but rather to her place in a feminist tradition that sought to redefine authority by associating it with women’s inconstant dispositions” (125-6).

³¹ Jennifer Low captures this fascinating quality well: “Cavendish simultaneously writes and unwrites her authority, as if writing forwards with the left hand and backwards with the right. [...] Indeed the writing itself, is self-defining” (150).

allows (or even trusts) readers to find their own way through her textual world. She assumes absolute authority through her prefaces by articulating an extreme hyper-awareness of the tenuousness of the several roles she adopts other than wife, and the failure to understand she assumes in her readers. This is most evident in the prefaces in which she speaks directly to the reader, but the anxiety is consistent throughout her texts. For example, in letter 173 she discusses a “Lady” who had recently misread “some of M.N.s Playes.” She references her collection of plays as if it were not obvious that she is the author of both the plays and the letter discussing the author of the plays:

Women, for the most part, Spoil all Good Writing with Ill Reading, and not only Women, but most Men, for I heard a Man who was a Great Scholar and a Learned Man, having Read much, and one that Pretended to be a Good Poet, and Eloquent Orator, Read Mr. W.Ns Excellent Works quite out of Tune and Time. [...] I am so Affected with fear of Unskilful Readers for my Poor Works, as when I Look upon them, I cannot choose but Mourn for their Danger and Disreputation; yet to Pacifie my Grief, I imagine that every several Person likes his own way of Reading Best, and so will not Dislike my Writing, for Want of Well Reading (185).

She guides readers at every turn, and does not stop at the text she addresses, or the text she is writing, and does not even confine herself to this one letter because she revisits topics—reiterating or contradicting her opinions—in other letters in which she offers further cross references. By redirecting readers to her other texts (or to other discussions about her other texts) she creates an internal dialogue that establishes a “textual community” in which each text “speaks” and “responds” to the other through her singular authorial voice. She invites readers to participate in this community through her prefaces, but never allows for any other way of reading except her own.

As she continues in letter 173, Cavendish criticizes the failures of both readers and condemns women and men alike for their poor reading skills. However, we can recognize another motive because she assigns *her* writing to women and her husband’s writing (W.N.) to men. This assignment, so subtle and seemingly offhand, is demonstrative of Cavendish’s gender-specific philosophy of reading and writing. In an earlier letter, Cavendish defends her writing by indicating that she has written, quite

specifically, in a language that may be inaccessible to men; in other words, she is writing in a language they cannot understand. In letter 144 she describes how “Sir O.B.” does not understand *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655) and blames this failure on his lack of the “Philosophical Brain” that would help him understand “Sense and Reason in those Opinions.” She goes so far as to ask that, if he disputes her writing, he should indicate exactly where she lacked sense or reason:

There is more Strength of Brain required to Understand it, than to Understand a Horn-book; besides, it is harder, because they are New Opinions, never Vented before; as for Example, if a man did make an Oration in such a Language which his Auditors never heard before, and because they do not Understand the Language, would they Condemn the Oration? That were not only Unjust, but Foolish to Condemn what they cannot Judge of, as not Understanding it; or would they say, it cannot be Understood, because they never Learn'd that language? If every one were of that Opinion, there would be no Languages Taught or Learned [...] their Opinions were Understood by those that did make it their Employment to Study and so to Understand them, but they had this Advantage, being Men, that they had liberty not only to Write their Opinions, but to Preach, Teach, and Instruct others to Understand them (154).

Her metaphor for the misunderstanding at once condemns O.B.’s inability to understand her text, and demands that she be judged as if “a man did make an oration.” She subtly equates her efforts with any “male orator’s” while she accuses O.B. of making no effort to understand her. Male readers, she insists, must learn the language they disallow if they ever wish to access it, instead of dismissing it as incomprehensible or unworthy of study. Men may have the advantage of access to education, but they fail to take the time to study or hear *her* language. This self-criticism is certainly connected to her anxiety over her male readers, in particular, because their approval could more widely validate her writing, especially with academic audiences, and this frustrated her. Jay Stevenson (who awards Cavendish the title of “anomalous champion of randomness” in a period “notable for obsession with order and dread of chaos”) argues that Cavendish also adopted the role of “defiant protofeminist,” and that in that role, she resisted “phallogocentric discourse by refusing to conform to its logic.” This explains her literary ambition and “contempt of method” but as Stevenson insists, reading Cavendish in this way “fails to explain her self-

criticism and evident desire to be appreciated, especially by her male readers" (527). The result of her methodless-method was a repeated contradiction in her writing that is egregiously considered a "failure to communicate." Instead, her contradiction demonstrates her surprising effort to "negotiate strictures" and to approach the faults of "male power" by generating, through her presence, an "absence of meaning" (527-8). She is the matter with which masculine utopian spaces were constructed, but as a writer of utopias herself, Cavendish dismantles their utopic spaces the moment she constructs her own space: Meaning is, at once, absent and present.

Her anxiety over her reception in letter 144 ends on an optimistic note exemplifying how she often coupled nervous apprehension with an equal measure of hope. In letter 173, for example, she equates her anxiety to mourning over the "Danger and Disreputation" that might befall her writings. It was not just misunderstanding that worried her, but a poignant fear that the texts themselves were in acute danger. In this letter, her anguish ends when she relinquishes mourning in favor of indulging her imagination: A variety of reading styles *must* exist, and that ensures that many readers, if not all, *will* understand them. Her texts breathed and lived, and she could breathe and live in them through her self-reflective textual presence. Through this physical presence in her text, she established her authority and allowed access to spaces where readers might ponder better communities or scientific ideas. She forged that physical, spatial connection so readers could experience her worlds as living, inhabitable places, but only in communion with *her*. No work reflects this presence, and her construction of a textual community by way of her presence, better than *Sociable Letters*. It has fewer prefaces than her other works, but includes an unusual prefatory poem about herself: "Upon her Excellency The Authoress." She follows the poem with another poem, "To the Censorious Reader." It was common for her to include more than one poem in her prefatory material, but her juxtaposition of these poems is indicative of her utopic structure in the text.

The two prefatory poems in *Sociable Letters* capture a common trope that illustrates Cavendish's purpose, as well as her surprising dexterity at finding ways of writing herself into her utopias. The first poem sets the tone for the second, in which the speaker shifts to the third person, not in reference to the text to come, but about her presence within the text to come. The speaker is distanced from the poet-as-subject, which is intriguing when we realize that both poems use similar wording to offer the same story from two perspectives. She will describe the grandness of herself-as-authoress from the outside in the first poem, and in the second will discuss her grandness from within. The first poem includes a specific Cavendish emerging as a utopic character within a poetically envisioned ideal of a gendered "mind." This is a telling introduction to a collection of letters by herself and for herself:

This Lady only to her self she Writes
 And all her Letters to her self Indites;
 For in her self so many Creatures be,
 Like many Commonwealths, yet all Agree.
 Man's Head's a World, where Thoughts are Born and Bred,
 And Reason's Emperour in every Head;
 But in all Heads doth not a Caesar Reign,
 A Wise Augustus hath not every Brain,
 And Reason in some Brains from Rule's put out
 By Mad, Rebellious Thoughts, and Factions Rout;
 And Great Disorder in such Brains will be,
 Not any Thought with Reason will Agree;
 But in her Brain doth Reason Govern well,
 Not any Thought 'gainst Reason doth Rebell,
 But doth Obey what Reason doth Command (10)

There is immediate ambiguity because the poet and the subject remain uncertain. The subject and object of this Lady's writing are generic and a specific person at once. In the second line, the poet refers to the forthcoming letters specifically, but may also be referencing her other works with "all" (Cavendish will also write *Philosophical Letters* [1664]). She writes exclusively ("only") to herself, and then reiterates that they are written ("Indited") *only* to herself. Establishing the Lady's singularity as self and other at once, the speaker explains that within this singular self are many "creatures," united in cohesive "commonwealths," that are always in agreement; there is no strife

within the Lady's utopic, if multiple, inner self. In the second poem, she addresses herself as speaker in the first person:

But on my Poor Writings they no Malace know,
Nor on a Crabbed Nature did they Grow;
I to Particulars give no Abuse,
My Wit Indites for Profitable Use (12).

The preface poems introduce two "selves" that are both, at once, Cavendish. Geraldine Wagner argues that Cavendish's prefatory poems indicate that she "considered textuality a means to subjectivity." In these poems, as she will do in *Blazing World*, "Margaret splits herself into two physically and intellectually separate personae" (1-2). Writing her "self" as many into the text allowed Cavendish to imagine an ambiguous subjectivity by which she could become plural beings, but remain her singular self in the "real." Utopia allowed her "self" to slip and slide at will through her creative, if manipulative, absent presence in her textual spaces, and this elaborate commonwealth of selves would find its most substantial realization in *Blazing World* (Wagner 2). Given how consistently contradictory her multiple presences render her textual presences, investigating her recurrent themes helps to reveal the "chaos" of Cavendish's utopian methodology.³²

Later in the first poem, Cavendish shifts focus from the personal to the universal by referencing a "Man's head" that contains "a World," and notes that Man's thoughts *should* be ruled by Reason as its Emperor, but instead, they disagree. Immediately following this generalization, she shifts back to the personal by referencing "*Her* brain" where "Reason governs well"; the one line offers personalization and generalization through Cavendish's multivalent poetic presence. When discussing her mind (and her writings as "creatures of her mind") she insists (here as elsewhere) that she is always ruled by Reason (a virtue she regularly personifies, deifies, and often feminizes). By choosing the third-person voice, Cavendish suggests that her brain can in fact be any

³² In reference to Cavendish's scientific and philosophical theories, Lisa Sarasohn has noted that her repetition of themes "became the vehicle for conveying her own ideas, while rejecting the conceptions of others" ("Leviathan and the Lady" 45). In a way, her repetition was a self-validation of her theories and a simultaneous marginalization of others.

female brain when compared with the general “man’s head” earlier in the poem. She thus grants greater reason to *all* women’s minds (even women who may share her mediocre education) by way of *her* mind, just as she grants them access to unwomanly topics by way of publication. Of course, this does not mean that she did not specifically and repeatedly contradict herself on this point; as often as she insists that women are far more reasonable, she also reiterates how unreasonable they can be. Her contradiction is a common complaint of readers and critics,³³ but at least she is *consistently* contradictory, which can be understood as her demonstrating the potential of simultaneity (that an idea or thing can be itself *and* its opposite simultaneously) instead of a weakness in her work. Contradiction exemplifies the deliberate, persistent utopicity of her works because utopia, as I have defined it in this dissertation, is critically, theoretically, and conceptually bound to contradiction and Cavendish recognized, and engaged with, this potential.

Cavendish ends the poem with a moment of unity, where her female “creature” thoughts travel among “Mankind,” (capitalized and distinguished from “her” mind) only to return to Reason, now (re)fashioned (and re-gendered) as a “Great King” within the Brain as subject to Contemplation’s rule over Senses:

And thus Her thoughts, the Creatures of her Mind,
Do Travel through the World amongst Mankind,
And then Return, and to the Mind do bring
All the Relations of each several thing;
And Observation Guides them back again
To Reason, their Great King, that’s in the Brain;
Then Contemplation calls the Senses straight,
Which Ready are, and Diligently Wait
Commanding Two these Letters for to Write,
Touch in the Hand, as also the Eye-Sight,
These Two the Soul’s Clerks are which do Inscribe,
And Write All Truly down, having no Bribe.

The inspiration for *Sociable Letters* came from the Virtues who exist, rule, and dictate within her mind: Contemplation and Reason who “command” her “hand” and “sight.”

³³ Cottegnies and Weitz note that studies of Cavendish often ignore the grand scope of her works preferring to focus closely on a single work, and that this results in “many works and even whole genres [left] untouched. Consequently, the coherence of [her] thought has often been overstressed when in fact her corpus is replete with—even in some respects, dependent on—contradictions” (9).

Her movement between the general and specific, and the real minds and ideal virtues, keep Cavendish present and absent at once, and also diffuses the responsibility for the unfeminine topics to come. She then shifts between the genders of each mind, and the thoughts and virtues within them. The movement between the minds suggests the possibility of visiting a diverse, peaceful commonwealth that allows for utopia but is safely contained. Sandra Sherman, discussing *Sociable Letters* specifically, argues that “fluidity between first and third person is a Cavendish trope” but Sherman then divests that fluidity of its potential by stating that Cavendish’s reference to herself in third person reflects “a paradox of unstable isolation” (188). Contradiction is as much part of Cavendish’s fluidity as paradox, and while Cavendish’s shifts suggest a sense of instability and self-isolation, it was far more liberating than isolating if considered from within her communities. Her textual spaces allowed her plentiful social (if virtual) interaction and the opportunity to speak through a variety of voices. When one reads Cavendish, one must expect the “I” as often as one expects the “she,” and then must consider what her subtle intent might have been in juxtaposing the two.

Cavendish was poignantly aware of how deliberately gendered language—pronouns in particular—influenced society. She demonstrates this awareness by challenging how pronouns assign identity and gender, but even more egregiously, how they constrain and limit form and style. As she writes in a preface to *Playes* (1662):

I Know there are many Scholastical and Pedantical persons that will comdemn my writings, because I do not keep strictly to the Masculine and Feminine Genders, as for example, a Lock and a Key, the one is the Masculine Gender, the other the Feminine Gender, so Love is the Masculine Gender, Hate the Feminine Gender, and the Furies are shees, and the Graces are shees, and the Virtues are shees, and the seven deadly Sins are shees, which I am sorry for; but I know no reason but that I may as well make them Hees for my use, as others did Shees, or Shees as others did Hees. But some will say, if I did do so, there would be no forms or rules of Speech to be understood by; I answer, that we may as well understand the meaning or sense of a Speaker or Writer by the names of Love or Hate, as by the names of he or she, and better: for the division of Masculine and Feminine Genders doth confound a Scholar [...] so that if my writings be understood, I desire no more; and as for the nicities of Rules, Forms, and Terms, I renounce, and profess, that if I did understand and known 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 (259).

Cavendish demonstrates profound insight into the random reasoning behind gendering in this letter to readers. The nature of conventional linguistic gendering, as she writes, is arbitrary because gender is based on nothing more than the deliberate intent of “pedantical and scholastic” men who decide how everyone (and everything) should be gendered. By shedding light on the randomness of gendering, she illustrates how she, too, may easily assign “hees” or “shees” to serve her purpose, just as they have. This subtle proposal does far more to highlight how “shees” have been used for centuries by “others,” than shock those “others” with her declaration that she will now gender for her purposes.³⁴ She is othering men as women have been othered and indicates that she will take authority over rules and forms as readily, and randomly, as “others” have. To close her argument, she makes a far bolder declaration: She formally renounces the linguistic conventions, forms, and rigid gendering that would confine her style (and thus, her ability to realize utopia). She sees no reason for absolute linguistic rigidity, and so, renounces “the nicities of Rules, Forms, and Terms.” It is an isolating choice of “singularity” that forged the chaos that at once disallowed the comprehension she sought while it influenced her reception and reputation. She focuses her condemnation on the wholly arbitrary construction of gender in drama that, as Jeffrey Masten argues, was “unaccustomed to a woman’s activity.”³⁵ For instance, her prefatory material in *Playes* is less chaotic and follows a clearer narrative because this unexpected gender discussion culminates in a theatrical scene in which she discusses the role of the female dramatist. Her final preface in the collection is a play-before-the-play “in

³⁴ Judith Haber has argued that Cavendish, in this preface, is reversing conventional gendering of the Lock and Key analogy by assigning the lock to men, and the key to women; it is a physically transgressive reversal of the metaphor that might just as easily be disregarded as an innocent transposition. As Haber argues, this reversal gives us “an erotically charged example of the gender bending Cavendish is advocating” (120). However, Mary Baine Campbell suggested to me that Cavendish was likely referring to French genders (i.e. *la clef* and *le serrure*) in this passage. Although Cavendish never wrote in French, and likely could not read it either (See Cottagnies 71, Sarasohn 130, and Whitaker 60), she most likely would have been quite familiar with it given her service at court and her time in France.

³⁵ Masten reads this preface as illustrating her entrance into a discourse that had always been “perceived as a conversation between men” because theater was a particularly “treacherous and heavily policed” arena for her to enter (*Textual Intercourse* 156).

which three gentlemen enter and discuss whether or not they should attend a play written by a woman" (157).

There are very few texts in which Cavendish does not negotiate gender roles, but by confronting restrictive pronouns as she introduces her plays (the most popular of genres that so few women before her had attempted), she is dramatizing her solitude in form (as one of the "singular" women writing plays) and fact (discussing the reasons for her singularity). Cavendish often discusses her solitude, isolation, and even loneliness. She approaches it as a personality trait, but also as liberating and oppressive at once, but always as a *choice*.³⁶ Letter 29 offers a good example:

It is not out of a Fantastick Humour, that I live so much Retired, which is to keep my House more than go Abroad, but out of Self-love, and not out of Self-opinion, and it is Just and Natural for any one to Love himself: Wherefore, for my Pleasure and Delight, my Ease and Peace, I live a Retired Life, a Home Life, free from Intanglements, confused Clamours, and rumbling Noise of the World, for I by this Retirement live in a calm Silence, wherein I have my Contemplations free from Disturbance, and my Mind lives in Peace and my Thoughts in Pleasure, they Sport and Play, they are not Vext with Cares nor worldly Desires, they are not Covetous of worldly Wealth, nor Ambitious of empty Titles; they are not to be catch'd with the Baits of Sensual Pleasures, or rather I may say, Sensual Follies, for they Draw my Senses to them, and run not out to the Senses; they have no quarrelling Disputes amongst them; they live Friendly and Sociably together; their only Delight is in their own Pastimes and harmless Recreations; and though I do not go Personally to Masks, Balls, and Playes, yet my Thoughts entertain my Mind with such Pleasures, for some of my Thoughts make Plays, and others Act those Playes on the Stage of my Imagination, where my Mind sits as Specator. Thus my Mind is entertain'd both with Poets and Players, and takes as much Delight as Augustus Caesar did to have his Mecaenae, the Patron of Poets, sit and hear Virgil and Horace read their works unto them (40).

She insists that "retired life" perfectly facilitates her self-reflection, her writing, and her entertainment. Her imagination comes alive in these virtual spaces as if it was "a stage of my imagination" that allows her Thoughts as actors, and Mind as a spectator, or as if her mind was a reproduction of the actual space of "Caesar's Mecaenae," that introduces a historical precedent equating her mind-stage with her favorite leader (a man who both ruled the world and who, in her opinion, shared her love of poetic

³⁶ For example, in letter 82, the addressee questions the writer's "Country life" because of her desire for "Glory," but the writer counters this by saying that glory can't be found in the "Vanities of a Metropolitan City" (93).

performance).³⁷ Later in the same letter, Cavendish insists that she so prefers a retired life that she would not give it up to be “Mistress of the World”:

I should not desire to be Mistress of that which is too Big to be Commanded, too Self-Willed, to be Ruled, too Factious to be Govern'd, too Turbulent to live in Peace, and Wars would Fright, at least Grieve me, that mankind should be so Ill-natur'd and Cruel to Destroy each other (42).

This conclusion offers two important details. First, she equates the importance and influence of the delight and entertainment of her own mind to that of Caesar's, suggesting a desire to inhabit the same historically idealized space (even if only virtually) as a leader who commanded the self-willed, factious world that she describes as too turbulent to bother with. Despite what she says here, she *very* much desires to be mistress of the world and adopted that title often by insisting that she would be far better at ruling the world (after all, the commonwealths of her mind have no strife).³⁸ This grants her the authoritative role that suggests she would do better than the men who have held mastery over the troubled world, and outside of the world she derides in favor of the peaceful, if isolated, world she already masters in her texts (as in her mind). She invites readers to share in this world, and that invitation (by way of publication) is critical, for it completely disregards her initial argument against desiring a public life. Secondly, she populates her virtual world with personified concepts that do not quarrel or dispute. The public world she does not want to enter can be (re)formed in her mind to end the cultural, social, and ideological strife that disrupted her life. The resulting space seems to be, on the surface, a painfully personal utopia, but in sharing it, in insisting that she be read, she establishes a community that can be commanded because it is imaginable. She intended her philosophical and scientific

³⁷ In letter 162, one of the only letters where she hints at her relationship with the nameless addressee “Madam,” Cavendish writes: “When we were very young Maids, one day we were Discoursing about Lovers, and we did injoyne each other to Confess who Profess'd to Love us, and whome we Loved, and I Confess'd I only was in Love with three Dead men, which were Dead long before my time, the one was Caesar, for his Valour, the second Ovid, for his Wit, and the third was our Countryman Shakespear, for his Comical and Tragical Humour” (173). Cavendish “marries” herself more to their ideals than to the men, and so, it is natural for her to idealize her own thoughts and friendships in comparison.

³⁸ Readers encounter the metaphor of Cavendish wanting (but not) to be mistress, or empress, “of the world” many times in her writings. In *Sociable Letters* alone, the phrase appears in her preface to the Professors, and in letters 15, 29, and 197.

writings to spark debate and discussion, and they illustrate her desire to participate in the academic communities that refused to acknowledge her voice or allow her presence. Her fiction, prose, and drama approach community differently, but they all describe some form of community that fosters collaborative intimacy, even if it must be shared only by a single community of multiple selves.

The first letter in Cavendish's *Sociable Letters* is brief, but in it, she sets the tone for the community she wants to build; it is addressed to "Madam" and laments the fact that she and Madam cannot "converse Personally" about "home-affairs," "Opinions," "Advice," "gossiping-meetings" and even "public affairs." However, as Cavendish insists, the letters will suffice "as if we were speaking to each other":

I am never better pleased, than when I am reading your Letters, and when I am writing Letters to you; for my mind and thoughts live always with you, although my person is at distance from you; insomuch, as, if Souls die not as Bodies do, my Soul will attend you when my Body lies in the grave; and when we are both dead, we may hope to have a Conversation of Souls, where yours and mine will be doubly united, first in Life, and then in Death (letter 1).

The reader must not see this collection as merely letters but as a conversation. Her closing lines insist that by reading *and* writing letters to her addressee, her *mind* will "live always with her." Cavendish is housing this "Conversation of Souls" within a constructed space that intertwines (and equates) mind and thoughts with gender-free body and soul.³⁹ Her final thought with this first letter is her union with the Other; she is united with the addressee in both life and death and exemplifies her purposeful disruption of binaries. She imagines spiritual closeness (despite the fictional physical distance), shares intimate dialogue despite isolation, and even disrupts the insuperable binary of life and death by spatially extending the conversation into a locatable realm of souls ("where yours and mine will be doubly united). Divisive binaries mean nothing because her "self" and her Other will conquer them (and any boundaries that arise), in order to maintain their Conversation of Souls and remain doubly "united." She promises

³⁹ A conversation of "souls" takes on an added dimension when we consider Mary Baine Campbell naming the imaginary correspondent a "ghost friend" (204) even suggesting that *Blazing World*, in its "Otherness *by and for* the Other" was written as if to the same friend. The other resides in her imagination (her mind) and in the hereafter, where souls might converse, as Cavendish suggests in her first letter.

intimacy and unity by populating her community with stories of “characters” that both reader and writer recognize.⁴⁰ She has told us that she is writing only for herself and to herself, and so we must divide her into the many voices in order to animate the community of women; after all, her reader must participate actively in the community in communion with Cavendish.

Cavendish could inspire this conversational mood because letters are an intimate form; they draw the reader in as if the letters are addressed directly to him or her, allowing a sort of voyeuristic moment of informal communion with the writer. Cavendish took advantage of this quality of the epistolary genre by immediately binding the reader to herself through a marriage of souls; from the first letter forward, the reader (adopting the role of “Madam”) is united with Cavendish, and the space for a personal conversation is in place. Diane Barnes, who studied Cavendish’s use of the epistolary, notes that the form was popularized by Renaissance Humanism and had the “reputation of being a natural genre, closer to speech than other kinds of writing” and was a form “reputed to compose a portrait of a writer” (201). Barnes connects the development of the epistolary form to Erasmus, an icon of Renaissance Humanism (his connection to the genre should remind us of his role in the prefatory letters to More’s *Utopia* because the letter writer is always present when the reader reads the letter). Traditionally, letters were considered “a kind of writing closely associated with speech or oratory” and the form had grown popular for Royalists conveying their masculine heroic action after the Civil War. The genre took a turn as the Restoration progressed; previously, men were expected to take on a “femininity” of style in letters (another genre in which the masculine tried to capture and use the feminine), but letter writing

⁴⁰ James Fitzmaurice does a painstaking job of outlining to whom the initials Cavendish uses in her letters might refer (*Sociable Letters* 1997). Curiously, after 199 letters addressed to “Madam,” with no warning, Cavendish includes letters addressed to *specific* women (her sisters, Sister Pye and Sister Ann, and a friend from Holland, Eleanora Duarte) along with anonymous initials (Madam C.H.) and even some unnamed men (Reverend Sir, Noble Sir). She returns to “Madam” in her final letters and begs forgiveness for including the others: “Pardon me for Mixing some other Letters with those to yourself, for the Assurance and Belief of your Pardon Perswaded me to do it, they are only to my Near and Dear Relations and Kind and Obliging Friends” (Letter 211). Though she insists these letters are only to her, they were likely collected over time, and may have been sent to someone in some form.

evolved to demand the same plain style that science was embracing.⁴¹ Cavendish, as Barnes argues, was attempting not only to re-appropriate the genre for a more “moral” and feminine purpose, but also to preserve a “heroic connection between speech and action” (204-5). Cavendish adopted the genre, with a clear purpose because she “writes from the feminine position and attempts to turn around the negative calculation of feminine style” (208). She uses and expands the feminine in the epistolary form by taking the “femininity” negatively associated with letter writing and transforming it: “Femininity, as a kind of exile, is [a] credential for judgment; placed outside the political system a woman can judge society” (Barnes 209). *Letters* located Cavendish outside the political system that allowed her the freedom to judge society, but I would add that in her creation of a utopic community in *Letters* she allowed the political system to enter *her* space, and so, circumvented the need to enter the political system. Cavendish’s *Letters* open with, as Barnes continues, a “rehearsal of feminized epistolary theory that should be read as an intervention in the royalist tradition of masculine letter writing” which suggests that she would have imitated women if “suitable models existed” (209-10). By actualizing the many exiles she was subject to, Cavendish was able to adopt genres and transform them. By maintaining, within *Letters*, her role as writer, addressee, and subject, she experiences the community from multiple perspectives, and thus, she generalizes and expands the generic ambiguity by which the epistolary was already associated.

The letters that begin as responses to letters the writer receives from “Madam” are an example of the multivalent interactive community *Sociable Letters* establishes. We only hear about these letters from the writer’s position as the recipient, and that means we are entering a two-way dialogue made more complicated because we must become a voyeur to a dialogue that does not include us, in the same moment we must

⁴¹ “Erasmus theorized that as letters stand in for presence they should be written in a manner that signals spontaneity. When this theory was accommodated to English style, gender became a crucial term. [...] A letter should be characterized by brevity, perspicacity (it must suit the occasion it addresses) and must be written in a plain and unornamented style. [...] Both academy and statesmen letters repudiate [the] idea that femininity is a costume that male letter writers should take on to produce breezy cavalier wit” (Barnes 205-6).

become the “Madam” who expects that Cavendish will answer her/our questions. Cavendish might easily have included “imagined” letters *to* herself that posed the questions she wanted to answer, after all, she is writing letters to herself by herself, so why not include the “fictional” voice sending her letters, or even actual letters she might have received from family or friends. “Madam” (as reader, self and other at once) remains silent, except by way of Cavendish because readers only hear about the topics “Madam” asks Cavendish to discuss (in a way, “Madam” embodies the same role as the teachers in *Female Academy*). A few of these letters begin with Cavendish defending herself against “Madam” who chides her for some fault, but most begin by referencing a topic “Madam” asked her opinion about in *her* last letter, or a specific request from her that Cavendish write about something in particular (which she promptly does). If Cavendish has written it before, she refers readers to the works that contain the answer because she shares her presence in her texts with her texts (as beings) who are always present.

Cavendish inhabits the textual spaces she creates through her books, and then she brings in the books themselves to share those spaces. As we saw in letter 173, Cavendish described her texts as living entities, and if they are alive, they can die and she can mourn them. Their death usually came from readers misunderstanding them, but in letter 143, Cavendish discusses a shipwreck that carried a manuscript of her plays for printing in England and threatened her texts with an *actual* death:

I was extremely Troubled, and if I had not had the Original of them by me, truly I should have been much Afflicted, and accounted the Loss of my Twenty Playes, as the Loss of Twenty Lives, for in my Mind I should have Died Twenty Deaths, which would have been a great Torment, or I should have been near the Fate of those Playes, and almost Drown'd in Salt Tears, as they in the Salt Sea; but they are Destined to Live, and I hope, I in them, when my Body is Dead and Turned to Dust. [...] I always keep the Copies of them safely with me, until they are Printed, and then I Commit the Originals to Fire, like Parents which are willing to Die, whenas they are sure of their Childrens Lives, knowing when they are Old, and past Breeding, they are but Useless in this World: But howsoever their Paper Bodies are Consumed, like as the Roman Emperours, in the Funeral Flames, I cannot say (153-4).⁴²

⁴² See Katie Whitaker's biography for details of this event (218).

It is a dramatic moment for Cavendish because the impact of their loss (if not for the good fortune of keeping the originals) is equal to that of twenty deaths and a personal torment so great *she* would have suffered the same salty death twenty times over. She adamantly insists on her physical connection with the manuscripts by saying that if they are destined "to live" she will also live (or die) "in them." There is a fluid relationship between herself and her works suggesting both interchangeability and presence; they *are* her, and so, her readers have her "paper body" in their midst as they read. Her community transcends distance (the obstacle she mentions in her first letter) by putting her virtually in the reader's room through the book; it may be a virtual self, but it is a self who can become many voices at once within the community.

Cavendish thus uses *Letters* to forge subjectivity, or as Melissa Hill writes, "to define herself in relation to the women in her community" and to "establish her persona as a writer and her relationship with her female correspondent," and her use of the epistolary form "sanctioned a space in which Cavendish could try on different personae and discuss subjects which were considered outside of women's proper sphere" (139). Hill focuses on the contradiction of Cavendish's multiple voices throughout *Letters*, and argues that she was aware of how the epistolary form enabled her to try on "varied and sometimes contradictory identities." She is at once "desirous of community" with women and "scornful" of their company, but also demonstrates a "dual move" between "isolation and community" and "singularity" through which she reflects the "tenuous aspect of women's subjectivity" (140). I agree that Cavendish saw the genre's power in creating a community and allowing for multiple subjectivities, and she was adept at using the freedom letters allowed her, but Cavendish's subjectivity was not starkly or tenuously divided, as Hill indicates. Her letters demonstrate a positive fluidity rather than a stark division among the varied personas that inhabit her community (or any "real" community of women she may have

been a part of in the Netherlands, and later in England).⁴³ In her texts, she was free to take on multiple selves, and inhabit multiple places, and her repeated insistence that she prefers a retired, reclusive space does not suggest pretense, but a preference (her eccentricity might well have been a result of that reclusiveness). Her contradictions, especially regarding herself, exemplify her belief that the kind of fluidity that allowed her to be so many characters was accessible because of the space she forged of the language and genres available to her. Cavendish was recreating herself so dexterously that readers can never be certain if she preferred seclusion or socializing. It did not matter if she had (or had not) been part of any actual communities, or if the places she discussed were real or not, or if her insistence of her preference for singularity or eccentricity was sincere, deliberate, or a sure sign of madness; *Letters* stands both within and outside of her real history, both within and outside of the political systems that she confronts, and her presence slips seamlessly across these many gaps as assuredly as she would have drowned with her plays. We see who she was (as society and convention dictated), but also who she wished to be in her reflections on society, its conventions, and how it might improve through the legacy and influence she anticipated for her texts.⁴⁴

Once she establishes her community in the first letter, she dives into a surprising variety of topics of discussion that demonstrate which “sociable” topics were most relevant to her. Some of the domestic topics she introduces one would normally expect in “feminine” letters, but she is less concerned with domesticity in *Sociable Letters*

⁴³ James Fitzmaurice in “Margaret Cavendish in Antwerp” argues that Cavendish “considers Antwerp as an actual place in *Sociable Letters*, and alternates between depicting the city itself and describing it as it is found transformed in her mind” (29). She defined much of her writing through a fluidity of self and, as Fitzmaurice argues, a fluidity of place as well. In a related article, Fitzmaurice adds that Cavendish “pictured herself as more reclusive than she actually was in order to reinforce the characterization she was forming for herself as melancholic.” Her role as eccentric “protected her” but critics do not take into account that she may have been pretending to be reclusive to escape from a difficult situation (“Fancy and the Family” 201-2).

⁴⁴ In *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (1998), Anna Battigelli has argued that *Letters* stands out among her works for capturing the progression of her precarious location because it was “begun in exile and completed after the Restoration.” Battigelli goes as far as considering the collection autobiographical (85-6) and writes that “no other volume reveals her mental life more immediately” (86) I agree, and I would add that *Letters* grants us insight into not only her mental life, but also into her future hopes, and utopic plans.

than in many of her other works. Here and elsewhere, she often claimed ignorance, incompetence, and disinterest in housekeeping, or other “feminine” responsibilities. Marriage was her most relevant domestic challenge, and she discusses it often in *Letters* (although marriage is often the greatest enemy to avoid in her plays). Lisa Sarasohn has recognized Cavendish’s conflicted opinions about marriage across her many texts and writes that she “often denounced marriage as a vehicle for male immortality, in which women lost all identity and independence.” She also demonstrated ambivalence about motherhood, as Sarasohn notes, which Cavendish believed “benefited only the husband and his family, while endangering the health and life of the wife” (“A Science Turned Upside Down” 299). Equality, she professed, “could only be found when women rejected marriage as the totality of life and sought to develop their intellectual capacities.” Cavendish was certainly aware that this ideal was improbable, if not impossible; her own social radicalism wavered towards a social conservatism that insisted an “unenlightened woman” could only improve herself “by virtuous behavior within the traditional framework of home and family (Sarasohn “A Science Turned Upside Down” 299). Indeed, Cavendish’s solutions for alternatives to patriarchal marriage were contradictory, but Sarasohn’s insightful observations reveal the underlying pattern to many of the social philosophies Cavendish proposes in *Letters*: Her ability to seed criticism and dissent (radical, or impossible, suggestions) within traditional frames, which allowed her to validate both positions at once. Her contradictions regarding marriage, for instance, functioned as a vehicle for rejecting marriage as the *only* defining characteristic of a woman’s life. She acknowledges how difficult it is for women to seek intellectual stimulation, but then demonstrates, in (and by) her books, how this path is not as impossible as it seems. Cavendish confronted the social restrictions all women faced from the perspective of the potential radicalism that suggested, even if only indirectly, there were other options than marriage and subservience. Of the potential radicalism in her dramatic utopias, Erin Lang Bonin has argued that, Irigaray’s assertion that the goods can refuse to go to

market is demonstrated in Cavendish's plays, which "feature separatist institutions that temporarily but explicitly reject marriage and family in order to accomplish their utopian projects." Cavendish, as Bonin writes, positions institutions "in opposition to patriarchal economies" to transform "her female characters from objects of exchange into utopian subjects" (340). Granting women subjectivity at all could be seen as a subversive act, but granting women a space (no matter how temporary or virtual) to reject the roles that denied them subjectivity demonstrates Cavendish's subtle understanding of the potential of utopian spaces.

Cavendish discusses a wide range of topics in *Letters*, and most are unexpected and unrelated to each other, but most of the letters share a common thread. Sometimes a theme stretches across letters, with conclusions, reiterations, or contradictions of that theme appearing in later letters. Usually, she is not immediately provocative over a given topic, but she ultimately confronts it in unexpected ways. She weighs each perspective in order to inspire debate and reflect on the conflicts that arise as she discusses it, neither wholly advocating nor completely denouncing any one topic or argument, which may mean that she has changed her mind several times by the end of the discussion. The same author that claimed that no strife could enter her mind's commonwealth here nurtures endless "friendly" conflict in her epistolary community. The topic of friendship, for instance, appears often, and her discussions do not reflect only on the pleasures of friendship, but also on the moments of concern, such as disagreements, or the qualities of true and false friendship. The letters are not written to inform and express "natural speech" as the humanist tradition expected; instead, they contain the debates (balancing both sides) in which Cavendish yearned to participate.⁴⁵ For example, a letter that begins innocently as a discussion about

⁴⁵ In the frontispiece from *Natures Pictures* (1656), Cavendish sits beside her husband, along with his children (and their spouses and children) in a discussion circle by the fireside. Margaret and William are both sitting apart wearing poetic laurel wreaths above an inscription saying: "Thus in this Semy-Circle, wher they sitt / Telling of Tales of pleasure & of witt / Heer you may read without a Sinn or Crime/ And how more innocently pass your tyme." For Cavendish, existing in a space of open, inclusive discussion and debate, and acting as a guide to the proceedings, without fear of ridicule or condemnation, was (to her) as ideal a space as one could imagine.

women's friendship may end up as a metaphor for a far grander subject. She opens letters with seemingly innocuous topics that act as a gateway to other topics that one would not expect in letters between women; once she has secured a safe space for her reader (establishing a sort of textual doorway from her constant presence on the thresholds of her text), she weaves in the unanticipated. Letter 16 demonstrates this masterfully. In it, Cavendish introduces her concern that a Lady, "D.A.," is upset and thinks the author is no longer her friend because of a difference of opinion. Cavendish considers D.A.'s worries about their friendship as one would expect, and then abruptly takes the letter in another direction:

One may be my very good Friend, and yet not of my opinion [...] 'Tis true, I should be glad my Friend were of my opinion, or if I thought my Friend's opinion were better than mine, I would be of the same; but it should be no breach of Friendship, if our opinions were different, since God is onely to be the Judg: And as for the matter of Governments, we Women understand them not, yet if we did, we are excluded from intermeddling therewith, and almost from being subject thereto; we are not tied, nor bound to State or Crown, we are free, not Sworn to Allegiance, nor do we take the Oath of Supremacy; we are not made Citizens of the Commonwealth, we hold no Offices, nor bear we any Authority therein; we are accounted neither Useful in Peace, nor Servicable in War; and if we be not Citizens in the Commonwealth, I know no reason we should be Subjects to the Commonwealth: And the truth is, we are no Subjects, unless it be to our Husbands, and not always to them, for sometimes we usurp their Authority, or else by flattery we get their good wills to govern; but if Nature had not befriended us with Beauty [...] to help us to insinuate our selves into men's Affections, we should have been more inslaved than any other of Natur's Creatures she hath made; but Nature be thank'd, she hath been so bountiful to us, as we oftener inslave men, than men inslave us; they seem to govern the world, but we really govern the world, in that we govern men [...] But howsoever, Madam, the disturbance in this Countrey hath made no breach of Friendship betwixt us, for though there hath been a Civil War in the Kingdom, and a general War amongst Men, yet there hath been none amongst Women (25-6).

What are we to make of a passage that takes us from a disagreement between friends, to a criticism of women's exclusion from government, to an assertion of ultimate power, and then to end suddenly back on the friendship? Given her general avoidance of formal paragraphs and smooth segues, this circular style could be construed as a rough topic shift, but Cavendish returns to the discussion of friendship as abruptly as she ended it, and that suggests otherwise. Cavendish was criticized for seeming unable to keep to a topic, or for speaking around a topic, often including (and delighting in)

endless combinations of rhetorical arguments.⁴⁶ She will speak on topics one did not hear from a woman, and she will do so by entering the dialogue from her expected position, then negating it, only to reaffirm it before she is through. Her habit of framing her argument within a more appropriate topic does not lessen the fact that she went ahead and discussed the unconventional. For example, in this passage, the argument turns when she brings up governments and when she insists that women do not understand them. However, she goes on to describe governments anyway with a telling rejection of her own statement: “yet if we did.” By complaining that women are excluded from involvement (and so lack the needed experience to develop their knowledge), she attacks the government and declares herself not a “subject” to that government because of its willful exclusion of her; from the public, and published, voice of a high-ranking Royalist wife, this is disloyal at best and near-treason at worst.

Safely housed within her textual space surrounded by the metaphoric walls of disagreeing friends, she *will* discuss it and then abruptly end it with the offhand suggestion that this is not a seemingly topic for women to discuss. Cavendish speaks freely because her discussions are protected within the generic expectations that she then alters, and finally, liberates through publication. The argument progresses to the enslavement of women whom she endows with the more feminized power of nature, then negates that argument by suggesting women are actually the enslavers of men, only to rest on another negation of her declaration that women do not understand government: “But we really govern, in that we govern men.” Women *do* understand governance (and enslavement) because they have been “subject” to it for quite a long time. She must close her argument by way of an acceptable exit, and so she points out that when men govern, it often leads to war, while women’s disagreements do not, and with that, we find ourselves back on the letter’s initial topic: friendship. Cavendish

⁴⁶ In letter 14, for example, Cavendish offers this argument: “for though Wisemen know Fools, yet Fools know not Wise men, nay Fools do not know Fools, but Wise men know Wise men; for how should a Fool know a Fool, when he knows Himself” (23). Cavendish includes every angle and possible combination because of her desire for thoroughness in reasoning; it may be difficult to read, but it is also difficult to disparage.

metaphorically connects friendship, governance and war in several letters, but most poignantly, and cleverly, she closes each instance with variations of this ending: "But this is fitter for Monarchs to Consider, than for Women to Speak of" (78). Yet, by then, she has *already* spoken of it. She has introduced a thought and there is no way to unring the bell with a turn of speech. For example, in letter 9 she writes:

I perceive that the Lady N.P. is an actor in some State-design, or at least would be thought so, for our Sex in this age, is ambitious to be State-Ladies, that they may be thought to be Wise Women; but let us do what we can, we shall prove our selves Fools, for Wisdom is an enemy to our Sex, or rather our Sex is an enemy to Wisdom (18).

Her use of "rather" in the final clause is curious. If we are to understand that wisdom is an enemy of women, the "rather" negates the previous statement as an error. The final clause leaves the women distanced from wisdom, but at first they are (textually at least) as aggressive and empowered as the enemy (just as in war, an enemy must overpower an opponent). Reversing the word order shifts the wisdom (and power) to women, and puts them on offense rather than defense. This is subtle, but intentional, given that the rest of the letter grants women a further martial role: "Women may, can, and oftimes do make wars, especially Civil wars [...] for though Women cannot fight with warring arms themselves, yet they can easily inflame men's minds against the Governours and Governments" (18).

Regularly connecting friendship with war suggests friendship was likely an ambiguous subject for Cavendish, but it was also clearly something she craved as we see in her descriptions of intimate friendships. *Sociable Letters* indicates a similar desire for social interchange; the separatist spaces of her plays use pastoral elements to capture the utopic, and *Blazing World* offers less of a pastoral realm and more of a classical golden age set in an alternative world (all familiar utopic spaces that she focused on encouraging friendship, intimacy, and communion with women). However, according to Rebecca D'Monté, Cavendish's texts often demonstrate a retreat from society in the creation of a world "made perfect through platonic relationships with women" as the true ideal. Furthermore, she was likely influenced by the "pastoral

ideal" that the "feminocentric court culture of Henrietta Maria" celebrated ("Mirroring Female Power" 93). These seemingly obvious influences emerge ambiguously in Cavendish's texts, as D'Monté and Nicole Pohl argue elsewhere: Henrietta Maria created "a feminocentric paradise within a strictly hierarchical exploitative and political environment" leaving Margaret Lucas to experience her court culture "not as liberating but as oppressive and limited," leading her to choose marriage to escape it (D'Monté and Pohl *Female Communities* 6). Cavendish likely recognized the potential of the feminocentric court and its pastoral freedom, but as D'Monté and Pohl argue, the Queen may also have represented a ruling "phallic mother" who reinforced "paternal supremacy" (6). Perhaps Cavendish sensed the court's simultaneous potential and oppression and adapted it for her utopic spaces.

The utopic potential of friendships between women was her means for allowing women to debate and learn from each other (whether in person or not) what formal education denied them. *Letters* became a political medium for Cavendish to model the masculine letter-writing Royalist tradition because of her exclusion from the social, scientific, and cultural arenas that inspired her. For women of her class, friendships were often maintained through letters because travel took great effort and time, especially given that Cavendish spent much of her life exiled from family and friends. She relied on the safety and enclosure of her "virtual" textual space to close the distance between them; the epistolary genre best simulated the intimacy of female friendship she sought. Consequently, her utopias were often single-gender spaces, and spaces from which one could not easily return. In a way, she enclosed women in order to *oblige* their friendship (just as she forged a similar dynamic by requiring readers to keep her company alone in her textual spaces). Returning to Diane Barnes's reading of the epistolary, she writes that "the markings of gender in this reformation of Royalist writings seem deliberate; the feminine epistle signals an ideal female mode of sociability or speech forced into writing by distance, which will recast the male concept of 'Action' in the world." Cavendish conceived of friendship between women

as political “in the sense that it models the behavior and modes of affiliation that constitute a reformed or restored polity (Barnes 205). She may have been arguing only with herself, but by forming a community as her utopic space, she imbued her text with the strength of numbers. It was not just another author speaking through characters, but Cavendish speaking to “Madam” about a host of “real” people, just as two people in government would discuss. Publication then granted that space authority the same way a government would gain authority through numbers, which allowed Cavendish to discuss the impossible in a familiar frame.

No topic Cavendish discusses in *Letters* is more significant or ubiquitous, than her repeated deliberation of gender roles and gender differences. *Letters* is written by a woman with a specific female audience in mind (here called “Madam”), perhaps to deflect the male readers who would have criticized her. Central to every topic the women discuss is the disparity between genders. Cavendish does not retain or reverse the conventional hierarchical gender binary when confronting this disparity, but weaves what became her “characteristic duality” into each letter. The result is a complex exploration of gender roles that moves towards a demand for equality in government, politics, history, and education. Comparatively, she discusses class distinctions with far greater uncertainty. For example, in letter 42, she complains angrily of the marriage between a lord and his kitchen maid, but in letter 55, she is democratic in discussing the honorable labors of country-women compared to the idleness of the nobility. Her arguments about gender are broader because they appear, to some extent, in all her other topics. She approaches each from the perspective of the impasse that prohibits men and women from reaching parity (letter 48 is a particularly interesting example). Cavendish is already speaking from the literal and figurative margins, and from the social and cultural differences that kept her at those margins, and she celebrates that freedom by requiring that readers approach each topic from the perspective of gender difference.

In the letters where she discusses gender directly, she often begins with moments when “appropriate” gender roles are uncertain. For instance, she discusses virtuous women who act inappropriately, and balances those discussions with women who do not act virtuously thereby reaffirming conventional female weaknesses. Alternatively, she discusses men whose valor she admires, and then balances those examples with discussions of “effeminate” men. Conventional gender roles act as a means to complicate existing ideals with more ambiguous examples. In letter 9, for instance, Cavendish declares that a woman’s greatest influence on men is “perswasion” born of her deceitful, crafty desire and hope of “advancement in Title, Fortune and Power of which Women are as ambitious as Men [...] But Women in State-affairs can do as they do with themselves, they can, and do often make themselves sick, but when they are sick, not well again: So they disorder the State, as they do their Bodies” (18-19). Men and women are equally ambitious, Cavendish insists, and ambition in general can disorder the state, just as it can weaken either sex. The letter does not suggest that it is preferable to have women handling state affairs, but makes it clear women have equal influence on the state and government (patriarchal institutions) because women can bring about war as easily as men (not coincidentally a contradiction of the earlier letter in which she insists that women do not cause wars). Women are responsible for their influence, whether it is thought to be “negative” or “positive” is not as relevant as her main objective: To communicate that women *have* an influence. If that influence is “negative,” it is the fault of their lack of education.

When it comes to marriage, Cavendish’s does not restrict discussion to how marriage influences women, or to the details of her role as a wife. More often than not, her discussions focus on disharmony in marriage, but with diplomacy, because she approaches marital strife under the assumption that men and women are equally responsible for any trouble. Less cautionary, or instructive, than fundamentally informative, the letters that discuss marriage paint a balanced picture for readers. In letter 12, Cavendish describes how a desire for company can lead women to use

“designs,” “insinuating flattery,” and “perswasion” to make husbands “Pimps to Cuckold themselves” because “most husbands are either deluded with Politick wives, or forced to obey, or humour their Turbulent and Peevish wives, or deceived by their Insinuating and Flattering wives, to betray themselves” (20-21). Are we to chide the wife for the manipulation of her husband, or the husband for not recognizing it? Cavendish will make no clear judgment, and neither should her readers, as she demands. Cavendish uses a similar rhetorical strategy in letter 26 discussing a woman who physically abuses her husband:

Because she would have Witness enough, she beat him in Publick Assembly, nay, being a woman of none of the least Sizes, but one of the largest and having Anger added to Strength, she did beat him Soundly, and it is said, that he did not resist her, but endured it Patiently; whether he did it out of fear to show his own Weakness, being not able to Encounter her, or out of a Noble Nature, not to strike a Woman, I know not; yet, I believe the best: and surely, if he doth not, or cannot tame her Spirits, or bind her Hands, or for Love will not leave her, if she beat him Often, he will have but a sore life. Indeed I was sorry when I heard of it, not onely for the sake of our Sex, but because she and he are persons of Dignity, it belonging rather to mean born and bred Women to do such unnatural Actions; for certainly, for a Wife to strike her Husband, is as much, if not more, as for a Child to strike his Father; besides, it is a break of Matrimonial Government, not to Obey all their Husbands Commands; but those Women that Strike or Cuckold their Husbands are Matrimonial Traitors, for which they ought to be highly punished; as for Blows, they ought to be banished from their Husbands Bed, House, Family, and for Adultery, they ought to suffer Death, and their Executioner ought to be their Husband (36).

The letter communicates the wife’s inappropriate anger and violence, but Cavendish’s description of the wife grants her a strength and size rarely granted to women.

Moreover, these traits need not be “negative” given that the lack of them is often considered the reason for women’s subordination to men. She is even endowed with the strategy and forethought of choosing to beat her husband before an audience so that he will endure greater shame. Cavendish does not know whether the husband is weak or noble in his patience, and she leaves the reader to wonder which of the husband’s reasons for enduring the abuse is “best.” The only recourses she grants him are taming her (like a Shrew), binding her (like a criminal), or leaving her (which will grant her freedom). Finally, once again, she compares their marriage to a government and their battle as a crime against the “Matrimonial Government” that the husband

“commands,” which at once lessens (by formalizing emotion) and intensifies (by granting it an official dimension) their interaction. By way of this cautionary tale, Cavendish highlights the inherent inequality of a government demanding blind obeisance from its subjects, and how women that do not follow commands are likened to “traitors” for striking their husbands. She unobtrusively reclaims the women’s treasonous role through the punishment meted out to traitors: banishment from the bed, house, and family, or death. She is stalwart in her defense of virtue, and thus believed that only adultery deserves death (or, at least another husband). Meanwhile, a woman who may have sufficient cause for such extreme violence might consider banishment a freedom rather than a punishment.

Domestic violence is not as seemly a subject for women to discuss as friendship, and letter 26 does express distaste for a woman acting badly against her husband. However, at the end of the same letter, Cavendish turns her condemnation around and offers a firm reason for the woman’s actions: Women express “unruly passions and appetites” because they are not “instructed and taught more industriously.” She argues that “there comes more Dishonour from their unruly Passions and Appetites, than from Mens,” but the final condemnation, balanced with the subtle empowerment discussed earlier, is most poignant. Women must control their passions and appetites, while men must bear the ultimate responsibility for any actions that result from women’s insufficient education. Cavendish makes this accusation and leaves the reader to contemplate it. Without warning, the conversation shifts again, with a “but” towards her true purpose:

But for the most part Women are not Educated as they should be, I mean those of Quality, for their Education is only to Dance, Sing, and Fiddle, to write Complemental Letters, to read Romances, to speak some Language that is not their Native, which Education, is an Education of the Body, and not of the Mind, and shews that their Parents take more care of their Feet than their Head, more of their Words than of their Reason, more of their Musick, than their Virtue, more of their Beauty than their Honesty, which methinks is strange as that their Friends and Parents should take more Care, and be at greater Charge to Adorn their Bodies, than to Indue their Minds, to their their Bodies Arts, and not to Instruct their Minds with Understanding; for this Education is more for outward Shew, than for inward Worth, it makes the Body a Courtier, and the Mind a Clown, and

sometimes it makes their Body a Baud, and their Mind a Courtesan [...] for the Mind will be Wild and Barbarous, unless it be Inclosed with Studey, Instructed by Learning, and Governed by Knowledg and Understanding, for then the Inhabitants of the Mind will live Peaceably, Happily, Honestly and Honorably, by which they will Rule and Govern their associate Appetites with Ease and Regularity, and their Words, as their Household Servants, will be employed Profitably (37).

We learn the true intention of the letter in the “unruly passion” of our authoress. What can you expect from a woman but anger, passion, and appetite when you allow her mind to become “wild and barbarous” for lack of a civilizing education? To prevent such actions, men need not bind or tame women. Instead, they need to guarantee them the education they require to govern their own appetites with “ease and regularity.” A letter that began so negatively towards women acting badly ends as a call for men to take responsibility for women’s failures and for the patriarchal structures that “bind” her without granting her access to understanding. This is certainly no “complemental letter.” Cavendish strategically constructs a frame that allows her the required space for measured argument and even blatant accusation. Her virtual community of women can debate about women (and men) as they are, but can also discuss the potential of more ambiguous gender roles. The letter’s first image, after all, is a woman with masculine traits. The letter’s final image encourages the idea that woman can contain far more than one imagines if she is educated. We cannot condemn her radical rewriting of knowledge as gendered because Cavendish continually locates such disturbing actions in an elastic frame that demands that society needed to challenge the nature of knowledge and thus, the nature of each gender’s ability to access that knowledge.⁴⁷

If we turn our attention to the letters that confront men’s natures, we see a marked difference. In letter 33, she wonders why “Lord C.R.” likes to delight in

⁴⁷ Brandie Siegfried considers Cavendish’s epistemological theory in her article “Anecdotal and Cabalistic Forms in *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*” and argues that Cavendish regularly collapsed “the archetype of male intellect” and deflated “the traditional reverence for masculine privilege” inviting audiences “to smile as she does so, thus sweetening the sting of social critique” (65). This tendency, as Siegfried notes, suggests that Cavendish advocated that an “elasticity of being (potentiality) precedes knowing by setting up the conditions under which true thinking can take place. [...] Her agility with literary form translates to a broader meditation on the very nature of knowledge as well as on the particular kinds of knowledge being advanced by her peers” (78).

“Effeminate Pastimes, as Dancing, Fidling, Visiting, Junketing, Attiring, and the like, because he is an Effeminate Man, fitter to Dance with a Lady than to Fight with an Enemy” (45). The same skills she listed as central to women’s inadequate education in the earlier letter she here disparagingly names the “effeminate pastimes” of an “effeminate man.” She then compares the effeminate man to a “Heroick man” who displays far better (masculine) attributes: “Riding, Fencing, Vaulting, Shooting, Hunting, Fortifying, Navigating, and the like” (45), and the remainder of the letter volleys between the qualities she assigns to good men and bad men. She mentions each man by their initials and “does not wonder” why one is “Debauch’d” and the other “Generous,” because she is certain that their actions show their worth (she often privileges actions as the true proof of a person’s worth). She circles back to the man who tops her list of bad men, describing him as “Effeminate, Idle, Wicked, and Base,” and then ends with a vitriolic description of him as “The Slime and Dung of Mankind”:

[They] are neither good for Citizens, Magistrates, nor Commanders, but rather fit to be set in the fore-fronts of Battles to be Destroyed, or to fill up Breaches, being but Rubbish; but then you will say, this were the way to Destroy most Men in the World, the truth is, if it were not for such Men and Ravenous Beasts, the World would be rather a Heaven than a World. But leaving them Beasts, I rest (46).

Here, there is no shift in purpose, only clear direction. She began deliberately with the effeminate man’s “sins” as an echo of the same skills women must master (skills representing much of their education). The specific roles—citizens, magistrates, commanders—for which effeminate men are unworthy are all roles women are barred from, as she points out. She frames the failure of women’s education within the body of a man, but she does not stop with even that requirement. She goes on to suggest that men of lesser quality reflect badly on *most* men in the world, and she assigns them the responsibility for the world no longer being “a heaven.” Boldly, she “rests” with a final word “leaving them Beasts” out of “Heaven.”⁴⁸ Cavendish’s references to

⁴⁸ Cavendish uses “heaven” throughout *Letters*, in both the Christian form of thanking heaven, and as a metaphoric comparison. In contrast, she uses “paradise” only once in Letter 61, referring to how proper class hierarchy will bring peace and harmony to a household where “the Master would sit as a Kingly Spectator, whilst his Servants were Pleasant Actors, in all which both

effeminate men, in light of her earlier suggestions that women can, and do, govern suggest that, as Susannah Quinsee writes, “implicit in this call for women to enter the public realm, is the idea that if men can assume feminine characteristics women can appropriate masculine ones” (98). Indeed, this is not the only example of Cavendish speaking from both sides of a paradoxical gender position because gender roles and expectations will never remain stable or clearly outlined in *Letters* or any of her utopias. In denigrating unworthy men, she uplifts women who are far more worthy, and then in similarly uplifting worthy men, she insists that women can be equally worthy. She is constructing a see-saw of gender expectations that can be balanced only through her assertion that, on the one hand, unschooled women are no worse than effeminate men, and on the other, virtuous women are *as* worthy as virtuous men. Her negotiation of gender roles reflects a distinct personal conflict about the several contradictions through which she defined herself: the characterization of men and women, her own desire for ambition, her shortcomings, and the gender roles she questions.

Each letter builds upon the other, yet stands alone; each letter communicates a point, like a fragment of an observation or argument, but also adds to the fragments of other letters like pieces to a puzzle that is never complete. The two letters that follow Cavendish’s condemnation of effeminate men demonstrate this complex structure and her innovative intent with *Letters*. In letter 33, the reader’s last image is the dramatic visual of men left as beasts, and it is significant that readers carry that image into the letter that follows: The sad tale of a young bride who has been “melancholy” since her marriage, being “not pleas’d with the Condition of her Life.” The Lady is called “M.L.,” suggesting Margaret Lucas (Cavendish’s name before marriage). Most of this Lady’s melancholy, Cavendish determines, comes from want of Company: “For most Women

Masters and Servants would be very Happy as this World would seem an Earthly Paradise” (74). She uses “paradise” in the intimate setting that defines her enclosed, country estate because, for her, paradise is far closer to utopia than a heaven that recalls the religious patriarchal tradition. She will assign the silent mastership to the Emperor in *Blazing World*, but as its Empress will actively participate in much of the “acting,” her servants do to *create* her paradise. As a founding utopist, Cavendish moves utopia away from divine and mythic sources and towards a woman-made “earthly” creation.

love Variety of Company, and much Company, even Married Wives as well as Maids, neither do all Widows shun Company" (46). From one letter to the next, readers move from bestial men to isolated women whose husband's company "is far from working any cure" (47). As she progresses to letter 35, Cavendish crafts a strange solution for the melancholy wife who depends on nurturing company. The husband of the next letter keeps both "a mistress for Delight" and "a Wife for Conservation," a mistress "to Look on, and Admire" and "a Wife to Listen to and Discourse with" and keeps both "to Embrace" at his pleasure (47). The wife in this letter accepts her husband's mistress because she is certain he will eventually leave the mistress:

Wit attracts the Mind more to Love, than Beauty to Admiration, and if my Husband Loves me Best, said she, I am well content he should Admire her Beauty Most, as also to Imbrace her as much as he pleases, for I am so Delighted and Wedded to my own Wit, that I regard not my Husbands Amours nor Imbracings, for Wit is Spiritual and not Corporeal, it lives with the Mind and not with the Body, being not subject to the gross Senses, for though Wit, she said may be known by Words and Actions, yet those are but the Pictures of Wit's Works, not Wit itself, for that Cannot be Drawn it is beyond all Draughts, and so much Difference, said she, is between my Husband's Mistress and his Wife, as a Picture and an invisible Spirit (48).

This story is less a cautionary tale for women on inconstant husbands and more a scenario for Cavendish to illustrate her philosophy with a sad story of a patient wife. The letter's tone indicates not that the woman is enduring the adultery as a martyr, or in weakness, but that she has transcended her husband's base, uncontrollable, uncivilized appetites by having reached a higher spiritual existence. She embodies the spiritual completeness and transcendence usually the province of the platonic ideal man and Cavendish offers this as a solution to the melancholy wife in the previous letter who suffered from lack of company.

She then moves forward to offer a clever resolution to both letters through the "freedoms" of the Courtesan in the next letter. She warns that Courtesans generally corrupt men, but in letter 36, you can sense her admiration at how "Courtesans are often assisted by the Powerful" or how, though in ages past, they could not marry, they may do so now. Moreover, they marry "more richly and Honourably for Dignities,"

and this leaves chaste women to question the “worth” of their virginity as a bargaining chip after all. Reformed courtesans may be welcomed, but she warns that these women “have a greater and stronger power to cause and Perswade Men to do Actions not only to the Ruin of their Estates and Families, but to the Ruin of their Honours and Reputation, nay to make the Unnatural, Extravagant or Base.” She then suggests that men “make better Husbands, and are more Fond and Kinder to their Wives if they be Libertines, than if they were Honest and True to their Marriage-Bed” (49). There is an uncertainty in this letter that is absent from those that preceded it. Cavendish is in genuine awe of the power Courtesans wield over their men, their histories, and their bodies. Through their physical and sexual freedom, they gain better Husbands as well as “greater and stronger power.” This is no lonely, melancholy wife, and there is no acquiescence to the “feminine” traits that bestialize a man when he displays the same femininity. Instead, there is an acknowledgement of the freedom and surprising power and self-determination. After all, courtesans marry more easily and in better condition than chaste women do, and to husbands who appreciate liberal women more than they do chaste women.

The intriguing progression of these letters indicates Cavendish’s dual purpose in *Letters*. She intricately weaves the letters together to foster continuity in her community by beginning and ending each letter with a poignant comment on gender, but also offers a solid message within each singular letter. In this sequence, she notes that men destroy the “ideal” by acting like beasts in letter 33, then moves on to the “real” misery of women in marriage in letter 34, and then to an “ideal” spiritual woman elevated against a mistress who brings only base delight rather than meaningful pleasure in letter 35, and finally, she ends with another kind of “ideal” woman who is sexual *and* empowered, and so, physically and socially liberated in letter 36. The movement across her letters is both circular and progressive (as utopias must be) because the letters are not designed to present an argument and then resolve it, but to

demonstrate how their common thread is continually applied to each new, or reintroduced, subject: the disruption of gender roles.

Cavendish addresses the effeminate man again in letter 53 in which a lady refuses the suit of a man she considers effeminate and whom she hates as “nature abhors vacuity,” saying she would rather have a debauched or severe man, or be “beaten by a Wise man, than kiss’d by a Fool” (64). Cavendish leaves her “without a Husband’s kisses or Blows,” for neither effeminacy nor severity will suffice; it is better to be left with neither. Suddenly, remaining single becomes a viable option and is here boldly declared as a possibility, rather than an impossible fate. Much later, in letter 158, Cavendish declares that “there are far more Effeminate Men than Masculine Women, that is, there are few Women so Wise as Men should be, and many men as Foolish as Women can be” (170). This is Cavendish’s sole mention of “masculine women” in *Sociable Letters* emerging clearly as less unnatural than the effeminate man, and exemplifying Quinsee’s argument that the continued exploration of the one implies the possibility of the other. It also illustrates Cavendish’s clever use of modals because she is at once declaring that men “should” be wise while women “can” be foolish: the first denotes a failure, and the second a choice, leaving women empowered and men willful. Kate Lilley names this tendency in Cavendish as her exploration of “the gendered possibilities of *chiasmus* (mirror inversion) as a means of rhetorically displacing or usurping the priority of the husband through a tropological engagement of the reciprocal rhetoric of the marriage contract” (“Contracting Readers” 20). Cavendish offers a “pre-emptive strike” with this letter by giving leave to suggest “that a wife’s emulation—or envy—of her husband entails a critique of [...] gender ideology in the service of female singularity and contingency” (20). Her style naturally (and purposefully) leads to contradiction, but always in service of her desire to question without seeming to question. Furthermore, her determination to consider every fragment (and every side of every fragment) of an argument allows readers to consider each as they ponder the issue at hand. It is not that Cavendish was unaware of

how to avoid contradiction, but that she wants to acknowledge every perspective as valid and invalid. Cavendish defies convention through many discussions in this epistolary conversation (or community), and Cavendish neither celebrates nor derides the gender expectations those conventions require. She discredits effeminate men for their failure to be “natural” in their activities, but celebrates women when they surpass their activities and roles, or the limitations on their bodies and minds that society assigned them. Letter 195 combines Cavendish’s many considerations of the construction of gender and gender roles and brings them into play in an unexpected arena. This critically popular letter is discussed in connection to theater as well as gender; it informs both spheres and demonstrates Cavendish’s hybrid connection of topics and themes in various genres and styles. In it, Cavendish describes, in elaborate detail, her experience at a carnival where she attends the performance of female artists who affect her profoundly. Female actresses were still a novelty because they had not been allowed in England before the Revolution and during the Interregnum, but their presence would grow swiftly through the Reformation. Sue Wiseman outlines the changing image of the female performer into the Restoration and describes the newly burgeoning space for such “public women” as female visionaries, preachers, and performers. This space allowed for a “clarifying agent in an ideologically confusing situation” to negotiate the distinction between the “female sectary and female performer” who were “locked into a binary similarity before the category of actress emerged as a worker on the Restoration stage [and were] in part separated and organized by the new pleasurable scandal of the actress” (109).

The letter begins with Cavendish introducing the “Pastimes this City hath, they be several Sights and Shews” (205). In the carnival, she encounters a “female” spectacle and describes it in detail:

Amongst the rest there was a Woman brought to me, who was like a Shagg-dog, not in Shape, but Hair, as Grown all over her Body, which Sight stay’d in my Memory, not for the Pleasantness, but Strangeness, as she troubled my Mind a Long time, but at last my Mind kick’d her Figure bidding it to be gone, as a Dog-

like Creature; and though I am of so Dull and Lazy a Nature, as seldom to take the Pains to see Unusual Objects (205-6).

Uncertain about how to react, Cavendish sustains her ambivalence with an image of “kicking it away” while at once acknowledging that she is also too lazy to bother with “unusual objects.” Immediately after describing the experience with the hairy woman, she describes the actors she saw on the “Mountebank’s Stage”:

There were two Handsom Women Actors, both Sisters, the one of them was the Mountebank’s, th’other the Fool’s Wife, and as the Saying is, the Fools have Fortune, his Wife was far the Handsomer, and better Actor, and Danced better than th’other; indeed she was the Best Female Actor that ever I saw; and for Acting a Man’s Part, she did it so Naturally as if she had been of that Sex, and yet she was of a Neat, Slender Shape; but being in her Dublet and Breeches, and a Sword hanging by her side, one would have believed she never had word a Petticoat, and had been more used to Handle a Sword than a Distaff; and when she Danced in a Masculine Habit, she would Caper Higher, and Oftener than any of the Men, although they were great Masters in the Art of Dancing, and when she Danced after the Fashion of her own Sex, she Danced Justly, Evenly, Smoothly, and Gracefully; wherefore in this Woman, and the Fool her Husband, I took such Delight, to see them Act upon the Stage, as I caused a Room to be hired in the next House to the Stage, and went every day to See them, not to Hear what they said, for I did not Understand their Language, & their Actions did much Delight my Sight (206).

This letter appears almost at the end of the collection and demonstrates a very different tone. We encounter two distinct images of ambiguous women, all three of which have fluid bodies and demonstrate fluid gender roles, but they are set in contrast to each other. By comparison, Cavendish’s portrayal of the hairy woman is “negative” because she is astounding and surprising in her strangeness, but not disgusting, bestial or unnatural. Cavendish’s reaction to her is interesting because, while the image disturbs her, she emphasizes how the image stays with her more than the disturbance itself. The image remains with her so long that she must work to forget it, only she suggests that she will likely fail. She was memorable and impressive, if disturbing, but never quite horrible or monstrous. In the second description, two actresses play men’s parts and bring Cavendish such delight that she does not want them to leave and so hires a room to allow her joy to continue through a private performance. The first image leaves a *memory* that remains with her, but the second leaves her eager to maintain the performer’s *physical* presence, and yet both

experiences are thought provoking specifically because of gender ambiguity. One endures in Cavendish's memory, the others she wishes to sustain by keeping their company indefinitely. Cavendish keeps company with these actresses: spiritually (in memory) *and* physically (in her private room). Still further, Cavendish is intentionally comparing women to women, which allows the reader to focus on the quality of their actions rather than on what is appropriately "feminine" behavior.

The hairy woman is certainly masculinized by her facial hair but Cavendish described ill-behaved men as far more bestial than her description of this woman. Meanwhile, female actresses, though absent from Shakespeare's stage, are present as cross-dressers of a new kind in this letter, and Cavendish is absolutely delighted with them. She declares them the best she has seen, and describes the one actress's talent at playing a man as so natural it seemed as if "she had been of that sex." Furthermore, she notes that a distinctive element of their performance of gender is how they wear their clothing, which comments on the long standing cross-dressing theatrical tradition. For Sophie Tomlinson, this moment suggests an important "act of suppression" in Cavendish, who is "simultaneously enthralled and disturbed by the actress's ambidextrous shifting between sexes":

One reason why the cross-dressing actress might be a disturbing as well as pleasurable figure is that her performance seals the argument which Cavendish's texts constantly broach as to whether gender difference is natural or constructed. [...] The female actor embodies a potent fantasy—not just of freedom from natural femininity—but of liveness, aptitude, art and aspiration ("My Brain the Stage" 135).

Her appreciation suggests a longing for a similar freedom from her own life that was "pampered and constrained," as Tomlinson argues, but perhaps it was both, in the same way she wished to be both a part of a community and left alone.

In Cavendish's description, the dog-woman's body comes across more natural or matter-of-fact than monstrous (her effeminate or endlessly warring men come across

as far more monstrous).⁴⁹ She stops short of judgment and condemnation and instead focuses on her own reaction to the unusual woman. In Sue Wiseman's view, Cavendish remains "undecided" about how the dog-woman "might be performing monstrosity" (98), but Cavendish's indecision indicates her desire to create a space where the seemingly unnatural dog-woman can inhabit the same space as the women who naturally act men's parts. The two images need not conflict because contradiction can exist in order to allow the freedom of thoughtful consideration, or the possibility of alternative ways of expressing gender. Nature allows for these expressions of ambiguity (an example of nature's fluidity) even if Cavendish has trouble processing it from her own social and cultural position. Wiseman also reads this moment as singularly powerful in allowing Cavendish the opportunity to divest female performers of their monstrous reputation by focusing on their skill at naturally *becoming* men, not just *performing* them. By focusing on the truth of the representation, she steers the reader's eyes away from the dog-woman as the first character she describes (and the convention she must express to facilitate the more questionable opinion) and towards the moment of women seamlessly playing men with no discomfort or suggestion of their lacking virtue. She makes a point to mention that both are married in order to negate the possibility that the women are available as they are accessible on the stage. The dog-woman she leaves for the reader to interpret. She revels in the freedom of the actresses and celebrates them even without understanding them (because they speak another language). Cavendish struggles with this tension between these two images, yet still includes both visions and condemns neither. She may have been unable to suppress her ambiguity, but she includes the potential for individual dissimulation so that her reader—those participating in her community—can find his or her own words

⁴⁹ Complicating this discussion, Sue Wiseman identifies Cavendish as "one of the mid-century commentators least troubled by the idea of female acting for money, on the stage or indeed in public life" but argues that this famous letter still displays a clear anxiety over "the relationship between herself and the things she views" (97-8). Cavendish "resists the possibility of identifying with the hairy woman, who is a spectacle because of the nature of her body rather than her skill," suggesting the importance of "of the negative implications of female performance that need to be overcome if a positive vision is to be produced" (98).

and tools to consider the dog-woman as *other*, rather than only monstrous. Sophie Tomlinson has noted the letter reveals Cavendish's thoughts on theater as well as gender. For Cavendish, the letter reveals the movement between the many "spaces" theater could inhabit because it transposes theater "twice over, from the open-air stage to private room, from private room, to a closet theatre of the mind" (135). The letter thus grants several potential ways to negotiate the role of women in theater, including Cavendish's own role as a dramatist. After all, *Letters* emerged between her two collections of plays, suggesting that her mind might well have been actively considering the images she would fulfill in *Convent of Pleasure*.

The carnival letter is also distinctive because it is one of only a few letters describing specific events from Cavendish's life. James Fitzmaurice has explored the letters that include details of her "real" life in his article "Margaret Cavendish in Antwerp" and writes that much of Cavendish criticism has considered her imaginary world-making without giving due attention to the "real" worlds she navigated (29). He, too, acknowledges Cavendish's overwhelming appreciation of the cross-dressed actresses: "Cavendish [is] openly fascinated with a woman who can cross boundaries of sex and gender. She truly appreciates a woman who adopts the manner of a man and is good at it, a woman who, a few minutes later, is completely feminine" (37). Fitzmaurice outlines Cavendish's approach to the potential in cross-dressing as something that is neither a final, nor an absolute choice, but one that can be adopted, worn naturally, and then shifted whenever one desires. It is a far more fluid consideration of gender and transvestism than one expects. Aside from this letter, and a few that describe winter in Amsterdam and her house in Antwerp, most of the letters are discussions or debates using elements from her experiences, or are simply stories she invented to launch discussions. Very few of her letters simply inform the reader about the events of her life, as women's letters usually did. They contain more reflection than intimate sharing; however, she presents them as artifice from the start. Cavendish must have considered this "real" event of her life significant enough that

she felt the need to capture it in all its detail. She included it near the end of the letters proper (or, before the inclusion of letters addressed to recipients other than “Madam”) which indicates its importance as if it demonstrates, and in a way punctuates, her project far more than the final letters to Madam in which she apologizes for her inclusion of the “other” letters. Why wrap up her community of women with a detailed description of two ambiguously gendered women?

We can find the answer to this question in another of Cavendish’s many firsts: Cavendish was one of the first writers, man or women, to write a critical literary analysis of Shakespeare. In letter 162 she will name him as one of the three men she admires most, but in letter 123 she defends him against a “Person” who claims his plays are “made up onely with Clowns, Fools, Watchmen, and the like” (130). At once, she marvels at Shakespeare’s ability to convey an infinite variety of characters (a quality she emulates), and insists that he could “express naturally” all sorts of people and their traits in order to “Deliver to Posterity” an infinite variety of beings:

Yet Shakespear did not want Wit, to Express to the Life all Sorts of Persons, of what Quality, Profession, Degree, Breeding, or Birth soever; nor did he want Wit to Express the Divers, and Different Humours, or Natures, or Several Passions in Mankind; and so Well he hath Express’d in his Playes all Sorts of Persons, as one would think he had been Transformed into every one of those persons he hath Described; and as sometimes one would think he was Really himself the Clown or Jester he Feigns, so one would think, he was also the King and Privy Counsellor [...] one would think that he had been Metamorphosed from a Man to a Woman, for who could Describe Cleopatra Better than he hath done, and many other Females of his own Creating [...] he Pierces the Souls of his Readers with such a True Sense of Feeling thereof, that it Forces Tears through their Eyes, and almost Perswades them, they are Really Actors, or at least Present at those Tragedies. Who would not Swear he had been a Noble Lover, that could Woo so well? (130-31).

It is Shakespeare himself, not the actor on his stage, who is “transformed” or “metamorphosed.” Cavendish was most influenced by how this metamorphosis demonstrated an evolution from man to woman, not vice versa, but she makes a habit of blurring the boundaries between character and author, usually with herself, and here with her literary idol. Interestingly, the tone of her description of Shakespeare’s characters suggests that Cavendish read his plays, for she does not discuss them as acted upon the stage. Her recognition of the quality of performance is evident in the

letter about the female actresses, so she could well have described the plays in performance. Her experience of reading the plays indicates how Shakespeare's characters came across to her as female, or feminine, because she notes how his "descriptions" of Cleopatra capture her, and the other women (characters) he creates. She grants generative power to all authors as a skill she routinely associates with the blurry lines between character and author.

Brandie Siegfried also connects Cavendish's "fascination with form" and "experimentation with poetical discourse" to Shakespeare's "penchant for mixing serious subjects (such as the question of what it means 'to be') with poetical playfulness and humour." Siegfried writes that Cavendish's celebration of Shakespeare was more than simply a recognition of a "kindred spirit" because "she saw in the playwright's theatrical works an ontological constant that paralleled her own philosophical stance" in which "various and detailed characters, all springing from the same authorial imagination, made up a microcosmic mirror for Nature's fluid unity" ("Dining at the Table of Sense" 63-4). Cavendish believed Shakespeare most readily conveyed utopic fluidity through his characterization, and, recognizing the transgressive power in it, she followed his example in her utopias. As the letter continues, Cavendish shifts her emphasis to another quality she admires in Shakespeare and redefines the letter's original position:

He was a Natural Orator, as well as a Natural Poet, and he was not an Orator to Speak Well only on some Subjects, as Lawyers [...] but Shakespear's Wit and Eloquence was General, for, upon all Subjects, he rather wanted Subjects for his Wit and Eloquence to Work on, for which he was Forced to take Some of his Plots out of History, where he only took the Bare Designs, the Wit and Language being all his Own; and so much he had above others, that those, who Writ after him, were Forced to Borrow of him, or rather to Steal from him (130).

She makes of Shakespeare a natural talent in all the areas she emulates: His subjects are varied, and his "eloquence" was general, and she celebrates that variety and generality by demonstrating similar variety and general eloquence in her own work.

In the prefatory poem to her first dramatic collection, *Playes* (1662), she mentions only four "great" playwrights (Ben Jonson, William Shakespeare, Francis Beaumont and

John Fletcher). The poem mostly discusses Ben Jonson, to whom her husband acted as patron and who was considered greater than Shakespeare in her day. She has evident respect for Jonson's intelligence—his "strong brain" and "Language, plain, significant, and free/And in the English Tongue, the Masterie"—but clearly felt a stronger kinship to Shakespeare. It is hard not to make the comparison between her frustration at her meager education and Shakespeare's own educational background because she indicates a subtle preference for Shakespeare's more "natural" talent (a quality she admires and often claims for herself):

Yet Gentle *Shakespear* had fluent Wit,
Although less Learning, yet full well he writ;
For all his Playes were writ by Natures light,
Which gives his Readers, and Spectators sight.

She then almost immediately follows with "As *Johnson, Shakespear, Beaumont, Fletcher* write; / Mine want their Learning, Reading, Language, Wit; / The Latin phrases I could never tell" (Shaver 265).⁵⁰ The "small Latin and less Greek" (Jonson's words) in particular, she takes and returns to Jonson. For all his intelligence, Shakespeare was the more natural talent because he succeeded with his infinite variety and transformative style without the fine education (as she hoped she would). Cavendish thought her writing stood apart even from the sources she acknowledged as influences (as well as her determined inclusion of her husband's name to any section within her work that he wrote) and she wanted to be considered unique and original. In the preface she decries Jonson as a plagiarist, but celebrates Shakespeare (who was equally a plagiarist). This honor is granted not because of Shakespeare's plots (which she might have known were borrowed), but because of his unequalled characterization, and specifically, his ability to "become" any gender through his development of

⁵⁰ Cavendish mentions only the contemporary playwrights that published their works in popular folios because she would follow with her own folio: "She brought out her plays in two editions that were so substantial that they rival the physical makeup of the three other sumptuous landmarks of dramatic publication in the century: the folios of Shakespeare, Jonson, and Beaumont and Fletcher" (Romack and Fitzmaurice 1). Cavendish may have also been motivated by the way folios established an author's reputation and that her folios, textually and visually, were designed to reinforce her association with the famous dramatists (Miller 9).

characters as she describes in the letter.⁵¹ Shannon Miller has noted that Cavendish's preference for Shakespeare represents one of the earliest critical elevations of Shakespeare over Jonson, demonstrating a move "that both participates in and may help to shape the cultural debate about Shakespeare's elevation" as the famous playwright "for all time" (9). Connecting to this praise, Miller argues that Cavendish criticized Jonson for his "lack in originality," which then suggests "her identification with the emerging valuing of originality." This was unusual given that the subject matter for Renaissance literature was routinely gleaned from other sources (16). She describes Shakespeare's relationship with his female characters intimately (describing Shakespeare transforming himself into them), which reminds us of Cavendish's own physical intrusion into her textual spaces. Shakespeare was doing with women's *roles* what Cavendish hoped to do for women themselves.

For Cavendish, the key is not only that gender shifts metaphorically between Shakespeare and his female character, but also that it *can* move fluidly in the utopic spaces authors create. In a related reading, Mihoko Suzuki argues that Shakespeare approached his women characters with great ambivalence. He was at once fascinated with "political women" of the tragedies while he expressed a need to explore the possibilities "of greater equality within the marriage" in his comedies (114). Suzuki's argument contributes an important perspective on Cavendish's relationship with Shakespeare; she "interrogates" Shakespeare far more than she "identifies" with him, as Suzuki argues, although their aims are similarly "of appropriation and revision." Cavendish's representation of "authorial identity" is "fragmented, dispersed, and subject to an almost cannibalistic appropriation." Still, her admiration is not merely "bardolatry," as Suzuki notes because Cavendish was, in fact, most like Shakespeare in his "relationship to authoritative texts." As we saw with Shakespeare's use of classical

⁵¹ Shakespeare's plays included two women who both effectively used their "natural" skills (rather than formal educations) to participate in the arenas their gender normally barred from them. Lisa Jardine explores the changing attitudes of women's education through these plays in her article "Cultural Confusion and Shakespeare's Learned Heroines: 'These are Old Padoxes'" and focuses on Helena, the physician, in *All's Well that Ends Well* (1605) and Portia, the lawyer, in *The Merchant of Venice* (1598) as examples.

myth (and other sources), he often gathered familiar characters, themes, and plot elements and adapted them to fit his less conventional stage, and Cavendish follows suit with her own adaptation of authoritative texts (including Shakespeare's). She often interspersed generalized "Shakespearean plots" with "distinctive subplots" that included her own critique of the sources in her adaptations. Her structural approach to Shakespeare's plays, "not only promotes a perspective of critical distance, but also works to level Shakespeare's plot with her own more satiric and multiple subplots" (106). She did not simply idolize him, rather, she honored him through her emulation and challenged him where he did not take things far enough. She was critical of Shakespeare, but stayed true to her method of hybridity by not merely copying, but carrying Shakespeare's characterization further still.

Cavendish recognized Shakespeare as a great man and included him in the pantheon of historical men whom she "loves," but hers was a form of literary imitation and emulation that allowed her to remain true to her own chaotic style. She took from Shakespeare what she recognized as gender transformation and then transformed it further still. Cavendish identified most with Shakespeare's metamorphic presence, which is likely the most utopic element in his plays. The two dramatists meet through the "textual fragmentation" and "pastiche" they employ to dismantle the classical forms they both wrote against (Suzuki 107).⁵² Cavendish's utopic potential is most vivid in her translation and fragmentation of the authors she emulated, and in her willingness to allow for contradiction and to revise her texts continuously, which helped her realize her utopias (just as it did for Shakespeare). Cavendish chose to adopt Shakespeare as a literary father, as Suzuki writes, and by so doing she renders yet another convention more fluid by reversing "the priority of parent over child" as

⁵² "She works by means of pastiche—by breaking up, refracting, and rewriting Shakespearean motifs—while throughout the subplots she criticizes the main plot for not going far enough and still remaining within the Shakespearean paradigm, thereby presenting an opposing perspective altogether [...] The "difference" that Cavendish makes in translating, appropriating, and revising the Shakespearean text is most obviously that of gender, but also as importantly, one of historical situation. As a woman writer, Cavendish imagines a greater range of political possibilities for female subjects than Shakespeare did" (Suzuki 114).

well as subverting “the succession of biological father to son” (119). It is no wonder that so many critics continue to bend time and space (and race) to bring Cavendish into the company of Shakespeare or even Hélène Cixous and Gloria Anzaldúa.⁵³ Cavendish’s communities transcend time and space in their fluid insistence that a conversation of souls would transgress even the most absolute barriers. After all, “Time is troublesome and every Place wearisome. [...] and the Motions of Thoughts are as far beyond the Motions of Time, as the Motion of Time is beyond the Motion of Nature’s Architecture” (letter 20).

Cavendish’s desire to gather her readers through a variety of prefaces before leading them into her chaotic writing is, essentially, what defines the blurred boundaries of her literary endeavors to create virtual communities and realize utopia. Fundamentally, she wanted to build communities that could survive the chaos in her life, and the chaos in her texts. In their introduction to *Female Communities* (1999) D’Monté and Pohl argue that Cavendish’s communities “explore the restraints of gender” and allow for specifically female communities as “distinct alternatives” (2). They outline the many forms these communities have taken in women’s literature. Generally, communities are defined by individuals that consciously congregate “within the framework of a specific social and ideological body,” and despite the variable forms the term “community” suggests, it is always established in the pursuit of “an ideal fellowship.” Communities conceived through literature indicate “the communication of communal ideals and visions” not as “an individual enterprise” but as “a civic act” (4). Cavendish’s communities were intensely personal, and even isolated, but the greater utopic potential of ideals and visions that D’Monté and Pohl reference are present in her critique of how society might allow greater choice for women. In the early modern period, female communities manifest themselves in “a rich diversity of communal forms, ranging from convents and monasteries, through

⁵³ See Carol Thomas Neely “Women/Utopia/Fetish: Disavowal and Satisfied Desire in Margaret Cavendish’s *New Blazing World*,” Gloria Anzaldúa’s “Borderlands/*La Frontera*,” and Jonathan Gil Harris’s “Touching Matters: Margaret Cavendish’s and Hélène Cixous’s Palimpsested Bodies” in *Untimely Matters in the Time of Shakespeare* (2009).

boarding schools and academies, to social networks such as literary circles and separatists households" (5). It is not surprising that Cavendish used most of these forms in her utopias. She wanted to draw upon the various potential spaces in order to try each space without necessarily choosing one or the other (like the genres and forms she experimented with). *Letters*, for example, can be seen a "literary circle" because she includes critiques of Shakespeare, her own works, and classics like Plutarch.

Meanwhile, her separatist spaces, as D'Monté and Pohl argue, consider "education and the notion of perfectibility" in their role in fulfilling "a utopian function in a time where secular and religious concerns converged" (10). The potential for "perfectibility" introduces the problem of the ideology of gender: To become a perfect wife, a woman must develop those qualities that serve "the good of the family, marriage, and ultimately, society." A women's education could not strive for her perfection except if that perfectibility was construed as the advancement of her "civil and social function," which included only specific roles "as mothers and teachers to future generations that would facilitate and support the process of perfection." Woman offered the physical, reproductive means by which utopia was populated. A more egalitarian education for women would "threaten the hegemony of men," and disallow their utopic endeavors. Cavendish's communities question the details that comprise the image of "gender ideals," and as I have argued, this questioning became particularly significant in the early modern because of the growing popularity of utopian literature. Concepts of perfectibility, regardless of what they are applied to, are notoriously unstable, and Cavendish challenges perfectibility as much as she complicates the process by which women could ever hope to encompass the ideal society required of them. She understood that separatist spaces afforded an opportunity for renegotiating the ideals of perfection that women were subject to by containing the potential for perfectibility even if only to show its ultimate failure.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Hero Chalmers, a dissenting critical voice, argues that Cavendish's separatist communities do not demonstrate a utopian ideal at the complete exclusion of the other sex, but rather are more

Ultimately, Cavendish constructed her textual communities with no other thought than to populate them with herself and her thoughts (if others wished to enter, they were welcomed, but she did not rely on it). She was happily letter writer and recipient, or actor and audience on her mind's stage, and Empress and Scribe all at once, because in that crowded community, she celebrated the joy of isolation (in proper contradiction). Sandra Sherman reflects on how this "discourse of the self-isolation" generated its own "mirror image" that still reflected "a self but only as that can be located and fixed in the text, a self-constructed entirely through discourse with others." Sherman argues that Cavendish's writing expresses a "bipolarity" that reveals an exemption from the intersubjectivity born of her insistence on her own singularity ("Trembling Texts" 184). However, as Sherman notes, Cavendish's subjectivity is most informative on another point that takes up Barthes and Kristeva's assertion that there is *only* intertextuality (that the self and the author do not exist prior to their inscription of the text). The self in Cavendish is a paradox and generally complicates theories of literary creation "in which literature is "generated as 'fancy,' unmediated by intertextuality" and also "inserted into discourse as the bringer of Fame":

This involvement underlies any analysis of self-creation in Cavendish, since if one can speak of a "self" anterior to a text, one must also [...] approach the self as a construct entirely of language. Cavendish opens up the possibility of both. [...] The self in these texts is fluid, intending an ideal fixity which necessitates contingency. However, it is always the creative self, engaged and disengaged, that defines the incredible energy in Cavendish's work (185-6).

Cavendish embraced paradox in her writing. However, if the place of paradox in utopian literature opens up the possibility of a fluid self that is simultaneously anterior to the text *and* constructed entirely of language, then Cavendish's texts reflect that paradox because she writes the very utopia that allows her to write, and inhabits the utopia she writes as she writes it. The "energy" Sherman discusses may be the chaos

demonstrative of the chaos of Cavendish's world. She argues that Cavendish was more concerned with presenting "a contentedly self-sufficient female community which attempts to exclude men altogether." She was less of a militant proto-feminist deriding the presence of men and more of an eternal optimist seeking a space where she could openly tell women that marriage and concerns of the home need not be the only destiny ("The Politics of Feminine Retreat" 85).

Cavendish celebrates, but it is an essential creative energy that allows for a utopic self that yearns for ideal fixity as it facilitates potentiality.

From solitary communities to reasonable paradoxes, Cavendish's writing refuses any clearer definition than a "consistently inconsistent" poetics.⁵⁵ For Cavendish, paradoxes were effective tools to disrupt binaries by indicating that one side of any binary does not need to be hierarchically devalued to another, but could be equal to it, or coexist with it. For example, incompleteness, or a fragmented idea or image, could be celebrated for what it brought to the picture instead of discarded because of what it lacked. One could see the "negative" as valuable without necessarily considering what the "positive" *should* be: "The tactic of inscribing letters to such a self—the publishing—broaches Cavendish's paradoxical relationship to discourse: the communication *from* the world is shunned, while one's thoughts (however much outside discursive conventions) are submitted *to* the world" (Sherman 188). Cavendish justified her (self as) paradox by insisting that her "negative" voice resulted from a direct failure of the "positive" world in its failure to represent her. Her fragmented discourse challenged the organization and consistent failure of this binary because in utopia paradox flourishes. She routinely shunned the world she wished to participate in by celebrating her isolation, except of course when she did not and enjoyed the spectacle she brought wherever she went. Her textual worlds were welcoming utopic spaces, and their publication made certain that the "real" world could not relegate the worlds she fashioned to a "negative" feminine ideal.

Cavendish recognized how utopia could dismantle boundaries and allow her to both create and inhabit those worlds because of the fragmentation and the resulting disruption of binaries (the one detail she required as both obstacle and empowerment was fluidity). Utopian literature by women went further in questioning those

⁵⁵ In their introduction to *Authorial Conquests* (2003) Cottegnies and Weitz argue that Cavendish was unconcerned with filling in the many gaps she left through her chaotic writing: Her poetics are "not based on humanistic ideals of order and symmetry" but rather evince "a predilection, both thematically and formally, for the fragmentary rather than the unified, incompleteness rather than definitiveness, proliferation rather than 'singleness of purpose,' paradox and juxtaposition rather than rational dialectic and transcendent meaning" (11).

boundaries.⁵⁶ Utopia could contain feminine writing more effectively, and be used more productively for women's utopic goals. The privileged space utopian literatures establish, as I have discussed, demonstrates how utopia can be considered a *genre féminine* in the same tradition by which Cixous professed a feminist requirement for an *écriture féminine* (although utopia will rightly, and blissfully, resist any attempts to name it as such). It was thus whenever woman put pen to paper to create her own world from within the patriarchal dialogue, and it did not begin with Cavendish, for we can sense a clear indication of how women's writing created communities of women as/through utopia with Christine de Pizan's texts and countless others. Cavendish's utopias demonstrate the progress of utopia through the early modern to its logical, spatial, and conceptual end. We must confront the theoretical space women forged from within the dominant space to define the freedom of the unstable utopic boundaries by considering the "unsettling in-between" of genre and gender, and why it was so prevalent with utopia.

As I leave Cavendish's epistolary community and move towards her more complex utopias, I must first establish her approach to the nature, the senses, and their role in science and observation. For Cavendish, these were integral to the perspective through which she created her separatist spaces in particular (not surprisingly, they reflect themes and concepts that are inextricably bound to constructions of gender). Cavendish adamantly believed that reason must rule science in the observation of nature, and discussions over the specifics of what such observation should entail appears in her philosophical and scientific writings, but it seeped into her narrative and dramatic works as well. She considers the role of the senses in observation (a detail not

⁵⁶ In their introduction to *Women, Texts, and Histories: 1575-1760* (1992), Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss confront this complex interdependence of genre and gender by noting how "the boundaries of genre shift when viewed through gender" because the "complex labels assigned by literary critics to particular kinds of text do little justice to the extraordinary power of those texts which resist such taxonomies, for such texts remain unsettlingly in-between, a ceaseless trouble to categorical structures, not excluding feminist ones." Women utopists resisted "assimilation to the canon or even to the literary, acting instead as disruptive forces which expose the stories told about gender by an interpretive community willing to consult only the canonical as open to question" (7-8).

unimportant to the descriptions as world-making that are integral to utopian literature) the same way she approached pronouns: how each element was gendered was most important. *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1668) accompanied, and in a way “introduced” as a sort of grand preface, her utopia *Blazing World* in reprint. In *Observations*, Cavendish includes a section titled “Human Senses and Perception” in which she considers the connection between philosophy and matter (as between the ideal and the real) by focusing on the nature of “Nature.” Neil Ankers reads this passage as demonstrating Cavendish’s desire to “synthesise elements of the religious and the scientific to produce a new philosophy of nature” (306) and argues that, for Cavendish, “nature is a single ‘united’ entity separable into degrees of matter which enable matter to organize itself into distinct forms” (311). Her description of nature (one where matter freely reorganizes itself into different forms) is expressly utopic because it suggests nature is simultaneously a synthesis (of science, religion, philosophy) and an explosion of the static understanding of matter and form. She defines philosophical or scientific concepts fluidly by considering their dimensions and projecting them within physical spaces to suit her needs:

For though nature is but one body, and has no sharer or co-partner, but is entire and whole in itself, as not composed of several different parts or substances, and consequently has but one infinite natural knowledge and wisdom; yet by reason she is also dividable and composable, according to the nature of a body, we can justly and with all reason say, that, as nature is divided into infinite several parts, so each several part has a several and particular knowledge and perception, both sensitive and rational, and again that each part is ignorant of the other’s knowledge and perception; whenas otherwise, considered altogether and in the general, as they make up but one infinite body of nature, so they make also but one infinite general knowledge. And thus nature may be called both “individual,” as not having single parts subsisting without her, but all united in one body; and dividable, by reason she is partible in her own several corporeal motions, and not otherwise: for there is no “vacuum” in nature, neither can her parts start or remove from the infinite body of nature, so as to separate themselves from it; for there’s no place to flee to, but body and place are all one thing (47-8).

Cavendish characterizes Nature, in all its perfect contradiction, as paradoxical and transgressive on several levels. Nature is initially complete and whole, but also divided because she refers to Nature as “itself” at first, then as “her” through the rest of the argument, only to end the passage referring to Nature’s infinite body as “it.” Nature is

all-knowing, but contains several parts ignorant of each other in another, and most tellingly, there is “no place to flee to” because body and place is all “one thing.”

This “scientific” passage illustrates her promised defiance of conventionally gendered metaphors and is even more transgressive given its philosophical approach.⁵⁷ Cavendish regularly undermines the rigid gendering that scientific metaphors insisted on perpetuating by emphasizing the violent dynamics that gendered metaphors suggest, in science most obviously, but also in poetry and philosophy. Each represents a fragment of the patriarchal system that writes against Nature, her dominions, and Cavendish herself:

I am of your opinion that Philosophers & Poets certainly should be the wisest men, for they having so deep an insight, as to pierce even the Secrets of Nature, it should be easie for them to have an insight into the Designs, Counsels and Actions of Men & to foresee the Effects of Things; for they that can Judge of Hidden and Invisible Causes, and can find out their Effects, may easily Judge of Visible Actions or Businesses amongst Mankind; and there is no man that can be Wise, that hath not a deep piercing insight (Letter 14, 22-23).

Cavendish uses the verb “pierce” twice, both with “insight” to combine the gaze with the suggestion of penetration in seeking knowledge. However, it is not Nature (as emblem or representation) that they observe with that violent moment, but the “Secrets of Nature,” more indicative of the hidden (private) areas of science and women’s more “natural” (less familiar, anxiety-causing) bodies (a suggestion she will reinforce later in the same letter). Cavendish’s complaints are subtle but firm, and more suggestive than blatant because these “wisest of *men*” (since she could have simply left it at Philosophers and Poets with no mention of gender) are unwise when they *should* be wise, and while their task is not “easie,” it *should* be easier given their education. The modal *should* convey unwillingness, or even an inability, in men who have the capability to be wise, or to easily understand their insight, but *can’t* or *don’t*

⁵⁷ Lisa Anscomb explores Cavendish’s approach to science and nature in her article on the Royal Society’s “heavy dependence on metaphor, and metaphors of femininity in particular” and argues that Cavendish’s related “organic use of metaphor” confronted “male discourse”: “Cavendish’s own consciousness of metaphor in general and female figuration in particular allowed her to create her own scientific rhetoric. [She] undermined notions of truth crucial to the Royal Society through a rhetoric,” which was “dependent on gendered metaphors which contradicted those employed by the Royal Society propagandists” (161-2).

because of the threat doing so would entail. Susan Fitzmaurice has analyzed Cavendish's plentiful use of modal verbs in *Sociable Letters* and finds in Cavendish's usage a "tentativeness on the one hand and an insistence on the other." Fitzmaurice argues that this illustrates how modalities might combine "leaving the reader the task of disambiguating the implied meanings [...] unsure of the sincerity with which the writer of *Sociable Letters* approaches the subject of women and their attitudes and behavior [...] she might be left grappling with the possible multiple meanings in the message" (7). Her combination of modalities might indicate contradiction, here again, but as I have argued, contradiction demonstrates how these multiple meanings emerge simultaneously. The *reader* must decide how to read the multiple meanings Cavendish allows in any single letter because of the interactivity through which *Letters* builds its community. In the same letter, for instance, Cavendish at once celebrates and criticizes those eminent "poets and philosophers":

But of this sort of men the world hath not many, indeed so few, as the rest of mankind doth not understand them, for they think them rather Fools than Wise men [...] Poets and Philosophers Minds are like the fixt Stars, having only a twinkling motion; or rather like the Sun, which keeps a constant Course, and never alters, but yet moves swiftly about the world, and views every corner, and pierces into the very bowels of the Earth, and their Sun-like Mind is the light of their Thoughts (23).

Their numbers are few and their minds are fixed and constant. These descriptions are at once complementary of their knowledge and condemnatory of their inability to see that to be so inflexible in their observation of so fluid a thing as nature will only result in violence: "Piercing into the very bowels of the Earth." Their words are fueled by the "sun-like" light that feeds their thoughts and perpetuates the sun's masculinization while indirectly dismantling the sun/moon binary in their failure. The subject/scientist was always male, and the object/discovery, female despite their insistence that science was above such fanciful metaphoricity. Cavendish's "reliance on gendered metaphor and the metaphoricity of her own gender" was then a strategy that "could not be accepted by a Society which championed the masculinity of straightforward language, plain and unadulterated, even while it denied its own defining use of tropes"

(Anscomb 164). The same way the propagandists were unable to avoid the gendering they defied, utopists were unable to avoid the fluid gender utopia inspired because such fluidity emerged in their most rigid attempts at perfect stasis in utopia.

That Cavendish published utopias at a time when the genre's traditions were starting to formalize meant that the questions of gender in genre were far less formal than they would eventually become in utopian literature. Martina Mittag considers Cavendish's negotiation of the "largely male tradition" of the utopian genre that required the construction of the "otherworld" or an "alternative order" represented as ideal by way of a traveler or a narrator who was himself "disconnected from the observer." Utopias were developing as imaginary spaces that could be "translated into a literary space" and "controlled, ordered and maintained by the author's mind." The development of utopia as a genre was definitively bound to gender, as Mittag argues: "Through its traditional affiliation with science and philosophy it underlies similar gendering processes concerning the relationship between subject and object, nature and art, nature and science, etc." By way of publishing, utopias emerged as gendered "insofar as the author emerges as the masculine owner of the text by the end of the seventeenth century (351).

Cavendish does not close the door to conventional utopic elements such as the alternative or otherworldly ideal spaces, and she clearly understands how critical it was to publish her utopias if others were to join her in her utopic spaces. Writing frequently and fervently, she lives within that "imaginary space" as she translates it into a "literary space." Readers discover that the boundary between the real and ideal fades through Cavendish's continual inclusion of herself in her virtual worlds, whether as character, intermittent commentator, or (as in *Letters*) as both writer and recipient of her own letters. However, she leaves her presence open in a way that invites readers to take over that space as well because her letters are as much by herself and to herself as they are by herself and to the reader (as in her prefatory poem, her mind was at once herself and every woman). For all its chaos, her writing is successful

precisely because it is utopic in both form and content, as a feminine construction, a feminine space, and a promising feminine genre in all the ways the feminine was always already constructed as encompassing the ideal while not participating in its own construction.

Cavendish influenced the construction of utopia at the end of the early modern from this fragmented perspective of simultaneity in place and being, of contradiction and clarity, of gendered metaphor and rejection of gender, of publication and absent presence. Her efforts manifested in a hybridity of genre and a persistent conflation of gender in her texts. Cavendish's penchant for such hybrid textual experiments, as Eve Keller argues, along with her remarkable love of outlandish and masculine clothing, suggest that "identity and gender are flexible hybrids" for Cavendish, and that "autonomy and self-consistency are electively assumed or performed rather than essentially given." She equated her "self" with her writing because both were "irregular, prone to contradiction, and non-discrete" (Keller 458). From More's beginnings to Shakespeare's experimentations, the early modern English utopia becomes, in Cavendish's texts, the space of gender freedom women could access. Cavendish defied convention through a "feminine" writing that redefined what an acceptable publication for women was, and in her writing, we encounter the realization of utopia as the feminine genre, or a *genre féminine*. Cavendish explored utopian concepts in philosophy and science, wrote literary utopias by manipulating, redesigning, and contributing to the development of the genre (as the first woman to publish a utopia in English), but she also became the foremother of further genres that used utopic themes, such as fantasy and science fiction. Finally, Cavendish fundamentally established utopia as a textual and virtual space she built to secure a place where she might rail against the obstacles that would bar her from utopia. Her utopias were overwhelming because they contained everything she ever wanted, or rather, everything she had always already either lost or never had.

Chapter Seven

Separatist Spaces: *The Female Academy* and *The Convent of Pleasure*

I intended them for plays; but the wits of these present times condemned them as incapable of being represented or acted, because they were not made up according to the rules of art; though I dare say, that the descriptions are as good as any they have writ.

The Blazing World, 220

Shakespeare was a part of Cavendish's utopic community; he was allowed in, in no small part, because of the metamorphic quality of his female heroines. Shakespeare's plays realized fluidity through transvestite actors whose ambiguity offered a transformative element to the early modern stage. Cavendish anticipated a similar fluidity for the women in her communities. In her plays, she envisioned spaces that were far less inclusive than *Letters* in which she invites all readers to participate in the community. In the two plays I consider in this chapter, Cavendish swings the pendulum to the other extreme by separating women from men altogether to demonstrate her utopic vision. She imagined these separatist spaces through many of the themes Shakespeare used in his utopic plays, but the two themes she connects directly to Shakespeare's legacy are change (varied, metamorphic and transgressive) and authority. These themes complicate women's utopias more significantly than men's utopias. Cavendish's heroines demonstrate a more substantial authority and ambiguity than Shakespeare's women demonstrate. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, for instance, the men's ill-conceived Academe fails in light of the women's greater authority (through their most effective, fruitful language), while the appearance of death in the midst of the masque changes the Princess into a Queen thereby leveling her authority with the King's. In comparison, *The Female Academy*, the first of Cavendish's plays to present a separatist space for women, offers a successful academic utopia in which women have a choice over their status and authority. The possibility of substantial education as a viable choice for women is central to Cavendish's utopic vision, which she facilitates as spaces offering women transformative authority.

The Female Academy appeared in Cavendish's first collection of drama, *Playes* (1662), and is shorter and less popular than *The Convent of Pleasure*, which appeared in *Playes, Never Before Printed* in 1668. *The Convent of Pleasure* is memorable in ways that *The Female Academy* is not, yet both confront the same themes in the same ways as if she was developing her ideas from one to the other. *The Female Academy* is challenging to read, has brief scenes followed by very long scenes, rough transitions between acts, and contains speeches that are often several pages long.¹ Moreover, the character list does not contain a single named character, a point that Erin Lang Bonin argues reveals the Academy as a "no place" without "a specific historical and geographical context." This emptiness of place and time, as Bonin continues, leaves a "cultural vacuum," but the play's importance can be attributed to Cavendish's conception of something that had not been imagined before: "An advanced institution for women" (340). The *Female Academy's* fluidity of time and place demonstrates just one example of the play's structural ambiguity, and one aspect of Cavendish's utopian methodology. Cavendish shifts between unity and fragmentation, between wanting to order the chaos she could not control and reveling in the same chaos that offered her artistic and imaginative freedom. The mutability of Shakespeare's transvestites acted as the fulcrum for potential change and transgression in his plays, and Cavendish's heroines demonstrate her similar impulse to normalize the ambiguity that grants her heroines the ability to transgress the boundaries that restrict them. Brandie Siegfried has noted that Cavendish's repeated echoes of Shakespeare's plays contradict her equally persistent assertion of uniqueness and singularity. Referencing *Convent of Pleasure* specifically, Siegfried argues that the play's cross-dressed lover "mediates between two otherwise irreconcilable ideas: on the one hand, the monist belief in unity's ability to accommodate multiplicity and the flux of constant mutability; on the other hand, the Epicurean notion that true pleasure tends toward equilibrium" ("Dining

¹ Bernadette Andrea calls it "a neo-classicist's nightmare," a point Cavendish willingly acknowledges in her prefaces. Andrea argues the play is "fashioned according to the deliberately distracted poetics Cavendish defends" (225).

at the Table of Sense" 65). Cavendish's characters demonstrate chaotic multiplicity, and at the same time, reflect a desire for unity and balance. This contradiction granted her characters an unprecedented potency and authority because her plays assume that only mutability and multiplicity can realize utopicity. Shakespeare's legacy of metamorphic heroines offered Cavendish an authoritative resource that she hoped to emulate *and* change. However, through her emulation, she still recognized how Shakespeare's female characters demonstrated a mutability that was dependent on a potential for unity, rather than a celebration of mutability, which she captured as the route to utopia.²

Her recognition of the potential for gender equity emerges in Cavendish's echoes of Shakespeare's plays and characters and in her realization of the more utopic endeavor in the absence of performance.³ Her plays were not performed publicly in her lifetime, and she wrote them expecting that they would never be performed, but this allowed Cavendish to demonstrate her characters' potential more vividly. Throughout her texts, she repeatedly declares that variety offers true pleasure, and variety fundamentally requires change (a form of metamorphosis from one pleasure to another). Shakespeare, as I have demonstrated, relied on thematic (mythic) metamorphosis in his plays. Siegfried points to the intricate relationship between nature and culture in *The Tempest* as the primary example of the play's fundamental "process of metamorphosis" (69), but Cavendish consistently takes Shakespeare a "step further" (75), so in *Convent of Pleasure*, metamorphosis becomes a rule more than a theme. We have learned of utopia that the only constant is constant change. Naming her community of women an "Academy" likely echoes Shakespeare's far less enclosed

² Cavendish's revision of *Love's Labour's Lost's* Academe, as Siegfried notes, demonstrates an "oblique thrust at her contemporaries" who were "advocating precisely the kind of single-sex academy" that offered inhabitants "a place of study untroubled by sexual desire or the distractions of women" (72). Lady Happy's plan for her convent firmly links pleasure with mutability because it "consists of a simple equation: perpetual delight is mostly a matter of variety, and constant variety is fundamentally a function of *metamorphosis*" (74).

³ Similarly dualistic, the transvestite in Cavendish, as Siegfried argues, functions as "the theatrical analogue to nature's improvisational unity, and dramatizes an important theoretical proposition: the process that fuses aesthetic sense to reason's role in knowing is the same process that reconciles the performativity of gender to the prospect of social equity" (65).

“Academe.” After all, the two institutions share a primary goal: intense study in a single-gender space. However, Cavendish’s Academy does not hold its members by royal imperative, and her Academy’s members do not rail against the restrictions of their enclosure. Instead, families of “honourable Birth” and “antient Descent” eagerly pay to send their daughters to the Academy (1.1). Where Shakespeare’s Academe fails, Cavendish’s succeeds, and not just in its more reliable boundaries, but in its establishment of a space for women to study unhindered (a success demonstrated in the popularity of their discourses). Meanwhile, the men of the Academe never study, ignore the King’s rules, and spend more time sonneting and disguising themselves in order to break the Academe rules. Most critically, in contrast even to Cavendish’s *Convent of Pleasure*, no men ever succeed in entering the Female Academy. In all the ways the utopic space should allow fluidity, *Female Academy* succeeds as a utopia.

To understand Cavendish’s utopias, we must recognize how her textual spaces are the result of her re-visioning (change) of critical literary forms as much as her self-fashioning as an author (authority). In every utopia, but particularly in drama, the negotiation of space and place is fundamental, as I have demonstrated at several points in this dissertation. Because Cavendish’s plays were exclusively textual, this negotiation is critical to the reader’s experience of her utopias (and women’s closet dramas in general). Once again, in her study of early modern women’s drama, Alison Findlay turns to Henri Lefebvre’s theories on the construction of space, which was dependent on the renegotiation of forms, for insight.⁴ Findlay grounds her argument on

⁴ Lefebvre applies Nietzsche and Hegel’s “primordially of space” to the question of “spatial problematics” and presents a theory of utopic fervor as critical to spatial production. In brief, Lefebvre writes: “In the realm of becoming, but standing against the flux of time, every defined form, whether physical, mental or social, struggles to establish and maintain itself. [...] Cosmic space contains energy, contains forces, and proceeds from them. The same goes for terrestrial and social space. [...] The relationships between force (energy), time and space are problematical. [...] One can neither conceive of a beginning (an origin) nor yet do without such an idea” (22). Lefebvre theorized that utopias were a “space of social practice [...] occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination” that he ascribed specifically to an origin/al “need for unity” (12), which agrees with Marin’s theory that utopic dialogue emerges as an inevitable “scheme of imagination.” Lefebvre defines both types of “space” as contradictorily implicated, arguing that they lead to a utopic circularity and simultaneity that can bear neither the imposed rigidity of division along a binary, nor the false comfort of perfect linearity. Spaces emerge along cosmic (energy) and material (social) axes and establish themselves because of a

Lefebvre's identification of space "as a liminal zone between past and future, hence temporal as well as topographical." Space is "Janus-faced" and is "constituted as an expression of existing power structures" and simultaneously constituted "the potential for challenging those structures." The negotiation of space and place in drama in particular, as Findlay posits, illustrates the distinctions between space and place unlike any other genre: "Space is the grid that commands bodies, prescribes and proscribes movements and gestures. At the same time, and in contrast, space is a producer of change, the vehicle through which alternative futures can be explored" (1). It is not that early women's drama converts space into place, as she continues, but that it "reconverts set place into active space. Its characteristic *jouissance* subverts the rules of the same by overthrowing ideas about appropriateness, reintroducing sensuality (the language of the body, the physical present)." This *jouissance* then fuels an "abundant, creative playing arena" that offers "a fluid, dynamic field with which spectators engage in the making of meanings. In particular, it transgresses boundaries (5). Drama in performance requires place while utopia (by name and custom) also requires place, but both require space *as* place. Cavendish's spaces, then, may have been inhabited "only" by her thoughts, but her elaborate personification of those thoughts allowed utopic transgression because of her insistence that her spaces were not just imagined "set" spaces but inhabitable, "active" places that facilitated communal creativity (whether they were performed on stage or not). She repeatedly mentions that in order to comprehend her efforts to create worlds of her own, readers must use her spaces as places where they might create spaces for themselves. The collaborative interactivity her texts offer is predicated not on actor/audience interaction as we saw in Shakespeare's plays, but on a "making of meaning" through which her utopias take shape as communities; author and reader/spectator can simultaneously subvert and

particular need, social or otherwise. For example, the need for unity is just one of the impetuses that can foster spatial creation. If transgression is needed to carve out a space, then that space will be nurtured by the need for transgression even if the need causes an unavoidable circularity and repetition or dismantling of the space.

transgress order to realize a mutual *jouissance*. Cavendish thoroughly recognized the potential of allowing the boundary transgression that defines utopia's *jouissance*.

One of the most dramatic events of Cavendish's life was her unprecedented invitation and visit to the Royal Society in 1667, which resulted in a great theatrical spectacle on her part, and criticism from her contemporaries. The Royal Society was likely on Cavendish's mind as she negotiated the role of women in scientific and philosophical debates in her plays and other texts; the visit surely influenced her vision of a space that would allow women's active participation.⁵ There was a growing desire for new social settings to discuss science that included the Parisian salons in vogue during Cavendish's time in France. These exciting new forums likely inspired Cavendish's vision for women's participation in scientific and philosophical dialogues. In *Female Academy*, Cavendish imagined the possibility of a space for women to participate in such a Society, but boldly reversed the gender requirement of its members.⁶ The teachers and the students of her Academy are women, as are the personifications of mythological and virtuous figures invoked in their discourses (from Lady Wit to her nine daughters). Cavendish may have been the first woman granted an "audience" to the Royal Society, but in her worlds, anyone with a desire to learn could participate, not just passively observe. Anyone, including men and women, and the rich and poor, could hear the Academy's debates through the curious "grate" she describes in exact detail. As Erin Lang Bonin observes, Cavendish's academicians "endure patriarchal pressures that transcend time and place," and I would add that they also transgress the gender expectations of the academic authority and participatory audience. The play's women "retreat from the marriage market to enclose themselves in an all-women's space" allowing them to resist convention and

⁵ Despite her exceptional visit, no woman was elected a full member of the Royal Society until almost 300 years later.

⁶ As Londa Schiebinger notes, "The matron portrays Lady Wit as the beautifully feminine mother of the nine muses; she surrounds herself in her court with poets—men of all nations and qualities—who serve as Platonic lovers to her virgin daughters (34). Cavendish imagined her active participation in such an academic society repeatedly in her texts, most notably in *Blazing World*, although in *Convent of Pleasure*, which appeared after the visit, her vision shifts from an academic enclosure to one of variety and pleasure, and of exclusive communion with women.

culture while the play's men, on the other hand, are presented as "petty, nonsensical, and petulant" (340). The freedom the women demonstrate from within the Academy parallels the anger the men feel from without. However, their reactions are intricately connected to each other because the reader, and the audience outside the grate, can hear both men and women equally. The men's inability to access the women is the most divisive element in the play. Because their voices are accessible, but their bodies are not, access to the women is fragmented, and thus, indefinitely delays the men's desire in the same moment that it prolongs the women's utopia. Ultimately, the play's momentum is sustained by the deliberate positioning and focused perspective of the audience outside of the grate.

Female Academy is not an easily recognizable utopia; readers expect to enter, or in some way experience, the better world utopian literature conveys. However, in *Female Academy*, readers only ever get to experience the *results* of the utopia. We have seen how important perspective is to utopia and how this complexity then contributes to the construction of space and place, and it is more critical to drama than any other utopian form because of the potential for performance. In *Female Academy* in particular, perspective is a critical plot point because we experience the utopia only from an external perspective. The reader may be privy to several anonymous discussions between "Ladies" or "Gentlemen" outside the Academy, and we hear the discourses along with the public outside of the grate, but we never once set foot inside the utopic space itself (unconventional for utopias). We join the citizens as they deliberate the educational qualities of the Academy, or discuss the Academy's role as a place of public education:

1 *Lady*: Do any men come amongst them?

2 *Lady*: O no; only there is a large open Grate, where on the out-side men stand, which come to hear and see them; but no men enter into the Academy, nor women, but those that are put in for Education; for they have another large Grate at the other end of the Room they discourse in; where on the out-side of that Grate stand women that come to hear them discourse (1.1).

Anyone can hear their discussions, but there is a sense of expanding enclosure that rigidly divides, by gender, the audience within the play as well as the place of the play. Cavendish outlines the physical organization of the Academy in order to secure the conditions for the public to benefit from women's knowledge, while still maintaining both the women's enclosure and the directive of the Academy: "A House, wherein a company of young Ladies are instructed by old Matrons; as to speak wittily and rationally and to behave themselves handsomely, and to live virtuously" (1.1). Defining the goals of her utopic spaces is more essential in her later, more complex, utopias, but in *Female Academy*, the reader/audience never gets closer to the utopic space than that public grate. Is the Academy a utopic space, or is the play's demonstration of the Academy's results sufficient to bring the reader or audience "inside" utopia? Does a utopia only require a strictly private space set against a public space where everyone can meet?

We are not allowed into the Academy; it is a private space meant to ensure the women can study outside of masculine control, which means there is the indication that the women are sexually available only to other women; this introduces an "illicit" element to this absolutely private space. However, in her study of the dynamics of privacy and outdoor spaces in early modern England, Mary Thomas Crane argues that "illicit privacy" was more easily found outdoors than indoors until late in the seventeenth century. Shakespeare's use of the King's gardens in *Love's Labour's Lost*, for example, seamlessly allowed for intimacy between Jaquenetta and Costard, but it negated the exclusivity of King's Academe from the start (as did many outdoor spaces that allowed sexual freedom in Shakespeare's plays). Perhaps this is why Cavendish likely felt a need to enclose her women completely. The grate was her answer to allowing access to the women's words and intellect alone thereby making a clear distinction between the private body behind the grate and their public words, and demonstrating her continuing negotiation of the connection between body and spirit (which she will explore further in *Blazing World*). In *Letters*, as Crane notes,

Cavendish's describes a window in a garden in Antwerp that might be an analogue to the *Academy's* grate. In the letter, Cavendish describes the precautions a husband has taken to ensure the privacy of the garden, including nailing the door shut, stopping the hole, and ultimately removing the door altogether to build a wall instead (Letter 124). As Crane argues, "although the point of the anecdote is the outrageous jealousy of the wife, it also illustrates the charged intimacy associated with looking into a private garden" (11). Vision penetrates the garden where bodies cannot, but as the anecdote describes, flowers (the common metaphor for female genitals) *can* pass easily through the window. There is a similar hint of permeability in the *Academy's* grate because it allows as it restricts by granting the women a secure boundary with only the suggestion of physical transgression. The grate is an ambiguous opening that secures conventions by fragmenting the women's bodies and ensuring their chastity in the same moment that it blurs boundaries by allowing voyeurs and hinting at the potential same-sex desire in the women's enclosure. The critical difference is that only the women's ideas are circulated (rather than their genitals-as-flowers), and their fragmentation does not render them the objects of traditional blazons. Instead, Cavendish's division of women's bodies from their words is liberating; their simultaneous, if contradictory, scattering fragmentation and containing enclosure allow the women self-determination, authority over their words and bodies, an unobstructed platform for demonstrating that authority, and the potential for physical desire that is unspoken, but sustained, by their liberating enclosure.

The women's speeches from within the *Academy* address specific themes through which they demonstrate their grasp of rhetoric and oration in long, flowing discourses. They use elaborate metaphors and personifications of philosophical virtues, and they discuss Wit and Wisdom, Friendship, Women, Theatre, and even the qualities of Discourse itself. Importantly, the Matrons encourage students to revisit themes, declaring "the same Theam may be discoursed of after different manners or ways" (3.16). Their academic authority demonstrates a flexibility that grant their students

freedom and acknowledges change as a fundamental pedagogical principle of learning and understanding. In other words, the search for Truth (as the goal of learning) is never fixed or static behind the Academy walls, but rather is fluid because there is never an absolute truth, only reconsideration of the same theme. In their discourses, they personify Truth a woman more than once:

Truth, although she has but one face, which is a natural face, yet she hath many several countenances [...] she is a most beautifull Lady: for although she do not shine as the Sun, which dazzles and obscures the sight with his splendrous beams, yet she doth appear like a bright, clear day, wherein, and whereby, all things are seen perfectly (2.12).

Only a “fluid” approach to truth, one in which one face can be many faces at once, reveals the metamorphic perfection in all things. The women use personifications and gendered metaphors of virtues and mythological figures throughout their discourses. In this example, the Sun is (as expected) masculine but he (unexpectedly) *fails* to bring knowledge (light) because of his severity. The sun’s light negatively impacts the senses of observation, but Truth, through *her* brighter, clearer method (just as a day more effectively uses the sun’s too severe light) is far more “natural” in her variety of faces. This detail connects Truth more closely to the feminized moon with its many faces; the moon’s variability was a “negative” quality, but variability demonstrated multiplicity to Cavendish. In this discourse, Women come to embody *both* day and night at once, while the masculine sun in its harsh severity is admonished for failing to teach women sufficiently; a more “natural” teaching method is needed, and that is a task women can, and must, undertake themselves.

The first we hear from the men of the play is in 2.3 where we learn that they have decided to set up their own Academy to compete with the women for an audience. Their nonchalance at opening a competing Academy suggests that opening such an Academy for men is a seamless undertaking. The women establish their Academy to study and discourse, but the men begin theirs out of competition, anger and jealousy: “The men are very angry that the women should speak so much, and they so little, I think: for they have made that Room which they stood in to see and hear the Ladies

speak in, so a place for themselves to speak in, that the Ladies may hear what they can say" (2.3). Their division becomes a matter of competition for authority over language and control of the audience, as well as a criticism of the women's decision to withhold themselves. Cavendish envisions a scene where the men are made to struggle for the stage the women master, suggesting that the women's voices, and the knowledge their discourse brings, as the only "parts" the men can access, are not enough for the men (as it has never been enough for women). They establish their own Academy "out of mockery to the ladies," but mostly, their motivation originates from the women's successful obstruction of sexual access as a means to reproduction:

1 Gent: 'Tis likely so, for they rail extremely that so many fair young Ladies are so strictly inclosed, as not to suffer men to visit them in the Academy

2 Gent: Faith if the men should be admitted into their Academy, there would be work enough for the Grave Matrons, were it but to act the part of Midwives (2.3).

The arrest of Costard and Jaquenetta in Shakespeare's Academe suggests that sexual access remains possible despite the royal enclosure, while in Cavendish's Academy, the enclosure allows a measured exchange that prohibits physical access, which inspires a violent reaction from the men. The Men's Academy confronts the same topics the women discuss, but one-dimensionally and with no thought for learning or progress, or rather with no allowance for change: "Gentlemen, we need no Learned Scholars, nor Grave Sages to propound the Theam of our discourse in this place, and at this time; for our minds are so full of thoughts of the Female Sex, as we have no room for any other Subject or Object; wherefore let the Theam be what it will, our discourses will soon run on them" (2.6). The men recognize that their speeches will always stop at the same topic rather than demonstrate a variety of topics developed through study and contemplation. For the women, the academy facilitates access to knowledge they never had before and offers the space to develop and deepen that knowledge unhindered. Cavendish makes an important statement in the contrast between the two academies in how the men take for granted their access to knowledge, while the

women appreciate it because of its rarity in their lives. The contrast between the two spaces is reinforced if we recognize Cavendish's surprising anticipation of the unprecedented potential of utopian literature for women writers. Men's utopias looked backward toward regaining an (imagined) wholeness or nostalgic return, and thus, the men of *Female Academy* construct their utopic space in an attempt to regain control of the women. Women's utopias, on the other hand, looked forward to achieving pleasure and accessing knowledge through metamorphic introspection, and thus, the women of the play demonstrate this through their words from inside their utopic space.

The men continue in their single-minded discussion while the women are undisturbed and go on discussing their diverse topics with little regard for the men's efforts. In 4.21, the play's audience starts to notice the inequality between the men's and women's discourses and, importantly, Cavendish has the men of the audience assess both groups in the play:

1 Gent: Methinks the womens Lectural discourse is better than the mens; for in my opinion, the mens discourses are simple, childish and foolish, in comparison of the womens.

2 Gent: Why, the subject of the discourse is of women, which are simple, foolish, and childish.

1 Gent: There is no sign of their simplicity or folly, in their discourse or Speeches, I know not what may be in their Actions.

2 Gent: Now you come to the point, for the weakness of women lyes in their Actions, not in the Words; for they have sharp Wits and blunt Judgements.

The difference between their discourses materializes between actions and words. The men attempt to challenge the women through words, but fail because the women have greater control of words (the play's audience attests to this). The men debate how to conquer with *actions* since their words fail (reenacting the "masculine" actions to the "feminine" words). The women's words, even only heard through a grate, are more "active" in their production of information and entertainment (disproving the men's conclusions); through their speeches, the women demonstrate the fruit of their labors through their words, while the actions themselves remain safely (if threatening) behind the grate. The women's actions simply prove incomparable to the men's "simple,

childish, and foolish" efforts, especially given the next scene in which the men demonstrate what they consider a "better" action:

1 Gent: The Academy of Ladies take no notice of the Academy of Men, nor seem to consider what the men say, for they go on their own serious way, and edifying discourses.

2 Gent: At which the men are so angry, as they have sworn to leave off talking, and instead, thereof, they will sound Trumpets so loud, when the Ladys are in their discoursing, as they shall not hear themselves speak; by which means they hope to draw them out of their Cloyster [...] they will disperse that swarm of Academical Ladies, with the sound of brazen trumpets (4.23).

With "brazen" trumpets, the men try to overwhelm the women's superior words (they are doubly bound because they can do nothing about the women's actions, and their own actions are limited by the women's enclosure) with the nonsensical noise of trumpet-as-voices that lack all comprehension and authority.⁷ Less a noble action than a petulant reaction, their protest does nothing more than emphasize the women's nobler rhetoric and bring attention to their own inequality. More subtly, Cavendish is forcing the men to feel the same sense of frustration women have felt for centuries: They should know what it feels like to be kept from all they desire by an insurmountable wall, or what it feels like to "see" what an education can offer, but not be allowed "in" to participate. In this short, strange, little play, Cavendish imagines one of the most creative impasses between the genders in drama. The men's irrational tantrum not only prevents the women from receiving a better education, but also prevents the audience from learning from the women's knowledge and dialogue. Moreover, their noise also obstructs the women's right to a peaceful life: The men refuse the women their voices, their audience, and their peace because they "will not let them rest in quiet, or suffer them to live in peace" (5.29).

When the Matron emerges from the Academy to ask them to stop their noise, the men do not apologize. In the final scene, the men complain about the women's desire for an education, which they consider "a toy in their heads":

⁷ This detail immediately recalls John Knox's vitriolic attack on women in power: "First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women" (1558).

As for their Education, it is but to learn to talk, and women can do that without teaching, for on my Conscience, a woman was the first inventer of Speech; and as for their Retirement, Nature did never make them for that purpose, but to associate themselves with men: and since men are the chief Head of their kind, it were a sign that they had but very little Brain, if they would suffer the youngest and fairest women to incloyster themselves (5.29).

The power of speech, the original word, is assigned (disparagingly) to women, while men have neither mind nor brain, but the more physical "head of their kind." Women's brains, indeed, become "little" when they are restricted from anything (even the possibility of breeding, as the men suggest). However, the tide turns when the Matron informs the men that the women only ever sought knowledge and have no desire to take a vow of chastity. They learn that, in the Academy, the women "are they taught how to be good Wives when they are married." The Matron then directs the men not to the now-willing women, but to the women's families who will be responsible for allowing the men leave to woo or not, *if* they can gain "their good liking and consent." The men rail against this notion because they consider it "secondary Love" rather than wooing openly, which would allow the all-important access to the female body. The Matron warns them: "If you be Worthy Gentlemen, as I believe you all are, their Love will be due to your Merits, and your Merits will persuade them to love you." The impetus behind their utopia requires access and control of the female body, but in securing that the women successfully enjoy their utopia, Cavendish prevents the men from reaching their utopia with any certainty. After all, their "Merits" have proven unworthy, and their ability to "perswade" is doubtful.

Most critical studies of *Female Academy* denounce the regulatory effect of the final scene because it sweepingly negates the women's progress with the Academy. However, the play does far more than imagine a temporary space for women to debate and discuss unhindered by men only to dismantle it completely. For one, the play demonstrates that women, by choosing to join the Academy, and demonstrating their success, inspire the men to establish their own Academy; their efforts bring about a measurable social impact in the creation of two productive spaces. A grate may

separate them, but their ideas can flow between the two spaces on a more substantial level that is simultaneously public and private. That the men do little more than whine in their academy is their choice, and adds a poignant commentary. It is with that accomplishment that “the women seem to have all the power by directing the male gaze, not only to their beauty, but to their intellectual capabilities” which allows the gaze to be “doubly controlled” by Cavendish. The female characters, as D’Monté argues, thus “retain ocular control” because when their orations are not in progress there is nothing for the audience to look at, but they also control their own freedom of speech because they choose what is being said, and therefore, what the men hear (“Mirroring Female Power” 95-6). As I mentioned earlier, the grate is likely the most instrumental detail of this play because it allows Cavendish to maintain control over the enclosure by simultaneously allowing and preventing access.⁸ The descriptive details and philosophical foundations of Cavendish’s space are crucial to its success because her space must allow and restrict access by ensuring the female community is heard (it must not be built upon false desires like Shakespeare’s Academe).

Perhaps Cavendish adopting an ending reminiscent of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* that also only suggests that marriage may be possible in the future is not unexpected. The end of Shakespeare’s play hints at the chance of the conventional comedic ending *if* the men honor their oath, but given the men’s failure to act according to their word, the marriages may never take place; this is the same quality the men in Cavendish’s play accuse the women of lacking. In *Female Academy*, the surety of the future marriages is, once again, left to the surety of men’s words: They must persuade the women’s families of their worth. Frankly, Cavendish’s men prove themselves as

⁸ Rebecca Merrens argues that the space of the Academy was as crucial for Cavendish as the resulting debates. The “presence” of the Academy as a space “forces the reconstitution of the communities which existed prior to its ‘Grates’ and walls. All prior activities come to a halt with the opening of the Academy: the men cease to debate other matters, the women leave the management of their homes and domestic occupations to attend the speeches. The speeches exist, therefore, in a space that is both private and public. The young scholars live ‘incloystered’ within the Academy and their speech is directed at each other for discussion and questioning; yet, the walls on either side of their private space are porous to the attentions of the men and women of their community. Their discourses unquestionably function as public lectures, even while the bodies of the lecturers remain secluded within the Academy” (247).

incapable of respect and honor (or even maturity) as the courtiers in Shakespeare's play. Just as Shakespeare's ladies leave the possibility of a marriage in the courtiers' hands, so the Matron leaves any unions in the men's (less capable) hands. After all, it is not that the women study specifically to become good wives, but rather that their discourse would make them good wives were they ever to marry. Their education also makes them good (single/singular) women, even if they never marry. This detail opens the all-important gap between an education undertaken solely for the expectation of marriage, and one that allows a viable alternative for women who might choose never to marry. Furthermore, because of the women's education, the men may not even want verbally superior women as wives.⁹

One can find Cavendish's true purpose within the overt (and infinitely varied) expectations *readers* bring to the play recalling much of the dramatic "play" we saw in *Twelfth Night*. For instance, Judith Haber has also described the play's ending as ambiguous, but for a slightly different reason. The ending, as Haber writes, demonstrates Cavendish's "resistance to conventional closure." Haber captures the crux of the interactive simultaneity of Cavendish's plays that I explored in Shakespeare. The *Female Academy's* "abrupt conclusion," as she argues, is not "a straightforward surrender to patriarchal conventions (if it is, it's a singularly ineffective one), nor as a simple criticism of them, but as both at once." What is at stake, as Haber continues, "is not only Cavendish's ambivalence about marriage and the status of women (although it is probably that as well), but her simultaneous need for and resistance to conventional closure; she thus calls attention both to the arbitrariness of her ending and to her inability to avoid it" (123). The play resolves the irresolvable gender separation by introducing a hope for marriage at the end, but this does not diminish the utopic space outside of the conventional patriarchal (and later heteronormative) expectations that are never breached outside of the Academy's

⁹ "Given the play's premise that serious education for women alters both student and society, it seems certain that the marriageable women will emerge from the Academy significantly different from the beautiful breeders the men seek" (Merrens 253).

walls. Merely the potential for such a space is remarkably transgressive and is rooted in Cavendish's own problematic desire for more fluid social and cultural structures. There is also often insecurity in Cavendish's plays related to her desire for such spaces in the first place. Her use of a wide variety of transformative spaces in her texts demonstrates her ambivalence about wanting what convention dictated she should not. *Female Academy's* ending suggests an equivocation born of this ambivalence, but it is an ambiguous equivocation at best. Alexandra Bennett has argued that the play's "disappointing ending" specifically indicates the play's potential for dissent because it rewrites the definition of what makes an ideal wife,¹⁰ but I would add that the play's greatest dissent is not that educated women make better wives, but that it offers women the choice of, and reliable access to, a meaningful education; whether that potential is realized as conformity (through marriage) or dissent (by remaining in the Academy) is a *choice* that will be left to the individual woman.

Choice, in all of Cavendish's utopias, is the ultimate form of dissent because it allows for variety, and ultimately, for constant metamorphic change. To facilitate the reception of "new" ideas, she grants the Academy women a powerful alternative: She might choose marriage at the end of her academic studies and be a more educated wife for it, just as easily as she chose to enter (or forever remain in) the Academy like the Matrons. Enclosure in the Academy may seem only a temporary dissent if a woman ultimately chooses to marry, but what she gains from that dissent can never be taken away. By choosing an academic space as the potential, if temporary, utopia, Cavendish makes certain that those women will carry the results of their efforts in their minds (the mind is always a space with far more potential than any academy for Cavendish)

¹⁰ In "Happy Families and Learned Ladies" Bennett considers the "disappointing ending" from a related perspective. The play, as she writes, "fulfills the mandates of early seventeenth-century humanist writers in teaching women to be good wives. [The Matron] sets conditions on her involvement in future courtships, and the final stage direction demonstrates a very different relationship with the men in the scene. [Her] explanations and her power at the end [...] also suggest more potentially seismic transformations implicit in Cavendish's vision of female education. [The ending] suggests that the definition of what a 'good wife' might be is in question, open to new ideas and possibilities for women. Under the guise of conformity (with the conventions of comic resolutions in the theatre, conflict ending in marriage) lurks the potential for dissent" (12-13).

and wield it as the tool for any dissent they may require in the future even from within a conventional role. The Academy grants women the tools to prevent the problems resulting from the lack of women's education Cavendish will come to describe in *Sociable Letters* and in *Convent of Pleasure*. By voicing these dissenting alternatives (in publishing them), Cavendish made sure detractors could, once again, never un-ring the bell because women will carry their education with them into their marriages. Dissent for Cavendish also meant refusing to restrict women to any single choice, space or role: they could be wife, or student, or student *and then* wife. The play's ending may seem startling after the liberating self-determination Cavendish granted the Academy women (given the success of their elaborate discourses), but the Matron never undermines the *Academy's* freedom with her final declaration. Rather, she introduces the simultaneous possibility of appeasing the men, and securing the Academy's continued survival. Cavendish closes this utopic space with a seemingly conventional ending but still manages to maintain the gap promising access to the utopia.

The men's reaction after they fail at outshining the women in the public discourse is motivated by the women's refusal to participate in the patriarchal reproductive exchange, but it also proves far more critical to Cavendish's utopic plan than the play's dramatic final twist. Their extreme anger seems almost misplaced in what should be, essentially, a comedy (it echoes the similarly unexpected violent penance levied against women entering the Academe in *Love's Labour's Lost*). Cavendish was no stranger to the requirements of the "marriage market," and she will discuss it at length in letter 50 of *Sociable Letters* with some intriguing reversals. In the letter, she organizes the women participating in the "market," into the many "realms" they must enter to find spouses. Cavendish significantly elaborates the "market" metaphor by including customers, goods, prices, scarcity or availability of "products," and even includes store fronts. She groups these "markets" into three realms. First is Hymen's Markets that includes the most acceptable spaces where women might meet a spouse like Churches, Plays, and Balls. Second is Venus's Markets that are the less virtuous

meeting areas where "Coin is current, but Virtue is not." Finally, she describes an unexpected third realm that she privileges by declaring it a "court" rather than a market: Diana's Court includes "Cloisters or Monasteries" as a choice for those "Persons as will live Single and Chast" or rather, for those who refuse to go to market (it should not go unnoticed that Cavendish offers this option to all "persons" rather than just "women"). And, in a demonstrative overturn of convention, Cavendish's markets do not exclude married women: "Married Wives that live Retired, do not Frequent this Market, but if they do, they never come into any of the Shops, but stand in the midst of the Marketplace, that it may be known they Buy nothing there" (61-2). Cavendish recognized the way women were historically exchanged as products within the marriage market, but she had a clearer understanding for what she saw as the role of married women (herself) within it: A critical observer who must be seen in her non-participation, but still be very much present in community with other women (she exists within and outside of the new world order she writes). A married wife in the marketplace seems a superfluous role, but she includes it directly following (in a sort of forced parallel) the description of those who refuse to participate by choosing Diana's Courts. The most telling difference in Cavendish's reorganization of the market metaphor is that women are the ones out purchasing husbands, rather than the other way around because there are far more "customers" than "Husbands to be Sold." Such a shift in the direction of the fundamental patriarchal exchange might go unnoticed (as does her earlier reversal of the Lock and the Key metaphor). She uses familiar metaphors and delights in amplifying them with greater metaphoric elaboration only to challenge them in the process. She has made the subtle connection between a cloistered life and marriage before, which reinforces her insistence that women must have a choice between multiple spaces they might inhabit. For example, in letter 130, she describes "Lady V.R." who "lives as if she were an Incloister'd Nun, although Wife, and her Husband is her only Confessor and Instructor, or rather her Saint, whome she Adores and Worships, and Prayes to, to Pardon her Sins of Omission" (139). The letter

goes on to chide the good woman for ignoring her health for the sake of her husband-worship. Cavendish is cautioning against rigid extremes (and the binaries they suggest) that are never the best route to happiness because they lead to either separation and isolation, or spectacle and exposure (of course, in her life and texts, she routinely contradicted this rule).

Cavendish was astutely insightful in her subtle dismantling of the marriage market metaphor in this letter, and throughout her texts. She was certainly not the first to notice or discuss the social realities of women-as-commodity and the economic and cultural realities wrought by forcing women into the role of an object to be exchanged and bartered. The system relied on the explicit accessibility of women, so any option that might lead to blocking men's access was a transgressive suggestion. Her thoughtful metaphoric rendering of the market, juxtaposed with cloistered women who refused to participate at all, and the presence of married women as witnesses (who are seen but not touched like the women in *Female Academy*) must be considered in light of the alternative "cloister" of *Convent of Pleasure* (without the ascetic lifestyle or vows of chastity), which illustrates a unique rendering of separatist spaces as utopias. Cavendish allows for simultaneous participation in, and exclusion from, the market that requires and subjects her. This recalls Luce Irigaray's notable "Women on the Market" in *This Sex Which is Not One* (1977, 1985) in which she theoretically defines and challenges society's reliance "upon the exchange of women" in the market:

Without the exchange of women, we are told, we would fall back into the anarchy (?) of the natural world, the randomness (?) of the animal kingdom. The passage into the social order, into the symbolic order, into the order as such, is assured by the fact that men, or groups of men, circulate women among themselves [...] All systems of exchange that organize patriarchal societies and all the modalities of productive work that are recognized, valued, and rewarded in these societies are men's business (170-1, punctuation original).

The natural, randomness and anarchy of animals (or Beasts, as Cavendish might say) is what would be left to us without this fundamental exchange based on the gender binary that must be in place for the system to work. In other words, chaos would reign just as Cavendish's writing demonstrates (by her own admission), or as the speaking

animals of *Blazing World* promise. Irigaray, in the tradition of Cixous and other feminists who confronted the place of Woman in a dialogue that was disallowing her, questions the exchange most adamantly with this well-known question: "*But what if these 'commodities' refused to go to 'market'?*" and instead "maintained 'another' kind of commerce, among themselves?" (196, italics original). Irigaray answers with her own utopic vision of culture and society:

Exchanges without identifiable terms, without accounts, without end ...Without additions and accumulations, one plus one, woman after woman...Without sequence or number. Without standard or yardstick. [...] Nature's resources would be expended without depletion, exchange without labor, freely given, exempt from masculine transactions: enjoyment without fee, well-being without pain, pleasure without possession. As for all the strategies and savings, the appropriations tantamount to theft and rape, the laborious accumulation of capital, how ironic all that would be. Utopia? Perhaps (197).

This abundant "market" economy and exchange, envisioned as an enjoyment of a "pleasure" so varied it is without number or sequence, and no rigid definition or conventional expectation, and without possession, is reminiscent of the society Cavendish will more safely enclose in the *Convent of Pleasure*. Irigaray questions the same constructions that Cavendish was writing against, and that both women in that journey end up squarely in utopia supports my position that utopia emerges most prevalently wherever the binary is dismantled, wherever the gap appears between the real and the ideal, and wherever women persist in writing themselves into that gap to escape absolute gender. The convent will prove a fundamentally utopic space precisely because Cavendish understood that the key was *not* simply pulling the woman out of the market, but rather in rewriting the market itself, insisting on access to allowable and various pleasures, and re-imagining the dynamics of knowledge and authority with a fundamental requirement of progress through perpetual change. A woman might go to market, or she might not; the potential to become what she wishes rests only on maintaining that potential. Cavendish's utopias build the "other kind of commerce" that Irigaray equates with utopia, and for good reasons. Cavendish foresaw this

potential and wrote it into her most popular play, *Convent of Pleasure*, and her most successful utopia, *Blazing World*.

Convent of Pleasure is perhaps Cavendish's most critically intriguing play. In many ways, it revisits her goals with *Female Academy*, and by comparison, the earlier play feels less complete, or less fleshed-out, than it might have felt. That sense of incompleteness indicates an unsettling fragmentation in the earlier plays that is, in fact, a critical element of its utopia.¹¹ However, *Convent of Pleasure* has a more developed argument as to why the women enclose themselves. Lady Happy does away with the "grate" altogether, and as in the earlier play, perspective makes the critical difference in *Convent* because the reader accompanies characters both inside and outside of the convent. In *Female Academy*, we participate with the cloistered women only by hearing them, along with the rest of the public, outside the grate for their daily discourses. This decision goes against the most anticipated element of utopian literature: The mystery of the "other" world opening up while we may remain anchored in the real world. Instead of the earlier play's blindness, *Convent* offers readers near-omniscience by comparing both worlds and suspending the wonder over what might be less than utopic for our not knowing. The older play does not allow us to hear what the women's lives are like inside the Academy leaving only the opinion of the citizens and the final voice of the Matron as evidence of the Academy's utopicity. We will remain curious because we never hear the student's reasons for choosing the Academy, or details of life in the Academy. Perhaps Cavendish could not verbalize her

¹¹ *Female Academy* has also been read as a response to William Newcastle's play, *The Varietie* (c. 1639), which portrays female scholars as "trivial," a quality Cavendish, assigns to the men in her play (there may have been a philosophical disagreement between husband and wife, despite how often Cavendish assures us of his support). "Newcastle's misogynistic parody of femino-centric court culture concerns a group of female scholars stereotypically depicted as stupid and petty-minded. Their triviality is wholly given over to the men in Margaret Cavendish's Academy, neatly reversing ideas about women's capacity for learning" (D'Monté "Mirroring Female Power" 96).

own reasons for wanting to participate in such an Academy, and instead, left us to measure the quality of the utopic space based on the discourses.¹²

The Academy women are exceptional orators and demonstrate everything that is excellent in women, and thus, surpass the men by the skill of both their words and actions. Sara Mendelson, for instance, argues that Cavendish deliberately wrote her dramatic women to “eclipse men as they surpass other women” and to demonstrate “all the exemplary virtues of their own sex” because they consistently perform tasks in which men were thought to excel;¹³ this demonstrates, according to Mendelson, “hermaphroditical attributes.” I agree that her women express a hybrid ambiguity similar to Shakespeare’s transvestite characters, but I believe the figure of the hermaphrodite is loaded with cultural assumptions that Cavendish did not wish to convey. Far more relevant is Mendelson’s argument that Cavendish wanted readers to challenge assumptions about gender difference, and emphasize how what was “natural” for either gender was culturally defined.¹⁴ Moreover, she meant to destabilize the hierarchical conventions defining gender, but not at the cost of dismantling similar class divisions. Cavendish reconstructed gender in the gap between what she explicitly believed, and what she could only implicitly suggest. She remained on that threshold in order to pose both sides of the argument, while knowing that the question of gender could only be dismantled from within a utopic space that allowed for the thought exercise of fluidity in gender and desire as a first step towards social improvement and utopia

¹² In a related reading, Sara Mendelson writes that the students of the Academy “effortlessly produce elegant orations brimming with wit and learning” and are “not in the least shy before large mixed audiences of strangers” and argues that their bravery might reflect Cavendish’s own “tongue-tied bashfulness” (“Playing Games with Gender and Genre” 207).

¹³ This point recalls, as I demonstrated, how effeminate men excel at the trivial tasks that were the core of women’s education in *Sociable Letters*.

¹⁴ According to Mendelson, Cavendish endowed her female characters with “hermaphroditical attributes” to challenge “contemporary assumptions about the nature of gender differences, and the ‘natural’ proclivities and capacities of each sex. In doing so, she destabilized the hierarchical worldview that defined the gender order in the comedies of sexual reversal of her Jacobean predecessors. Yet in the context of Cavendish’s anti-autobiographical dreamscapes, questions of gender are posed implicitly rather than explicitly” (208).

To realize her community of women's full utopic potential, Cavendish had to establish it through solid reasoning. The Academy demonstrated her first step, where women could safely realize their education, but the Convent had to go further by providing everything a woman needed, and nothing that would ever make her want to leave. This prevents the men in the later play from being able to reason them out because, clearly, the women's space is far better than the outside world; it also leaves the men no other choice but to infiltrate.¹⁵ Rebecca D'Monté reading the two plays against each other argues that Cavendish's use of the separatist spaces to empower women was evident in how she defuses the male gaze by turning inward to her enclosure, to influence the construction of same-sex desire within those spaces, and to allow for the possibility of new norms to replace the structures that her communities destabilize: "The controlling male gaze has no strength and is transformed instead into a mutually supportive gaze between women, whilst conventional seventeenth-century motifs, such as the masque, the pastoral and the mirror, are turned into images of narcissistic pleasure and erotic desire." By dismantling these conventions, as D'Monté notes, such plays privilege "power relations between women rather than men" and even "rewrite the normative model of the heterosexual couple" ("Mirroring Female Power" 93). Cavendish turns the gaze inward at the exclusion of men, and then transforms the gaze into one that is mutually wielded and supportive, rather than exclusive or at the cost of either men or women. She does not reflect the condemnation of the controllers, but rather disperses the controlling gaze. From the tactile to the visual, Lady Happy's convent focuses on ensuring that her devotees find pleasure in all they do, see, here, taste, and experience. The distinction between the physical, sensual pleasures the convent offers (her descriptions of the convent's pleasures focus, almost stubbornly, on pleasing the senses) and the acetic deprivation

¹⁵ The plays share several similarities that indicate Cavendish was working with the older play, for instance, how the men in both plays compare the collective women to bee hives that need to be swarmed out: In the final scene of *Female Academy*, they fear the women's stings, and in 2.4 of *Convent of Pleasure*, the smoke from a fire they set will make the women swarm.

that convents were associated with, illustrates Cavendish's rewriting of convents as a utopic convention for her specific purposes.

Among her works, Cavendish describes a successful academy, a convent that is more a luxurious palace than restrictive nunnery, and an elaborate imperial palace, court and spiritual harem, in *Blazing World*. Of these many spaces, which also included nunneries, boarding schools, academies, and harems, convents held the most serious implications for women writers of utopia. Nicole Pohl explores the development of these several spaces, focusing on convents as ideal communities, in *Women, Space, Utopia 1600-1800* (2006), and argues that a desire for women-only communities that were inaccessible to men "was seen as disruptive and unnatural" because it suggested a withdrawal from "the patriarchal authority within the family and political life." Often, these worlds were imagined (and thus hidden) "under the guise of comedy" as most appear in comedic plays, but also represented "a powerful and consistent social vision of utopian potential that engages with contemporary discourses of gendered domesticity." (99). For Cavendish the convent affirmed "the female community as a viable alternative to marriage *and* castimony, a female sexuality that whilst being non-reproductive and virginal, embodies lesbian desire and pleasure or simply friendship." I agree that Cavendish anticipated this potential, but, once again, she goes further because women of the convent need not be restricted to a single path in life, and not even to one form of sexuality. Even castimony need not be restricted to the love of God, the Father, but could be left open to a plurality of gods, deified Empresses, or transcendent spiritual marriages between women. Culturally, convents evoked a sense of sanctuary that required submission to economic and sexual control by an intolerant religious authority that dictated how much women could benefit from that sanctuary's utopia. At the same time, as Pohl notes, convents were organized like "gentry households" because "spatial gender segregation dominated the use of spaces," and "the allocation of space symbolized the gender matrix" (97). Convents designated "appropriate" gendered spaces allowing for somewhat permeable boundaries between

public and private, but the Council of Trent, in favor of far more rigidly restricted access to cloistered women, dismantled this organization, as Pohl discusses.

Influenced by this history and tradition (and her time at court) Cavendish recognized that convents offered an “active choice” from which women could “denounce the society of men.” Convents need not be “libertine or evil” but could be a “blissful and gratifying [...] place of friendship and intellectual, sensual, and culinary pleasures” (Bonin 103).¹⁶ That potential emerges in convents despite their “dubious reputation,” but Cavendish’s convent, in particular, represents a space “aggressively separate from the heterosexual economy” because of the “walled exclusivity” that allows the play to reconfigure “the relationship between women and property”; the play also disavows “matrimonial romance” by situating sexual desire in “explicitly feminine contexts” (Bonin 347). Lady Happy’s women enter the convent and discover a respite from the marriage market, and a carefree life of pleasure that allows them the freedom to live outside of the exchange and form a “new” system. One has to wonder which aspect of this utopia most upset the men of the play: The new system of exchange they could neither participate in nor control, or the women’s refusal to take part in *their* system. It is a curious question because Cavendish does not demand that the men dismantle their system, but by exempting women from participation in a system that requires women’s submission, dismantling their system is precisely what Cavendish’s convent does. If the patriarchal system can be seen as a masculine utopia, then it is understandable that both are predicated on the subjugation of women; for a woman’s utopia to exempt itself in favor of a parallel system allows women access to the means of power and production, while removing the requirement of their subjugation (elements of class would add another hierarchical dimension). In effect,

¹⁶ Cavendish’s use of the convent, according to Erin Lang Bonin, evokes other serious implications. The utopian potential of a convent lies in its “capacity to house forms of female authority and autonomy unthinkable in other social contexts” and, as Bonin continues, Women were no longer “mere appendages to their dowries” or “the means through which men transfer land, goods, and cash. Instead, women manage these commodities themselves in a community that eschews marriage. The play’s early scenes represent marriage as a purely economic arrangement, in which the wife is the losing partner” (347).

Cavendish demands that men try to imagine their system without women, and Cavendish's demand draws attention to their failure.

Generally, utopias for (and by) women usually took two familiar forms: convents and schools.¹⁷ As utopian literature developed, such societies appeared more often as separatist spaces because "separation" kept the "real" at bay and moderated utopia's constantly blurring boundaries. The seemingly protective isolation usually proved more fluid than expected; spaces could be expanded or restricted to greater or lesser extremes at will, located on lost islands or hidden countries, and still later, expanded to include the moon, planets or even alternate dimensions. However, convents and schools promised access to the education Cavendish knew was critical to her ability to disregard the obstacles preventing her success in the "real" world, but were inextricably bound to the classical conventions that encompassed every understanding of "ideal" space.¹⁸ She reimagined her contemporary models (reaching back to the classical spaces) in politics and government, and then focused on reforming the political through the personal by reconsidering authority and challenging religion. Her challenge to religion will take on surprising dimensions in *Blazing World*, but Cavendish demonstrates this defiance in *Convent of Pleasure* by designing a very different kind of "religious" convent. The play is set in a pagan land where men address both the ambiguously plural "gods" and an undefined "clergy" hoping to gather divine support to coerce Lady Happy out of her cloister. Madam Mediator informs them that she is "not a Votress to the gods, but to Nature" (2.1); she cannot allow the men in, for

¹⁷ Alison Findlay defines an important socio-historical element to Cavendish's understanding of academies and convents as utopic spaces for women: "Several of [her] plays bring the traditions of the academy and convent together in ways that problematise the all-female community as utopian space. The overlap of convent and academy is not surprising given Cavendish's cultural environment. [Her] household, her married home, provided a school of learning in which William and his brother Charles encouraged research into philosophy, politics, science as well as writing. A monastic presence was always close by" (168).

¹⁸ Nicole Pohl, in her introduction to *Gender and Utopia in the Eighteenth Century* (2007), a collection that considers French and English utopias from where Cavendish left off, writes that Cavendish's utopian literature represents "a much older tradition that understands the convent and the female academy as possible intentional communities providing a viable alternative to marriage, enforced vocation or single life. The focus here is not only on the female community per se but on education as the basis for personal and political reform. These and other modes of female utopias also experiment—if in different ways—with a wide range of political and economic models that redraw contemporary models of political economy and government" (2).

"Lady Happy is Lady-Prioress her self, and will admit none of the Masculine Sex, not so much as to a Grate, for she will suffer no grates about her cloister" (2.1). Her convent promises the women a reimagined political and economic environment of freedom from patriarchal authority, as the Academy did, but this time Cavendish adds freedom from the restrictions of the ruling patriarchal church of the conventional convents. Lady Happy's political (and religious) economy is wholly hers as she is a daughter richly left. As supreme authority of her convent, she does not have to seek approval from a government, nor from a church, nor from any man representing a patriarchal structure; she is not even under the admonishing hands of a harsh prioress who might, herself, be subject to those structures. She has taken charge of every structure that would subject her by enclosing herself according to her ideals, and in choosing her own (feminized) deity, her own faith.

These several reasons may have influenced Cavendish's decision to her dramatic utopia in a convent, but ultimately, she must have recognized that convents, as a popular theme of utopian literature, readily allowed for the suspension of convention. Indeed, perhaps they endured because, as Alison Findlay argues, "sororities were increasingly perceived as threatening" primarily because of the implied chastity, but the convent also endured "as a place of otherness in the female literary and dramatic imagination" (177). The threat of chastity was a withdrawal from the reproductive system of exchange, and that was enough to indicate dissent because it suggested radical alternatives safely enclosed within an outwardly virtuous frame. Convents also conjure images of women in authority and anxiety over what women might do in the absence of men's authority, which then conjures images of same-sex desire as simultaneously transgressive and titillating. Cavendish routinely depicted intimate bonds between women as preferable to marriage, but the same-sex desire in *Convent of Pleasure* is far more fluid than in her other texts. According to D'Monté, Cavendish's preference for female intimacy is demonstrated implicitly "in the frequent rejection of marriage in place of a companionate bond between women" and in the depiction of

“solipsistic female scholars who reject men in favor of their own company” (“Mirroring Female Power” 101-2). Furthermore, she widely and consistently privileged the spiritual over the material, most often by indicating through their elevation that women’s unions were more spiritual, thus locating them on the “higher plane” considered beyond the reach of women’s weaker minds and bodies.¹⁹ In *Letters*, an epistolary exchange can realize a conversation of souls to indicate community within a spiritual space; in *Blazing World*, a spiritual marriage allows two women to travel across time and space; in *Convent of Pleasure* a kiss shared between the Princess and Lady Happy is a “mingling of souls.” The slippage between the boundaries of the spiritual and the material blur throughout her worlds, but in *Convent of Pleasure* the enclosed space allows for a far more physical exchange between the women representing Cavendish’s final successful utopic vision in her combination of physical *and* spiritual transcendence in a community of women.

We have already seen several other convents in this dissertation. The nun’s convent in “The Land of Cockayne” was described as awash with rivers of milk, and the nuns were free to romp naked in their natural, wild environment. In the poem, the abbey is the space of pure pleasure and freedom between the women, but the lack of cloister walls welcomes the monk’s easy access (although desire and sexuality still blur in the poem). In Shakespeare’s utopias, the men’s academy is meant to shield them from pleasure in their studies, but that monastic space fails because of its permeability, while Olivia, the cloistered woman, can be accessed only by the cross-dressed boy/girl. Lady Happy’s convent is a good mixture of these spaces because it grants women “natural” pleasure, freedom, and intimacy between women, but securely encloses them away from the lustful men that are the only obstacles to

¹⁹ “There are several cases where this is expressed more overtly, as in the slippage that takes place between gender identity, erotic love, and female friendship.” For Cavendish, intimate relationships with women reflected “the purity of platonic love” which privileges “chastity rather than sexuality and which is based on Cavendish’s philosophy of atomism, itself a denial of the corporeal.” (“Mirroring Female Power” 101-2).

women's true pleasure, and, as Viola managed with Olivia, the newly arrived Princess indicates that only a fluidly gendered being can gain access:

MEDIAT. You intend to live incloister'd and retired from the World.
 L.HAPPY. 'Tis True, but not from pleasures; for, 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 incumbred cares and vexations, troubles and perturbation of the World.
 MEDIAT. But if you incloister your self, How will you enjoy the company of Men, whose conversation is thought the greatest Pleasure?
 L.HAPPY. Men are the only troublers of Women; for they only cross and oppose their sweet delights, and peaceable life; they cause their pains, but not their pleasures. Wherefore those Women that are poor, and have not means to buy delights, and maintain pleasures, are only fit for Men; for having not means to please themselves, they must serve only to please others; but those Women, where Fortune, Nature, and the gods are joined to make them happy, were mad to live with Men, who make the Female Sex their slaves; but I will not be so inslaved, but will live retired from their Company. Wherefore, in order thereto, I will take so many Noble Persons of my own Sex, as my Estate will plentifully maintain, such whose Births are greater than their Fortunes, and are resolv'd to live a single life, and vow Virginity: with these I meant to live incloister'd with all the delights and pleasures that are allowable and lawful; My Cloister shall not be a Cloister of restraint, but a place for freedom, not to vex the Senses but to please them (1.2).

Lady Happy has a clear vision for her convent, and all the convent's inhabitants are willing and eager to participate in it, unlike the King's courtiers in *Love's Labour's Lost* who resist and join only out of fear of their king, or Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, who cloisters herself and rejects male company in order to sustain her mourning. Lady Happy insists that "retiredness bars the life from nothing else but Men" and the absence of men is not so great a burden given the pleasures and socio-economic freedom the convent affords her. After all, even Madam Mediator qualifies her statement that conversation with Men is the "greatest Pleasure" with the word "thought" thereby suggesting that while some may think it true, the Princess will demonstrate the falsity of that assumption. What need has she of marriage, or conversation with men, when all the "variety" she could desire is within the convent's walls, including the mysterious Princess?

In the following scene, Lady Happy welcomes some newly arrived ladies and asks them if they repent of their decision to enter the convent. They answer: "Most

excellent Lady, it were as probable a repentance could be in Heaven amongst Angels as amongst us," and after they hear of the richness and plenty that will fill their lives in the convent (echoing, following, and respecting the seasons in communion with nature) they say: "None in this World could be happier." Cavendish designs a sensual "vision" in her convent that Sophie Tomlinson has described as a "domesticated golden world in which changes of season will merely bring increased sensual delight and in which luxury will extend to the smallest detail" ("My Brain the Stage" 153). Cavendish captures the golden age (and the attendant pastoral details) and encloses it in her convent to make it the exclusive realm of women alone. The equation of the convent with heaven, and some "other" world that only *may* prove happier, is proof of success enough to convince the doubtful Madam Mediator, who declares her "admiration and wonder" that so young a Lady could be so wise (2.2). By excluding men, Cavendish was testing, in the progression between the two plays, a new path to utopia. In her endeavors to level the disparity between the genders she kept encountering the same obstacles that the presence of men left to women, and as much as she tried to go around the obstacles, or level the playing field, women were still barred from fully participating in, and enjoying, utopic spaces.

Cavendish would have been acutely aware of the potential for convents to allow for pleasure as well as just religious seclusion given her experience in the court of Henrietta Marie who was unapologetically, outwardly, and controversially, Catholic (she was the patroness of an influential convent at Chaillot in 1651 and eventually retired there after the Restoration).²⁰ In fact, Henrietta Marie's personal chapel in London (built in 1632) was a substantial influence to Restoration England, not just

²⁰ Julie Crawford in "Margaret Cavendish and the Drama of Property" argues that Henrietta Marie's convent at Chaillot greatly influenced Cavendish's *Convent of Pleasure*. Henrietta Marie's convent signaled a dramatic step away from the plight of the Royalists who had remained loyal. The Queen established a convent, while Cavendish and other loyal Royalists struggled to regain the money and lands lost because of their loyalty to the crown. For Cavendish, Crawford argues, *Convent* "restores royalists' losses of property and privilege to their former glory. Her convent is a royalist retreat that celebrates the values of an exiled court culture, but it is also a fantastically restored and safe royalist property, replete with the material registers of noble privilege" (179).

Cavendish's dramatic convent. Alison Findlay argues that the Queen's support of its building influenced the period's fundamental concepts of space.²¹ Cavendish served the Queen's court from 1643 to 1645, and fled to Paris along with the court in 1644. She was the youngest daughter of a country gentleman and was sheltered from the world, but these tumultuous years, coupled as they were with political and social chaos, would have a lasting impact because she was in the center of the highest levels of court politics and war and was forced her to travel to a country whose religion and language were unfamiliar. She served the court in Oxford, but she would have been familiar with the Queen's chapel in London and the controversy it inspired, as well as the masques the court regularly produced that would have catered to the Queen's beliefs. To Henrietta Marie's particular influence, Sophie Tomlinson notes that her well-known court performances were not only "woman-centered" but also regularly promoted, in their dramatization, the embodiment of ideal feminine beauty. As Tomlinson continues, "the unprecedented feminine focus of court culture produced a division between an attitude which countenances the notion of women as theatrical, and one which stigmatizes female theatricality as sexually transgressive" (137). The division between the two could have opened up a gap that Cavendish filled with the women performers she discussed in *Letters* performing as characters in her plays even if only on her mind's stage. Her many experiences in exile and with the Queen come together in the *Convent of Pleasure* and grant us substantial insight on how Cavendish saw her experiences reflected in the ideal spaces her writing allowed.

Her time at court offered her an opportunity to capture the elements of court life that she found liberating, and reimagine those elements she found oppressive. There are several instances in her writing where she complains about her time at court, but with the same contradiction that defined her writing, she also understood the dramatic

²¹ "Catholic Englishwomen could only build such spectacular architectural declarations of their faith through their imaginations. The convent became an idealized fictive space. The palaces of light inhabited by women in the masques sponsored [by Henrietta Marie] can be read, on one level, as theatrical recreations of a separate, all-female space like a convent. From here, women's relationships to the central institutions of power, concentrated at Court, could be defined in new ways" (Findlay 159).

potential of the “feminine” Court she served: It was as a utopic space where women were in the majority, and ruled and “played” as they saw fit.²² Discovering the opportunities and freedoms women could gain in court, in contrast to her experiences with enforced exile and dispossession must have fostered, as Hero Chalmers argues, “the royalist need to produce representations of voluntary retreat from the traditional public sphere”, and Cavendish recreates those potential spaces of escape in her plays (“The Politics of Feminine Retreat” 87). One of her dramatic visions captures the revelry and relative safety of the lavish court life, and the other suggests a desire to create sanctuaries as an escape from the realities of forcible exclusion. *Convent of Pleasure* does not come across as a Catholic convent (with the attendant suggestions of the sexual perversity and opulence), nor does it demonstrate the carnivalesque lewdness Protestant critics accused the convents and monasteries of encouraging. Instead, it demonstrates the several positive elements Cavendish gleaned from her experiences in order to focus on female, or sororal, unity that encouraged women to claim a space in which they can take charge of their own pleasure. Convents and same-sex spaces of all sorts were already (and would continue to be) a utopic convention, but Cavendish’s spaces did more to criticize the political inferiority conventional utopias had always assigned to women.²³ Masculinist utopias were more often political, rather than social, critiques, but Cavendish’s use of convents did not remove her

²² Hero Chalmers argues that Cavendish’s plays actually demonstrate a “nostalgia” for the Caroline court because her plays “may be seen to draw on this climate of royalist nostalgia for the ethos and activities of Henrietta Maria’s court life” since *Convent of Pleasure* “echoes the female theatrical pursuits of the Caroline court, both plays might be read as idealised portrayals of the exiled court” (“The Politics of Feminine Retreat” 87).

²³ Erin Lang Bonin recognizes another important influence in Cavendish’s use of convents that, as she argues, is less reverence than a rejection of the swiftly developing, and increasingly popular, seventeenth-century utopian literary conventions such as islands and the New World: “By rejecting the island utopia so prevalent in seventeenth-century culture, Cavendish implicitly criticizes the form’s nearly invisible foundation: women’s political inferiority. Instead, she pieces together her utopian ideals within other discursive traditions. [...] Because these [traditions] embody worlds turned upside down, they accommodate visions of societies in which women wield economic, political, and intellectual power. Within these satirical traditions, Cavendish constructs makeshift, ambiguous utopias that simultaneously challenge masculinist assumptions and imagine feminist possibilities. These utopias dissolve as the plays end, as if to demonstrate that culturally dominant modes of thought are dystopian for women. Succumbing to patriarchal pressures, Cavendish’s utopian heroines eventually rejoin worlds turned right side up, worlds in which women are men’s political inferiors” (340).

utopias from the political. *Sociable Letters* discusses the place of women in government and citizenry more directly, and *Blazing World* is a political (and martial) treatise for women because the Empress both wields power and changes it at will. The confluence of varied influences and definitions fit perfectly with what we have come to see as Cavendish's consistent contradiction; these many social and cultural influences might have entered her mind when she imagined Lady Happy's convent, but the precise textual world she ultimately imagined was undoubtedly unique and utopic.

Using the relative safety of convents, Cavendish demonstrates the potential utopias promise, but her convents also demonstrate a prevalence of fluidity in desire as well. Her use of the convent as a feminist utopia was "trail-blazing" in putting same-sex amorous relationships in a "positive light," as Horacio Sierra writes (668). Sierra defines the play as "a crypto-Catholic closet drama" that uses convent ideology from within a Protestant literary landscape that imagined such communities as "antiquated, foreign, and belonging to another world—much like the utopian narratives that came into vogue by the end of the seventeenth century" (647). Whether they were criticized or idealized, hidden or open, convents were at least immediately recognizable to European society, and their substantial history offered a wealth of familiar material Cavendish could fragment. Referring to *Convent* specifically, Sierra compares the "ideology behind this same-sex enclave" as being "too Brobdingnagian of a utopian-like scenario for Cavendish to ignore." Sierra's comparison introduces an element of the fantastical that Cavendish may have been considering, but Cavendish did not wholly relinquish realism in her convent because there is a clear distinction between the outside and inside worlds.²⁴ In the first play, Cavendish imagines a school as the space of possibility and she allows a semi-permeable grate for observation. The school is transgressive because it offers women an education and a choice to remain outside of the reproductive patriarchal exchange evoking, perhaps, Cavendish's own utopian

²⁴ As Sierra describes it, the convent offers a place that is "an *other within*" rather than "a truly marginal, outsider population since it still deals with would-be suitors, disguised princes, and gossiping gentlemen, much as abbesses and their nuns still had to deal with the Catholic Church's male hierarchy and their inexorable intrusions into their community" (652).

desire. The wealth of suggestions and condemnations that convents inspired motivate the men to consider more violent reactions than the men of *Female Academy*, as we shall see. In the second play, Cavendish removes the grate and closes off the women entirely, which leaves the men little choice but to bend *their* gender through cross-dressing if they want to access the women. Ultimately, Cavendish's convent may evoke these many elements, but no element comes across as purposefully than the potential for same-sex desire between women who prove themselves self-sufficient in all other things, so why not sexuality and desire. Cavendish's decision to create a convent utopia indicates the removal of women from the patriarchal exchange rather than as a space for same-sex desire, according to Kate Chedgzoy: "The all-female space of the convent is potentially troubling to the sexual order, not because it facilitates female homoeroticism, but as a site of resistance to marriage and reproductive sexuality." As such, "queer fantasies of convent sexuality are enabled by the fact that the nunnery is an all-female space, but actually arise from its enmeshing in the discourses and institutions of heterosexual patriarchy" (59). Cavendish did not need to confront the possibility of lesbian desire directly because the convent setting and the resulting successful removal of women from the marriage market suggests it indirectly and enables, once again, an oblique approach to her utopia that bypassed patriarchal discourses in order to make it a queer fantasy as well. Chedgzoy goes on to argue that the convent does not replace "lesbian desire with female community," but that Cavendish's communities of women are always already "a possible site for female eroticism" (60). It is not that the women *must*, or *can only*, desire each other, but rather that they *can* desire differently if they please within the utopic space; utopia's potential is based on alternatives that promise fundamental change.

This dialogue of female eroticism circles around the intimacy and love affair between the Princess and Lady Happy in *Convent*. In the execution of their growing love, the play shares several themes with *Twelfth Night* (just as it shares several structural themes with *Love's Labour's Lost*) as Olivia and Lady Happy both cloister

themselves and immediately become prized objects. Perhaps more revealing of the themes of same-sex desire is what the play shares with *Twelfth Night* because the only being that could find its way into both worlds is a transvestite.²⁵ It does not seem coincidental that Cavendish's two plays appear before and after *Sociable Letters* in which she debates Shakespeare's gender-metamorphic qualities. After all, we read the Princess throughout the play as a woman before ever learning she was always a cross-dressed man. Several critics have looked at Cavendish's decision to include the *dramatis personae* at the end of play rather than at the beginning. Some of the plays in the same collection list the characters at the beginning of the play (although some others at the end as well), and strangely enough, it does not list the Prince even then but maintains *her* name as the Princess. This suggests that Cavendish's intent was that readers have no knowledge of the Prince's gender until his revelation as such to grant the same-sex desire much greater relevance and impact.²⁶ Although her placement of the list might have led to reader's assuming the Princess must be a man because it would have been the only acceptable resolution to the affair. After all, from her first introduction and throughout the play, the reader gets several clues: "She is a Princely brave Woman truly, of a Masculine Presence" (2.3). Readers would have no problems accepting the Princess as a woman, which would maintain the character's ambiguity,

²⁵ At the end of *Convent of Pleasure*, Mimick shares a discussion with Lady Happy where he proves her to be "a fool," like we saw Feste prove Olivia a fool. Parallels of such specificity go far to suggest that Shakespeare's plays were on Cavendish's mind.

²⁶ Valerie Traub offers the most convincing argument regarding the character list placement noting that its placement is a clear demonstration of Shakespeare's influence on Cavendish. Her primary motivation in its the placement is to construct gender in a way that allows for same-sex desire: "Unlike Shakespeare, who established the 'femininity' of his heroines before allowing them to don masculine dress, Cavendish withholds the gender of the Prince(ss) until the final unveiling scene. The extent to which the relationship between Lady Happy and the Princess is one of two femmes, then, relies on the reader's (auditor's) lack of knowledge of the cross-gender disguise. Certainly, Lady Happy believes herself to be in love with a woman who, however 'masculine' her presence, fits comfortable and companionable in with the other women (some of whom also dress as shepherds). [...] Licensed through the artifice of the pastoral, explored through the strategy of transvestism, and supported by the sororal community, 'feminine' homoeroticism appears as part and parcel of the pleasures Lady Happy deems a noblewoman's natural right (*Renaissance of Lesbianism* 179-180). Once again, the role of the reader/audience is critical to the successful effect of the character list and is in keeping with Cavendish's expectation of an interactive community. Focusing, as Traub does, on why Cavendish does not let us recognize the Prince before he becomes the Princess is more revealing of Cavendish's utopic endeavor.

but the certainty falters at how cross-dressing functions in a play meant to be read. Cavendish was not hindered by the performance tradition that required male actors alone, and furthermore, she professed that her plays might not (and even should not) ever be performed. Given the theatrical expectations of the Renaissance, the “stranger” entering the convent would suggest (at the very least) that the Princess was not who she said she was, and Cavendish’s many hints would only reinforce that suggestion. However, even if the Princess’s true gender is ambiguous from the start (more so for the reader than it would be to the spectator), the scene that immediately precedes the Princess’s entrance offers an intriguing perspective on Cavendish’s intention with the character and the character list.

In 2.4, the play’s men discuss how they might “get those Ladies out of their Convent.” At one point, they even consider setting fire to the convent, but the presence of a “great Princess” and the possibility of persecution (rather than the horror and violence of it) stay their hands. Admitting that the idea of a similar convent for them seems logical (as it did in *Female Academy*) they decide against it because they would not want a convent of men alone. Their next step is to see if they might peek inside the convent somehow. After all, if getting them out is not an option, perhaps they can at least see what they are doing; alas, the convent has no “grate.” Eventually, the conversation turns to cross-dressing as their only alternative. Our experience with Shakespearean cross-dressing was of female characters dressing as men, and there is never a doubt that they will be easily accepted as men, although, in *Twelfth Night*, the opposite gender twins complicate this exchange. The all-male cast demands that audiences sidestep the idea of perfect representation as part of the spectacle, titillation, and humor that boys dressed as girls offered. In this scene, Cavendish’s men are adamant that their cross-dressing will fail to disguise their masculinity. This would not have been a concern on the Renaissance stage, and certainly not with male actors accustomed to playing women. Ultimately, there is no

consensus among the men, and they remain uncertain that transvestism could ever prove effective and the ending leaves their many suggestions ambiguous:

TAKEPL. Faith, let us resolve to put our selves in Womens apparel, and so by that means get into the *Convent*
 ADVISER. We shall be discover'd
 TAKEPL. Who shall discover Us?
 ADVISER. We shall discover our Selves
 TAKEPL. We are not such fools as to betray our Selves
 ADVISER. We cannot avoid it, for, our Garb and Behavior; besides, our Voices will discover us: for we are as untoward to make Courtesies in Petticoats, as Women are to make Legs in Breeches; and it will be as great a difficulty to raise our Voices to a Treble-sound, as for Women to press down their Voices to a Base; besides, We shall never frame our Eyes and Mouths to such coy, dissembling looks, and pritty simpering Mopes and Smile, as they do.
 COURT. But we will go as strong lusty Country-Wenches, that desire to serve them in Inferior Places, and Offices, as Cook-maids, Laundry-maids, Dairy-maids, and the like.
 FACIL. I do verily believe, I could make an indifferent Cook-maid, but not a Laundry, nor Dairy-maid; for I cannot milk Cows, nor starch Gorgets, but I think I could make a pretty shift, to wash some of the Ladies Night-Linnen. [...]
 FACIL. Come, come, we shall make a shift one way or other: Besides, we shall be very willing to learn, and be very diligent in our Services, which will give good and great content; wherefore, let us go and put these designes into execution.
 COURTLY. Content, content
 ADVISER. Nay, faith, let us not trouble our Selves for it, 'tis in vain (2.4).

This scene demonstrates the “real” obstacles to cross-dressing as a means of “becoming” the other gender when the men realize that clothing is not enough. Theater facilitated the suspension of the “real” to allow men to perform femininity during the century that preceded Cavendish’s play. In this scene, Cavendish at once questions the artifice of a tradition that assumes men can perform femininity, and the foolishness of restricting women from performing that femininity themselves (much less performing masculinity as transvestites). Their conversation seems almost meta-theatrical given the long history and familiarity of theatrical cross-dressing, but Cavendish wants to question the failure of the popular convention in theater in order to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of similarly restrictive social conventions. The men cannot reason the women out, cannot violently force them out, will not start their own same-sex academy, and cannot play either noble women or servants. By the end of the

scene, we are unsure whether the men will even bother trying at all. Monsieur Facil is determined to attempt it and Courtly supports him, but the final word on the subject comes from Monsieur Adviser who suggests that they not trouble themselves “in vain.” To whom the men listened to in the end, we do not know, but we never hear of the scheme again. In the next scene, a new Princess enters the convent. The possibility of a cross-dressed man is now on the reader’s mind right before the Princess, whom the men discuss, is introduced. The connection should be obvious, but the men have spent a considerable amount of time convincing readers that no man could ever effectively perform “woman.” Did Cavendish mean this to be another clue, a rejection of gender role restrictions, or was it a distraction from her overall intent to surprise us with the Princess’s truth?

The performance tradition in public theaters refused women the stage, but court performances generally included female performers. Cavendish’s never saw her plays performed, and in her prefaces, she defends her plays by claiming they could not be acted in England (as the playhouses were closed) in any case, and furthermore, they were far too long for the stage. However, the ban on public performance, as Judith Peacock argues, “constituted a period of temporary equality between men and women writers when neither sex could write dramatic material with a view to professional production” (90). She may have asserted the failure of her theatrical knowledge, but Cavendish includes very specific stage directions in anticipation of their performance. According to Peacock, this demonstrates how “dramaturgically aware [of] controlling spectacle and visual effects” Cavendish was (92). In keeping with her consistent contradiction, Cavendish closes her preface thus:

The printing of my Playes spoils them for ever to be Acted; for what men are acquainted with, is despised, at lest neglected; for the newness of Playes, most commonly, takes the Spectators, more than the Wit, Scenes, or Plot, so that my Playes would seem lame or tired in action, and dull to hearing on the Stage, for which reason, I shall never desire they should be Acted; but if they delight or please the Readers, I shall have as much satisfaction as if I had hands of applause from the Specators (255).

She conceived the plays outside of performance, or as plays that would only ever be acted on the stage of her mind. Because “newness” is critical to the performative experience, her decision to publish them further diminished the possibility of their performance. However, this did not lessen Cavendish’s conviction that the genre offered a utopic space like no other. Alexandra Bennett, discussing Cavendish’s use of the genre, argues that “the mimetic possibilities afforded by drama as a genre” enticed Cavendish to write plays. She hoped to exploit this mimesis in order to take advantage of the “playfulness and apparent illogic in structure that drama provides.” Drama was flexible and allowed for greater experimentation than the narrative, philosophical and scientific texts she wrote (“Fantastic Realism” 182). She experimented with many conventions (and hybrid combinations of conventions) successfully, but *Convent* is particularly fluid because it contains both a series of plays-within-play (presented as a succession of scenes) and a several masques. The result, as Sara Mendelson notes, is that with this play Cavendish leads the viewer into “a kind of generic maze” that expands and celebrates the dramatic world (198). Like worlds within worlds, her scenes and masques bring readers deeper into the greater play through that maze; Mendelson’s astute metaphor captures Cavendish’s adeptness with manipulating genre for her specific purpose, and her recognition of its potential at once.²⁷ If generic boundaries could be dismantled through fragmentation and reorganization, then the categorical boundaries that restrict gender roles would follow. Women (and men) can possess characteristics as random, chaotic, and inconsistent as nature itself (or herself), and so could genres. That Cavendish’s characters often

²⁷ Bennett considers Cavendish’s skills with the genre and her creation of a more fluid dramatic structure arguing that her style was not the result of “simple or mere technical ineptitude,” but rather was a strategic design: “The lack of unity in the plot constructions of her dramas is a result of a deliberate, conscious choice. Rather than working from older models or in traditional modes, Cavendish deliberately employs both the mimetic practice and the mutable promise of the dramatic form, elements that permit an episodic or scenic approach to contemporary life. Consequently, her depictions of gender, agency and conduct in these plays demonstrate that she was not wholly concerned with the notions of either class or gender as necessarily definable monolithic categories that must and do maintain particular, consistent characteristics. [...] The potentially fragmentary nature of drama itself allowed the duchess to intertwine the legendary fantasy of her imagination with contemporary reality, providing a series of snapshots of seventeenth-century life and the possibilities of agency therein (“Fantastic Realism” 180).

flouted social expectations, as did Cavendish herself, and thus *Convent's* Prince plays a woman willingly and convincingly. The stage usually included men who dressed as women who dressed as men, which was plausible because, after all, what woman would not want to dress up as a man? However, in *Convent*, a man chooses to dress as a woman, and the lack of performance emphasized nothing more than it was a male *character* who dressed as a woman to make love to another woman. The play encourages a progression not towards man as perfection, but a natural movement towards whichever gender one *chose* to adopt.

In drama, Cavendish's multiple selves were not restricted to a single role or character, or to the limited scope of a letter, but had formidable space to move about and recite orations as multiple characters.²⁸ That spatial freedom was especially powerful for women dramatists who understood that the genre encompassed a spatial element that prose or poetry could not. Early women's drama, before and after the Restoration, was particularly strategic in its deployment of space, as Alison Findlay has argued because the stage's space offered playwrights, "a stake on which wagers for the future of characters, authors, and womankind more generally, could be articulated [as] crucial determinants of meaning." Women who wrote plays instead of poetry or prose (and regardless of whether or not they had a public venue in which to perform before 1660) wrote those plays with "a keen awareness that drama constitutes a more immediate expression of spatial practice than any other form of literature" because theater is "a genre designed to generate, or to be exploited within, a spatial practice. [...] Drama constituted a route for transforming place into space" (225). Cavendish demonstrated a powerful creative imperative and believed she was acting as a role model for her audience to create for themselves, and drama allowed her to both animate her spaces and imagine the potential for audience participation. If she wished to establish a truly active community of women, drama would grant her not only the

²⁸ Mendelson notes that theater in particular proved, for Cavendish, an excellent medium for "constructing a series of autobiographical or imagined selves" (201).

space for her thoughts, but the chance that, no matter how remote, it might be played before an audience. That possibility allowed her a space like no other genre, save for utopian literature, and so, she used both in her dramatic utopias.

These several negotiations of history, convention, space, performance, and audience interaction, determine how readers/spectators of *Convent of Pleasure* negotiate the Princess. Because audiences would have been aware that men played female roles at the playhouse, there would be no need for a list of characters organized by gender and class, and the Prince would be played by a man regardless of the role s/he adopted in the play. However, in the absence of stage performance, reading the character list would have influenced the Princess's perception from the start. The element of surprise that Cavendish hopes to sustain depends on including the full character list at the end. When a play is read (as Cavendish read Shakespeare) female characters are simply women (or however one conceives of "female") because they remain in the textual space. The stage, where utopia takes on physical presence, realizes gender fluidity through dialogue and the transvestite actors. While Cavendish included women cross-dressing as men in other plays, *Convent* offers one of the few instances where a male character, and a noble Prince at that, cross-dresses, and remains so for most of the play (there is no moment in the play when the Prince is dressed as himself). The play requires that he be taken for a woman from the first, and revealed as a man later (regardless of what he might be wearing at that moment) because gender becomes transgressive when it moves in the direction of "woman." Most of Shakespeare's transvestite heroines are introduced as women, but choose to adopt male disguises for a variety of reasons. In *Convent*, the Princess starts as a woman, deceives us and Lady Happy at once, and is only revealed later; she transforms from a "she," then to an "it," and ultimately to a militant, conquering "he" at the very end. Readers may assume the Princess is a woman, or a man, as they wish, because the textual space allows for ambiguity far more readily than the physical stage of Cavendish's lifetime.

The defining point is not that Shakespeare allowed his women to dress like men, but that Cavendish's man chooses to become a woman. How Cavendish challenges the tradition requires that the audience accept a boy dressed as a woman, regardless of their individual desires. A boy chooses to dress as the women he plays, and the woman (character) is subsumed by what is understood as a perfectly natural desire to become male (and the spectacle of men and boys making love on stage only added to the overall pleasure). However, without performance, the woman (character or actor) need not be subsumed. The Princess and/or Prince, and his/her desire and sexuality, were perfectly fluid on a virtual stage. Thus, in *Convent*, the dangerous titillation is feminized (and homoerotic) because it is conveyed by women desiring women, although not in the same way as Olivia with Viola as Cesario (who were both, on the stage, men). Homoerotic desire is, then, not a matter of comedy but of possibility. Erin Lang Bonin argues that the representation of female homoerotic desires in Cavendish's play is discernible precisely because she imagines it "in opposition to marriage and family" because the convent's "strict exclusionary rules and its cultural associations establish a homoerotic context" is reinforced by Lady Happy's privileging of desire among women (348). Inside the convent, homoerotic desire is "unnatural" only because it is outside of patriarchal control; Cavendish's convent promises limitless transgression, which allows for the possibility of same-sex desire, and then capitalizes on the utopia that emerges. Shakespeare's heroines cross-dress to get out of, or avoid, dangerous situations, or to access spaces barred from them, while Cavendish's Princess cross-dresses to get into the world he wished to access thereby reversing the restrictions against, as well as the direction of, both the intended and original gender. This shift in the potential gender for the transvestite allows for greater fluidity because it does not restrict the "goal" gender to "male." It also echoes, here again, utopia's movement because the male transvestite turns inward to what he wants to regain, and the female transvestite turns outward to what she never had. Alison Findlay reads Cavendish's ambiguity over the performance of her plays in this moment as the key to

maintaining her ambiguous gender: "Cavendish's failure to designate professional stage, closet performance, or reading as the arena for her play keeps the gender of the actor playing the Princess indeterminate, and the protagonists' sexual orientations ambiguous. The convent's performances can thus offer a range of pleasures to spectators or readers" (176). This "failure" translates into the clear disruption of conventional dramatic structure. Cavendish did not think that her plays would be performed (although they have been), but she still included descriptions indicating her intention with stage direction (just in case they were).²⁹ She spoke against their production, and much of their utopic potential depends on their non-performance, as I have argued, but Cavendish did not relinquish the visual and spatial potential her plays also promised.

The first dramatic performance the reader/audience encounters from within the convent is a series of short scenes; it is unexpected because masques were the most common form for the play-within-the-play. Furthermore, the scenes are played with no clear introduction in order to unsettle the reader by blurring the lines between the scenes and the play itself, the characters and the audience, who are also characters, and the convent and the various settings for each scene. The Princess has just joined the convent at the start of Act 3 and Lady Happy graciously invites her to sit down because "the Play is to be Acted." However, the play does not begin immediately thereafter, but at the start of a new scene. Then, each of the scenes in the play-within-the-play begins a new scene, and this repeats for every scene of the play-within-the-play. The effect of Cavendish's scenic structure in this section is that a reader might just as easily assume that he or she is shifting locations from scene to scene while reading the play. Cavendish's organization of the scenes is intentionally disorienting because the reader cannot be certain if the characters of the play have

²⁹ The possibility of their performance and the frustration that they would likely never be performed was surely on Cavendish's mind when she wrote her first collection of plays. In *Blazing World*, she condemns "the wits" that obstructed her plays from ever being acted. It is a regret she will overturn in *Blazing World*, where the plays find a willing stage: "Then my plays may be acted in your Blazing World, when they cannot be acted in the Blinking World of Wit" (220).

shifted to a “real” world scene outside the convent.³⁰ The play’s scenes conflate the real world and the ideal world by blurring the movement and location within the play, and still further within the play-within-the-play. We expect pastoral beauty and mythic masques in plays-within-plays, but we will have none of that (at least, not yet). Our first experience of a play inside the convent only adds to the estrangement when it conflicts with expectations. Here, inside a convent of *pleasure*, the first play we witness is of misery and suffering that demands social justice: The first scene (3.2) depicts poor women married to drunkards and adulterers, in the next (3.3) a woman suffers in pregnancy where she finds “not one minutes time of health,” and in the next (3.4) noble ladies lament their gambling and whoring husbands and the resultant failure of their economies and marriages. After this, the scenes grow progressively worse: in 3.5, a child dies, and in 3.6 a wife searches in vain for her drunken, negligent husband and is followed by (3.7) a woman in the throes of childbirth, (3.8) two ladies discussing the shame of their disappointing children, and (3.9) a mother laboring for three days to bring forth a dead child only to die herself leaves another mother fearing the same. In the final scene (3.10) a virtuous lady rejects a married man’s advances, only to be threatened with rape. Our final thought, thus, lingers on the ultimate violence against women by men (something that Cavendish returns to at the end of the play).³¹

The play-within-the-play encapsulates every horror a woman’s life can experience in ten successive scenes, but it is only after the last scene that it is finally clear that the preceding scenes have been only playacting rather than random scenes from the streets outside the convent: Lady Happy enters immediately after the epilogue with no closure into a new scene. Cavendish opens scenes when we least expect it, and closes scenes where we would not. To add to this blurring, Lady Happy asks the Princess if she

³⁰ There is precedence in Cavendish’s plays as we experienced this in the *Female Academy*, for example, where scenes shift between Academy discourses and Citizen Ladies discussing their unrelated troubles with thieving servants (2.11).

³¹ Jeanne Addison Robert’s connects this play-within-play with the failed play of nine worthies acted on by the servants and fools in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, Cavendish’s women in a sense are playing “nine lowly wives” (85). Rather than showing the glories of ancient men, she is focusing on the present social condition of women, not all of which were poor and unworthy.

likes the play. The Princess speaks against it, feeling that “for though some few be unhappy in Marriage, yet there are many more that are so happy as they would not change their condition” (3.10). Still, the Princess swears devotion to the Lady and immediately thereafter, we get: “*Exeunt. Enter the Gentlemen*” and the reader, without a doubt, finds him- or her-self outside with the men discussing new ways of dissolving the convent. There is *no* scene shift between the convent and the play’s real world at this moment when an *actual* shift in the play’s space and place occurs, but shift after shift during the convent’s play of women’s sorrows. This organization cannot be discounted as random because what seems so careless is strategically blurring the lines between multiple dramatic spaces. The reader can momentarily suspend the play he or she is reading and wander beyond the pleasure of the convent to experience the very reason women need the convent in the first place. The scenes of the convent’s play are brief and unannounced, yet their scenic division grants them far greater emphasis. The movement between these spaces demonstrates how Cavendish’s worlds converge to unsettle our certainty. Valerie Traub reads these scenes, and the masques to come, as strategically meta-theatrical; their “boldness,” she writes, “in assigning responsibility for the misery of womankind to the actions of men” is a dramatically provocative way to introduce the reader (and the Princess) to the convent:

These vignettes attain dramatic power from their status as the theatrical crossdressed version of a “real world” that happily has ceased to exist with the exclusion of men from Lady Happy’s domain. Cavendish’s meta-theatrical strategy is not wholly dedicated to feminist polemic. Whereas segregation from men removes temporarily the threat of marital oppression, eroticism remains ever present, not only as an aspect of the sensual environs, but in the entertainments and eventually in the behaviors of Lady Happy and a mysterious stranger. As if in homage to the pastoral of Shakespeare and Lyly, much of the homoeroticism of the play arises out of the amorous pastime of pastoral “Recreations.” [...] Pastoral in this play does not promote an elegiac distancing of homoerotic bonds, but further enables transitive gender and erotic exploration through playing the parts, for instance, of a shepherd and shepherdess or Neptune and a sea goddess. [...] The amorous freedom associated with pastoral, combined with the gender fluidity of transvestism, lead to an expression of love (178-9).

I include Traub’s argument in its entirety because of her astute focus on the worsening progression between the accusations in the vignettes, how they move to the convent’s

later masques, and how their their use of classical elements from mythology and the pastoral facilitate the same idealized homoeroticism as Shakespeare's plays. Traub captures the fluidity in gender and desire that the several dramatic performances within the convent conjure, which I have argued is the fundamental requirement for the construction of utopia. This movement away from the masculine, and towards a utopic expression of an insular feminine desire, would always arrive in utopian spaces. Finally, the organization of the scenes confounds even the logical progression it is asking the reader/audience to notice because Cavendish moves outwards through the vignettes to read the worst threat to women only to arrive, with the convent's next performance, at the innermost expression of fluid desire with the masques. In true utopic circularity, you must venture outward to arrive inside.

No other element of the play demonstrates fluidity in gender and desire as eloquently as the relationship between Lady Happy and the now cross-cross-dressed Princess-as-Shepherd Prince. They play a grand Pastoral and are crowned May King and Queen with the Ladies as attending shepherdesses, and later, play Neptune and a Sea-Goddess with the ladies as attending sea-nymphs. The subjects for the masques recall two utopian themes—the pastoral and mythology—that I have discussed in this dissertation, and through them Cavendish creates a new from classical sources. The Princess and Lady Happy's courtship transpires in the space between these two utopic masques within a separatist utopia. Lady Happy's questions are far more provocative than similar moments of same-sex desire in Shakespeare's plays that verbally and visually played on the humor suggested by the cross-dressed male actor in order to dissipate their transgression. It is not so in this play, which introduces Lady Happy's doubts *before* the Princess's revealing aside. Lady Happy tells us, before the Princess hints otherwise: "My name is Happy, and so was my Condition, before I saw this Princess; but now I am like to be the most unhappy Maid alive: But why may not I love a Woman with the same affection I could a man? / No, no, Nature is Nature, and still will be / The same she was from all Eternity" (4.1). After her melancholy lament, the

Princess enters the scene, dressed in "Masculine Shepherd's Clothes," and Lady Happy confesses that Nature might punish her for "loving you more then I ought to love you":

PRIN. Can Lovers love too much?

L.HAPPY. Yes, if they love not well.

PRIN. Can any Love be more virtuous, innocent, and harmless then ours?

L.HAPPY. I hope not.

PRIN. Then let us please our selves, as harmless Lovers do.

L.HAPPY. How can harmless Lovers please themselves?

PRIN. Why very well, as, to discourse, imbrace and kiss, so mingle souls together.

L.HAPPY. But innocent Lovers do not use to kiss.

PRIN. Not any act more frequent amongst us Women-kind; nay, it were a sin in friendship, should not we kiss: then let us not prove our selves Reprobates.

They imbrace and kiss and hold each other in their Arms.

PRIN. These my Imbraces though of Femal kind,
May be as fervent as a Masculine mind (4.1).

We know from Cavendish's other works that Nature is not as men would write her because she is fluid and chaotic and allows for variety (see chapter 6). By appealing to nature, Cavendish is invoking the possibility for that same variety and fluidity, but from within the convention that will read nature as containing hidden knowledge waiting to be pierced. This admonition limits the homoerotics Lady Happy suggests because, after all, embraces of the female kind *may* indeed be as fervent.³² On one level, Cavendish is challenging nature, but she is more assuredly redefining it on another, as she has throughout her philosophical and scientific writing. She not only attempts to redefine it to allow for her utopic ideals, but also hopes to redefine the society that restricts nature, like gender, to such limited dimensions. After all, utopias in general, not just for Cavendish, are a contradictory mixture of fulfillment and frustration. Desire is integral to any description of fulfillment, and desire between women is plausible within the convent, regardless of the Lady Happy's concerns.

³² Erin Lang Bonin reads this moment as "signaling the beginning of the conventional utopia's end," and argues that it illustrates how Cavendish's "adherence to nature perpetuates patriarchal economies [...] because natural law positions women in domestic spheres Cavendish deems decidedly dystopian, her female utopians challenge nature. In order to construct separate, nondomestic spheres for themselves and their projects, her women characters subvert the cultural contexts and codes around them to question and sometimes redefine nature. Each play's imaginary community is both a space for utopian possibilities and a forum that illustrates patriarchal pressures and their destructive effects. As such, Cavendish's dramatic utopias represent both fulfillment and frustration" (351).

The amorous scene is erotic and mesmerizing, but it is more so when paired with a later scene in which Madam Mediator impressively describes their intimacy to add physical detail to the earlier scene's actions. For lack of an actual performance, these scenes are left to reader's imagination, but Cavendish wanted to be certain of the image she conveyed. In 5.2, after the Princess has been revealed as a man, Madam Mediator describes their kissing: "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." The revelation that a man has entered the Convent appears between the kissing scene and Madam Mediator's more erotic description (and thus repetition) of the scene, but not before the Princess suggests what lies beneath her clothing:

What Have I on a Petticoat, Oh *Mars!* thou God of War, pardon my sloth; but yet remember thou art a Lover, and so am I; but you will say, my Kingdom wants me, not only to rule, and govern it, but to defend it; But what is Kingdom in comparison to a Beautiful Mistress? Base thoughts flie off, for I will not got; did not only a Kingdom, but the World want me (5.1).

She expresses surprise over her own petticoat, which is odd given that the masque she just performed would have meant she was already dressed as a man. Cavendish does not instruct us to her dress at this point, but we know that the Princess requested that she be allowed to wear men's clothing in all their playmaking early on in 3.1: "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 accoutered and act the part of your loving Servant." Most of her time "on stage" is spent in men's clothing, but Lady Happy, who still believes her to be a woman, is the only one suffering from love because she is turning pale, looking lean, and wishing the gods would strike her dead.

To follow the Princess's subtle revelation, Madam Mediator reveals the presence of a man in the convent and begs the women to "search and you'll find it." Her last word on the invader is the neutral pronoun hanging, and slipping, between genders. Robin DeRosa has discussed the use of the "it" in the revelation scene arguing that "if

the cross-dresser performs woman, there is some implication that the essential maleness of the performer might be erased just enough to make the indeterminate pronoun 'it' appropriate" (278). And I agree, except that the resulting erasure of "essential maleness" is far more complex than DeRosa allows because there is an erasure of essentialism as a "whole" requiring us to question gender itself as being "essentially" anything at all with this critical "it." Madam Mediator acknowledges that she is "most suspect," but, in the moment before the Princess is given the option to claim the name of "Prince," an Ambassador appears and demands he return to his land because his people worry that he is imprisoned. The Prince suddenly declares that "I may marry this Lady; otherwise, tell them I will have her by force of Arms." The martial threat, coupled with the earlier prayer to Mars and with the final scene of the play-within-the-play of social ills, is realized in his final threat of war and rape. There are now only two choices for Lady Happy: To "marry" or to be "had" by force. The Prince does not say that he will marry her by force if she refuses, but rather will "have" her by force. The progression of events and the organization of the scenes all work in tandem. However, if there is a singular suggestion of its continued potential, the final scene assures us that while the Prince infiltrated the Convent, Madam Mediator, who is worried about the fate of the convent, asks *him* whether he will dismantle it, and the Prince declares that he will not. The convent will go on, even if Lady Happy must marry and sacrifice her pleasure and freedom in the convent. Perhaps with that act of realignment Lady Happy ensures that *future* Ladies will still enjoy its utopic freedom. Judith Haber has also addressed this pivotal moment, arguing that Madam Mediator's reference to the "it" that must be found out calls our attention to the presence of the phallic "it"; the pronoun also registers Sophie Tomlinson's moment of aporia "in its indefinite reference."³³ Haber writes that Cavendish "not only

³³ In *Women on Stage in Stuart Drama* (2005) Sophie Tomlinson notes that "Madam Mediator's use of the indefinite pronoun [...] registers at the climax of the play a moment of aporia, in which it is impossible to know whether the Princess is, as we are directed to believe, 'a Princely brave Woman, *truly* of a Masculine presence', or, as Cavendish's comma has it, 'a Princely brave *Woman truly*, of a Masculine presence" (181).

temporarily ambiguates the gender of the Prince/ss, but opens up the possibility that there is no clear phallic point here at all. The Prince/ss's wonderful defense [...] in its insistence on the primacy of clothes and (perhaps, even more) in its triumphant disregard for conventional logic, further undermines the security of the phallic referent" (122). The phallic point was already undermined, and its ambiguation comes across as a disregard of logic, which we have seen before in Cavendish. The phallic feel of the "it" upon the page conflicts with the neutrality of its meaning, just as the hanging comma in Tomlinson's argument is also fluid because it keeps the reader guessing while maintaining progress at the point of gender.

The most freeing aspect of the play revolves around its expression of this same-sex desire as possible and natural. It suggests a liberal flexibility in Cavendish that is complexly bound to the transgressive possibility of her utopian spaces.³⁴ The moment one could read the possibility of same-sex desire in their vigorous kiss is the same moment one could deny it through the many subtle suggestions that the Princess was a Prince all along. The most informative aspect of their relationship rests less with the Princess as transgressive transvestite, and more with the hesitant Lady Happy, whose judgment and reason had been balanced and assertive thus far. Her concerns are not declared, as "I can't love a woman," but are stated through their rhetorically reversed equivalent: "But why may not I love a Woman with the same affection I could a Man?" (4.1). Her question does not indicate that she cannot love a woman, it demand a reason why she couldn't love a woman if she wanted to. Her "why" remains unanswered: "No, no. Nature is nature and still will be / The same she was for all eternity." This does little to address the very specific question she posed and instead

³⁴ Sophie Tomlinson, for one, argues that the play expresses a surprising duality that facilitates multiple simultaneous readings of its fluid gender promise: "The reader engaged in one way by Lady Happy's feminine world may share her credulity as to the Princess's gender and enjoy the suggestion of an erotic relationship between women. For other readers the story of a Prince who infiltrates a convent disguised as a woman who then acts as a man offers fantasies of voyeuristic access to a woman-centered world, and the suspension of an essential masculine identity. We could see the play itself as caught in a conflict between these different, sexually determined modes of reading ("My Brain the Stage" 157). Tomlinson's argument suggests that readers bring their own desires to bear on Lady Happy's relationship.

offers a pretty, rhyming, but very general, aphorism. Cavendish will not answer it, because she does not believe that Nature, in her chaos, would restrict one to a single gender or object of desire, or Lady Happy to one answer. From another perspective, after Lady Happy says this, no more is said on the topic before the Princess arrives, and they share a romantic encounter; their actions answer the “why” more certainly than her general cry to Nature. The double “no” demand to Nature can also indicate a rejection of doubt and an acceptance of the fluidity that might allow all kinds of affectionate combinations. Once again, we confront Cavendish’s ability (and tendency) to introduce a controversial topic within a more allowing frame to facilitate the utopic space.

As I leave Cavendish’s plays, I would like to consider her utopian methodology through Teresa de Lauretis argument in *Practice of Love* (1994) because in it she offers a critical perspective into the lesbian desire of Cavendish’s dramatic spaces:

It is the fantasy of a femininity at once constrained and defiant that is revalorized in the popular imagination of all-female socio-sexual spaces, amazonic or matriarchal, ranging from girls’ schools to prisons and from alternative worlds to convents and brothels. Here the female body is the site of a sexuality that is both incited and forbidden or regulated, but in either case female-directed and female-centered. [...] In all these cases perverse desire is sustained on fantasy scenarios that restage the loss and recovery of a fantasmatic female body. Even when they take the form of a return to the mother—and thus may appear as ineffectual political nostalgia for a non-Oedipal, pre-patriarchal world, or as a regressive retreat from the “realities” of sexual conflict [...] to a nurturing anodyne, maternal body—the fetishized scenarios of an empowered and exclusive femininity have less to do with mothering or with the mother’s body as such than with restaging the subject’s own loss and recovery of the female body (264-5).

Fantasy (and perhaps the fantastical) is integral to these sexualized and socialized women-only spaces. Not surprisingly, de Lauretis circles around the same areas we have encountered since the earliest construction of utopic spaces throughout this dissertation: The desire for a nostalgic return to our conceptualized origins, the theoretical maternal space before the Fall, and ultimately, our emergence into the language that would grant us the “reality” that alternative spaces try to dismantle if only to rewrite that maternal body as welcoming and nurturing, rather than uncanny,

painful and expelling. Kate Chedgzoy brings de Lauretis's observations to bear on Cavendish's plays as well. She writes that "the psychoanalytic notions of fetishism" are often interpreted as "the desiring subject's way of managing her unassuageable yearning for the lost, fantasmatic maternal body." Chedgzoy notes that de Lauretis argues for an "intricate and mutually constitutive relation between gender and sexuality" that formulates a "lesbian identity" constructed "by means of a kind of reverse discourse, in which the emergent lesbian subject appropriates—one might indeed say, perverts—the very categories of male/female and masculine/feminine through which sexual identities are normally apprehended and performed" (56-7). If we accept Chedgzoy's reading, then de Lauretis's theories would be dependent on the emerging lesbian subject whose presence (as fetish) specifically affects the categories of sexual identity in Cavendish's play. Thus, Cavendish's convent can be said to pervert those categories by facilitating the emergence of lesbian subjectivity if not directly, then indirectly, and certainly in discourse that is not only reversed, but utopic in its circularity and contradiction as a reversal that appears in the rhetoric itself in Lady Happy's words in the last scene, or in the transvestite's performance of gender.

Returning briefly to Theodora Jankowski's rich reading in *Pure Resistance*, Jankowski demands a "distinctly-queer" definition of Cavendish's plays, not necessarily of the lesbian as de Lauretis argues, but of a virginity that "carries with it the notion that there are strong bonds of friendship and affection which exist between women, bonds that are acknowledged by patriarchal society or the patriarchal marriage narrative." These bonds, Jankowski continues, "might grow into woman-woman desire" because "being a virgin means that the woman in question defines herself in terms of herself and other women, not in terms of men, or the patriarchal sexual economy" (26). From a historical perspective, as Jankowski explains, this "queer virgin" emerges from the surprising "plurality of sexual/erotic arrangement within Catholic medieval Europe," which I discussed in the last chapter. This had the potential "to destabilize the categories of sex and gender, especially when contrasted to the more limited, and

therefore restrictive, sex/gender arrangements of the early modern Protestant England [that] organized gender in terms of bodily differences and an actively heterosexual gender paradigm." By comparison, the Protestant organization of society "reduces not only people's sexual options, but also their gender options [...] placing these resistant virgins in the 'queer' middle—or at the 'queer' end—of the Protestant/patriarchal sex/gender system in an 'officially' unnamed—and often untheorized—seemingly 'empty' position that is fundamentally dissident (11-12). Call it the queer middle, or end of a gender system rendered as empty, or no place, but Jankowski is here pinpointing the crucial element that makes queer virgins of Cavendish's heroines. This makes Cavendish's utopic space not just dissident, but utopically dissident. The shifting of the queer across positions in space, from the middle or the end, or within the empty no-place that is difficult to conceptualize or fathom, is the transgressive utopic endeavor that gender and feminist theory, and more recently queer theory, keeps encountering, dismantling, and rebuilding in a variety of forms. The "magical" fantasy of a space that allows for everything at once is the sense of freedom that can only be utopia. The queer virgin forms in this troublesome space where inhabitants can "desire/pleasure in ways totally different from—and in opposition to—the patriarchal sexual economy [...] to show that lives lived in isolation from men provide a space within which traditional notions of gender and gender-marked pleasure can be challenged, redefined, and reinvented" (171-2). This style of virginal behavior was unacceptable in "real society" because the queer virgin stood wholly outside an early modern gender system that "conceived no place for them" (198). However, they stand, placeless and formless in the real, located safely and in full form within Cavendish's Convent and Academy.

The queer virgin was virtually conceivable, if not actually realizable within the newly imagined gender system of Cavendish's utopias. After all, it is not biology that defines these virgins because the queer virgin must be understood within a patriarchal context where "virginity means not only lack of penile vaginal penetration resulting in

the perforation of the hymen, but implies an overall, often religiously determined ascetic behavior." Apart from the biological notion "virgin" suggests, Cavendish's use of "pleasure" does not work with patriarchal definitions of virginity. Jankowski notes that the "pleasure" of the Convent certainly reflects sexual connotations, but "pleasure" also raises questions about whether or not the Convent's virgins "are allowed to be sexual with each other and, if so, to what degree." The contradiction between "pleasure" and "virginity" suggests to Jankowski an intentional juxtaposition that affirms that Cavendish's virgins are queer: "We can view their pleasure, then, as a form of resistance to the sexual economy" even if Cavendish was not completely explicit about what, precisely "pleasure between queer virgins encompasses." (178-9). And yet, as I demonstrated, the juxtaposition between the action of the kissing scene and Madam Mediator's reiteration and description of the same scene is more explicit than expected, if perhaps not as explicit as Jankowski would hope. When considering gender identity from within any binary, what does not belong to either side seems to demand its own space, whether conceivable or not. Jankowski considers this point in Cavendish's play because the women remain hidden, and what defines them as exceptions remains unnamed; that they are neither man/husband nor woman/wife suggests an inability to "theorize a place for adult virgin women" (193). That these virgins remain "unseen" indicates they are members of "a third gender" because the convent in a Protestant country "allows for the restriction and/or elimination of that queer third gender" and the place where "the persona of an accepted gender/sexuality can live within society." Basically, convents "act at least partially as places of containment where the possessors of a deviant sexuality can be removed from a society whose restrictively binary gender construction allow no place for them" (185). Their greatest threat, it would seem, comes not from what their private, dedicated space allows, but rather that their extreme autonomy and choice of "virginity" allows them to resist participating in the patriarchal, heteronormative sexual economy: "That such behavior is not only resistant but also severely threatening is obvious from the

unreadability of queer virgins"; few early modern plays contain "adult virgins who remain alone, unmarried, unpunished, and unrecuperated at the end" (193). We may have lost Lady Happy to convention and the conquering Prince, but the Convent, and all that it threatens and promises, will continue. We lose our heroine in order to appease the conventional framework of Cavendish's transgressive utopias, but the option, the alternative utopic space, the all-important dissent of *choice*, remains and endures.

In the purely textual space of Cavendish's plays, the bodiless women can queer our understanding of gender and identity itself. Katherine Kellett considers Cavendish's choice of the convent through a queer lens and focuses on the how the play allows for a queer space precisely because it was not performed. Cavendish's characters, Kellett notes, are more than just "gender bending," instead they demonstrate how her characters "re-signify their position, in Judith Butler's terms, from 'object' to self-sufficient subjects" (421) and much of this re-signification emerges from the lack of performance, and from a language that creates a "rapidly changing" textual environment: "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" (421). The play "works to reveal the contingency of identity itself" and this demonstrates how, in Lee Edelman's words, "queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one" (*No Future* 17). Queerness, as Kellett argues, "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" (421). Perhaps Kellett's most intriguing argument confronts the lack of performance that I considered earlier. As Kellett argues, it does not necessarily influence performativity because it "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 act that contests the constraints of such

categorizations (423). The convent becomes “a place of shifting gender roles where individuals recreate their bodies through language,” and it reflects the metamorphic gender of this play’s continual disruption of categories. This potential is realized through a complex assertion of simultaneity, one where desire need not be lesbian (or more generally homosexual, which would not signify in the early modern anyway), or conventional, as the realignment at the ending of her plays suggests (429).

We must consider her drama from the familiar liminal gap that her work purposely generates. She forces us into a threshold between text and peritext and requires us to listen to the multiple roles she adopts to help her readers understand her vision, and with those disruptions and contradictions, we find ourselves comfortably fluid within even her most dramatically fragmented, chaotic text. The constant tensions in her plays exemplify the sheer potential of utopic possibility. We really can be inside and outside of utopia at once by never denying one before claiming the other. Cavendish’s plays do not acknowledge “a particular ideology or ideal” rather they “reflect her ambivalence in positioning herself philosophically with regard to her world; unable or unwilling to engage with it or retreat from it.” In her textual spaces, she “occupies an indeterminate position, one that [...] she describes [as] being both in the world and out of it” (Battigelli, *Exile of the Mind* 33). Duality, contradiction, paradox and estrangement, were not discomfiting to Cavendish; if she could conceive of multiple worlds, she could locate herself in both, or one, or the other, on the stage of her mind, or in virtual performance. Capturing ambivalence and possibility as a choice rather than a singular ideology or ideal, defined her dramatic utopias and allowed her the authority to facilitate the fluidity she demonstrates as infinitely accessible even within enclosed separatist spaces.

Chapter Eight

New World: *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World*

My ambition is not only to be Empress, but Authoress of a whole world; and that the worlds I have made, both the Blazing and the other Philosophical World [...] made and composed of the most pure, that is, the rational parts of matter, which are the parts of my mind; [...] And in the formation of those worlds, I take more delight and glory, than ever Alexander or Caesar did in conquering this terrestrial world; [...] and if any should like the world I have made, and be willing to be my subjects, they may imagine themselves such, and they are such, I mean, in their minds, fancies, or imaginations; but if they cannot endure to be subjects, they may create worlds of their own, and govern themselves as they please: but yet let them have a care, not to prove unjust usurpers, and to rob me of mine.

Blazing World, Epilogue 224-5

Margaret Cavendish would not have described *The Blazing World* as a utopia, let alone assigned a single genre or form to it. Nevertheless, it is her most surprising work and contains characteristics from multiple forms; depending on perspective, a reader can find elements of forms Cavendish worked on elsewhere, and simultaneously recognize that the text is also something wholly new and unfathomable. On reprinting, it was appended to her *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1668) and Cavendish hoped the pairing would balance the worlds she had "composed": One fantastical the other philosophical, but definitely "worlds," rather than narratives, or treatises, discussions or debates (although those forms appear as well). William Newcastle's prefatory sonnet to *Blazing World* is unlike his other poems about Cavendish and her works; it does not flatter her skills as a writer, per se, but neither does it capture the astounding depth of her utopic influence, nor the freedom she conveys in *Blazing World* as her most utopic text. However, her husband's poem does capture Cavendish's engagement with contemporary dialogues, and the socio-cultural environment that influenced her utopic endeavors. Newcastle's poem compares Cavendish to the New World explorers, but gives precedence to her creation of a world, over their lesser undertaking of just finding a world that had always already been there:

Now this new World was found, it was not made,
Only discovered, lying in Time's shade.

Then what are You, having no Chaos found
 To make a World, or any such least ground?
 But your creating Fancy, thought it fit
 To make your World of Nothing but pure Wit.
 Your Blazing-World, beyond the Stars mounts higher,
 Enlightens all with a Celestial Fire (121).

Newcastle compares her efforts with *Blazing World* to the discovery of the New World, but also to creation itself, and not only the artistic creation he usually attributes to Cavendish's writing, but the fundamental creation of worlds (recalling the cosmogonic myths) that begin in Chaos and emerge as a "world of nothing but pure wit" in the spirit of More's satirical no-world of wit. Newcastle's poem, thus, touches upon the two central utopic origins I discussed in Part I of this dissertation. His preface does not present the Blazing World as a "trifling nothing," as Marina Leslie writes, but offers "a paradox of praise" that describes Cavendish "in a drama of creation ex nihilo" because she carves worlds "out of empty air and pure whimsy" and so can be named "a celestial maker of worlds" (*Renaissance Utopias* 149).

In the epigraph, Cavendish reminds readers that this world is hers, and though she welcomes them into it, she insists that they should create their own world if they are unwilling to be subject to her world precisely as she created it. Entering her utopia requires and celebrates that choice: Either submit, or create your own world. Cavendish took world-making seriously and had faith in the potential that literary utopias offered of a shared (virtual) imagination. To Cavendish, imagining something was equal to realizing it: "They may imagine themselves such, and they are such." Her worlds also acted as a medium for political change because she based each on a creative imperative that privileged further world-creation as a means to facilitating constant improvement; she wanted readers to recognize, and enjoy, the well of transformative potential and unrestrained abundance she had discovered in utopia. *Blazing World* represents the height of Cavendish's utopic goals; it includes several themes she had used before and combines them into something completely different, but recognizable. Her separatist spaces granted women educations, self-reliance and

authority, while her *Letters* inspired transformative debate that challenged gender roles and expectations, and both spaces celebrated her desire for the intimacy and sororal support that such communities of women fostered. Still, Cavendish wanted more, and she realized her desires through her stubborn confidence that utopia alone allowed for relationships founded on plurality. In utopia, such an existence was not only possible, but also re-creatable, and thus, varied and infinitely transgressive.

Mary Campbell has called Cavendish's *Blazing World* an "inimitable scientific (anti)romance" (202) and argues that Cavendish's decisions with the text suggest that she was consciously distancing herself from the genre of the "lunar voyage" that was growing more popular. Indeed, Cavendish specifically mentions one of the more recognizable French lunar voyages in her preface:¹

The Moon (especially in a mental world as attuned to analogy and as prone to allegory as that of seventeenth-century England) comes equipped with the burden of actuality as well as with the ineluctable symbolic features of oppositeness and mirroring (and perhaps surveillance). It had been functioning for decades as a hyperbole of America and in the most successful and Influential of the moon voyages the lunar inhabitants were said to be descended from earthlings. [...] The opportunities for satiric and utopian relevance to affairs of the actual were irrefutable (203).

The descriptions of celestial worlds paralleled the discovery of the New World because both were capitalizing on exciting arenas that offered blank spaces that utopists could use as a mirror for the social and cultural problems of the Old World. Their utopic possibility fed the hope that a new world that might offer a fertile space for rebirth, return, or redemption. A *tabula rasa* always offered fertile ground for utopic visions, whether it was located on a new moon, or in a new land, or in Cavendish's case, a wholly new world at the blurring of Earth's poles. The development and increasing improvement of telescopes, for instance, allowed viewers to see the moon, and it became at once closer and less divine than it had been encouraging visions of traveling

¹ The "French-man" of her preface was Savien Cyrano de Bergerac, whose *Voyage dans la lune* (1657) and *L'Histoire des états et empires du soleil* (1662) illustrate the period's fascination with extraterrestrial worlds which rivaled the increasing colonization of new lands around the world and science's discovery of miniscule worlds.

to the moon, and from there, to other worlds.² It also challenged a long history that feminized the moon and considered it a lesser entity; the natural progression of the sun/moon metaphor now fashioned the moon as a mirror reflecting the possibility of its own new space, rather than just the sun's greater light. The moon was now one of many possible new worlds that were different but the same. Campbell notes that mimesis, as a motive, "seems to have been only intermittently interesting" to Cavendish. Playing on the *alter et idem* of Hall's parody, Campbell argues: "It is alterity that energizes the production of the Blazing-World, a world more *alter* than *idem* [...]" (203). Cavendish did not care to mimetically mirror her troublesome world, either in satire or parody, only to recreate it on a blank space. Instead, she imagined an alternative—a choice—of a world that was between worlds, rather than wholly other. She then granted the sole power of unlocking this world to a virtuous woman who escapes the real world by transgressing the delimiting power of the phallic poles. In her brave new world, shooting stars in their unpredictable movement offer more intense light than the harsh masculine sun, or even the pale mirroring moon. The real world can keep the binary motifs that have served to restrict self and other; her world would be different.

The moon offered countless authors the space and place for their lunar voyages, and offered yet another opportunity to conquer and colonize a feminized "new world." Marina Leslie considers the ambivalence that accompanied the gendering of the New World, and how it followed the feminization of the moon and other spaces. There were "a variety of ways in which this geography of gender reshaped conceptions of the Old World," but Cavendish offers, as Leslie argues, "a very different representation of women in (and as) the New World" because she used the "ambiguities and ambivalences of gendered discourses of travel" ("Antipodal

² Cavendish's husband owned several telescopes. Along with his brother, Charles Cavendish, who studied them and developed their construction, Newcastle invested heavily in the swiftly growing trend and by 1648 owned two telescopes, including one that was over sixteen feet long (Whitaker 98-99). Cavendish was skeptical of the use of optics and she negotiates her doubts in several texts, including *Blazing World*.

Anxieties" 53-4). Cavendish recognized the baseless foundations of gendering in language and manipulated the gaps in the logic for her utopia. She uses the familiar topos and instead of simply reflecting or reversing it, she reorients it "towards the North Pole" (67) and by doing so recharges polarities.³ Cavendish does not give in (wholly) to the more obvious dissent of the "antipodal inversion," or satire, in utopia, or even the more popular travel narratives. Instead, she intertwines the many worlds (through many forms) she believed were "capable of reform." *Blazing World* is, then, not a better world, but "a world which responds to new ideas and is capable of correction" (70), and as a utopia, it must "respond" rather than simply declare betterment or affirm classical convention; fundamentally, it must offer a virtual and interactive space that both the reader and author share. Cavendish recognized how perpetual metamorphic variety and change was fundamental to utopia. The familiar *topoi* of "a world turned upside down" and "woman on top" usually ascribed to Cavendish's narrative (and women's utopias in general) cannot capture the unique "difference" of *Blazing World*; simply put, no familiar categorization or description could effectively account for the "nuclear force of the *Blazing-World*" (Campbell 204). I propose that, with *Blazing World*, Cavendish is turning the world inside-out rather than merely repeating the convention of a world turned upside-down; in doing so, she simultaneously reveals the failure of the real world and the skewed potential of the masculine ideal. *Blazing World* is more than just the same, but different, and it certainly includes carnivalesque themes as well, but it is more volatile than traditional utopias because it entertains and normalizes notions of chaos by questioning the structures of time, matter, nature and space (and thus, the power and authority garnered by the control and measurement of those scientific concepts). The humor and satire usually conveyed by the carnivalesque is subsumed by Cavendish's single-minded

³ As Leslie argues, Cavendish "transforms the topsy-turvy inversions representing female rule as disordered into the powerfully paradoxical construction of absolute rule as feminine" in order to exploit and rework the topos and to make "the autonomous (self-)governing female subject the repository and preservation of traditional hierarchies and thus the resolution of the contradictions presented by the early modern Amazon" (69).

celebration of chaos and fragmentation. Her world turned inside-out is not a feminized mirror image of the real because it maintains, rather than reverses, the patriarchal structures that have excluded and used women. This world includes these structures, just as they are, to expose their failures by revealing how they work, and the potential power and influence the hidden others repressed by those structures can wield if they are allowed access. Just as a piece of clothing turned inside-out reveals the work of a tailor, so Cavendish turns the real world inside-out, leaving dissonance and chaos in her wake in order to expose the baseless foundation beneath the structures that exclude women, and she does so simply by including women. Cavendish insists that these “organizing” patriarchal structures fail at the utopic social and cultural improvement men hoped to secure through them because they exclude women.

Cavendish’s utopic goal was not to connect the ideal world with the real in order to offer a critical satire of real-world problems, but rather to go much further than the “progressive wish-fulfillment mode of utopia,” or, at least, what conventional utopias were formulating as the genre was developing. Campbell describes the *Blazing World’s* “narrative consciousness” as being “too disenfranchised to maintain for long the common ground with a worldly audience that satire assumes.” Instead, it surpasses utopia and, according to Campbell, attempts to satisfy “the writerly and readerly hunger [...] for *something else*—not ‘better,’ necessarily, in terms of a virtue generated after all by a patriarchal, monarchist, colonialist status quo—but other” (204). I agree that Cavendish’s goal was to produce a space where a reader might imagine something completely different, and absolutely other, but the presence of the specific institutions from the “real” world she exposes in *Blazing World* connects her utopia to the real far more substantially. Acting less like a mirror than a parallel existence, her reimagined structures bind the *Blazing World* across the poles to the chaotic multiplicity of many worlds (including Cavendish’s real world). After all, the Empress and Duchess travel seamlessly across their boundaries to reinforce the connection. Satire was not enough, just as *Utopia* was not utopic enough, and just as the lunar voyage, the travel

narratives, and romances were not enough. In this odd, sometimes manic, utopia, Cavendish condemns the social and cultural institutions that have failed to improve the real world and then demonstrates how those institutions failed precisely because of their exclusion of women. Her alternative to “the actual world of her incarcerations,” as Campbell argues, results in a world more scientific than many contemporary imaginary voyages and utopias, because “Cavendish has to construct it from the atom up. [She] has to make a world in the same fundamental sense that an infant in the ‘mirror stage’ does. [...] Both must be created together, as they are functions of each other (205). The required anchor between the real and ideal on which utopia depends exists parallel to the real, but also reflects her perspective on the boundaries between physical, spiritual, and even psychological states of being. She blurs the lines between herself and her self-as-character in *Blazing World*, in *Sociable Letters* between herself as writer and recipient (her *alts*), and in her experiential similarities to her many other heroines. Appearing at once simultaneous, multiple, and in that as perfectly singular, she constructs a divided self that allows for her plural existence in her alternate worlds despite the chaotic dissonance such division suggests. In a way, she becomes like the talking animals in *Blazing World*, through which, as Campbell notes, Cavendish questions the “boundaries that make them separated from our own” to inform how her hypothesizing of “other sentient species entails at the same time an assessment of the human as a single collectivity” (205). There is always a clear goal of fragmentation in Cavendish’s text; she fragments genre, form and style, and imagines characters that are self and other at once, just as the Empress and Duchess are double presences of Cavendish herself, as Campbell notes, and *Blazing World* inhabitants are human and animal at once.

Cavendish was certain that the chaos of fundamental fragmentation was a powerfully creative force and this certainty represents the foundation of her utopic methodology. She fragments, but does not necessarily rebuild, because she wants to allow the fragments to speak individually, or as a whole, or however her reader sees fit

to connect and combine the many distinct pieces to create their own new whole. For Campbell this imitated the early modern scientific endeavors with microscopy (where only fragments of the whole were in focus and never the whole at once) that fostered a sort of “microcosm of the self” (211) that rested on the imagined possibility of a “different history of a different science” (218). Campbell allows that Cavendish demonstrates how the “continuous fragmentation and dissolution of the protagonist’s character (or its border) might best be understood as scintillation, a glittering, a ‘multiple refraction’—a blazing where we had expected a blazon” (217). As we have seen from Shakespeare to Cavendish, a fragmented poetics always recalls the familiar trope of parsing women through blazons; Cavendish employs a self-blazon (just as Olivia does in *Twelfth Night*) when the Duchess and the Empress find freedom and authority, as well as unparalleled intimacy and unity, in their choice to fragment their own body from their soul in a demonstration of the utopic contradiction of finding unity only through fragmentation.⁴

In this final chapter, I explore *Blazing World* and its representation of Cavendish’s utopic project as her most fully developed utopia. In it, she simultaneously grants herself the authority of creation itself, while granting each heroine different aspects of the power women could wield in utopia. The Empress wields social, political, cultural, religious, and most tellingly, academic and scientific power, and her self-as-character wields authority as author-scribe. Fluidity emerges in her intensely intimate relationship with the Empress, and in her negotiation of immaterial spirits. Much as she does in *Letters*, Cavendish imagines a narrative through a dialogue focused on intimacy *between* characters that may or may not reflect *only* herself. *Blazing World* represents a logical progression from *Female Academy* and *Sociable Letters* because she, once again, includes a distinct enclosure and then expands it. It would

⁴ Catherine Gallagher’s “Embracing the Absolute” explores Cavendish’s fragmentation and singularity in-depth, and reminds us that Cavendish’s consideration of the absolute rested on a fundamental paradox that “self-fragmentation is entailed in her very metaphors of absolute sovereignty.” Cavendish embraced an absolute that exploded women’s privacy and allowed a privacy “void of other bodies and empty even of other minds” (30).

now contain an entire world, rather than a school or an epistolary community alone; the outside world was still of men, their authority, power, and religion, but we are invited to witness the workings of both. She populates it with her characters and herself and newly envisioned “beasts” who demonstrate greater respect and consideration for the female characters (unlike the men-as-Beasts of *Letters*). *Blazing World* offers women access to power while honoring the expectation for perpetual change that utopia requires. Cavendish may not have been trying to write a utopia in name, but she was one of the first women to publish a utopia in English.⁵ Today, *Blazing World* is generally considered a utopia, but there has been much critical discussion over that definition; perhaps this is not unexpected given the problems in defining utopia, or for that matter, Cavendish’s writing. The difficulty in classifying *Blazing World* depends on how one defines utopia. Cavendish’s narrative intentionally defies categorization, and to understand the complexity and challenges of defining Cavendish’s utopias in particular, it is as important to look at *Blazing World*’s critical reception as it is to look at *Blazing World*, its influence on the early modern utopia, and its authoritative impact on utopian literature, science fiction and fantasy.

Rachel Trubowitz was one of the first scholars to reclaim Cavendish’s *Blazing World* and located the text firmly in the dialogue of utopian literature. Trubowitz defends the text as a “canny revision of the utopian social paradigm, driven by the competing demands of the Duchess’s radical feminism and social conservatism” and argues that “Cavendish’s complex engagement with the utopian paradigm [...] results in a revision of the utopian genre that is at once culturally subversive and politically nostalgic” (229-30). The key to Cavendish’s challenge to conventional utopias, as Trubowitz argues, is her “paradigm of felicitous community” to which she added fantasy, myth and transcendence to the “rationalized physical and psychic topography.” As I argue in chapters 6 and 7, much of Cavendish’s utopic methodology

⁵ Arguably, it can be considered a work of science fiction as well, making Cavendish one of only two women to write in either genre before Mary Shelly published *Frankenstein* (1818). Sarah Scott’s 1762 *A Description of Millenium Hall and Country Adjacent* is the other utopia.

focuses on establishing textual spaces that could foster communities, or collaboration, between women. However, Cavendish's "reechantment of utopia" is two-pronged, as Trubowitz argues, because she simultaneously feminizes it (through a politically powerful and militant Empress) and aligns it with "aristocratic nostalgia" to foster a strange mixture of radical feminism and patriarchalism (230). However, this contradictory mixture somehow sits comfortably in Cavendish's chaotic writing.

We must also keep in mind Lisa Sarasohn's more recent caution in *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (2010) that Cavendish must be studied from the perspective of her own time. She was not a feminist if feminism meant the empowering of all women, but her gender "enabled Cavendish to write the way she wanted to write. The seventeenth-century notion of proper womanhood as domestic and dumb became the foil for Cavendish's self-fashioning." Furthermore, her singularly chaotic style, as Sarasohn insists, best demonstrates how she "tried to make herself understood and admired in a new world of intellectual activity barred to women." By defining herself by what she was not, Cavendish could become "a natural philosopher and a scientific revolutionary in her own right" (191-2). Cavendish's criticism of women is evidence of her intention not to empower women instead of men, as Sarasohn argues, but Cavendish regularly empowered women by masking dissent as empowerment through the very conventions that restricted women. However, her gender enabled her on several levels; for example, her own identification as a "singular" woman left her publicly "dismissed" for her eccentricities rather than considered a viable threat, and this both empowered and trivialized her. She was eager to show how women were equally capable, or could be, if they had access to education and the patriarchal restrictions guiding society were diminished (although, as we saw in *Letters*, she does suggest on several occasions that women may be more adept at certain skills). I take issue only with Sarasohn's statement that Cavendish's self-fashioning as a philosopher and revolutionary take place "only" in her mind; her mind, or her imagination, should never be considered the "least" of any space. She believed the mind was as vast and

accessible a creative a space as any, and Sarasohn herself points out the flexibility with which she gendered her own mind because of her belief that there “was a particular women’s way of knowing.”⁶ Cavendish dismantles the hierarchy that deemed women’s skills trivial or irrational, and presents their rational minds without gendered categories. Her direction is clear: Transgress the spaces that disallow women, demonstrate equality of skills, create the conditions to access alternatives, and utopia is realizable.

The men’s utopias in Parts I and II demonstrated how gender slips in utopia, despite authorial efforts to resolve the resulting fluidity. Cavendish influenced the genre through her creation of physically ambiguous textual spaces in which she closed “the gap between the vision of utopia as a natural paradise in Arcadian settings and that of cultural construct, set in the city” and through her utopias she exemplified “the point at which genre and gender intersect in the representation of utopian desire is in the locus of discursive authority,” as Lee Cullen Khanna argues (15). Utopia is both space and text, both locus and discourse. Discussions of utopia require spatial language, and such language is prevalent in Cavendish’s negotiation and re-imagination of the genre as a means to her self-determined authority. Khanna more firmly connects Cavendish’s influence on utopia by arguing that she granted “historical precedent to the intersection of genre and gender” and by demonstrating Cavendish’s participation in the establishment of “an alternate utopian tradition in English” (16). She used convention to forge a new understanding of what utopia could accomplish, and to that end, Cavendish’s utopia “makes room for a discourse of difference” through “varied subject positions for women,” and ultimately, by releasing “the utopian genre from conventional binary oppositions in the depiction of the desire for the good life” (15). Much of Cavendish’s challenge to convention is through her self-assertions (within the

⁶ “Early in her career she suggested that women are particularly adept at imaginative knowledge, and later she included imagination as a form of rationality. Nevertheless, the mechanisms of perception are not particular to any one gender or species. [...] Cavendish was able to maintain an egalitarian epistemology allowing for distinction amongst different beings, but never surrendering to a hierarchy of rationality” (Sarasohn 194).

spaces she constructs) of authority, and her stalwart belief in the potential for change within the utopic space of her texts. She relocated utopia “in the borders of feminine desire and masculine models of meaning” (18). This relocation and alteration of utopian constructs rely on a “transformed subject position” and demonstrate a wealth of insight into the potential of utopian literature, and her great influence on the development of utopia at the end of the early modern.

In *Blazing World*, desire is dynamic, while art, intimacy and creativity are social institutions that are as important as government or law to the utopic environment, which only further connects public and private. Utopian literature requires the contrast between an unsatisfactory “real” and an improved “ideal,” and the disparity between the two, set in binary opposition, established utopia on that fundamental binary and led to utopia’s feminization. As Khanna argues, Cavendish rejected this imperative in favor of utopia. To encounter her utopia is to encounter infinite change:

The reader discovers a continuous process of making and unmaking worlds. Multiplicity, not binary opposition, constitutes the utopian methodology [and] the distinction between reality and illusion is vastly complicated by the *mise en abîme* technique Cavendish explores here, and by her deliberate confusion, not only of author and character, historical and fictional subjects, but also material and immaterial societies, inner and outer worlds (24).

Cavendish is not *just* writing against utopian conventions, she is fundamentally establishing utopian methodology, as it would come to be known by theorists in general, and feminists in particular. Rather than restricting utopia within a binary, she frees it by revealing the truth of its foundation on fragmentation, and in appropriate circularity, paradox and contradiction emerge as the tools of her fragmentary poetics in the establishment of utopia. For example, utopias materialize in an infinity of nesting boxes illustrating the metaphoric potential of worlds within worlds (of words) rather than the limitations of two worlds rigidly set against each other, or as Khanna

notes, in the oft-used metaphor of *mise en abîme* demonstrating Cavendish's inclusion of multiple voices and selves within the infinitely metamorphic multiplicity of utopia.⁷

From another perspective, Geraldine Wagner takes issue with the critical categorization of *Blazing World* as feminist and utopic; *Blazing World*, she argues, is "a utopian experiment, a romance adventure, an unconventional autobiography, and a philosophical/scientific exposition." However, it is neither feminist nor successfully utopic because it connects more comfortably to several other genres. Instead, as Wagner argues, *Blazing World* illustrates Cavendish's "attempt" at a "utopian experiment" but her attempt fails because she "returns to romance as heroic quest and romantic (self) love." This failure demonstrates, as Wagner argues, Cavendish "finally rejecting a utopian framework for romance as the genre most suited to figuring female subjectivity" (11). Wagner points to Cavendish's preference for, and movement towards, romance as the failure of her utopia, but by declaring that the text emerges as "both one and many," Wagner actually affirms the potential that Cavendish hoped to convey as utopia. Challenging Trubowitz and Khanna specifically, Wagner defines their arguments as re-appropriating and refiguring Cavendish's fantasy as supportive of a "feminist politics and female selfhood," and argues that, instead, Cavendish's subject positions "repeatedly defer and subvert her utopian project, while revealing how romance conventions, plots and forms enable a discourse of difference" (13). *Blazing World* only makes the varied subject positions possible if Cavendish subverts "the traditional utopian paradigm of a well-ordered, peaceful society. [...] One might argue that this is a tension between a traditional and a new vision of utopia, but that new vision is dominated by romantic adventures, and limited in scope to the liberation of [her] multiple selves" (14). Wagner presents the two "visions" of utopia as if they were contradictory or in competition. However, the fundamental tension between them, as I have argued, is precisely what fuels the fluidity that utopias require, which

⁷ Most famously (and humorously), Catherine Gallagher, in her groundbreaking reading of Cavendish's infinite regression, named Cavendish "the seventeenth-century's Ms.en abyme" (32).

Wagner dismisses by labeling it "romance" only to empower it as a genre apart; she favors a rigid definition of utopia in the hopes of reining in the chaotic fragmentation of the critical categorizations.

The scope of *Blazing World* is far from limited to Cavendish's fragmentary style and multiple intrusions into the text, although they are certainly part of her method. Wagner maintains that following Cavendish's thought process with *Blazing World* demonstrates Cavendish coming to terms with the fact that "utopia contains no space for romantic, heroic action of the sort that she and her personae within the text require for self-fulfillment." Her coming to terms is demonstrated in an unwillingness "to remain in the stasis that perfection requires" and is further evidenced by the characters' "growing awareness that she must turn away from a utopian project as a means to achieving her selves-integration and look instead to romance—not only in its conventional heroic forms, but as a way of defining her authorial practice." Wagner is not the first critic to address the Empress's reassessment of her political and religious changes as a sign of failure. *Blazing World* demonstrates "an attempted utopia" for Wagner because it "continually becomes 'infected' with all those problems, disputes, and imperfections to which utopias are supposed to be immune." This failure is ascribed primarily to Cavendish's inability to contain genre, but also to her faith in a "fantasy of female empowerment," and her creation "of a subject that is at least double" requiring "a world that is out of control: one where she can display and enjoy her military expertise, political ambitions and philosophical opinions -and have a romance with herself" (37). Cavendish is, indeed, unwilling to settle for static perfection, but hers is a desire not born of a struggle to integrate her many selves, but rather to demonstrate how fragmenting yourself can be more freeing than adopting conventional roles. *Blazing World* is less regressive than it is transgressive and as such is perhaps not the "traditional" utopia one expects, but it certainly is not a traditional romance either. *Blazing World* is absolutely "infected"; indeed, it is lousy with the "imperfections" Wagner insists are antithetical to "utopia." The metaphor of infection

denotes transgression, the blurring of bodily boundaries, and a seamless movement from one state, or one body, to another. Infection often indicates transgression, and so Wagner's metaphor further illustrates utopia's fundamental requirement of change: Utopia needs to be immune only from stasis, not imperfection. The infection, fragmentation, and the blurring of boundaries these metaphors denote ensure the progress utopia requires.

Attempts to realize utopia are bound to patriarchal conventions, and yet it evolved from a newly imagined, if fragmented, discourse that Shakespeare unwittingly, and Cavendish definitively, feminized. Wagner insists that these two positions are in competition, or incompatible, rather than simultaneously present in their contradiction: "These competing aims draw Margaret simultaneously toward romance and utopia. This is problematic because the genres pull her in incompatible directions." Utopia, as Wagner argues, "excludes the transgression necessary to female subjectivity, while romance enables a female subjectivity at the cost of tranquility and social stability, requiring as it does counter-hegemonic thought" (11). Ultimately, Wagner compares *Blazing World* not with *Utopia*, but with *The Tempest* since the play "creates and comfortably inhabits a fantastic realm where the supernatural is linked to self-realization" (11). To define utopia so rigidly only leads to a failure of the very categories Wagner is trying to establish; indeed, transgression is necessary for female subjectivity, but utopia does not exclude transgression, it *requires* transgression. Cavendish's utopia succeeds because she recognized this potential for transgressive female subjectivity and she maintained the contradictory, chaotic voice that would not only maintain the transgression, but also normalize it. Nevertheless, I agree that *Blazing World* resembles *The Tempest* far more than *Utopia*, but then again, I have defined *The Tempest* as a far more utopic text than *Utopia*.⁸ Furthermore, these texts

⁸ Marina Leslie has identified several important parallels between *Blazing World* and *The Tempest*; for instance, both begin with a tempest at sea and a thwarted rape, and I would add, both storms and shipwrecks lead the travelers to the utopic "other" worlds. These similarities also recall *Twelfth Night* in which Viola is also afraid after a shipwreck and storm at sea leading her to the shores of a strange new world. Leslie importantly adds that Cavendish's most dramatic

allow for transgression from multiple perspectives because they allow one to both create *and* inhabit the utopic space in order to allow for self-realization. In her version of Shakespeare's most utopic play, Cavendish is the fantastically singular Miranda *and* the ambiguously gendered Ariel, just as she is both the Empress and the Scribe, or both the agent and the instrument by which the agent operates. More's *Utopia* set the tone for the early modern utopian literary conventions that Cavendish would confront and negotiate (following the classical historical convention), and that Shakespeare would experiment with on stage, but as we have seen, Cavendish took Shakespeare (and *Utopia*) further by celebrating the genre's complication of gender expression and freedom from gender assignment.

We gain greater insight into Cavendish's utopic space by focusing our attention *not* on how she strains conventional utopian literature, but rather how she recognizes the potential in the genre, or in the mixtures of genres, and how her texts demonstrate that this potential was particularly poignant for women. Cavendish "exploits both the novelty and tremendous range of utopian narratives to authorize a revisionary project that subsumes and transforms a number of more intractable generic models for representing female nature, authority, and experience," as Marina Leslie argues in *Renaissance Utopias*. Cavendish approaches the several dominant discourses representing women—a misogynist strain, romance, and natural philosophy—only to conjoin "these discursive practices—like many worlds—to establish an axis of female agency that resists the simple inversions of a world turned upside down" (124-5).⁹ Each of these arguments is incredibly valuable in deliberating the many dimensions, the

take on Miranda as the central female character in *The Tempest* is making her heroine an agent, and not just an instrument, of the restoration of order. I would argue that part of that order in *The Tempest* hinges on creating a utopia that, for both women, requires the participation of ambiguously gendered spirits: Ariel in *The Tempest* and the immaterial spirits in *Blazing World* (*Renaissance Utopias*132).

⁹ It is far more complex than even this figuration, as Leslie warns of Khanna's argument: "Utopia emerges not so much as location but as situation, where female desire must confront its mirror image, already constructed and constrained by masculine discursive models" (126). The backlash to this line of thought, Leslie warns, is the notion that it creates a "positive spin" on the topos of woman-on-top and fosters a "dematerialization of female power" to locate the utopia in her mind rather than as a potentially accessible place (even if only textually and virtually).

complex position, and continuing influence of Cavendish as an early modern utopist. There need be no agreement on the definitions of utopia, just as there need be no clear definition on Cavendish's genre or writing style, or her influence on utopian literature. Mary Campbell wisely notes that these several understandings "widen and subtilize our understanding of genres as transformed by female authorship," even if she disagrees that "utopian" should be assigned to Cavendish's text (204, note 26).

To begin, we must approach Cavendish's *Blazing World* the way her prefaces instruct us to: We must fragment Cavendish's narrative, as much as she fragmented it for us, if we hope to gain greater insight on her curious utopic narrative. We must learn to look at Cavendish's utopia of difference, differently. In this final chapter, I will show that Cavendish not only attempts, but dramatically succeeds, at revising her real world through *Blazing World*, and she does so with as great a variety of narratives in this one work as she has across her other texts. She forms her world with a determined, single-minded utopian methodology that takes to task several patriarchal structures that consistently used women for their own utopic endeavors (individually and systemically): Among others, she tackles religion, politics, and academics most aggressively, and I will consider these in turn. Cavendish restructures each to expose their social and cultural failures while demonstrating how they could function in ways that would prove infinitely more utopic to women (and the men that choose to come along). Her utopias reimagine the patriarchal institutions that prevented women from gaining access to the means to improve society as a whole whether we call it feminist or not. She dealt with many of these institutions in her other writings (as we saw in *Letters* and her plays), but it is only *Blazing World* that gathers them into a purposeful creation of a simultaneously singular and plural utopian world. The result was surely more fantastical than conventional utopias, but it was transgressive and metamorphic,

and focused much of its efforts not only on imagining a commonwealth that worked, but also on how it could work better.¹⁰

The Duchess, as Cavendish's is called in *Blazing World*, is just as "humble" as Cavendish is in her texts. Towards the end of the story, she tells her intimate friend, the Empress, what her truest desire is thereby reiterating (and in this text, perhaps perfecting) her once and future dream of authority: "Well, said the Duchess, setting aside this dispute, my ambition is, that I would fain be as you are, that is, an Empress of a world, and I shall never be at quiet until I be one" (184). Cavendish's constant writing certainly suggests she never quite achieved the "quiet" of absolute governance she yearned for; each new work reaffirmed her desire to create a better world, even if momentarily, where she might rule. One finds as much variety in her works as one finds repetition because some phrases appear again and again to reveal her intentions and desires: the notion of being Empress, or mistress over worlds, is one of them (as I noted earlier), and another is the image of a world ablaze. In *Letters*, she uses it several times to illustrate her understanding of nature and world creation. In letter 118, for instance, she writes: "Constancy is as Seldom or Rarely Seen, as a Blazing Star; Indeed, Constancy in this World is somewhat like a Blazing Star, it Lasts for a time, and then Goes out, for it is not as the Fix'd Stars, but rather as the Wandering Planets" (126). She locates the elusive blazing star in the same celestial realm as the Blazing World; both appear through a telescope, and she names its appearance a singularly rare event and privileges it for its "constancy." Through this metaphor, she simultaneously rarefies and privileges the blazing star, but also suggests that it is a melancholy experience to be avoided and valued. The blazing star is unfixed, wanders freely, and

¹⁰ Sylvia Bowerbank has argued that *Blazing World* offers "no instruction and no access to or compromise with the outside world," and that "only in paradise [...] could Cavendish find a haven for the intellectually ambitious woman" and that, worst of all, Cavendish's text "offers little reading satisfaction or intelligibility" (405). Cavendish did not want her readers to read her worlds in the ways they had grown accustomed to reading. An intellectually ambitious woman could access the "ideal" *Blazing World* far more easily than she could access the "real" world resources she required to imagine utopia, but that society restricted to men.

can be compared to the planets that were becoming more familiar through scientific observation.¹¹

These qualities do not come across as negative in Cavendish's texts, but rather beautiful in their *inconstancy*. In a later letter—letter 143—Cavendish describes the loss of her manuscript in a shipwreck. Her work was saved for posterity because she always kept copies of her originals until they were safely printed, after which, she burned them: “But howsoever their Paper Bodies are Consumed, like as the Roman Emperours in Funeral Flames, I cannot say, an Eagle Flies out of them, or that they Turn into a Blazing Star, although they make a great Blazing Light when they Burn” (154). As we saw in chapter 6, Cavendish's texts are alive; they live, breathe, die, and, once printed, provide the vital textual spaces she inhabited. They are also immortal, phoenix-like, and rise from the ashes of their consumed paper bodies like eagles or blazing stars that light the heavens with a blaze of knowledge for *everyone* under the sky to take in regardless of gender. She believed that her writing granted knowledge—like a blazing light—to the world. She chose her utopia's name to denote the rare impact of seeing the brilliant light of a world ablaze; she acknowledges that it may be only temporary, but its results last eternally because learning is so rare and singular an endeavor that the experience lives on after the source of that learning fades. Perhaps she strained this metaphor beyond measure across her many works, but it represents the central hope of her textual utopias because we can follow these repetitions to trace her thought process across her works. The blazing star offered her narrative the sense of temporality she equated with the ephemera of fantasy, while grounding it in social criticism. Her world's light may burn briefly, but when it burns, it blazes, and

¹¹ Elizabeth Spiller explores Cavendish's use of, and complaints over, telescopes in *Blazing World* and argues that Cavendish situates her utopia always “just beyond the range of unaided vision” and that “science [...] appears to provide the most certain access to and confirmation of her fictional realm. Yet, as soon as Cavendish allies this world with scientific discoveries, she qualifies that connection. Astronomers could see the Blazing World through their ‘very good Telescopes’ in the same way that they sometimes see ‘two or three suns at once’ transforms scientific discovery into optical illusion” (214). Cavendish is uncertain about the use of telescopes, and her incomplete, fragmentary utopia sustains this uncertainty. Several other scholars have elaborated on the connection between *Blazing World* and optics, including Anna Battigelli in “Between the Glass and the Hand: The Eye in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing-World*.”

will for generations to come. She had attempted a utopic school with porous boundaries, would later consider the rigid walls of a freeing convent, but for her *Blazing World*, the boundaries between utopia and the real world had to both blaze and blur; her world must be shielded, but seen, and had to apply conventional blazons with unconventional power, and it had to restore what was lost as it recreated what humanity never had: A utopia built on a firm foundation of fragmentation, contradiction and paradox. The 1666 "Great Fire" of London, for instance, might well have ignited Cavendish's desire to forge a new blazing world that shone, but did not burn, out of the rubble of a real world that neither gave her what she had before her exile, nor what she believed she deserved after the Restoration.¹² The fire might well have offered the inspiration for defining a world of "spectacle and incendiary power," but as Amy Boesky complains, the *Blazing World* is far less accessible to modern readers than the utopias her contemporaries were writing, reminding us that it is important "neither to discredit Cavendish's position within the tradition of English utopianism nor to deemphasize her desire to alter that tradition." This desire, Boesky continues, emerges as a singular utopia "concerned with estrangement, isolation, and the relationship between real and invented worlds" (132). Cavendish's utopia captures her desire to alter tradition by infusing her estrangement and isolation in the distinctions between worlds.

On arriving in the *Blazing World*, Cavendish's heroine is discovered surrounded by the frozen bodies of the men who kidnapped her; the men are killed by the extreme cold that she, alone, survives by "the light of her beauty" and "the heat of her youth."

¹² Among others, Amy Boesky has recognized Cavendish's naming of the *Blazing World* to the "Great Fire" of London in 1666, which coincided with a plague year and was certainly as memorable as it was blazingly destructive. Cavendish first published her utopia in that "infamous year of calamity, self-scrutiny, and apocalyptic ruin" (128). Boesky identifies the influence of both tragedies, and the Restoration that never seemed to reach women, as part of Cavendish's cultural dialogue: "The Great Fire offered Cavendish a symbol bringing together spectacle and incendiary power. [...] In her Utopia Cavendish sees 'disturbance' both as an instrument and consequence of Restoration. Men may govern, but women are left to blaze." Addressing the *Blazing World*, Boesky writes that "to play monarch in this realm is to blaze, in the sense of shielding, shining, and blazoning as well as burning. But as the lessons of 1666 would have confirmed, the power of blazing could eventually be construed as the power of containment" (131-3).

The light and warmth of her virtue and goodness are sufficient to help her survive the cold of the “very end or point of the Pole of that world, but even to another Pole of another world, which joined close to it; so that the cold having a double strength at the conjunction of those two Poles, was insupportable” (126). She moves between the poles from her world to the Blazing World, and in that progression she evolves and becomes more spiritual and less material, while the same progression renders the men more physical. The men “begin to thaw and corrupt” and emit “a nauseous smell,” and they are emptied of their humanity as they move across the poles while our heroine moves towards spiritual ideality (126). Distinctions between body and soul, or external and internal, become progressively fluid as one enters further into this world turned inside-out to emphasize the impossibility of wholeness or binary constructions. Our nameless heroine soon becomes less an individual than the endlessly malleable Virtue itself, as symbol and representation; she remains so until she is offered, and accepts, absolute power as “Empress.” In leaving her nameless, Cavendish focuses the reader’s attention on her role as authority, rather than simply “woman,” or whatever associations a name might have assigned her.¹³

The prevailing early modern belief was that men were hotter and drier than women were, and that too much heat in women was detrimental to fertility; sexual desire required warmth and it was the responsibility of men to inspire women to greater heat in order to assure conception (Laqueur 101). That Cavendish facilitates the heroine’s salvation through qualities that render her far warmer than the lustful men who stole her is an upset of biological convention. In her progression across the phallic poles that pull her into the “other” world, logic evolves and becomes more utopian; here, a woman can be just as warm, and perhaps warmer, than a man. Her utopia’s initial transgression is a geographic journey across the planetary poles leading to a physical reversal of convention. Men were also considered more intellectually

¹³ Names prove limiting, connotative, or intentional, as in *Twelfth Night*, although Shakespeare does something similar to Cavendish with the Princess/Queen in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*.

capable and more worthy of spirituality, while women were stuck in their leaky, open overly-material bodies (the heroine spends much of the narrative in spirit form); from the start, it is the *male* bodies that leak and emit gas, which is a further reversal of ideal gender characteristics. Cavendish's disruption of convention, mitigated by the frame of magical fantasy, begins with this initial reversal. She goes on to relentlessly revise gendered metaphors that she demonstrates as insubstantial and incapable of capturing women's potential. The heroine leaves behind the men of her world whose bodies seem human, but whose actions prove bestial and moves into a world of men whose bodies *are* bestial, but whose actions prove honorable and kind (men-as-beasts moves towards beasts-as-men). Less a mirrored image of the world she leaves and more a counter-balanced world turned inside out because the internal worth of every being proves the truer measure of their worth (similarly, external gender characteristics so often used in judging a being are very much a part of this condemnation). Our heroine is saved by bear-men, and then taken to fox-men (because their climate is more temperate), and finally to wild-geese men, from whom she learns the native language very quickly. They take her to meet the Emperor along with a host of people of a wide variety of color: "The men were of several complexions, but none like any of our world" (130). Cavendish usually compares details with the "real" world and, more often than not, the distinctions are dramatic and make the comparisons quite stark because even skin color is not what you would find in "our" world. There is a simultaneous expansion and generosity in Cavendish's descriptions that is general enough to include even what is not directly described, as if any possibility outside of the purview of the description might be discovered in it as well. For example, this minor description of skin color is not a listing of the colors the heroine discovered, but rather it invites the reader to imagine every possible shade of skin, except the shades found in the "real" world (it would likely include a far greater subset than the real world). It is as if Cavendish is saying that the Blazing World offers anything one seeks, except for the limitations of the real world.

Once she arrives safely in the "imperial city, named Paradise," the reader is required to ask who the real "beasts" of this tale are: The decomposing men of monstrous actions the Lady just left behind, or the "creatures, how terrible soever they appeared to her sight, yet they so far from exercising any cruelty upon her, that rather they showed her all civility and kindness imaginable" (127). She travels across the poles not just from one world to another, but from the condemned postlapsarian world where God promised Man he would rule over women and beasts, towards a new space where a new Eve is reclaimed and the original Paradise is rediscovered; in that progression, Cavendish dismantles the origin story that subjected women, female nature, and beasts, to the patriarchy. Lisa Sarasohn adds an important point to this detail arguing that by endowing these beast men with humanity Cavendish demonstrates not only her "fascination with hybrid creatures" but also that "beasts and women share the same fate" because "they are both enslaved by masculine tyranny. [...] By emphasizing the rationality that characterizes stones, beasts, and women, Cavendish's universe became both animate and free, and the existence of a female natural philosopher possible ("Leviathan and the Lady" 53-54). The beasts treat her with dignity and respect, and in general, act far more human/e than the men she leaves in the "other" world as she enters to reclaim Eden. Yet, this connection with man's theological origin runs far deeper than this moment. In a later discussion with the immaterial spirits, the heroine (then Empress) discovers that, indeed, "Paradise," the imperial capital city, is not just *like* Eden, it *is* Eden:

After this the Empress desired the spirits to inform her where the Paradise was, whether it was in the midst of the world as centre of pleasure? Or whether it was the whole world, or a peculiar world by itself, as a world of life, and not of matter; or, whether it was mixed, as a world of living animal creatures? They answered that Paradise was not in the world she came from, but in that world she lived in at present; and that it was the very same place where she kept her court, and where her palace stood, in the midst of the imperial city. [...] She asked again, whether they were none of those spirits that frightened Adam out of the Paradise, at least caused him not to return thither again? [...] They answered they were not. Then she desired to be informed, whither Adam fled when he was driven out the Paradise? Out of this world, said they, you are now Empress of, into the world you came from (170-1).

Eden—the quintessential utopia—is actually under the Empress’s feet. Cavendish then goes on to invest the power and authority over the divine Paradise into *her* hands. By locating Eden in the Blazing World, she also condemns the “real” world as eternally fallen in contrast. We need not seek humanity’s lost utopias, Christian or classical, in the Americas, on lost islands, or even on the moon, because Cavendish has found it and “corrupt” men cannot get there. The Empress is immediately curious about Eden, and her next question is not posed in a way that suggests a regret of the loss of original perfection (as usually accompanies visions of lost Eden), nor as a condemnation of Eve for weakness, disobedience, or the temptation of Adam (all sins traditionally used to defend the subjugation of women). Instead, the Empress asks if the spirits had anything to do with frightening Adam out of Eden. The Fall is no longer blamed on Eve’s willful disobedience of an all-powerful father god, or on a feminine weakness of giving into sin; Cavendish blames the Fall on Adam’s fear of the spiritual, which only reiterates the overarching theme in her utopias that women are the more transcendent gender because she has just equated women with the spiritual and the men with the material.

There is hardly a utopia that does not confront, on some level, the state of man before and after the Fall from the Garden of Eden; the development of utopia cannot be untangled from the development of the Judeo-Christian narrative of humanity’s origin and the loss of divine perfection. Did the Fall and the expulsion from Eden signal the birth of transgression, rather than sin? Was it a movement away from the ignorant, static, innocence and towards the struggle for knowledge? If so, then the first transgressive step towards achieving knowledge belongs to Eve and should be celebrated, rather than defamed. Change could begin because of Eve’s step towards transgression and the infinite march towards utopia as an infinite search for variety and difference. Myth in the hands of the patriarchal church could not relinquish what was lost, and that loss required someone to blame; Woman would bear the pain of reproduction, and was authoritatively now subject to men, Eve’s step became oppressive sin rather than liberating transgression. Cavendish would not stop at

reclaiming Eve, or reassigning the blame for the Fall, she reclaimed Eden by writing it as the metamorphic space between the poles that none of her utopic predecessors had either discovered, or imagined, without labeling the space as feminine, and perfect only because it should offer men the wholeness they lost. In this reclaimed origin Cavendish saw fragmentation rather than stasis and completeness. Nicole Pohl outlines the early modern understanding of the Fall and how the understanding of perfectibility in man and nature was changing how society reflected on the supposed "loss" of Eden in *Women, Space Utopia, 1600-1800* (2006). Pohl references Jean-Jacques Rousseau's theories (the prevailing philosophy on the nature of Man) that defined humanity's ability to improve as the one quality that elevated humanity above the beasts. Rousseau's discussions on perfection and perfectibility (which would intrigue generations of social theorists in their consideration of utopia in theory) often used metaphors that compared man to beasts through anthropomorphic examples to illustrate this "perfectibility" (a term he coined). The key to humanity's superiority over animals was an ability to improve, but he also added that age or illness might lead a person to *lose* perfectibility as well, leaving him or her to relapse and become bestial once again (while beasts are always beasts). It is perhaps not unexpected that Rousseau defined man's perfectibility ambiguously as both "a blessing and a curse, the source of both his knowledge and his stupidity, his virtues and vices, his sociability and his wickedness" (12). Yet the central defining quality behind perfectibility, according to Rousseau, was how "human beings successively change" and the accumulation of such changes "is what goes under the name of progress" (7).¹⁴

Cavendish's *Blazing World* confronts the human/bestial divide as a primary metaphor for constructing perfection; she used anthropomorphic examples to illustrate

¹⁴ "The idea of the 'Fall of Man' in the early modern period was ubiquitous but, certainly from the mid-seventeenth century onwards, not undisputed. The growing optimistic belief in the perfectibility of mankind changed the assumption about human fate. Out of a passive acceptance of the doctrine of the "Fall" grew an active endeavor to advance human accomplishments and society. The Christian notion of finite perfectibility was challenged by the possibility of infinite perfection. The ideal of a just and equal society as either a millenarian commonwealth of saints or an Augustinian *civitas dei* was secularized into the idea of civil society" (Pohl 150-51).

a social improvement predicated on constant change. This theoretical shift defines a powerful influence on the development of utopian thought as it would progress from philosophy to literature and theory. And indeed, as discussion and debates over science and reason flourished in the century of Enlightenment that followed, the notion of humanity's hand in creating "perfection" was undoubtedly connected to the simultaneous increase in the visions of utopias that imagined society as a utopia built from man's efforts, rather than in reclaiming the static perfection of a lost Eden. They sought it, or imagined it, in the highest mountains in the New World, and on the most isolated islands in the oceans, and even in the farthest reaches of the distant Moon (and eventually, even the depths of the human psyche as the lost maternal womb). But humanity was swiftly realizing that Eden was lost; it would never be found, and quite possibly, had never physically existed in the "real" world. Man's prelapsarian divinity, mythologized in/as Eden, was giving way to a new idea in the possibility, and ultimately, the hope that man could perfect himself, and his societies, by building an Eden they could call Utopia. Utopia became synonymous with reclaiming Eden (or the Golden Age that preceded the Christian origin myth) in the hope of salvaging the perfection that symbolized the last time Man was divine, perfect, and "whole." Cavendish follows this expectation, but shifts the focus away from the condemnation of Woman and the desire for wholeness, and towards a more equitable space of perfection; she was not just reestablishing Eden or saving women from condemnation, she was reclaiming mythological transgression as the means to utopia.

Once she discovers that Paradise is Eden, the Empress's questions shift to Adam's role in the Fall and his journey in the "real" world the Empress left behind (where men acted as the beasts they were meant to rule over). Eden was lost but can now only be "found" through the Woman, rather than the nostalgic yearning of Man. The Empress's last question addresses Eve, but with a clear purpose of rewriting (and re-gendering) her damnation:

Then the Empress asked, that since it is mentioned in the story of the creation of the world, that Eve was tempted by the serpent, whether the Devil was within the serpent, or whether the serpent tempted her without the Devil? They answered, that the Devil was within the serpent. But how came it then, replied she, that the serpent was cursed? They answered, because the Devil was in him: for are not those men in danger of damnation which have the Devil within them, who persuades them to believe and act wickedly? (171)

The tone is not at all accusatory; Eve was not a seductress, and her role is minimized through the Empress's repeated requests for details about the devil's role. Still further, the spirits describe the effect of the serpent's possession as a method of persuading *men* to "believe and act wickedly." By speaking around the topic, Cavendish shifts the blame from Eve to the demon-possessed serpent, and by posing the question multiple times, in different forms, she focuses the reader's attention on the investigation of the possession because her hypothetical retelling even uses a damned man, rather than a woman. The final thought is of man's weakness to the devil's persuasion, rather than a disobedient woman as the sinner who failed to heed a god who would restrict her access to (the tree of) knowledge. From this dialogue, our mind goes swiftly to reading the Empress as a new Eve with her entrance into Paradise/Eden at the behest of talking, civilized animals, but she is redeemed at every step and given the powers she was denied because of the Fall, along with unhindered access to the knowledge she sought: dominion over the animals, authority in arranging them (according to their talents) into their academic groups, and her execution authority.¹⁵ Cavendish challenges religion, its decrees, and most vividly in this example, its authority, by rewriting the creation myth, facilitating access to its ideal spaces, and investing authority and power over religious ritual and spectacle in the Empress; she will develop and establish religious power according to *her* strategic and political intentions in the reclaimed divine space. By doing so, Cavendish comments on gender and the power structures of the patriarchal church, but simultaneously decries their inherent falsity.

¹⁵ John Rogers has addressed this reference in *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* (1996). He argues that Cavendish purposefully does not mention Eve's role in the expulsion from Eden, and instead, "invites our identification of the Empress with Eve, an Eve who in the powerfully utopian space of Cavendish's fiction and scientific writing has been left to govern Paradise alone" (178).

Once the Lady enters the imperial palace, she describes the wealth, luxury, and beauty of each new space as she walks from room to room. Strangely enough, before she meets the Emperor, one of the first rooms she walks through is his bedchamber, and one of the first things she describes in any detail is his bed, which is “made of diamonds and carbuncles.” This offers an unexpected journey through Paradise that takes us from the inside out because we walk first through the most private domestic space before reaching the public meeting spaces. Conventional utopic narrative usually described the journey from outside inwards (just as a man becomes a woman in *Convent of Pleasure*, progress in Cavendish’s utopias moves in unexpected and directions). When they finally meet, the Emperor’s first words to her immediately invoke the divine because he elevates her even above himself:

No sooner was the Lady brought before the Emperor, but he conceived her to be some goddess, and offered to worship her; which she refused, telling him [...] that although she came out of another world, yet was she but a mortal; at which the Emperor rejoicing, made her his wife, and gave her absolute power to rule and govern all that world as she pleased. But her subjects, who could hardly be persuaded to believe her mortal, tendered her all veneration and worship due to a deity (132).

Cavendish is connecting the Emperor with domesticity far more than politics as our heroine takes us through his private rooms, which is then reinforced by his immediate silence and disappearance from the narrative the moment he grants the Empress absolute power. In this, the Emperor embodies the silent, closed qualities that the ideal woman was expected to demonstrate. Cavendish refused to be silent, and rejected the trappings of domesticity through (and in) her writing. That she assigns these ideal female characteristics not only to a man, but an Emperor, illustrates the importance of rewriting gender roles to her utopian project. In many ways, Cavendish is gendering the monarchy just as utopia was gendered, but it is an ambiguous gendering; throughout her writing, she demonstrates great uncertainty about how to remain loyal to a monarchy that had treated her husband so poorly.¹⁶ The power the

¹⁶ Amy Boesky has argued that in *Blazing World*, Cavendish “genders the monarchy” through a “borrowed power” that renders both the Empress and the Emperor “impotent” to reveal that

Empress wields, along with her later correction of her own mistakes, demonstrates that the Empress's power is not impotent, but rather progressive and transgressive, even in its absoluteness. The second part of the narrative puts into action all the powers the Emperor would have undertaken. It is far less a rejection of monarchy than an idealization, but one that was critical of the quality and worth of the monarch. After all, an absolute monarchy is precisely what the Empress requires of the conquered people in her warring homeland. If it takes a good and noble Empress to bring peace to two worlds, then it was a wise decision for the Emperor to have "chosen" her as monarch. Lisa Sarasohn captures Cavendish's vision about the monarchy in her article "A Science Turned Upside Down" in which she writes that Cavendish "believed that the social order could expand to accommodate the intellectual equality of women, without its structure fragmenting from this innovation." In describing Cavendish's approach to social order as an expansion, Sarasohn perfectly illustrates how she wished her real world to grow and expand to contain the Blazing World under an umbrella of noble authority. I would add that, while Cavendish believed that these structures would not fragment by women's inclusion in the dialogue, the possibility of women's inclusion neither excludes fragmentation *as a means* towards that inclusion, nor does it suggest that fragmentation alone would bring about the destruction of these structures.

The Empress is described as "divine," or associated with divinity, several times in the narrative. She is a goddess from the first despite insisting on her mortality because the people she will rule remain unconvinced and choose to continue to worship her as a deity. Later, she uses that role to her strategic and political advantage. The fealty they bestow on her is rooted in Cavendish's own Royalist belief in a singular ruler as the divinely anointed head of state to whom such loyalty is owed. She even reproduces the categorical early modern sumptuary laws in her Blazing World where "the imperial race" alone could wear or use gold, and where only imperials could

royal power is "performative rather than absolute"; Boesky argues that this indicates Cavendish's uncertainty about the monarchy because she vacillates between idealizing and rejecting them (133).

achieve nobility (133). However, Cavendish carefully invests the Empress with all the virtue that would make her worthy of such high worship. She discusses religion and government with the priests and statesmen and is told that “monarchy is a divine form of government, and agrees most with our religion; for as there is but one God, whom we all unanimously worship and adore with one faith, so we are resolved to have but one Emperor, to whom we all submit with one obedience” (134). After further probing, the Empress discovers that eunuchs head the Blazing World’s religion and that church leaders are made into eunuchs to prevent women and children from disturbing their “church and state” (135). This tradition affects more than their religious leaders: “It is not fit [...] that men and women should be promiscuously together in time of religious worship; for their company hinders devotion and makes many, instead, of praying to God, direct their devotion to their mistresses”; women, it seems, must worship and pray “in their closets” because *men* cannot be trusted with the sight of them (135).

The discussion shifts focus at this point, but we find out later that the Empress found their religion “very defective” (162). The Empress asks about their religion but begins her inquiry about the place of men and women within their religious practice. Her questions probe deeper on the points she finds most disturbing; it is not the public expression of faith she believes is troublesome, but its intimate connection with the display of power and authority over the faithful. Women do not serve in church or state and do not pray publicly, but all that must change because as Empress she *is* the state. Her next step must be, then, to change their religion and serve as their deity in order to secure religious devotion; she manages it through a one-woman crusade to convert them to “her own religion” as well as a fair amount of trickery:

She resolved to build churches, and make also up a congregation of women, whereof she intended to be the head herself, and to instruct them in several points of her religion. This she had no sooner begun, but the women, which generally had quick wits, subtle conceptions, clear understandings, and solid judgments, became, in a short time, very devout and zealous sisters (162).

Her efforts to convert the population succeed exceedingly and quickly, and she is inspired not by a movement of men (who require everyone’s submission to a patriarchal

god), but by the missionary efforts of reasonable women who see the sense in her religion because of their clarity and solid judgment. The first step in establishing her new religion is to create a "sisterhood," and through the women, she reasons with the men. Cavendish's excess grants extraordinary insight into her thought process, and here, the step-by-step description of this world-wide conversion illustrates the strategic planning and organization Cavendish believed was needed to facilitate a convincing, peaceful conversion in the making of a utopia. The Empress, satisfied with the devout sisters, now ponders what might bring the "inconstant nature of mankind" to "desert the divine truth" (163), and so she contrives a detailed plan to build two chapels. She designs both with intricate architecture that will enable artifice through wild special effects wrought by special Blazing World materials: One chapel will be of fire, the other of brilliant light. In the first chapel, she will preach sermons of terror to the wicked, and in the other, sermons of comfort to those who repented of their sins. She has found Eden, and now, through persuasive trickery, recreates Heaven and Hell:

As that chapel was an emblem of Hell, so this was an emblem of Heaven. And thus, the Empress, by art, and her own ingenuity, did not only convert the Blazing World to her own religion, but kept them in a constant belief, without enforcement or blood-shed; for she knew well, that belief was a thing not to be forced or pressed upon the people, but to be instilled into their minds by gentle persuasions (164).

In her utopic revision of patriarchal religion, she focuses on newly idealized religious *spaces*. She recreates these new spaces within the greater utopic space (like her plays-within-plays) in order to expose the artifice behind religion. All it takes to convince the people, she suggests, is persuasive deception (played out in her utopia as wild spectacle). If she could rewrite the divine creation story, then the social and cultural consequences of religion could be mitigated, myth could be constructed, and belief could be persuaded. Each of these points, in effect, dismantles the most influential of the patriarchal structures—religion—by revealing its failure to profess a singular truth. She never discusses how her religion might offer the people of Blazing World *the* "truth" in contrast to "false" beliefs she insists they must "desert." Her main concern

seems to be using creative persuasion instead of force (a significant fact given that there were violent religious conflicts in her real world that had led to her personal, social and political strife). Cavendish has indicated several times that women are more persuasive than men, and here she significantly redesigns the power dynamics of religion by rejecting the violent force of religion that had failed in her "real" world in preference for what she considered a more "feminine" ideal where "gentle persuasions" bring people to faith through devotion and loyalty (164).

Christopher Hair explores the specifics of Cavendish's rewriting of ideology and religion and begins his argument with a complaint that too many critics have overlooked Cavendish's "inconsistencies"; he insists "we should not explain away all contradictions in her productions" (56). I disagree that critics have overlooked her contradictions; in fact, scholars have repeatedly confronted her contradictions (whether in celebration or derision). Furthermore, as I have demonstrated, her contradictions are not a sign of inconsistency, but are a critical part of Cavendish's utopian methodology rather than a failure to convey utopia. The crux of Hair's critique focuses on the "failure" of the Empress's societal reforms, and Hair defines the resulting space as "something approaching a feminist utopia" that is "packed with paradoxes." The narrative's primary paradox is the protagonist's desire "to create an ideal female-centered commonwealth coupled with the ultimate failure of this commonwealth and subsequent creation of an impotent utopia of the mind." Once again, Cavendish's world is relegated to her mind, and she is connected with impotence, to illustrate her utopia's emptiness and failure. Hair then assigns this primary paradox to Cavendish's use of, and appropriation of, Genesis "to analyze order, epistemology, and the conflicting desire for and fear of idealism" (57). Hair's argument does not allow for how Cavendish, with the very contradiction he claims suggests a failure in her ideology, *realizes* a utopia far more ideal than her contemporaries: the Empress, on the advice of the Duchess, decides to "alter her own decrees acts and laws" (202) so that the Blazing World "may be rendered peaceable,

quiet, and happy, as it was before"; this required establishing "one sovereign, one religion, one law, and one language, so that all the world might be but as one united family, with no divisions" (201). The Empress's regress does not indicate a failure in her utopian ideology, or even, as Hair argues, a realization that her world was so beyond reform that any utopia could only be "impotent" and in her mind. Rather, because utopia must always be in progress, the Empress's ability to embrace change demonstrates the volatile potential of utopia. The Empress acknowledges her error, and subsequently changes society back to avoid further error in the future: "To return from a worse to a better [would] express and declare [the Empress] to be more than ordinary wise and good; so wise, as to perceive her own errors, and so good, as not to persist in them, which few did" (*Blazing World* 202). Her change is less a suggestion that the real world is unable to reform than it is a stringent demand that reform is possible if a ruler can see beyond binary thinking (right/wrong, utopic/dystopic) and towards utopia.

On Cavendish's use of religion in particular, Hair argues that the Empress "usurps the role of goddess in parts one and two, desiring to be like God and displaying the same ambition with which the serpent seduces Eve" (59) but then, realizing her error, "restores the world to its previous harmony" (61). Cavendish does more to redeem Eve and return her to the original space of harmony than pointing out that the Empress restores the world to the utopia it was before her. After all, she does not relinquish control back to the Emperor in the end, but continues to rule, becoming a wiser ruler for recognizing her error, and begins her work on creating better worlds with her Duchess Scribe. Focusing on the connection between Cavendish's utopia and religion, Hair writes:

[She] revisits the paradise myth to explore utopianism, it shows the impossibility of returning and the failure of external reform. If paradise is to be achieved, it is only internally since, in Cavendish's experience, the external world is ungovernable and unreformable. Cavendish's literary utopias end in the collapse of the ideal primarily because the author was keenly aware of the dangers of trying to impose one's ideals on the external world (63).

We cannot dismiss the fact that this “reversal” occurs immediately before the second part of the narrative when the Empress brilliantly, and successfully, commands a military campaign to save (and reform) her own world from the damaging division that always threatened Cavendish’s “real” world. This is far less a backing-down than a re-evaluation of a utopia that remains in progress. Because the Empress “rescinds her absolutism” at the end of the *Blazing World*, Hair suggests that “the heart of the collapse of the feminist utopia is not so much a critique of patriarchalism [...] as a critique of idealism.” Cavendish desires order, just as the Empress does, but detests the power systems that have maintained that order, as Hair argues (62-3). However, these two critiques need not exclude each other because Hair does not take into account how the two are the same. The “order” of idealism was defined as “ideal” by the patriarchal structures and Cavendish criticizes the one for its falsity, and the other for its rigidity in defining the first. At once, she imagines the potential order behind a more “ideal” utopic system that would embrace the “order” of chaos and formlessness as a better way of achieving true idealism, or utopia.

For instance, in one of the Empress’s discussions with the Duchess they consider the failures of the forms and patterns of the “real” world as they both work on creating worlds of their own:

When the Duchess saw that no patterns would do her any good in the framing of her world; she resolved to make a world composed of sensitive and rational self-moving matter [...] which world after it was made, appeared so curious and full of variety, so well ordered and wisely governed, that it cannot possibly be expressed by words, nor the delight and pleasure which the Duchess took in making this world of her own (188).

The classical genres and forms that the “real” world offered her were incapable of capturing the potential Cavendish recognized in utopia; perhaps it is less utopianism and more naïve idealism on one level, but for the Duchess (both fictional and real), *her* utopia is formless but well ordered, chaotic but wisely governed, and because of her rejection of the conventional forms and genre, her utopia is also full of rich metamorphic variety. Cavendish often faults men for creating the political division that

leads to war and conflict, as we saw in *Letters*. Though contradictory on the subject, Cavendish also claims women were equally capable of inciting division and violence even if only through strategic manipulations and persuasions rather than weapons and force. However, Cavendish grants the Empress first political, then religious, then academic, and finally, military power as well. Cavendish combines the several specific conflicts that influenced her life and then hands them to her Empress-self whose *Blazing World* is so civil that even their need for law is minimal:

Of the statesmen she enquired first, why they had so few laws? To which they answered, that many laws made many divisions, which most commonly did breed factions, and at last break out into open wars" and that monarchy agrees with their religion, while commonwealth which allows for "many governors" was like "a monster with many heads (134).

Seeing no need for legal reform, she moves forward with the religious reforms, and will later explore academic reforms before her military campaign brings peace to the Empress's home world.

The Empress's most dramatic political action is the war she leads against the enemies of her native land in the second part of the narrative. More's *Utopia* had a similar narrative organization, and the two parts of his book seem as disjointed as Cavendish's book.¹⁷ The second part of the narrative describes a violent homecoming, and the ensuing war requires and rewards loyalty to a powerful monarch; it is a rather jarring departure from the scientific and philosophical discussions and playful spiritual travels of the first part. The dramatic shift between the parts, as between the worlds, or between conventional topics and dissenting ideas, is testament to Cavendish's chaotic genre and form. Even the most idyllic utopic moments can become dark and oppressive through a war, or a messenger bearing bad tidings, because the expectation

¹⁷ Amy Boesky argues that the thematic division between the two sections suggests a grander purpose, and that one of the most remarkable features of the utopia is "the fluidity with which it draws its borders." Describing the distinction between the two parts, Boesky writes: "Avowedly nostalgic throughout, the characters in *The Blazing-world* often yearn for home, longing to restore their native countries to the splendors they now inhabit. [...] This return visit ruptures the perfection of Book I's idealized court, offering an embedded theater of ruin within the Utopian narrative. England is the "other" of the *Blazing-world*, a place where ownership and ruin still bear the names of "lord and husband." [...] Their wealth, like their power, has value only in their imaginary realm. England for them remains the site of exclusion, of invisible and unusable power" (136-7).

is perpetual change even though the desire may be for continued stasis. The Empress uses the spirits at her disposal in the war, and the spectacle and special effects she used in her religious temples she uses against her compatriots; this time, her primary goal is not to persuade lovingly, but to gather the many lands of her kingdom under a single absolute monarch by force: the King of ESFI.¹⁸ Her campaign is tyrannical, and includes a violent war and threats against townspeople as she requires unwavering submission (in one instance, she even sets fire to a whole town, promising continued destruction to any group who falters in their fealty). And yet, her true intention is clear—"I intend to make you the most powerful nation of this world"—and she warns all the other monarchs that they best pay tribute "justly and truly" to assure the king's authority as "the head-monarch of all this world; which power, though you may envy, yet you can no ways hinder him; for all those that endeavor to resist his power, shall only get loss for their labour, and no victory for their profit" (210).

Between the books, we see the Empress evolve into a fearsome military force who uses more than persuasion—the weapon Cavendish overwhelmingly assigned to women—to demand submission of the warring kingdoms. Cavendish does less to suggest that women are superior to men in the spaces of government and religion, and more to equate them with each other by assigning the Empress and the Duchess "masculine" methods and successes, but also similar failures. Women can be effective rulers of academies, governments and religions as the first part demonstrates. If they are granted access to power, then they will wield it with the same fervor and single-minded goal as any man, as the second part demonstrates. In some arenas, she suggests female superiority, and even in war, she indicates a far nobler, strategic and creative approach to warfare. At one point, the Empress uses her knowledge of one nation's natural flooding to prompt their complete destruction by way of a natural disaster (214), and in another, she attacks using the spectacle of the Blazing World's

¹⁸ Mary Campbell has identified a possible meaning to ESFI as an acronym for England, Scotland, France, and Ireland in "Other World, Inner World, Blazing World, or, What the Microscope Missed" an unpublished paper presented at Harvard's Center for Literary and Cultural Studies, February 1996. See *Wonder and Science* (204 note 25).

burning stones and the aide of the many animal-men to navigate better in their respective elements. Even after all that violence, her focus is always her “singular” certainty: Loyalty belongs not to just any monarch, but to a singularly wise and incorruptible monarch to prevent the corrosive division and factions she most feared. Her fragmentary embrace of creative literary chaos demonstrates that Cavendish believed that a worthy monarch could make the “real” world an ideal place (a point that recalls Cavendish’s repeated desire to be Empress of a world).

Dolores Paloma offers a closely connected perspective on the Empress’s military campaign, arguing that her actions, as with Cavendish’s other military heroines, demonstrate a desire in Cavendish herself to be the active, military hero her brothers (and husband) were during the Civil War; her militant heroines allowed her to dramatically imagine undertaking the “heroic actions” that were forbidden to her. Paloma warns we should read the connection with caution: “Margaret Cavendish’s armed women should not be construed either as an emblem of aggressiveness or hostility toward men.” Cavendish is working, here and elsewhere, to question “the inherent masculinity of particular activities and behavioral traits, which is to say that she sought to enlarge the definition of woman” (63-68). It was not a way to exclude men, but rather a way to include women even while her plays often required enclosing the women away from the men who would only assign one role to them. In *Bell in Campo* (1662), for instance, Cavendish includes warrior women who form their own army. She did not restrict the Empress to military action, but included another aspect to the war in ESFI: She attacks nations through their trade routes whose disruption economically cripples them. It is a war of economy, as well as influence and power, and the Empress takes full advantage of this strategic tool. Women, Cavendish suggests, understand that wars are not about power and aggression as expressions of masculinity alone, but are about money, and the politics that both elements require. Still, for Cavendish to maintain her utopic endeavor she ensures that the war and trade battles remain only in the “other” (real) world and far away from the Blazing World

that has no need for money or war: "They used no coin, but all their traffic was by exchange of several commodities" (133). This distinction is critical to understanding Cavendish's organization of her ideal space. Women can play equally as generals, but the need for those skills remains only in the "real" world of fallen men because strife is the result of the failed patriarchal structures that always excluded women. The absence of violence and war in the *Blazing World* when compared to the dramatic battles in *ESFI* represent a rather rigid boundary in so fluid a text. Women could fight as easily if they had equal access to the structures of power, as in her utopia, but then there would be no need for warring generals, man or woman. Cavendish's suggestion is that the problem is not that women cannot fight, or even that they should be allowed to fight, but rather that if women were allowed access to education, government, and religion, division would be mitigated and war might not be necessary for anyone.

Other than establishing her religion and developing a relationship with the Duchess as her female scribe, part one of *Blazing World* is dominated by the Empress's foundation of scientific and philosophical societies, their experiments and research, and her elaborate discussions with immaterial spirits. She gathers the intelligentsia of the *Blazing World* almost immediately after gaining power and begins by questioning their statesmen, priests and architects. She calls for the "new founded societies [of] vertuosos" (136) who she sets to work on "several employments." The groups are made up of animal-beings whose characteristics best "fit" their tasks, according to Cavendish. For example, bird-men are expected to give "a true relation of the two celestial bodies" and fish- and worm-men deliver "observations which they had made, both within the seas and the earth" (145), while magpie-, parrot-, and jackdaw-men "were her professed orators and logicians" (160). The style and tone of the scientific society section—with each group offering its results and demonstrating its instruments to the Empress in turn—echoes Cavendish's complaints against the Royal Society. Cavendish had expressed a desire to see the new Society's experiments and had already written about two of their famous members, Robert Boyle and Robert Hooke;

through her husband connections, she was invited to witness their experiments. This was a highly controversial and extraordinary proposal, but Cavendish's husband was powerful and her writing made her infamous in her own right. Furthermore, the Society had not yet established itself, and in fact, still had more enemies than supporters. In 1667, Cavendish appeared at the Royal Society with much pomp and to great acclaim, and followed by huge crowds. She witnessed a range of experiments never before seen by a woman inside the Society as demonstrated by its members.¹⁹ Most critics discuss the Royal Society visit from the perspective of contemporary diarists and various publications that recount, and mostly criticize, the elaborate spectacle of Cavendish's arrival. John Evelyn, for example, complained about her outrageous "masculine" style of dress that made her look, in his eyes, like "a cavalier, but that she had no beard" (qtd. in Whitaker 299). The singular audacity of asking to be invited in the first place, and her bravery at accepting the invitation knowing that she would be the only woman among many, mostly bellicose, men who did not value her scientific and philosophical opinions, observations or writings, is truly impressive.

It is unlikely that Cavendish would not have been eager for the opportunity to participate in such a Society if only for the insight it would offer her, and the authority and validity it would bring her writings. Her desire to participate in formal academic dialogue, debate, and all forms of educational endeavors, together with her enthusiastic interest in natural science and philosophy are evident: Her communities of women allow debates, her separatist spaces contain educated women, and her *Blazing World* is ruled by a woman who establishes and leads a formal academic society. The scientific society section in *Blazing World* is usually considered the slowest, least accessible, part of Cavendish's utopia, but it demonstrates the fundamental impetus behind her desire for utopic spaces. Ultimately, and perhaps sadly, the Royal Society's efforts succeeded in firming up the boundaries between science and literature that Cavendish persistently defied. Richard Nate discusses the Royal Society visit from the

¹⁹ For a detailed recounting of the Royal Society visit, see Whitaker's biography 298-301.

perspective of the changes in rhetoric the Society inspired. He writes that in 1666 “the boundaries between science and literature had become more stable due to the efforts of the Royal Society, which not only argued against figurative language but also demanded a clear distinction between the products of reason and the products of the imagination” (415). *Blazing World*, then, is not only Cavendish’s condemnation of the belligerent disregard of “products of imagination,” but also represents her insistence and demonstration that such products could be powerfully effective.

As strange as *Blazing World* seems, Cavendish does not wholly ignore the more familiar utopian tropes. The Empress’s discussions with her societies include many themes common to utopian literature, but she pointedly engages them from the scientific perspectives that most intrigued her, and in a language that defied the plain style that science increasingly demanded. This demonstrates one of utopia’s first movements towards science fiction. For example, the quality and dimensions of nature, matter, and its movements were topics that Cavendish discussed repeatedly in her scientific texts. She also considered the spiritual world and the possible existence of immaterial spirits as the other side of this philosophical question. At one point, after the Empress has discovered the existence of immaterial spirits, she asks them to attend her, and they happily do so. The Empress questions them on the nature of matter, not asking about the specifics of its “nature,” but rather posing her questions in a way that indicate her beliefs as she has written them in her philosophical and scientific writings: “Then, the Empress asked them, whether all matter was fluid at first? They answered, that matter was always as it is, and that some parts of matter were rare, some dense, some fluid, some solid, etc. Neither was God bound to make all matter fluid at first” (171). This is a strangely ambiguous answer neither denies nor confirms Cavendish’s theory of matter (which she asserts elsewhere). Matter, the spirits answer, was always as it is, but their answer only invites further questions. Nature is then fragmented, and presented as chaotic as Cavendish has always professed her to be because she appears in every form imaginable. Even God is freed from scientific restrictions as Cavendish,

through the spirits, assigns him the full freedom to make matter. This was not only presumptive in its suggestion of an intimate knowledge of the workings of God, but also demonstrative of a quite radical scientific observation against the belief in a solid-state world, which advocated for understanding the world as eternally static because it was always exactly as God originally created it (God, who was "perfect," could only create perfection, and so, change was unnecessary). By conveying a more fluid understanding of matter, and nature itself, Cavendish supports the scientific refashioning of creation through the many mythic cosmogonic stories revised through utopian literature. She voices her observations through immaterial spirits, which validates and tempers the notion because it comes from "immaterial" beings that surely have a more intimate knowledge of God and creation, but who are also less dangerous because they are imagined within an imaginary world and are figuratively (and narratively) no more substantive than air. She grounds all matter within this vision of nature, which negates as it postulates, and this maintains and normalizes a fragmented, chaotic understanding of origins.

It is not just with the scientific themes and discourses that Cavendish dances around the utopian tropes she inherits. The descriptive details of the *Blazing World* are similar to what one expects to find in utopian literature: the elaborate luxury of the royal palace, the abundance of material wealth, creative city organization and architecture, and, of course, an eternally peaceful populace. The *Blazing World* also possesses a singularly vital resource routinely coveted by early modern utopists and discoverers: immortality. From the earliest classical utopias, to the utopic projections of the New World discovery accounts, to contemporary science fiction utopias, all of them include, on some level, a search for a divine space, a magical potion, an ancient fountain, or in the utopias to come, in a superior technology that promises to delay, if not conquer, death. *Blazing World* is no different; Cavendish locates this powerful gift in her utopia, but restricts its benefits to members of the "imperial race." However, she will not stop at simply recounting the magical rock's power; instead, she goes into

extraordinary “scientific” detail outlining the entire biological process of reaching immortality. The special rock yields golden sand and a magical gum that, when ingested, makes an aged person purge all his or her bodily fluids for six weeks, the body then breaks apart, and then covers itself with a scab for four months before the person emerges, fragile and vulnerable, as if newly born. He or she will then need to be swaddled for nine months only to finally emerge as a twenty year old. Cavendish painstakingly outlines the process of this “philosopher’s stone,” presenting it as less mystical or mythical than a concrete, scientific discovery. Instead of a fountain of youth with magical properties, she imagines immortality as a biological process with a reasonable, natural explanation for its power.²⁰ As if she is collecting data, she specifies and itemizes every physical change a body undergoes to reach this resurrection of youth and vigor down to the color of the phlegm and the particular orifices that emits each fluid and for how long. For Cavendish, this is the observation of a scientific process of becoming younger, not divine, and that is far more feasible than a legendary font lost to man and awaiting rediscovery. Cavendish was particularly interested in health and medicine (especially her own) and wrote often, in surprising detail, about the various herbs, mixtures, and purges she took herself for her many ailments. In *her* utopia, the secret to eternal youth (and the eternal health it promised) was not a matter of magic or divine intervention but rather a distinctly physical and biological process contingent not only on what is put in and on the body, but what must be purged from the body; the internal is privileged over the external as the scientific material world is turned inside-out. The physical matter of her own body concerned her, and in reading the extreme details of this curative, one is left wondering if the process is worth the regained youth after all. Perhaps Cavendish may have wondered the same of the various curatives she endured to ease her own pain and

²⁰ If we consider this detail from a modern definition of fantasy and science fiction, the indication is that Cavendish was approaching her utopic world as science fiction, rather than fantasy, which is distinguished by a level of scientific plausibility that fantasy does not address.

ailments.²¹ The description of the immortality stone also introduces a decided shift in the narrative; through the remainder of the book, the Empress spends most of her time outside of her physical body as if the material body now threatens failure.

Furthermore, the body will come to represent the most obstinate hurdle keeping the Empress from her platonic lover, the Duchess. Both women remain exclusively in spirit form as they travel and explore many spaces, including the Duchess's world and the Duke's body, allowing both women to leave behind the very messy business and maintenance of their (gendered) bodies.

The immaterial spirits are the medium through which Cavendish envisions utopia's potential most vividly. When the Empress wishes to learn of the world beyond the Blazing World (including her own home world) she gathers all the societies together and asks them a new round of questions concerning "immaterial spirits" (165). Their discussion shifts to the substance, quality, and dimensions of the spirits and eventually, leads to the spirits themselves answering the Empress's many questions directly. The spirits come at the request of the fly-men, and Cavendish is careful to keep them ambiguous saying that though they were present before the Empress, "in what shapes or forms, I cannot exactly tell" (165), which suggests that she *may* know, but will not tell the reader. She asks about the quality of matter and even the nature of God in relation to the Cabbalist's assertion that the spirits are a resource for truth, and then asks whether "there was any Cabbala in God, or whether God was full of Ideas?" Curiously, they answer in a way that equates God, conceptually, with Cavendish's view of Nature: "There could be nothing in God, nor could God be full of any thing, either forms or figures, but of himself; for God is the perfection of all things, and an unexpressible Being, beyond the conception of any creature, either natural or supernatural" (167-8). Later, she inquires about the Cabbala yet again, asking if God

²¹ Both Cavendish and her husband suffered from what seems, in retrospect, an almost hypochondriac anxiety over their health. There is much evidence of their experimentations with wild curatives and violent purges meant to cure everything from Cavendish's childlessness and/or Newcastle's impotence to digestive problems in both. Often, rather exotic medications were prescribed for nothing more than "melancholy" (Whitaker 99-100).

has a number or emblem: "There can be no emblem of God, answered the spirits; for if we do not know what God is, how can we make an emblem of him? Nor is there any number in God, for God is the perfection himself, but numbers are imperfect" (172).

Cavendish's connection of God to the infinite (as suggested by numbers and mathematics) and with freedom in form and figure, locates God in the realm of the same formless infinity she assigned to the far more feminized Nature, although her characterization of Nature proves (appropriately) inconsistent as well and adding to her always ambiguous presentation of the nature of Nature. Lisa Sarasohn, once again, explores how Cavendish's gender influenced the content of her science. She writes:

Cavendish's gender may have acted as an heuristic device, causing her to be sympathetic toward those ideas which substantiated and supported a fuller role for women in the social and natural cosmos. Thus, whenever there is a choice Cavendish chose the more organic and nurturing view of nature, not necessarily because psychological presuppositions of the early seventeenth century associated the roles of women and nature. [...] While Cavendish sometimes treats nature as the totality of matter, is immanently self-ordering, in other parts of her work nature is considered as an ordering principle, somehow transcendent as well as immanent in matter. She considered this principle to be female. Since the Duchess had abstracted God so thoroughly from her metaphysics, nature was left with an extraordinarily large sphere of action. [...] Many of her ideas like vitalistic matter, the great chain of being, or a female and fecund nature, were part of the intellectual currency of her day, even if they were not usually associated with the new science ("A Science Turned Upside Down" 295-6).

In a way, Cavendish is detaching God from Nature so that she might equate Nature's influence with God's, just as she expanded the spaces where women might similarly influence the patriarchal spheres of action and authority in society. Her understanding and ordering of science was based on a female principle, and though she did not privilege it as the *only* understanding, she did prefer it as a metaphor for many of her arguments. A "feminine" order infused her writing, and was fundamental to her choice of utopia as a genre for her ideal space. By writing and publishing, Cavendish could be said to be trespassing into "the male worlds [...]" in order to stake her claim to fame and to promote a socially conservative view of power distribution, but in doing so, she also engages in a much more challenging and imposing undertaking: the appeal for a thorough re-evaluation in our cultural understanding of the very nature of gendered

subjectivity" (Hiscock 416). In *Blazing World*, as Hiscock argues, Cavendish "wills into being a reality in which women are not imprisoned solely within male private existence" (412). Her will—to publish and be heard—was a force to be reckoned with and each example of a utopia in her texts demonstrate how effective her will was in bringing into reality a utopic space.

As the Empress continues to question the spirits—her genderless, formless, bodiless (and thus boundless) source of all knowledge—she focuses not on trying to understand the divine (for she has already rewritten the divine in the *Blazing World* as herself), but rather on learning how to go about following her greatest desire: To write "a Jews' Cabbala." The moment she mentions this project, the spirits leave suddenly to the antipodes, and the Empress physically panics:

No sooner had the Empress declared her mind, but the spirits immediately disappeared out of her sight; which startled the Empress so much, that she fell into a trance, wherein she lay for some while; at last being come to herself again, she grew very studious, and considering with herself what might be the cause of this strange disaster (179).

This small detail is a significant moment of empowerment because it animates the inconsistency of knowledge, and failed access to knowledge that Cavendish endured most of her life. The moment the Empress assertively declares her academic plans, her source of knowledge abandons her wordlessly, but that abandonment empowers her—she became "very studious"—to learn more and take action for herself (she sends her subjects to find them and demand they return). To emphasize this progression from inquiry to self-empowerment, Cavendish sets the initial weakness of the Empress's body (she falls into a trance) against the bodiless spirits who travel where they want to without needing to ask leave of anyone, certainly not a husband and not even an Empress. Seemingly innocent, this moment demonstrates a freedom the Empress will soon discover for herself as a bodiless spirit, and in that spiritual, disembodied state, she discovers the freedom to enter any realm she finds interesting, but also will be able to interact more intimately with the Duchess, who plays such a vital role in her explorations. On their return, the spirits immediately tell the Empress that she needs a

scribe to help with her project. At first, she considers the souls of “some ancient famous writer,” but learns they “were so wedded to their own opinions that they would never have the patience to be scribes.” She then considers “one of the most famous modern writers” for the role, but is told that “they were fine ingenious writers, but yet, so self-conceited that they would scorn to be scribes to a woman,” at which point the spirits suggest the Duchess of Newcastle who they describe as “the most learned, eloquent, witty, and ingenious, [yet] plain and rational writer”; the Empress chooses her because “neither will the Emperor have reason to be jealous, she being of my own sex.” At that, the spirits warn her that “husbands have reason to be jealous of platonic lovers, for they are very dangerous, as being not only very intimate and close but subtle and insinuating” (181). The Empress assumes the physical purity of a union of spirits, while the spirits themselves suggest, as they have until this point, a far deeper understanding of the potential intimacy and desire between spirits with no need for a physical body.

The two women greet each other by embracing and sharing a “spiritual kiss” and then immediately dive into a discussion about the Empress’s Cabbala that becomes a discussion of the expectations of genre. From a scriptural Cabbala as a start, the women consider the many different forms a Cabbala might take. They consider a philosophical, moral, or political Cabbala at first, but the Empress is finally convinced by the Duchess (who has dissuaded her from the other forms as being without a good end) that her best Cabbala would be “poetical and romancical” so that she might use “metaphors, allegories, similitudes, etc.” and interpret them as she pleases (183). Martina Mittag explores Cavendish’s use of the Cabbala and argues that the Duchess’s rejection of the several forms, and her insistence on a poetic and romantic Cabbala, allow the Empress a variety of interpretive possibilities, but also represents a direct critique and parody of Henry More’s cabbala-project (published in 1653, which Cavendish commented on in her 1664 *Philosophical Letters*): “Her use of the cabbala, far from literal pretenses, accommodates her desire for alternative femininities

through providing a representational and hermeneutic model, which allows for both infinity in the realms of literature and science [...] and the correspondence between self-moving ideas and the brain of the author, which finally take shape in the text" (359). Cavendish was very intrigued by the Cabbala's potential to illuminate hidden meanings and interpretations, but she wanted to move away from the restrictions of the Puritan appropriations of ancient Hebrew knowledge in order to create a space for women in this new academic arena. She would not accept that this revision of an ancient philosophy would follow the same strict gender restrictions as the Royal Society. She recognized the same potential in science, and Cavendish attempted to establish a feminine perspective into that dialogue as well, just as her hybrid genres of literature and form carved out a space for women to participate in literature. The choice she intended for alternative femininities was tied to her conceptualization of the infinite (a concept which exploded categorizations in form as much as utopia did), and the Cabbala illumination promised access to an infinite (utopic) divine. The form could provide Cavendish a "basis for creating a plurality of worlds, for unsettling the strict order of the sexes with its concomitant gendered territories (359).²² Plurality—of spaces, genre, forms, beings, and worlds—was a fundamental theme in Cavendish's writings, and the suggestion of infinite plurality is now a common theme of utopianism. For Cavendish, it was always already one of the most powerful philosophical metaphors for realizing utopia as multiple, or infinite, worlds within her texts (and through multiple, plural genres through her writing).

Multiplicity, as it relates to gender, is thematically connected to the changing concept of the hermaphrodite. Nicole Pohl considers gender and the hermaphrodite within the newly developing Baroque understanding of "symbolic union of complementary opposites" that indicated the increasingly popular preference for a

²² "If the masculine language of the Royal Society excluded women already on linguistic grounds, the 'cabbala' seems to bridge women's way into the scientific realm by offering a rational model for interpreting the world without insisting on the masculinized language of the Royal Society, but pointing to secret meanings underneath the surface of mere words. No doubt, neither the Christian cabbalists nor the cabbalist themselves intended to include women within the realm of knowledge and Cavendish would have been the last to nourish this illusion" (Mittag 359).

union of opposites thus allowed for the affirmation of spiritual marriages between male and female. The equally popular “Neo-Platonic notions of love and marriage prevalent in the Renaissance” led directly to the liberating notions of the Baroque with new images and themes that “re-united the two separated halves of the former hermaphroditic self.” Pohl argues that Cavendish, who lived during one of the most dramatic transitional moments in English history, developed her own “Baroque concept of the hermaphroditical” that made inclusion dependent on multiplicity and contained three elements: “The male, the female, and the individual, developing a triangular discourse.” As we saw in *Twelfth Night* in Shakespeare’s disruption of the erotic triangle, the presence of a hermaphrodite being will disrupt convention. Cavendish associates the triangle, as Pohl notes, with “multiplicity, transgression, and transcendence” and she explored it through several forms of hermaphroditism (“Questions of Genre” 53).²³ By continuously, emphatically, and repeatedly exploring elements of plurality, multiplicity (and by way of contrast, its opposite form in singularity), Cavendish insisted that gender was never static or certain in its singularity, especially in transgressive literary forms, and utopia was the one form through which transgression, and the infinity that perpetual transgression required, was absolute because it could not contain binary gender. Hermaphroditism, like hybridism, is recalled whenever the gender binary is dismantled. This dismantling would come to define the content and form of her works, as Pohl thoroughly outlines.

²³ Pohl has defined three forms through which Cavendish explored multiplicity as hermaphroditism. She advocated a “discourse of multiplicity” in which she “consciously deconstructs contemporary notions of binary opposition in gender politics, science and literature. The importance of the gendered body is rejected in favour of a transgressive but singular mind, which as singularity is part of a larger multiplicity. [...] Cavendish delivers three aspects of hermaphroditism in her oeuvre [and] defines hermaphroditism in a scientific-philosophical context as something ‘of mixt natures,’ or more precisely, the composite of the natural and the artificial. Another context is that of historical/cultural hermaphroditism [and] a third context is strictly literary, when Cavendish discusses the pluralistic writing modes of Shakespeare. [Her] concept of gender [...] surpasses the plain biological character of the sexes. For Cavendish this gendered subjectivity applies to all forms of cultural representation [...] she deconstructs these notions of gendered subjectivity by creating a transgressive literary form in her utopia (“Questions of Genre” 53-5).

She could not help but express hybridity and ambiguity because she wrote from an assumption of multiplicity and plurality that binary gender could not express.

Cavendish's greatest contribution to the dialogue of plurality and multiplicity was her discussion of the impact of gendered language, whether it was through her rejection of pronouns or support of fancy and adorned language as a means to convey reason and knowledge. In *Blazing World*, she continues this dialogue in several ways, but in none so directly as the Empress and the Duchess's consideration of the Cabbala. Cavendish understood the obstacles that a cabbala's gendered language would bring, and consequently, her-self-as-Duchess suggests a cabbala for the Empress that allowed a meaningful and deliberate movement away from rigidly gendered language of science that was slowly seeping into the resurgence of revisited philosophies. As Mittag notes, this awareness in Cavendish indicates her "move against the language of science and philosophy and its hardened subject-object relationship" and her "plea for a female activity of mind and soul that even a cabbalist would have denied to the imperfect sex" (360). Cavendish withdrew into an inner world in which she privileged a metamorphic transition from "world into word." This desire can be compared to the Christian cabbalist' claim that "self-concentration and "self-effacement" was "part and parcel of a divine substance in Man, which was not automatically extended to include women." It was thought that women, associated with the body, could not "contract and dilate" and so they remained perpetually "outside of the sphere of knowing" because self-concentration was a basis for creation and "semiotic and somatic creativity, secret meanings and secret parts remain in different—gendered—spheres." How could a woman "dilate" within an enclosed space, and where could she find "infinities" if the "concept had already been gendered to the extent that it excluded the female by definition" (360)? She imagined the infinite, even within the spaces men relegated to women, which she, in any case, reclaimed in her insistence that any space could be expanded to contain the infinite as variety of pleasure, knowledge, and possibility. Cavendish wanted access to every sphere of knowing, with

the full awareness that those spheres were already gendered to exclude her. She did not dispute the gendering, but she disputed the restriction of the spheres just as she disputed the restrictions of pronouns that gendered her in language, and the gendered definitions of “appropriate” style and form. Thus, the Empress’s choice of a “Jewish” cabbala located Cavendish’s woman of power and authority (who had just founded her own Royal Society and religion) squarely in the “divine” sphere that women were (by hierarchical tradition and divine decree) thought unable (or unworthy) to access. The Duchess’s suggestion to rewrite the “poetical and romancical” form (because of women’s exclusion from the other forms) suggests that the power of creation within the other Cabbalas could be extended into the spaces women were given; to revise one’s own sphere was just as powerful a utopic endeavor, and could create its own forms of hidden meaning and variety of interpretation. It is a powerfully utopic moment that challenges not only the religious and philosophical academic arenas, but also the creation of spaces that facilitated utopic potential and the gendering of those spaces.

Cavendish’s persistent rhetoric of a plurality refuses binary gender, and in *Blazing World*, this is demonstrated most profoundly in her (non)gendering of the immaterial spirits, and her consideration of whether those immaterial spirits could express gender at all; the question is further connected to the idea of whether the soul is gendered. This involves the conflict between the fluidity of utopia and the inherent restrictions of a rigidly gendered existence, which at once brings up themes of sexuality, desire, and intimacy. Sujata Iyengar has considered this conflict as Cavendish’s negotiation of “what seems at first to be a binary distinction between material/immaterial” later becomes “blurred by the Duchess’s and Empress’s travels as gendered, ‘material souls,’ just as the confusion between materiality / immateriality challenges the Empress’s earlier assumptions about the superiority of rational Cartesianism over physical scientific investigation.” Iyengar follows Empress’s deliberation of the philosophical question by noting that the Cavendish may be

indicating, through her Empress, the truth of both observations at once: "Perhaps the two spheres of intellectual enquiry are not as different as the Empress believes, since souls can be both abstractions and 'material' objects clothed in air, all at the same time" (665). Cavendish imagined the Empress's court as a space that would foster debate as it dismantled the gender binary that had been central to so many dialogues. Genderless spirits indicate the possibility of the diffusion of gender differences on the women's bodies, and both support the utopic possibility of *Blazing World*. I have argued that simultaneity always accompanies utopian constructions of fluid gender because utopia promises fluidity expressed as freedom from rigid gendering through which one can be one gender, the other gender, or both at once. Fragmentation results from this disruption of the binary, but it does not necessarily rupture reason or the potential for improvement, and it may even lead us to utopia. Cavendish's discussion of the gender of immaterial spirits is an elaborate, and accurate, example of utopia's fundamental potential.

Iyengar argues that Cavendish offers us at once insistent essentialism and affirmation of fluidity in the spiritual gender discussion. The two positions, she argues, change within the narrative through several delimiting categories like color, race, class, nationality, gender, and the direction of sexual desire (657). Indeed, such contradictory descriptive waffling would not sit well in a "real" space bound by binary thinking, but the simultaneity suggested by such contradiction fuels utopia because it must constantly change and transgress if it is to succeed. When the immaterial spirits contradict the Empress after she assumes that a female scribe would not make her husband jealous, it immediately introduces the real question of the possibility of a gendered spirit and Cavendish's contradictory gendering of the "spirits" and the "soul." Cavendish does not say that the Duchess choosing a female scribe would *prevent* his jealousy, just that he would have no reason to be jealous: "This lady, then, said the Empress, will I choose for my scribe, neither will the Emperor have reason to be jealous, she being one of my own sex." To which, the wily spirits answer: "In truth,

said the spirit, husbands have reason to be jealous of platonic lovers, for they are very dangerous, as being not only very intimate and close, but subtle and insinuating" (181). Warned of the danger, the Empress does not react as we would expect, but instead immediately tells them "You say well" and has them call her forth as if that sort of "danger" were welcomed, or perhaps it merely suggests that it would never occur to the Emperor to consider it unseemly between two women. Male superiority, Cavendish insists, is dependent on perspective; their superiority did not emerge only by how men perceived women, but on how the patriarchal structures organized the world and required the perception of the world from within the exclusive perspective of the dominant hierarchy. Cavendish saw through this and created a world where perspective could be plural and fluid.²⁴ We have already seen how Cavendish frees Nature, and even God, from the confines of categorical binary thinking, much as she frees genre and form. It is with her characterization of the *Blazing World's* immaterial spirits and their potential for ambiguous desire, sexuality and intimacy where we encounter Cavendish's principal utopic form; their ambiguous construction informed the familiar and popular Neo-Platonic philosophies.

After some time together, the Empress and Duchess develop "an intimate friendship between them" and become "platonic lovers, although they were both females" (183). Given that platonic lovers shared, by definition, a spiritual rather than a physical union, and together they strove to achieve ideal unity in beauty and form, it

²⁴ Lisa Walters explores Cavendish's theories on the interaction between matter and the soul and argues that she was determined to dismantle the gender binary through natural philosophy. Cavendish, she writes "defines the soul as corporeal, a presence within all matter, that is not supernatural or exclusive to humanity. [...] There is no true self or soul, but infinite, dizzying amounts of living, knowing souls within one organism since even the atoms within a human have soul. There is no death within this paradigm, only changes within atoms. [...] Matter exists as a plurality of states as the various forms compose, dissolve and continuously change. In redefining the concept of soul and blending it with materiality, Cavendish again transgresses dualisms that contain gender associations. [She] does not just deconstruct hierarchy between man and woman, but questions hierarchy and binaries of all kinds. [...] Cavendish systematically deconstructs metaphors, analogies and cultural associations that define gender, recognizing the multifaceted dimensions of a patriarchal social reality [and] demonstrate how the belief in natural gender differences and, consequently, male superiority is entrenched within the way society perceives the world. Power does not merely function in social interactions, but is supported and justified by an ideological system. Throughout her texts, Cavendish attacks in multiple, diverse ways, the metaphors that define gender within her society" (31-3).

is particularly intriguing that the first *two* descriptions of the Empress and the Duchess's relationships warns that there *could* be the potential for "more" than just a spiritual affection by so adamantly insisting that there was not. As David Michael Robinson writes, "however accurately this may describe the ideal of platonic love, it completely fails to account for the reality, a reality acknowledged elsewhere in Cavendish's work: the intention that a relationship will be platonic (i.e., nonsexual) is no guarantee it really is or will remain so. Sexual desire is not so easily eliminated (147). The spirits who introduce the women to each other warn that such a spiritual union is fraught with intimacy, and the Empress, in the second reference to their friendship, includes the phrase "although they were both females" to remind readers, again, that this love is between women. The ladies travel long distances, across and between worlds, using only "airy vehicles" and sharing thoughts as if they were words. They discuss the Duchess's great ambition to become regent to a world of her own, but the spirits intervene to convince the Duchess that she has no need for a terrestrial world to rule because a spiritual world will prove just as satisfying. The spirits are privileging the nature of her relationship with the Duchess (itself spiritual) and promising that it, too, will fulfill her every desire. She is contented and immediately sets to create a variety of worlds with the Empress; initially, they base their possible worlds on classical utopic plans. Eventually, they agree their world must be wholly new because recreating the other (conventional, classical, and fundamentally masculine) forms would not satisfy them.

The Empress and Duchess's spirits/souls are definitively gendered, but the immaterial spirits are non-gendered (or, at least non-sexed). The several, repeated caveats about the virtuous union between the two female spirit/souls express, as Marina Leslie argues, "a patently erotic stamp to the immaterial conjoining of souls" and indicates a licensing, rather than a constraint against, a "homoerotic bond" precisely because of "its 'spirituality', as it places the relationship outside the traditional arguments about the biological-mandate of male-female relationships"

(141). Cavendish insists that souls cannot have sex, but as Leslie notes, “they can and do have gender” referring to the Duchess’s Platonic doctrine on the three “principles of man” which include: “first of the intellect, spirit or divine light: 2. of the soul of man herself: and 3. Of the image of the soul, that is *her* vital operation on the body?” (173, emphasis mine). Leslie points us to the “her” that Cavendish assigns to the soul and argues that it indicates Cavendish is reversing “the Aristotelian principle that [identifies] mind with the male and matter with the female.” Leslie continues: “Cavendish almost dissolves masculine materiality altogether in order to free the now generically female soul. [...] Cavendish draws on traditional Christian representations of the soul as female; in this passage, however, she would seem to create a sexual and textual hermaphrodite, combining male and female, classical and Christian (141-2). Once again, we encounter reversal of a convention through a minor detail. From the detail to the whole, Cavendish dismantles the categorical gendering of nature and the universe, of the ancient and classical conventions, and of the Christian and scientific demands for rigidity. The soul need not be male, or female, but it must be simultaneously both, one, or the other, and always fluid. Cavendish was not alone in this as there was a movement among the Renaissance Neo-Platonist to gender the soul feminine regardless of whether she belonged to a male- or female-sexed body.²⁵

A desire for unity and wholeness is predicated on an assumption of a binary, two sides united would realize a whole; most binaries could be equated to, or metaphorized as, male/female and so the insubstantial *anima* each human possessed was gendered female. The female soul was what the patriarchal church would make its mission to control with the threat of eternal damnation and separation from the unity promised only by eternal union with the patriarchal father. The soul may have been

²⁵ “According to Plato’s story of creation, the soul is the universal ‘ruler and mistress’ of the world, permeating and enveloping the heavens, enduring through all time. For Plato, the rational soul of the universe is feminine and gives form to the whole. [...] For Renaissance neo-Platonists, each man’s individual soul is feminine. This soul yearns to unite with the King of Glory, God the Father [...] marriage was the basic metaphor for unity in the individual and the cosmos; order in the universe could not be preserved without the cooperation of male and female elements” (Schiebinger 134).

immortal, but she was also the eternal repository of all the sins of man, and she would endure the punishments in the hereafter. The religious and philosophical gendering of the spirit as female and body as male contradicted the anatomical/medical gendered details of the physical body. Gendering of the body was inconsistent and based solely on masculine requirements, while gendering of the soul was based on both classical and Christian paradigms. Cavendish presents this dynamic in a way that expanded the sphere of influence and responsibility for both the body and soul by complicating the construction of the "immaterial spirits" and pointing towards neutrality and femininity. She gendered spirits or souls ambiguously, rather than consistently, because the distinction between the two is uncertain. Rosemary Kegl has argued that the logic of Cavendish's text promotes a "repeatedly emphasized physical barrier" between the women of *Blazing World* that prevents "the possibility of physical contact between women and thus allows for the continued representation of the mobility of their desire—including their desire for one another." The relationship between the women is thus, by definition, "immaterial" because it is not experienced as "a threat to the women's conjugal contracts and thus is not experienced as relevant" (134). Kegl captures the movement and progress of same-sex desire made possible in Cavendish's utopia. Desire is mobilized, just as a physical union is realized later within the body of the Duke, and is repeatedly implied by Cavendish's insistence that nothing at all is happening.

On that point, perhaps the most memorable moment of the spiritual relationship that develops between the Empress and the Duchess is when they join the Duke of Newcastle in the Duchess's world, and their spirits jump into the Duke to form a *ménage a trios* within his body (a sexual suggestion that is not lost on Cavendish who immediately compares the shared space to a seraglio). Together, the women in spirit form visit the Duke as he finishes his exercises; the Duchess, who is concerned for his health and misses him, jumps into his body. The Empress decides to follow the Duchess

and jumps in as well, resulting in both women's souls united, along with the Duke's soul, within his body:

And then the Duke had three souls in one body; and had there been but some such souls more, the Duke would have been like the Grand Signior in his seraglio only it would have been a platonic seraglio. But the Duke's soul being wise, honest, witty, complaisant and noble, afforded such delight and pleasure to the Empress's soul by her conversation, that these two souls became enamoured of each other; which the Duchess's soul perceiving, great jealous at first, but then considering that no adultery could be committed amongst Platonic lovers, and that Platonism was divine, as being derived from divine Plato, cast forth of her mind that Idea of jealousy (194-5).

For the third time, Cavendish reminds us that this seraglio is platonic, which means that the lovers cannot join physically (in case we have forgotten). She is denying the possibility of physical intimacy far too much, and that only serves to reinforce its possibility more than anything else. Repeatedly reminding the reader that their union is innocent of physical contact is symptomatic of what such a spiritual union would have suggested to readers. Her readers would have known what a platonic friendship meant, as well as its spiritual ideology. The three-way union within not just any male body, but her husband's body, is significant because it blurs the lines between the spiritual and physical on multiple levels: The Duchess as scribe existing physically in one world and spiritually in another, Cavendish herself as character and author, the Empress as Cavendish's other alter-ego existing in the *Blazing World*, her own world, and the Duchess's world, and now even the Duke as character and himself (none of them is physically or spiritually bound or whole). Ultimately, his empowering male body allows the two female souls to join in a physical space; they enter the Duchess's husband as smoothly as Cavendish enters the patriarchal structures that rejected her. In a way, this moment lets the reader's mind explore the other side of her words as the potential of what Cavendish warns is not happening at all, but certainly *could*.

The power of a triad-being, as Cavendish constructs it (as we saw in Pohl's reading of Cavendish's triangular multiplicity), confronts the potential for same-sex desire that *Blazing World* allows, and as in *Convent of Pleasure*, the suggestion is never far from the conventional frame meant to hide its potential. Rebecca D'Monté has

argued that Cavendish “vacillates between depicting companionate friendship and lesbian desire made all the more teasing because of Cavendish’s own appearance.” The Duchess, after all, has become the Empress’s “favorite,” which D’Monté notes, a “had homosexual implications,” and in a way, the same can be said of the Princess’s relationship to Lady Happy (102). The single element that is absent in their exchanges is men, and the potential of their physical bodies; the Duke’s presence is only required as the conduit, the representation of material space, for a female-only union (after all, the Duke’s female *anima* joins in as well). David Michael Robinson defines the erotics of *Blazing World* as “lesbian, rather than bisexual or queer.” Robinson agrees that there are aspects of the text “that might justify either of the latter two labels, just as there are aspects and passages that resist labeling entirely” but goes on to explore Cavendish’s work “with instruments calibrated specifically to register love and desire between women.” Such desire, Robinson insists, surfaces “again and again in Cavendish’s writings; it is one of her imaginative preoccupations.” Robinson uses the term “lesbian” rather than “bisexual” and “queer” in order to assert and “render visible the degree to which female homoeroticism, and not simply a more general fluidity of desire or gender, suffuses Cavendish’s works” (138-9). His argument eloquently approaches *Blazing World* from this unique angle, and captures Cavendish’s multiple gender constructions:

The foundation of the assumption that love between women is no threat to heterosexual marriage [relies] upon the denial of the reality of sex between women: either sex between women doesn’t happen, or it isn’t “real” sex (sex involving at least one penis). Yet what kind of sex could happen between a male spirit and an embodied woman? If the characters were weighing the advisability of the Empress taking on an embodied male scribe versus an embodied female scribe, the spirit’s argument would make sense according to heterosexist and sexist thinking: the male scribe’s possession of a penis and the female scribe’s lack of one would make all the difference. But the relevant difference between a disembodied male and a disembodied female, upon reflection, is nonexistent. While seeming to assert dominant, hetero/sexist, antilesbian thinking, the passage can thus be read as unraveling it (146).

That a woman, or rather two women, “enter” a man suggests not only transgression in general, but the epitome of transgression of a physical penetration, which usually

indicates the piercing phallus that immediately introduces the familiar dichotomy of the piercing man and the pierced woman.²⁶ They enter him and, immediately, the Duke becomes enamored of the Empress, inciting jealousy in the Duchess so that she must remind herself that “no adultery could be committed.” This, of course, does not address the many forms of desire and intimacy that do not necessarily require genital, or even physical, contact, but that suggest the possibility of a spiritual union based on a “physical” desire that Cavendish privileges. Similar to the material/terrestrial worlds that the spirits warn the Duchess away from by suggesting that her preference for spiritual/imaginative worlds would prove far more satisfying, the union between women, here as in her other texts, emerges as the preferred form of desire and is idealized to the point of utopic splendor. The spirits tell the Duchess that she will not miss the troubles and cares of a real world, but that “by creating a world within yourself, you may enjoy all both in whole and in parts, without control or opposition, and may make whatever world as you please and alter it when you please, and enjoy as much pleasure and delight as a world can afford you” (187), and the two set out to make worlds of their own. When the Empress calls on the Duchess for help, the Duchess brings her world to the Empress inviting her to “observe the frame, order and government of it” (188). Their worlds are within their imaginations, separate from the physical obstacles of the “real,” but interactive between each other. In a way, each creates a virtual world for the other to participate in and inhabit. Cavendish envisions in the Duchess’s world a space that others can inhabit, not a world that fails because it tries to strain against the hindrances of the real, but one that flourishes in the ideal: “Her Majesty was so ravished with the perception of it, that her soul desired to live in the Duchess’s world” (189). The worlds they create are not only of the mind, though they are, they are spaces that enclose ideal utopias where others can live with the creator, or rather, *creatoress*.

²⁶ This recalls Traub’s assertion in the *Renaissance of Lesbianism* that women were locked in the role of “receptacle”; while men could penetrate a variety of beings, women could never penetrate anyone, and thus, the suggestion of this triad was a space fundamentally barred to women.

The immaterial spirits are a vital part of the Empress's court discussions and are central to the *Blazing World's* utopia. At one point the Empress, concerned over her body in the absence of her soul, asks that "an honest an ingenious spirit" attend on her soul-less body and she insists that the spirit would need to be female. The spirits tell her that "there was no difference of sexes amongst them" (189). The distinction between the Empress and Duchess in spirit form, and the spirits that attend them, is ambiguous; the first two are feminine gendered souls, as the many references to their gender and the threat over their possible intimacy indicate, but the immaterial spirits insist *they* are sexless. At another point, the Empress asks the spirits whether or not they could be naked by addressing the possibility of their physical presence (and thus, the presence of genitals) in several questions in different forms, but always receives the same answer: spirits are immaterial and non-corporeal, they do not have bodies and their motion is wholly reliant on "corporeal vehicles" that "move by the help of our bodies, and not the bodies by the help of us" (168). This, of course, contradicts Cavendish's insistence that souls are corporeal: Spirits can move through sexed bodies, but are not gendered. The concern over the gender of the Empress's scribe focuses on the possibility that a male scribe will not want to work with a female writer, even in spirit form, and that as two women, their spiritual love affair somehow is too intimate an exchange for women. In one instance, the spirits insist that without their bodies, nothing untoward can occur, and in another, they warn against the certain intimacy that will occur; but the spirits themselves have no gender (which would have put the questions of a gendered soul aside). We gain no clarity about the nature of the soul/immaterial spirit by the end of the narrative, and in fact, ambiguity is the only consistency in the spirit's gendering. Nevertheless, this is Cavendish's intention because ambiguity allows her to maintain the reader's uncertainty in order to convey utopia. Robinson has also noted this disparity and he argues that "immaterial spirits" and "souls" are indistinguishable from each other.²⁷ Presenting both possible states of

²⁷ "The 'platonic seraglio' episode seems like a vision of a world beyond gender. Such an

being at once (the immaterial spirits address the Empress and the Duchess in soul form) realizes the transgressive moment in this utopia conveyed through a language of gender ambiguity that itself conveys same-sex desire and intimacy (clearly, it *can* be expressed in order to create that “world beyond gender”). Cavendish will not let the possibility slip away; women can be equal with men, their friendships as intimate as any, their union and communion with each other as powerful, their affection as ideal, and their participation in the arenas and spaces they are restricted from as effective. Neo-Platonic theories decreed that all souls were always already female, and the immaterial spirits came along and insisted that spirits are detached from the physical body with its rigid gendered characteristics. In these beings Cavendish captures the world beyond gender that utopists (along with feminists, theorists, and philosophers) before and after her could only dream was realizable. In fact, as Dolores Paloma writes Cavendish “knew that transgressing the boundaries specified by gender allowed her to express a strong sense of self as a unique being and to imagine utopian societies in which ‘he’ and ‘she’ would no longer be restrictive categories” (66). Cavendish’s rejection and complaints over the failure of pronouns to define her, or anyone, run thematically throughout her writing, but I would add to Paloma’s argument that the utopian societies in which Cavendish blurred those restrictive categories of gender facilitated the transgression far more than most critics allow.

I arrive at the end of this dissertation with what I hope offers a new understanding of the development of utopian literature in the early modern in light of what is today better understood as utopianism; it is where ideas of transgressive spaces are now relegated to a realm of abstract theory and philosophy. Cavendish’s world-making allowed for spaces that could define far more than models of potentiality; her

impression is certainly valid, and given the popularity of cross-dressing and gender-confusion plots in late Renaissance and Early Modern narratives (not least Cavendish’s own), this reading would certainly have been congenial to many of Cavendish’s readers. Yet, while by no means banishing [gender] instability [...] that the human soul was conventionally gendered feminine might suggest, at least to prolesbian readers alert to such possibilities, that the three souls in the Duke’s body enjoying “Conversation [...] so pleasant that it cannot be expressed” may in some sense all be female” (Robinson 150).

utopias insist that the space of the mind, understood as inherently transgressive, is as real a utopia as the ideal worlds of literature that reflected men's concerns because Cavendish was "claiming utopian space" and thus "claiming the text as a utopian site for women" (Mittag 363). Her journey was one of ownership translated into an assertion that texts, and the spaces that texts could create, were indeed, definitively, *women's* spaces. That the male utopist tried to stabilize utopia's nature did not prevent Cavendish from seeing in utopia what it would become. The cabalistic spheres of knowing left women with little choice of spaces in which they might move, but Cavendish accepted the spaces and forms that were before her and used them adeptly to create a utopia of that space because she understood that utopias were built of women, and so were women's spaces. Mittag argues that desire was central to the "gendering early modern utopian thought" because, like utopia, desire was denied to women; on a "temporal level," this left woman "reduced to self-masculinization and an existence as angels in the afterworld." Cavendish cleared the way for "female desire," as Mittag notes, because of "the confined space of women's writing" which led her to coexist between "Blazing World and English reality" where fluid desire, like a "secret passage," allowed her to move between worlds (364). Cavendish confronts men's utopias because they so often reflected the structures from which women were systematically excluded. If utopia promised a vision for a better society, then male utopists had to control the women's opportunities within it to maintain their structures. Cavendish did not accept this, and understood that utopia promised much of what utopianism, or utopic theory and philosophy, suggested it might because she continually experimented with it through her utopian writing and lived within her textual utopias.

The consistency with which Cavendish created potential spaces of access and female authority suggest that all of her writing was infused with utopianism. If not writing utopias, then she was surely fostering the conditions to allow women utopic thought by her disturbance of the binary structures that disallowed their participation

in, and benefit from, utopic endeavors. Cavendish moved between the two worlds: one real, the other ideal (if virtual). However, as I have shown, the virtual or imaginary were not less than “real” to Cavendish. They were as just as powerful, if only in changing the thought processes to a more creative, generative, approach and at that, distributed evenly between male and female minds. After all, the utopian tradition she emerged from was not professing that the satirical Utopia or the scientific Bensalem were truly “real” plans for social betterment (they were just as much imaginary thought experiments as the Blazing World). Cavendish’s utopian methodology granted women the education, participation in government, science, religion, and philosophy that men controlled so that women might more actively participate in improving society for everyone in order to achieve utopia. Her expression of this potential emerged as simultaneity of opinion (or contradiction), and ambiguous desire, physical union, and presence. Male utopists resisted transgression at every turn in their efforts to mitigate utopia’s resulting chaos while Cavendish embraced the chaos as creative in the same way that the cosmogonic myth insisted that neutral Chaos was the one original creative force.

When Cavendish brings readers to the point of entering her Blazing World she warns everyone that when one arrives at the poles, one has a decision to make: “*he* is either forced to return, or to enter into another world” because “they move each one in their peculiar circles; which motion is so just and exact, that neither can hinder or obstruct the other” (126, emphasis mine). Enter at your own risk, she admonishes; a man can always turn around and go home again, or enter into “another” world, but if he wishes to enter *her* world, he must neither hinder nor obstruct those that move in *her* circles. After the Duchess has returned to the Duke, the Empress entertains him with stories of the variety and beauty of the horses and stables of the Blazing World²⁸ while the Duke answers that “he was sorry there was no passage between those two

²⁸ The Duke was famous for his horsemanship, even publishing a famous book on dressage that was published first in French as *Méthode et invention nouvelle de dresser les chevaux* (1658), and later as *A New Method and Extraordinary Invention to Dress Horses and Work them according to Nature* (1667), the book was highly influential and remained so for centuries.

worlds, but said he, I have always found an obstruction to my good fortunes" (221). Subtly, and carefully, with the narrative's final moment, the Duke is left out of her idealized utopic space; he is "obstructed" from it as assuredly as Cavendish was obstructed from the many institutions that might have granted her the means to realize the utopia of her mind.

Conclusion: Beyond Utopia

If there be nothing new, but that which is
 Hath been before, how are our brains beguiled,
 Which, labouring for invention, bear amiss
 The second burden of a former child.
 O, that record could with a backward look,
 Even of five hundred courses of the sun,
 Show me your image in some antique book,
 Since mind at first in character was done!
 That I might see what the old world could say
 To this composed wonder of your frame;
 Whether we are mended, or whe'er better they,
 Or whether revolution be the same.
 O, sure I am, the wits of former days
 To subjects worse have given admiring praise.

William Shakespeare, Sonnet 59

Then she desired to be informed, what opinion they had of the beginning of forms? They told her Majesty, that they did not understand what she meant by this expression, for, said they, there is no beginning in nature, no not of particulars, by reason nature is eternal and infinite, and her particulars are subject to infinite changes and transmutations by virtue of their own corporeal figurative self-motions; so there's nothing new in nature, nor properly a beginning of any thing.

Margaret Cavendish, *Blazing World* (152-3).

In the end, we arrive back at the beginning; utopia is born of the anxiety over origins (in all their chaotic uncertainty) and arriving in utopia, we discover that the fluid progress of the journey itself allowed the perfection. The *Blazing World's* fluidly gendered spirits held the answers of origins for the Empress, but she never asks them to explain the unanswerable question of origin. Instead, she questions the origins of the structures that barred her from utopia. By questioning the uncertain certainty of the origin of forms, she could dismantle them in order to rebuild them with their "original" fluidity intact. In doing so, the Empress challenges the familiar forms—of writing, of literature, of genre—that Cavendish continuously fragmented and reconstructed. The spirits answer with confusion at the question itself, for it is illogical to ask about the beginning of anything when nature is "eternal and infinite" and everything in nature is subject to "infinite changes and transmutations." The end of their argument only

reiterates the Biblical adage that there is nothing new under the sun, just as Cavendish insists there is nothing new in nature.¹ Right before the King James Bible added this idiom to the English language, Shakespeare (who contributed his own wealth of idiomatic and metaphoric expressions to English) captured this sentiment in several sonnets, but in none so exactly as Sonnet 59. The melancholy sentiment of looking backwards, of untangling the burden of classical mythic, literature and history and the simultaneous desire to know them better as one uses them in new ways. Utopian literature is burdened and liberated by the unrelenting desire to reclaim origins from endless historical revision, even as it provides spaces for new revisions that will only expand the traditions it questions. Much of the conversation of souls between Shakespeare and Cavendish contains the same utopian desire to forge something new, despite the knowledge that the task was not only impossible, but also destined to fail; they persisted and succeeded knowing that they would always fail and reveled in the attempt alone. Cavendish enjoyed the generous tradition that Shakespeare bequeathed to her, while Shakespeare wove together the classical traditions, new world dialogue, and the burgeoning utopian literature that helped him contribute to the English Renaissance we would come known.

These backward glances continue, to varying degrees, across more ages and authors than we can fathom. However, there is a single thread of literature, history, and utopian desire that curiously ties Shakespeare to three women of words who have far more in common with each other than seems possible: Margret Cavendish, Emily Dickinson, and Virginia Woolf. These women writers wrote about Shakespeare, expressed admiration for Shakespeare or criticized him, but the similarities do not end with their words about Shakespeare or his texts. Each of these women lived through dramatic wars that disturbed their lives. Each was accused of madness, thought of as mad, or demonstrated mental illness in fact. Perhaps most profoundly, each wrote in

¹ From the King James Bible, Ecclesiastes 1:9: "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun."

forms and styles that confronted gender roles and expectations by challenging conventions, and each was writing at the cusp of a new literary tradition. They are separated by time, location, and circumstance, and yet their circumstances echo each other astoundingly. Each discussed, endured, and preferred isolation at some level. Each wrote themselves into dialogues that did not want to hear their inconvenient words, see them demonstrate their unusual styles, and challenge convention with their chaotic complication of forms. Their private lives demonstrated surprising similarities on many levels as well. What can it mean that each expressed such admiration for Shakespeare, and felt so strongly about that admiration that each chose to write about it? What can it mean that the realities of their lives fostered similar responses such as a desire for isolation, horror over the consequences of war, and a desire to capture their complex philosophies in wholly new "ideal" forms that might elevate them from the "real"? Why did each have a problematic relationship with religion, and why was each an avid letter writer as well? Cavendish, with her wild chaotic writing, lived at the cusp of a shift in worldview. Hers was a world at the end of the Early Modern and the beginning of the Restoration, a world of exile from the English Civil War and of a regicide that promised the destruction of the epitome of patriarchal structures of absolute monarchy.

Emily Dickinson, centuries later, wrote poetry obsessively, but refused to share those poems with anyone but her most intimate friends. She lived an eccentric and reclusive life, and her writing was difficult to categorize conveniently because her poetry did not fit neatly into any familiar poetic form. Her poetry defied the same rules of grammar and punctuation that Cavendish stated she would defy. Dickinson saw what the American Civil War did to her quiet world and she retreated inward to her thoughts writing the great bulk of her poetry during the tumult of the war years. History would come to recognize her as an innovative poet and feminists now celebrate her skills. Dickinson's love of Shakespeare ran as deep as her faith, and she often

referred to him as the only truly indispensable author for anyone to read: "She read Shakespeare & thought why is any other book needed" (L342b). In one letter, she writes, "While Shakespeare remains Literature is firm" (L368). Meanwhile, Virginia Woolf at the turn of the twentieth century wrote modernist novels that offered a stream of consciousness that also refused to submit to rules of grammar, narrative, and form. Her severe depression combined with the horrors of World War I and then World War II rendered her a near invalid; her tragic response, in particular, cannot be overstated except that, like Dickinson and Cavendish before her, it fueled her writing. Today, we have categorized Woolf as one of the pioneers of the literary modernism she helped establish, but in her day, she refused to be restricted even by the style of her successful novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927). She expressed herself in a variety of forms, such as letters, essays, criticism, and one surprising fusion of fiction and autobiography in *Orlando* (1928) that bestowed on literature a character of absolute gender fluidity. Curiously, she judged both Shakespeare and Cavendish harshly and yet could not avoid following their paths. Her complaints of Shakespeare focus on the benefits he enjoyed that his imaginary sister was denied, and in her famous essay, she demonstrates frustration over the same points that Cavendish lamented: If only Judith had been educated, if she had been taught, if she had been allowed to explore those paths she yearned to explore! What greatness might the world have gained (*A Room of One's Own* 1929)?

The closer one looks, the more similarities between these innovative women one finds. Each had a problematic relationship with revision and publishing, each privileged a closed circle of friends, each experienced (and/or imagined) intimacy with women, each was noted for (or defined by) a demonstration of unconventional style in clothing or in their repeated challenges to social expectations. Can these similarities be a mere coincidence? Can it be just another example of the fact that there truly is nothing new under the sun? Might there be a deeper connection between these writers that tells the

story of how a desire for utopia is intricately tied to those in history who challenge convention, who play with gender, and who see the potential in utopia for accessing the fluidity the world's patriarchal structures demanded? Could it be that this is what they understood was Shakespeare's most valuable legacy? After all, it did not stop with Virginia Woolf.

In this dissertation, I have established connections between the foundation and development of the early modern English utopia, and its themes, with contemporary expressions of utopia through several interludes. I considered a music video that strove to rewrite and re-gender the destruction of one utopia for the colonial vision of another utopia. I considered a science fiction revision of history that demonstrates the same backward glances that Shakespeare and Cavendish evoked, only with a new technology that promises that the nostalgic ideal can seamlessly appear in the real. Finally, I considered the impact of future-focused virtual worlds that embrace absolute change in an effort to reach for the same utopian desire we kept searching for in the past, only now projected into the fluid potential of an unknowable space. These interludes may seem incongruent, but how contemporary culture reflects utopian desire, and how that conflict continues to plague us in every expression of utopia is fundamental to my goals with this dissertation. The search for utopia is inextricably bound to how society constructs gender and desire and it has been since the moment humanity first imagined a better future in contrast to an idealized past from their position in the "real." We cannot fathom how to improve our world without confronting the gender binary that refuses the possibility of fluidity that continually prevents that achievement. Moreover, the same impulse that drives new authors of utopia to try to temper the dissonant gender constructions will always exist. After all, John Mayer's *Woman as Wonderland* followed Shakira's "feminine" reclamation of the New World. The Doctor reveled in the gender-play of Shakespeare's stage, but still locked away the witches that mastered words as they tried to realize their utopia. Finally, the

consummate freedom of virtual worlds is growing swiftly, but is so threatening that world governments are scrambling to come up with legislation to curb the internet's chaotic freedom in an effort to maintain economic control over content with new efforts at censoring its fluid freedom.² The struggle to unshackle the new fluid forms continues in the face of equal struggles to squelch the ensuing dissonance. The conflict over utopia has established a binary between stasis and fluidity in the very form that cannot exist within relentless binary division. I chose only a few modern examples of this conflict, but innumerable examples, in infinite forms, could have demonstrated the same conflict. Feminist writers of science fiction alone, for example, offer a wealth of narratives that celebrate the utopic potential of fluid gender and desire. Writers such as Ursula Le Guin, Marge Piercy, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Margaret Atwood and Octavia E. Butler, published unconventional novels against the tide of expectation, and each imagined ambiguous utopias where fluid gender and forms of desire are celebrated; their work demonstrates the potential of reconstructing conventions more fluidly through utopian literature. Along the way, some struggled with entering a genre that would not have them, for example, Alice Bradley Sheldon wrote under the name James Tiptree, Jr. because publishers thought young male readers who would never read the work of a female author.

In conclusion, I would like to rest on a final example that offers hope in the same moment that it repeats this pattern. Yet another genre that has been historically associated with utopia, ambiguous gender constructions, and consistent challenges to convention, form, and genre is comic books, graphic novels, or to use the newest validating term, graphic literature. Unfortunately, graphic literature (like the science fiction it often includes) is generally disparaged as escapist literature, read only by young men, from its beginnings in the earliest superhero stories. The genre has grown

² In the US, two legislative bills were proposed in 2011 that, if passed, will dramatically curb the exchange of content on the internet: House Bill 3261, SOPA (Stop Online Piracy Act) and Senate Bill 968, PIPA, or PROTECT IP Act (Preventing Real Online Threats to Economic Creativity and Theft of Intellectual Property Act).

more complex and socially provocative over the twentieth century. Women superheroes appeared slowly, bearing the weight of oppressive gender assumptions in their images and narratives, to cater to the young male readers. In time, these images evolved as writers and illustrators understood the greater potential of challenging gender and desire with the more fluidly drawn characters, and the more complex story lines that fused fantasy, horror, crime, science fiction, and newly revised mythologies. The progression of the image of women in graphic literature has become an important influence in many areas, including virtual worlds and online gaming. The popularity of comic books grew from the fallout of the postmodern with its futurism, science fiction, and fantasy. Later, fluid generic fusions such as steampunk and cyberpunk emerged between mediums and across genres and forms. Comic books soon gave way to novels based on their characters and story lines, animated series and live action films, and even later rebooted versions of video games and new virtual worlds. The utopic beauty of these new genres is that one hardly knows where the boundaries between these forms are because what started in a comic book may be wholly rewritten by a film producer, only to be readopted from its new form in a new novel series, only to be reborn again, and again, in films, new novels, new series, before it leads back again to new graphic novels (and so on). Each new form rewrites the origin stories, repeatedly, through infinitely malleable forms.³ Testament to its postmodern origins, one can hardly know where any character began its life because the culture will take it, change it, and breathe new life into a character that may change into many incarnations in the

³ One example is Batman, a superhero character who first appeared in Detective Comics #27 in 1939 by Bob Kan and Bill Finger. He was a consistently popular character in several comic book series, but was subsequently reinvented for a 1960s television series that celebrated the character through popular camp humor and several animated versions. The character first appeared on film in 1966, but did not gain popularity on screen until 1989 with Tim Burton's *Batman*, and its sequels *Batman Returns* (1992), *Batman Forever* (1995), and *Batman and Robin* (1997). Christopher Nolan in *Batman Begins* (2005), *The Dark Knight* (2008), and the upcoming *Dark Knight Rises* (2012) reinvented the character, yet again. However, his character's original image has been absent from these several mass-market reinventions. The 1950's series included several story lines that had panels indicating overt sexuality between Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson. *Riddle Me This, Batman!*, edited by Kevin Durand and Mary Leigh (2011) contains several critical articles that explore the homoeroticism of the early series.

decades to come. Some characters and story lines have even been born of video games, like the wildly popular Pokémon,⁴ which was followed by graphic novels and several animated series. In these many liminal genres, the fluidity of gender and form emerges most seamlessly in the resulting conflict between utopias as they might be, and utopias as social convention wants them to be.

Between 1999 and 2007, writer Alan Moore and illustrator Kevin O'Neill worked on a wildly popular graphic novel series, *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, which was later collected into two volumes that then culminated in a third graphic novel called *Black Dossier* (2007). The series is celebrated for its dramatic writing, overwhelming intertextuality and gritty artwork in keeping with its view of a steampunk world that resembles the Victorian age, but is more of an alternate reality. The series follows a league of crime fighters working for the still-supreme British Empire. A mysterious woman leads the League, and in the early issues, she travels around the world in an effort to convince the other members to join. Despite the group's name, she is the primary "extraordinary gentlemen" and its most developed character. Perhaps the most "extraordinary" detail about these crime fighters is that we have seen them all before. They are all recycled characters, reformulated by Moore and O'Neill, and brought to life in the new fictional world of these graphic novels. The characters do not come from the colorful pages of comic books, but from the pages of literature. The first series follows Mina Murray, of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), as she gathers the members together for their first mission. She assembles the league from the antiheroes of Victorian fiction that would soon lead to pulp fiction, one of the predecessors of the comic book. The first new character Mina introduces to the group is Allan Quartermain, the great white hunter and adventurer from H. Ridder Haggard's novel series, which began with *King Solomon's Mines* (1885). Mina finds him in Cairo, half-dead, in an opium den; she arrives in Cairo with the help of Captain Nemo of Jules

⁴ Nintendo introduced Pokémon in 1996 as a video game before it grew to include an anime series and several films.

Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1870) and his Nautilus submarine. Next, they hunt for Robert Louis Stevenson's divided anti-hero from *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1885) who is now spending all his time as Hyde as he ravishes London. Their group is eventually complete with their most difficult character to locate, H.G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* (1897) who they find enjoying the pleasure of covertly raping teen girls at an all-girl's school that has been reporting a series of miraculous immaculate conceptions. At the end of the second volume, after they have saved the world, Hyde violently bludgeons and sodomizes the Invisible Man for hurting Mina, whom he adores. We discover that death is the only cure for his invisibility, and with that final violent act, the League ultimately dissolves.

The League fights against two great enemies of the British Empire who also emerge from Victorian literature: In the first volume, H.G. Wells's troublesome Martians from *War of the Worlds* (1898) must be stopped, and in the second volume, Sax Rohmer's Dr. Fu-Manchu is the master of a massive crime syndicate that threatens Britain (they encounter a large host of other familiar criminals and assistants along the way). Moore builds this world out of literature; it is plagued by the dangers of literature, and consequently, only characters from literature can help. It is intertextuality taken to a hyperbolic extreme. The references to works and characters, sometimes in the dialogue, sometimes only with a small illustration or image, are overwhelming and far too numerous to recount. Moore so masterfully wove references throughout this world of violence, sex, and brilliant artwork that it is impressive in its scope alone. The two series offer endless readings and commentary on the development of Victoriana and steampunk in modern graphic novels, but the final sequel to the series is particularly intriguing. In it, we find the collection of, and expression of, every element of utopia that I have discussed in this dissertation. It is one of the most vivid examples of my understanding of utopia; it represents the sum of how utopian literature demands fluidity, how it is continually reimagined within those

spaces, but most importantly, how the several themes are inextricably bound to utopia. Consequently, it is not surprising that Cavendish and Shakespeare (and Virginia Woolf, for that matter) cross paths within its utopic world in a very deliberate way. Despite the dramatic possibility this new utopic space allows, even this brilliantly freeing example demonstrates an effort to control the dissonance that emerges.

Black Dossier offers an elaborate story through an uncanny level of verisimilitude that fuses the world of the graphic novel with the real, the boundaries between the distant past of the dossier and the novel's present only add to the continual conflation of time and place. The plot focuses on the recovery of a mysterious dossier that is, conveniently, included in/as the graphic novel. The dossier is stolen from a decrepit government office building sometime in a distant future when the British Empire rules over a dark, postmodern nightmare of a world that looks a lot like the 1950s. The story starts with the mood and tone of a noire crime story in which a beautiful young woman seduces a government worker in a grimy pub after which he takes her down a dark, steamy street. The woman attacks him with the help of an equally mysterious young man, and they escape with the stolen dossier. As the story progresses, we read the dossier along with the thieves, and learn that the dossier contains a chronicle of the League's activities. We also discover that the League's activities did not begin with the League we came to know in the two original books, but stretches far back through history in several incarnations in which a collection of characters from the literature of that League's age gathers to fight for the common good. Interestingly, the dossier is not just a recording of each League and their actions, but a compendium of diverse documents related to the different Leagues. It contains a variety of forms, styles, and genre that supplement the history of each League through the actual literature in which they appeared. Each item is a work of literature that never came to light, but now readers the opportunity to discover the "real" fate of various characters. Sometimes, the dossier includes prequels, or sequels, and still other

times, lost works. For instance, one of the main characters in *Dossier* that we meet repeatedly is the immortal Orlando from Virginia Woolf's novel. A "lost" story, rendered in the dossier as an early comic book, illustrates that s/he was born a girl in ancient Thebes, and then lived through the centuries interacting with famous figures and in a variety of roles and occupations, changing gender along the way. At once, we gain a prequel of his/her life, and a sequel as well because Orlando appears repeatedly through to the end of the *Dossier's* story. S/he is in the graphic novel's story and in the dossier at once transgressing the boundaries of verisimilitude as the reader tries to hold on to the unstable lines between the several levels of the "literary" and "real."

Another example included in the dossier is a sequel to John Cleland's infamous *Fanny Hill* (1748) that continues Fanny's story as a letter she writes to Cleland describing her work with the League, only this time it is brilliantly (and pornographically) illustrated. Each literary example is written in the form, style, and "look" of the original literature's time. For example, the dossier includes the first act of a lost Shakespearean play that mimics Shakespeare's language while the typography, color, and style reproduce the folios. The lost play, dated 1620, is called *Færie's Fortunes Founded*, and includes as its characters, those who would be characters again: Prospero, Gloriana, Queen of England, and none other than Orlando, who keeps appearing in all the dossier's documents through the centuries. The thread tying all the Leagues to each other, and all the literature between them, is Woolf's Orlando.

There is a multiplicity in *Black Dossier* that accounts for the dissonance created when the reader is reading the volume and experiencing the story of the two mysterious thieves, who are reading the same volume as the reader at the same time. The volume in the reader's hands appears in miniature as it sits in the character's hands, and the reader's hand, sometimes even offering a sneak peak of the page to come. This creates the same *mise en abîme* we came to know in Cavendish's texts. The two thieves, we discover, are none other than Mina and Allan newly come from the

Fountain of Youth where they regained their vigor, youth, and extreme sexual desire (much of their time running from the government agents is spent having “graphic” sex). The agents chase them to recover the dossier, and as they flee, they progress through the dossier along with the reader. Eventually, they arrive at their own League’s story. We see hints of the Leagues that followed the Victorian “Murray League,” and learn that the next League emerges out of the literature of both World Wars and the popular pulp fictions that followed, but we go no further into the newer League’s actions.⁵ Mina and Allan escape their pursuers in hot-air balloon on the way to the North Pole. The graphic novel opens onto a map accompanied with a pair of 3-D glasses. The map is dated 1666, and its title: “Being a True and Faithful Mapped of Ye Blazing Worlde.” As the air-ship gets closer, Mina says, “It’s been so long since I’ve seen the Blazing World that I’ve almost forgotten what it looks like” and suddenly, with a turn of the page, we arrive in the Blazing World in all its magnificent, 3-D glory. Mina reminisces, “It always comes back to me the moment I see it. You know, I’m sure I used to dream about this place, when I was a little girl” and Allan answers, “I know what you mean, I think I caught a glimpse of the Blazing World in a vision once, during my opium years.” However, there is more to this vision than the individual worlds Moore creates in answer to Cavendish’s call. Of its location we are told that it is to be found “in four dimensional space” in the South Pole location of “Megapatagonia,” which is actually the same as the Blazing World in the North Pole. The two poles lead to each other, in endless circularity, towards the Blazing World, just as Cavendish imagined it. They fly over the land and the various animal people distract Mina; each is a specific embodiment of the animal-men Cavendish described in her text. They disembark and Orlando (now a man) welcomes them and embraces both Mina and Allan seductively as they walk together into the Blazing World for a far more graphic *ménage*

⁵ Several episodes of *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, Volume III: Century* (2009-2012) have been published. The new series stretches across the twentieth century and includes several new characters, along with Mina and Allan.

a trios to echo Cavendish's spiritual seraglio. Mina realizes that, like the virtual worlds Moore echoes, "this place looks different to how I remember it. Although in a timeless way, it's exactly the same." As we walk with them into the world Cavendish dreamed for us, we learn that this Blazing World contains infinite portals that connect it to multiple dimensions, and worlds within worlds, just as Cavendish foresaw. Apparently, "the trick is to close one eye, then another, so that you can see the coexistent zones separately," because the many worlds connected to the Blazing World exist simultaneously in the same space, just like a virtual world.

Moore and O'Neill's vision realizes most of Cavendish's details from *Blazing World*. From its simultaneous entrance at the two poles that exist at the same time, to the possibility of accessing different worlds and spaces, and even the suggestion of immortality, not only for the inhabitants, but also for the world itself that is changed but the same at once. In fact, this world is the absolute celebration of change because it facilitates the metamorphosis of the literary characters that readers like to imagine are whole and forever unchanging. Moore realized the power of Cavendish's utopic vision through this magical landscape populated by literature in infinitely evolving forms. The resulting world seems to be a direct response to Cavendish's utopic plan, and a realization of Umberto Eco's argument from *On Literature* (2002, 2004):

The world of literature is a universe in which it is possible to establish whether a reader has a sense of reality or is the victim of his own hallucinations. Characters migrate. We can make true statements about literary characters because what happens to them is recorded in a text, and a text is like a musical score. [...] But certain literary characters [...] leave the text that gave birth to them and migrate to a zone in the universe we find very difficult to delimit (8).

O'Neill's vision of the *Blazing World* is staggering in its detail and breadth, and it realizes the postmodern possibility of characters migrating between texts, within the narrative itself, and between worlds within texts. Moore and O'Neill have taken great care to preserving the detail of the characters, and their textual worlds, even as they allow the characters to evolve as characters, to undergo change in their new

visual/textual worlds, all to allow readers to sift through each tiny image and locate beloved figures somewhere in the vast expanse of literature. In a rare interview, Alan Moore discussed his vision for the series: "The continuum of the League represents the whole of fiction. Every fictional world and every fictional character that has ever existed—potentially at least—coexists somewhere in the world of the League. And, so that world, as you can imagine, is pretty much limitless." The infinitely fluid potential between literatures that he conceives as malleable worlds offer him "quite a territory" and he approaches the vast expanse with the intention of "knocking down the picket fences between one story and another" in order to erase the rigid boundaries between those textual worlds. The infinite variety and limitless possibility of folding innumerable characters and narratives into a new pastiche formulates, for Moore, a "unified field theory of fiction" that cannot help but emerge of the "worlds of imagination that have been around almost as long as we, as a species, have been around" (Amacker n.p.).

Moore's homage to Cavendish's *Blazing World* at the conclusion of this special issue illustrates how he reimagined a world from out of the academic circles; he recreated her world just as Cavendish's texts were once salvaged from library stacks where they sat, unread, except by a select few through the centuries. Furthermore, this progression also echoes Cavendish's own efforts to reimagine a utopia out of the fragments of the several discourses that would not include her. Moore did more than repackage Cavendish's world in a popular medium: he animated it, colored it, granted it depth and space through its 3-D rendering, and populated it with literary characters and creatures of every sort from Moby Dick flying through the air down to the ruler of the Blazing World, who is an Honored Duke of Milan named Prospero (followed around by none other than Caliban). Cavendish, it seems, was right to fill her world with creatures of her mind, and that is precisely the vision Moore captures when he fills the Blazing World with creatures of our collective, literary minds. The final breathtaking

image (after the triad of lovers retire to their room) shows Prospero, central and large as life, taking us on a final tour of the dramatic dreamscape of the Blazing World. He recites a soliloquy on the World as a continuation of *The Tempest's* epilogue:

Rejoice Imaginations! Quenchless Pyre burns on, a Beacon to eternity, its triumphs culture's proudest pinnacles, when great wars are ingloriously forgot. Here is our narrative paradise, brief tales made glorious continuity. Here champions and lovers are made safe from bowdlerizer's quill, or fad, or fact. Here are brave banners of romance unfurled to blaze forever in a Blazing world! (*Black Dossier* n.p.)

With that, the story ends, but the World does not. An unofficial companion to the *League* was published as *A Blazing World: An Unofficial Companion to the Second League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (Nevins 2004). This fan publication, captures and explains the countless references for those who read the series, but lack the literary knowledge and identify the countless references. In the companion, Cavendish is acknowledged as the author of *Blazing World*, but the *Black Dossier* does not mention her. Moore wanted to maintain the fluidity between the textual worlds to avoid the lines between literature and the real, and so, he only rarely mentions the authors of the original works (when he does, it is often through subtle details like place names). However, in *Black Dossier*, he mentions Shakespeare in reference to the play, and John Cleland as the recipient of Fanny's letters, and several others, thereby inviting the authorial voice to share a space with the fictional creations in their world. Cavendish, by all rights, might well have found a place in Moore's revision of her world. She granted such magic and substance to Moore and O'Neill's endeavor, and yet, her hand in imagining their utopia is missing even as her production of that world is celebrated. For all its celebration of utopia's potential, Cavendish is excluded from the world of her own making. Moore borrowed far more than just an idea from Cavendish: His pastiche echoes hers, his experimentation with genres, forms, and styles are as chaotic as hers, his celebration of fluid narrative echoes hers, and he even is notoriously reclusive and "wild" in his style and demeanor, like Cavendish. We are also never certain of time or place in either version of the Blazing World. Graphic novels are as

much a conflation of genres as Cavendish's hybrid texts were, and usually include examples of fluid gender, desire, and sexuality, and visions of utopia. From superheroes to adventure stories, comic books and graphic novels have captured the extremes of imaginative potential in seeing the world differently, frame by frame, and connecting language to art in a palpable way. They even offer a postmodern approach to dialogue where the pictures on the page appear in boxes and frames, spread haphazardly, often requiring arrows to guide the reader to which frame comes next, and words and thoughts appear in bubbles floating above elaborate, imaginative characters. In fact, they realize the postmodern utopia like no other genre, and yet still manage to build utopias of the feminized matter while restricting women's access their potential.

Kate Lilley argues that, in general, utopian writing has become "a privileged formal and theoretical domain for feminist women" and often demonstrates "a desire to subvert [...] categories and boundaries" ("Blazing Worlds" 101). Today, Lilley continues, utopias "are necessarily works of theory, of criticism, and of speculative fiction" and are of particular interest to genre theory:

Any utopian speculation brings with it a meta-concern with systematicity and taxonomy itself; with interpretive categories and the elaboration of, and motivation of, imagined space. Both discourses share a repertoire of tropes of exploration, demarcation, mapping and listing. But in this dialogue between utopian writing and genre theory, only Le Doeuff attends to questions of gender and sexual difference: the explicit focus is politics, more or less untroubled by sexual politics, and women writers rarely feature, despite the fact that they are now prolific and experimental producers of utopian discourse (103).⁶

Lilley references a long tradition of men's utopian literature that considered the politics of sexuality less often, and the place of women within that political system, until women writers explored, and later took hold of, the genre through a rich tradition of feminist science fiction. Utopia had been "the province of well-educated men, exploring and debating the possibilities for systematizing happiness—their happiness—

⁶ Michéle Le Doeuff's empirical philosophies confront misogyny in utopian literature, in particular, the works of Francis Bacon. Most notably, see *The Sex of Knowing* (2003).

within an 'enlightened' public sphere," which was partially defined "through the exclusion of women as agents, and by contrast with a feminized private sphere" (103-4). Utopias conveyed worlds that addressed what men wished to improve to achieve their happiness, and those spaces left little room (but much need) for women because they recreated the elements of society men believed hindered *them* from achieving *their* happiness. After all, many of the social elements that inspire the need for improvement stem from situations where women were denied control. In contrast, women utopists challenged the genre by considering it "gender-blind" and they used utopian writing "to participate in the metadiscourse on the relations of gender and genre, public and private" not necessarily to create a "separate sphere" or "alternative genealogy of utopian writing by women, except in so far as the texts [...] enact and explicitly theorize, the particular attractions of utopian discourse for woman" (104). Cavendish's works reflect these metadiscourses, given her extreme self-reference and the intertextuality within her own corpus. Her efforts have culminated in Alan Moore's ultimate explosion of metatextual discourse with *Black Dossier's* Blazing World. Moore's Blazing World contains the literary characters within the utopic world, and liberates them through the magical portals between poles that open wide any obstacles or boundaries they might encounter.

Women utopists, as Lilley continues, have focused "less on political systems and more on the possibilities and problems of gendered social life and the weight of custom—micropolitical questions of sexuality, maternity, education, domesticity, and self-government—while declining the burden of representing a fully articulated model of a new political order (118). They focused on the specific elements within the greater political system that directly influenced women's social and cultural improvement, but from a fragmented foundation. For instance, Cavendish's texts in all their superfluity, offered readers a microscopic view of the specific social changes that needed attention, instead of offering the entire map (just as Thomas More hoped to capture

the impermeable, perfect whole upon his page, and Alan Moore attempts in mapping the Blazing World as the whole of the literary universe). Perhaps her resulting texts are chaotic because of their overwhelming detail, but it granted her utopias variety and maintained a tone of constant potential that Moore here demonstrates to a more visual extreme. Cavendish, and indeed the women utopists that followed her into the seventeenth-century, privileged “sexual, social and educational over legal and/or political reform in utopian writing.” This does not necessarily indicate, according to Lilley, a “generic failure or incapacity” but rather a “specifically gendered insight into the diffuse, informal, ideological mechanisms by which women are controlled.” Moreover, it demonstrates “the perverse pleasures and transformations of utopian writing” that, for women writing in an uncharted genre, must have seemed infinitely promising (128). Cavendish did focus on many of the points that Lilley suggests were routine for the woman utopist; *Blazing World* (and, to varying degrees, her *Letters* and her plays) confronts the social, educational, religious, legal, and political systems that male utopists struggled to improve through the reinforcement or reinvention of the same patriarchal structures that had failed them in the real. Cavendish will not just prove them wrong, and will not construct a world that is merely opposite to their own, but instead will redesign the structures by fragmenting them through forcible inclusion of women if only to highlight the critical element of how the gender disparity within those systemic structures prevented the improvement that male utopists sought. Requiring the equality of these structures, and demonstrating how seamlessly they could be made more balanced, would facilitate true social improvement, disrupt the binary, and destabilize nothing less than the continued patriarchal dominance Cavendish insists is the very element hindering the utopia’s potential.

Moore and O’Neill’s *Black Dossier* is a particularly significant example of the results of the tradition of utopian literature as I have discussed in this dissertation. The conflict is so fundamental it could be demonstrated through a great many examples

from science fiction and fantasy, but Moore and O'Neill's final vision is so fitting an example it can only be called a "Utopia of Literature" (for no lover of literature would turn from the opportunity to revel with their favorite literary characters). Their utopia poignantly indicates how far we have come in finding comfort in the postmodern mimesis that defines many of our contemporary utopic visions with their more sensual, graphic, vision that elaborates expressions of fluidity in gender and desire. However, it also highlights the seeming impossibility of ever loosening the grip of the male utopist's desire to temper the dissonance utopia promises. What would it have cost Moore and O'Neill to include Cavendish herself as a resident of her Blazing World, or even listed her as founder, discoverer, or even simply as the scribe-character she was? It would have been seamless given the extreme detail and vast cast of characters one delights in identifying among the busy 3-D pages. Yet, he silenced Cavendish with the same hand that he took her world to create his own utopia. Men writing utopia needed women because their utopias would not be utopic without women. The men in *Convent of Pleasure* consider creating their own convent and realize quickly that without women, the task is impossible. All the men of *The Tempest* relied on Miranda alone to realize their various utopias for she already had her brave new world before her, but it is not Miranda at the helm of the Moore and O'Neill's Blazing World. Instead, it is her despotic father and her would-be rapist, Caliban, who are now living the ultimate utopian desire of immortality in Cavendish's Blazing World. Prospero's "every third thought" need no longer be of the grave because he now lives his utopia there, among the very literary "people" that populated the books he preferred to everything else (5.1). Men wrote the new lands they wanted to build into utopias as women, and they personified their ideals as women, and in so doing, instigated the very fluidity that made those spaces utopic. In the face of the resulting gender dissonance, they could only struggle to prevent women from accessing the very utopias their presence allowed in the first place. More often than not, it failed, as all utopias must when forced into

the binaries in which they cannot exist. Moore and O'Neill used a woman's utopia to create a space of glorious fluidity, but they could not let it be Cavendish's world. Cavendish had warned all men who enter her world that they would have to submit to her rules, but she also knew that in publishing her world she would risk it to the "danger and disreputation" of misuse and misunderstanding that we now call interactivity and inter-textuality. However, she also believed that her works would find greater recognition in the future; we would surely know what to make of it today. Despite Moore and O'Neill's egregious omission, I believe Cavendish would have appreciated their vision of her Blazing World as much as she would have reveled in the metamorphic freedom of Second Life, if only because, despite years of banishment into the stacks of old books, we are still talking about her and her Blazing World. And yet, for every Moore and O'Neill, we have a Monique Wittig, whose warring women in *Les Guérillères* burned the world as readily as the Empress burned hers to achieve utopia:

The women descend from the hill carrying torches. Their troops advance, marching day and night. They say, where shall we carry the flame, what land set ablaze, what murder perpetrate? They say, no. I shall not lie down, I shall not rest my tired body before this earth to which I was so often compared, turned upside down from top to bottom, shall be incapable of bearing fruit (126).

Wittig's women (like Cavendish in *Black Dossier*) are both named and nameless; they set their world ablaze and refuse to lie down on the land that was beaten into submission to create utopia. We set her world ablaze every time we discuss her in our academic journals and conferences, and in our classrooms, and even the readers of graphic novels, who may not participate in those circles, and may not know her name, will come to know her Blazing World and will make something of it.

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