

THE CONVENT OF MEASURE: PROSODIC PASSING AND
STABLE SUBJECTIVITY IN CAVENDISH'S
THE CONVENT OF PLEASURE

by

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ABSTRACT

Although contemporary criticism of Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure* often focuses on Happy's convent as a site of queer resistance, my prosodic analysis of the verse structure of the 4.1 pastoral scene suggests that Lady Happy's convent is not defined negatively in relation to the patriarchy (as in resistance); rather, her convent is established to reflect her positively defined homoerotic desires. The Prince's successful infiltration of Happy's convent depends, then, upon not only his temporary rejection of patriarchal imperatives but also upon his assumption of the "feminine" discourse that Happy establishes as the discursive currency of her convent.

The ways in which Happy delivers prose in scenes prior to 4.1 suggest that she prefers both content that glorifies nature and structure that demonstrates speed and poetic continuity. Likewise in the 4.1 scene, the disguised Prince delivers to Happy an erotic suit that succeeds because of its smooth, swift iambic trimeter form. The Prince's gender mimicry, then, extends beyond the standard adoption of cross-gendered clothing to an appropriation of positively defined, "feminine" ways of speaking. With this poetic gender mimicry, the Prince is able to infiltrate Happy's feminine utopia and collapse it from the inside by insinuating the patriarchal imperative of marriage into his otherwise feminine discourse.

The poetic mode that Happy espouses represents a mode of feminine resistance that is borne out in Butlerian theories of gendered resistance. Happy's convent, then, characterizes a need to move beyond received (and largely inaccurate) notions of Butlerian performativity and to shift focus toward the more manageable terms of iteration and citation.

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
I. A PROBLEM PLAY AND ITS THEORETICAL PRESSURES	1
II. A RELUCTANT INTRODUCTION.....	5
III. ZERO PLUS ONE.....	10
IV. ONE PLUS ZERO	15
V. AN ABSENT “AMOUROUS” VERSE	20
VI. PATRIARCHAL PARSING	29
VII. FEMININE FORMATIONS.....	38
VIII. “WE SHALL MORE CONSTANT BE”	44
IX. UNFORTUNATE FORMULATIONS	48
X. CITATION AND ITERATION.....	54
XI. CONCLUSION.....	63
WORKS CITED	67

I. A PROBLEM PLAY AND ITS THEORETICAL PRESSURES

Margaret Cavendish's *The Convent of Pleasure*, a problematic Restoration "comedy" in which the wealthy Lady Happy finds an exclusively feminine community, hinges on a broken promise. In 4.1, the Princess (actually, the disguised Prince) presents Happy with an impossible homoerotic contract whose violation, I think, pithily summarizes both the text's apparent contradictions and the critical difficulties entailed in their taming. S(he) assures Happy that they "shall more constant be,/ And in a Married life better agree" (4.1), but even a less discerning reading of the play's final scenes reveals a convent of anything but "constant" architectural and discursive integrity. Not only does Happy's convent eventually disperse, but the empowering, feminine discourse that was the linguistic currency of the little community is shuffled neatly away with a number of rapid modal, formal, and contextual shifts such that the affable, chatty Happy loses her voice entirely, adapting a terse and dumbstruck posture that, far from affirming the Princess's promised constancy, foregrounds the essential fluidity of the supposedly consistent self. The various sexual spaces that Happy occupies throughout the play (from willing homoerotic lover to brooding, silent bride to the Prince's treacherous masculinity) represent a compelling starting point for queer readings that insist the play's erotic transactions and deceptions are indicative of Cavendish's resistance to the heterosexual fantasy of stable gender roles. I will argue, however, that to suggest that the play's many postulations and upheavals exist *only* to disrupt sexual identity is, in some ways, to reenact the Prince's most grievous offense to the vocal and intensely brilliant Happy: the snuffing out of her voice.

In their introduction to *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader*, Sylvia Bowerbank and Sara Mendelson note that “*The Convent of Pleasure* presents a parodic critique of a gender order that postulates fixed polarities between the masculine and the feminine [and] unfolds as an ongoing debate over what constitutes ‘natural’ behaviour” (16-7). The connection, implicit here, between *Convent*’s “parodic” deconstruction of “fixed” gender and the queer imperative to disrupt the fantasy of fixed sexual identity is not lost on many Cavendish scholars. The play’s impressive number of shaky assertions (and its subsequent, shamefaced redactions) regarding the characters’ erotic identities make this play particularly susceptible to readings that highlight the play’s resistance to the standard masculine/feminine binary and the stable subjectivities¹ that such a paradigm is assumed to (en)gender. Theodora Jankowski, for example, refigures Happy’s chaste cloister as an arena in which virginity represents queer resistance to the patriarchy (“Pure” 218-55) The convent, for Jankowski, is a community that is primarily set apart, one that does not “adhere to any of the given terms” of gender signification or, by necessity, the standard categories of sexual identity (“heterosexual,” “lesbian,” etc.) (218). Similarly, Katherine Kellett explores the play’s linkage between performance and Butlerian performativity—categories that are often considered opposed—to track the resistant instability of the characters’ sexual identities (419-42). By placing interpretive pressure on the inconsistencies of character and identity in the play, Kellett produces a reading that finds in the characters’ indeterminate identities a model of resistant identity that resists the patriarchal taxonomies of hetero/homosexual and feminine/masculine. According to Kellett, a return to an earlier model of Butlerian

¹ Throughout this paper, I will be using three root terms (subject, self, identity) to signal psychological interiority (however constructed), and while I am aware that they connote varying degrees of constructedness (subject/subjectivity) or autonomy (self), I will be using the terms more-or-less interchangeably not only because I suspect that too much of one or the other makes a paper stale to read but also because I stress the need for a theoretical scheme that can account equally for social construction and individuality.

performativity that stresses, first, the ethereality and inconsistency of sexual identity will multiply the resistant possibilities of a text².

It is this theoretical insistence on the instability of identity, however, that rankles many of Butler's critics. Performative resistance, according to Butler, does not imply a resistant subject; instead, performativity foregrounds the very instability and constructedness of the sexual subject as an entity that the "discursive condition of social recognition *precedes and conditions*" (Butler "Imitation" 24). With such a model, the resistant subject, rather than an acting and willful agent, seems reformulated as a product of cultural determinism. Reacting against this ostensible deflation of the subject's agency, Sue-Ellen Case and Martha Nussbaum indicate several of the theoretical pitfalls of so complete an effacement of the subject (Case 4-8; Nussbaum 37-45). And although Kellett offers a brilliant queer reading of the play by insisting on this effacement, I argue that "queer," as a category of resistance within performativity that "can only ever disturb [an identity]" cannot adequately account for the positively-defined subjectivities in *The Convent of Pleasure* (Edelman 17). Although often flighty, Lady Happy is not nebulous. Although often led, she is not without direction. And most importantly for this argument, she is often formed, *but she is not formless*. By attending to the formal characteristics that are spoken by/attractive to Happy in the 4.1 pastoral scene, we can begin to understand Happy as a character of strikingly stable subjectivity. She does not just resist; she *prefers*—an indication of consistent desire that, I argue, cannot be completely subsumed into *only* theories of resistance, which focus, first, on ways in which subjects are *set against* (epistemologically negative); rather, an account of Happy's consistency requires a theory of identity that can attest to both erotic resistance *and* sexual identity as a potentially stable, epistemologically positive phenomenon. And while the

² This has always, of course, been one of Butler's chief concerns, but, at least according to Kellett, the clarifications and qualifications included in Butler's later works compromise in this regard (Kellett 421-3).

latter, amidst allegations of essentialist chauvinism, seems something of a taboo amidst a theoretical climate dominated largely (and, for the most part, for good reason) by social constructivism, Happy is a stable homoerotic entity. Formally, erotically, she has a type.

II. A RELUCTANT INTRODUCTION

In broad, crude strokes, the specific questions concerning the stability or ethereality of Happy's erotic identity are related, too, to the critical shift away from form and toward social constructivism. This transition has become so radical and complete that, for the most part, papers like this one that include keywords such as "prosody" or "formal" are expected to provide a very specific sort of preface before the business of puzzling out a reading can be taken up. I am speaking of the programmatically recited "yes-I-know-this-is-a-formal-reading-but-bear-with-me" introduction, and while I suspect that apologies of this sort have become commonplace enough for us to begin skipping them entirely, the erosion of form from curricula and research is so tightly entangled with the critical effacement of an idiosyncratic and (relatively) autonomous subject that I feel compelled to include something like it here. That said, while the academic shifts away from New Criticism coincided with a much-needed attentiveness toward history, the academy may have been too eager to discard one of its most delicate methodologies for accounting for stable, internally-consistent subjects: the formal analysis of poetic and dramatic patterns. We are hard-pressed, at present, to account for the dense, perdurable kernel of selfhood that often speaks beneath the nacreous accretions of culture, which must, of course, supplement our characters in significant ways but which must also sometimes yield to other modes of subject-formation (anatomical, chemical, indeterminate, or otherwise). We are skilled at reckoning instability, but my study of Lady Happy's erotic, formal, and subject-*stable* modes of resistance (i.e., not just rests, somewhat, upon a few of the outmoded assumptions of formalism

and the New Criticism. It is helpful, then, to take stock of these assumptions by reviewing the tensions among formalist readings, subjectivity, and historicism.

While antiformalism is one of the better documented shifts in critical procedure, Jerome McGann's "Keats and the Historical Method in Literary Criticism" remains an exemplary account of the charges against formalism, and it is difficult to find a neo- or historical formalist reading that does not, at least on some level, try to answer McGann's allegations, summarized in the following, often-cited passage:

The special character of poetry and art—its universal or eternal aspect so-called—is that it permits its audience to encounter the human experience of the poem as finished, not only in respect to the poem's immediate, specified circumstances, but in terms of all human history (past and future). The poem, like all human utterances, is a social act which locates a complex of related human ideas and attitudes. Unlike non-aesthetic utterances, however, poetry's social evaluations are offered to the reader *under the sign of completion*. That sign of completion is what formalists recognize as their object of study; i.e., the integral language, construction of the poem, or what is called "the text." But this text is not what we should understand as "a poem." Rather, what we ought to see is that "text" is the linguistic state [the cultural and historical, as well as the linguistic situatedness] of the "poem's" existence. (991-2; emphasis his)

It is this "sign," understood as the mystified depiction of the status quo—masquerading as a transcendent aesthetic experience—that post-structuralism and New Historicism has denied. And with great success, too, it seems. Today it is commonly held that no aesthetic product comes decanted from essential human experience without bringing along the cultural sediment from

which it arose. No literature is complete in itself; it is situated historically and culturally, just as our appreciation of it is situated. Accordingly, our job as critics is to read not only the poem but also the cultural and historical matrix that produced it.

This last point, however, represents one of the difficulties that many critics have attributed to the disavowal of formalist methodologies. For some critics, literature can become a simple mouthpiece of a given cultural moment, and it becomes just another mode of discourse that manufactures already-existing categories of oppression. But if literature is designed only to perpetuate the dominant cultural discourse, then, according to Stephen Cohen, historicism cannot easily account for works that represent an oppressed or revolutionary voice (4). The new historical tradition does not, of course, ignore social change altogether or even that it is unable to account for it; rather, much of new historicism has been too preoccupied with ways in which literature is culturally *produced* to provide a plausible theoretical account of how literature is culturally *productive*. As Cohen remarks on one of Greenblatt's seminal papers, "his essay is far more concerned with the movement of extraliterary materials into and out of the literary domain than with the specific ways they are shaped by that domain" (27). Cohen's critique proceeds from a thoughtful survey of the theoretical impetus to disclaim the New Critical view of a transcendent literature while preserving the notion that literature can represent ideological resistance (22-5). But despite promising theoretical positions from Louis Althusser to Raymond Williams, the new historicism has succeeded in the former while more-or-less disregarding the latter, especially in regard to formal considerations, which, even by the critics of new historicism, has been largely discredited for its supposed New Critical affiliations (18).

In fact, the increased attention accorded to modes of socio-cultural production makes it difficult for the new historical tradition to account for *voice* at all, at least the conception of voice

that presumes a speaking and willful subject. Although it is widely recognized that studies of form are considered complicit in “privileging privilege” by purporting apolitical readings of eminently political texts (Dubrow 61), there persists a sense that something is lost in so completely abandoning a methodology that places (perhaps, admittedly, too much) “emphasis on the subjective” and “plays up the individual” (61). Accordingly, critics such as Cohen are interested in acquitting studies of form from charges of wholesale hegemonic ventriloquism (disguised as essential, individual utterance) by compiling examples of form that are “historically *productive*” as well as “historically produced,” noting the ways in which form may enact change. More radical still are those scholars who, like George Levine, argue that “the ‘experience’” of literature has been “displaced by professional strategies of unsentimental analysis, demystification and historical contextualization” (4). Levine quite suspects, however, that the aesthetic product is, like the New Criticism’s conception of the self, “something that cannot be completely subsumed under larger categories” (10).

It is no coincidence that contentions such as Levine’s sound conspicuously similar to contentions against the Butlerian effacement of the subject that I outlined above. Both camps are interested in wresting their respective subjects from the grip of hard cultural determinism; both must do so without being guilty of charges of essentialism. The challenge, then, is to negotiate a course between the two standard accounts of subjectivity, by which either 1) the subject is rendered stable only by dint of his or her articulation of the dominant discourse or 2) the subject resists characterization altogether, erecting, rather, a “queer” posture that, like Kellett’s conception of Lady Happy, undermines not only the dominant discourse but also the tenability of stable selfhood in general. For the former, the subject’s voice is muddled into the compelling, orotund pronouncements of the hegemony. For the latter, the subject subverts the dominant

discourse by figuring his or herself *outside* of it; however, in so doing, the subject also forecloses the standard avenues by which the subject, according to Butler, is made concrete, effectual, and signified (Butler *Bodies* 15). By neither account can the subject claim ownership of his or her voice, the one an echo of what has always already been spoken by a particular hegemony and the other signified only by virtue of its voicelessness within a discourse that does not contain that which it abjects³. What is needed, then, is a theory of subjectivity that threads the seam between these two extremes. What my reading of *Convent* will demonstrate is that this theory is, in actuality, nested within the *old* theory of Butlerian subjectivity and that readings such as Jankowski's and Kellett's that insist upon the instability of the subject in *The Convent of Pleasure* are based upon a *misreading*⁴ of Butler that misses an intermediate position, within which a subject may resist the phallogocentric hegemony while simultaneously exploiting the stable modes of subject formation that such a discourse affords. This reading of *Convent*, therefore, profiles formal and contextual modes that *cite* the patriarchal discourse while refiguring it as the "unlivable" outside (8). These poetic forms represent a discursive consistency that recasts Lady Happy as a character whose erotic subjectivity is stable enough to evade the standard "Butlerian" ascription of queer instability while being resistant enough to avoid being a mouthpiece for the patriarchy. In this reading, I hope to help establish a critical model that eschews both essentialist chauvinism and social constructivism in favor of a more complexly reciprocal paradigm.

³ I will, in due course, reference the philosophies of subjectivity that assert that such abjections are, in fact, *constitutive* of a discourse, but for now I am referring only to the *critical* difficulty to put this philosophical disclaimer into the practical effect of a reading.

⁴ This misreading, at least in the case of Kellett's very clever reading, is intentional.

III. ZERO PLUS ONE

Necessarily, not only does this project explore Cavendish's *reformulation* of femininity in relation to the patriarchy but it also explores her reformulation of femininity in relation to *itself*, that is, what Valerie Traub refers to as "femme-femme homoeroticism." As the gathering body of criticism on the subject attests, early modern notions of female homoerotic desire are entrenched in complex and often contradictory representations of femininity, gynecology, and gender mimicry. That said, the most appropriate way to unravel such a knotted theoretical ganglion may not be to start with what early modern culture said on these matters; rather, many critics have rightly built careers from what it *could not* say. Discussing non-transgressive, femme-femme relationships (i.e., homoerotic relationships between women that do not involve the appropriation of a phallus), Traub writes, "To what extent, then, can women's relationships with one another be perceived as 'resistant', 'oppositional', or 'transgressive'? To the extent that they existed coterminously with patriarchal prerogatives, not at all. [...] [T]he 'femme' woman, who challenged neither gender roles nor reproductive imperatives, seems to have been so unworthy of notice that little note was taken of her at all [...] [She] did not signify" (164-5). This does not mean, necessarily, that early modern England did not have something similar to our modern conception of female homoerotic relationships, but what Traub and others adduce is that early modern patriarchal discourse could not easily account for them without resorting to language reserved for more familiar masculine categories.

As Thomas Laqueur argues in *Making Sex*, this insistence on terminological masculinity extended beyond early modern imaginings of gender to include gynecological and anatomical

categories, in which the vagina is described as structurally analogous to the penis, a comparison that cannot account for the morphological distinctness of the feminine member (and, by extension, gender). He calls this the “one-sex model,” writing, “The anatomists, physicians, and even midwives I have cited were writing to make their readers understand the body and its fluids in a particular way. They were articulating a set of representational or semiotic claims: that the womb must be *understood* as an interior penis” (109, emphasis his). Laqueur’s emphasis of the term *understood* is significant. He is suggesting that anatomists had little choice but to categorize the feminine anatomy under a patriarchal epistemology. The early modern cultural vocabulary was not furnished with terms sufficient to depict something as structurally distinct (with respect to the more “knowable” masculine anatomy) as a woman’s reproductive organs. If their work were to be intelligible, the woman’s body must be *understood* in masculine terms.

It seems, though, that the “privilege” of signification that recourse to masculine terminology affords is valid only through certain hegemonically sanctioned channels. Gender mimicry, integral to my reading of *Convent*, does not appear to be one of them. Recounting a particular case of French tranvestism, Greenblatt details the aforementioned, early modern deficit for exclusively feminine categories, which is here figured in mortal terms :

It seems that seven or eight girls from a place called Chaumont-en-Bassigni plotted together ‘to dress up as males and thus continue their life in the world.’ One of them set up as a weaver [...] and moved to a village called Montier-en-Der. There the weaver fell in love with a woman, courted her, and married. [T]he matter was brought to justice, and she was condemned to be hanged, which she said she would undergo than return to a girl’s status; and she was hanged for using illicit devices to supply her defect in sex. (66)

According to Greenblatt, the weaver's phallic appropriation is a capital offense because such "devices [...] enable the woman to take the part of a man" (66-7). Similarly, though more radically, Traub later asserts that the weaver's ploy is so dangerous not because of the "illicit devices," per se, but because they supplement her sexual "defect," a word she emphasizes to highlight the lack of early modern feminine signification (153-65). The court that tried her had no sufficient lexical mechanism for defining her transgression, so it must understand it negatively, backwards from the paradigmatic language of masculinity. They may not have known what this woman was as far as being categorically female, but they knew that she was *not man*, hence the discomfort with her prosthetic phallus and the vague use of the term "defect." The weaver is only represented discursively insofar as she is sexually transgressive, and her transgressions are only represented insofar as they are of a recognizably *phallic* nature. Had the weaver avoided masculine gender mimicry altogether and simply kept her lover as a "bedfellow" (a term whose vague usage attests to the special anxieties attendant to homoerotic desire and femininity), it is unlikely that she would have drawn the attention of the courts. But because she "supplements" her "defect" with masculine garb and something as powerfully signified as a phallus, she places herself within the mortal reach of patriarchal signification. It is only because she threatens the sovereignty of the masculine category that early modern discourse can signify the woman, although negatively, down to some lack, some question mark, some "defect"—a particular "lack" that achieves surprising representation (or lack thereof) on the early modern stage, for which feminine homoeroticism and gender mimicry must be only framed around the discursive resistance to femininity.

In Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, for example, Hippolyta's sister Emilia is represented as a proper Amazoness, committed against the heteronormative subjugation

of women and devoted to her virginity. Her heteronormative disavowals, however, often betray a homoeroticism that extends beyond notions of mere chastity. For example, when she speaks of Flavina, her childhood “play fellow,” she speaks with a “high-speeded pace” and becomes “out of breath,” perhaps physically retrieving her eroticism through the recollection of her relationship with her prepubescent bedfellow(1.3 83-4). At first glance, it would seem that Shakespeare and Fletcher have provided a rare vision of female homoeroticism with Emilia’s erogenous remembrance, but, more significantly, the recollection is “appropriately” penned within early modern patriarchal discourse, because it is exactly that: a recollection. It is represented historically or, as Traub states, it is “always already lost” (Traub 158). Thus, even if we can read Emilia’s breathlessness in this scene as a giddy frisson for a homoerotic remembrance, this homoeroticism is “simultaneously [...] acknowledged *and mastered* by male poets [or playwrights].” Shakespeare and Fletcher offer their audience a provocative vision of homoerotic subjectivity while simultaneously suppressing any present, onstage significance it might represent. Emilia’s homoeroticism is rendered safely in the remembered past.

Similarly Lyly’s *Galathea*, one of the most provocative early modern examples of female-to-male gender mimicry, is thick with suggested female homoeroticism without committing to its onstage signification. The masculine-disguised maidens Galathea and Phillida fall in love with one another, not knowing (though suspecting) that they are both women. In 3.2, the sexual tension culminates when Phillida suggests that they “into the grove and make much of one of another.” As Theodora Jankowski notes, Galathea’s and Philida’s offstage “much-making” probably describes an activity intimate enough to reveal the characters’ true sexes to each other (““Where there” 263); however, in a later scene (4.4), each character is still unaware of the sex of her counterpart; they still refer to each other as “sweet boy” or “brother.” Jankowski

suggests that the characters' persistent unawareness suggests one of two things: a) the absence of a penis makes it impossible for the "much-making" to be definitively sexual⁵; or b) the sexual amnesia with which Lyly controls female homoeroticism here has extended to the desiring female characters themselves (262-4). Either option is as likely the other, and both demonstrate the early modern reticence to represent femininity and female homoeroticism onstage, but the latter is perhaps more unsettling. If whatever happened in the grove was indeed sexual enough to have peeled the women out of their disguises, their later forgetfulness when they again don their masculine garb suggests that even the sartorial *appearance* of masculinity signifies more than naked, essential femininity. If this is the case, Lyly does more than control femininity by ignoring it; he *erases* it after the fact with little more than shirts and breeches.

⁵ Here, Jankowski follows the example of critics such as Traub, who attests, as we have seen, to the early modern anxiety toward feminine terms. Like the French weaver's transgressive passing, sex must be understood in phallogocentric terms. As Traub notes, "[S]odomy, by definition, entails *penetration*" (153, emphasis mine).

IV. ONE PLUS ZERO

Readers familiar with *The Convent of Pleasure* will recognize how significant these conceptions of feminine homoeroticism and female-to-male gender mimicry are in relation to the play's principal male character, the Prince. Because Lady Happy (his intended love) has founded an enclosed community of women committed against matrimony, it is essential to the Prince's successful infiltration that his passing reinscribe his masculine identity, and if Lyly's *Galathea* is any indication for the potency of gender-bending garb, the Prince's task should be as simple as presenting himself as one of Happy's female initiates. Gender categories, however, are not signified evenly. As discussed, the default discursive position of the early modern patriarchy is masculine, so masculine gender ascriptions are obstinate to reshape. Masculine-to-feminine gender mimicry, then, becomes much more straightforward. Clothing gendered feminine is not culturally substantive enough to override the sovereignty of the masculine aspect. A woman dressed as a man can be a man, but a man dressed as a woman may only be just that (or, worse, an actor). One plus zero is still one.

Thomas Heywood's *The Golden Age* provides an excellent example of male-to-female gender mimicry that, due to the ineffaceable authority of the masculine category, becomes transparent under any real scrutiny. In 2.1, Jupiter transmutes himself into a maiden so that he may infiltrate Diana's chaste train and freely woo the nymph Calisto. When Diana pairs the nymphs off and Jupiter is alone with Calisto, he engages her:

Jup. Oh, how I love thee: come, let's kiss and play.

Cal. How?

Jup. So a woman with a woman may.

Cal. I do not like this kissing.

Jup. Sweet, sit still.

Lend me thy lips, that I may taste my fill.

Cal. You kiss too wantonly.

Jup. Thy bosom lend,

And by thy soft paps let my hand descend.

Cal. Nay, fie what mean you? (Heywood 2.1)

Jupiter then takes Calisto offstage and rapes her. The scene's brutality notwithstanding, it is significant how easily Jupiter's gender mimicry seems discovered as such by Calisto. Although Traub notes that the play "makes no stand on whether her [Calisto's] resistance is due to an aversion to passion between women, because of Jupiter's haste and aggressiveness, or because of some inchoate suspicion regarding Jupiter's coercive designs," the language of the "courtship" suggest a complex interplay between the feminine discourse of Diana's train and how Jupiter, removed from his masculine discourse community, must misspeak (Traub 160).

Although Heywood provides his readers with no evidence that Jupiter's *physical* gender mimicry is anything short of perfect (he is, after all, a god and a notoriously talented shapeshifter), Jupiter is still recognizably Jupiter by his failure to suitably adapt an effective *discursive* gender mimicry with which he could integrate himself into Diana's community and its specifically feminine modes of characterization and representation, depicted as distinctly "soft". As the scene opens, Diana and Atlanta characterize their society by the soft beds in which they sleep, and Jupiter subsequently characterizes Calisto by the softness of her "paps" (2.1). By becoming "wantonly" hard and aggressive, Jupiter separates himself from the soft language of

Diana's society and Calisto suspects that her "bedfellow" is somehow different. In a dramatic tradition in which disguises seem to be a foolproof theatrical device, Calisto's sensitivity is important. That Jupiter appropriates only a feminine form without the accompanying discursive gender patterns suggests that his addition of gendered parts *does not* entail a corresponding addition of gendered roles. Jupiter's disguise is nothing more than a replacement of body by body that suggests that a feminine disguise is nothing but a shedding of masculine parts, a physical appropriation of lack that can replace sexual (biological) masculinity but cannot, as an undersignified category, replace *gendered* (cultural/discursive) masculinity.

The ineffectiveness of Jupiter's discursive gender mimicry is not limited to the content of his lines; so, too, the *formal* manner in which he presents his verses fails, a prosodic shortcoming that not only measures out his aggressiveness, but also renders explicit the *implicit* resistance of Calisto's responses. From his first line here, Jupiter speaks his suit (to use the words of Cavendish's Shepherd) in a formal structure suited to a god: two rhyming lines of ten iambic syllables. Jupiter's verse here is *heroic*, a verse structure traditionally accorded to epic and sweeping subjects. While there is insufficient evidence in this scene to identify heroic verse as a specifically patriarchal discursive model (unlike in *Convent*, discussed later), nevertheless, we can see that Calisto resists the formal configuration of Jupiter's lines even as the god tries to confine their conversation into the strictures of his verse form. The first line (Oh, how I love thee: come, let's kiss and play) is one-half of a heroic couplet, but rather than finish the couplet himself, Jupiter offers the prosodic responsibility of its completion to Calisto. Following the impressive examples of Simon Palfrey and Tiffany Stern in (cf. *Shakespeare in Parts*), I would like to suggest that Jupiter's gesture here is not merely one of prosodic significance; it is one of erotic significance.

According to Palfrey and Stern, the completion of verse forms, as shared between two speaking subjects, can connote a social or erotic communion (340-2). By leaving his first line ripe for the nymph's completion, Jupiter foregoes the erotic culmination of the scene (prosodic foreplay?), perhaps hoping that Calisto will arrive at his poetic/erotic mode of her own accord. Instead, Calisto seems taken aback by the forwardness of his proposition and the suggestiveness of "play" and leaves Jupiter's couplet dangling, asking, "How?" Still seeking a discursive and physical connection, Jupiter adds nine iambic syllables to her lonely, startled one and consummates his own heroic couplet, rhyming with himself in a prosodic turn of sexual and formal frustration. Afterward, in a tense admission, Calisto says that she "does not like this kissing," a line that does not lend itself easily to the unstressed, stressed iambic scheme that Jupiter clearly prefers. The god interjects, however, forcing the exchange back into pentameter. He gives three syllables ("Sweet, sit still") to complete Calisto's anxious seven before providing another complete line of ten, again rhyming with himself. The last exchange is almost formally identical, and the reader is finally left with Calisto's six distressed syllables ("Nay, fie what mean you?")—an unrhymed, unaccompanied, and unanswered line that foregrounds the formal and thematic disconnectedness of the two characters. Jupiter tries to insinuate his preferred verse form onto Calisto, but her rejection of his formal aggressiveness provides a significant and unnervingly appropriate backdrop for his physical aggressiveness. In this respect, Jupiter's gender mimicry is limited; it furnishes him with a body that allows him access to Diana's cloister, but when he speaks, Calisto's abrupt "How?" suggests that she recognizes him as something extrinsic to the feminine community, not because his disguise does not hide his physical masculinity, but because it *only* hides his physical masculinity. A review of the formal patterns of *Convent's* 4.1 pastoral scene reveals, however, that the Prince succeeds precisely

where Heywood's Jupiter failed: a complete male-female *discursive* gender mimicry, for which he is rewarded Happy's mistaken devotion and, eventually, the dissolution of her erotically resistant convent.

V. AN ABSENT “AMOUROUS” VERSE

In contrast to Heywood, Cavendish rejects the formal conventions of the patriarchy and maintains the distinctiveness of the feminine community through her depiction of the Prince’s gender mimicry, which represents the successful appropriation of an independent feminine discourse. The question remains: what conventions does the Prince reject in adapting a disguise for a distinctly feminine community? Are they historically masculine conventions? If not, can we even say that Cavendish is providing a discursive dimension to her resistance? If the precedents of poetry and theater are all composed in the masculine mode, how are we even to recognize feminine resistance? These questions, I think, are most effectively answered by recourse to what Cavendish chooses *not* to include in the characters’ courtship.

Luckily, the Princess⁶ provides an explicit account of what poetic values are rejected when she says

In amorous Pastoral Verse we did not Woo.

As other Pastoral Lovers use to doo.

Although the OED lists a specifically *prosodic* consideration of “verse” as the most likely usage (OED “Verse” 1.a), it is not implausible that the Princess could be referring to the *modal* conventions (rather than the metrical conventions) of the verse. The answer depends, finally, upon which word the Princess stresses here: an emphasis on “Pastoral” suggests that she is referring to the thematic capabilities of the pastoral mode, while “verse” most likely refers to the prosodic considerations within that mode. Both words suggest that the Princess has recalculated

⁶ Because I believe that the Prince’s disguise is consummate in this scene, I will refer to him, for now, in grammatically feminine terms.

the *formal* terms of this absent “Pastoral verse,” and, either way, we are dealing with a rather tricky negative deduction (the Princess is *not* using something), so, to understand the exact nature of the Princess’s recalculation of femininity, our first project must be to determine why, exactly, the Princess’s suit is not as pastoral as those of “other Pastoral Lovers.” Is it by the mode or meter? It makes sense to begin, then, by assuming that the Princess has not courted Happy with the conventional *modal* posture of pastoral. To determine what makes the Princess’s formal gender mimicry distinct (and, we shall see later, distinctly feminine) we must only follow her cue and ask what content of the 4.1 pastoral scene is set against the modal demands set down by “other Pastoral Lovers.”

If the most straightforward pastoral convention is the incorporation of the shepherd, then perhaps we need to look no further to identify how the Princess differentiates her pastoral voice from the mode’s historical conventions. While there *is* a Shepherd, who, appropriately to pastoral, is frustrated by Happy’s rejection of his erotic “suit,” and while the Princess appears in decidedly pastoral “Masculine Shepherd’s Clothes,” readers are likely not to forget her “Princely [...] Presence” so easily. If the *sine qua non* of pastoral is its investment in the lives of simple (poor) shepherds, then we must understand the Princess’s lowly habiliments as a sort of gender mimicry similar to Jupiter’s in *The Golden Age*. A shepherd’s hook does not a shepherd make. Hers does not represent a genuine induction into the socioeconomic *hortus* of the lowborn; it is a hostile incursion of gentility into a locus that is otherwise free from courtly intrigue. One may think, then, the erotic pact contracted between the Princess and Lady Happy does not constitute conventional “Pastoral verse” because the two lovers do not share the social simplicity of “other Pastoral Lovers.”

The shepherdness of the pastoral shepherd, however, has never been a matter of genuine representation, and as we will see, there is ample room in the pastoral canon to include figures of wealth and privilege. William Empson explains in his foundational *Some Versions of Pastoral*, that “Proletarian literature [...] includes such folk literature as is by the people, for the people, and about the people [...] whereas pastoral though ‘about’ is not ‘by’ or ‘for’” (6). Translated historically, pastoral literature is “about” the people insofar as shepherds are represented, but it is a figuration whose primary operation consists of “exposing the best side only of a shepherd’s life, and in concealing its miseries” (Pope 27). In his celebrated theoretical formulation, Empson qualifies pastoral as a mode for which the honest depiction of the low-born has never been a defining impetus. When we read the shepherds of Virgil or Spenser, we are not reading shepherds as the physical creatures that they really are; rather, we are reading the “culture-specific significance” of the shepherd, a significance that is groomed in the court rather than tilled in the fields (Montrose 416). Nor is this notion a scrap of presentist theory applied retroactively to Renaissance imaginings; George Puttenham’s 1589 *Arte of English Poesie* seems acutely aware of a distinctly aristocratic pastoral when he notes that its content is composed “under the veil of homely persons [...] to insinuate and glance at greater matter, and such as perchance had not been safe to have been disclosed in any other sort” (128). Through pastoral, the young aristocratic poet may announce his (in almost every case, his) courtly discontents by dressing them down as shepherds and sheep. We should not be surprised, then, to see the Princess similarly decked: noble mettle clothed in humble matter.

But clothed how well? If, as Puttenham notes, pastoral is a courtly contrivance, what are we to do with the *ostensible* nobility of the Princess? Cavendish’s intent here is not “to insinuate and glance.” Although the Princess has changed her dress, she is the Princess still. If indeed

Cavendish wishes to play the traditional pastoral poet and critique the court, her inclusion of a princess represents a rather straightforward manner of doing so. And as Puttenham hints, so apparent a critique would be considered unbecoming or even dangerous for prior pastoral poets. Before Shakespeare, pastoral poets generally followed the Virgilian formula, which was, according to Paul Alpers, “The poet represents (himself as) a shepherd or shepherds,” but the turn of the seventeenth century witnessed a slackening of this convention, enabling the shepherd to be supplanted by the more inclusive “pastoral speaker [...] who may not be identified with the country and its occupations but whose function and presence are like those of the herdsmen of traditional pastoral” (185-6). Thus, finding himself exiled from the “envious court,” Duke Senior of *As You Like It* can find “tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,/ Sermons in stones, and good in every thing” (2.1 4; 16-7). While not strictly a bucolic personage, Duke Senior is still able to sustain the pastoral mode, speak its “tongues,” without having been reared among its folds and without giving the reader a sense of irony (Alpers 73). Characters such as Shakespeare’s Duke Senior and Cavendish’s Princess (and Lady Happy, for that matter) can come from the court without violating the pastoral mode insofar as they have a certain cultivated sensitivity toward the countryside and its attendant charms. The “essential trick of the old pastoral,” described by Empson as the mystification of a “beautiful relation between rich and poor” can be sustained by pastoral speakers such as the Princess, even if those speakers have much more to do with the former (rich) than the latter (poor); this implicit mystification simply becomes, after Shakespeare, much more explicit. Pastoral is a courtly form, and the Princess, despite (maybe even because of) her courtly standing, is a pastoral speaker.

We are still at a loss, however, to determine exactly what the Princess means by remarking upon the non-pastoral countenance of her pastoral suit. We might do well to find a

more expansive definition of pastoral and its mechanisms, but that has historically been an under-nourished area of criticism. Interestingly, like Formalism, it is pastoral's mystifications, rather than its machinery, that have attracted scholastic attention, and although critics have conjectured, albeit briefly, about the historical or textual ligaments that support those mystifications, most provide expansions (though insightful expansions) of William Empson's original postulation: that pastoral "gives a natural expression for a sense of social injustice" (16). For example, Renato Poggioli's *The Oaten Flute* outlines a pastoral that contracts its mystifications primarily through "retreat" and "wishful thought" (1-2), an idea that has recently been refurbished in Terry Gifford's *Pastoral: The New Critical Idiom*, in which he states that pastoral, "[e]ven at its most culpable—the moment of willful retreat from social and political responsibility—[...] may be more strategized than mystified" (11). While overdue and politically sophisticated, stances such as these, however, do little for us here. We have seen that the Princess's modal relations to the countryside are pastoral still, regardless of their being strategized or mystified. Such evaluations are, in this case at least, peripheral to the primary task that the Princess has charged to us, for which we may need a more expansive definition of what does (and thereby does not) define pastoral.

The most helpful critical traditions in this regard seem to be those that distinguish themselves, not by disavowing the foundational works outlined above, but by expanding their considerations to the cultural or textual kernels around which pastoral pads mystifications. Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* is perhaps the first earnest exploration of the socio-economic factors that frame pastoral's emergence and durability, and, similarly, the works of Louis Montrose analyze pastoral's historical functions (see especially "Of Gentlemen and Shepherds"). Despite the novel evaluations of these critics, however, pastoral remains an

amorphous and permeable form, and any inquiry such as ours that tries to identify pastoral (or non-pastoral) elements of a piece, is bound to run into difficulties of classification. Luckily, much of the work has been done for us by Paul Alpers and his felicitously named *What is Pastoral?*, an exhaustive study of the textual organs by which pastoral moves. Unfortunately, however, because Alpers's is one of the most sophisticated accounts of pastoral, anything presented here in this short paper must seem reductive, and though I have tried to cull from his work what I think to be the most significant pastoral mechanisms, my treatment of *What is Pastoral?* must necessarily be a limited one. Even still, it is helpful insofar as it presents a few easily recognizable criteria against which we may judge our Princess's own pastoral scene.

I have already spoken at length about pastoral's insinuated courtliness, for which I am heavily indebted to Alpers, but aside from the subtle courtly trimmings of the mode, Alpers discusses pastoral convention as a means of "convening." He says,

A convention is a usage that brings human beings together; a pastoral convention brings them together under the figure of shepherds [...] The literary conception of the shepherd's strength relative to his world explains why pastoral is so 'conventional' a form: as opposed to epic and tragedy, with their ideas of heroic autonomy and isolation, it takes human life to be inherently a matter of common plights and common pleasures" (93).

We might not expect to find this pastoral sense of rural conviviality in this play, for which sequestered "retiredness" is a central organizing conceit (1.2). Additionally, this seclusion (from the "common plights" of marriage) is possible, in this case, not by a *congress* of similarly-stationed gentlewomen but by the singular will (and privileged resources) of one Lady. The convent that arises is not an edifice built in the conventional/communal spirit of traditional

pastoral; built by a single woman, it represents an escape from a world of masculine-sanctioned horrors (listed, catalogued, and performed in the play-sequences of 3.2-3.10). In other words, the convent itself is conceived as “isolation,” and its architect, as the principal agent of the first half of the play, possesses the “heroic autonomy” that is beyond the pastoral shepherd’s “strength relative to his [or, here, her] world.”

There is a way, however, to understand Happy’s convent, while not strictly pastoral in its seclusion and its individually-willed conception, as containing from the outset some pastoral germ that reaches its fruition in the recognizably pastoral/communal 4.1 scene. If Happy’s convent is an escape for the privileged and if pastoral, as the critics above attest, is a privileged (Empson, Williams) escape (Poggioli, Gifford), then there is a way in which one could argue that *all of The Convent of Pleasure* is pastoral. Unfortunately this argument would be wrong, but it is not as huge a leap as one would expect. The convent, as it is conceived by Happy, is a courtly fabrication, a mystified fable, and a hopeful escape; were it not for the play’s emphasis on Happy’s individual agency and the convent’s selective isolationism, it would be distinctly pastoral. Appropriately however, what we see in the transition between 4.1 and the earlier scenes is exactly what Alpers prescribes: a resituation of priorities from “heroic autonomy” to “common pleasures.” While the operative scene begins privately with Happy rehearsing her erotic thoughts about the Princess, the language in the moment of modal transition into pastoral is especially significant to Happy’s “strength relative to [her] world.” After worrying over the unnaturalness of homoerotic desire (Happy, remember, has enlisted herself as a handmaiden to Nature) (1.2), Happy is joined by the Princess, who quickly allays the Lady’s fears, and after an excursus on the naturalness of innocent love that prefigures the Arcadian scene that follows, the women “*imbrace and kiss,*” and

The Scene is open'd, the Princess and L. Happy go in. A Pastoral within the Scene.

The Scene is changed into a Green, or Plain, where Sheep are feeding, and a May-Pole in the middle.

L. Happy as a Shepherdess, and the Princess as a Shepherd are sitting there.

Enter another Shepherd, and Wooes the Lady Happy.

Interestingly most important to us among these details, the surreality of which is probably owing to the play's designation as closet drama, is also perhaps the most banal. While shepherds, shepherdesses, may-poles, and greens can be important imagistic indices for a pastoral scene, I think that Alpers might agree that the most pastoral element of this batch of stage direction is its being "open'd." This is not a simple matter of transitioning from one scene to another; rather, the openness here suggests an emerging laxity in the boundaries of the cloister that, according to the scene immediately prior (3.10), is supposed by the gentlemen outside "never [to] be dissolved." The pastoral transition is one from private contemplation to communal celebration as the scene gradually piles its *personae* into the "open'd" scene. The Princess, an unspecified Shepherd, Madam Mediator, and an entire detachment of amorous and dancing shepherds and shepherdesses rush onto the "Green," cleverly dramatizing in literal terms the figurative convention of communal pastoralism. The scene is opened; the convent opens, and, in so doing, it becomes genuinely pastoral. By all theoretical accounts of the mode's thematic powers, the 4.1 pastoral scene seems much too pastoral to warrant the Princess's evaluation of the mysterious, *non-pastoral* "verse" upon which her suit is contracted. According to mode, the scene is sufficiently pastoral, but we have still yet to account for the Princess's strange claim to poetic uniqueness:

In amorous Pastoral Verse we did not Woo.

As other Pastoral Lovers use to doo.

If the Princess is not calling attention to the modal distinctiveness of her suit, her “Pastoral Verse” must, I believe, refer to the *formal* character of her verse compared to that of “other Pastoral Lovers.” I will argue that there is something decidedly non-pastoral in the prosodic construction of both the Princess’s suit and of Happy’s approval. To understand why the Princess courts Happy with a distinctly non-pastoral discourse, we have to look at the meter of the courtship, and more importantly, to understand why these verses are distinctly *feminine*, we have but to look at the first pastoral speaker—a Shepherd, a *man*. With the sudden infiltration of masculine characters, however, we must also ask ourselves an unfortunate question: If the pastoralism of Happy’s successful courtship depends upon an opening of her convent, to whom does it lie “open”?

VI. PATRIARCHAL PARSING

Because the formal/ideological configurations of the 4.1 scene depend upon a stepwise erosion of syllables from iambic pentameter to iambic trimeter, it is most helpful to begin with the first, less successful “suit” for Happy’s affection. After the scene opens, a Shepherd enters the “Green” and propositions Happy with an elaborately-constructed quatrain of heroic verse (stressed (/) and unstressed (o) syllables indicated):

 o / o / o / o / o /
Shepherd. Fair Shepherdess do not my Suit deny,

o / o / o / o / o /
O grant my Suit, let me not for Love die:

o / o / o / o / o /
Pity my Flocks, Oh save their Shepherd’s life;

o / o / o / o / o /
Grant you my Suit, be you their Shepherd’s Wife. (4.1)

In his suit, the Shepherd gives us a quatrain of heroic verse (rhymed couplets of five iambs per line), and the structural demands of such a form is apparent both within each end-stopped line (each discrete idea is completed on the last syllable) and the rhymes that accord *across* the lines. While I do not want to distract from the Shepherd’s very significant formal shortcomings by mentioning the details of the Princess’s prosodic/erotic successes, it is important to note that the poetic appeal of the Princess’s suit depends, I argue, upon an imagistic fluidity and changeability (gendered feminine, discussed in greater detail) that a more differentiated and regulated (gendered masculine) verse form such as the Shepherd’s is not likely to express. I would argue, too, that the Shepherd’s suit, its images temperately paced within the respectable pentameter

strictures of its end-stopped and rhymed lines, demonstrates such cautious prosodic trigonometry that even the *caesurae* are planted and shaped with all of the measured care and manicured labor of a topiary. If, indeed, early modern masculinity may be measured by order and differentiation, then perhaps it is *not* the size of the boat that matters here; the Shepherd has mapped the motion of the ocean with the pulse of his caesurae. Happy's eventual rejection (importantly, not of the Shepherd himself, but of his words—the “Love-Suit” blown to her by “the “Winds”) is all the more significant as a code to her homoerotic subjectivity.

While often neglected in discussions of form, the caesura was a crucial organizing device for the early modern poet. Indeed, George Puttenham identifies its usage with more civilized verses, and he prescribes strict guidelines regarding its dosage, noting, “If there be no caesura at all and the verse long, the less the maker's skill and hearer's delight. Therefore in the verse of twelve syllables the caesura ought to fall right upon the sixth syllable; in a verse of eleven upon the sixth also, leaving five to follow; *in a verse of ten upon the fourth, leaving six to follow*” (164, emphasis mine). Thomas Campion, in his *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*, agrees: “[T]he naturall breathing place of our English *Iambick* verse is in the last sillable of the second foote [after the fourth]” (13, emphasis his). The arbitrary nature of this subdivision notwithstanding (why not split the verse of ten cleanly in fives?), we can scan the Shepherd's suit and see that it accords with the demanding formal strictures of heroic verse *and* the caesurae attendant to the ten-syllable line. After every fourth syllable is either an actual orthographic comma or an implied caesura of equal weight (e.g., after the initial address of “Fair Shepherdess”), which, according to Puttenham, signals the “clear distinction of voices” in “the most laudable languages” (163). Because the very obvious (perhaps, deliberately, *too* obvious) organization is one of the defining features of the Shepherd's speech, it is reasonable to

conjecture that Happy is reacting against precisely that organization; as discussed, the Princess's more successful suit lacks the tempered pace of the Shepherd's pentameter, and it is perhaps not unimportant that Puttenham notes that the Princess's trimeter is a form too "delicate" and swift even to support the carefully apportioned compartmentalizations of a proper caesura, which, tellingly, the Shepherd also abandons for a time after his rejection frustrates and disarranges the proportions of his lines.

After Happy dismisses him, he pleads to Madam Mediator,

Good Dame unto your Daughter speak for me.

Perswade her I your Son in Law may be:

I'le serve your Swine, your Cows bring home to Milk;

Attend your Sheep, whose Wool's as soft as Silk;

I'le plow your Grounds, Corn I'le in Winter sow,

Then reap your Harvest, and your Grass I'le mow;

Gather your Fruits in Autumn from the Tree.

All this and more I'le do, if y'speak for me.

While the Shepherd is not yet obliged (or outright unable) to abandon his heroic verse for a less structured mode, we can see in the scattered dispersion of his caesurae that he perhaps did not foresee his suit to fail. The majority of the Shepherd's lines here lack the parsed differentiation that his previous lines boast with their deliberately rationed caesurae.⁷ His first couplet, importantly following his rejection, is especially rambling (Puttenham might call it "barbarous"), and he does not move toward a more regular distribution of pauses until the caesurae, a structural

⁷ It's important to remember here that the strictures of any reading of structure, even this one based on what looks like the statistical placement of caesurae, is never completely empirical. There is no one-to-one relation between refinement of voice and "proper" distribution of caesurae. We are fortunate in this example only insofar as Cavendish's Shepherd has provided us with a prior example of a quatrain with "perfectly" arranged caesurae.

means of control, accords with a significant shift to *content* of control. While his first quatrain (“Fair Shepherdess [...]”) is a proper courtship—a supplication to the woman that demonstrates the mistress/servant relationship dramatized earlier (3.1)—the content of the Shepherd’s frustrated appeal boasts a trait that must prove ineffectual to a woman who has earlier pledged herself to the natural world (1.2). The Shepherd inadvisably represents himself as a man proud of his agrarian domestication of natural forces: “Perswade her I your Son in Law may be:/ I’le serve your Swine, your Cows bring home to Milk;/ Attend your Sheep, whose Wool’s as soft as Silk;” (4.1). The stumbling disorganization of the first line contrasts with the coherence of the second and third, whose context of agrarian domination is matched with the restoration of the regular 4/6 caesurae, a means of structural control to accompany the Shepherd’s purported mastery over nature. What the Shepherd fails to realize, however, is that Lady Happy, as a pledged attendant to unbounded nature (see, for example, 1.2 and 2.2), would be unlikely to appreciate the artfulness of his bridled structure and the bridling content of his poetics. We cannot, however, begrudge our pastoral speaker; he is only voicing the “appropriate” concerns of the patriarchal discourse, wrung though it is throughout with the standard early modern anxieties concerning philosophical/cultural/sexual (in addition to prosodic) organization. Understood through the unique cultural moment of the Restoration, the Shepherd’s lines are not only exceptionally well-wrought, they are also a firm, masculinized statement about the proper state of the world. Their juxtaposition among other, less intricately organized poetic forms and their failure in light of these alternative forms make Happy’s choice something of far greater import than a mere expression of her erotic preference. Happy is not only rejecting the Shepherd; she is rejecting the patriarchal conceptions (philosophical, religious, prosodic) of the way the world must be understood in order for the patriarchy to control it.

Because of the tense socioeconomic fault lines in seventeenth-century England, slipping and catching again through the Interregnum and the Restoration, and because of the grim philosophical appeal of the chaotic world-systems of Ovid and Lucretius, the latter half of the seventeenth century experienced a renewed interest in stable metrical systems. The prosodist Paul Fussell Jr. writes,

It seems apparent that many of the late seventeenth-century prosodists were attracted to the conservative system of stress regularity mainly because it seemed to offer, when fused with the matter of poetry, a means of restoring to that matter the order and purposive regularity of which the naturalistic current in philosophy during the seventeenth century had helped deprive it. (39)

According to Fussell, Cavendish is writing from a discursive climate in which the need for prosodic stability is a gradually emerging issue. Conversely, an absent or otherwise slipshod meter indexes an ill-disciplined morality in the author, and, in the most radical cases, metrical irresponsibility is related to the Adversary himself. In *A Discourse Concerning Vulgar Prophecies*, John Spencer notes that divine inspiration may be borne either by the “Prophetick Spirit”⁸ or the Holy Ghost, a “rational” and “well-disposed” (gendered masculine) force, the truths of which were often soothsaid in well-proportioned verse (54). False prophecies, on the other hand, are delivered with “halting meeter [sic],” “affected barbarisms,” and a “stile fluttering and uneven” that are characteristic not only of bad poets but also of “all the Devil’s Predictions” (50-1). Considering the spiritual and philosophical significations of stable verse, it

⁸ The metrical nature of the prophetic spirit is interesting to any study of early modern prosody. Spencer must somehow account for the prose prophecies of such New Testament prophecies as the Revelations, but rather than conceding, of course, that those prose prophets are characterized by moral irresponsibility, Spencer notes that the Prophetic spirit is “quick and vehement, and such as the flow feet of a Verse cannot hold pace withal” (54).

is significant that the Shepherd chooses a verse form that historically demands a high degree of metrical structure, and it is more significant still that Happy rejects him.

It might be helpful here, though, to slow down a measure and recall that it is not, on the surface, the early modern dogma of metaphysical stability that the Princess is setting her verse and erotics against. It does not seem that we have any evidence that Happy or her suitor is explicitly espousing a particular metaphysical schema. She *is*, I think, saying something about the patriarchal and poetical preoccupation with stability and proportion, but we must remember that Cavendish is obliged to, in the words of George Puttenham, “insinuate and glance” at these matters. We must remember that, ostensibly, the Princess’s successful “Suit” to Happy is opposed only to the verse of “other Pastoral Lovers” so before we discuss the precise nature of Happy’s homoerotic alternative there remains something to be said about the pastoral tradition and its formal considerations. Can the Princess’s strange assertion refer to the heroic (masculine) verse of older pastoral forms (I believe it can)? Or is she citing something that we have missed (I believe she is not)?

Although it must be admitted that pastoral poetry has enjoyed a particularly diverse history of form, its flexibility due in part by the ostensible simplicity of its content, pastoral poetry has a very real historical relationship with heroic verse. I have already mentioned that, despite its provincial subject matter, pastoral is entangled with the intrigue of king and court. This relationship is associated with an additional historical engagement that is often neglected in criticism that treats the mode. Pastoral is a cousin to the epic; even in its ancient inception, pastoral was a heroic form. The first pastoral poem was composed not only in the same formal manner with which epic poetry was penned but also Theocritus’s “Idyll 1” shares both the verse structure of epic poetry and *ekphrasis*, a poetic device generally reserved for heroic descriptions.

Thyrsis, one of the pastoral speakers of Idyll 1, is offered an elaborately inlaid cup of exquisite craftsmanship;

Then, on the inside, a woman is fashioned, some masterpiece of the⁹
Gods' manufacture, outfitted with robe and with diadem. By her
Side are two men with elaborate hair-dos, disputing in speech, one
After another, but none of their dialogue touches her deeply, [...]
Next to this group is a fisherman in low relief and a scabrous
Rock from whose top the old fellow is eagerly dragging a big net
In for the cast, like a person who labours with might and with main. You'd
Say he was "seineing the speechless" with all the strength of his limbs, the
Sinews all over his neck are so terribly painfully swollen; [...]
Some little way from the scene of the old man worn by the sea a
Vineyard is pictured as gorgeously laden with ripening bunches
Which a small boy is protecting, recumbent on top of a stone wall;
Round him two foxes are busy: (4)

Many scholars will immediately recognize the improbable depictions of image and (impossibly) action as the same device that Homer deploys with his representation of the divinely-wrought scenes on Achilles' shield, and Paul Alpers traces this *ekphrasis* also to the elaborate design on the shield of Heracles from an eponymous fragment of questionable authorship (139-40). The *ekphrasis* of Idyll 1 demonstrates that pastoral poetry, from even its very first incarnation, is engaged with the form of heroic verse (see footnote 9) and content of epic poetry.

⁹ Because it is here translated, the language of Idyll 1 lacks the significant prosodic connections to heroic works, but the original passage is in dactylic hexameter (six metric feet of three syllables—stressed, unstressed, unstressed), which is the Greek heroic verse. It is also important to note that, due to linguistic differences, English strains under the weight of extended metrical feet, such as the dactyl, and so English heroism is conventionally depicted by rhymed couplets of iambic pentameter.

Although it is true that Terry Gifford notes that “to refer to ‘pastoral’ up to about 1610 was to refer to poems or dramas of a specific formal type in which supposed shepherds spoke to each other, *usually in pentameter verse*,” I have also noted that pastoral has a rich history with diverse prosodic forms, and it is important to remember that there is no “official” verse structure for pastoral (1, emphasis mine). Indeed, even within the “August” month of Edmund Spenser’s *Shepherd’s Calendar*, we see an impressive repertoire of verse structures:

WILLIE

[In iambic pentameter] Wherefore with myne thou dare thy musick matche?
Or bene thy Bagpypes renne farre out of frame?
Or hath the Crampe thy joynts benomd with ache? (90)

Later:

PERIGOT

[In iambic tetrameter] ‘It fell upon a holy eve,

WILLIE

Hey, ho, hollidaye! [Indeterminate verse form consisting of one spondee and a concluding dactyl (92)

The diversity of the pastoral form, demonstrated in a conveniently condensed scope with Spenser’s “August,” represents the pitfalls in proposing that a given form must always accompany a particular genre or mode. It does not, however, contradict the assertion that the Princess means anything other than iambic pentameter when she rejects the “amorous Pastoral Verse” of “other Pastoral Lovers.” Rather, the Princess is rejecting *prior* “Pastoral Lovers,” and as we have seen, pastoral has traditionally had a unique and complex relationship with the more “masculine” iambic pentameter. Additionally, the prosodic transition in Spenser’s “August”

occurs because of a *contextual* prompt: the shepherds break into song and must therefore augment their scansion. We will later see however, that *Convent's* transitions occur, primarily because of *discursive* prompts, that is, the scansion changes with the speaker and with that speaker's position in the continuum of gender signification. Along with the historical significance of heroic forms in pastoral, *Convent's* emphasis on the form of the speaker (rather than, say, of the context) points squarely to the Shepherd when the Princess mocks the romantic ineffectuality of "other Pastoral Lovers." His preoccupation with metrical stability, its importance to patriarchal methods of containment and exclusion, and Happy's swift rejection of everything the Shepherd does "right," suggests, again, that the Princess and Happy are opposed to speaking forms of the patriarchy, preferring, instead, forms that are, as we will see, unique and indicative of feminine homoerotics.

VII. FEMININE FORMATIONS

Happy suggests that she has erected her convent upon an ideological foundation that, far from subscribing to a patriarchy that reproduces itself through matrimony, is constituted of a more feminine discourse; Happy vows first to “serve Nature” (1.2), a guarantee satisfied when Happy describes the interior of their bedchambers as having a decidedly seasonal aesthetic (we will return to this section later to examine the actual language) (2.2). We are thus presented with a woman who has a penchant for the changeable (gendered feminine) and the natural (also feminine). The Shepherd, according to his station and the strict parameters of his verse, cannot produce the poetical fluidity or the poetics of natural emancipation that might attract Happy. After his first, severely sculpted quatrain, Happy rebuffs, punctuating her rejection with a fundamentally elemental evocation:

o / o / o / o / o /
L. Happy. How can I grant to every ones request?

o / o / o / o / o /
Each Shepherd’s Suit lets me not be at rest;

o / o / o / o / o /
For which I wish, the Winds might blow them far,

o / o / o / o / o /
That no Love-Suit might enter to my Ear. (4.1)

In her response, Lady Happy is not denying the Shepherd, per se; rather, it is his *suit* that she finds particularly disagreeable. By the significant indices of “Winds” and “Ear,” we can surmise that it is his *words* that so rankle the Lady Happy. It is important that the focus here is on the verbal characteristics of the Shepherd’s speech. Important, too, is the fact that Happy tastes the

Shepherd's scansion for herself (her response is also in heroic verse) before rejecting him, regardless. We will return later to a discussion of Happy's prosodic promiscuity, but it is enough for now to recognize that Happy is rejecting the verbal aspects, whether structural or contextual, of the Shepherd's suit. In terms already visited, the success of these suitors depends upon something more than the conventional avenues of courtship; without enrolling himself in the *discursive* mode of Happy's convent, the Shepherd is as Heywood's Jupiter: jarringly masculine in a decidedly feminine discourse community. What the suitors need, then, is a standard of language that attends to Happy's aesthetic/erotic expectations, which as we will see, is a structural fluidity and a likeminded sensitivity to the natural world, represented first in the loose, cascading prose of Happy's descriptions of her bedchambers and later matched in the staccato poetics of the Princess's trimeter suit.

When Lady Happy describes the intimate quarters of her enclloistered maidens, we see a surprising effluence of description, spirited out perhaps upon the homoerotic frisson of imagining "tak[ing] pleasure in our [hers and the women she ordains] own Beauties" (2.2). As with the Shepherd's suit, the form and content of her speech is indicative of her erotic paradigm, especially considering the intimacy of her subject matter. She says,

I have such things as are for our Ease and Conveniency; next for Pleasure, and Delight; as I have change of Furniture, for my house; according to the four Seasons of the year, especially our Chambers: As in the Spring, our Chambers are hung with Silk-Damask, and all other things suitable to it; and a great Looking-Glass in each Chamber, that we may view ourselves and take pleasure in our own Beauties, whilst they are fresh and young; also, [...] I have all the Floor strew'd with sweet Flowers: In the Summer I have all our Chambers hung with Taffety,

and all other things suitable to it, and a Cup-board of Purseline, and of Plate, and all the Floore strew'd every day with green Rushes or Leaves, [...] To invite repose in the Autumn, all our Chambers are hung with Gilt Leather, or Franchipane; also, Beds and all other things suitable; and the Rooms Matted with very fine Mats: In the Winter our Chambers are hung with tapestry, and our Beds of Velvet, lined with Sattin, and all things suitable to it, [...] and all the Wood for Firing to be Cypress and Juniper; and all the Lights to be Perfumed Wax; also, the Bedding and Pillows are ordered according to each Season; [...] and my Gardens to be kept curiously, and flourish, in every Season of all sorts of Flowers, [...] our drink cooler or hotter according to the several Seasons; and all our Drinks fresh and pleasing: (2.2)

And so on. Significantly truncated here, this disquisition is easily the longest in the play. Five hundred and sixty-five words. And it is just one endlessly unspooling, monstrously trundling, hyperventilated sentence. It is not, however, as if this draggling treatise is contained so claustrophobically that it cannot breath. On the contrary, it is propped up by a sophisticated scaffolding of commas, semicolons, and colons, all of which indicate some “intermission of sound” according to George Puttenham (163). None of these, though, has the blunt stopping power of a full-stopped period (164). Also, we cannot attribute Happy’s discursive gratuity to Cavendish’s (purported) grammatical ignorance (Grant 112). In other words, Cavendish knew what a period meant for syntax. Although it is true that many of the characters’ orations are arranged similarly, none is quite so long, and they are often parsed with full-stopped periods. Cavendish knew how to slow a sentence; she also knew how to spur one on. The rhetorical force of this bulky compound sentence is not that it is without transition; it is not. Rather, the partial

caesurae here allow Happy's speech to be formally *continuous* (suggesting fluidity) instead of *continual* (suggesting seriality), a characteristic that a full-stopped period would confer. What is emphasized, then, is the interrelatedness of natural imagery and the speed with which these images can be reported when the speaker elides the full caesurae. As I argue that the formal fluidity and natural imagery here characterize not only her discursive preferences but also her stable and homoerotic subjectivity (one has to wonder if Happy is riled into such a breathy, compounded speech by the thought of female "Beauties [...] fresh and young"), it is important to note that Cavendish is characterizing her protagonist by appropriating two of the ill-formed conceptions of femininity from among the often-contradictory catalogue of early modern feminine significations: fluidity and intimacy with nature.

The connection between women and fluidity (both anatomical and discursive) is, according to Thomas Laqueur, "a way of talking about women as colder, less well-formed, and more protean than men—and partly a way of understanding the body generally as much less bounded and restrained than we would today" (103). Because of the related anxieties toward vocal expressions of feminine agency, the purported anatomical leakiness of women extended ideologically to cover linguistic leakiness, for which women were frequently censured in corrective texts such as *The Schoolhouse of Women* (1541):

Wherefore men say most commonly,
'Where many geese be, are many turds,
And where be women, are many words.'

This relationship between linguistic and anatomical incontinence achieves interesting, frequently negative significations within early modern drama. In Thomas Middleton's *Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, for example, the shallow and tittery gossips are characterized by not only

talkativeness (see *OED* “gossip” 2b) but also by their unregulated bodily fluids. Just as the gossips’ idle speech includes an account of young girl made incontinent by sexual ardor, the gossips themselves “have drunk so hard in plate” that they are in urgent need of a chamberpot (3.2 113-217). With the syntax of Happy’s sprawling speech, however, Cavendish is allowing her protagonist to appropriate the patriarchal conception of a feminine discursive fluidity while modifying it, significantly, from the captious masculine paradigm. First, though we can see from the above example that linguistic freedom often implies standard attendant notions of heterosexual promiscuity, Happy’s convent is, as Theodora Jankowski notes, a chaste and “queer space” in which one may explore “varieties of nonheterosexual activity” (“Pure Resistance” 218). Second, as I have already discussed, the intricate seams of non-full-stopped caesurae bespeak a measure of linguistic regulation that, say, the immodest gossips of Middleton’s *Chaste Maid* lack. And third, the formal smoothness of Happy’s lengthy disclosure seems appropriately attuned to the content of her speech, which stresses the way in which the images of one season transitions into the next. Perhaps Lady Happy, as Nature’s foremost supplicant, is structurally and contextually aware that Nature does not proceed in discrete steps (as might be suggested with a stricter proportion of caesurae). That Happy’s speech here valorizes the discursive modes of the feminine and contextual modes of the natural should come as no great surprise. Eco-feminist accounts of early modern England such as Sylvia Bowerbank’s *Speaking for Nature* suggest that the two are inextricably bound and that, indeed, Cavendish herself had an aesthetic (and financial) stake in the dutiful stewardship of the Sherwood Forest (4, 52-3). What is surprising, perhaps, is that Happy’s preferences of feminine discourse are retained throughout the play, most notably with her *erotic* preference for the Princess in the 4.1 pastoral scene. From the sprawling description of her bedchambers to the Princess’s suit that attracts her, we get not only

a queer destabilization of heteronormativity (as theorists such as Kellett and Jankowski are correct to point out) but also a surprisingly *stable* sexual profile of Happy as a desiring, homoerotic subject.

VIII. “WE SHALL MORE CONSTANT BE”

After her outright rejection of the Shepherd’s suit, which lacks the feminine finesse and the natural glorification of Happy’s earlier prose, the Princess offers her a more appealing proposal:

Prin. My Shepherdess, your Wit flies high,
Up to the Skie,
And views the Gates of Heaven,
Which are the Planets Seven;
Sees how fixt Stars are plac’d,
And how the Meteors wast;
What makes the Snow so white,
And how the Sun makes light; [...]
And what makes Lightning flow
Like liquid streams, you show. (4.1)

Notice, first, that while the Shepherd is not able to go more than six lines (and often much less¹⁰) without carving up his speech with a full-stopped period, the section above represents one of two *sixteen-line* appeals¹¹ that end with periods. This is, like Happy’s earlier prose, an intricately organized section of text that is, because of the caesurae, swiftly delivered. Immediately obvious, too, are the imagistic similarities between the two texts; they each glorify the permutability of the

¹⁰ He ends, for example, with two full-stopped lines.

¹¹ There are three more sections: one of twelve lines, one of four, and one of two. I suspect the twelve- and two-line sections constitute a third sixteen-line section that, due to a typographical error, was split. It is likely, however, that the final section is simply a closing couplet.

natural world—a glorification that the Shepherd cannot utter as one who deploys masculine verse and who must, according to his station, *subdue* nature. One can argue, too, that Happy’s approval of the Princess’s verse form, iambic trimeter¹² (except the first couplet, discussed later), is an erotic approval of a verse form that is, in some ways, more “feminine” as Happy conceives of it.

Interestingly and significantly, while Puttenham characterizes iambic pentameter of the Shepherd’s sort as “very stately and heroical,” he opines that the iambic trimeter is “very sweet and delicate” (160-2). While it is not clear that Puttenham intentionally described lines such as the Princess’s in these historically-feminine terms (see, especially, entry 4 in the *OED* for “delicate”), it does seem that, in this case at least, the Princess’s preferred form is acutely fit to contain exactly the sort of feminine discourse that attracts Happy. In direct contrast to the Shepherd’s reserved and tedious heroic verse, the Princess’s trimeter is able to speed through a stacked set of natural images with an alacrity and a flexibility that would be unwieldy for a longer form or for a form stuttered through with caesurae. Because of the relative scarcity of sustained trimeter verse in English poetry, many early modern prosodic handbooks neglect to account for the form, but at least Puttenham seems to be aware of the structure’s speed when he notes that trimeter generally does not admit the organization of mid-line caesurae of the sort perforating the Shepherd’s pentameter (164). This internal cohesion, coupled with the absence of full-stopped lines, allows the Princess to mimic, in verse, the swift imagistic successions of Happy’s earlier prose. We should not be surprised, then, to find Happy accepting her discursive counterpart with an identical trimeter tract, sampled below:

My Shepherd,

All those that live do know it,

¹² Three metrical feet of iambs, six syllables in all.

That you are born a Poet,
Your Wit doth search Mankind,
In Body and in Mind;

A very careful reader might note that Happy's opening couplet (ignoring the first, unrhymed line) consists of *seven*, not six, syllables by an extraneous addition of one unstressed syllable. This is an identical construction to the Princess's first trimeter couplet ("And views the Gates of Heaven,/ Which are the Planets Seven"), and, according to prosodic terminology current to Cavendish's period (*OED* "feminine" A6b), the lines represent a twinned pair of *feminine* couplets. What better way to represent a courtship between two desiring female subjects? If one, however, is exceptionally cautious, one might answer, "Any way would be better." And in many ways this would be correct. The prosodic *feminine* derives originally from the extra syllable appended to French nouns to designate a feminine noun; the single syllable is not necessarily a surreptitious compartment in which to stow commentary on actual gender categories. Even still, such interpretive moves have been made in radical cases (see, for example, Amy Stackhouse's "Shakespeare's Half-Foot"), and, considering the homoerotic context, the presence of two feminine couplets that open what I believe is a more feminized form is, at worst, intriguing and, at best, a monosyllabic expression of feminine erotics.

What Cavendish provides with Happy's sustained formal and erotic preferences is not only, as many critics have noted, the expression of a formidable queer stay against heteronormativity but also a profile of a stable homoerotic feminine subjectivity that need not borrow the terms of its signification from the phallogentric patriarchy. By the sustained formal cues projected from and rejected by Lady Happy, she is epistemologically positive; unlike the weaver recounted by Greenblatt, Happy's identity as a desiring female subject is not understood

as a “lack.” Nor do the formal terms of Happy’s homoerotic courtship completely foreground the instability of sexual categories, as Katherine Kellett seems to suggest. It would be ludicrous to attest that Cavendish, by expressing the fungibility of erotics within the convent, is not doing many of these things by degrees. What I hope to have shown, however, is that Happy’s formal patterns suggest that all that Happy is—erotically, poetically, subjectively—cannot be divided cleanly into these modes of resistance. And although I am not suggesting that the feminine comportment that attracts Happy are valid across cultures or even across texts (such were the temptations of the New Criticism), *within the convent*, Happy’s formal preferences constitutes what is, in Barthes’s terms, “a precious remainder (something like *individuality*, in that, qualitative and ineffable, it may escape the vulgar bookkeeping of compositional characters)” (190). And while Barthes’s ruminations here explore the narrative effect of the proper name, Happy’s formal resistance represents something no-less *proper* to her than her name. Happy’s homoerotic subjectivity is persistent, celebrated, epistemologically positive, and not, in Traub’s words, “always about to be betrayed” (158).

IX. UNFORTUNATE FORMULATIONS

She *is* betrayed, however. The openness that corresponds with the modal shift into pastoral represents not only the founding of a new arena in which to establish formal/erotic subjectivities but also, as discussed, the transition from Happy's private, reflective chamber to the public and pastoral forum within which discrete formal patterns may be at play. It is ironic, though, that the very inclusiveness that allows a new formal dimension to Happy's erotics constitutes a breach in the otherwise-enclosed cloister; in the later scenes, this new openness bleeds the convent of its privately-contracted homoerotic discourse. And although critics have neglected the formal dimension of the 4.1 pastoral scene, many of them are correct to note that this scene represents the first step of the gradual dilapidation of Happy's feminine utopia (Bonin 349; Kellett 419). In missing the formal *celebration* of femininity, however, critics fail to understand this scene as a compact site of immense interpretive potential. The scene is witness to both a powerful formal assertion of feminine agency and a gradual formal shift back toward masculine modes of discourse. Nor does it seem that Happy is particularly aware of this latter shift. She is, unknowingly, formed toward a masculine discourse, the utterance of which collapses Happy's convent of pleasure.

In my earlier discussion of Heywood's *Golden Age*, I suggested that Jupiter's sham disguise is discovered as such because of his insistence on a formal scheme that does not match the "softness" of Calisto's maidenly discourse. It is a very different case with the Prince(ss). I am able to shelve the "reality" of the Prince(ss)'s "true" sex for so long precisely because (s)he succeeds so completely where Jupiter jarringly fails. With this, the Prince (hereafter referred to

in his masculine construction) is able to so convincingly infiltrate Happy's society, but his cunning extends further: after establishing an erotic trust contracted in feminine trimeter, the Prince guides Happy into a masculine formal state, from which she presides over the destruction of her own cloister¹³. This shift from trust-earning to betrayal is best understood through the stepwise shuffling of formal modes in the 4.1 pastoral scene. I have outlined the significant steps below.

Shepherd [in heroic pentameter].

Fair Shepherdess do not my Suit deny,

O grant my Suit, let me not for Love die: [...]

L. Happy [also in heroic verse]. How can I grant to every ones request?

Each Shepherd's Suit lets me not be at rest; [...]

As already discussed, we see Happy trying out the Shepherd's pentameter before rejecting it. Happy's willingness to taste the discursive modes that her suitors present to her is important to the formal shaping that she finally suffers under the Prince's poetic auspices.

[Madam Mediator as a] *Shepherdess* [in iambic tetrameter].

My Daughter vows a single life.

And swears, she n're will be a Wife; [...]

Prin [also in tetrameter]. My Shepherdess, your Wit flies high,

Up to the Skie,

[in iambic trimeter] And views the Gates of Heaven,

Which are the Planets Seven; [...]

¹³ This is assuming, of course, a reading of the prince in which he is a passing male for the length of the play. This disclaimer seems obvious, but Katherine Kellett and Sophie Tomlinson have produced very persuasive arguments that question the stability of the Prince's biological identity (Kellett 433; Tomlinson 157). I disagree with these readings, however, because of the play's few contextual clues (in 2.3, the Princess is described as a "Princely brave Woman truly, of a Masculine Presence) and because of his formal sabotage of Happy in 4.1, outlined below.

As Erin Bonin notes, Madam Mediator earns her namesake by occupying a space between the patriarchy outside and the feminine convent. It makes formal sense, then, for Cavendish to assign her an intervening tetrameter speech that is two syllables removed from both the “masculine” pentameter and the Prince’s winning trimeter. It takes the Prince a stammered, incomplete tetrameter couplet, however, to transition into the swifter trimeter. His last halved, difficult tetrameter line is perhaps a formal symptom of his “true” sex. Like Madam Mediator, he occupies a transitional space between his biological sex and his attempts at feminine discursive gender mimicry. Once he gets a taste for trimeter, though, he catches his stride, with positive results:

L. Happy [in indeterminate verse]. My Shepherd,
[in iambic trimeter] All those that live do know it,
That you are born a Poet,

While it is not clear that the first unrhymed, abridged line constitutes verse at all, the next couplet perfectly reflects the structural presentation of the Prince’s suit: an opening trimeter couplet with feminine endings. The twenty-two lines she speaks before coming to a full-stopped caesura demonstrates how easily she finds this form and how closely it resembles her earlier, effortless disquisition on the convent’s bedchambers. However, having gained Happy’s affection and trust, the Prince revisits, though mockingly, the Shepherd’s masculine discourse.

Prin [in heroic verse]. In amorous Pastoral Verse we did not Woo.

As other Pastoral Lovers use to doo.

L. Ha. [also in heroic verse]. Which doth express, we shall more constant be,
And in a Married life better agree.

The Prince's return to heroic verse operates on two levels—one ostensible and one insidious. On the surface, the heroic verse provides a formal dimension to the mocking reference to such less successful "Pastoral Lovers" as the importunate Shepherd. The Prince is not only foregrounding the impotence of such forms in the convent; he is *using* one such form to do so. More insidiously, the Prince's heroic verse represents a furtive effort to lead Happy into a form that Happy rejected under the regime of her exclusive feminine discourse. The Prince succeeds; the formally-susceptible Happy responds in pentameter, responds with *marriage*—a proposal of heteronormative tradition that perhaps may only be spoken in this masculinized form. Thus, she bespeaks the collapse of her convent. It is here, the point at which Happy's form and content conspire against her resistant erotics, that the presiding sexual paradigm of the community shifts to heteronormativity. The convent's femininity is then dismantled piecemeal by a number of contextual offences that culminates in the diminution of the vocal subjectivity that spoke into the convent its operant feminine code. In the final scenes, the affable and chatty Happy holds her tongue.

After Happy's proposal, the Prince accepts with a final heroic couplet, and the convent's feminine distinctness dissolves into discursive instability; the boundaries of the private, enclosed convent melt away in a formal lysis of polyglot babble. After the agreement, a phallic Maypole is erected in a festivity of fecundity, against which much of the Act Three play-within-a-play is conceived. Following communal games and dances, the Prince and Lady happy are crowned *King* and *Queen* of the festival, and, perhaps the most obvious index of patriarchal infiltration, *William Cavendish* provides a few sections of text, headed (rather submissively) "Written by my Lord Duke" (4.1-5.2). Most egregious, however, is that the Prince proclaims a contextual reversal to the same sort of patriarchal exploitation of nature that failed the Shepherd earlier in

the scene. Once again, “*The Scene is opened,*” and the Prince, as Neptune, asserts himself as an ecologically-exploitative sovereign:

I Am the King of all the Seas,
All Watry Creatures do me please,
Obey my Power and Command,
And bring me Presents from the Land; [...]
What Earthly Creature’s like to me,
That hath such Power and Majestie?
My Palaces are Rocks of Stone,
And built by Nature’s hand alone; [...]
Nature directs and doth provide
Me all Provisions which I need,
And Cooks my Meat on which I feed. (4.1, emphasis mine)

The reversal from natural glorification to this subversion of Nature (and Happy) is almost tactile here. More perceptible, however, is the textual slack that Happy’s silence creates in Act 5.

After the Neptune masque, Happy speaks only four times. She has none of her characteristic loquacious charm. Additionally, the 4.1 patriarchal shifts away from feminine verbal fluidity have eroded her smooth and insouciant compound sentence structure. In Act 5, she speaks only in brief sentences, the range of which is diminished volubly by a narrative tag unique to her: “*L. Happy speaks to [the addressee]*” (5.3). It seems that, once her incumbent discourse craters under the thrall of her new matrimony, Happy loses her ability to command the general company; she speaks only in peeping trifles that are, strangely, only to or about an eerie new character, Mimick, who appropriately ventriloquizes for Happy her loss of voice: “How can

you speak it, and never had it? I marry, that's the question; but words are nothing, and then an *Epilogue* is nothing, and I may speak nothing; Then nothing be my Speech" (5.3).

Considering the spasmodic modal shifts of the final scenes and the Happy's hurried muffling, it is not surprising that critics such as Kellett, Jankowski, and Tomlinson have focused more on the instability of the play's sexual ascriptions, and, in the main, they are right to do so. It is clear from the play's amoebic configurations of gender that there is real contestation butting against the bounds of Happy's convent. What is often forgotten or, if not forgotten, underestimated is that Happy had other things than sexually-resistant reinscription on her mind when she founded her utopia. And while there is surely some satisfaction in bucking the patriarchy in favor of a new frontier of sexual signification, I believe that Cavendish's play is best served if we remember that Happy's convent is primarily and nominally a convent of *pleasure*. It resists, impedes, and qualifies. But it also *reflects* the desires of Happy's erotic subjectivity. Only when that subjectivity is betrayed does the convent crumble to discursive indeterminacy. It is because of the critical neglect of the play's formal dimension that this underlying consistency is overlooked. Formally, Happy has a determinably-constituted, homoerotic subjectivity that is attracted to naturalness and easy verbosity. It is true, however, that we do not generally understand such stable homoerotic identities in relation to early modern gender categories, and I see no reason to now repeal sexual historicism in favor of some theory of perdurable, transhistorical gender categories. I am not saying, of course, that Happy is a lesbian. Far from it. Happy's is a unique configuration of "feminine" eroticism, multifaceted and furnished from complementary scraps of cultural discourse and personal desire. To classify such a thing an already-existing category would be a reduction of a celebrated, enthusiastic, desiring subject. Happy's sexual identity is not transhistorical. If not transhistorical, however, it is *hers*.

X. CITATION AND ITERATION

Unless, however, one is prepared to answer allegations of essentializing chauvinism, one should not propose that thus-and-such belongs to so-and-so without doing at least some degree of dutiful hand-waving, qualifying the exact terms on which, say, Happy may lay claim to her own subjectivity. In the case of something as overdetermined as the subject, what does it mean to “possess”? Much of the anxiety surrounding Butler’s model of subjection, for example, emerges from what Case and Nussbaum would argue is an unreasonable restriction of the ways in which the subject can be said to possess the stuff of his or her own subjection. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler probes at the discursive mechanisms by which gender is propagated, noting,

The activity of this gendering cannot, strictly speaking, be a human act of expression, a willful appropriation, and it is certainly *not* a question of taking on a mask; it is the matrix through which all willing becomes possible, its enabling cultural condition. In this sense, the matrix of gender relations is prior to the emergence of the ‘human.’ (Butler *Bodies* 7)

Butler reassures us that her formula “is not to do away with the subject, but only to ask after the conditions of its emergence and operation,” and while it is true that Butler’s project has always been more about the gendering process rather than the subjects of that gendering, I think that Case and Nussbaum are not mistaken when they detect in Butler’s language a considerable restriction of the subject’s agency. And although I suspect that Butler would be quick to allay our

fears in this regard, she surely is not helping things by bracketing “human” and “activity”¹⁴ in quotation marks or by choosing “matrix” to describe the interpellations that ascribe gender. If, indeed, this gendering is not something that is susceptible to human appropriations or disavowals, then it is clear that Butler chooses “matrix” not only for its generative meaning but also for its *encapsulating* meaning, as something that surrounds, something from which nothing can dislodge the subject from his or her place within. For this matrix (not, I think, as Butler means it, but as her language suggests), there is no subject position that is external to the network of patriarchal significations because subjects cannot occur without the mystified swaddling of gendered discourse, prior and constitutive.

If, however, the “human” as such is inconceivable without an antecedent, hegemonic gendering, how can we conceive of resistance, the goal of which must be to expose the limitations (rather than the boundlessness, as Butler seems to do) of the patriarchal discourse that names the subject into a gendered being? If there can be no subjects external to the compelling thrall of performative gendering, can resistance really be an *activity* that *humans* may engage, or must we, too, soften both terms with quotation marks? Though I will shortly argue that they are not as insurmountable as they may seem, problems such as these have earned Butler some scorn from her critics, most notably Sue-Ellen Case and Martha Nussbaum. Case attempts to resuscitate the terms “lesbian” and “performance” to foreground the role of the resistant agent in a philosophical culture that prefers the more passive, subordinate term “subject” to describe the human’s relationship with its own gendering (5). Nussbaum, too, attacks what she calls Butler’s “hip defeatism,” charging that Butler “finds it exciting to contemplate the alleged immovability of [gendering] power, and to envisage the ritual subversions of the slave who is convinced that

¹⁴ Please note that both of these terms, human and activity, bear nuances of meaning that stress the subject’s autonomy, the former for its connotations of an enclosed biological entity and the latter for its emphasis on agency.

she must remain as such” (1, 43). Although I think that these arguments are directed at a misapprehensions of Butler’s theoretical stance, I do not think that these misapprehensions are due specifically to a *misreading* of Butler’s positions; indeed, as we have seen, Butler’s text appears to confirm Case’s and Nussbaum’s contentions. Rather, as I mentioned above, I think that Butler’s language undercuts her own position, which, far from foreclosing the standard avenues of resistance, simultaneously broadens and specifies the ways in which one *may* resist.

To take the most recognizable example, many of Butler’s problems, I think, arise from the term “performative” and its obvious phonetic relationship with “performance,” which imports an inaccurate theatrical dimension into Butler’s term¹⁵. This misconception encourages readers to imagine the implacable matrix of gender attribution as little more than a role or a mask, beneath which breathes a pre-gendered and inalienable subject. This is not, however, what Butler envisions. As we have seen, Butler imagines a conception of the subject that is much more limited (though not, as we will see, crippled), although the historical connection of “performative” with J. L. Austin’s speech-acts leads Butler’s readers to expect a theoretical scheme that places emphasis on *doing things* (as in *How to Do Things With Words*) to escape the gendering matrix. Misconceptions such as these have caused Butler to retread many of her initial positions of *Gender Trouble* in her later *Bodies that Matter*. This need to clarify her position has prompted commentators such as Katherine Kellett to bemoan the confusion with Austin’s performativity as “infelicitous” (422). I would like to shift my focus, then, from the term “performativity” toward the more manageable (though still central) terms “iteration” and “citation” because I believe that these terms are useful both in understanding Butler’s philosophical scheme and in describing Happy’s particular version of resistance..

¹⁵ Of the relationship between performance and performativity, Butler notes that “the former presumes a subject, but the latter contests the very notion of the subject,” thus identifying a fundamental disconnect between the terms (“Gender as” 33).

With a particularly useful analogy to Lacanian symbolic law, Butler elaborates her conception of the iterative and the citational, stating,

If “sex” is assumed in the same way that a law is cited [...] then the “law of sex” is repeatedly fortified and idealized as the law only to the extent that it is reiterated as the law, produced as the law, the anterior and inapproximable ideal, by the very citations it is said to command [...] In this way, the symbolic law in Lacan [and the Butlerian “law of sex”] can be subject to the same kind of critique that Nietzsche formulated of the notion of God: the power attributed to this prior and ideal power is derived and deflected from the attribution itself [...] the ideal that is mirrored depends on that very mirroring to be sustained as an ideal. (*Bodies* 14)

Based on this model, any conceivable resistance to dominant (patriarchal) gendering protocols amounts to exposing the tautological constructedness of those protocols. Gender resistance would evince that the referent of patriarchal pronouncements regarding “proper” gender is only their own authority, which is, in turn, sanctioned by the imagined antecedence of that very authority. Butler, however, is careful to locate and qualify this sort of resistance: “In this sense, the agency denoted by the performativity of ‘sex’ will be directly counter to any notion of a voluntarist subject who exists quite apart from the regulatory norms which she/he opposes. The paradox of subjectivation (*assujétissement*) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms” (15). That a resistant discourse owes its own signification to the discourse that it opposes is by no means a self-evident assertion, and this model becomes a great deal clearer when Butler elaborates the ways in which any discourse (resistant or otherwise) establishes its own power. Butler has in mind is a sort of mutual citationality whereby the phallogocentric gendering matrix is constituted not only by its own

(re)constitutive citations but also by the resistant communities that “[have] to be excluded for those economies [that is, the patriarchy] to function as a self-sustaining system” and, importantly, *vice versa*. The patriarchy propagates its authority by citing its own “laws” and the externality of that which it imagines is alien to it, and a resistant discourse is rendered distinct only insofar as it can articulate the *otherness* of the patriarchy that it resists. Therefore, these dual economies, though ostensibly opposed, are central to each other’s signification. It is important to realize, too, that in the case of gender, this is not (as other critics seem to imagine) to discredit resistance or to preclude the agency of the gendered subject; this is only to emphasize the fundamental nature of presuming *some* investiture of gender. Even if one’s conception of gender is resistant (that is, not ratified by the dominant discourse), it is resistant only insofar as it tracks (cites) its relation to the patriarchy.

Although Butler’s primary aim in the relevant section of *Bodies that Matter* is to explicate and not to exemplify, her analysis of Luce Irigaray’s language in “The Power of Discourse” is an apt demonstration of philosophical resistance that attains its articulation chiefly through its citationality. Of the feminist philosopher’s diction and structure, Butler remarks,

[H]er terms tend to mime the grandiosity of the philosophical errors that she underscores. This miming is, of course, tactical, and her *reenactment of philosophical error* requires that we learn how to read her for the difference that her reading performs. Does the voice of the philosophical father echo in her, or has she occupied that voice, insinuated herself into the voice of the father? If she is “in” that voice for either reason, is she also at the same time “outside” it? [...] This is a taking of his place, not to assume it, but to show that it is *occupiable*, to

raise the question of the cost and movement of that assumption. (36, emphasis mine)

According to Butler, Irigaray's essay represents a version of resistance that is set against the dominant philosophical discourse, but at the same time, it is made intelligible and credible by its citation and replication of the discourse against which it is set. To my mind, the key phrase of Butler's analysis is "reenactment of philosophical error," as it foregrounds both the fundamental citationality ("reenactment") of Irigaray's style and the resistant possibilities enabled by her deliberate exposure of "error." While there is a definite emphasis on "error" in the sense that Irigaray's appropriation of the "voice" of dominant philosophical discourse is designed to *destabilize* (as in the conceptions of queer resistance, discussed in the introductory section), Butler's analysis also stresses Irigaray's ability to infiltrate, mobilize, and reconfigure. In Butler's depiction of Irigaray, there is no sense that she (Irigaray) is, in Nussbaum's language, a "slave [to the dominant discourse] who is convinced she must remain as such" (43). I will argue shortly that this form of resistance has certain parallels with Happy's reconfigurations of "proper" gender and desire, but to appreciate Happy's *resistant* citationality, it is helpful to offer, first, a comparable example from early modern drama that demonstrates *non-resistant* citationality that reconstitutes the patriarchal fantasy of gender.

Jonson's *Epicoene*, a play about a young knight's scheme to retain the inheritance of his uncle's estate, is similar to *Convent* by the centrality of gender mimicry as the primary motivator of the plot's action. The protagonist, Dauphine, contracts a young man to disguise himself as a silent woman, Epicoene, to gull his uncle (named Morose) into and, later, out of marriage in order to secure his birthright. Unlike *Convent*, however, the young man's transition into the feminine role does not entail a corresponding reformulation of that role, as with Happy's

homoerotic and discursive demands of her “female” suitor. The success of Dauphine’s ploy depends upon Epicoene’s effective reflection of the early modern feminine aspect or, rather, the reflection of what Morose, as a prominent member of society, *expects* of the feminine aspect. That is, to attract him, Epicoene must embody the patriarchal imagining of the feminine ideal: silence, a criterion to which “she” takes quickly, according to the posy composed in “her” honor by the ludicrous Sir John Daw:

‘Nor is’t a tale

That female vice should be a virtue male,

Or masculine vice, a female virtue be:

You shall it see

Proved with increase

I know to speak, and she to hold her peace.’ (2.3 114-19)

When Epicoene “marries” (“she” cannot, of course, as a man) Dauphine’s dour uncle, however, she must augment her disguise to fit the early modern imaginary of the “bad” woman who “speaks out” in order to drive Morose to seek divorce, thus guaranteeing Dauphine’s inheritance (3.4 33). Unlike Epicoene’s “ideal” signification, (if, indeed, we can say that silence amounts to signification at all), the outspoken Epicoene is signified only insofar as she is co-opting masculine “virtue” (as Sir John Daw has it), recoding it as “vice” in the feminine mouth. Truewit’s observation of the much-changed Morose household is especially telling:

“[Epicoene’s] *masculine* and loud commanding and urging the whole family, makes him think he has married a Fury” (4.1 7-10, emphasis mine). In Jonson’s play, then, we have a case of male-to-female gender mimicry that succeeds by its consummate subscription to early modern feminine imaginings: the silent woman, who, as Traub notes, “did not signify” and the outspoken

woman who is, like the French tribade weaver, understood only on the basis of her “masculinity” (164-5).

In a thoughtful comparative study, Phyllis Rackin, too, has observed how accurately *Epicoene* represents (cites) early modern gender roles. She states, “[I]n Jonson’s play, which subscribes to the neoclassical ideal of art as an imitation of life, gender also imitates life [...] since women in the play are subject to the same calumny, stereotyping, and social restrictions that real women suffered in Jonson’s world” (33). Not only does Jonson’s play provide a direct representation of early modern gendering conditions, thus presenting a citational replication of gender politics in the early modern moment, but the play also transcribes the loss of agency that, as we have seen, some critics of Butler associate with direct one-to-one iteration of gender norms¹⁶. Rackin states, “No androgyne and no heroine, Epicoene, the ‘silent woman’ of Jonson’s subtitle, is simply a pretty boy in female disguise, a pawn in Dauphine’s economic game with no stake in the outcome of the plot and no will or character of his own” (31). For Dauphine’s ruse to function, Epicoene *must* be nothing more than a passive surface from which is reflected (cited) the patriarchal mystifications of the feminine. Were Epicoene to exercise his agency and resist, subvert, or augment (as Happy does) those mystifications, Dauphine’s scheme would collapse.

After examining the mimetic representational mode of *Epicoene*, Rankin characterizes that of Lyly’s *Gallathea*, whose representational scheme, rather than mimetic, bears a resemblance to that of *Convent*: “The relation between art and life is complementary as well as reflective [...] What is real in one world becomes unreal in the other, what is impossible in one

¹⁶ Lest I offend any Jonson scholars, please note that because my reading of *Epicoene* is restricted to an analysis of Epicoene’s gender mimicry and the ways in which the feminine is presented, my treatment of Jonson’s play is very limited and, in many ways, unfair. I recognize that, although the state of early modern feminine significance is represented in chauvinistic and phallogocentric terms in the case of the character Epicoene, there is plenty of room in the play for a critique of that very chauvinism. Because I am looking only at Epicoene’s “feminine” presence, however, much of this play’s subversive potential is beyond the scope of my project.

world becomes possible in the other, and the work of art is not only to imitate the defects of the real world but also to supply what is wanting” (33). It is such representational fluidity that enables this artistic mode to provide something beyond the direct citational signification that *Epicoene* presents (if not promotes). As discussed, the model of performative resistance that Butler detects in Irigaray is simultaneously one that attains its intelligibility by its citation of dominant discourse and one that owes its revolutionary bite to the transgression that such a co-optation represents when appropriated on different grounds and mobilized on different terms. For Rankin, for Butler, and, as I will argue in the concluding section, for Happy, transgressive citation of gender “is not only to imitate the defects of the real world but also to supply what is wanting.”

XI. CONCLUSION

I have spoken at length about the autonomy of Happy's subjectivity, and I have ridden the play text hard to argue that the bedrock on which her convent is laid is primarily one of personal homoerotic desire; however, I would be badly remiss not to recognize that this foundation is not bedded, first (though, I think, not foremost) by a sedimentation of historical gender codes. Like any resistant discourse, Happy's must cite the dominant gender formulation, and her particular erotics, unreal and alien to the early modern patriarchy, is smuggled into signification through the citations of verse and context that I have explored. I began this project under the misguided assumption that the "feminine" prosodic form was something that I could untwine from *Convent's* 4.1 pastoral scene to examine the flex and fray of those independent strands, but I soon discovered that Happy's resistant feminine dialect became more legible to me as I understood the forms of the patriarchy, as well. I could not devote this paper solely to a reading of the Princess's trimeter, for example, without feeling as if the Shepherd were tonguing some secret meaning into his cheek while my back was turned. Even the Princess's quicksilver tongue, as we have seen, has a difficult time flexing around its own femininity without defining itself in terms of the "other Pastoral lovers," and no matter how handily he is trumped, the Shepherd may rest assured that without his deliberate caesurae and solemn metrics, the flowing trimeter would appear to readers only as an idiosyncratic babble whistled idly into an otherwise empty "green."

It is *because* of Cavendish's treatment of masculinity, because the green is "open'd" to the scattered, robust flavors of the gender spectrum that we are able to register the sly

reconfigurations that the play boasts. Even as Happy retreats into her convent, set insular against the patriarchy, “it is formed by the very discourse from which it seeks to free itself” (Butler *Bodies* 11). It is no coincidence, I think, that a full *ten* of the play’s twenty scenes is devoted to the Act Three play-within-a-play, in which are detailed the dangers of bodily and ideological investment into the heterosexual economy. It is significant that the lush interplay of pastoral and poetic modes of the 4.1 scene should almost immediately follow such the heaping-on of pallid, charnel images that addle Act Three:

Lady. Oh! my Child is dead, my Child is dead, what shall I do, what shall I do?

Maid. You must have patience, Madam.

Lady. Who can have patience to lose their only Child? who can! Oh I shall run mad, for I have no patience. (3.5)

Later:

I Lady. I have brought my Son into the World with great pains, bred to him with tender care, much pains and great cost; and must he now be hang’d for killing a Man in a quarrel? when he should be a comfort and staff at my age, is he to be my ages [sic] affliction? (3.8)

And more:

1 Woman. Is the Midwife come, for my Lady is in a strong labour?

2 Woman. No, she cannot come, for she hath been with a Lady that hath been in strong labour these three days of a dead child, and ‘tis thought she cannot be delivered. (3.9)

Act Three, Scene Ten leaves the stage a flyblown excess of bodies caught in the immense, plodding machinery of the patriarchal economy; the very next scene, 4.1, flowers as a pastoral

celebration of feminine agency, homoerotic desire, and verdant liveliness. The mode with which Cavendish chooses to limn the convent's femininity is a chiaroscuro sketch of masculine/feminine: it is extradiscursive (feminine) by virtue precisely of its citation of the masculine.

This is no *Epicoene*, however, and we are not invited to understand Happy's transgressions merely as masculine appropriations (as with the tribade weaver); we know her both by her disavowal of the masculine and by the alternatives she presents. Significantly, these alternatives are also citational. I have already spoken at length about her glorification of feminine nature and spoken swiftness, and it should be clear that Happy is using these formal and contextual stances to propose an alternative erotic mode for the "feminine." What might have raised some hackles, however, is the seemingly contradictory argument that this alternative mode is, at once, *hers* and versions of *already-established* attributions that are used by the patriarchy to contain and encode the feminine. How can I attest that Happy's generative, autonomous will erected an extra-discursive, self-sustaining space from nothing more than the speaking of it, when the two operant discursive postures of her convent—the natural and the loquacious—antedate her convent as patriarchal tools used to exclude the feminine and, thus, to shore up the boundaries of the masculine? I would like to propose that Happy's appropriation of those masculine terms does not render her convent derivative of masculine codes (unless one is willing to concede that *masculine* terms are derivative of *feminine* codes), nor does it disturb her impressive agency; rather, much like one cannot own the words that comprise one's speech, Happy produces a new discourse by recoding already-existing terms. In her convent, women are allowed to take solid hold over the vague and plastic terms (nature and speech) that purport to describe them, resignify them as epistemologically positive (virtue, not vice; substance, not

lack), and invert the status quo such that the feminine is produced by the same exclusionary procedure perpetrated by the patriarchy.

While the heteronormative is produced by the delineations of its Others, in *Convent's* gruesome play-within-a-play, the masculine is reconstructed as the obscure, a shifting and insidious presence that ekes out its threatening and alien significations on a discursive frontier of "psychosis, abjection, psychic unlivability" that is usually the post of the feminine (Butler *Bodies* 15). That Happy proceeds with her feminine reformulations by her citation of antecedent psychosexual codes does not, to my mind, make her slave to those patriarchal terms. Instead, Happy demonstrates that, while the subject may not escape from gendered terms while retaining its subjectivity, the terms themselves, as with Luce Irigaray, may be ratified in the mouths of the extra-discursive as well as the discursive. Indeed, Happy's subjectivity is so poignant and stable, I think, precisely by her consistent use of recognizable (though much-changed) terms of gender signification. Happy's femininity, like all discursive states, is written in stolen ink and on paper whose costs are often dear indeed, but we can still discern the honest swerve of her signature on the convent walls while Happy is able to have them hold, speaking them to stand.

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