[Review of the book *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind*]

Isis 1999

Sarasohn, Lisa T.
*Reviewing Author

sition as a "hermetical philosopher," and his chemical experiments. After a short review of the state of medical alchemy in the sixteenth century, Kühlmann and Telle analyze the two of Croll's works published in 1609 and trace their reception within Europe's scientific world throughout the centuries until the rise of homeopathy, which brought a modest reappraisal of Croll's ideas. (A modern perspective on Croll is offered by Michel Foucault. Recognizing his historical significance, Foucault quotes Croll's book extensively as the most perfect expression of the system of signatures: see the second chapter of *The Order of Things,* trans. Alan Sheridan [New York, 1971; original ed. 1966]). Here the 1609 Latin text, reproduced without commentary, is followed by its first German translation (Frankfurt, 1623); the editors' indexes help make both texts accessible to the present-day reader. The list of mineral symbols is reproduced twice (pp. 135–138, 235–240), once following the Latin text and again after the German. The volume also includes an exhaustive list of the different editions of *De signaturis,* followed by an extensive bibliography and a final index. The enduring value of Croll's work is manifest in the number of editions in which it appeared (title pages of twenty-two of those editions are reproduced here): there were sixteen editions in Latin between 1609 and 1690, seven in German between 1623 and 1851, eight in French between 1624 and 1976, one in English (1670), and one in Spanish (1982), as well as manuscript translations in Dutch, Russian, and probably Arabic.

The volume *Alchemomedizinische Briefe* is a collection of twenty-six of Croll's letters on experiments and questions of medical transmutational alchemy written between 1585 and 1597. Some are composed in Latin, others in German, yet others in French (and occasionally Croll uses several languages in one letter); they are addressed to eight different correspondents. Sixteen letters were sent to the influential physician and alchemist Franz Kretschmer at Görlitz. Among the other correspondents represented here are the Basle professor of medicine Caspar Bauhin, his Strasbourg colleague Melchior Sebiz, and the Paracelsian physicians Joseph Duchesne and Bernard Georges Penot. The editors also include a calendar of Croll's later correspondence, from 1605 to 1608, while he was in the service of Prince Christian. (Croll's travel journal to Italy, however, has apparently been lost [p. 149].) German translations clarify the passages in Latin and French. Facsimile pages show the painstaking precision of the transcriptions, but, curiously, Kühlmann and Telle have rendered the French final *s* as *z* (Letter 21).

Our understanding of Croll's letters is enriched by a wealth of commentaries. Textual criticism, content analysis, lists of alchemical concepts, and extensive biographies of the scholars quoted or involved make this volume a gold mine for the student of early modern medical alchemy.

In their introduction Kühlmann and Telle state their ambition to revive the the tradition of publishing learned correspondence, letters being the principal means of scholarly communication for many centuries. But their method seems so time consuming that one can't help wondering whether a less sophisticated and, indeed, a less antiquated approach—not to mention electronic publishing—wouldn't be much more effective. Nevertheless, this correspondence reflects many of the issues and problems related to early modern medical alchemy: the practitioners' fear of competition and the problems of secrecy; the vital need for cooperation; the difficulty an itinerant tutor faced in trying to perform his experiments properly; the scholars' supraconfessional attitude, far from the dogmatic quarrels of the time; the profound impact of Paracelsianism; the pietistic context and the spiritual meaning of alchemy; the high hopes placed on experiments in transmutation, but also the increasing doubt about their efficacy for the establishment of a truly new science.

We must be grateful to Kühlmann and Telle for their careful editing of a major hermeneutic text in the history of medicine, together with the correspondence that makes its context and its contents more intelligible. Whatever the fate of Paracelsian medicine may have been, medical alchemy remains one of the major undertakings of early modern Western science.

WILLEM FRIJHOFF

Anna Battigelli. *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind.* xxii + 180 pp., bibl., index. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998. $32.

Margaret Cavendish, the first woman to publish extensively on natural philosophy in English, is a tantalizing and enigmatic figure who has engaged the interest of students of English literature, feminism, and the history of science. Anna Battigelli's intelligent book contributes greatly to our understanding of the aims and contexts of Cavendish's work. By tracing Cavendish's responses to such figures as Queen Henrietta Maria

(the wife of Charles I), Thomas Hobbes, and Robert Hooke, Battigelli provides an interpretive thread that can help guide us through the morass of ambiguities that characterize both Cavendish's literary and scientific work and the conduct of her life.

Cavendish claimed that she was so bashful that she could not even speak aloud in public. Yet this extraordinarily shy young woman chose to become a maid of honor to Henrietta Maria and accompanied her into exile in 1644. Battigelli argues that Cavendish's experience of exile was internalized and became the departure point for her entire rhetorical stance. As an exile, Cavendish could be both a participant in the world and an observer of the world. As an inhabitant of her own mind, Cavendish could comment on the intellectual and political currents of her times and explore the relationship between the mind and the world.

Henrietta Maria was an advocate of Platonic spiritual love. According to Battigelli, this doctrine inspired Cavendish to shun the corrupt world around her and to live in the spiritual world of the mind. Throughout her life Cavendish explored the tension between following the contemplative life and pursuing the active life. The world of the mind seemed a better alternative to this victim of the Civil War whose brother was shot and whose home was seized by the parliamentary rebels.

In Paris, after marrying William Cavendish, the earl of Newcastle, Cavendish was also exposed to the many thinkers who attended her husband's intellectual salon, including Descartes, Hobbes, and Pierre Gassendi. From them Cavendish learned a new scientific vocabulary in which to express her growing interest in natural philosophy. In 1653 Cavendish published her first book of poetry on atomistic themes; this work was later followed by treatises, orations, letters, and fantasies focused on natural philosophy.

In atomism Cavendish found a philosophy that could be used as a heuristic device in attempts to explain the chaotic state of the natural world, the political world, and the world of the mind. Cavendish's atomism was more radical than that of her peers, Battigelli observes, because she did not attempt to Christianize the ancient philosophy but, rather, emphasized its materialistic implications. Further, by denying the validity of immediate sensory perception, atomism allowed Cavendish to develop an epistemological skepticism, which in turn undermined the validity of any dogmatic claim—in science, politics, or religion.

Cavendish eventually rejected atomism because of its democratic implications, but she remained profoundly influenced by the mechanical philosophers, especially Hobbes, who "looms" behind her more mature philosophical works, published in the 1660s. Cavendish shared Hobbes's pessimism and ethical relativism, and his work encouraged her to think politically. Like Hobbes, she attacked the experimental program of the Royal Society. Battigelli presents Cavendish as ultimately more Hobbesian than Hobbes himself, for she felt society and the human mind were so disordered as to preclude any ordered social structure. Her response was to endorse political quietism and to retreat into the "voluntary interiority" of the mind.

Battigelli's argument here is suggestive, but it would have been more persuasive had it been supported by more extensive textual evidence. And there are other themes that Battigelli should have addressed. Cavendish's retreat to the mind can be better explained by the Epicurean ethic of abstention from public life than by Platonism. This interpretation would support Battigelli's claim that Cavendish was more attuned to the moral ramifications of atomism than her peers. A fuller discussion of Cavendish's decision to abandon atomism in favor of materialistic vitalism, and an analysis of the implications of that doctrine, would also have improved the book. Nevertheless, Battigelli significantly enriches our understanding of Margaret Cavendish the exiled natural philosopher.

LISA T. SARASOHN

■ Eighteenth Century

Johan van der Zande; Richard Popkin. *The Skeptical Tradition around 1800: Skepticism in Philosophy, Science, and Society.* (International Archives in the History of Ideas, 155.) xx + 462 pp., bibl., index. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998. $250, £90, Dfl 265.

This book is a collection of essays on skepticism in the second half of the eighteenth century that were presented at a conference held in Leipzig and Göttingen in 1995. Although over two dozen authors contributed to the volume, and although its ostensible topic—skepticism in philosophy, science, and society—is a broad one, it displays an impressive degree of coherence, both in the range of topics covered and in its general methodological approach.

The volume is divided into seven parts. The