

MARGARET CAVENDISH

1623 – 1673

Margaret Cavendish was one of the most unusual, most prolific, and most wide-ranging writers of the English Interregnum and Restoration periods. As a woman who published under her own name she was widely ridiculed by her social peers. Cavendish's reputation suffered for centuries; it was not until the late twentieth century that critics began to admire her eclectic range of interests and her passionate, personal style of writing.

Cavendish was born Margaret Lucas near Colchester, Essex, in 1623. She came from a rich family, the youngest of eight children of Thomas Lucas, Earl of Colchester, and Elizabeth Leighton Lucas. Her father died when she was two years old. Her mother raised her, and in doing so proved to be a strong, independent role model. Because she was a girl, Margaret was not formally educated, and received no training beyond rudimentary reading and writing skills.

In 1642 the Lucases's comfortable life was interrupted by the beginning of the English Civil War. Firmly in the Royalist camp, the family moved to Oxford, which was then the center of power for the Royalist faction. Margaret was impressed by the strength of character demonstrated by Queen Henrietta Maria (wife of Charles I) during the conflict, and she joined her court as a maid of honor, against the advice of her family. In 1644 she went with the Queen into exile in Paris. These were difficult years for Margaret Lucas. Separated from her family, she was very lonely. Painfully shy, she said very little in court, for fear of being thought foolish—and in a social culture that valued wit above all, she was mocked for her silence.

In 1645 she met and was wooed by William Cavendish, the recently widowed Marquess of Newcastle, who was also in exile for being a Royalist military commander. The age gap between the two was considerable: Margaret was 22, and William was 52, a difference so great that the Queen advised her against the match. But William proved to be persuasive—the two were married in December 1645.

Although William was a supportive husband, the marriage did not bring much financial stability. In 1649 the Royalists were defeated and King Charles I was beheaded. William was officially banished from England, and all of his estates were confiscated. The couple lived impoverished in exile, first in Paris, then in Antwerp. While living in Paris, however, Cavendish had the opportunity to meet some of the most influential thinkers of the time; Thomas Hobbes and René Descartes were dinner guests at the Cavendish household.

Cavendish went to England in 1651 to request compensation for the loss of William's property from the new government. Her petition failed, but during the two years that she spent in the endeavor, she began writing. She was to continue to write for the rest of her life.

In 1653 she published two volumes under her own name, *Poems, and Fancies* and *Philosophical Fancies*. This was not in itself an unusual event, but her sex made it an outrageous act. In Cavendish's time, women were expected to limit their activities to the private sphere; although women occasionally published, it was usually done under pseudonyms or under the writer's initials, not under



their own, full names. (There was also a class issue; though members of the upper classes often wrote, they frequently felt it more dignified not to publish.) Public reaction was immediate. Cavendish was portrayed as a vulgar, attention-seeking pretender within her social circle. No doubt it did not help that Cavendish's writing was often unconventional; her style was clear and evocative, but she had not had a thorough education in the rhetorical conventions of her time.

The negative reactions did not deter Cavendish from writing and publishing a torrent of works throughout the rest of her life. Her letters indicate that she was driven by a desire to be remembered by the world, and not just as the wife of a nobleman. As she wrote in one of her *Sociable Letters*,

I should weep myself into water if I could have no other fame than rich coaches, lackeys, and what state and ceremony could produce, for my ambition flies higher, to worth and merit, not state and vanity; I would be known to the world by my wit, not by my folly, and I would have my actions be wise and just, as I might neither be ashamed nor afraid to hear of myself.

Cavendish chose to forego writing poetry about love, arguing that it was an overdone topic, and instead wrote poems as well as prose on subjects such as politics, morality, and—most frequently—natural philosophy. Because she often discussed scientific matters in verse that she claimed was “not given for truth, but pastime,” and because her views evolved throughout her career, it can be difficult to identify what opinions she fully embraced, but it is clear that even her approach to science was unconventional. In her early works at least, she rejects Descartes' dualism (the notion that mind and matter are two different kinds of substance), but she also rejects the purely mechanistic view most commonly held by Descartes' opponents: instead, she argues that all material things have mental properties and that human beings have souls, but that these, too, are made of matter—just matter of a finer, more quickly moving kind. Her 1653 books present a theory that the world is composed of “atoms” whose different shapes determine their physical properties, but she soon abandons this idea in works such as the “Condemning Treatise of Atoms.”

The “Condemning Treatise of Atoms” appeared in Cavendish's *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), a discourse concerning the methods of the new philosophers; in the same year she also published *The World's Olio*, a broad-ranging book on politics, aesthetics, and science. In 1656 she followed up with a collection of short prose and verse entitled *Nature's Pictures*, an eclectic collection of fables and romances, together with a short autobiography. She had planned to publish a book of closet drama, plays intended to be read rather than performed, but the manuscript was lost en route from Antwerp to England when the ship it was on sank. The publication, *Orations of Divers Sorts and Plays*, was delayed until 1662.

The Cavendishes returned to England in 1660 when the monarchy was restored and the new king, Charles II, named them Duke and Duchess of Newcastle. They regained their estate, albeit in a poorer condition than when they left it, and settled into a quieter life. Despite all of the ridicule, Cavendish had by this time become something of a literary celebrity. She was also considered a public curiosity; she disdained convention by dressing in men's waistcoats and cavalier hats, and choosing to bow, rather than curtsy.

She continued to publish, writing at least seven more books, including the remarkable *Description of a New World Called The Blazing World* (1666), a companion piece to a long scientific study called *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*. *Blazing World* is in some respects a precursor of the genre we now call science fiction. It begins as a record of the observations of a female protagonist who enters another world through a connection at the Earth's North Pole, but the book soon strays into the fields of natural science, philosophy, and even autobiography.

In 1668 Cavendish published a new volume of plays, *Plays Never Before Printed*. One of these, *The Convent of Pleasure*, has proved particularly compelling for recent commentators. In this play the

heroine, Lady Happy, creates a man-free haven in her newly inherited estate, only to find the haven infiltrated by a man disguising himself as a woman.

Toward the end of her life, Cavendish spent her time revising and reissuing her body of work. She died, suddenly, on 15 December 1673 at the age of 50, and was buried in Westminster Abbey on 7 January 1674. Her husband died three years later; in the year of his death he published *Letters and Poems in Honour of the Incomparable Princess Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle*.



The Poetess's Hasty Resolution

Reading my verses, I like't them so well,
 Self-love did make my judgment to rebel.
 Thinking them so good, I thought more to write;
 Considering not how others would them like.
 5 I writ so fast, I thought, if I lived long,
 A pyramid of fame to build thereon.
 Reason, observing which way I was bent,
 Did stay my hand, and ask't me what I meant;
 "Will you," said she, "thus waste your time in vain,
 10 On that which in the world small praise shall gain?
 For shame, leave off," said she, "the printer spare,
 He'll lose by your ill poetry, I fear
 Besides, the world hath already such a weight
 Of useless books, as it is over-fraught.
 15 Then pity take, do the world a good turn,
 And all you write cast in the fire, and burn."
 Angry I was, and Reason struck away,
 When I did hear what she to me did say.
 Then all in haste I to the press it sent,
 20 Fearing persuasion might my book prevent:
 But now 'tis done, with grief repent do I,
 Hang down my head with shame, blush, sigh, and cry.
 Take pity, and my drooping spirits raise,
 Wipe off my tears with handkerchiefs of praise.
 —1653

An Excuse for so Much Writ Upon My Verses

Condemn me not for making such a coil^o *fuss*
 About my book, alas it is my child.

Just like a bird, when her young are in nest,
 Goes in, and out, and hops and takes no rest;
 5 But when their young are fledged, their heads out peep,
 Lord what a chirping does the old one keep.
 So I, for fear my strengthless child should fall
 Against a door, or stool, aloud I call,
 Bid have a care of such a dangerous place:
 10 Thus write I much, to hinder all disgrace.
 —1653

A World Made by Atoms

Small atoms of themselves a world may make,
 SAs being subtle, and of every shape:
 And as they dance about, fit places find,
 Such forms as best agree, make every kind.
 5 For when we build a house of brick, and stone,
 We lay them even, every one by one:
 And when we find a gap that's big, or small,
 We seek out stones, to fit that place withal.
 For when not fit, too big, or little be,
 10 They fall away, and cannot stay we see.
 So atoms, as they dance, find places fit,
 They there remain, lie close, and fast will stick.
 Those that unfit, the rest that rove about,
 Do never leave, until they thrust them out.
 15 Thus by their several^o motions, and their forms, *different*
 As several workmen serve each other's turns.
 And thus, by chance, may a new world create:
 Or else predestined to work my fate.
 —1653

*The Four Principal Figured Atoms Make the
Four Elements, as Square, Round, Long, and
Sharp*

The square flat atoms, as dull earth appear,
The atoms round do make the water clear.
The long straight atoms like to arrows fly,
Mount next the points, and make the airy Sky;
5 The sharpest atoms do into fire turn,
Which by their piercing quality they burn:
That figure makes them active, active, light;
Which makes them get above the rest in flight;
And by this figure they stick fast, and draw
10 Up other atoms which are round and raw:
As waters are round drops, though ne'er so small,
Which shew that water is all spherical,
That figure makes it spongy, spongy, wet,
For being hollow, softness doth beget.
15 And being soft, that makes it run about;
More solid atoms thrust it in, or out;
But sharpest atoms have most power thereon,
To nip it up with cold, or heat to run.
But atoms flat, are heavy, dull, and slow,
20 And sinking downward to the bottom go:
Those figured atoms are not active, light,
Whereas the long are like the sharp in flight.
For as the sharp do pierce, and get on high,
So do the long shoot straight, and evenly.
25 The round are next the flat, the long next round,
Those which are sharp, are still the highest found:
The flat turn all to earth, which lie most low,
The round, to water clear, which liquid flow.
The long to air turn, from whence clouds grow,
30 The sharp to fire turn, which hot doth glow,
These four figures four elements do make,
And as their figures do incline, they take.
For those are perfect in themselves alone,
Not taking any shape, but what's their own.
35 What form is else must still take from each part,
Either from round, or long, or square, or sharp;
As those that are like to triangulars cut,
Part of three figures in one form is put.
And those that bow and bend like to a bow;
40 Like to the round, and jointed atoms shew.

Those that are branched, or those which crooked be,
You may both the long, and sharp figures see.
Thus several^o figures, several tempers make, *different*
But what is mixt, doth of the four partake.
—1653

*What Atoms Make a Palsy, or Apoplexy*¹

Dull atoms flat,² when they together join,
And with each other in a heap combine;
This body thick doth stop all passage so,
Keeps motion out, so numbed the body grow.
5 Atoms that are sharp, in which heat doth live,
Being smothered close, no heat can give:
But if those atoms flat meet in the brain,
They choke the spirits, can no heat obtain.
—1653

All Things Are Governed by Atoms

Thus life and death, and young and old,
Are, as the several^o atoms hold. *different*
So wit, and understanding in the brain,
Are as the several atoms reign:
5 And dispositions good, or ill,
Are as the several atoms still.
And every passion which doth rise,
Is as the several atoms lies.
Thus sickness, health, and peace, and war;
10 Are always as the several atoms are.
—1653

¹ *Palsy* Bodily paralysis, especially when accompanied by trembling; *Apoplexy* Sudden loss of sense and motion, often due to bleeding of the brain.

² *Dull atoms flat* In her poem "The Four Principal Figured Atoms Make the Four Elements, as Square, Round, Long, and Sharp" (included above), Cavendish relates each element to a particular shape of atom. "Square flat atoms," according to this poem, make up the element of earth.

The Motion of the Blood

Some by industry of learning found,
 That all the blood like to the sea runs round:
 From two great arteries the blood it runs
 Through all the veins, to the same back comes.
 5 The muscles like the tides do ebb, and flow,
 According as the several^o spirits go. *different*
 The sinews, as final pipes, come from the head,
 And all about the body they are spread;
 Through which the animal spirits¹ are conveyed,
 10 To every member, as the pipes are laid.
 And from those sinews pipes each sense doth take
 Of those pure spirits, as they us do make.
 'Tis thought, and matter comes from the sun
 In streaming beams, which Earth doth feed upon:
 15 And that the earth by those beams back doth send
 A nourishment to the sun, her good friend.
 So every beam the sun doth make a chain,
 To send to Earth, and to draw back again.
 But every beam is like a blazing ship,
 20 The sun doth traffic² to the earth in it.
 Each ship is fraught with heat, through air it swims,
 As to the earth warm nourishment it brings:
 And vapour moist, Earth for that warmth returns,
 And sends it in those ships back to the sun.
 25 Great danger is, if ships be over-fraught,^o *overloaded*
 For many times they sink with their own weight;
 And those gilt ships such fate they often find,
 They sink with too much weight, or split^o *break*
 with wind.
 —1653

Of Many Worlds in this World

Just like unto a nest of boxes round,
 Degrees of sizes within each box are found.
 So in this world, may many worlds more be,

¹ *animal spirits* Substance considered responsible for functions now attributed to electrical impulses in the nervous system; animal spirits were believed to carry sensory information and to cause bodily movement.

² *traffic* Traverse for the purpose of trade.

Thinner, and less, and less still by degree;
 5 Although they are not subject to our sense,
 A world may be no bigger than two pence.³
 Nature is curious, and such work may make,
 That our dull sense can never find, but scape.^o *escape*
 For creatures, small as atoms, may be there,
 10 If every atom a creature's figure bear.
 If four atoms a world can make,⁴ then see,
 What several^o worlds might in an earring be. *different*
 For millions of these atoms may be in
 The head of one small, little, single pin.
 15 And if thus small, then ladies well may wear
 A world of worlds, as pendants in each ear.
 —1653

A World in an Earring

An earring round may well a zodiac⁵ be,
 AWherein a sun goeth round, and we not see.
 And planets seven about that sun may move,⁶
 And he stand still, as some wise men would prove.
 5 And fixed stars,⁷ like twinkling diamonds, placed
 About this earring, which a world is vast.
 That same which doth the earring hold, the hole,
 Is that, which we do call the Pole.^o *north pole*
 There nipping frosts may be, and winter cold,
 10 Yet never on the lady's ear take hold.
 And lightnings, thunder, and great winds may blow
 Within this earring, yet the ear not know.

³ *two pence* British coin, equal to two pennies.

⁴ [Cavendish's note] As I have before shewed they do, in my Atoms. [Cavendish is here referring to her poem "The Four Principal Figured Atoms Make the Four Elements, as Square, Round, Long, and Sharp" (included above), in which she explains how the four elements of earth, water, air, and fire are each made of a different shape of atom.]

⁵ *zodiac* Belt-shaped area of the celestial sphere, in which the motions of the heavenly bodies appear to take place.

⁶ *And planets seven ... move* At the time of writing, the known planets were Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn; counting the Moon would make seven.

⁷ *fixed stars* Stars, which do not change position in relation to each other (as opposed to "wandering stars," i.e., planets). In Ptolemaic cosmology, the fixed stars were believed to occupy permanent positions on the celestial sphere.

There seas may ebb, and, where fishes swim,
 And islands be, where spices grow therein.
 15 There crystal rocks hang dangling at each ear,
 And golden mines as jewels may they wear.
 There earthquakes be, which mountains vast down fling,
 And yet ne'er stir the lady's ear, nor ring.
 There meadows be, and pastures fresh, and green,
 20 And cattle feed, and yet be never seen:
 And gardens fresh, and birds which sweetly sing,
 Although we hear them not in an earring.
 There night, and day, and heat, and cold, and so
 May life, and death, and young, and old, still grow.
 25 Thus youth may spring, and several° ages die, *many*
 Great plagues may be, and no infections nigh.¹
 There cities be, and stately houses built,
 Their inside gay, and finely may be gilt.
 There churches be, and priests to teach therein,
 30 And steeple too, yet hear the bells not ring.
 From thence may pious tears to heaven run,
 And yet the ear not know which way they're gone.
 There markets be, and things both bought, and sold,
 Know not the price, nor how the markets hold.
 35 There governors do rule, and kings do reign,
 And battles fought, where many may be slain.
 And all within the compass of this ring,
 And yet not tidings to the wearer bring.
 Within the ring wise counsellors may sit,
 40 And yet the ear not one wise word may get.
 There may be dancing all night at a ball,
 And yet the ear be not disturbed at all.
 There rivals duels fight, where some are slain;
 There lovers mourn, yet hear them not
 complain.° *lament*
 45 And death may dig a lover's grave, thus were
 A lover dead, in a fair lady's ear.
 But when the ring is broke, the world is done,
 Then lovers they into Elysium² run.
 —1653

A Dialogue betwixt the Body and the Mind

BODY. What bodies else but Man's did Nature make,
 To join with such a mind, no rest can take;
 That ebbs, and flows, with full and falling tide,
 As minds dejected fall, or swell with pride:
 5 In waves of passion roll to billows high,
 Always in motion, never quiet lie.
 Where thoughts like fishes swim the mind about,
 Where the great thoughts the smaller thoughts eat out.
 My body the barque° rows in mind's ocean wide, *row-boat*
 10 Whose waves of passions beat on every side.
 When that dark cloud of ignorance hangs low,
 And winds of vain opinions strong do blow;
 Then showers of doubts into the mind rain down,
 In deep vast studies my barque of flesh is drowned.
 15 MIND. Why doth the body thus complain, when I
 Do help it forth of every misery?
 For in the world your barque is bound to swim,
 Nature hath rigged it out to traffic in.
 Against hard rocks you break in pieces small,
 20 If my invention help you not in all.
 The lodestone° of attraction I find out, *magnet*
 The card of observation guides about.
 The needle of discretion points the way,
 Which makes your barque get safe into each bay.
 25 BODY. If I 'scape drowning in the wat'ry main,° *sea*
 Yet in great mighty battles I am slain.
 By your ambition I am forced to fight,
 When many winds upon my body light.
 For you care not, so you a fame may have,
 30 To live, if I be buried in a grave.
 MIND. If bodies fight, and kingdoms win, then you
 Take all the pleasure that belongs thereto.
 You have a crown, your head for to adorn,
 Upon your body jewels are hung on.
 35 All things are sought to please your senses five,
 No drug unpractised to keep you alive.
 And I, to set you up in high degree,
 Invent all engines used in war to be.
 'Tis I that make you in great triumph sit,
 40 Above all other creatures high to get:
 By the industrious arts, which I do find,
 You other creatures in subjection bind:
 You eat their flesh, and after that their skin,

¹ *no infections nigh* I.e., the wearer of the earring would not contract the infections.

² *Elysium* In Greek mythology, the residence of the blessed upon death.

When winter comes, you lap^o your bodies in. *fold*
 45 And so of every thing that Nature makes,
 By my direction you great pleasure takes.
 BODY. What though my senses all do take delight,
 Yet you my entrails always bite.
 My flesh eat up, that all my bones are bare,
 50 With the sharp teeth of sorrow, grief and care.
 Draws out my blood from veins, with envious spite,
 Decays my strength with shame, or extreme fright.
 With love extremely sick I lie,
 With cruel hate you make me die.
 55 MIND. Care keeps you from all hurt, or falling low,
 Sorrow and grief are debts to friends we owe.
 Fear makes men just, to give each one his own,
 Shame makes civility, without there's none.
 Hate makes good laws, that all may live in peace,
 60 Love brings society, and gets increase.
 Besides, with joy I make the eyes look gay,
 With pleasing smiles they dart forth every way.
 With mirth the cheeks are fat, smooth, rosy-red,
 Your speech flares wit, when fancies fill the head.
 65 If I were gone, you'd miss the company,
 Wish we were joined again, or you might die.
 —1653

*A Dialogue between an Oak,
 and a Man Cutting Him Down*

OAK. Why cut you off my boughs, both large,
 and long,
 That keep you from the heat, and scorching sun;
 And did refresh your fainting limbs from sweat?
 From thundering rains I keep you free, from wet;
 5 When on my bark your weary head would lay,
 Where quiet sleep did take all cares away.
 The whilst my leaves a gentle noise did make,
 And blew cool winds, that you fresh air might take.
 Besides, I did invite the birds to sing,
 10 That their sweet voice might you some pleasure bring.
 Where every one did strive to do their best,
 Oft changed their notes, and strained their
 tender breast.
 In wintertime, my shoulders broad did hold
 Off blustering storms, that wounded with sharp cold.

15 And on my head the flakes of snow did fall,
 Whilst you under my boughs sat free from all.
 And will you thus requite my love, good will,
 To take away my life, and body kill?
 For all my care, and service I have past,
 20 Must I be cut, and laid on fire at last?
 And thus true love you cruelly have slain,
 Invent all ways to torture me with pain.
 First you do peel my bark, and flay my skin,
 Hew down my boughs, so chops off every limb
 25 With wedges you do pierce my sides to wound,
 And with your hatchet knock me to the ground.
 I minced shall be in chips, and pieces small,
 And thus doth Man reward good deeds withal.
 MAN. Why grumblest thou, old Oak, when thou hast
 stood
 30 This hundred years, as king of all the wood?
 Would you for ever live, and not resign
 Your place to one that is of your own line?
 Your acorns young, when they grow big, and tall,
 Long for your crown, and wish to see your fall;
 35 Think every minute lost, whilst you do live,
 And grumble at each office^o you do give. *duty*
 Ambition flieth high, and is above
 All sorts of friendship strong, or natural love.
 Besides, all subjects they in change delight,
 40 When kings grow old, their government they slight:
 Although in ease, and peace, and wealth do live,
 Yet all those happy times for change will give.
 Grows discontent, and factions still do make;
 What good so ere he doth, as evil take.
 45 Were he as wise, as ever Nature made,
 As pious, good, as ever Heaven saved:
 Yet when they die, such joy is in their face,
 As if the devil had gone from that place.
 With shouts of joy they run a new to crown,
 50 Although next day they strive to pull him down.
 OAK. Why, said the Oak, because that they are mad,
 Shall I rejoice, for my own death be glad?
 Because my subjects all ungrateful are,
 Shall I therefore my health, and life impair.
 55 Good kings govern justly, as they ought,
 Examine not their humours, but their fault.
 For when their crimes appear, 'tis time to strike,
 Not to examine thoughts how they do like.

If kings are never loved, till they do die,
 60 Nor wisht to live, till in the grave they lie:
 Yet he that loves himself the less, because
 He cannot get every man's high applause:
 Shall by my judgment be condemned to wear,
 The ass's ears,¹ and burdens for to bear.
 65 But let me live the life that nature gave,
 And not to please my subjects, dig my grave.
 MAN. But here, poor Oak, thou liv'st in ignorance,
 And never seek'st thy knowledge to advance.
 I'll cut thee down, 'cause² knowledge thou may'st gain,
 70 Shalt be a ship, to traffic^o on the main:^o *travel / sea*
 There shalt thou swim, and cut the seas in two,
 And trample down each wave, as thou dost go.
 Though they rise high, and big are swelled with pride,
 Thou on their shoulders broad, and back, shalt ride:
 75 Their lofty heads shalt bow, and make them stoop,
 And on their necks shalt set thy steady foot:
 And on their breast thy stately ship shalt bear,
 'Till thy sharp keel the watery womb doth tear.
 Thus shalt thou round the world, new land to find,
 80 That from the rest is of another kind.
 OAK. O, said the Oak, I am contented well,
 Without that knowledge, in my wood to dwell.
 For I had rather live, and simple be,
 Than dangers run, some new strange sight to see.
 85 Perchance my ship against a rock may hit;
 Then were I straight^o in sundry^o *immediately / many*
 pieces split.
 Besides, no rest, nor quiet I should have,
 The winds would toss me on each troubled wave.
 The billows^o rough will beat on every side, *waves*
 90 My breast will ache to swim against the tide.
 And greedy merchants may me over-freight,^o *overload*
 So should I drowned be with my own weight.
 Besides with sails, and ropes my body tie,
 Just like a prisoner, have no liberty.
 95 And being always wet, shall take such colds,

¹ *ass's ears* According to Greek myth, King Midas, who was given ass's ears by a god as a punishment, hid the ears under a tall cap and asked his barber to keep his secret. The barber, unable to keep his knowledge to himself, spoke it into a hole; a bed of reeds then grew from that spot and began to whisper the secret. In some versions of the story, Midas was so ashamed he killed himself.

² *'cause* So that.

My ship may get a pose,³ and leak through holes.
 Which they to mend, will put me to great pain,
 Besides, all patched, and pieced, I shall remain.
 I care not for that wealth, wherein the pains,
 100 And trouble, is far greater than the gains.
 I am contented with what Nature gave,
 I not repine,^o but one poor wish would have, *complain*
 Which is, that you my aged life would save.
 MAN. To build a stately house I'll cut thee down,
 105 Wherein shall princes live of great renown.
 There shalt thou live with the best company,
 All their delight, and pastime thou shalt see.
 Where plays, and masques, and beauties bright
 will shine,
 Thy wood all oiled with smoke of meat, and wine.
 110 There thou shalt hear both men, and women sing,
 Far pleasanter than nightingales in spring.
 Like to a ball, their echoes shall rebound
 Against the wall, yet can no voice be found.
 OAK. Alas, what music shall I care to hear,
 115 When on my shoulders I such burdens bear?
 Both brick, and tiles, upon my head are laid,
 Of this preferment⁴ I am sore afraid.
 And many times with nails, and hammers strong,
 They pierce my sides, to hang their pictures on.
 120 My face is smucht^o with smoke of candle lights, *smudged*
 In danger to be burnt in winter nights.
 No, let me here a poor old oak still grow;
 I care not for these vain delights to know.
 For fruitless promises I do not care,
 125 More honour 'tis, my own green leaves to bear.
 More honour 'tis, to be in Nature's dress,
 Than any shape, that men by art express.
 I am not like to Man, would praises have,
 And for opinion make my self a slave.
 130 MAN. Why do you wish to live, and not to die,
 Since you no pleasure have, but misery?
 For here you stand against the scorching sun:
 By's⁵ fiery beams, your fresh green leaves become
 Withered; with winter's cold you quake, and shake:
 135 Thus in no time, or season, rest can take.

³ *pose* Cavendish likely intends "pox," an infectious disease distinguished by the appearance of pockmarks.

⁴ *preferment* Promotion or position.

⁵ *By's* I.e., by his.

OAK. Yet I am happier, said the Oak, than Man;
 With my condition I contented am.
 He nothing loves, but what he cannot get,
 And soon doth surfeit¹ of one dish of meat:
 140 Dislikes all company, displeas'd alone,
 Makes grief himself, if Fortune gives him none.
 And as his mind is restless, never pleas'd;
 So is his body sick, and oft diseas'd.
 His gouts, and pains, do make him sigh, and cry,
 145 Yet in the midst of pains would live, nor die.
 MAN. Alas, poor Oak, thou understandst, nor can
 Imagine half the misery of Man.
 All other creatures only in sense join,
 But Man hath something more, which is divine.
 150 He hath a mind, doth to the heavens aspire,
 A curiosity for to inquire:
 A wit that nimble is, which runs about
 In every corner, to seek Nature out.
 For she doth hide her self, as feared to shew
 155 Man all her works, lest he too powerful grow.
 Like to a king, his favourite makes so great,
 That at the last, he fears his power he'll get.
 And what creates desire in Man's breast,
 A nature is divine, which seeks the best:
 160 And never can be satisfied, until
 He, like a god, doth in perfection dwell.
 If you, as Man, desire like gods to be,
 I'll spare your life, and not cut down your tree.
 —1653

A Dialogue betwixt Peace, and War

PEACE. War makes the vulgar^o multitude *common*
 to drink
 In at the ear the foul, and muddy sink
 Of factious² tales, by which they dizzy grow,
 That the clear sight of truth they do not know.
 5 And reeling stand, know not what way to take,
 But when they choose, 'tis wrong, so a war make.
 WAR. Thou flattering^o Peace, and most *charming*
 unjust, which draws
 The vulgar by thy rhetoric to hard^o laws: *unfeeling*

¹ *surfeit* Indulge to excess.

² *factions* Tending to produce factions; divisive.

Which makes them silly ones, content to be,
 10 To take up voluntary slavery.
 And mak'st great inequalities beside,
 Some like to asses bear, others on horseback ride.
 PEACE. O War, thou cruel enemy to life,
 Unquieted neighbour, breeding always strife.
 15 Tyrant thou art, to rest will give no time,
 And blessed peace thou punishest as a crime.
 Factions thou mak'st in every public weal,^o *commonwealth*
 From bonds of friendship tak'st off wax, and seal.
 On natural affections thou dost make
 20 A massacre, that hardly one can 'scape.
 The root of all religion thou pull'st up,
 And every branch of ceremony cut.
 Civil society is turned to manners base,
 No laws, or customs can by thee get place.
 25 Each mind within it self cannot agree,
 But all do strive for superiority:
 In the whole world dost such disturbance make,
 To save themselves none knows what ways to take.
 WAR. O Peace, thou idle drone,^o which *lazy person*
 lov'st to dwell,
 30 If it but keep thee safe, in a poor cell.
 Thy life thou sleep'st away, thoughts lazy lie.
 Sloth buries fame, makes all great actions die.
 PEACE. I am the bed of rest, and couch of ease,
 My conversation doth all creatures please.
 35 I the parent of learning am, and arts,
 Nurse to religion, and comfort to all hearts.
 I am the guardian, which keeps virtue safe,
 Under my roof security she hath.
 I am adorned with pastimes, and with sports,
 40 Each several^o creature still to me resorts. *different*
 WAR. I a great school am, where all may grow wise:
 For prudent wisdom in experience lies.
 And am a theater to all noble minds,
 A mint of true honour, that valour still coins.
 45 I am a high throne for valour to sit,
 And a great court where all fame may get.
 I am a large field, where doth ambition run,
 Courage still seeks me, though cowards me shun.
 —1653

*Earth's Complaint*¹

O Nature, Nature, hearken to my cry,
 Each minute wounded am, but cannot die.
 My children which I from my womb did bear,
 Do dig my sides, and all my bowels tear:
 5 Do plow deep furrows in my very face,
 From torment, I have neither time, nor place.
 No other element is so abused,
 Nor by mankind so cruelly is used.
 Man cannot reach the skies to plow, and sow,
 10 Nor can they set, or mark the stars to grow.
 But they are still as nature first did plant,
 Neither maturity, nor growth they want.
 They never die, nor do they yield their place
 To younger stars, but still run their own race.
 15 The sun doth never groan young suns to bear,
 For he himself is his own son, and heir.
 The sun just in the center sits, as king,
 The planets round about encircle him.
 The slowest orbs over his head turn slow,
 20 And underneath, the swiftest planets go.
 Each several^o planet, several measures take, *different*
 And with their motions they sweet music make.
 Thus all the planets round about him move,
 And he returns them light for their kind love.
 —1653

The Hunting of the Hare

Betwixt two ridges of plowed land lay Wat,²
 Pressing his body close to earth lay squat.
 His nose upon his two forefeet close lies,
 Glaring obliquely with his great gray eyes.
 5 His head he always sets against the wind;
 If turn his tail, his hairs blow up behind:
 Which he too cold will grow, but he is wise,
 And keeps his coat still down, so warm he lies.
 Thus resting all the day, till sun doth set,
 10 Then riseth up, his relief for to get.
 Walking about until the sun doth rise,

¹ *Complaint* Lament.² *Wat* Name for a hare.

Then back returns, down in his form³ he lies.
 At last, poor Wat was found, as he there lay,
 By huntsmen, with their dogs which came that way.
 15 Seeing, gets up, and fast begins to run,
 Hoping some ways the cruel dogs to shun.
 But they by nature have so quick a scent,
 That by their nose they trace what way he went.
 And with their deep, wide mouths set forth a cry,
 20 Which answered was by echoes in the sky.
 Then Wat was struck with terror, and with fear,
 Thinks every shadow still the dogs they were.
 And running out some distance from the noise,
 To hide himself, his thoughts he new employs.
 25 Under a clod of earth in sand pit wide,
 Poor Wat sat close, hoping himself to hide.
 There long he had not sat, but straight^o *immediately*
 his ears
 The winding^o horns and crying dogs he hears: *sounding*
 Starting with fear, up leaps, then doth he run,
 30 And with such speed, the ground scarce treads upon.
 Into a great thick wood he straightway gets,
 Where underneath a broken bough he sits.
 At every leaf that with the wind did shake,
 Did bring such terror, made his heart to ache.
 35 That place he left, to champaign^o plains he went, *open*
 Winding about, for to deceive their scent.
 And while they snuffling were, to find his track,
 Poor Wat, being weary, his swift pace did slack.
 On his two hinder legs for ease did sit,
 40 His forefeet rubbed his face from dust, and sweat.
 Licking his feet, he wiped his ears so clean,
 That none could tell that Wat had hunted been.
 But casting round about his fair great eyes,
 The hounds in full career^o he near him spies: *speed*
 45 To Wat it was so terrible a sight,
 Fear gave him wings, and made his body light.
 Though weary was before, by running long,
 Yet now his breath he never felt more strong.
 Like those that dying are, think health returns,
 50 When 'tis but a faint blast, which Life out burns.
 For spirits seek to guard the heart about,
 Striving with death, but death doth quench them out.
 Thus they so fast came on, with such loud cries,
 That he no hopes hath left, nor help espies.

³ *form* Shallow nest of compressed grass.

55 With that the winds did pity poor Wat's case,
 And with their breath the scent blew from the place.
 Then every nose is busily employed,
 And every nostril is set open, wide,
 And every head doth seek a several^o way, *different*
 60 To find what grass, or track, the scent on lay.
 Thus quick industry, that is not slack,
 Is like to witchery, brings lost things back.
 For though the wind had tied the scent up close,
 A busy dog thrust in his snuffling nose:
 65 And drew it out, with it did foremost run,
 Then horns blew loud, for th' rest to follow on.
 The great slow hounds, their throats did set a bass,
 The fleet swift hounds, as tenors next in place;
 The little beagles, they a treble sing,
 70 And through the air their voice a round did ring.
 Which made a concert, as they ran along;
 If they but words could speak, might sing a song,
 The horns kept time, the hunters shout for joy,
 And valiant seem, poor Wat for to destroy:
 75 Spurring their horses to a full career,
 Swim rivers deep, leap ditches without fear;
 Endanger life and limbs, so fast will ride,
 Only to see how patiently Wat died.
 For why, the dogs so near his heels did get,
 80 That they their sharp teeth in his breech^o *hindquarters*
 did set;
 Then tumbling down, did fall with weeping eyes,
 Gives up his ghost, and thus poor Wat he dies.
 Men whooping loud, such acclamations make,
 As if the Devil they did prisoner take.
 85 When they do but a shiftless^o creature kill; *defenseless*
 To hunt, there needs no valiant soldier's skill.
 But man doth think that exercise, and toil,
 To keep their health, is best, which makes most spoil.
 Thinking that food, and nourishment so good,
 90 And appetite, that feeds on flesh, and blood.
 When they do lions, wolves, bears, tigers see,
 To kill poor sheep, straight say, they cruel be;
 But for themselves all creatures think too few,
 For luxury, wish God would make them new.
 95 As if that God made creatures for man's meat,
 To give them life, and sense, for man to eat;
 Or else for sport, or recreation's sake,
 Destroy those lives that God saw good to make:

Making their stomachs graves, which full they fill
 100 With murdered bodies, that in sport they kill.
 Yet man doth think himself so gentle, mild,
 When he of creatures is most cruel wild.
 And is so proud, thinks only he shall live,
 That God a God-like nature did him give.
 105 And that all creatures for his sake alone,
 Was made for him, to tyrannize upon.
 —1653

Nature's Cook

Death is the cook of Nature; and we find
 Meat drest several^o ways to please *various*
 her mind.
 Some meats she roasts with fevers, burning hot,
 And some she boils with dropsies¹ in a pot.
 5 Some for jelly consuming by degrees,
 And some with ulcers, gravy out to squeeze.
 Some flesh as sage she stuffs with gouts, and pains,
 Others for tender meat hangs up in chains.
 Some in the sea she pickles up to keep,
 10 Others, as brawn is soused,² those in wine steep.
 Some with the pox,³ chops flesh, and bones so small,
 Of which she makes a French fricasse⁴ withal.
 Some on gridirons of calentures⁵ is broiled
 And some is trodden on, and so quite spoiled.
 15 But those are baked, when smothered they do die,
 By hectic fevers some meat she doth fry.
 In sweat sometimes she stews with savoury smell,
 A hodge-podge of diseases tasteth well.
 Brains drest with apoplexy⁶ to Nature's wish,

¹ *dropsies* Accumulations of fluid in body tissues or cavities, causing bloating.

² *brawn* Flesh or muscle, especially of the boar when used to make head cheese; *soused* Pickled in vinegar.

³ *pox* Infectious disease distinguished by the appearance of abscesses on the skin, which result in pockmark scars when healed.

⁴ *fricasse* Dish of meat stewed or fried with a sauce.

⁵ *gridirons* Cooking surface of parallel metal bars used for broiling flesh; *calentures* Fever common in the tropics, characterized by delirium.

⁶ *apoplexy* Sudden loss of sense and motion, often due to bleeding of the brain.

20 Or swims with sauce of megrimes^o in a dish. *headaches*
 And tongues she dries with smoke from stomachs ill,
 Which as the second course she sends up still.
 Then Death cuts throats, for blood-puddings to make,
 And puts them in the guts, which colics¹ rack.
 25 Some hunted are by Death, for deer that's red,
 Or stall-fed oxen, knocked on the head.
 Some for bacon by Death are singed, or scaled,
 Then powdered up with phlegm, and rheum² that's salt.
 —1653

A Woman Drest by Age

A milk-white hair-lace^o wound up all *head-band*
 her hairs,
 And a deaf coif³ did cover both her ears,
 A sober countenance about her face she ties,
 And a dim sight doth cover half her eyes,
 5 About her neck a kercher^o of coarse skin, *kerchief*
 Which Time had crumpled, and worn creases in,
 Her gown was turned to melancholy black,
 Which loose did hang upon her sides and back,
 Her stockings cramps had knit, red worsted⁴ gout,
 10 And pains as garters tied her legs about.
 A pair of palsy gloves her hands drew on,
 With weakness stitched, and numbness trimmed upon.
 Her shoes were corns, and hard skin sewed together,
 Hard skin were soles, and corns the upper leather.
 15 A mantle of diseases laps her round,
 And thus she's dressed, till Death lays her in ground.
 —1653

Of the Theme of Love

O love, how thou art tired out with rhyme!
 Thou art a tree whereon all poets climb;

¹ *colics* Severe pains of the stomach.

² *rheum* Mucous discharge that dries to form a crust at the corners of the eyes or elsewhere on the face.

³ *coif* Close-fitting cap which covers the top, back, and sides of the head.

⁴ *worsted* Type of woolen fabric.

And from thy branches every one takes some
 Of thy sweet fruit, which fancy feeds upon.
 5 But now thy tree is left so bare, and poor,
 That they can hardly gather one plum more.
 —1653

from *The Description of a New World,
 Called the Blazing World*

from TO THE READER

... **T**his is the reason why I added this piece of fancy to my philosophical observations,⁵ and joined them as two worlds at the ends of their poles; both for my own sake, to divert my studious thoughts, which I employed in the contemplation thereof, and to delight the reader with variety, which is always pleasing. But lest my fancy should stray too much, I chose such a fiction as would be agreeable to the subject I treated of in the former parts; it is a description of a new world, not such as Lucian's, or the Frenchman's world in the moon,⁶ but a world of my own creating, which I call the Blazing World: the first part whereof is romancical, the second philosophical, and the third is merely fancy, or (as I may call it) fantastical; which, if it add any satisfaction to you, I shall account myself a happy creatoress. If not, I must be content to live a melancholy life in my own world; I cannot call it a poor world, if poverty be only want of gold, silver, and jewels; for there is more gold in it than all the chemists⁷ ever did, and (as I verily believe) will ever be able to, make. As for the rocks of diamonds, I wish with all my soul they might be shared amongst

⁵ *This ... observations* *The Blazing World* was published in conjunction with *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy*, a critique of the method then championed by the Royal Society. Cavendish challenges the Society's belief that human perception—with the aid of machines such as microscopes and telescopes—could uncover the workings of the natural world.

⁶ *not such ... moon* References to Greek satirist Lucian (124–c. 200 CE), whose *True History* consists of a dialogue concerning an imaginary voyage, and to French author Cyrano de Bergerac, who wrote a story in this tradition about a voyage to the moon (*Histoire comique contenant les états et empires de la lune*, 1657).

⁷ *chemists* I.e., alchemists.

my noble female friends, and upon that condition, I would willingly quit my part; and of the gold I should only desire so much as might suffice to repair my noble lord and husband's losses:¹ for I am not covetous, but as ambitious as ever any of my sex was, is, or can be; which makes, that though I cannot be Henry the Fifth, or Charles the Second, yet I endeavour to be Margaret the First; and although I have neither power, time, nor occasion to conquer the world as Alexander and Caesar did; yet rather than not to be mistress of one, since Fortune and the Fates would give me none, I have made a world of my own; for which nobody, I hope, will blame me, since it is in everyone's power to do the like.

THE DESCRIPTION OF A NEW WORLD,
CALLED THE BLAZING WORLD

A merchant travelling into a foreign country fell extremely in love with a young lady; but, being a stranger in that nation, and beneath her both in birth and wealth, he could have but little hopes of obtaining his desire. However, his love growing more and more vehement upon him, even to the slighting of all difficulties, he resolved at last to steal her away, which he had the better opportunity to do because her father's house was not far from the sea, and, she often using to gather shells upon the shore, accompanied not with above two or three of her servants, it encouraged him the more to execute his design. Thus, coming one time with a little light vessel, not unlike a packet-boat,² manned with some few seamen and well victualled,³ for fear of some accidents which might perhaps retard their journey, to the place where she used to repair, he forced her away. But when he fancied himself the happiest man of the world, he proved to be the most unfortunate; for Heaven, frowning at his theft, raised such a tempest as they knew not what to do, or whither to steer their course; so that the vessel, both by its own lightness and the violent motion of the wind, was carried, as swift as an arrow out of a bow, towards the north pole, and in a

short time reached the icy sea, where the wind forced it amongst huge pieces of ice. But, being little and light, it did, by assistance and favour of the gods to this virtuous lady, so turn and wind through those precipices as if it had been guided by some experienced pilot and skilful mariner. But alas! those few men which were in it, not knowing whither they went, nor what was to be done in so strange an adventure, and not being provided for so cold a voyage, were all frozen to death; the young lady only, by the light of her beauty, the heat of her youth, and protection of the gods, remaining alive. Neither was it a wonder that the men did freeze to death; for they were not only driven to the very end or point of the pole of that world, but even to another pole of another world, which joined close to it; so that the cold, having a double strength at the conjunction of those two poles, was insupportable. At last the boat, still passing on, was forced into another world; for it is impossible to round this world's globe from pole to pole, so as we do from east to west; because the poles of the other world, joining to the poles of this, do not allow any further passage to surround the world that way; but if anyone arrives to either of these poles, he is either forced to return or to enter into another world. . . .

But to return to the wandering boat and the distressed lady, she, seeing all the men dead, found small comfort in life. Their bodies, which were preserved all that while from putrefaction and stench by the extremity of cold, began now to thaw and corrupt; whereupon she, having not strength enough to fling them overboard, was forced to remove, out of her small cabin, upon the deck to avoid that nauseous smell; and, finding the boat swim between two plains of ice, as a stream that runs betwixt two shores, at last perceived land, but covered all with snow: from which came walking upon the ice strange creatures, in shape like bears, only they went upright as men. Those creatures, coming near the boat, caught hold of it with their paws, that served them instead of hands; some two or three of them entered first; and when they came out, the rest went in one after another. At last, having viewed and observed all that was in the boat, they spake to each other in a language which the lady did not understand, and, having carried her out of the boat, sunk it, together with the dead men.

¹ *my noble . . . losses* During the Civil Wars, William Cavendish was banished from England and his property confiscated.

² *packet-boat* Mail-boat; a small boat that regularly ferries mail and goods between two ports.

³ *victualled* Supplied with provisions.

The lady, now finding herself in so strange a place, and amongst such a wonderful kind of creatures, was extremely stricken with fear, and could entertain no other thoughts but that every moment her life was to be a sacrifice to their cruelty. But those bear-like creatures, how terrible soever they appeared to her sight, yet were they so far from exercising any cruelty upon her, that rather they showed her all civility and kindness imaginable; for she being not able to go upon the ice, by reason of its slipperiness, they took her up in their rough arms and carried her into their city, where, instead of houses, they had caves underground. And as soon as they entered the city, both males and females, young and old, flocked together to see this lady, holding up their paws in admiration. At last, having brought her into a certain large and spacious cave, which they intended for her reception, they left her to the custody of the females, who entertained her with all kindness and respect, and gave her such victuals as they were used to eat; but, seeing her constitution neither agreed with the temper of that climate, nor their diet, they were resolved to carry her into another island of a warmer temper; in which were men like foxes, only walking in an upright shape, who received their neighbours the bear-men with great civility and courtship, very much admiring this beauteous lady, and, having discoursed some while together, agreed at last to make her a present to the emperor of their world. ...

[THE LADY BECOMES EMPRESS]

No sooner was the lady brought before the Emperor but he conceived her to be some goddess, and offered to worship her; which she refused, telling him (for by that time she had pretty well learned their language) that although she came out of another world, yet was she but a mortal; at which the Emperor, rejoicing, made her his wife and gave her an absolute power to rule and govern all that world as she pleased. But her subjects, who could hardly be persuaded to believe her mortal, tendered her all the veneration and worship due to a deity...

Their priests and governors were princes of the imperial blood, and made eunuchs¹ for that purpose;

¹ *eunuchs* Castrated males. In Oriental and Roman courts, these men often dealt with important matters of state.

and as for the ordinary sort of men in that part of the world where the Emperor resided, they were of several complexions; not white, black, tawny, olive- or ash-coloured; but some appeared of an azure, some of a deep purple, some of a grass-green, some of a scarlet, some of an orange-colour, &c. Which colours and complexions, whether they were made by the bare reflection of light, without the assistance of small particles, or by the help of well-ranged and ordered atoms, or by a continual agitation of little globules, or by some pressing and reacting motion, I am not able to determine. The rest of the inhabitants of that world were men of several different sorts, shapes, figures, dispositions, and humours, as I have already made mention heretofore; some were bear-men, some worm-men, some fish- or mer-men, otherwise called sirens; some bird-men, some fly-men, some ant-men, some geese-men, some spider-men, some lice-men, some fox-men, some ape-men, some jackdaw-men, some magpie-men, some parrot-men, some satyrs,² some giants, and many more which I cannot all remember. And of these several sorts of men, each followed such a profession as was most proper for the nature of their species, which the Empress encouraged them in, especially those that had applied themselves to the study of several arts and sciences; for they were as ingenious and witty in the invention of profitable and useful arts as we are in our world, nay, more; and to that end she erected schools and founded several societies. The bear-men were to be her experimental philosophers, the bird-men her astronomers, the fly-, worm-, and fish-men her natural philosophers, the ape-men her chemists, the satyrs her Galenic³ physicians, the fox-men her politicians, the spider- and lice-men her mathematicians, the jackdaw-, magpie-, and parrot-men her orators and logicians, the giants her architects, &c. But before all things, she, having got a sovereign power from the Emperor over all the world, desired to be informed both of the manner of their religion and government, and to that end she called the priests and statesmen to give her an account of either. Of the statesmen she enquired, first, why they had so few laws. To which they

² *satyrs* Creatures with partially human and partially bestial forms.

³ *Galenic* Following the theories of Galen, Greek physician (131–201 CE), whose medical views revised those of Aristotle and were foundational to medical practice until the sixteenth century.

answered that many laws made many divisions, which most commonly did breed factions, and at last break out into open wars. Next she asked why they preferred the monarchical form of government before any other. They answered that as it was natural for one body to have but one head, so it was also natural for a politic body to have but one governor; and that a commonwealth which had many governors was like a monster of many heads: besides, said they, a monarchy is a divine form of government, and agrees most with our religion; for as there is but one God, whom we all unanimously worship and adore with one faith, so we are resolved to have but one Emperor, to whom we all submit with one obedience.

Then the Empress, seeing that the several sorts of her subjects had each their churches apart, asked the priests whether they were of several religions. They answered her Majesty that there was no more but one religion in all that world, nor no diversity of opinions in that same religion; for though there were several sorts of men, yet had they all but one opinion concerning the worship and adoration of God. The Empress asked them whether they were Jews, Turks, or Christians. We do not know, said they, what religions those are; but we do all unanimously acknowledge, worship, and adore the Only, Omnipotent, and Eternal God, with all reverence, submission, and duty. Again the Empress enquired whether they had several forms of worship. They answered, no: for our devotion and worship consists only in prayers, which we frame according to our several necessities, in petitions, humiliations, thanksgiving, &c. Truly, replied the Empress, I thought you had been either Jews or Turks, because I never perceived any women in your congregations; but what is the reason you bar them from your religious assemblies? It is not fit, said they, that men and women should be promiscuously together in time of religious worship; for their company hinders devotion, and makes many, instead of praying to God, direct their devotion to their mistresses. But, asked the Empress, have they no congregation of their own, to perform the duties of divine worship as well as men? No, answered they: but they stay at home and say their prayers by themselves in their closets.¹ Then the Empress desired to know the reason why the priests and governors of their world were

¹ *closets* Private inner chambers.

made eunuchs. They answered, to keep them from marriage: for women and children most commonly make disturbance both in church and state. But, said she, women and children have no employment in church or state. 'Tis true, answered they; but although they are not admitted to public employments, yet are they so prevalent with their husbands and parents that many times, by their importunate persuasions, they cause as much, nay, more, mischief secretly than if they had the management of public affairs. . . .

[THE EMPRESS BRINGS THE DUCHESS OF NEWCASTLE
TO BE HER SCRIBE]

After some time, when the spirits² had refreshed themselves in their own vehicles, they sent one of their nimblest spirits to ask the Empress whether she would have a scribe. . . . The Empress received the proffer which they made her, with all civility; and told him that she desired a spiritual scribe. The spirit answered that they could dictate, but not write, except they put on a hand or arm, or else the whole body, of man. The Empress replied, how can spirits arm themselves with gauntlets of flesh? As well, answered he, as man can arm himself with a gauntlet of steel. If it be so, said the Empress, then I will have a scribe. Then the spirit asked her whether she would have the soul of a living or a dead man. Why, said the Empress, can the soul quit a living body and wander or travel abroad? Yes, answered he, for according to Plato's doctrine there is a conversation of souls, and the souls of lovers live in the bodies of their beloved. Then I will have, answered she, the soul of some ancient famous writer, either of Aristotle, Pythagoras, Plato, Epicurus,³ or the like. The spirit said that those famous men were very learned, subtle, and ingenious writers, but they were so wedded to their own opinions that they would never have the patience to be scribes. Then, said she, I'll have the soul of one of the most famous modern writers, as either of Galileo, Gassendus, Descartes,

² *spirits* In addition to all the other inhabitants of the Blazing World, the Empress makes the acquaintance of the spirit-people, who inhabit the air and can travel between her old world and the Blazing World.

³ *Aristotle . . . Epicurus* Four classical philosophers, each of whom founded his own school of philosophy.

Helmont, Hobbes, H. More,¹ &c. The Spirit answered that they were fine ingenious writers, but yet so self-conceited that they would scorn to be scribes to a woman. But, said he, there's a lady, the Duchess of Newcastle, which, although she is not one of the most learned, eloquent, witty, and ingenious, yet is she a plain and rational writer, for the principle of her writings is sense and reason, and she will, without question, be ready to do you all the service she can. That lady, then, said the Empress, will I choose for my scribe, neither will the Emperor have reason to be jealous, she being one of my own sex. In truth, said the Spirit, husbands have reason to be jealous of platonic lovers, for they are very dangerous, as being not only very intimate and close, but subtle and insinuating. You say well, replied the Empress; wherefore I pray send me the Duchess of Newcastle's soul; which the spirit did; and after she came to wait on the Empress, at her first arrival the Empress embraced and saluted her with a spiritual kiss. . . .

[THE DUCHESS AND THE EMPRESS
CREATE THEIR OWN WORLDS]

One time, when the Duchess her soul was with the Empress, she seemed to be very sad and melancholy; at which the Empress was very much troubled, and asked her the reason of her melancholic humour. Truly, said the Duchess to the Empress (for between dear friends there's no concealment, they being like several parts of one united body), my melancholy proceeds from an extreme ambition. . . . My ambition is that I would fain be as you are, that is, an empress of a world, and I shall never be at quiet until I be one. I love you so well, replied the Empress, that I wish with all my soul, you had the fruition of your ambitious desire, and I shall not fail to give you my best advice how to accomplish it. The best informers are the immaterial spirits, and they'll

soon tell you whether it be possible to obtain your wish. . . . No sooner had the Empress said this, but some immaterial spirits came to visit her, of whom she inquired whether there were but three worlds in all, to wit, the Blazing World where she was in, the world which she came from, and the world where the Duchess lived? The spirits answered that there were more numerous worlds than the stars which appeared in these three mentioned worlds. Then the Empress asked whether it was not possible that her dearest friend the Duchess of Newcastle might be empress of one of them? Although there be numerous, nay, infinite worlds, answered the spirits, yet none is without government. . . . But we wonder, proceeded the spirits, that you desire to be empress of a terrestrial world, whenas you can create yourself a celestial world if you please. What, said the Empress, can any mortal be a creator? Yes, answered the spirits; for every human creature can create an immaterial world fully inhabited by immaterial creatures, and populous of immaterial subjects, such as we are, and all this within the compass of the head or skull; nay, not only so, but he may create a world of what fashion and government he will, and give the creatures thereof such motions, figures, forms, colours, perceptions, &c. as he pleases. . . . And since it is in your power to create such a world, what need you to venture life, reputation and tranquillity to conquer a gross material world? For you can enjoy no more of a material world than a particular creature is able to enjoy, which is but a small part, considering the compass of such a world; and you may plainly observe it by your friend the Empress here, which, although she possesses a whole world, yet enjoys she but a part thereof. . . . Why should you desire to be empress of a material world and be troubled with the cares that attend government whenas, by creating a world within your self, you may enjoy all, both in whole and in parts, without control or opposition, and may make what world you please, and alter it when you please, and enjoy as much pleasure and delight as a world can afford you? You have converted me, said the Duchess to the spirits, from my ambitious desire; wherefore I'll take your advice, reject and despise all the worlds without me, and create a world of my own. The Empress said, if I do make such a world, then I shall be mistress of two worlds, one within, and the other

¹ *Galileo* Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564–1642); *Gassendus* Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655), French mechanistic philosopher; *Descartes* René Descartes (1596–1650), French philosopher and mathematician; *Helmont* Jan Baptista van Helmont (1577–1644), French chemist and philosopher; *Hobbes* Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), English philosopher, political scientist, and author; *H. More* Henry More (1614–87) English neo-Platonic philosopher.

without me. That your Majesty may, said the spirits; and so left these two ladies to create two worlds within themselves: who did also part from each other until such time as they had brought their worlds to perfection. ...

At last, when the Duchess saw that no patterns would do her any good in the framing of her world;¹ she was resolved to make a world of her own invention, ... which world, after it was made, appeared so curious and full of variety, so well ordered and wisely governed that it cannot possibly be expressed by words, nor the delight and pleasure which the Duchess took in making this world of her own.

In the meantime the Empress was also making and dissolving several worlds in her own mind, and was so puzzled that she could not settle in any of them; wherefore she sent for the Duchess, who, being ready to wait on the Empress, carried her beloved world along with her, and invited the Empress's soul to observe the frame, order, and government of it. Her Majesty was so ravished with the perception of it that her soul desired to live in the Duchess's world; but the Duchess advised her to make such another world in her own mind; for, said she, your Majesty's mind is full of rational corporeal motions, and the rational motions of my mind shall assist you by the help of sensitive expressions, with the best instructions they are able to give you.

The Empress, being thus persuaded by the Duchess to make an imaginary world of her own, followed her advice; and after she had quite finished it, and framed all kinds of creatures proper and useful for it, strengthened it with good laws, and beautified it with arts and sciences; having nothing else to do, unless she did dissolve her imaginary world, or made some alterations in the Blazing World she lived in, which yet she could hardly do, by reason it was so well ordered that it could not be mended; for it was governed without secret and deceiving policy; neither was there any ambition, factions, malicious detractions, civil dissensions, or home-bred quarrels, divisions in religion, foreign wars, &c., but all the people live in a peaceful society, united

tranquillity, and religious conformity; she was desirous to see the world the Duchess came from, and observe therein the several sovereign Governments, Laws and Customs of several Nations. ...

THE EPILOGUE TO THE READER

By this poetical description you may perceive that my ambition is not only to be empress but authoress of a whole world; and that the worlds I have made, both the Blazing and the other Philosophical World, mentioned in the first part of this description, are framed and composed of the most pure, that is, the rational parts of matter, which are the parts of my mind; which creation was more easily and suddenly effected than the conquests of the two famous monarchs of the world, Alexander and Caesar. Neither have I made such disturbances and caused so many dissolutions of particulars, otherwise named deaths, as they did; for I have destroyed but some few men in a little boat, which died through the extremity of cold, and that by the hand of Justice, which was necessitated to punish their crime of stealing away a young and beauteous lady. And in the formation of those worlds I take more delight and glory than ever Alexander or Caesar did in conquering this terrestrial world; and though I have made my Blazing World a peaceable world, allowing it but one religion, one language, and one government; yet could I make another world, as full of factions, divisions, and wars as this is of peace and tranquillity; and the rational figures of my mind might express as much courage to fight as Hector and Achilles had; and be as wise as Nestor, as eloquent as Ulysses, and as beautiful as Helen.² But I esteeming peace before war, wit before policy, honesty before beauty; instead of the figures of Alexander, Caesar, Hector, Achilles, Nestor, Ulysses, Helen, &c., chose rather the figure of honest Margaret Newcastle, which now I would not change for all this terrestrial

¹ *At last ... world* Before resolving to create her own world, the Duchess attempts to follow the models of philosophers Thales, Pythagoras, Plato, Epicurus, Aristotle, Descartes, Hobbes, but with each world she encounters irreconcilable difficulties.

² *Hector and Achilles* The two heroes of Homer's epic poem *The Iliad*, about the Trojan War. The following characters also figure prominently in this work; *Nestor* Wise, elderly advisor to the Greeks during the Trojan War; *Ulysses* Hero of the Trojan War and Homer's *Odyssey*; *Helen* Wife of the Greek King Menelaus. Her extraordinary beauty prompted the Trojan Paris to steal her away, thus causing the Trojan War.

world; and if any should like the world I have made, and be willing to be my subjects, they may imagine themselves such, and they are such; I mean, in their minds, fancies, or imaginations; but if they cannot endure to be subjects, they may create worlds of their own, and govern themselves as they please: but yet let them have a care not to prove unjust usurpers and to rob me of mine; for, concerning the Philosophical World, I am Empress of it myself; and as for the Blazing World, it having an empress already, who rules it with great wisdom and conduct, which Empress is my dear Platonic friend; I shall never prove so unjust, treacherous, and unworthy to her as to disturb her government, much less to depose her from her imperial throne for the sake of any other; but rather choose to create another world for another friend.

—1666

from *Sociable Letters*¹

LETTER 55

Madam,

YOU were pleased in your last letter to tell me that you had been in the country and that you did almost envy the peasants for living so merrily. It is a sign, Madam, they live happily, for mirth seldom dwells with troubles and discontents; neither doth riches nor grandeur live so easily as that unconcerned freedom that is in low and mean fortunes and persons. For the ceremony of grandeur is constrained and bound with forms and rules, and a great estate and high fortune is not so easily managed as a less. A little is easily ordered, where much doth require time, care, wisdom, and study as considerations. But poor, mean peasants that live by their labour are for the most part happier and pleasanter than great rich persons that live in luxury and idleness; for idle time is tedious, and luxury is unwholesome,

whereas labour is healthful and recreative, and surely country housewives take more pleasure in milking their cows, making their butter and cheese, and feeding their poultry than great ladies do in painting, curling, and adorning themselves. Also, they have more quiet & peaceable minds and thoughts, for they never, or seldom, look in a glass to view their faces. They regard not their complexions, nor observe their decays; they defy time's ruins of their beauties. They are not peevish and froward² if they look not as well one day as another; a pimple or spot in their skin tortures not their minds. They fear not the sun's heat, but out-face the sun's power. They break not their sleeps to think of fashions, but work hard to sleep soundly. They lie not in sweats to clear their complexions, but rise to sweat to get them food. Their appetites are not queasy with surfeits, but sharpened with fasting. They relish with more savour their ordinary coarse fare than those who are pampered do their delicious rarities, and for their mirth and pastimes they take more delight and true pleasure, and are more inwardly pleased and outwardly merry at their wakes, than the great ladies at their balls. And though they dance not with such art and measure, yet they dance with more pleasure and delight; they cast not envious, spiteful eyes at each other, but meet friendly and lovingly. But great ladies at public meetings take not such true pleasures, for their envy at each other's beauty and bravery disturbs their pastimes and obstructs their mirth. They rather grow peevish and froward through envy than loving and kind through society; so that whereas the country peasants meet with such kind hearts and unconcerned freedom as they unite in friendly jollity and depart with neighbourly love, the greater sort of persons meet with constrained ceremony, converse with formality, and for the most part depart with enmity. And this is not only amongst women, but amongst men, for there is amongst the better sort a greater strife for bravery than for courtesy, for place than friendship; and in their societies there is more vainglory than pleasure, more pride than mirth, and more vanity than true content. Yet in one thing the better sort of men, as the nobles and gentry, are to be commended, which is that, though they are oftener drunken and more debauched than peasants, having more means to

¹ *Sociable Letters* Book of fictitious letters in which Cavendish, as she says in her Preface, "endeavoured under the cover of letters to express the humours of mankind, and the actions of a man's life, by the correspondence of two ladies living at some short distance from each other."

² *froward* Difficult to deal with or please.

maintain their debaucheries, yet at such times as at great assemblies they keep themselves more sober and temperate than peasants do, which are for the most part drunk at their departing. But to judge between the peasantry and nobles for happiness, I believe where there's one noble that is truly happy, there are a hundred peasants; not that there be more peasants than nobles, but that they are more happy, number for number, as having not the envy, ambition, pride, vainglory, to cross, trouble, and vex them, as nobles have. When I say nobles, I mean those that have been ennobled by time, as well as title, as the gentry. But, Madam, I am not a fit judge for the several sorts or degrees, or courses of lives, or actions of mankind, as to judge which is happiest; for happiness lives not in outward show or concourse, but inwardly in the mind, and the minds of men are too obscure to be known, and too various and inconstant to fix a belief in them. And since we cannot know ourselves, how should we know others? Besides, pleasure and true delight lives in everyone's own delectation. But let me tell you, my delectation is to prove myself,

Madam,

Your faithful friend and servant.

LETTER 143

Madam,

I heard the ship was drowned wherein the man was that had the charge and care of my plays, to carry them into E. to be printed, I being then in A. Which when I heard, I was extremely troubled, and if I had not had the original of them by me, truly I should have been much afflicted, and accounted the loss of my twenty plays as the loss of twenty lives; for in my mind I should have died twenty deaths, which would have been a great torment, or I should have been near the fate of those plays and almost drowned in salt tears, as they in the salt sea. But they are destined¹ to live, and, I hope, I in them when my body is dead and turned to dust. But I am so prudent and careful of my poor labours, which are my writing works, as I always keep the copies of them safely with me until they are printed, and then I

commit the originals to the fire like parents which are willing to die whenas they are sure of their children's lives, knowing when they are old and past breeding they are but useless in this world. But howsoever their paper bodies are consumed, like as the Roman Emperors, in funeral flames, I cannot say an eagle flies out of them, or that they turn into a blazing star, although they make a great blazing light when they burn. And so, leaving them to your approbation or condemnation, I rest,

Madam,

Your faithful friend and servant.

LETTER 163

Madam,

You were pleased to desire me to let my steward receive five hundred pounds for you here in this town, but you must have a little patience, for they will pay no money, although it be due, until these Christmas holy-days be past. I know not whether they are so strict as to receive none; methinks they should be apt to take, for they are all busy in entertainments, eating, drinking, and feasting. But I observe some things which I wonder at, viz. that money should pass, or move so slowly in matters or affairs of right and due, as debts, rewards, and gratitudes, or concerning honour, as generosity, or, for Heaven's sake, as charity, whenas in causes of injustice and wrong, as in bribes, or wars, or for vice and vanity, as for unlawful love, gaming, drinking, gluttonous feasting, vain shows, and superfluous bravery, it runs about with that swift speed that there is no catching hold of as to stay it. But it seems to be the minds of men that hold it from going forth to good and noble uses, and the appetites of men that make it run to base, wicked, vain, and foolish employments, so that we may perceive that the appetites have more power to do evil than the mind hath will to do good. But, Madam, my will hath a mind to serve you, although I have not means nor power to do it; yet in what I can, your Ladyship shall always find me,

Your most faithful friend and servant.

—1664

¹ *destinated* Destined.