

THE UNNATURAL TRAGEDY

MARGARET CAVENDISH

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

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Introduction

Margaret Cavendish (née Lucas)

Achievements and Reputation

Margaret Cavendish was, by any measure, an extraordinary woman. Living, roughly speaking, through the middle fifty years of the seventeenth century, she occupied a time and place where opportunities for female self-expression were limited. Female contributions to literary and intellectual life were not unheard of in the period — writers like Isabella Whitney, Aemilia Lanyer, Mary Herbert, Elizabeth Cary and Lady Mary Wroth had all published plays, poems or translations by the time Cavendish saw her name in print — but such contributions were intermittent and tended to be limited in extent, if not in significance; the five aforementioned authors had between them only seven published works (or eight, if one includes Mary Herbert's edition of Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*). With that in mind, the volume of Cavendish's output alone marks her as unique. She published twenty-three works (including revised second editions) in her lifetime, several of which were themselves substantial collections of smaller works. More extraordinary still is the thematic and disciplinary range of her work: her oeuvre comprises drama, poetry, short fiction, biography, philosophy, science and utopian fantasy. Cavendish's publications were confident expressions of authorial identity, usually expensively produced in folio — a print format generally reserved for works of a perceived cultural and intellectual gravity — and often including in their front matter large portraits of the author in stately or scholarly pose.¹ The subject matter, too, was often daring; her plays and poems addressed topics such as erotic desire (hetero- and homosexual), infidelity and incest, while her philosophy espoused a materialist world-view that was not always clearly distinct from atheism.² In terms of its quantity, scope and attitude, then, Margaret Cavendish's body of work was unprecedented in the context of women's writing.

While few would venture to question Cavendish's industry and innovation, estimations of the literary, philosophical and scientific merit of her work have been less than unanimous since the time her first publications emerged in the 1650s. During her own lifetime her work

¹ Three engravings of Cavendish, each based on paintings by the Dutch artist Abraham von Diepenbeke, are used repeatedly in her publications. In the most commonly occurring — and the one which appears opposite the title page of the 1662 collection *Playes*, in which *The Unnatural Tragedy* appears — she is depicted atop a plinth under a classical arch, flanked by allegorical statues and horns of plenty. In another, she appears in her private study, writing materials at the ready, while airborne *putti* prepare to crown her with a laurel wreath in recognition of her poetic genius. In a third image, Cavendish is pictured sitting beside her husband in a convivial parlour scene. While the rest of the party appear to be busily engaged in pleasant conversation, Cavendish, this time already crowned with laurel, gazes out towards the viewer, wearing a melancholic expression. See Emma L. E. Rees, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Genre, Exile* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 31–3.

² See Lisa T. Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

received both effusive praise and vituperative criticism, best exemplified by the polarised responses of the age's two great diarists: while John Evelyn likened her to a glittering array of female luminaries such as Elizabeth I, Isabella of Castille and the poet Katherine Philips, finding her literary talents to outmatch all of theirs combined, Samuel Pepys remarked after reading her biography of her husband that she was a 'mad, conceited, ridiculous woman'.³ Cavendish's status as a woman confidently writing and publishing in a realm of intellectual enquiry all but exclusively reserved for men undoubtedly exacerbated the criticism she faced. In the years of her first few publications, Cavendish faced accusations that her work, which despite its idiosyncrasies demonstrated a considerable degree of scholarly knowledge and command of terminology, was not her own.⁴ Where some took Cavendish's extraordinary output to be proof of plagiarism, others, as in Pepys's dismissive comment, saw it as a symptom of insanity: evidently less enamoured with the duchess than her husband was, Mary Evelyn remarked after observing Cavendish engage in intellectual discourse with her male companions that she 'was surprised to find so much extravagancy and vanity in any person not confined within four walls'.⁵ As her contemporaneous admirers passed on and popular tastes became more delicate, this became the dominant way of remembering Cavendish (when she was remembered at all). Through the eighteenth, nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries Cavendish was characterised predominantly as an eccentric aristocrat and ersatz intellectual with an enthusiasm for vanity publishing, a reputation reflected in her posthumously-earned nickname 'Mad Madge'.⁶ Virginia Woolf's seminal feminist essay *A Room of One's Own* provides an unlikely source of influential support for this view, suggesting that 'the crazy duchess' spent her days in creative isolation, and 'frittered her time away scribbling nonsense and plunging ever deeper into obscurity and folly'.⁷

This widespread dismissal of Cavendish has been challenged in recent years. Since the end of the twentieth century, accounts of her life which reductively posit her as an eccentric curiosity have been superseded by nuanced and scholarly biographies by Anna Battigelli and Katie Whitaker.⁸ In the same period, her literary, scientific and philosophical work has been the subject of increasing critical attention, with recent notable contributions to Cavendish criticism including an essay collection by Katherine Romack and James Fitzmaurice focusing on Cavendish's artistic connections with Shakespeare, and monographs by Lara Dodds, who

³ See Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, Royalist, Writer and Romantic* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2003), pp. 314–15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 189–90.

⁵ Cited in Whitaker, p. 296.

⁶ See Whitaker, pp. 360–67.

⁷ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, in *Selected Works of Virginia Woolf* (London: Wordsworth, 2007), pp. 561–634 (p. 601).

⁸ See Anna Battigelli, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998) and Whitaker. The biographical portion of this introduction is heavily indebted to Whitaker, especially.

challenges Woolf's view of Cavendish as a figure working in isolation from the rest of literary culture, and Lisa Walters, who seeks to complicate the dominant view that Cavendish's works indicate a straightforward royalist authorial identity.⁹ Margaret Cavendish is now discussed not as a figure of novelty, but as a female author who was fully engaged in the intellectual discourse of her age and whose work exhibits a pioneering degree of interplay between the realms of literature, philosophy and science. It is this ongoing critical reappraisal of Cavendish as a thinker and writer to which this edition of *The Unnatural Tragedy* aims to contribute.

Life and Work

Margaret Lucas was born in or close to 1623 in Colchester, Essex, to Thomas and Elizabeth Lucas. The family was not aristocratic, but was well connected and had been very wealthy; the Lucases were great beneficiaries of the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, acquiring extensive tracts of formerly monastic land in Essex.¹⁰ Thomas's death while Margaret was still probably only two years old, however, left the family in the precarious financial position of being without a male head. This meant that Elizabeth Lucas had to sustain the family from what was left to her in her jointure, in the process providing the young Margaret, James Fitzmaurice suggests, with a model of female resilience and independence.¹¹ As well as resilience, Elizabeth demonstrated considerable political acumen, making good use of the family's connections to secure an advantageous marriage for her elder daughter Mary and thus strengthening the Lucases' links to the court.¹² This set the tone for what turned out to be a sustained rise in the family's stock: in 1628 Thomas, the eldest son, was granted a knighthood, and in 1643 Margaret marked the end of her teenage years with an appointment as maid of honour at the court of Queen Consort Henrietta Maria.¹³

In 1643, an appointment at Henrietta Maria's court did not mean relocating to London, but to Oxford. Tensions between Charles I and parliament had escalated to open hostility in the previous year, marking the start of the English Civil War. As Charles was away leading an army in the north of the country, the staunchly royalist Oxford was deemed a safer base for the Queen Consort and her court. From this point until many years later, Margaret's fortunes would be closely tied to Henrietta Maria's, and her family, who had remained loyal to the

⁹ See Katherine Romack and James Fitzmaurice, eds, *Cavendish and Shakespeare, Interconnections* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Lara Dodds, *The Literary Invention of Margaret Cavendish* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2013); and Lisa Walters, *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Science and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹⁰ See Whitaker, pp. 1–7.

¹¹ See 'Early Life', in James Fitzmaurice, 'Cavendish, Margaret, duchess of Newcastle upon Tyne (1623?–1673)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4940>, accessed 8 Dec 2014].

¹² See Whitaker, pp. 12–14.

¹³ On Margaret's appointment as maid of honour, see 'Early Life' in Fitzmaurice. On Thomas's knighthood, see Whitaker, p. 11.

royalist cause, would see the trajectory of their lives dictated by that of the royal faction in general. By 1644, the parliamentarians were in the ascendancy, and the Queen Consort, accompanied by Margaret Lucas, was forced into exile in Paris, enduring a gruelling channel crossing on a ship that was damaged by cannon-fire from pursuing parliamentarian forces. This was the beginning of a lengthy period of exile for Margaret; with the exception of a spell in London from 1651 to 1653, she would remain in Europe until the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

The first part of Margaret's spell of exile was spent in Paris, and it was here that she met William Cavendish, Marquess of Newcastle, whom she married, despite Henrietta Maria's opposition to the match, late in 1645.¹⁴ Cavendish was a prominent courtier and senior figure in the Royalist military cause, but had left for Europe under a cloud of ignominy after his forces were routed at the battle of Marston Moor. Despite this setback in William's reputation, he remained a well-connected member of the court that revolved around Henrietta Maria at the Louvre palace. As a Cavendish, Margaret was now a member of a social circle that included the most prominent of English Royalists, as well as cultural and intellectual heavyweights such as Thomas Hobbes and René Descartes. Crucially, in marrying William Margaret engaged in a union with a man whose interests were sympathetic to her own. William, as well as being the finest of English horsemen, was a literary man, and in addition to writing poems and plays that were performed on the London stages prior to the outbreak of hostilities, he was a noted literary patron. Within his creative coterie were prominent writers such as Richard Brome, James Shirley, John Ford and, most famously, Ben Jonson.¹⁵ While her writing is striking in its independence and individuality, Margaret was fortunate to have access to the literary network at William's disposal, and to receive his support in pursuing literary ambitions that most men — and, for that matter, women — in the period would have considered outlandish and improper for a woman.

In 1648 the couple moved to the Netherlands. After briefly staying at Rotterdam, they moved to Antwerp, where they rented the house of the late artist Peter Paul Rubens. It is here, it seems, that Margaret's literary impulses began to come to the fore: 'Early in 1650', Whitaker states, 'she began to write about everything that excited her'.¹⁶ The things that excited her were many: her musings covered topics ranging from literature, philosophy, science, ethics and gender politics.¹⁷ It did not take long for this creative energy to manifest itself in print. In 1651 Margaret returned to London, where she would remain until 1653, in an unsuccessful attempt to claim an allowance from the proceeds of the sale of Cavendish properties that had

¹⁴ See Fitzmaurice, 'Marriage'.

¹⁵ Whitaker, p. 68.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 124.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 124–30.

been seized by the parliamentary government. While there, Margaret took advantage of her proximity to the London printing and bookselling trades and published in 1653 her first book, *Poems and Fancies*, a collection of philosophical poetry which presented in a literary form her theories on the natural world. This was followed up in the same year by *Philosophical Fancies*, which developed those theories further. In 1593 Margaret returned to Antwerp and to William as an established, published writer, and soon began work on *The World's Olio*, a collection of essays on a characteristically broad variety of topics which was sent to London for publication and appeared in print in 1655. Later that year, the latest update on her theories of natural philosophy, *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions*, followed.

Margaret's creative work began to take a more literary turn in the mid-1650s. After several volumes of philosophical and scholarly reflection, 1656 saw the publication of *Nature's Pictures*, a collection of stories, poems and dialogues, written in verse and prose, again on a strikingly broad range of topics, most notably romantic and erotic relationships and martial conflict (this edition also contained a brief autobiography). It seems likely that Cavendish's first attempts at writing drama began around the time of the publication of *Nature's Pictures*. Between 1656 and 1658, she worked on the collection of drama that included *The Unnatural Tragedy* and that would eventually be published in 1662 under the title *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, The Lady Marchioness of Newcastle*. This was evidently a period of abundant creative energy for Margaret, as *Playes* comprises no fewer than fourteen plays, seven of which consist of two parts. Present throughout the collection are active, voluble female characters who consider and debate the position of their sex in society and who do not always arrive at conventional conclusions. The institution of marriage features prominently in these debates; as Whitaker states, '[m]any of Margaret's plays dealt with women discussing their hopes and fears as they faced courtship and marriage. How should they choose their partners? Was romantic love desirable? What should their marriages bring? Should they even marry at all?'¹⁸ The many plays in the collection offer various and conflicting answers to these questions, and, as we shall see, *The Unnatural Tragedy* in itself features women with remarkably divergent views on matrimonial conventions, as well as offering a dramatic examination of the consequences of those conventions being transgressed. Together with *The Female Academy* and *Wit's Cabal*, *The Unnatural Tragedy* is also remarkable for placing female characters in intellectually engaged milieus that might be said to reflect seventeenth-century European salon culture. The group of young women known as the sociable virgins, as well as voicing their disapproval of conventional gender politics, spend significant portions of the play debating such lofty topics as classical historiography, the poetry of Homer and the exercise and maintenance of political power. Margaret Cavendish's first collection of plays, owing both to the quantity of work it

¹⁸ Whitaker, p. 211.

contains and to its representation of independent and academically-minded women, stands as an unprecedented achievement for a female dramatist.

Between the writing and the publication of *Playes*, the Cavendishes were finally able to end their spell in exile. The restoration of the monarchy in 1660 allowed prominent royalist sympathisers who had followed the royal family into Europe years earlier to return to England shores. It also meant that the young prince Charles, to whom William had previously been a governor, had become Charles II, King of England, and as a result the family was now ostensibly better connected than it had ever been; William should have been in a strong position to benefit as powerful positions were handed out to loyal royalists at Charles's new court. The Cavendishes were to be disappointed, however, as William — perhaps still tainted by his unceremonious retreat from the battle of Marston Moor — was granted no position of note. Despite this disappointment William was able to set about restoring his estate, much of which had either been appropriated during the interregnum by senior parliamentarians or, as in the case of William's pleasure palace, Bolsover Castle, had fallen into a state of disrepair. Doubtless aware that William's political career was on the decline, the family moved to their seat at Welbeck Abbey in Nottinghamshire; here Margaret would remain for the rest of her life.

The return to England presented an opportunity to Margaret, who was now able to maintain more direct contact with the publishers with whom she had previously had to correspond from Antwerp. Throughout the 1660s she published work at a considerable rate, continuing her exploration of different academic and creative disciplines. After the appearance of *Playes* in 1662, Margaret produced *Orations of Divers Sorts* (1662), a collection of rhetorical set pieces which again considered the topic of women's position in society; *Sociable Letters* (1664), a work consisting of mostly fictional correspondences discoursing upon a broad range of social, artistic and political issues; *Philosophical Letters* (1664), a series of reflections challenging the ideas of prominent thinkers such as Descartes and Hobbes; and *Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666), a scientific treatise engaging with another major figure of the period, Robert Hooke. From a literary perspective, this latter publication is most remarkable in that it contains what has probably become Cavendish's best known and most frequently discussed work of literature. *The Discovery of a New World, Called the Blazing-World*, which was reprinted in its own edition in 1668, tells the story of a young woman who is taken away on a voyage against her will by a young admirer. After the admirer and his crew are lost in a nautical mishap, the young woman enters a parallel world, accessed via the North Pole, which is perpetually sunlit, is populated by strange beasts and people of bright and unusual colours, and is also awash with gold and precious stones. Before long, the young woman becomes the empress of this 'blazing world', and later receives a visit from a certain

duchess of Newcastle, with whom she builds a friendship that centres around the discussion of philosophical ideas already familiar to those who had read Cavendish's work.¹⁹

In the last years of her life and literary career, Cavendish devoted an increasing amount of focus to producing corrected, revised and updated versions of existing publications. She still pursued new projects, however, and once more delved into new generic territory, this time with a biographical work entitled *The Life of the Thrice Noble, High and Puissant Prince William Cavendish, Duke, Marquess, and Earl of Newcastle*. The biography remains an important if, as the lavish title might imply, not entirely impartial contemporary source on William Cavendish's life, and also, as the first published biography of a husband by a wife, represents another pioneering undertaking by Margaret.²⁰ That she saw this as a work of urgent gravity is demonstrated by her publication, the following year, of a Latin translation, a treatment no other of her works received. This final stage of Cavendish's writing career also produced *Ground of Natural Philosophy*, a work which revisited and built upon her previous philosophical and scientific work, and a second collection of drama: *Plays, Never Before Printed*. Containing only four new comedies, this anthology of plays was much more modest in scale than her first, but nonetheless addressed similarly challenging issues, not least in *The Convent of Pleasure*, which seems to suggest the possibility of fulfilling romantic love between women.

During their post-interregnum years at Welbeck William and Margaret put a number of arrangements in place to ensure Margaret's financial prosperity after the death of her husband, who was twenty-five years her senior. This included, to the concern of other members of the Cavendish family, the signing over of wealth and property — including the magnificent Bolsover Castle — as Margaret's 'jointure', a legal term for possession that passes directly to the wife upon the passing of the husband, rather than down to the male heir (Margaret's familiarity with this legal practice is evident from the Malateste plot of *The Unnatural Tragedy*; see 1.6).²¹ These would prove to be unnecessary measures, however, as Margaret died before her elderly husband in 1673, at the age of fifty. As befitting the prominent aristocratic status of her family, Cavendish was buried in Westminster Abbey, where there remains an elaborate marble monument depicting her lying beside her husband, each of them figured in a manner suggesting their greatest achievements: he in armour and she holding a book and inkpot.

¹⁹ Whitaker, p. 287, and Perry, cited in Whitaker, p. 363.

²⁰ Whitaker, p. 290.

²¹ *Ibid.* pp. 332–3.

The Unnatural Tragedy

The Play and Its Source

The Unnatural Tragedy is distinctive among Margaret Cavendish plays for two prominent reasons. Firstly, it is the only one of her plays to advertise itself as a tragedy. Secondly, it runs counter to a suggestion that Cavendish makes about her own work in her general prologue to *Playes*. In that prologue, she asserts the distinctiveness of her work: ‘But Noble Readers’, she protests, ‘do not think my Playes, / Are such as have been writ in former daies; / As Shakespear, Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher writ’.²² This distinctiveness she puts partly down to her lacking the ingenuity and learning of those dramatists, but it is also a result of the originality of her writing: ‘All the materials in my head did grow, / All is my own, and nothing do I owe’.²³ This claim is of a piece with Cavendish’s sense — and construction — of her authorial identity. As a woman, Cavendish is denied the formal education available to her male counterparts, but this, she suggests, is a virtue: working unencumbered by restrictions associated with rigorous scholarly learning, Cavendish is able to become a spontaneous, ‘natural’ writer. While there is some truth in this notion, it is on some levels disingenuous. While Cavendish did not receive a formal education, for example, she was nonetheless considerably learned.²⁴ Most pertinently in relation to the current edition, however, her work is not always as original as she claims. *The Unnatural Tragedy* in fact takes its central plot rather transparently from another play, *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, written around 1630 by John Ford (a dramatist whose name is conspicuous by its absence from Cavendish’s list of writers whom she does not emulate).

Ford’s play has a young aristocrat, Giovanni, return to Parma from his university studies in Bologna, apparently having developed Epicurean ideas that worry his friar. Shortly after his return he begins to pursue a sexual relationship with his sister, Annabella, who, in an important distinction from Cavendish’s play, requites his affections and becomes pregnant by him. After being persuaded of the error of her ways by the friar, Annabella agrees to marry her father’s preferred suitor and reject her brother. The plot reaches its hyperbolic climax as Giovanni kills Annabella and bursts into her marriage banquet brandishing a dagger on the end of which is impaled her heart. At the sight of this, Florio — the father of the star-crossed siblings — dies instantaneously, before a melee ensues in which everyone is wiped out aside from the sinister Cardinal and his aides, who promptly appropriate the assets of the victims for the church.²⁵ The parallels between the main plots of Ford’s play and *The Unnatural*

²² Margaret Cavendish, *Playes* (London: 1662), A7v.

²³ *Ibid.* A8r.

²⁴ See Dodds, pp. 17–18.

²⁵ See John Ford, *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore*, ed. by Brian Morris (London: A&C Black, 1990). All quotations from the play are taken from this edition.

Tragedy are clear (the phrase ‘’tis pity’ even appears in the play twice, at 1.3.47 and 3.3.6): a young man, Frere, returns to France from his university study and travels in Italy, and finds himself sexually fixated upon his sister, Soeur, who is betrothed to another man. Like Giovanni, Frere appears to have developed — or at least appears to develop over the course of the play — an atheist-materialist world view that allows him to rationalise his desires. Unlike Ford’s Annabella, Soeur resists her brother’s persistent and increasingly frenzied advances until in the final act he rapes and murders her before committing suicide. Upon the discovery of the scene, Pere, the father of the dead siblings, emulates Ford’s Florio by dropping dead on the spot.

As this introduction will discuss, the play’s appropriation of *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* allows it to tap into a pre-existing commentary on the limits of natural behaviour and the role of religion in establishing and maintaining the moral codes according to which society functions. But the play is not entirely indebted to Ford. Cavendish runs the incest plot alongside two other plots that ostensibly bear little relation to it, but that, I hope to show, interrogate similar themes. In one of these plots a group of young women, calling themselves the sociable virgins, conduct intellectual debates under the watchful eye of two conservatively-minded matrons. In these debates, the virgins offer radical and iconoclastic opinions on, among other things, the value of marriage, the role of women in society and the capacity of women to rule, the veracity of the writings of Tacitus and Thucydides, the poetry of Homer and the genealogical history of William Camden. The sociable virgins are petulant to the point of ridicule (a production of the play staged in 2014 by the British American Drama Academy portrayed them, to humorous effect, as teenagers in a Catholic high-school dormitory),²⁶ but there is no doubting their intellectual acuity and agility of wit. Cavendish here, as in other plays in the 1662 collection, breaks new ground by presenting women in drama as more than capable of holding their own in combative scholarly discourse.

In the play’s third plot, the rich and irascible Malateste repeatedly berates his docile wife, Madame Bonit, who remains devoted to her husband despite relatively clear evidence that he is pursuing an affair with the household maid, Nan. Rejected by her husband, supplanted by her maid and divested of her jointure, Madame Bonit dies, apparently of grief, leaving Malateste free to remarry. When Malateste finds a new wife among the sociable virgins, the tables are turned, as the new Madame Malateste scorns her husband, dismisses his maid and spends his fortune socialising in fashionable circles in the city. Like his first wife, Malateste is destroyed by a bad marriage, and left to muse on his deathbed at the folly of having so mistreated his most faithful companion.

²⁶ The production, directed by Graham Watts, was performed at the Ovalhouse Theatre in Kennington, London, on 11 December, 2014, with a dress rehearsal performed to invited guests on the previous day. It is possible that these are the only public performances of the play to have ever taken place.

Nature and the Unnatural

The Unnatural Tragedy is a play which is striking in its apparent disjointedness. Its three main plots seem at best incidentally related, and the dramatic action is placed on hold at regular intervals in order to make way for protracted philosophical, literary or historical debates. What the play does consistently, though — in at least two of its plots, in both its dramatic and its discursive moments, and even in its title — is reflect upon the concept of nature. If we include the title, the word ‘nature’ and its cognates appear sixty times in the play. As I aim to show, however, nature does not always mean the same thing in this play. Rather, Cavendish offers distinct, sometimes competing, conceptions of nature, in the process engaging with Hobbesian philosophy and with notions of poetic creativity.

The meaning of the play’s title seems straightforward enough: the play is primarily about the tragic fallout of a sexual desire that transgresses the bounds of the natural. But Cavendish was not a writer who would make uncritical assumptions about what can be classed as natural and what cannot. As has been recently shown by Lisa Sarasohn and Brandie R. Siegfried, Cavendish exercised a great deal of thought over what pertained to nature, and what the relationships were between nature and the divine, and nature and the human.²⁷ Where critics have discussed Cavendish’s idea of the natural, they have tended to do so in relation to her philosophical writings. Her conception of nature is difficult to pin down, and develops over the course of her writing career, but can be broadly characterised by notions of variation and diversity. Nature is created by God, but is responsible for the ordering of all things. Importantly, for Cavendish, nature is fallible: as Sarasohn puts it, ‘Nature is wise and provident, but the variety and freedom inherent in her work also means that she makes mistakes’.²⁸

So what is unnatural about *The Unnatural Tragedy*? Of the little critical writing there is on this play, not much of it has paid attention to this question. Marguérite Corporaal has argued that the play severs the link usually made in early modern tragedy between female eloquence and sexual wantonness. As such, she suggests, Cavendish ‘produces a tragedy which is “unnatural” in that it undermines the written and unwritten tragic generic conventions of the age’, and also argues that, in the process, this unnatural tragedy shows those conventions to be themselves unnatural.²⁹ In addition to this, Alison Findlay notes that the Malatesta plot,

²⁷ See Sarasohn, *Natural Philosophy* and Sarasohn and Brandie R. Siegfried, eds, *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).

²⁸ Sarasohn, ‘Fideism, Negative Theology, and Christianity in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish’, in Sarasohn and Siegfried, eds, *God and Nature*, pp. 93–106 (p. 97).

²⁹ Marguérite Corporaal, ‘An Empowering Wit and an “Unnatural” Tragedy: Margaret Cavendish’s Representation of the Tragic Female Voice’, *Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 14 (2004) 12.1–26 (para. 3).

‘at a superficial level, dramatises the loss of the traditional household as an “unnatural tragedy”’.³⁰

That some critics have been able to see beyond the Frere/Soeur relationship when considering the representation of the unnatural in the play shows, I think, that there is a complexity to its treatment of nature that is worthy of further consideration. There is no doubt, however, that it is through the relationship between Frere and Soeur that the play most clearly encourages its readers to consider what constitutes unnaturalness. Interestingly, though, despite the play’s evident interest in the idea, and despite its title, at no point in the play does anyone accuse Frere of behaving unnaturally. In several short scenes which depict Soeur attempting to talk her brother out of his incestuous desire, she points out to him the wickedness and sinfulness of his advances, stressing the infamy they will bring to the family, but she never comments on their naturalness. Instead, it is Frere who levels the accusation of unnaturalness at his sister: shortly before his secret desire is revealed, Soeur demands to know why he is following her around, ‘with sighs fetched deep and groans that seem to rend [his] heart in two’ (4.1.1–2). Frere responds:

Sisters should not be so unnatural as to be weary of a brother’s company or angry at their grief, but rather strive to ease the sorrow of their hearts than load on more with their unkindness. (4.1.3–5)

Frere’s assertion here anticipates the line of argument that he will repeatedly pursue once his lust for his sister has been revealed: that is, love — of whatever kind — between a brother and sister is natural, and any moral or civil code which outlaws it is artificial. ‘Sister’, he implores, ‘follow not these binding laws which frozen men have made, but follow nature’s laws, whose freedom gives a liberty to all’ (4.3.13–14). He then goes on to elaborate on the point, warning his sister to

be not deceived with empty words and vainer tales, made only at the first to keep the ignorant vulgar sort in awe, whose faith, like to their greedy appetites, take whatsoever is offered ...
for what is taught men in childhood grows strong in their manhood, and as they grow in years, so grow they up in superstition. (4.3.17–18; 25–7)

³⁰ Alison Findlay, “I hate such an old-fashioned House”: Margaret Cavendish and the Search for Home’, *Early Modern Literary Studies* Special Issue 14 (2004), 11.1–14 (para. 13).

Those familiar with Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* will recognise a line of argument used by its incestuous anti-hero, Giovanni. In Ford's play, Giovanni defends his desire for his sister in a debate with his Friar, asking

Shall a peevish sound,
A customary form, from man to man,
Of brother and of sister, be a bar
'Twixt my perpetual happiness and me?
Say that we had one father, say one womb
(Curse to my joys!) gave both us life and birth;
Are we not, therefore, each to other bound
so much the more by nature?

(1.1.24–31)

For both Frere and Giovanni, then, two things are true: first, that the desire for sexual union with a sibling is a natural extension of an already existing familial bond, and second, that objections to such a union are grounded on its transgression not against nature, but against convention: against Frere's 'laws of frozen men' or Giovanni's 'customary forms passed down from man to man'.

While both plays have their anti-heroes express the same arguments in favour of incest, where they diverge is in the credence these arguments are afforded. The suggestion that sexual union is a natural extension of sibling love is barely made plausible by either play, but if anything is more preposterous in *The Unnatural Tragedy*, in which, unlike in *'Tis Pity*, the sister refuses the brother's advances until she is eventually raped and murdered. But while Giovanni's rejection of conventional morality comes across as a symptom of wild Epicureanism, Frere's maintenance of the same position is able to make greater sense in its context, since it receives covert support from aspects of another of the play's plots, and since it bears a striking resemblance to opinions expressed both by Cavendish herself and by thinkers in whose work she is known to have had an interest.

One of these thinkers was Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes was a close acquaintance of the Cavendish family: William was his patron. Margaret knew and conversed with Hobbes, and her thinking overlapped with his in a number of ways. Cavendish was coy about acknowledging her familiarity with his work, claiming in her *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* that, of Hobbes's work, she '*had never read more than a little book called De Cive*'.³¹ Despite her protestations, however, Sarasohn and L. E. Semler have both recently

³¹ Margaret Cavendish, *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London: 1655), Wing / N863, B3v.

shown that Cavendish was, from an early stage in her writing career, well versed in Hobbes's ideas, and seems to have been strongly influenced by them when developing her own materialist philosophy.³²

With Cavendish's Hobbesian connection in mind, Frere's distinctions between the natural and the conventional become both more interesting and more philosophically grounded. What is particularly striking is the relationship of Frere's argument to Hobbes's contention, made most famously in *Leviathan* but also in *De Cive*, that human beings required artificial restrictions in order to curb their 'natural' predilection to conflict and ruthless, amoral, pursuit of personal gain. Importantly, though, those artificial restrictions must not be seen to be artificial. Hobbes explains:

And therefore the first Founders, and Legislators of Common-wealths amongst the Gentiles, whose ends were only to keep the people in obedience, and peace, have in all places taken care; First, to imprint in their minds a belief, that those precepts which they gave concerning Religion, might not be thought to proceed from their own device, but from the dictates of some God, or other Spirit; or else that they themselves were of a higher nature than mere mortals, that their Lawes might be the more easily received³³

Hobbes describes here precisely the process that Frere, whether genuinely or not, attempts to demystify in his encounters with Soeur.

Crucially, Frere is not the only character in the play who voices these iconoclastic opinions. The Sociable Virgins, in their numerous discourses throughout the play, set about dismantling various cultural and intellectual edifices, and in the process draw attention to the constructedness of authority. In one debate, the discipline of historiography is subjected by the Virgins to sceptical scrutiny. Tacitus, the third virgin argues, must have fabricated many of the speeches and conversations contained within his *Histories* and *Annals*, since in many of the episodes that contain them it is inconceivable that he could have known what precise words were spoken (2.6.37–69). Shortly afterwards, William Camden, author of the monumental historical and geographical survey, *Britannia*, receives the same treatment. Camden, the third virgin claims, offers not an impartial account of the realm's history, but rather a self-interested narrative that promotes the virtues of aristocratic families whose early

³² See Sarasohn, 'Leviathan and the Lady: Cavendish's Critique of Hobbes in *The Philosophical Letters*', in *Authorial Conquests: Essays on Genre in the Writings of Margaret Cavendish*, ed. by Line Cottegnies and Nancy Weitz (Madison, NJ.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), pp. 40–58, and L. E. Semler, 'Margaret Cavendish's Early Engagement with Descartes and Hobbes: Philosophical Revisitation and Poetic Selection', *Intellectual History Review* 22.3 (2012), 327–53.

³³ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by C. B. Macpherson (London: Penguin, 1982), p. 177.

modern descendants were in a position to reward him personally (2.6.70–106). The weight of scholarly authority seems to hold no fear for the virgins, who spend the play interrogating ideas that are broadly accepted by virtue of the reputation of their male originators rather than by virtue of their content. As critics of the play tend to note, the sociable virgins also interrogate the basis upon which certain predispositions are assigned to both genders. The fourth virgin makes clear that the barriers between women and positions of political power and freedom are entirely of social making: ‘we only want experience and education’, she says, ‘to make us as wise as men’ (2.3.13–14).

Like Frere, the sociable virgins also demonstrate a keen awareness of the constructed nature of political power and status. Reflecting the arguments made by both Frere and Hobbes, the first and fourth virgins bemoan the lack of authority wielded by the sovereigns of their age (no doubt a loaded criticism given the civil-war context of the play). They put this down to a modern lack of understanding of the performative aspects of statecraft:

4 VIRGIN Indeed, princes are not so severe, nor do they carry that state and majesty as those in former times, for they neglect that ceremony nowadays, which ceremony creates majesty and gives them a divine splendour. For the truth is ceremony makes them as gods, when the want thereof makes them appear as ordinary men.

1 VIRGIN It must needs, for when princes throw off ceremony, they throw off royalty; for ceremony makes a king like a god. (2.6.190–96)

This, of course, directly recalls Hobbes’s suggestion that heads of state since ancient times have characteristically made themselves appear as if ‘they were of a higher nature than mere mortals, that their Lawes might more easily be received’. Without the artifice of ceremony, the fourth virgin suggests, this expediency is undermined.

The Unnatural Tragedy, then, insists on an opposition between what is natural and what is an ideological construct. In a sense, what the play holds as unnatural, or at least what certain characters in the play hold to be unnatural, are the socially-determined codes of conduct that, among other things, determine the place of women in society and that delineate the boundaries of acceptable sexual behaviour: not the contravention of these codes, but the codes themselves. But what does the play suggest about what would be left in the absence of these ‘unnatural’ constructs? If the play follows Hobbes’s thinking, then we might expect something monstrous. Hobbes’s work does draw attention to the man-made nature of the civil codes by which people live, but it does not do so in order to criticise them. Rather, he is emphatically clear that in the absence of these codes, the reality for man in his natural

condition is bleak. As men are naturally created roughly equal, and therefore harbour roughly equal hopes of personal advancement, then, in the absence of an artificial governing mechanism, conflict is inevitable when different men desire the same things. For Hobbes, the world in a ‘state of nature’ is a world of perpetual conflict, a world in which life is, to quote those famous words, ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’.³⁴

Cavendish, as mentioned above, knew Hobbes’s work well — she may even be remembering it when she has the second virgin describe Homer’s gods as ‘rude, barbarous, brutish and cruel’ (2.6.131) — but her sense of nature seems to be more ambiguous than that of Hobbes. Firstly, nature in this play is associated more frequently with desire and sexual liberty than with conflict. This is not just in the case of Frere’s defence of his desire for his sister. When the Matron demands to know of the first virgin why she will not seek a husband, the reply is to suggest that nature has made women unfit for monogamous commitment:

1 VIRGIN And the truth is that variety is the life and delight of Nature’s works, and women — being the only daughters of Nature, and not the sons of Jove, as men are feigned to be — are more pleased with variety than men are.

1 MATRON Which is no honour to the effeminate sex. But I perceive, lady, you are a right begotten daughter of Nature, and will follow the steps of your mother.

1 VIRGIN Yes, or else I should be unnatural, which I will never be.

(1.7.44–51)

The first virgin’s assertion of promiscuity as the natural state of things — and her refusal to defy nature by embracing monogamy — are the final words spoken in the first act, leaving the association between nature and sexual freedom lingering in the mind of the reader or audience. They also prove to be prophetic: the first virgin eventually marries Malateste, and, it is implied, makes a hopeless cuckold of him.

The play’s men seem to associate nature with sexual desire too. In the first act, two unnamed gentlemen converse about the question of whether women possess rational souls, and nature is cited as the discussion moves on to more physical considerations:

1 GENT If Jove hath not given them rational souls, I am sure nature hath given them beautiful bodies with which Jove is enamoured, or else the poets lie.

³⁴ Hobbes, p. 186.

2 GENT Poets describe Jove according to their own passions and after their own appetites.

1 GENT Poets are Jove's priests.

2 GENT And nature's panders. (1.3.34–9)

What is striking here is not just the association of nature with sexual desire, but the association of both of these things with poetry. The suggestion that poets are 'nature's panders' implies that poetry acts as a kind of conduit through which the sexual freedom of the natural world spills into the regulated world of social and moral convention.

This is especially interesting, given that Cavendish elsewhere associates nature with poetic creativity. The third virgin, in an odd turn of phrase, states that 'Nature's flowers are poets' fancies, and Nature's gardens are poetical heads' (3.1.7–8). This is not, I think, just a metaphor using the relationship between the garden and the flower as an analogue for that between the poet's mind and the poetic idea; rather, it suggests that poetic ideas *come* from nature. Moreover, in Cavendish's thought, nature seems to relate specifically to poetic creativity that is both spontaneous and original. In her General Prologue to the collection of *Playes*, Cavendish draws a distinction between the meticulous labour of the scholarly Ben Jonson, whose plays, like foreign emperors, appear to their subjects only once a year, and the more 'fluent wit' of the less studious Shakespeare, whose 'Playes were writ by natures light'.³⁵ Where Jonson's ideas derive from a reservoir of learning, a rigorous understanding of poetic conventions and a capacity to imitate ancient masters, Shakespeare's arrive spontaneously, because, as Cavendish writes in her *Sociable Letters*, he is a 'Natural poet'.³⁶ While she clearly admires both dramatists, Cavendish imagines herself more in the Shakespearean mould — a poet of natural inspiration rather than scholarly perspiration — and makes this clear to the reader. As well as stating that she has borrowed nothing from Jonson, Shakespeare, Beaumont or Fletcher, she draws an elaborate conceit for the originality of her work:

*Just so, I hope, the works that I have writ,
Which are the buildings of my natural wit;
My own inheritance, as Nature's child,
But the worlds Vanities would me beguild:
But I have thriftly been, houswiv'd my time,
and built both cottages of Prose and Rhime;*

³⁵ Margaret Cavendish, *Playes* (London: 1662), Wing / N868, A7v.

³⁶ Margaret Cavendish, *Sociable Letters*, ed. by James Fitzmaurice (Plymouth: Broadview, 2004), p. 178.

*All the materials in my head did grow,
All is my own, and nothing do I owe (A7v–A8r)*

In the case of *The Unnatural Tragedy*, this claim is rather disingenuous, given its debt to Ford's *'Tis Pity*. If 'natural poetry' is poetry that is spontaneous and original, then, perhaps one thing that makes *The Unnatural Tragedy* 'unnatural' is its derivativeness.

By virtue of its title and its shocking main plot, *The Unnatural Tragedy* prompts its readers to access their preconceptions about what belongs outside the bounds of the natural. At the same time, however, it encourages a re-examination of those preconceptions, both by voicing radical ideas about the constructedness of values which are often assumed to be natural, and by associating nature itself with patterns of behaviour that directly contravene those values. All of this is carried out within a work which claims to be naturally inspired but is in fact a dramatic appropriation. This is not to say that the play invites a sympathetic reading of Frere's sexual infatuation with his sister. Rather, I suggest that it uses this extreme case in order to provoke a reaction and then encourage critical reflection upon that reaction. In the end it is unclear from the play precisely what any one thing Cavendish means by 'nature', but, I think, that is the point: if the play shows nature to be such a nebulous concept, then perhaps it also suggests that we should apply sceptical consideration to the assumptions that underpin our sense of the *unnatural*.

THE TEXT AND THE EDITION

It is my intention that this edition provide an accessible and scholarly resource that might be of use to the general reader as well as those with an academic interest in Margaret Cavendish. With that in mind, I have aimed for clarity and accessibility, modernising spelling and punctuation and providing explanatory notes to accompany obscure terms or references to concepts or figures likely to be unfamiliar to a non-specialist in the period. It is my hope, however, that specialists will also find the annotations useful. As I will detail below, much of the routine modernisation of the text has been carried out silently, but all substantive changes from the copy text are recorded in a collation, provided in small type at the top of the notes section, where applicable. Any changes that I have judged to be potentially contentious are also discussed in the notes. While I have opted to modernise the spelling and punctuation of the text, my overall policy has been one of minimal editorial intrusion, with a focus on avoiding emendations which may have the effect of closing down interpretative possibilities.

The Unnatural Tragedy exists in a single printed source, appearing as one of fourteen plays in the 1662 folio publication, *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (referred to in the collation and notes as *F*). In producing this edition I have used as copy the document images of the text hosted by *Early English Books Online*, which are taken from the copy held at the Huntington Library (Wing / N868). The document in and of itself presents relatively few difficulties for the editor; the text is of a reasonably good quality, and is rendered throughout in clearly legible Roman type. There are few apparent printers' errors, and some of the instances where these do occur are addressed in a list of errata appended at the end of the collection (the corrections suggested in the errata are adopted in this edition). As the play is written almost entirely in prose, there were no issues of lineation to consider. The most significant challenges presented by the text may well be — although this is difficult to say with certainty — authorial in origin; the text's largely arbitrary punctuation, particularly in longer speeches, is in some cases entirely resistant to satisfactory modernisation, and Cavendish's stage directions, some of which contain reported dialogue, demand a more intrusive level of editorial intervention than I have employed elsewhere in the text.

I have silently modernised the spelling throughout the edition, although where an obsolete variant of a modern term has a distinctive character of its own, *and* has an entry in the *OED*, I have retained it. As such, 'deboist' at 1.1.35 is retained rather than being emended to its modern equivalent, 'debauched'. In such cases I have included an explanatory footnote. *F*'s 'Madam' has been retained where it is used as a term of address to a female superior, and emended to 'Madame' where it is used as a title. Punctuation has also been modernised throughout, but this represented a more complex process. Whether the punctuation in *F* is

Cavendish's or that of the printer is difficult to say, although Whitaker suggests that printers tended to apply a process of standardisation to Cavendish's own haphazard punctuation.³⁷ Whoever's it is, the punctuation in *F* is, by modern standards, chaotic. Period marks are reserved almost exclusively for the end of speeches, meaning that even large blocks of prose, sometimes of more than twenty lines in length, are punctuated only by commas, colons and semi-colons. At times colons seem to be used in place of period marks, but this is not a substitution that can be applied consistently; sometimes the colons behave like colons, sometimes like semi-colons, and sometimes they are placed where no punctuation belongs at all. Modernising the text's punctuation, then, required some interpretative work, particularly in scenes such as those in which the sociable virgins exchange lengthy witticisms. For the most part this has been done silently, although in instances where a decision has been made between alternative solutions with the potential to produce different meanings I have included details of those alternatives in a footnote.

Modernised punctuation notwithstanding, Cavendish's syntax remains problematic in places. Usually when such difficulties occur the sense of the passage is still apparent, as when Malateste bemoans the errors of his ways in a sentence that, however the punctuation is arranged, lacks a main verb:

But I, devil as I was to use her as I did, making her a slave unto my whore and frowns, conjecturing all her virtues to a contrary sense; for I mistook her patience for simplicity, her kindness for wantonness, her thrift for covetousness, her obedience for flattery, her retired life for dull stupidity (5.15.20–24).

In certain instances, however, the difficulties are such that only an approximation of the sense of a passage is accessible. See, for example, the second virgin's critique of William Camden's genealogical scholarship:

I observed one error in his writing: that is, when he mentions such places and houses, he says, 'the ancient situation of such a worthy family', when, to my knowledge, many of those families he mentions bought those houses and lands some one descent, some two descents, some three before, which families came out of other parts of the kingdom, or the city, and not to the ancient and inheritary families (2.6.97–103).

In almost all such cases, any attempt to 'correct' the syntax would have required a greater degree of editorial intervention than I was prepared to accept; for that reason I have not sought to correct them through emendation, but have instead offered clarifying notes where

³⁷ Whitaker, pp. 176–77.

the sense of a passage is obscure. I have made a small number of exceptions to this rule in instances in which my judgement was that flawed syntax had not just an obscuring but a misleading effect, and where a simple solution was available. One such case occurs when Madame Bonit reflects upon the folly of men. *F* has her say: ‘That’s when men are fools, and want the wit and judgement to value worth and merit, or not to understand it’ (2.14). The elimination of ‘not’, which here produces a double-negative that renders the sense of the sentence impenetrable, leaves us with what I take to be the intended meaning: ‘That’s when men are fools, and want the wit and judgment to value worth and merit, or to understand it’ (2.7.16–17). Recovering ‘intended meaning’ is, of course, a problematic business, and as such I keep such emendations to a minimum and resort to them only where they involve minimal intrusion and make an incomprehensible passage comprehensible. Where they have been made they are discussed in an accompanying footnote and recorded in the collation.

While my emendation policy has been to err on the side of caution, I have taken a more liberal approach with the play’s stage directions, which are somewhat eccentric in character and tend to serve a narrative as much as a practical purpose. Vagueness is one problem: the stage directions often refer to characters by pronouns or titles, such as ‘he’, or ‘wife’, and sometimes simply detail an action without specifying which character is performing it. In no instance does this represent an insurmountable interpretative difficulty: the subject of the stage direction is always evident after some decoding, but working on the assumption that readers, directors or performers will appreciate clarity in the stage directions, I have emended stage directions that contain ambiguous pronouns to contain the names of the characters to whom they refer. A more knotty problem is presented by the handful of stage directions in the play that contain dialogue. Rather than being presented or marked as speech, this dialogue is either simply stated as part of the stage direction or reported indirectly. Rather than attempting to render these snippets of dialogue as spoken lines with accompanying speech prefixes, which would have required some quite creative reconstruction of the precise words spoken by the character and would have necessitated a complete rewriting of the stage directions in which the speech was originally reported, I have left the dialogue in the stage directions and have attempted to clarify its status as speech by using quotation marks and by specifying the identity of the speaker. Thus, I have — with a heavy heart — emended the exquisite stage direction ‘*Oh, oh, dies*’ to ‘*SOEUR cries “Oh! Oh!” and dies*’ (5.14.16 SD). A more complicated instance of this problem required the adjustment of the tense and narrative perspective of the dialogue being reported: 3.4 closes with a stage direction that is rendered in *F* as ‘*She goes out, and the Sociable Virgins follow her, saying, stay, or else Truth would meet her, and cloath her in a fools coat*’, which I emend to ‘*The second MATRON goes out and the sociable VIRGINS follow her, saying “stay, or else Truth will meet you and clothe you in a fool’s coat”*’ (3.4.47 SD). All emendations to stage directions have been recorded in the collation.

A feature of *F* that has not been retained in this edition is its frequent, if not consistent, capitalisation of nouns. While it was not unusual in early modern print practice for capitalisation to be used for emphasis, its application in *F* seems to me to be too arbitrary to suggest that this is the case here. As such, I have standardised capitalisation throughout the edition. While this was largely a simple process, careful deliberation was required in the instances of capitalised references to abstract concepts that were also commonly represented in the period through personification. ‘Love’ and ‘Nature’, for example, are capitalised throughout *F*, and in the process of standardising the edition’s capitalisation I have considered each instance of these terms on a case-by-case basis; sometimes it is clear that the personifying deity is being referred to, and sometimes it is clear that the reference is to the abstract concept. In such cases I have removed or retained the capitalisation accordingly. In instances where there is a degree of ambiguity, I have included an explanatory note.

Finally, an oddity of the text that has been retained is the occasionally confusing — or confused — accounting for how many characters are on stage at a particular time. Most striking is the apparent disappearance of one of the matrons who accompany the sociable virgins. In *F*, 1.7 opens with the stage direction ‘Enter the sociable virgins and two grave matrons’, and contains dialogue attributed to 1 Matron and 2 Matron. The next time this plot is revisited is in 2.3, which welcomes onto the stage ‘the sociable virgins and the matrons’. One short speech is delivered by 1 Matron, after which, from line 15 onwards, distinction between the matrons ceases and the speech prefix ‘Matron’ is adopted. The two subsequent scenes in this plot, 2.6 and 3.1, refer only to a single ‘Matron’, but in 3.4 and 3.9 the opening stage directions call once again for multiple matrons (‘two grave matrons’ and ‘Matrons’ respectively), and the speech prefixes ‘Matron’ and ‘2 Matron’ are used. It may be that Cavendish deliberated in the process of writing over whether more than one matron was necessary for these scenes, and that relics of her thought process have been retained in the text. It may be that ‘Matron’ simply becomes shorthand for ‘1 Matron’, and that 2 Matron is a silent presence in 2.3 and is then absent in 2.6 and 3.1. If that is the case, there seems to be little dramatic logic in the decision; there is nothing in 1.7, 2.3, 3.4 or 3.9 that demands a second matron any more than 2.6 or 3.1. Since any solution to this problem would necessarily be speculative, however, I have reproduced it as it appears in *F*. Likewise, in 5.16, which features vague instructions pertaining to the arrival and departure of multiple servants, I leave it to the reader or director’s discretion to imagine how the scene might work, rather than imposing an interpretation of my own.

THE UNNATURAL TRAGEDY

[DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Monsieur FRERE

Madame SOEUR (sister of FRERE)

Monsieur PERE (father of FRERE and SOEUR)

Monsieur MARI (husband of SOEUR)

Mademoiselle AMOUR (engaged to FRERE)

Monsieur SENSIBLE (father of Mademoiselle AMOUR)

Monsieur MALATESTE

Madame BONIT (first wife of Monsieur MALATESTE)

Monsieur FEFY (friend of Monsieur MALATESTE)

The sociable VIRGINS

First VIRGIN (later Madame MALATESTE, second wife of MONSIEUR MALATESTE)

Second VIRGIN

Third VIRGIN

Fourth VIRGIN

Fifth VIRGIN

MATRONS (chaperones to the sociable VIRGINS)

First MATRON

Second MATRON

Malateste household staff

NAN

JOAN

MAIDS

SERVANTS

STEWARD

FRIEND (of Monsieur FRERE)

MAN (servant to Monsieur FRERE)

First GENTLEMAN

Second GENTLEMAN]

Monsieur MARI] rendered in *F* as ‘Marry’. I have emended to ‘Mari’ here for consistency with the play’s device of naming characters according to the French designation of their familial role (brother, sister, father and, in this case, husband).

Mademoiselle AMOUR] emended from *F*’s ‘Amor’.

PROLOGUE

A tragedy I usher in today;
All mirth is banished in this serious play.
Yet sad contentment may she to you bring,
In pleased expressions of each several thing.
Our poetress is confident, nor fears,
Though 'gainst her sex the tragic buskins wears,
But you will like it. Some few hours spent,
She'll know your censure by your hands what's meant.

5

This prologue was written by the Lord Marquess of Newcastle.

6. nor] *this edn*; no, *F*.

5–7. **Our poetress ... like it.**] Buskins — boots with enlarged soles that exaggerated the height of their wearer — were part of the traditional costume for the Athenian tragic actor. The term was often used in the early modern period as shorthand to refer to the tragic genre. These lines suggest that, as a woman writing a tragedy, the author knows that she is flouting convention but is nonetheless confident that the reader/audience will enjoy the play.

8. **She'll know ... meant.**] 'She will understand your opinion of the play by virtue of the applause that you grant it'.

9. **This prologue ... Newcastle.**] The Marquis of Newcastle was one of the titles held by William Cavendish, Margaret's husband. William Cavendish was noted courtier, horseman, soldier and writer. At the time he met and married Margaret (née Lucas) in 1645, however, his political fortunes were at a low ebb; as a prominent Royalist he had been forced into continental exile by the civil war two years earlier. The couple remained in Antwerp until the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 allowed William to return to England and reclaim his estate and titles. Margaret Cavendish's dramatic collection *Playes*, which contains the only extant version of *The Unnatural Tragedy* and which was published in 1662, would seem to have been a project embarked upon very soon after the couple's presumably triumphant return home. See introduction for more details.

1.1

Enter Monsieur FRERE and his FRIEND.

- FRERE Since we are come out of our own country to travel, we will go into Turkey, if you will, and see that country.
- FRIEND With all my heart. But now I think on't better, I will stay here a while longer for the courtesans' sake, for we shall never get such store, nor such choice of mistresses. Therefore though the sober and chaste women are kept up here in Italy, yet the wild and wanton are let loose to take their liberty. But in Turkey, that barbarous country, all are kept close; those that will as well as those that will not. But if they had the custom of Italy — to keep up only their honest women — it were a charity, for otherwise a man loses his time in courting those women that will not accept of his love. For how should a man know whether women will or will not, having all sober faces and demure countenances, coy carriages and denying words? 5 10
- FRERE But yet they consent at last; for importunity and opportunity, 'tis said, wins the chastest she. 15
- FRIEND Faith, all the flowery rhetoric, and the most observing times, and fittest opportunities, and counterfeiting dyings win nothing upon a cold, icy constitution or an obstinate morality. 'Tis true it may work some good effect upon an icy conscience.
- Enter a MAN to Monsieur FRERE, with a letter.*
- FRERE From whence comes that letter? 20
- MAN From France, sir, I believe, from your father.

Exit MAN. FRERE opens the letter and reads it to himself.

21 SD. *Frere opens the letter*] *this edn; he opens it, F.*

5. **Therefore**] for (see *OED* 'therefore' adv, 1a).

14. **at last**] eventually.

15. **she**] here used as a noun.

17. **counterfeiting dyings**] perhaps a reference to the Petrarchan tradition of poetic courtship, according to which the spurned suitor would express in hyperbolic terms the agony of his unrequited affection. The friend may also be evoking Shakespeare's Falstaff, who, after having avoided active participation in the battle at Shrewsbury by pretending to be dead, offers the following observation: 'to die, is to be a counterfeit, for he is but the counterfeit of a man who hath not the life of a man. But to counterfeit dying, when a man thereby liveth, is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed' (*1 Henry IV*, 5.3.114–17).

FRIEND	What news? Hath thy father sent thee money?	
FRERE	Yes, but it is to return home; for he hath sent me word my sister is married to a very rich, honest, and sweet-natured man, and that also he would have me come to marry a rich heir, one that is his neighbour's daughter. For my father says he desires to see me settled in the world before he dies, having but us two, my sister and I.	25
FRIEND	Why, is he sick, that he talks of dying?	
FRERE	No, but he is old, and that is more certain of death's approach.	
FRIEND	But is your sister married, say you?	30
FRERE	Yes.	
FRIEND	Faith, I am sorry for't, for I thought to have married her myself.	
FRERE	Marry, she would have had but a wild husband if she had married you.	
FRIEND	The thoughts of this rich heir make thee speak most precisely, as if thou wert the most temperate man in the world, when there is none so deboist as thou art.	35
FRERE	Prithee hold thy tongue, for I am very discreet.	
FRIEND	Yes: to hide thy faults, to dissemble thy passions, and to compass thy desires, but not to abate any of them. Well, if thy sister had not been married I would have praised thee, but now I will rail against thee; for losers may have leave to talk.	40
FRERE	Why, what hopes could you have had to marry her?	
FRIEND	Why, I was thy friend, and that was hope enough. But is thy sister so handsome as fame reports her?	
FRERE	I cannot tell; for I never saw her since I was a little boy and she a very child, I being kept strictly at school and from hence to the university. And, when I was to travel, I went home, but when she was at an aunt's	45

35. **deboist**] an obsolete by-form of 'debauched' (*OED* 'deboist' adj. 1).

45–8. **I cannot tell ... saw her not**] The first of the play's several echoes of John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore* (1633). In Ford's play, Annabella does not initially recognise her brother Giovanni, who is newly returned to his home city of Parma from the University of Bologna (Ford, 1.2).

house a hundred miles from my father's house, so as I saw her not. But I must leave off this discourse, unless you'll return into France with me.

FRIEND No, faith, thou shalt return without me, for I will not go so soon unless my friends had provided me a rich heiress to welcome me home. But, since they have not, I mean to stay and entertain my self and time with the plump Venetians. 50

FRERE Fare thee well, friend, and take heed you entertain not a disease.

FRIEND Thou speakest as if thou wert a *Convertito*. 55

Exeunt.

1.2

Enter Madame BONIT, alone, who sits down to work, sewing. As she is working, Monsieur MALATESTE, her husband, enters.

MALATESTE You are always at work! For what use is it? You spend more money in silk, crewel, thread and the like than all your work is worth.

BONIT I am now making you bands.

MALATESTE Pray let my bands alone, for I'm sure they will be so ill-favoured as I cannot wear them. 5

BONIT Do not condemn them before you have tried them.

MALATESTE You may make them, but I will never wear them.

BONIT Well, I will not make them, since you dislike it.

Exeunt.

1.2. 1 SD. *who sits down to work, sewing*] *this edn*; and *sits down to work, as sowing, F.* | 7. *will*] *this edn*; *wi'l, F.*

1.1. 55. *Convertito*] from the Italian, meaning 'religious convert'.

1.2. 2. *crewel*] thin worsted yarn used for tapestry and embroidery (*OED* n.1).

3. *bands*] intricate decorative neck-bands, or collars (*OED* 'band' n.2, 4a), but also here with a sense of bands as instruments of confinement (*OED* 'band' n.1, 1).

1.3

Enter two GENTLEMEN

- 1 GENT Come, will you go to the gaming-house?
- 2 GENT What to do?
- 1 GENT To play at cards, or the like games.
- 2 GENT I will never play at such games but with women.
- 1 GENT Why so? 5
- 2 GENT Because they are effeminate pastimes, and not manly actions. Neither
will I merely rely upon Fortune's favour without merit, as gamesters do.
- 1 GENT Why then, will you go to a tavern?
- 2 GENT For what?
- 1 GENT To drink. 10
- 2 GENT I am not thirsty.
- 1 GENT But I would have you drink until you are thirsty.
- 2 GENT That's to drink drunk.
- 1 GENT And that's that I desire to be.
- 2 GENT What? 15
- 1 GENT Why, drunk.
- 2 GENT So do not I; for I will not wilfully make my self incapable, as I can
neither be able to serve my king, country, nor friend, nor defend my
honour: for when I am drunk, I can do neither. For a man drunk is weaker
than a child that hath not strength to go or stand, and is worse than those 20
that are dumb; for the dumb keep silence, when those that are drunk do
stutter and stammer out nonsense, and make themselves fools. Besides,

19. **I can do neither.**] Since an obsolete usage of 'neither' allowed it to refer to more than two alternatives, here it would seem to refer back to all four of the incapacibilities mentioned by the second gentleman in lines 17–19 (See *OED* 'neither' pron. B, 1b).

- every coward will take courage to beat — at least affront — a man that is drunk, when as he dares not look askew or come near him without respect when he is sober. 25
- 1 GENT Come, come; thou shalt go, if it be but to decide our drunken quarrels, and allay the wrathful vapour of Bacchus.
- 2 GENT No, I will never decide the disputes of fools, madmen, drunkards nor women; for fools understand no reason, madmen have lost their reason, drunkards will hear no reason and women are not capable of reason. 30
- 1 GENT Why are women not capable of reason?
- 2 GENT Because it is thought — or rather believed — that women have no rational souls, being created out of man, and not from Jove, as man was.
- 1 GENT If Jove hath not given them rational souls, I am sure nature hath given them beautiful bodies with which Jove is enamoured, or else the poets lie. 35
- 2 GENT Poets describe Jove according to their own passions and after their own appetites.
- 1 GENT Poets are Jove's priests.
- 2 GENT And nature's panders. 40
- 1 GENT Well, if you will neither go to the gaming-house, tavern, nor bawdy-house, will you go and visit the sociable virgins?
- 2 GENT Yes, I like sociable virginity very well. But pray, what are those sociable virgins which you would have me go to see?
- 1 GENT Why, a company of young ladies that meet every day to discourse and talk, to examine, censure, and judge of everybody and of everything. 45

28. fools] *this edn*; fool, *F*.

24. **when as**] whereas (*OED*, 'whenas' 2b).

27. **Bacchus**] god of wine and fertility.

33. **Jove**] Jupiter, king of the gods in the Roman pantheon. Also used in the period to refer to the Judaeo-Christian God.

40. **nature's panders**] A pander is a pimp, or someone who acts as a facilitator or go-between in clandestine love affairs (*OED* 'pander', n., 1). As such, the suggestion that poets are 'nature's panders' is ambiguous: it may denote either that poets are products of nature and are panders, or that poets act as panders on behalf of nature.

2 GENT 'Tis pity if they have not learned the rules of logic, if they talk so much,
that they may talk sense.

1 GENT I will assure you they have voluble tongues and quick wits.

2 GENT Let us go then.

50

Exeunt.

1.4

Enter Monsieur MALATESTE to his wife, Madame BONIT.

MALATESTE Lord, how ill-favoured you are dressed today!

BONIT Why, I am cleanly.

MALATESTE You had need be so, for if you were ill-favouredly dressed and sluttish
too it were not to be endured.

BONIT Well, husband, I will strive to be more fashionably dressed.

5

Exeunt.

1.5

Enter Monsieur PERE and Monsieur FRERE, as newly come from travelling.

PERE Well, son, but that you are as a stranger — having not seen you in a long
time — I would otherwise have chid you for spending so much since you
went to travel.

FRERE Sir, travelling is chargeable, especially when a man goeth to inform
himself of the fashions, manners, customs and countries he travelleth
through.

5

*Enter Madame la SOEUR and Monsieur MARI, her husband, who salute
and welcome their brother home.*

1.5. 6 SD. *who salute*] *this edn*; *where they salute*, *F*.

1.4. 47. 'Tis pity] a verbal echo of the title of John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*.

47–48. 'Tis pity ... sense.] 'Given that they talk so much, it would be a shame if they had not learned the rules
of logic required in order to make sense'.

1.5. 2. *chid*] rebuked.

4. *chargeable*] expensive (*OED*, *adj.*, 4).

PERE Look you, son, I have increased my family since you went from home:
your sister's beauty hath got me another son.

SOEUR And I make no question but my brother's noble and gallant actions will
get you another daughter. 10

PERE Well, son, I must have you make haste and marry that you may give me
some grandchildren to uphold my posterity, for I have but you two; and
your sister, I hope, will bring me a grandson soon, for her maids say she
is sick o' mornings, which is a good sign she is breeding, although she
will not confess it. For young married wives are ashamed to confess 15
when they are with child; they keep it as private as if their child were
unlawfully begotten.

Monsieur FRERE all the while looks upon his sister very steadfastly.

MARI Methinks my brother doth something resemble my wife.

FRERE No, sure, brother; so rude a made face as mine can never resemble so
well a shaped face as my sister's. 20

MARI I believe the Venetian ladies had a better opinion of your face and person
than you deliver of yourself.

SOEUR My brother cannot choose but be weary, coming so long a journey today;
wherefore it were fit we should leave him to pull off his boots.

PERE Son, now I think of't, I doubt you are grown so tender since you went 25
into Italy, as you can hardly endure your boots to be roughly pulled off.

FRERE I am very sound sir, and in very good health.

PERE Art thou so? Come thy ways, then.

Exeunt.

19 **No, sure**] surely not.
25 **doubt**] fear.

1.6

Enter Monsieur MALATESTE and Madame BONIT, his wife.

MALATESTE Wife, I have some occasion to sell some land, and I have none that is so convenient to sell as your jointure.

BONIT All my friends will condemn me for a fool if I should part with my jointure.

MALATESTE Why, then; you will not part with it? 5

BONIT I do not say so; for I think you so honest a man that if you should die before me, as Heaven forbid you should ...

MALATESTE Nay, leave your prayers.

BONIT Well, husband, you shall have my jointure.

MALATESTE If I shall, go fetch it. 10

She goes out, and comes back and brings the writing and gives it him, and then he makes haste to be gone.

BONIT Surely, husband, I deserve a kiss for't.

MALATESTE I cannot stay to kiss.

Enter Madame BONIT's maid, JOAN.

JOAN Madam, what will you have for your supper? For I hear my master doth not sup at home.

BONIT Anything, Joan; a little ponado, or water-gruel. 15

JOAN Your ladyship's diet is not costly.

2. **jointure**] a portion of an estate set to pass into the hands of the wife in the event of her widowhood (*OED* n., 4).

15. **a little ponado, or water-gruel**] Ponado, or panada, is a soup-like dish consisting of bread pulped in water and flavoured with sugar, spices or fruit (*OED* 'panada' n.). Water-gruel, as the name suggests, is a bland gruel made from water rather than milk. As Joan's response implies, these modest dishes would have been considered markedly austere by the standards of the aristocratic diet.

BONIT It satisfies nature as well as costly olios or bisks, and I desire only to feed my hunger, not my gusto; for I am neither gluttonous nor lickerish.

JOAN No, I'll be sworn are you not.

Exeunt.

1.7

Enter the sociable VIRGINS and two grave MATRONS.

1 MATRON Come ladies, what discourse shall we have today?

1 VIRGIN Let us sit and rail against men.

2 MATRON I know young ladies love men too well to rail against them. Besides, men always praise the effeminate sex, and will you rail at those that praise you? 5

2 VIRGIN Though men praise us before our faces, they rail at us behind our backs.

2 MATRON That's when you are unkind or cruel.

3 VIRGIN No, 'tis when we have been too kind and they have taken a surfeit of our company.

1 MATRON Indeed, an over-plus of kindness will soon surfeit a man's affection. 10

4 VIRGIN Wherefore I hate them, and resolve to live a single life; and so much I hate men, that if the power of Alexander and Caesar were joined into one

1.6. 17. olios] Olio was a spiced meat and vegetable stew of Iberian origin. In the seventeenth century the term was used more generally to refer to any dish containing a large variety of ingredients, and could also denote a miscellaneous collection of literary or artistic works. The word appears in this latter sense in the title of Margaret Cavendish's 1655 collection *The World's Olio* (*OED* 'Olio' n.).

17. bisks] rich soups (*OED* 'Bisk' n.).

18. gusto] taste (*OED* n., 1).

18. lickerish] given to luxurious appetite (*OED* adj. 2).

11–17. Wherefore ... marry him] The fourth virgin here reels off pairs of figures from classical history or myth as archetypal representative of the various qualities mentioned in the speech. Power is represented by Julius Caesar (100–44 BC) and Alexander the Great (356–323 BC), both venerated politicians and generals who ruled expansive empires. In Homer's *Iliad*, Achilles and Hector were heroes of the Greek and Trojan armies, respectively, and here serve as exemplars of courage. Standing for wisdom are the biblical king of Israel, Solomon, and Ulysses, the Latin name for the cunning hero of Homer's *The Odyssey*, Odysseus. Marcus Tullius Cicero, or 'Tully', (106–43BC) and Demosthenes (384–322BC) were famously eloquent orators of ancient Rome and Athens respectively. Narcissus and Adonis were both beautiful youths of Classical mythology; Narcissus fell in love with his own reflection, while Adonis was amorously pursued by the goddess Venus.

- arm, and the courage of Achilles and Hector were joined into one heart, and the wisdom of Solomon and Ulysses into one brain, and the eloquence of Tully and Demosthenes into one tongue, and this all in one man, and had this man the beauty of Narcissus, and the youth of Adonis, and would marry me, I would not marry him. 15
- 2 MATRON Lady, let me tell you, the youth and beauty would tempt you much.
- 4 VIRGIN You are deceived. For if I would marry I would sooner marry one that were in years, for it were better to choose grave age than fantastical youth. But, howsoever, I will never marry. For those that are unmarried appear like birds, full of life and spirit; but those that are married appear like beasts, dull and heavy, especially married men. 20
- 1 MATRON Men never appear like beasts but when women make them so.
- 1 VIRGIN They deserve to be made beasts when they strive to make women fools. 25
- 2 VIRGIN Nay, they rather think us fools than make us so; for most husbands think, when their wives are good and obedient, that they are simple.
- 1 VIRGIN When I am married, I'll never give my husband cause to think me simple for my obedience, for I will be cross enough.
- 3 VIRGIN That's the best way. For husbands think a cross and contradicting wife is witty, a bold and commanding wife of a heroic spirit, a subtle and crafty wife to be wise, a prodigal wife to be generous, a false wife to be beautiful, and for those good qualities he loves her best otherwise he hates her; nay, the falser she is, the fonder he is of her. 30
- 4 VIRGIN Nay, by your favour, for the most part, wives are so enslaved as they dare not look upon any men but their husbands. 35
- 1 MATRON What better object can a woman have than her husband?
- 1 VIRGIN By your leave, matron, one object is tiresome to view often, when variety of objects are very pleasing and delightful; for variety of objects clear the

1.7. 13. arm] *this edn*; army, *F*. | 36. men] *this edn*; man, *F*.

33–4: **for those ... hates her**] ‘the qualities which the husband loves best in the wife are also those which he hates most’.

35: **by your favour**] with your permission.

35: **as**] that.

38: **By your leave**] with your permission.

senses and refresh the mind, when only one object dulls both sense and mind, that makes married wives so sad and melancholy when they keep no other company but their husbands. And, in truth, they have reason; for a husband is a surfeit to the eyes, which causes a loathing dislike unto the mind. And the truth is that variety is the life and delight of Nature's works, and women — being the only daughters of Nature, and not the sons of Jove, as men are feigned to be — are more pleased with variety than men are. 40 45

1 MATRON Which is no honour to the effeminate sex. But I perceive, lady, you are a right begotten daughter of Nature, and will follow the steps of your mother. 50

1 VIRGIN Yes, or else I should be unnatural, which I will never be.

Exeunt.

44. **Nature**] Nouns are arbitrarily capitalised throughout *F*, and in the vast majority of cases I have standardised initial letters of nouns to lower case. Here, however, the initial upper case letter is retained, as the context suggests nature personified as Mother Nature.

51. **or else I should be unnatural**] see introduction, pp. xii–xix for a discussion of the play's treatment of naturalness and unnaturalness.

2.1

Enter Monsieur PERE and Monsieur FRERE.

FRERE Sir, I wonder, since my sister is so handsome, that you did not marry her more to her advantage.

PERE Why, son, I think I have married her very well for your advantage; for her beauty was her only portion, and she is married to a noble gentleman who hath a very great estate. 5

FRERE But sir, her beauty doth deserve a king, nay, an emperor: a Caesar of the world.

PERE O son, you are young, which makes you partial on your sister's side.

Exeunt.

2.2

Enter Madame BONIT and her maid, NAN.

BONIT It's a strange forgetfulness not to come near me in two hours, but let me sit without a fire. If you were my mistress, I should make a conscience to be more diligent than you are, if I did take wages for my service as you do.

NAN If you do not like me, take another. 5

BONIT If you be weary of my service, pray change; perchance you may get a better mistress, and I hope I shall get as careful a servant.

Exeunt.

2.3

Enter the sociable VIRGINS and the MATRONS.

1 VIRGIN I would have all women bred to manage civil affairs and men to manage the military, both by sea and land. Also, women to follow all manufactures at home and the men all affairs that are abroad. Likewise,

- all arts of labour the men to be employed in, and for all arts of curiosity,
the women. 5
- 2 VIRGIN Nay, certainly, if women were employed in the affairs of state, the world
would live more happily.
- 3 VIRGIN So they were employed in those things or business that were proper for
their strength and capacity.
- 1 MATRON Let me tell you, ladies, women have no more capacity than what is as 10
thin as a cobweb lawn, which every eye may see through, even those that
are weak and half blind.
- 4 VIRGIN Why, we are not fools. We are capable of knowledge; we only want
experience and education to make us as wise as men.
- MATRON But women are incapable of public employments. 15
- 1 VIRGIN Some, we will grant, are; so are some men. For some are neither made by
Heaven, nature nor education fit to be statesmen.
- 2 VIRGIN And education is the chief, for lawyers and divines can never be good
statesmen: they are too learned to be wise; they may be good orators, but
never subtle counsellors; they are better disputers than contrivers; they 20
are fitter for faction than reformation; the one makes quarrels, or upholds
quarrels, the other raises doubts. But good statesmen are bred in courts,
camps and cities, and not in schools and closets, at bars and in pulpits.
And women are bred in courts and cities; they only want the camp to
give them the perfect state-breeding. 25
- 3 VIRGIN Certainly, if we had that breeding, and did govern, we should govern the
world better than it is.

4. **arts of curiosity**] In the seventeenth century ‘curiosity’ was a term with a broader range of significations than it carries today. As well as a desire to know or learn, the term might denote fastidious attention to detail, subtlety of craft, scientific or artistic interest or a trifling interest or whim (*OED* n.)

8–9. **So they were ... capacity**] ‘if that were the case, women would be employed in a business to which their strengths are suited’.

11. **cobweb lawn**] a very fine transparent linen (*OED* n.).

15. **MATRON**] From this line onwards, with the exception of the scene here rendered as 3.9, *F* ceases to distinguish between two separate matrons. See introduction, pp. xxiii.

- 4 VIRGIN Yes, for it cannot be governed worse than it is; for the whole world is together by the ears, all up in wars and blood, which shows there is a general defect in the rulers and governors thereof. 30
- 1 VIRGIN Indeed the state counsellors in this age have more formality than policy, and princes more plausible words than rewardable deeds, insomuch as they are like fiddlers that play artificially and skilfully, yet it is but a sound which they make and give, and not real presences. 35
- 2 VIRGIN You say true; and as there is no prince that hath had the like good fortune as Alexander and Caesar, so none have had the like generousities as they had, which shows as if Fortune (when she dealt in good earnest, and not in mockery) measured her gifts by the largeness of the heart, and the liberality of the hand of those she gave to. And as for the death of those two worthies, she had no hand in them, nor was she any way guilty thereof; for the gods distribute life and death without the help of Fortune. 40
- MATRON 'Tis strange, ladies, to hear how you talk without knowledge, neither is it fit for such young ladies as you are to talk of state matters. Leave this discourse to the autumnal of your sex, or old court-ladies who take upon them to know everything, although they understand nothing. But your discourses should be of masques, plays and balls, and such like recreations fit for your youth and beauties. 45

[*Exeunt.*]

2.4

Enter Monsieur MALATESTE and Madame BONIT.

- MALATESTE What's the reason you turn away Nan?
- BONIT Why, she turns away me, for she is more willing to be gone than I to have her go.
- MALATESTE It is a strange humour in you as never to be pleased, for you are always quarrelling with your servants. 5

2.3. 29. together by the ears] denotes the stance of fighting animals, and was used figuratively to suggest people who are at odds with one another (*OED* 'ear' n. 1, 1d).

36. **Alexander and Caesar]** See note at 1.7.7–11.

37. **shows as if]** seems to show that.

BONIT Truly, I do not remember that ever I had a dispute or quarrel with any servant since I was your wife, before this with your maid Nan; and to prove it is that I do not speak many words in a whole day.

MALATESTES Those you speak, it seems, are sharp.

BONIT Let it be as you say, for I will not contradict you.

10

MALATESTES Well, then, take notice: I will not have Nan turned away.

BONIT I am glad she pleases you so well, and sorry I can please you no better.

Exeunt.

2.5

Enter Monsieur FRERE, alone.

FRERE She is very handsome, extreme handsome, beyond all the women that ever nature made. O, that she were not my sister!

Enter Madame SOEUR. He starts.

SOEUR I doubt, brother, I have surprised you with my sudden coming in, for you start.

FRERE Your beauty, sister, will not only surprise but astonish any man that looks thereon.

5

SOEUR You have used yourself so much to dissembling courtships since you went into Italy as you cannot forbear using them to your sister. But pray leave off that unnecessary civility to me, and let us talk familiarly, as brothers and sisters use to do.

10

FRERE With all my heart, as familiarly as you please.

SOEUR Pray, brother, tell me if the women in Italy be handsome, and what fashions they have, and how they are behaved.

2.4. 7–8. **and to prove it is that**] and the proof is that.

2.5. 3. **doubt**] fear.

7. **You have used yourself so much to**] you have become so used to.

10. **use to do**] are accustomed to doing.

- FRERE To tell you in short, they are so artified as a man cannot tell whether they are naturally handsome or not. As for their behaviour, they are very modest, grave and ceremonious — in public and in private — confident, kind and free, after an humble and insinuating manner. They are bred to all virtuosa, especially to dance, sing and play on musical instruments; they are naturally crafty, deceitful, false, covetous, luxurious and amorous; they love their pleasures better than Heaven. As for their fashion of garments, they change as most nations do, as one while in one and then in another. As for their houses, they are furnished richly, and themselves adorned costly when they keep at home in their houses, for they dress themselves finest when they entertain strangers or acquaintances. But this relation is only of the courtesans; as for those that are kept honest, I can give little or no account, for they are so enclosed with locks and bolts, and only look through a jealousy, so as a stranger cannot obtain a sight, much less an acquaintance.
- SOEUR Then they have not that liberty we French women have?
- FRERE O, no.
- SOEUR Why, do they fear they would all turn courtesans if they should be left to themselves?
- FRERE The men are jealous, and will not put it to the trial; for though they are all merchants, even the princes themselves, yet they will not venture their wives.
- SOEUR I would not live there for all the world, for to be so restrained; for it is said that Italian men are so jealous of their wives as they are jealous of their brothers, fathers, and sons.

14. **artified**] rendered artificial. This is the earliest use of the word cited by the *Oxford English Dictionary*. (*OED* ‘artify’ v.).

14. **as**] that.

18. **virtuosa**] ostensibly refers to a female who is highly accomplished in music and other arts (*OED* n.), but here seems to be used to refer to the arts themselves.

21–2. **as one while in one, and then in another**] ‘which are for a while in one and then in another’. In Italy, as in other nations, Frere suggests, fashions change regularly.

22. **As for their houses ... home in their houses**] ‘the women’s houses are expensively furnished, and the women who occupy them are expensively dressed, too’.

27. **and only look through a jealousy**] The precise meaning of this statement is unclear. The suggestion may be that the husbands only look at or to their wives when they are driven to by jealousy; this reading would be consistent with what appears later in the passage, but remains syntactically problematic.

33. **will not put it to the trial**] i.e. will not allow their suspicions to be confirmed or refuted by granting their wives freedom.

37. **as**] that.

FRERE They are so, for they are wise, and know nature made all in common, and
to a general use; for particular laws were made by men, not by nature. 40

SOEUR They were made by the gods, brother.

FRERE What gods sister, old men with long beards?

SOEUR Fie, fie, brother, you are grown so wild in Italy as France, I doubt, will
hardly reclaim you; but I hope when you are married you will be
reformed and grow sober. 45

FRERE Why, sister, are you become more sober or reformed since you are
married?

SOEUR No, brother; I never was wild nor wanton, but always modest and honest.

FRERE Faith, sister, methinks you might have been married more to your
advantage than you are, had not my father been so hasty in marrying you 50
so young.

SOEUR Why do you say so, brother, when the man I'm married to is so worthy a
person as I do not merit him? Neither would I change him for all the
world.

FRERE Nay, sister, be not angry; for 'tis my extreme love, having no more sisters 55
but you, that makes me speak.

SOEUR Prithee, brother, do not think I am angry; for I believe it proceeds from
love, and that it is your affection that makes you so ambitious for me.

FRERE Know, sister, I love you so well, and so much, as 'tis a torment to be out
of your company. 60

SOEUR Thank you brother, and know I desire never to be in any other company
than my husband, father and brother; nay, any other company is
troublesome.

Exeunt.

40. **for particular ... nature**] reminiscent of the passage in Ford's *'Tis Pity* in which Giovanni dismisses the warnings of Friar Bonaventura to abandon his lust for his sister. See introduction, p. xiv.

43. **as France, I doubt**] that France, I fear.

52–3. **is so worthy a person as I do not merit him**] i.e. is so worthy a person that I am not worthy of him.

59. **as 'tis**] that it is.

2.6

Enter the sociable VIRGINS and MATRON.

- MATRON Ladies, how are your wits to day?
- 1 VIRGIN Faith, my brain is like Salisbury Plain today, where my thoughts run races, having nothing to hinder their way, and my brain, like Salisbury Plain, is so hard, as my thoughts, like the horse's heels, leave no print behind. So as I have no wit today, for wit is the print and mark of thoughts. 5
- 2 VIRGIN And I am sick today, and sickness breaks the strings of wit; and when the strings are broke, no harmony can be made.
- 3 VIRGIN It is with wits as it is with beauties; they have their good days, as to speak quick and to look well, to look cloudy, and to speak dully; and though my tongue today is apt to run like an alarm-clock, without any intermission, yet my mind being out of order, my tongue will go out of time, as either too fast or too slow, so as none can tell the true time of sense. 10
- 4 VIRGIN For my part, I am so dull today as my wit is buried in stupidity, and I would not willingly speak unless my speech could work upon every passion in the heart, and every thought in the head. 15
- 1 VIRGIN For my part, if any can take delight in my unfolded tongue and unpolished words, my discourse is at their service.

2–5. **Faith ... no print behind**] Salisbury Plain is an expansive and sparsely populated chalk plateau in the county of Wiltshire. The first virgin's association of this location with horses, and their capacity or otherwise to leave an imprint on the landscape, is intriguing, since, with the exception of the Stonehenge monument, the most striking feature of the plain is the Westbury White Horse, a 180-foot image of a horse cut into the landscape and filled with white chalk. The current horse dates to 1778, but there is some evidence to suggest that earlier iterations may have existed on the same site. In a 1742 treatise, Francis Wise notes the existence of a white horse in the same area, but states that the inhabitants of Westbury informed him that it had been 'wrought within the memory of persons now living, or but very lately dead', suggesting at the earliest a late-seventeenth-century origin. He goes on to wonder, however, 'whether the authors of it had not preserved the tradition of some older Horse' (pp. 47–8).

4. **as**] that.

9–10. **It is with wits ... dully**] This statement appears to be incomplete. It seems logical to suggest that the intended sense is that wit and beauty 'have their good days, as to speak quick and to look well, [and their bad days, as] to look cloudy and speak dully.' It is possible that Cavendish may have left the sense approximate in order to facilitate a neat chiasmus (speak/look/look/speak), or, as the third virgin is here discussing her inability to speak coherently, this difficulty may be the product of design.

11. **alarm-clock**] This is the earliest recorded use of the term in the English language (*OED* 'alarm' C2).

15. **as**] that.

MATRON	Methinks, ladies, your wits run nimbly, fly high, and spread far; wherefore make a witty match, or a match of eloquence.	20
1 VIRGIN	With all my heart, for in the combat of eloquence I shall do like to a valiant man in a battle; for though he wins not the victory, yet he proves not a coward. So, though I should not get the victory of wit or eloquence, yet I shall not prove myself a fool.	25
2 VIRGIN	I will make no such match, for, though I have read some few books, yet I have not studied logic nor rhetoric to place and set words in order; and, though I have read history and such like books, yet I have not got their speeches by heart, nor parts of them, as the parts of one oration and a part of another oration, and of three or four to make up an oration of my own, as all orators do nowadays. Neither have I studied the morals or the fathers so much as to have their sayings and sentences to stuff my discourse as preachers do, and to speak a natural way, although extraordinary witty, as to have their orations as full of wit as of words, yet it would be condemned if the speaker is not learned, or that their speeches express not learning.	30 35
3 VIRGIN	Now you talk of speeches and orations, it seems very strange to me to read the speeches that chronologers write down to be truly related as from the mouths of those that spoke them, especially such as are spoken extempore and on a sudden, but more especially those that are spoken in mutinies and to a tumultuous multitude, wherein is nothing but distraction both in the speakers and hearers, frights and fears in opposers and assaulters. As, for example, when Tacitus set down the speeches of some persons at such times when and where everyone is in such fears and disorders as there seemed to be not any one person that could have the leisure, time, rest or silence to get those speeches by heart, to bear them	40 45

31–2. **the morals or the fathers**] ‘moral’ could refer to St Gregory the Great’s commentary on the book of Job, or to the ethical writings of Plutarch or Seneca (‘moral’ *OED* n. 1). Given the context, the former seems the most apt interpretation. ‘The fathers’ refers to the biblical patriarchs.

31–6. **Neither ... learning**] The syntax here obscures the sense of the speech, but the second virgin seems to be suggesting that she would not be able to produce the combination of improvised wit and book-learning that was considered necessary for the successful performance of public oratory.

38. **chronologers**] A chronologer is, specifically speaking, one who investigates the date and order of time in events (*OED* n.), but, given what follows, the term seems here to refer generally to historians.

43. **Tacitus**] Roman historian (c.56–c.120). Tacitus’s work was influential in the Renaissance, and his *Histories* and *Annals* had been translated into English by the end of the sixteenth century.

45. **as**] that.

away in their memory, or had they place, time, ink, pen, or paper to write them down.

- 4 VIRGIN But the speeches that Thucydides sets down may be better credited, because most of them were premeditated, and soberly, orderly and quietly delivered, which might more easily be noted and exactly taken to deliver to posterity. 50
- 3 VIRGIN Another thing is how Tacitus could come to know the particulars and private speeches betwixt man and man, as friend and friend, brother and brother. And not only the speeches of the Roman nations, of which he might be best informed, but the speeches of persons of other nations, whose language was not easily understood or frequent amongst the Romans. Nay, not only so, but he hath writ the thoughts of some commanders and others. 55
- MATRON Lady, you must not be so strict in history as to have every word true; for it is a good history if the sense, matter, manner, form and actions be true. As for example, say a man should be presented all naked; is he less a man for being naked? Or is he more a man for being clothed, or for being clothed after another fashion than his own? So a history is not the less true if the actions, occasions, forms and the like be related, although every word be not expressed as they were; so that Tacitus's speeches may be true, as to the sense, although he should express them after his manner, fancy, wit or judgment. Thus the body or subject of those speeches might be true; only the dress is new. 60 65

47. **or had they]** or that could have had.

49. **Thucydides]** Athenian historian (c.460 BC–c.395 BC), renowned for his account of the Peloponnesian wars between Athens and Sparta.

54. **as]** such as.

65. **although]** even if.

3 VIRGIN But by your leave, let me tell you that chronologers do not only new-
dress truth but falsify her, as may be seen in our later chronologers, such
writers as Camden and the like. For they have written not only partially,
but falsely. As for particular families, some Camden hath mistaken, and
some of ancient descent he hath not mentioned, and some he hath falsely
mentioned to their prejudice, and some so slightly — as with an
undervaluing — as if they were not worth the mention, which is far
worse than if he should rail or disclaim against them. But I suppose he
hath done as I have heard a tale of one of his like profession, which was a
schoolmaster as Camden was, which went to whip one of his scholars,
and the boy, to save himself, promised his master that if he would give
him his pardon that his mother should give him a fat pig, whereupon the
fury of the pedant was not only pacified but the boy was stroked and
made much of; so it is to be observed that most schoolmasters commend
those of their scholars most as to be the most apt and ingenious to their
learning, although mere dunces, whose parents and friends see or bribe
them most, which causes them both to flatter their scholars and their
parents. So Camden, to follow the practice of his profession, hath
sweetened his pen as towards his scholars and their families, and 'tis
likely most towards those scholars that were more beneficial to him. But
to such persons whose parents had tutors for them at home, not suffering
them to go to common schools, he hath passed over or lightly mentioned
their families, or hath dipped his pen in vinegar and gall.

70–92. **But by ... gall]** William Camden (1551–1623) was the author of *Britannia*, the first topographical and historical survey of the British Isles, published in 1586 and subsequently reprinted in several enlarged editions. Camden was also headmaster at Westminster School and held the prestigious position of Clarenceux King of Arms. Kings of arms, of which there were three, ‘sat in attendance at court, presided over tournaments, public processions, noble marriages and funerals; they granted arms and approved genealogies, determined on matters of title and degree, and had authority to confiscate any armigerous images that were determined to be false, inaccurate, or unauthorized’ (*DNB*, ‘Camden, William’). In 1599, Ralph Brooke, a herald who reportedly resented Camden’s promotion to King of Arms, published *A discoverie of certaine errours published in print in the much commended Britannia*, a tract which points out numerous genealogical and heraldic misrepresentations — of the kind complained about here by the third virgin — in the fourth edition of Camden’s *Britannia* (See *DNB*, ‘Brooke, Ralph’). Camden included in the 1610 English translation of his work a response to these criticisms, stating that ‘There are some peradventure which apprehend it disdainfully and offensively that I have not remembered this or that family, when as it was not my purpose to mention any but such as were more notable, nor all them truly (for their names would fill whole volumes) but such as happened in my way according to the methode I proposed to my selfe’. See William Camden, ‘The Author to the Reader’, in *Britain*. 77–8. **he hath done as I have heard a tale of one of his like profession]** ‘he has done the same thing that I have heard of someone else of the same profession doing’.

83–7. **so it is ... parents]** ‘so it can be seen that most schoolmasters praise the intelligence of those students whose parents bribe them the most, however limited their ability’.

- 1 VIRGIN Nay, faith, it is likelier that he might take some pet at those that did not entertain him at their houses when he went his progress about the kingdom to inform him of the several parts of the country, before he writ of the same. 95
- 2 VIRGIN I observed one error in his writing: that is, when he mentions such places and houses, he says, ‘the ancient situation of such a worthy family’, when, to my knowledge, many of those families he mentions bought those houses and lands some one descent, some two descents, some three before, which families came out of other parts of the kingdom, or the city, and not to the ancient and inheritary families. But he leaves those ancient families unmentioned. 100
- 4 VIRGIN Perchance he thought it fit that those families that were so ill husbands or had so ill fortunes as they were forced to sell their ancient inheritance, their memories should be buried in their ruins. 105
- 1 VIRGIN What say you of the chronologer of the gods and gallant heroes, which was Homer?
- 3 VIRGIN I say he was a better poet than an historian.
- 2 VIRGIN Why, Homer’s works are only a poetical history, which is a romance; for romance writers heighten natural actions beyond natural power, as to describe by their wit impossible things yet to make them sound or seem probable. 110
- 1 VIRGIN Nay, faith, impossible can never be described to be probable.
- 4 VIRGIN I am sure Homer was out — or else noble persons were not so well bred in his time as they are now in our time — as when he makes them miscall one another, giving one another ill names when they met to fight — as ‘dog’ and the like names — when, in these our days, when noble persons

93. it is] *this edn*; is is, *F*. | 117 names] *this edn*; rames, *F*.

93. **pet**] offence at being slighted (*OED*, n. 3).

102. **and not to the ancient and inheritary families**] While the broad sense of the second virgin’s complaint is clear, the problematic syntax leaves open two specific interpretations of this phrase, neither of which is entirely satisfactory. Either she means to suggest that a) the families come from ‘other parts of the kingdom, or the city’ and not *from* ‘ancient and inheritary families’, or that b) Camden refers to these arriviste families but not *to* ‘ancient and inheritary families’.

108. **Homer**] Greek poet (c.8th Century BC) to whom *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, foundational epic poems depicting the Trojan war and its aftermath, are attributed. These poems were profoundly influential in Renaissance culture, with a complete English version first appearing in George Chapman’s 1616 translation.

- meet to fight they bring compliments in their mouths and death in their hands, so as they strive as much in civility as courage. Indeed, true valour is civil. 120
- 1 VIRGIN If you condemn Homer for making men to speak so, you may condemn him much more for making the gods to speak after that manner; for he hath made the gods to speak so, as to call one another ‘dogs’ and the like names. 125
- 2 VIRGIN The truth is, Homer — as excellent a poet as he is famed to be — yet he hath not fitted his terms of language proper to those he makes to speak, or the behaviour of those persons he presents proper to their dignities nor qualities. For, as you say, he makes the gods in their contentions and fights not only to speak like mortals, but like rude-bred, ill-natured clowns, and to behave themselves like rude, barbarous, brutish and cruel men, when he should have made the gods to have spoken the most eloquentest of humane language, and after the most elegant manner, by reason eloquence hath a divine attraction, and elegance a divine grace. 130
- 3 VIRGIN For my part, I can never read Homer upon a full stomach; for, if I do, I am sick to hear him describe their broiled, roast and boiled meats. 135
- 1 VIRGIN For my part I can read him at no time; for my stomach is always so weak, or at least nice, as the discourse of the large thighs or chines of beef and mutton, with their larded fat, suffocates my spirits and makes me ready to swoon. For the discourse makes me imagine I smell the strong savour of the gross meats and the drunken savour of wine. 140
- MATRON They had meat fit for soldiers, and not ladies.
- 1 VIRGIN I hope their concubines that lay in their tents had finer meats, or else they would appear foul pursy sluts.
- 4 VIRGIN Why, if they were, they would be handsome enough to serve those slovenly heroes. 145

133–4. **by reason**] the reason being that.

138. **nice**] fussy, or difficult to please when it comes to food (*OED* adj. and adv., 3b).

138. **chines of beef**] A chine is a cut of meat consisting of the backbone of the animal and the adjoining meat (*OED*, n. 2, 3).

144. **pursy sluts**] ‘Pursy’ was an adjective meaning ‘fat’ or ‘corpulent’ (*OED* adj. 1, 2). The term ‘slut’ did not necessarily denote sexual promiscuity, and was used often to refer to untidiness or slovenliness (*OED* n. 1a). One might infer both senses from the first virgin’s use of the word here, however.

- MATRON Why do you call those great and brave heroes slovens?
- 4 VIRGIN Because they killed and dressed their own meat, and there are no such greasy fellows as butchers and cooks, and therefore must needs stink most horribly. 150
- 2 VIRGIN It was a sign they had excellent stomachs in Homer's days.
- 3 VIRGIN It was a sign Homer had a good hungry stomach himself, that he could talk so often and long of meat.
- MATRON Let me tell you, ladies, it was a sign those persons in those times were hospitable and noble entertainers; but in these times the nobler sort are too curious and delicate. 155
- 1 VIRGIN I have observed that one pen may blur a reputation, but one pen will hardly glorify a reputation.
- 2 VIRGIN No; for to glorify requires many pens and witnesses, and all little enough.
- 4 VIRGIN It is neither here nor there for that. For merit will get truth to speak for her in Fame's palace, and those that have none can never get in, or at least to remain there. For have not some writers spoke well of Nero and strived to have glorified him, who was the wickedest of all the emperors? And have not some writers done the like for Claudius, who was the foolishest of all the emperors? Yet they were never the more esteemed in the house of Fame. And have not some writers writ ill, and have endeavoured to blot and blur the renowns of Julius Caesar, and Augustus Caesar, and of Alexander? And yet they are never the worse esteemed in the house of Fame. But heroic actions and wise governors force pens, although pens cannot force swords. 160 165 170

159. **and all little enough**] and even that is barely enough.

160–70. **It is neither ... swords.**] In noting the revisionist tendencies of some historians, the fourth virgin provides examples of blameworthy and meritorious figures of classical history. In the former camp are Nero Claudius Caesar (37–68), who as Roman Emperor lived an extravagantly debauched lifestyle, ordered the murder of both his mother and his first wife, and ultimately committed suicide, and his predecessor as Emperor, Tiberius Claudius Nero Germanicus (10 BC–54 AD), who had an almost certainly unwarranted reputation for stupidity. In the latter camp are Gaius Julius Caesar (100 BC–44 BC), a general who, by taking sole control of Roman government, created the conditions in which the rule of emperors could begin, his adopted heir and the first Roman Emperor, Augustus Caesar (63 BC–14 AD) and Alexander III of Macedon (356–323 BC), better known as Alexander the Great, the most renowned conqueror of the ancient world.

161. **Fame**] I have retained *F*'s capitalisation here and in the rest of the speech, as the context suggests personification.

- 2 VIRGIN By your favour, but pens and prints force swords sometimes, nay, for the most part; for do not books of controversies or engravings or printed laws make enemies, and such enemies as to pursue with fire and sword to death?
- 3 VIRGIN Well, for my part, I do not believe it was the glory of victory and conquering the most part of the world which made Alexander and Caesar to be so much revered, admired and renowned by those following ages, but that their heroic actions were seconded with their generous deeds, distributing their good fortune to the most deserving and meritorious persons in their parties. 175
- 1 VIRGIN You say true; and as there have been none so heroical since their deaths, so there have been none so generous. 180
- MATRON Ladies, by your leave, you are unlearned, otherwise you would find that there have been princes since their times as heroical and generous as they were. 185
- 2 VIRGIN No, no. There have been none that had so noble souls as they had; for princes since their days have been ruled, checked and awed by their petty favourites. Witness many of the Roman emperors, and others, when they ruled and checked all the world.
- 4 VIRGIN Indeed, princes are not so severe, nor do they carry that state and majesty as those in former times, for they neglect that ceremony nowadays, which ceremony creates majesty and gives them a divine splendour. For the truth is ceremony makes them as gods, when the want thereof makes them appear as ordinary men. 190
- 1 VIRGIN It must needs, for when princes throw off ceremony they throw off royalty; for ceremony makes a king like a god. 195
- 2 VIRGIN Then if I were a king or had a royal power, I would create such ceremonies as I would be deified, and so worshipped, adored and prayed to whilst I live.

172 engravings] *this edn*; engraving, *F*.

171. **By your favour**] if you will allow me to disagree.

195. **It must needs**] it is necessarily the case.

198. **as**] that.

1 VIRGIN So would I, rather than to be sainted or prayed to when I were dead. 200

4 VIRGIN Why, ceremony will make you as a god both alive and dead, when
without ceremony you will not be so much as sainted.

1 VIRGIN I had as lief be a saint as a god, for I shall have as many prayers offered
to me as if I were made a god.

MATRON Come, come, ladies, you talk like young ladies, you know not what. 205

Exeunt.

2.7

Enter Madame BONIT and her maid, JOAN.

JOAN Lord, madam, I wonder at your patience that you can let Nan not only be
in the house and let my master lie with her — for she is more in my
Master's chamber than in yours — but to let her triumph and domineer,
to command all as chief Mistress, not only the servants, but yourself, as
you are come to be at her allowance. 5

BONIT How should I help it?

JOAN Why, if it were to me, I would ring my husband such a peal as I would
make him weary of his wench, or his life.

BONIT Yes, so I may disquiet myself but not mend my husband; for men that
love variety are not to be altered, neither with compliance or crossness. 10

JOAN 'Tis true, if he would, or did, love variety; but he only loves Nan, a
wench which hath neither the wit, beauty nor good nature of your
ladyship.

BONIT I thank you, Joan, for your commendations.

JOAN But many times a good-natured wife will make an ill-natured husband. 15

BONIT That's when men are fools, and want the wit and judgment to value

2.6. 203. **I had as lief be a saint as a god**] I would as much like to be a saint as a god.

2.7. 5. **at her allowance**] under her command.

7. **I would ring my husband such a peal**] I would give my husband such a scolding.

worth and merit, or to understand it.

- JOAN Why then, my master is one. But why will you be so good as to spoil your husband? For, in my conscience, if you were worse he would be better. 20
- BONIT The reason is that self-love hath the first place, and therefore I will not dishonour myself to mend or reform my husband; for everyone is only to give account to heaven and to the world of their own actions, and not of any other's actions, unless it be for a witness.
- JOAN Then I perceive you will not turn away this wench. 25
- BONIT It is not in my power.
- JOAN Try whether it be or not.
- BONIT No, I will not venture at it, lest I and my maid should be the public discourse of the town.
- JOAN Why, if she should have the better, yet the town will pity you and condemn my master, and that will be some comfort. 30
- BONIT No, truly, for I had rather be buried in silent misery and to be forgotten of mankind than to live to be pitied.
- JOAN Then I would, if I were you, make him a scorn to all the world by cuckolding him. 35
- BONIT Heaven forbid that I should stain that which gave me a reputation — my birth and family — or defame myself or trouble my conscience by turning a whore for revenge.
- JOAN Well, if you saw that which I did see you would hate him so as you would study a revenge. 40
- BONIT What was that?

2.7. 17. or to understand it] *this edn*; or not to understand it, *F*.

39–40. **you would hate him so as you would study a revenge**] you would hate him so much that you would plan your revenge. Joan here echoes Francis Bacon's warning that 'a man that studieth revenge keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal and do well' (Bacon, p. 14).

- JOAN Why, when you came into my master's chamber to see him when he was sick of the French pox, I think you chanced to taste of his broth that stood upon his table; and when you were gone, he commanded Nan to fling that broth out which you had tasted and to put in fresh into the porringer to drink. 45
- BONIT That's nothing, for many cannot endure to have their pottage blown upon.
- JOAN It was not so with him. For before he drank the fresh broth, Nan blew it and blew it, and tasted it again and again to try the heat, and another time to try if it were salt enough, and he seemed to like it the better. Besides, he was never quiet whilst you were in the chamber, until you went out; he snapped you up at every word, and if you did but touch anything that was in the chamber he bid you let it alone, and at last he bid you go to your own chamber and seemed well pleased when you were gone. 50
55
- BONIT Alas, those that are sick are always froward and peevish. But prithee, Joan, have more charity to judge for the best, and have less passion for me.

Exeunt.

49. For before] *this edn*; for he, before, *F*.

43. **French pox**] syphilis.

45. **porringer**] a bowl used for soups and stews (*OED* n., 1).

47. **pottage**] soup, stew or porridge (*OED* n., 1).

51. **salt**] salty (*OED* 'salt' adj., 1.d)

56. **froward**] perverse or difficult to deal with (*OED* adj., adv. and prep., A.1).

57–8. **have less passion for me**] don't be so angry on my behalf.

3.1

Enter the sociable VIRGINS and MATRON.

- MATRON Come, ladies, what will you discourse of today?
- 1 VIRGIN Of nature.
- MATRON No, that is too vast a subject to be discoursed of; for, the theme being infinite, your discourse will have no end.
- 2 VIRGIN You are mistaken; for nature lives in a quiet mind, feeds in a generous heart, dresses in a poetical head and sleeps in a dull understanding. 5
- 3 VIRGIN Nature's flowers are poets' fancies, and Nature's gardens are poetical heads.
- MATRON Pray, leave her in her garden and talk of something else.
- 4 VIRGIN Then let us talk of thoughts; for thoughts are the children of the mind, begot betwixt the soul and senses. 10
- 1 VIRGIN And thoughts are several companions, and, like courtly servitors, do lead and usher the mind into several places.
- 2 VIRGIN Pray, stay the discourse of thoughts, for it's a dull discourse.
- 4 VIRGIN Then let us talk of reason. 15
- 3 VIRGIN Why should we talk of reason, when there are so many seeming reasons as the right cannot be known?
- 1 VIRGIN Seeming reasons are like seducing flatterers, persuade 'tis truth, when all is false they say.
- 2 VIRGIN Let us talk of Justice. 20

5–6. **for nature lives ... dull understanding**] The point of the second virgin's enigmatic response seems to be that, contrary to the Matron's suggestion that nature is boundless, nature is contained within the individual.

7–8. **Nature's flowers ... poetical heads**] i.e. poetic ideas (fancies) are like nature's flowers, and the poet's mind (poetical head) is like the garden in which those flowers grow.

9. **her**] Nature.

12–13. **several**] can be taken to mean 'numerous' or 'separate, distinct' (*OED*, adj., adv., and n.).

18. **seducing flatterers, persuade**] seducing flatterers who persuade.

- 4 VIRGIN Justice, to the generality, hath a broad full face; but to particulars she hath but a quarter and half-quarter face, and to some particulars she veils it all over. Wherefore to talk of Justice is to talk blindfold.
- 2 VIRGIN Let us talk of bashfulness.
- 3 VIRGIN What, should we talk of our own disgrace? 25
- MATRON A grace, you mean, lady.
- 3 VIRGIN No, surely; a distempered countenance and a distorted face can be no grace.
- 1 VIRGIN Let us talk of the passions.
- 2 VIRGIN It is easier to talk of them than to conquer and govern them, although it is easier to conquer the perturbed passions of the mind than the unruly appetites of the body. For as the body is grosser than the soul, so the appetites are stronger than the passions. 30
- 4 VIRGIN Let us talk of gifts.
- 5 VIRGIN There are no gifts worth the talking of but natural gifts, as beauty, wit, good nature and the like. 35
- 4 VIRGIN Let us talk of wit; that is a natural gift.
- 1 VIRGIN Nature gives true wit to very few, for many that are accounted wits are but wit-leeches that suck and swell with wit of other men, and, when they are over-gorged, they spew it out again. Besides, there are none but natural poets that have variety of discourses; all others talk according to their professions, practice and studies, when poets talk of all that nature makes or art invents, and, like as bees that gather the sweets of every flower, bring honey to the hive which are the ears of the hearers, wherein wit doth swarm. But since we are not by nature so indued, wit is a subject not fit to be pursued by us. 40 45
- 5 VIRGIN Let us talk of beauty.

45. **indued]** To 'indue' or to 'endue' (like the modern 'endow') is to invest someone or something with a power or quality (*OED*, 'endue | induce', v., 9).

3 VIRGIN Those that have it take greater pleasure in the fame than in the possession, for they care not so much to talk of it as to hear the praises of it. 50

MATRON Come ladies, let us go, for I perceive your wits can settle upon no one subject this day.

Exeunt.

3.2

Enter Monsieur FRERE, alone, as being melancholy.

FRERE O, how my spirit moves with a disordered haste! My thoughts tumultuously together throng, striving to pull down Reason from his throne and banish conscience from the soul.

Walks as in a melancholy posture. Enter Monsieur PERE.

PERE What, Son, lover-like already, before you have seen your mistress? Well, her father and I am agreed; there's nothing wanting but the priest and ceremony, and all is done. 5

FRERE Sir, there are our affections wanting; for we never saw one another, wherefore it is not known whether we shall affect or not.

PERE I hope you are not so disobedient to dispute your father's will.

FRERE And I hope, sir, you will not be so unkind as to force me to marry one I cannot love. 10

PERE Not love? Why, she is the richest heiress in the kingdom!

FRERE I am not covetous, sir. I had rather please my fancy than increase my estate.

PERE Your fancy? Let me tell you that your fancy is a fool, and if you do not obey my will I will disinherit you. 15

FRERE I fear not poverty.

PERE Nor fear you not a father's curse?

FRERE Yes, sir; that I do.

PERE Why then, be sure you shall have it if you refuse her.

20

FRERE Pray, give me some time to consider of't.

PERE Pray do, and consider wisely, you had best.

Exeunt.

3.3

Enter two SERVANTS.

1 SERVANT I doubt my lady will die.

2 SERVANT I fear so, for the doctor, when he felt her pulse, shook his head, which was an ill sign.

1 SERVANT It is a high fever she is in.

2 SERVANT The doctor says a high continual fever.

5

1 SERVANT She's a fine young lady; 'tis pity she should die.

2 SERVANT My master puts on a sad face, but yet methinks his sadness doth not appear of a through-dye.

Exeunt.

3.4

Enter the SOCIABLE VIRGINS and two grave MATRONS.

MATRON Come, ladies, how will you pass your time today?

3.3. 1. doubt] fear.

7–8. **his sadness doth not appear of a through-dye]** 'through-dye' (or 'through-die', as it is spelled in *F*) is an unusual term; I have been able to locate only one other instance of it from the period, in a sermon by John Stoughton published in 1640. Both there and here it seems to refer on a literal level to a dye in which the colour has been thoroughly absorbed by the material to which it has been applied, but is used figuratively in both cases to illustrate the distinction between the genuine and the superficial. In his sermon, Stoughton contrasts superficial spiritual understanding, which 'is never a perfect dye of knowledge', with the kind of understanding that 'is saving and solid, namely then when it is penetrating, when it so farre fills the understanding, and enters so deeply into it; that there is a resultance to overflow from it on the affections to inflame and draw them, that will give the through dye which is in graine, which will never out, but truly save' (Stoughton, p. 77). The second servant's suggestion here is that Malateste's apparent sadness, like an imperfect dye, goes no deeper than the surface.

1 VIRGIN	Pray let us sit and rhyme, and those that are out shall lose a collation to the rest of the society.	
ALL	Agreed, agreed.	
1 VIRGIN	Love is both kind and cruel, As fire unto fuel; It doth embrace and burn, Gives life, and proves death's urn.	5
2 VIRGIN	A low'ring sky and sunny rays, Is like a commendation with dispraise; Or like to cypress bound to bays, Or like to tears on wedding days.	10
3 VIRGIN	A flatt'ring tongue and a false heart, A kind embrace which makes me start, A beauteous form, a soul that's evil, Is like an angel, but a devil.	15
4 VIRGIN	A woman old to have an amorous passion, A puritan in a fantastic fashion, A formal statesman which dances and skips about, And a bold fellow which is of countenance out.	20
5 VIRGIN	A scholar's head with old dead authors full, For want of wit is made a very gull.	
1 VIRGIN	To laugh and cry, to mingle smiles and tears, Is like to hopes and doubts, and joys and fears; As sev'ral passions mixes in one mind, So sev'ral postures in one face may find.	25
2 VIRGIN	To love and hate both at one time, And in one person both to join,	

2–3. **those that are out ... the society**] A 'collation' seems here to refer to a collection or donation of money. The virgins are here establishing a bet whereby those competitors whose rhymes are 'out' will have to pay a forfeit to the rest of the group.

11. **Or like to cypress bound to bays**] 'Bays' were laurel leaves worn in a wreath as a celebratory symbol of excellence in combat or poesy, while Cypress was associated with mourning and funeral rites. As such, the notion of the leaves of the two trees being bound together is in keeping with the motif of antithesis employed throughout this passage.

To love the man, but hate the crime,
Is like to sugar put to brine.

30

MATRON Ladies, you had better tell some tales to pass your time with, for your rhymes are not full of wit enough to be delightfully sociable.

3 VIRGIN Agreed. Let us tell some tales.

4 VIRGIN Once upon a time Honour made love to Virtue. A gallant and heroic lord he was, and she a sweet, modest and beautiful lady, and naked Truth was the confidant to them both, which carried and brought love messages and presents from and to each other.

35

2 MATRON Out upon beastly Truth, for if she goeth naked I dare say she is a wanton wench. And Virtue, I dare swear, is little better than herself if she keeps her company, or can behold her without winking. And I shall shrewdly suspect you, ladies, to be like her, if you discourse of her; but more, if you have any acquaintance with her. And, since you are so wild and wanton as to talk of naked truth, I will leave you to your scurrilous discourse, for I am ashamed to be in your company and to hear you speak such ribaldry. O fie, O fie, naked Truth! Jove bless me and keep me from naked Truth, as also from her sly companion, Virtue; out upon them both!

40

45

The second MATRON goes out and the sociable VIRGINS follow her, saying 'stay, or else Truth will meet you and clothe you in a fool's coat'. Exeunt.

3.5

Enter Madame SOEUR and Monsieur FRERE.

SOEUR Now you have seen your mistress, brother, tell me how you like her.

FRERE It were a rudeness to your sex if I should say I dislike any woman.

SOEUR Surely, brother, you cannot dislike her; for she is handsome, well-behaved, well-bred, a great estate and of a good fame and family.

3.4. 47 SD. *The second MATRON goes out and the sociable VIRGINS follow her, saying 'stay, or else Truth will meet you and clothe you in a fool's coat'] this edn; She goes out, and the Sociable Virgins follow her, saying, stay, or else Truth would meet her, and cloath her in a fools coat, F.*

3.4. 40. **winking]** closing her eyes.

41. **but more]** still more.

PERE By the Mass, girl, thou givest me good counsel, and I will temper him gently.

Exeunt.

3.6

Enter two or three Maid-SERVANTS.

1 SERVANT O, she's dead! She's dead! The sweetest lady in the world she was.

2 SERVANT O, she was a sweet-natured creature. For she would never speak to any of us all — although we were her own servants — but with the greatest civility, as 'pray do such a thing', or 'call such a one', or 'give or fetch me such or such a thing', as all her servants loved her so well as they would have laid down their lives for her sake, unless it were her maid, Nan. 5

1 SERVANT Well, I say no more; but pray God Nan hath not given her a Spanish fig!

3 SERVANT Why, if she did, there is none of us knows so much as we can come as witnesses against her. 10

Enter NAN.

NAN It is a strange negligence that you stand prating here and do not go to help to lay my lady forth.

Exit NAN, the maid. Enter Monsieur MALATESTTE, who passes over the stage with his handkerchief before his eyes.

1 SERVANT My master weeps. I did not think he had loved my lady so well.

3.6. 12 SD. *who passes*] *this edn*; and *passes*, *F*.

3.6. 4. **as**] for example.

5. **as**] so that.

8. **Spanish fig**] 'a poisoned fig used as a secret way of destroying an obnoxious person' (*OED*, n. 1, 2). The term was also used euphemistically to denote 'the disease *Ficus*, or the piles' (*OED*, n. 1, 3a), a complaint from which Cavendish is known to have suffered (Whitaker, pp. 113–15).

9. **so much as we can**] so much as we who can.

2 SERVANT Pish, that's nothing; for most love the dead better than the living, and many will hate a friend when they are living and love them when they are dead. 15

Exeunt.

3.7

Enter Monsieur FRERE. Madame SOEUR comes after, and finds him weeping.

SOEUR Brother, why weep you?

FRERE O, sister, mortality spouts tears through my eyes to quench love's raging fire that's in my heart! But 'twill not do; the more I strive, with greater fury doth it burn.

SOEUR Dear brother, if you be in love she must be a cruel woman that will deny you; for pure and virtuous love softens the hardest hearts and melts them into pity. 5

FRERE Would I were turned to stone and made a marble tomb, wherein lies nothing but cold death, rather than live tormented thus.

Exit [FRERE]. She alone.

SOEUR Heaven keep my fears from proving true. 10

Exit.

3.8

Enter Monsieur SENSIBLE and Mademoiselle AMOUR, his daughter.

SENSIBLE Daughter, how do you like Monsieur Frere?

AMOUR Sir, I like whatsoever you approve of.

SENSIBLE But setting aside your dutiful answer to me, tell me how you affect him.

AMOUR If I must confess, sir, I never saw any man I could love but him.

3.7. 1 SD. *Enter Monsieur FRERE. Madame SOEUR] this edn; Enter Monsieur Frere, and Madam Soeur, F.*

3.6. 14. **Pish]** an expression of 'contempt, impatience, or disgust' (*OED*, int. and n., A).

SENSIBLE You have reason. For he is a fine gentleman, and those marriages most commonly prove happy when children and parents agree. 5

AMOUR But sir, he doth not appear to fancy me so much or so well as I fancy him.

SENSIBLE It's a sign, child, thou art in love, that you begin to have doubts.

AMOUR No, sir; but, if I thought he could not love me, I would take off that affection I have placed on him whilst I can master it, lest it should grow so strong as to become masterless. 10

SENSIBLE Fear not, child.

Exeunt.

3.9

Enter the sociable VIRGINS and MATRONS.

1 MATRON 'Tis said that Malateste is a widower.

1 VIRGIN Why then, there is a husband for me.

2 VIRGIN Why for you? He may choose any of us as soon as you, for anything you know.

3 VIRGIN I'm sure we are as fair. 5

4 VIRGIN And have as great portions.

5 VIRGIN And are as well-bred as you are.

1 VIRGIN Well, I know he is allotted to my share.

2 MATRON Pray do not fall out about him; for surely he will have none of you all, for 'tis said he shall marry his maid. 10

1 VIRGIN Why, he is not so mad; for though his maid served to vex and grieve his wife into her grave, and also to pass away idle hours with him, yet he will not marry her, I dare warrant you. For those that are married must take such as they can get, having no liberty to choose, but when they are free from wedlock's bonds they may have choice. 15

Enter Monsieur MALATESTE, all in mourning.

1 VIRGIN So, sir, you are welcome, for you can resolve a question that is in dispute amongst us.

MALATESTE What is it, lady?

1 VIRGIN The question is whether you will marry your maid or not.

MALATESTE No, sure, I cannot forget myself, nor my dead wife, so much as to marry my maid. 20

1 VIRGIN Faith, that is some kindness in husbands that they will remember their wives when they are dead, although they forget them whilst they live.

MALATESTE A good wife cannot be forgotten, neither dead nor alive.

1 VIRGIN By your favour, sir, a bad wife will remain longest in the memory of her husband, because she vexed him most. 25

MALATESTE In my conscience, lady, you will make a good wife.

1 VIRGIN If you think so, you had best try.

MALATESTE Shall I be accepted, lady?

1 VIRGIN I know no reason I should refuse, sir; for report says you have a great estate, and I see you are a handsome man. And as for your nature and disposition, let it be as bad as it can be, mine shall match it. 30

MALATESTE My nature loves a free spirit.

1 VIRGIN And mine loves no restraint.

MALATESTE Lady, for this time I shall kiss your hands, and, if you will give me leave, I shall visit you at your lodging. 35

1 VIRGIN You shall be welcome, sir.

Exit Monsieur MALATESTE.

1 VIRGIN Ladies, did not I tell you I should have him?

25. **By your favour]** with your permission. In this instance the phrase ironically foreshadows the first virgin's subsequent intransigency.

- 2 VIRGIN Jesting and raillery doth not always make up a match.
- 1 VIRGIN Well, well, ladies, God be with you, for I must go home and provide for
my wedding. For I perceive it will be done on the sudden, for widowers
are more hasty to marry than bachelors, and widows than maids. 40
- 1 MATRON Stay, lady, you must first get the good will of your parents.
- 1 VIRGIN All parents' good will concerning marriage is got beforehand, without
speaking. If the suitor be rich, and if he prove a good husband, then 45
parents brag to their acquaintance, saying how well they have matched
their child, making their acquaintance believe it was their prudence
and industry that made the match, when the young couple were agreed
before their parents ever knew or guessed at such a match. But if they
prove unhappy then they complain to their acquaintance and shake their 50
heads, crying 'it was their own doings', saying their children were wilful
and would not be ruled, although they forced them to marry by
threatenings and cursings. O, the unjust partiality of self-love, even in
parents, which will not allow right to their own branches! But I forget
myself. Farewell, farewell. 55
- ALL VIRGINS Bid us to your wedding! Bid us to your wedding!
- Exeunt.*

54. own branches] *this edn*; own own branches, *F*.

4.1

Enter Madame SOEUR, and Monsieur FRERE follows her.

SOEUR Why do you follow me, with sighs fetched deep and groans that seem to rend your heart in two?

FRERE Be not offended. Sisters should not be so unnatural as to be weary of a brother's company or angry at their grief, but rather strive to ease the sorrow of their hearts than load on more with their unkindness. 5

SOEUR Heaven knows, brother, that if my life could ease your grief I willingly would yield it up to death.

FRERE O gods, O gods, you cruel gods, commanding nature to give us appetites, then starve us with your laws, decree our ruin and our fall, create us only to be tormented! 10

Exit Monsieur FRERE. Madame SOEUR alone.

SOEUR I dare not ask his griefs or search his heart, for fear that I should find that which I would not know.

Exit.

4.2

Enter Monsieur Malateste's STEWARD and SERVANTS.

STEWARD My master and our new lady are coming home, wherefore you must get the house very clean and fine. You, wardropian, you must lay the best carpets on the table and set out the best chairs and stools, and, in the chamber wherein my master and lady must lie, you must set up the cross-stitch bed and hang up the new suit of hangings, wherein is the story 5

4.1. 11. ask his griefs] ask him about his sorrows.

4.2. 2. wardropian] I can find no other instances of this word, which is presumably a variant of 'wardrober' or 'wardroper', the title of an 'officer of a royal household who had charge of the robes, wearing apparel, etc.' (*OED* 'wardrober', n., 1).

3. carpets on the table] In a now obsolete form of the word, 'carpet' could refer to a 'thick fabric, commonly of wool, used to cover tables, beds, etc.' (*OED*, n. 1a).

5–6. the story of Abraham ... and her maid] Chapters 16 and 21 of Genesis tell this story. Abraham's wife, Sarah, who has not been able to provide her husband with children, offers to him her handmaid Hagar as a second wife. Hagar has a son, Ishmael, by Abraham, but both mother and son are later exiled into the wilderness when Sarah produces a son, Isaac. This story of a wife's position being usurped by her maid presents a clear parallel to the Malateste plot.

of Abraham and Sarah, and Hagar her maid. And you, pantler, must have a care that the glasses be well washed and that the basin and ewer, voider and plates be bright scoured, as also the silver cistern and the silver flagons standing therein, and to have a care that the table-cloths be smooth and the napkins finely nipped and perfumed, and that the lemons, oranges, bread, salt, forks, knives and glasses be set and placed after the newest mode. 10

Enter NAN.

O, Mistress Nan, you have prevented me, for I was going to seek you out to let you know my master and our new lady will be here before night, wherefore you must see that the linen be fine and the sheets be well dried and warmed, and that there be in my lady's chamber all things necessary. 15

NAN Let her command one of her own maids, for I am none of her servant.

STEWARD Why, whose servant are you?

NAN My master's, who hired me and pays me my wages. I never saw her, nor she me. 20

STEWARD But all my master's servants are my lady's; for man and wife divide not their servants, as to say, 'those are mine, these are yours'.

NAN Why, I'm sure in my other lady's time all the servants were my master's, and none my lady's; for she had not power to take or turn away anyone.

STEWARD The more was the pity, for she was both virtuous and wise, besides beautiful and well-bred, rich and honourably-born, and of a sweet disposition. But 'tis said this lady hath such a spirit as she will share in the rule and government. 25

10. nipped] *this edn*; knip'd, *F*. | 13. No speech prefix] *this edn*; Steward, *F*.

6. **pantler**] 'An officer in a large household who was in charge of the bread or pantry' (*OED* n.).

7. **voider**] Generally refers to a receptacle into which rubbish or waste food is deposited (*OED* n. 3), although the reference could be to a 'voyder knife', which was used for 'clearing or voiding a table'. One of these items appears in an inventory of William Cavendish's belongings (Worsley, p. 112).

10. **nipped**] folded.

11. **forks**] An apt item to appear at a table laid out to the latest fashion; forks were not used in England until the 1630s, and were still not in common use by the time Cavendish's *Playes* was published (Worsley, pp. 111–12).

NAN Yes, yes, for a little time, as long as honey-month lasts. I dare warrant you she shall reign nor rule no longer.

30

Exit NAN.

STEWARD Come, my friends and fellow-servants, let's every one about our several affairs.

Exeunt.

4.3

Enter Mademoiselle SOEUR, as sitting in her chamber. Enter Monsieur FRERE, who comes to her and, kneeling down, weeps.

SOEUR Dear brother, why do you kneel and weep to me?

FRERE My tears, like as distressed petitioners, fall to the ground and at your feet crave mercy; it is not life they ask but love that they would have.

SOEUR Why, so you have; for I do vow to Heaven I love you better than ambitious men love power or those that are vainglorious love a fame, better than the body loves health or the life loves peace.

5

FRERE Yet still you love me not as I would have you love.

SOEUR Why, how would you have me love?

FRERE As husbands love their wives, or wives their husbands.

SOEUR Why, so I do.

10

FRERE And will you lie with me?

SOEUR How! Would you have me commit incest?

FRERE Sister, follow not those foolish binding laws which frozen men have made, but follow nature's laws, whose freedom gives a liberty to all.

4.3. 1 SD. *Enter Monsieur FRERE, who comes to her*] *this edn; Enters Monsieur Frere, and comes to her, F.*

4.2. 29. **honey-month**] Honeymoon.

4.3. 5. **a fame**] 'fame', in a now rare usage of the word, could refer to a specific rumour or report likely to increase its subject's notoriety. As such, one might in the seventeenth century have been as likely to speak of 'a fame', as of 'fame' in the abstract (*OED*, 'fame' n.1, 1a).

12. **How!**] an exclamation of alarm, or 'cry of pain or grief' (*OED*, int. 1).

SOEUR Heaven bless your soul, for sure you are possessed with some strange wicked spirit that uses not to wander amongst men. 15

FRERE Sister, be not deceived with empty words and vainer tales, made only at the first to keep the ignorant vulgar sort in awe, whose faith, like to their greedy appetites, take whatsoever is offered; be it ne'er so bad or ill to their stomachs they never consider, but think all good they can get down. So whatsoever they hear they think 'tis true, although they have no reason or possibility for it. 20

SOEUR But learned and knowing men, wise and judicious men, holy and good men, know this you ask is wicked.

FRERE They do not know it, but they believe as they are taught; for what is taught men in their childhood grows strong in their manhood, and as they grow in years, so grow they up in superstition. Thus wise men are deceived and cozened by length of time, taking an old forgotten deed to be a true sealed bond. Wherefore, dear sister, your principles are false, and therefore your doctrine cannot be true. 25 30

SOEUR Heaven hath taught that doctrine, wherefore we cannot err.

FRERE Heaven considers us no more than beasts that freely live together.

SOEUR O, that I should live to know my only brother turn from man to beast!

She goes out. Monsieur FRERE alone.

FRERE I am glad the ice is broke, and that her fury rages not like fire.

Exit.

4.4

Enter Monsieur SENSIBLE and Mademoiselle AMOUR.

SENSIBLE Daughter, I do perceive that Monsieur Frere doth neglect you. Besides, he is a wild, debauched young man, and no ways likely to make a good husband. Wherefore I charge you on my blessing and the duty you owe me to draw off those affections you have placed upon him.

AMOUR Good sir, do not impose that on my duty which I cannot obey. For I can
sooner draw the light from the sun, or the world from its centre, or the
fixed stars from their assigned places, than draw away love from him. 5

SENSIBLE Why, how if he will not have you?

AMOUR I can only say I shall be unhappy.

SENSIBLE I hope you will be wiser than to make yourself miserable for one you
cannot have to be your husband. 10

Exeunt.

4.5

*Enter many of Monsieur MALATESTES'S SERVANTS, waiting against their master and
lady's coming home. Enter Monsieur MALATESTES and MADAME MALATESTES.*

SERVANTS Heaven give your worship joy, and our noble lady.

MME MAL What, is this your best house?

MALATESTES Yes, and is it not a good one, sweet?

MME MAL Fie upon it, I hate such an old-fashioned house, wherefore pray pull it
down and build another more fashionable, as that there may be a bell-
view and pergolas round the outside of the house. Also, arched gates,
pillars and pilasters, and carved frontispieces with antic imagery. Also, I
would have all the lower rooms vaulted and the upper rooms flat-roofed,
painted and gilded, and the planchers chequered and inlaid with silver,
the staircase to be large and winding, the steps broad and low as shallow;
then to take in two or three fields about your house to make large gardens 5
10

4.5. 1 SD. *and MADAME MALATESTES] this edn; and his lady, F.*

4.4. 8. **how if]** what if.

4.5. 1 SD. *waiting against]* waiting for.

4–15. **Fie upon it ... sing in summer]** The fashionable house described here by Madame Malateste bears a striking resemblance to the Little Castle, the living quarters at Bolsover Castle, a household of the Cavendish family built by William specifically for entertainment and pleasure. See introduction.

6. **pergolas]** 'Pergola' can refer either to a raised balcony or a covered walkway in a garden (*OED*, n.).

7. **carved frontispieces with antic imagery]** A frontispiece is a decorative area surrounding or surmounting the main entrance to a building (*OED* n.). 'Antic' refers to art or architecture which is 'grotesque, in composition or shape; grouped or figured with fantastic incongruity; bizarre' (*OED* adj. and n., A. adj., 1).

9. **planchers]** Floors or ceilings of wooden planks, or the planks that comprise those floors or ceilings (*OED*, n.).

wherein you may plant groves of myrtle; as also to make walks of green turf, and those to be hanging and shelving as if they hung by geometry. Also, fountains and waterworks, and those waterworks to imitate those birds in winter that only sing in summer.

15

MALATESTES But this will cost a great sum of money, wife.

MME MAL That's true, husband, but to what use is money unless to spend?

MALATESTES But it ought to be spent prudently.

MME MAL Prudently, say you? Why, prudence and temperance are the executioners of pleasure and murderers of delight, wherefore I hate them, as also this covetous humour of yours.

20

Exeunt Monsieur MALATESTES and MADAME MALATESTES.

1 SERVANT Ay, marry, sir; here is a lady indeed. For she talks of pulling down this house before she hath thoroughly seen it, and of building up another.

2 SERVANT If you will have my opinion, the old servants must go down as well as the old house.

25

3 SERVANT I believe so: for she looked very scornfully upon us, nor spoke not one word either good or bad to us.

4 SERVANT Well, come let us go about our employments and please as long as we can, and when we can please no longer we must seek other services.

Exeunt.

4.6

Enter Monsieur FRERE and Madame SOEUR.

SOEUR Do not pursue such horrid acts as to whore your sister, cuckold your brother-in-law, dishonour your father and brand your life and memory with black infamy. Good brother, consider what a world of misery you strive to bring upon yourself and me.

4.5. 21 SD. and MADAME MALATESTES] *this edn; and his wife, F.*

4.5. 23. **thoroughly**] *thoroughly.*

FRERE Dear sister, pity me, and let a brother's pleading move your heart, and bury not my youth in death before the natural time. 5

SOEUR 'Tis better you should die, and in the grave be laid, than live to damn your soul.

FRERE To kill myself will be as bad a crime.

SOEUR O, no. For death any way is more honourable than such a life as you would live. 10

Exeunt.

4.7

Enter the two GENTLEMEN.

1 GENT Friend, prithee tell me why you do not marry.

2 GENT Because I can find no woman so exact as I would have a wife to be. For first, I would not have a very tall woman, for she appears as if her soul and body were mismatched, as to have a pigmy soul and a giantly body.

1 GENT Perchance her soul is answerable to her body. 5

2 GENT O, no, for it is a question whether women have souls or no. But, for certain, if they have they are of a dwarfish kind. Neither would I have a wife with a masculine strength, for it seems preposterous to the softness and tenderness of their sex. Neither would I have a lean wife, for she will appear always to me like the picture of Death, had she but a scythe and hour-glass in her hand. For, though we are taught to have always death in our mind — to remember our end — yet I would not have Death always before my eyes, to be afraid of my end. But to have a very lean wife were to have Death in my arms as much as in my eyes, and my bed would be as my grave. 10 15

1 GENT Your bed would be a warm grave.

4.7. 9. have a lean] *this edn*; have lean, *F*.

4.6. 10. **death any way**] death of any kind.

4.7. 2–3. **For first**] i.e. to give a first reason.

5. **Perchance ... body**] i.e. perhaps her soul is of a size appropriate to that of her body.

11. **death**] Here I have used a lower case 'd', as in this instance the second gentleman appears to have in mind death as a concept, rather than, as in the other instances in this speech, the grim reaper.

2 GENT Why, man, though death is cold, the grave is hot; for the earth hath heat, though death hath none.

1 GENT What say you to a fat woman?

2 GENT I say a fat woman is a bedfellow only for the winter, and not for the summer, and I would have such a woman for my wife as might be a nightly companion all the year. 20

1 GENT I hope you would not make your wife such a constant bedfellow as to lie always together in one bed.

2 GENT Why not? 25

1 GENT Because a man's stomach or belly may ache, which will make wind work, and the rumbling wind may decrease love, and so your wife may dislike you, and dislike, in time, may make a cuckold.

2 GENT By your favour, it increases matrimonial love! 'Tis true, it may decrease amorous love, and the more amorous love increases the more danger a man is in. For amorous love even to husbands is dangerous, for that kind of love takes delight to progress about, when matrimonial love is constant and considers nature as it is. Besides, a good wife will not dislike that in her husband which she is subject to herself. But, howsoever, I will never marry unless I can get such a wife as is attended by virtue, directed by truth, instructed by age on honest grounds and honourable principles, which wife will neither dislike me, nor I her, but the more we are together the better we shall love, and live as a married pair ought to live, and not as dissembling lovers, as most married couples do. 30 35 40

1 GENT What think you of choosing a wife amongst the sociable virgins?

2 GENT No, no, I will choose none of them, for they are too full of discourse. For I would have a wife rather to have a listening ear than a talking tongue, for by the ear she may receive wise instructions, and so learn to practise that which is noble and good; also to know my desires, as to obey my will, when by speaking much she may express herself a fool. For great talkers are not the wisest practisers. Besides, her restless tongue will 45

disturb my contemplations, the tranquillity of my mind and the peace,
quiet and rest of my life.

Exeunt.

4.8

Enter MADAME MALATESTES with a maid, and NAN, the former Lady's maid.

MME MAL Are you she that takes upon you to govern and to be mistress in this
house?

NAN Why, I do but that I did in the other lady's time.

MME MAL Let me tell you, you shall not do so in my time. Nay, you shall have no
doings. Wherefore, get you out of the house. 5

NAN I will not go.

MME MAL No? But you shall.

She speaks to her other maid.

Go, you, and call one of those servants I brought with me.

The maid goes out. Enter a MANSERVANT.

Here, take this wench and put her out of the gates.

Exit MADAME MALATESTES.

NAN You rogue! Touch me and you dare, I shall have one to defend me. 10

MAN I defy your champion.

The MANSERVANT takes her up and carries her. She shrieks or cries out.
Monsieur MALATESTES enters.

MALATESTES What, you villain, will you force her? Set her down.

MAN I did no more than what I was commanded.

4.8. 1 SD. *Enter MADAME MALATESTES with a maid*] this edn; *Enter Madam Malateste, and another maid, F.* | 8 SD. *The maid goes out.*
Enter a manservant] this edn; *The maid goes out, and enters a man-servant, F.* | 9 SD. *Exit Madame MALATESTES*] this edn; *Exit Lady, F.* |
11 SD. *The MANSERVANT takes her up*] this edn; *the man takes her up, F.*

4.8. 10. and] if.

MALATESTES Who commanded you?

MAN My lady, sir, commanded me to carry her out of the gates. 15

MALATESTES Pray let her alone until I have spoke with my wife.

MAN I shall, sir.

[MANSERVANT puts NAN down]. *Exit* MANSERVANT. NAN *cries*.

MALATESTES What's the matter, Nan?

NAN Only my lady's dislikes of my person; for it could not be through any neglect of my service, or faithful diligence, or humble duty, but through a passionate humour, because she hath heard you were pleased heretofore to favour me. 20

MALATESTES But now we are very honest, Nan.

NAN Yes, the more unkind man you, to win a young maid to love and then to turn her away in disgrace. 25

MALATESTES I do not turn you away.

NAN Yes, but you do, if you suffer my lady to turn me away.

MALATESTES How should I help that? For she hath such a strong spirit as not to be controlled.

NAN O, sir, if you bridle her you may guide her as you will. 30

MALATESTES How should I bridle her?

NAN Why, put her to her allowance, and take the government of your family out of her hands, as you did to your former lady.

17 SD. *Exit* MANSERVANT. NAN *cries*.] *this edn*; *Exit Man./ She cries.*, F.

30. **bridle**] To bridle is to 'curb, check, restrain, hold in', a sense that derives figuratively from the bridle worn by a horse (*OED*, v. 2). The context of this usage also brings to mind the 'scold's bridle' or 'branks', a piece of iron headwear with an intrusive mouthpiece which was used as an instrument of punishment for women who were perceived to be quarrelsome (*OED* 'branks' n.1).

32. **put her to her allowance**] i.e. restrict her to her due allowance. This is an unusual expression, but a similar usage appears in Thomas Middleton's 1608 comedy *A Mad World, My Masters*: 'Puh: that's enough: I'll keep her to her stint, / I'll put her to her pension, / She gets but her allowance, that's a bare one.' (1.2.65–67).

MALATESTES My other wife was born with a quiet obedient nature, and this with a high and turbulent nature, and if I should cross her high working spirit she would grow mad. 35

NAN Why, then you would have a good excuse to tie her up.

MALATESTES Her friends would never suffer me. Besides, the world would condemn me and account me a tyrant.

NAN Why, it is better to be accounted a tyrant than a fool. 40

MALATESTES O, no! For men ought to be sweet and gentle-natured to the effeminate sex.

NAN I see by you that the worse that men are used, the better husbands they make; for you were both unkind and cruel to your other lady, neither could you find, or at least would not give, such arguments for her. 45

MALATESTES Will you rebuke me for that which you persuaded me unto by dispraising your lady unto me?

NAN Alas, sir, I was so fond of your company that I was jealous even of my lady, and love is to be pardoned. Wherefore, dear sir, turn me not away; for Heaven knows I desire to live no longer than when I can have your favour, and I wish I were blind if I might not be where I may see you, and my heart leaps for joy whensoever I hear your voice. Wherefore, good sir, for love's sake pity me. 50

She seems to cry.

MALATESTES Well, I will speak to my wife for you.

Exit Monsieur MALATESTES. NAN alone.

NAN Well, if I can but get my master but dance once, to kiss me again — which I will be industrious for — I will be revenged of this domineering lady. I hope I shall be too crafty for her. 55

Exit.

5.1

Enter Monsieur FRERE and Mademoiselle SOEUR.

- SOEUR Brother, speak no more upon so bad a subject, for fear I wish you dumb; for the very breath that's sent forth with your words will blister both my ears. I would willingly hide your faults — nay, I am ashamed to make them known — but if you do persist, by Heaven I will discover your wicked desires, both to my father and husband. 5
- FRERE Will you so?
- SOEUR Yes, that I will.
- FRERE Well, I will leave you and try if reason can conquer my evil desires, or else I'll die.
- SOEUR Heaven pour some holy balsam into your festered soul. 10
- Exeunt.*

5.2

Enter Monsieur MALATESTE and MADAME MALATESTE, his wife.

- MALATESTE Wife, I am come an humble petitioner to you in the behalf of Nan. She hath been a servant here ever since I was first married to my other wife.
- MME MAL No, no, husband, I will have none of your whores in the house where I live. If you must have whores, go seek them abroad.
- MALATESTE Pray let not your jealous passion turn away a good servant. 5
- MME MAL Had you rather please your servant — a whore — or me?
- MALATESTE Why, you.
- MME MAL Then turn her away.
- MALATESTE But surely, wife, you will let me have so much power as to keep an old servant. 10
- MME MAL No, husband, if your old servant be a young lusty wench.

5.1. 8. try if] see if.

- MALATESTES But I have passed my word that she shall stay.
- MME MAL And I have sworn an oath that she shall go away.
- MALATESTES But my promise must be kept, wherefore she shall not go away.
- MME MAL I say she shall go away. Nay, more, I will have her whipped at the end of a cart and then sent out of doors. 15
- MALATESTES As I am master, I will command none shall touch her, and let me see who dares touch her.
- MME MAL Who dares touch her? Why, I can hire poor fellows for money, not only to whip her but murder you. 20
- MALATESTES Are you so free with my estate? I will discharge you of that office of keeping my money.
- MME MAL If you do, I have youth and beauty that will hire me revengers and get me champions.
- MALATESTES Will you so? 25
- MME MAL Yes, or anything rather than want my will. And know I perfectly hate you for taking my maid's part against me.
- MALATESTES Nay, prithee, wife, be not so choleric; for I said all this but to try thee.
- MME MAL You shall prove me, husband, before I have done.

Exeunt.

5.3

Enter Madame SOEUR, alone.

- SOEUR Shall I divulge my brother's crimes, which are such crimes as will set a mark of infamy upon my family and race for ever? Or shall I let vice run

5.2. 26. **perfectly**] completely.

28. **choleric**] irascible.

29. **You shall prove me**] The word 'prove' here means both to 'test' and to establish the true nature of something. Madame Malateste responds to her husband's suggestion that he has tried to try (test) her, by assuring him that he will find out her nature soon enough (See *OED*, 'prove', v. II.6.a and 7).

without restraint? Or shall I prove false to my husband's bed, to save my brother's life? Or shall I damn my soul and his, to satisfy his wild desires? O, no, we both will die to save our souls, and keep our honours clear.

5

Exit.

5.4

Enter Monsieur FRERE, alone.

FRERE The more I struggle with my affections, the weaker do I grow for to resist. If gods had power they sure would give me strength, or were they just they would exact no more than I could pay; and if they cannot help, or will not help me, furies, rise up from the infernal deep and give my actions aid. Devils, assist me, and I will learn you to be more evil than you are, and when my black horrid designs are fully finished, then take my soul, which is the quintessence of wickedness, and squeeze some venom forth upon the world that may infect mankind with plagues of sins.

5

*There multitudes will bury mine,
Or count me as a saint and offer at my shrine.*

10

Exit.

5.5

Enter Monsieur MALATESTE and his maid, NAN.

MALATESTE Nan, you must be contented, for you must be gone; for your lady will not suffer you to be in the house.

NAN Will you visit me if I should live near your house, at the next town?

5.4. 5. learn you] teach you.

10–11. *There multitudes will bury mine, / Or count me as a saint and offer at my shrine*] This enigmatic couplet is rendered in *F* as it appears here, that is, in italics and set apart from the rest of Frere's speech. This could possibly suggest that Frere is here quoting from another text, but I have been unable to find any such source. In any case, the directness with which these lines apply to the previous speech makes it unlikely that their origin lies elsewhere; Frere's suggestion in the couplet is that once he has infected mankind with the plague of sin, his own sins ('mine') will either be obscured by the sins of the multitudes or so overtaken by them that he will be considered a saint by comparison. It seems most likely that typographical distinction is applied to these lines simply to place emphasis upon them, representing as they do the only scene-closing rhyming couplet in the play.

MALATESTTE No, for that will cause a parting betwixt my wife and me, which I would not have for all the world. Wherefore, Nan, God be with you. 5
NAN May your house be your hell and your wife be your devil.

Exeunt.

5.6

Enter MADAME MALATESTTE and her MAID.

MAID What will your ladyship have for your supper?

MME MAL Whatsoever is rare and costly.

Exit MAID. Enter STEWARD.

STEWARD Did your ladyship send for me?

MME MAL Yes, for you, having been an old servant in my father's house, will be more diligent to observe and obey my commands. Wherefore, go to the metropolitan city and there try all those that trade in vanities and see if they will give me credit, in case my husband should restrain his purse from me, and tell them that they may make my husband pay my debts. The next is, I would have you take me a fine house in the city, for I intend to live there and not in this dull place where I see nobody but my husband, who spends his time in sneaking after his maid's tails, having no other employment. Besides, solitariness begets melancholy, and melancholy begets suspicion, and suspicion jealousy, so that my husband grows amorous with idleness, and jealous with melancholy. Thus he hath the pleasure of variety, and I the pain of jealousy. Wherefore, be you industrious to obey my command. 5
10
15

STEWARD I shall, madam.

Exeunt.

5.7

Enter Mademoiselle AMOUR to her father, Monsieur SENSIBLE.

AMOUR Good sir, conceal my passion, lest it become a scorn when once 'tis

5.6. 8. may make] *this edn*; may may make, *F*. | 5.7. 1 SD. *Enter Mademoiselle AMOUR to her father*] *this edn*; *Enter Madamoiselle Amor, as to her Father, F*.

known. For all rejected lovers are despised, and those that have some small returns of love; yet do those faint affections triumph vaingloriously upon those that are strong, and make them as their slaves.

SENSIBLE Surely, child, thy affections shall not be divulged by me. I only wish thy passions were as silent in thy breast as on my tongue, as that he thou lovest so much may lie as dead and buried in thy memory. 5

AMOUR There's no way to bury love, unless it buries me.

Exeunt.

5.8

Enter Monsieur MALATESTE and MADAME MALATESTE.

MALATESTE I hear, wife, that you are going to the metropolitan city.

MME MAL Yes, husband, for I find myself much troubled with the spleen, and therefore I go to try if I can be cured.

MALATESTE Why, will the city cure the spleen?

MME MAL Yes, for it is the only remedy, for melancholy must be diverted with divertisements. Besides, there are the best physicians. 5

MALATESTE I will send for some of the best and most famous physicians from thence, if you will stay.

MME MAL By no means, for they will exact so much upon your importance as they will cost more money than their journey is worth. 10

MALATESTE But wife, it is my delight and profit to live in the country. Besides, I hate the city.

MME MAL And I hate the country.

5.7. 2–4. **all rejected ... their slaves]** i.e. even though both rejected and successful lovers are held with scorn, love still gets the better of even the strong.

6–7. **as that]** so that.

5.8. 2. **troubled with the spleen]** 'Spleen' here denotes a melancholic, depressed state of mind (*OED* n. 7). The term derives from humoral theory, which attributed illnesses or personality types to imbalances of bodily fluids (in this case an excess of bile, which was thought to be produced by the spleen). Margaret Cavendish herself received regular treatment for melancholia from London-based physicians (Whitaker, pp. 141–3).

9. **as]** that.

MALATESTES But every good wife ought to conform herself to her husband's humours and will. 15

MME MAL But husband, I profess myself no good wife. Wherefore, I will follow my own humour.

Exit MADAME MALATESTES. He alone.

MALATESTES I find there is no crossing her. She will have her will.

Exit.

5.9

Enter Monsieur MARI and Madame SOEUR.

MARI Wife, I am come to rob your cabinet of all the ribands that are in it, for I have made a running match betwixt Monsieur la Whip's nag and your brother's barb, and he sayeth that he shall not run unless you give him ribands; for he is persuaded your favours will make him win.

SOEUR Those ribands I have, you shall have, husband. But what will my brother say if his barb should lose the match? 5

MARI I asked him that question, and he answered that, if he lost, he would knock his barb's brains out of his head.

SOEUR Where is my brother?

MARI Why, he is with your father; and such a good companion he is today, and so merry, as your father is so fond of his company, in so much as he hangs about his neck as a new-married wife. But I conceive the chief reason is that your brother seems to consent to marry the Lady Amour. 10

SOEUR I am glad of that with all my soul.

MARI But, he says, if he doth marry her it must be by your persuasions. 15

5.9. 1. **ribands**] ribbons.

3. **barb**] barbary horse. According to William Cavendish, who was one of the foremost horsemen in Europe, 'Barbs are the gentlemen of horse kind' (Worsley, p. 171).

4. **favours**] A lady's ribbons or garments, offered to a man as a token of affection. In chivalric tradition a knight would wear his lady's favours in battle or when competing in a tournament (*OED*, 'favour' n. 7).

11. **as your father**] that your father.

SOEUR He shall not want persuading if I can persuade him.

MARI Come, wife, will you give me some ribands?

SOEUR Yes, husband. I will go fetch them.

MARI Nay, wife, I will go along with you.

Exeunt.

5.10

Enter Mademoiselle AMOUR alone, as in a melancholy humour.

AMOUR Thoughts, cease to move and let my soul take rest, or let the damps of grief quench out life's flame.

Enter Monsieur SENSIBLE.

SENSIBLE My dear child, do not pine away for love; for I will get thee a handsomer man than Monsieur Frere.

AMOUR Sir, I am not so much in love with his person as to dote so fondly thereon. 5

SENSIBLE What makes you so in love with him, then? For you have no great acquaintance with him.

AMOUR Lovers can seldom give a reason for their passion. Yet mine grew from your superlative praises; those praises drew my soul out at my ears to entertain his love. But since my soul misses of what it seeks, it will not return, but leave my body empty to wander like a ghost, in gloomy sadness and midnight melancholy. 10

SENSIBLE I did mistake the subject I spoke of, the substance being false. Those praises were not current, wherefore lay them aside and fling them from thee. 15

5.10. 11. it will] *this edn*; will, *F*.

5.10. 5. **person**] in this case refers to 'an individual considered with regard to his ... outward appearance' (*OED* n., 4b).

AMOUR I cannot, for they are minted and have love's stamp, and, being out, increases like to interest-money, and is become so vast a sum as I believe all praises — past, present, or what's to come or can be — are too few for his merits and too short of his worth. 20

SENSIBLE Rather than praise him, I wish my tongue had been forever dumb.

AMOUR O, wish not so, but rather I had been forever deaf.

She goes out. He alone.

SENSIBLE My child is undone.

Exit.

5.11

Enter two SERVANTS of Monsieur MALATESTE.

1 SERVANT My master looks so lean and pale as I doubt he is in a consumption.

2 SERVANT Faith, he takes something to heart, whatsoever it is.

1 SERVANT I doubt he is jealous.

2 SERVANT He hath reason, for if my lady doth not cuckold him, yet she gives the world cause to think she doth, for she is never without her gallants. 5

1 SERVANT There is a great difference betwixt our lady that is dead, and this.

Enter Monsieur MALATESTE.

MALATESTE Is my wife come home yet?

1 SERVANT No, sir.

MALATESTE I think it be about twelve of the clock.

1 SERVANT It is past one, sir. 10

5.10. 22 SD. *Exit*] *this edn*; *Exeunt, F.* | 5.11. 1 SD. MALATESTE] *this edn*; Malateste's, *F.*

5.10. 17–20. **I cannot ... his worth**] Mademoiselle Amour here plays on Monsieur Sensible's assertion that his praises of Frere were not 'current' (i.e. authentic) by figuring those praises as monetary currency which, once put into circulation, inflates in value (see *OED* 'current', adj., 4–7).

5.11. 1. **as I doubt**] that I fear. 'doubt' carries the same sense in line 3.

MALATESTES If it be so late I will sit up no longer watching for my wife's coming home, but I will go to bed; for I am not very well.

1 SERVANT You do not look well, sir.

MALATESTES Indeed, I am sick.

Exeunt.

5.12

Enter Madame SOEUR and Monsieur FRERE.

SOEUR Lord brother, what is the reason you are come back so soon? Hath not your barb run the race?

FRERE No.

SOEUR What makes you here then?

FRERE To see you. 5

SOEUR To see me? Why, I shall give you no thanks, because you left my husband behind you.

FRERE I do not come for your thanks. I come to please myself.

SOEUR Prithee, brother, get thee gone, for thy face doth not appear so honest as it uses to do. 10

FRERE I do not know how my face doth appear, but my heart is as it was: your faithful lover.

SOEUR Heaven forbid you should relapse into your old disease.

FRERE Let me tell you, sister, I am as I was, and was as I am. That is, from the first time I saw you — since I came from travel — I have been in love with you, and must enjoy you; and if you will embrace my love with a free consent, so. If not, I'll force you to it. 15

SOEUR Heaven will never suffer it, but cleave the earth and swallow you alive.

5.12. 4. **What makes you here]** what brings you here?

9–10. **as it uses to do]** as it usually does.

17. **so]** so be it.

FRERE I care not, so you be in my arms; but I will first try Heaven's power, and struggle with the deities.

20

He takes her in his arms, and carries her out. She cries, 'help! Help! Murder! Murder!'

Exeunt.

5.13

Enter Monsieur MALATESTE, as being not well, and his wife, MADAME MALATESTE.

MALATESTE Wife, is this the way to cure melancholy? To sit up all night at cards, and to lose five hundred pounds at a sitting? Or to stay all night abroad a'dancing and revelling?

MME MAL O, yes; for the doctors say there is nothing better than good company to employ the thoughts with (outward objects), otherwise the thoughts feed too much upon the body. Besides, they say that exercise is excellent good to open obstructions and to disperse melancholy vapour, and the doctors say there is no exercise better than dancing, because there are a great company meet together, which adds pleasure to the labour.

5

MALATESTE My other wife did not do this.

10

MME MAL Wherefore she died in her youth with melancholy. But I mean to live while I am old, if mirth and good company will keep me alive; and know I am not so kind-hearted to kill myself to spare your purse or to please your humour.

MADAME MALATESTE goes out, and MALATESTE goes out after, sighing.

5.13. 14 SD. MADAME MALATESTE *goes out, and MALATESTE goes out after*] *this edn; The Lady goes out, and he goes out after, F.*

5.13. 3. **a'dancing and revelling**] *F* here has 'a dancing and revelling'. I have opted for the present reading, but this might as easily be a misprint for 'at dancing and revelling'.

8–9. **there are a great company meet together**] A syntactically awkward clause. 'there' presumably denotes 'at a dance', but the verb 'meet' would seem to require the removal of 'are' in order to create a grammatically coherent unit. I have chosen against emending the line, however, as a possible solution is provided by reading 'meet' as an adjective — meaning suitable or well-fitted — rather than a verb (*OED* 'meet' adj. 2a).

12. **while**] until.

5.14

Enter Madame SOEUR alone, as ravished.

SOEUR Who will call unto the gods for aid, since they assist not innocency, nor give protection to a virtuous life? Is piety of no use? Or is Heaven so obdurate no holy prayers can enter Heaven-gates, or penitential tears can move the gods to pity? But O, my sorrows are too big for words, and all actions too little for his punishment. 5

Enter Monsieur FRERE, all unbuttoned, and his sword drawn in his hand.

FRERE Sister, I must die, wherefore you must not live; for I cannot be without your company, although in death and in the silent grave, where no love's made nor passion known.

SOEUR It's welcome news; for if death comes not by your hand, my hand shall give a passage unto life. 10

FRERE There is none so fit to act that part, as I, who am so full of sin, want nothing now but murder to make up measure.

He wounds her to death.

SOEUR Death, thou art my grief's reprieve, and wilt unlade my Soul from heavy thoughts that miserable life throws on, and sinks me to the earth. Brother, farewell; may all your crimes be buried in my grave, and may my shame and yours be never known. 15

SOEUR cries 'Oh! Oh!' and dies.

FRERE Now she is dead my mind is at rest, since I know none can enjoy her after me. But I will follow thee: I come, my mistress, wife, and sister all in one.

Monsieur FRERE falls upon the point of his sword. He falls close by Madame SOEUR and lays his arm over her, then speaks.

16 SD. Souer cries 'Oh! Oh!' and dies.] *this edn*; Oh, Oh, dies., F. | 19 SD. sword. He falls close by Madame Soeur] *this edn*; sword, then falls close by Madam Soeur, F.

7. **although**] even if it must be.

You gods of love, if any gods there be, O hear my prayer! And as we came both from one womb, so join our souls in the Elysium, our bodies in one tomb.

20

FRERE *cries 'Oh! Oh! Oh!' and dies.*

5.15

Enter Monsieur MALATESTE upon a couch, as sick of a consumption, his friend Monsieur FEFY sitting by him. Then enters MADAME MALATESTE to her sick husband.

MALATESTE Wife, you are very unkind that you will not come to see me now I am sick, nor so much as send to know how I do.

MME MAL I am loth to trouble you with unnecessary visits or impertinent questions.

MALATESTE Is it unnecessary or impertinent to see a husband when he is sick? Or to ask how he doth?

5

MME MAL Yes, when their visits and questions can do them no good. But God be with you, for I must be gone.

MALATESTE What, already?

MME MAL Yes; for I doubt I have stayed too long, for I have appointed a meeting and it will be a dishonour for me to break my word.

10

FEFY But it will be more dishonour to be dancing when your husband is dying, lady.

MME MAL What, will you teach me? Go tutor girls and boys, and not me.

[MADAME MALATESTE *starts to leave*. FEFY *goes to stop her*.]

MALATESTE Let her go, friend, for her anger will disturb me.

Exit MADAME MALATESTE.

FEFY I know not what her anger doth you, but her neglect of you doth disturb me, and, for my part, I wonder how you can suffer her.

15

5.14. 22 SD. FRERE *cries 'Oh! Oh! Oh!' and dies.*] *this edn*; *Oh, oh, oh, dies., F.* | 5.15. 14 SD. *Exit MADAME MALATESTE*] *this edn*; *Exit Lady, F.*

9. **doubt**] fear.

MALATESTTE Alas, how shall I help or remedy it? But Heaven is just, and punishes me for the neglect I used towards my first wife, who was virtuous and kind.

FEFY She was a sweet lady indeed.

MALATESTTE O, she was! But I, devil as I was to use her as I did, making her a slave 20
unto my whore and frowns, conjecturing all her virtues to a contrary
sense; for I mistook her patience for simplicity, her kindness for
wantonness, her thrift for covetousness, her obedience for flattery, her
retired life for dull stupidity. And what with the grief to think how ill I
used her, and grieving to see how ill this wife uses me, wasting my 25
honour and estate, she hath brought me into a consumption, as you see.
But when I am dead, as I cannot live long, I desire you, who are my
executor, to let me buried in the same tomb wherein my wife is laid. For
it is a joy to me to think my dust shall be mixt with her pure ashes, for I
had rather be in the grave with my first wife than live in a throne with my 30
second. But I grow very sick, even to death; wherefore let me be
removed.

Exeunt.

5.16

Enter Monsieur PERE and his son-in-law, Monsieur MARI.

PERE Son-in-law, did your brother say he was very ill?

MARI He said he had such a pain on his left side as he could not sit on his horse, but must be forced to return home again.

PERE Heaven bless him, for my heart is so full of fears and doubts, as if it did prognosticate some great misfortune to me. 5

5.15. 28. **let me buried**] leave me buried (see *OED* 'let' v. 1a).

5.16. 2. **he had such a pain on his left side**] Lisa Hopkins notes that this is a symptom of the hereditary condition known as porphyria, from which William Cavendish's cousin Arbella Stuart, along with several other members of the Stuart family, suffered. The condition is also known to cause passing attacks of psychosis, a point that leads Hopkins to suggest that 'one might be tempted to read Frere's behaviour in such terms.' (Hopkins, para. 8).

MARI Pity, sir, be not so dejected, nor look so pale. I dare warrant you the news that his barb hath won the race will be a sufficient cataplasm to take away his stitch.

PERE *and MARI meet a SERVANT.*

PERE How doth my son and daughter?

SERVANT I think they are both well, sir. 10

PERE Why, do not you know, and yet dwell in the same house?

SERVANT No, indeed not I, for I only saw my young master go towards my lady's lodging, but I did not follow to inquire of their healths for fear they should be angry, and think me bold.

Enter Madame Soeur's MAID.

PERE Where is your lady? 15

MAID In her chamber, I think, sir.

PERE Do you but think so? Do you not know? 'Tis a sign you wait not very diligently.

MAID Why sir, I met my young master going to his sister's chamber and he sent me on an errand, and when I came back the outward doors were locked, so as I could not get in any ways. 20

MARI The doors locked, say you?

MAID Yes, sir.

MARI Let them be broken open.

PERE O, my doubts foretell a miserable tragedy. 25

The door seems to be broken open. The SERVANT, seeing the murdered couple, cries out 'Murder! Murder!' Monsieur PERE falls down dead at the sight. While the servant strives to recover life in the old man, Monsieur MARI runs to his murdered wife and falls to the ground and

5.16 8 SD. PERE *and MARI meet a SERVANT*] *this edn*; *The Father and Son-in-Law meet a servant, F.*

7. **cataplasm**] a poultice or plaster for dressing a wound (*OED n.*).

kisses her, and then tears his hair and beats his breast, and, being as distracted, rises hastily and catches up the bloody sword to kill himself. His SERVANTS hold and hinder him from that act.

MARI Villains, let go! She shall not wander in the silent shades without my company. Besides, my soul will crowd through multitudes of souls that flock to Charon's boat, to make an easy passage for her pure soul; wherefore, let go! I command you as being your master, let go!

The SERVANTS still scuffle for to get away the sword. In come more SERVANTS, and carry MARI out, as being distracted. Monsieur PERE, not to be recovered, is carried out with the two murdered bodies.

Enter three SERVANTS.

1 SERVANT This is so strange an accident that hardly story can mention the like. 30

2 SERVANT I wonder how they came murdered, the door being locked and none but themselves; if it had been thieves, they would have robbed them as well as murdered them.

1 SERVANT I believe my young master was the thief that did both rob and murder.

3 SERVANT Well, I could tell a story that I heard, listening one day at my lady's chamber-door; but I will not. 35

1 SERVANT Prithee tell it us.

3 SERVANT No, I will not. You shall excuse me for this time.

Exeunt.

5.17

Enter Monsieur SENSIBLE and Mademoiselle AMOUR.

SENSIBLE Daughter, I am come to bring you a medicine to take out the sting of love.

AMOUR What is it sir?

SENSIBLE Why, Monsieur Frere hath most wickedly killed himself.

5.16. 29 SD. carry MARI out] this edn; carrie him out, F.

EPILOGUE

If subtle air, the conduit to each ear,
Hearts' passion moved to draw a sadder tear
From your squeezed brains, on your pale cheeks to lie,
Distilled from every fountain of each eye;
Our poetress hath done her part, and you,
To make it sadder, know this story's true;
A plaudity you'll give, if think it fit,
For none but will say this play is well writ.

5

The Lord Marquess of Newcastle writ this Epilogue.

7. A **plaudity**] applause.

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