Chapter 10

MARGARET CAVENDISH AND THE CULTURAL MILIEU OF ANTWERP

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I

When the then Margaret Lucas arrived in Paris in November of 1644, she was a quiet but observant maid of honour to Queen Henrietta Maria. Margaret met and not long afterwards married William Cavendish, Marquess of Newcastle, a widower and a Royalist grandee who had been on the losing side at the Battle of Marston Moor. In her autobiography and in her drama, Margaret tells her readers that she was beset with bashfulness in Henrietta Maria's court, and it is probably true that during her early days in Paris she tended to watch and listen in silence. Nevertheless, and contrary to much of what has been written about her, Margaret was not paralyzed by fear into insensibility while at court. Her letters to her future husband show her sharing shrewd and even harsh observations of court politics.[1] Furthermore, the strong relationship that developed between the two provided a foundation for her daring marriage to her socially prominent wooer, a marriage that contravened the wishes of her royal mistress. If Margaret was quiet in large aristocratic gatherings in Paris, she was not overawed by those in power.

This chapter will provide evidence for the assertion made by Timothy Raylor that Cavendish did not endure a harmful exile on the Continent during the Interregnum, and it will establish instead that she benefited from participation in a rich intellectual and cultural environment in Antwerp. To this end, the chapter will concentrate on connections between the visual arts and architecture of the Low Countries and what is found in Cavendish's fiction published in *Natures Pictures* (1656). The chapter will conclude with a consideration of the restricted cultural environment available to Cavendish when she returned to England and took up residence in the north after the Restoration.[2]

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1 Margaret's letters to William are in *The Phanseys of William Cavendish, Marquess of Newcastle Addressed to Margaret Lucas and her Letters in Reply*, ed. Douglas Grant (London: Nonesuch, 1956) and in Appendix B of Anna Battigelli's *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998).

2 Timothy Raylor disagrees with those who see the Cavendishes as exiled to Antwerp. See "Exiles, Expatriates and Travellers: Towards a Cultural and Intellectual History of the English Abroad, 1640–1660," in *Literatures of Exile in the English Revolution and its Aftermath*, 1640–1690, ed. Philip Major (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 16–43, 19–21. Raylor's position is to be preferred over that that taken by Emma L. E. Rees and others who believe that Cavendish endured "powerlessness" and, in the words

During 1648 and after a brief stay in Rotterdam, Margaret and William began living in Antwerp, where they became immersed in the cultural life of the city.[3] She writes that William made the decision to leave Rotterdam so as to avoid the "costs of keeping an open and noble table," and she goes on to say that Antwerp contained only small numbers of English men and women.[4] We may imagine that in Antwerp William and Margaret found themselves with fewer unwanted Royalist dinner guests, but it was also the case that in Antwerp the couple was able to enter a more cosmopolitan environment, where art and architecture mattered a great deal and where topics of intellectual interest dominated drawing-room conversation.[5] Both she and William were appreciators of oil painting, and the move allowed them to set up residence in the architecturally significant Rubens House, which they rented from the painter's widow. Lucy Worsley describes the building as "a Mannerist … extravaganza," and it included a new wing designed by Rubens himself (Figure 10.1).[6] The house was a place fit to entertain a king, which is precisely what happened when the Cavendishes played host to Charles II in 1658. On March 17, the structure was literally filled to capacity for a ball, poetry reading, and vocal performances.[7] Only the well-connected and the very lucky were able to gain entry.

Near to the Rubens House and situated on the Meir was the residence of the art-dealing Duarte family. John Loughman and John Michael Montias explain in *Public and Private Spaces* that "During this period, people tended to spend a greater deal of time in their homes, to conduct business and to entertain guests."[8] Loughman and Montias focus on Amsterdam, but the mix of trade, especially in art, with sociability was no doubt true of Antwerp as well.[9] Margaret writes about having chatted in a "Frolick Humour" at a gathering at the Duarte home. Others present performed elaborate and

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of Rees, "triple exile." Rees, *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 5.

3 Antwerp benefited from a shift in shipping to the Iberian Peninsula. See Gustaaf Asaert, A. De Vos, R. Legreve, Fernand Suykens, and Karel Veraghtert, ed., *Antwerp: A Port for all Seasons* (Antwerp: Ortelius, 1986).

4 Margaret Cavendish, *The Life of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle*, ed. C. H. Firth (New York: Dutton, n.d.), 49.

5 For English visitors, the Jesuit Chapel was Antwerp's most important building. See Kees van Strien, *Touring the Low Countries: Accounts of British Travellers, 1660–1720* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), 55.

6 Lucy Worsley, " 'His Magnificent Buildings': William Cavendish's Patronage of Architecture," in *Royalist Refugees: William and Margaret Cavendish in the Rubens House, 1648–1660*, ed. Ben Van Beneden and Nora De Poorter (Antwerp: Rubenshuis & Rubenarium, 2006), 101–4, 102.

7 Katie Whitaker, *Mad Madge: The Extraordinary Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle: The First Woman to Live by the Pen* (New York: Basic, 2002), 221.

8 John Loughman and John Michael Montias, *Public and Private Spaces: Works of Art in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Houses* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1999), 71.

9 Owen Feltham in *A Brief Character of the Low Countries* (1651) observes, tongue in cheek, that "The poorest [homes] are there furnished with pictures [i.e., oil paintings]," 19.

Figure 10.1. Frans Harrewyn after Jacques van Croes. View of Rubens's house in Antwerp in 1684. British Museum number 1868,0612.1384. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

fashionable Italian songs, while Margaret made a point of singing English ballads in an unadorned musical style.[10] Generally speaking, however, she was less inclined to be the centre of attention and more likely to feel comfortable with individual or small-group interaction. Indeed, the assemblage of aristocrats at the Duarte residence probably was not especially large. She writes in her preface to *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1653) that much of her intellectual growth was fostered in "visiting and entertaining discourse," that is, in conversation conducted in intimate social settings.[11] Those social settings included English men and women living abroad but were not dominated by such people.

10 Margaret Cavendish, *CCXI Sociable Letters* (London, 1664), 427.

11 Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 184. Timothy de Paepe suggests a connection between Diego Duarte and Margaret based on Stoic philosophy: "Diego Duarte II (1612–1691): A Converso's Experience in Seventeenth-Century Antwerp," *Jewish History* 24 (2010): 169–93, 181.

Margaret's interlocutors more frequently were important figures from the Continent like the Dutch philosopher and virtuoso scientist Constantijn Huygens.[12] She spent time in the presence of René Descartes but could not converse with him because, as she writes, she did not speak French and he was equally unskilled in English.[13] She would have known various friends of the Duartes, such as Béatrix de Cusance, Duchess of Lorraine, and the merchant Guilielmo Calandri.[14] She is likely to have made the easy river journey to Brussels to observe the salon of Béatrix at Beersel Castle. Béatrix was numbered among the guests at the exclusive entertainment at the Rubens House in March of 1658.[15] After Margaret's return to England at the beginning of the Restoration, she and William spent a brief time in London at Newcastle House, but before long they retired from court circles to live at Welbeck Abbey in Nottinghamshire. At Welbeck, she had fewer opportunities for social and intellectual interaction with cultural elites and less exposure to newly available works of art or volumes on architecture. She would have heard about Christopher Wren's plans but missed most of the rebuilding of London after the great fire of 1666.

During this, the final period in her life, she would have discussed with William and his builders the renovations of the Terrace Range at Bolsover Castle and his plans to construct the Italianate palazzo that is Nottingham Castle. Husband and wife no doubt employed agents in London who sent prints of new artwork and sheaves of architectural drawings to Welbeck Abbey, but easy access to drawing-room conversation with men and women who were knowledgeable about art and architecture was never what it was when they lived in Antwerp.[16]

Many characters in Cavendish's fiction are observers, and, as with the newly arrived Margaret Lucas in Paris, they often spend time at court as outsiders. Some of these observers are travellers, young men who journey through foreign lands to achieve educational goals or to satisfy desire for knowledge. Cavendish's observers and also her narrators have a special association with art and architecture as subjects of study. Sometimes that association is shown explicitly, for example, in one observer's extended discussions of palace design and painting. On other occasions there is no obvious and direct connection

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12 Letters between the two are published in Lisa Jardine's "Consorts of Viols, Theorbos, and Anglo-Dutch Voices," in *Going Dutch: How England Plundered Holland's Glory* (London: Harper Perennial, 2009), 175–204.

13 Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 184.

14 Timothy de Paepe, "Diego Duarte II," 183. De Paepe describes the Duarte circle. Line Cottegnies provides a listing of continental intellectual contacts in "A Bibliographical Note: Cyrano's 'Estates et Empires de la Lune' and Cavendish's 'Blazing World,' " in *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish*, ed. Brandie Siegfried and Lisa Sarasohn (Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 107–20, 212–13.

15 See James Fitzmaurice, "Margaret Cavendish, Richard Flecknoe, and Raillery at the Salon of Beatrix de Cusance," *English Studies* 92 (November 2011): 771–85.

16 Virginia Woolf remarks that Margaret and William often critiqued one another's writing: *The Common Reader* (London: Hogarth, 1929), 102–3. Rees finds William's treatment of Margaret as an equal to be essential to her development as a writer: *Margaret Cavendish*, 3.

to the visual arts, but there are allusions to particular paintings and buildings associated with Antwerp. Cavendish's observers and narrators have something in common with modern-day sociologists: a keen attention to details of human behaviour and a habit of not rushing to make harsh judgements or to construct unpleasant evaluations. At the same time, there are implied judgements situated in narratorial choice of words and in the narrators' willingness to examine some topics in more depth than others. Cavendish's observers, while avoiding quick judgements, often render evaluations, some quite dubious, before their tales conclude. These judgements can reflect personality flaws, flaws that might qualify the observers as Jonsonian humour characters. When Cavendish's tales of observers are finished, there are likely to be unanswered questions. Did the observer see what the narrator saw? Did the observer notice and understand the implied judgements of the narrator? Should we, the readers, take what we are told at face value?

The complicated relationship of observer to narrator is in part a matter of narrative technique, a device that causes the reader to wonder what is transpiring in the head of the observer and to speculate about what will happen next in the plot line. In part, however, the complexity acts as an elaboration in fiction of Cavendish's developing critique of scientific method, as that method privileged observation over various mental processes, including reason. Cavendish had a particular view of reason, of which more later in this chapter. For Cavendish, observation was important but complex thought paramount. As Lisa Sarasohn puts it, "The more other investigators of nature limited their conclusions to what they could see, the more Cavendish credited the primacy of conception and reason."[17] After her return to England, Cavendish would use her scientific writing to state explicitly her positions on observation and reason *contra* Robert Boyle, Robert Hooke, and various members of the Royal Society.[18]

Cavendish probably would have been well acquainted while living in Antwerp with a position on observation later articulated by Robert Hooke in *Micrographia* (1665). Hooke writes, "It is now high time that [the science of nature] should return to the plainness and soundness of observations."[19] It is plainness from which Cavendish escapes into a world of complex intellectual discourse, a world that recognizes the legitimacy of self-contradiction in mental processes. Jay Stevenson writes that "Cavendish was self-reflexive and self-contradictory" in her construction

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17 Lisa T. Sarasohn, *The Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 190.

18 It is important to remember that "the early Royal Society was less intellectually homogeneous than is sometimes thought." See Emma Wilkins, "Margaret Cavendish and the Royal Society," *Notes and Records of the Royal Society Journal of the History of Science* (May 14, 2014): online.

19 See Lisa Walters's discussion of Hooke and Cavendish on the brain and fancy in "Optics and Authorship in Margaret Cavendish's 'Observations' and 'The Blazing World,'" *Viator* 45 (2014): 377–93 at 384. The quotation is from Robert Hooke, *Micrographia* (London, 1665), sig. blr.

of a philosophy of mind and that her readers "are ambiguously implicated in [her attendant] playfulness."[20] That world of intellectual discourse included drawing rooms where Cavendish could match wits with Constantijn Huygens, and it probably extended to the salon at Beersel Castle, where she was able to converse with various guests and Béatrix de Cusance herself.

In the short fiction written while she lived in Antwerp, we find articulations of her positions on scientific matters, positions often folded into her observations of the visual arts.[21]

II

Cavendish's short story "The Observer," published in *Natures Pictures* in 1656 and while she was resident in the Low Countries, includes an observer who sees and hears a great deal but who apparently does not consider what he has taken in until the tale draws to a close. This observer, named the Stranger, plans to investigate the forms of government of various countries, presumably out of a desire for knowledge. Once inside the royal palace, however, he becomes passive, and Cavendish's readers do not know the degree to which this "observer" is actually observing. Rather her readers are given a great deal of information by her narrator about the social and architectural context through which the Stranger moves. The Stranger spends time among courtiers, first in the Long Gallery and then in the Presence Room, eventually making his way to the Privy Chamber, where he sees the king and queen from a distance.

He does not converse with anyone and is told to have supper at "the waiters' table," an apparent indignity which he accepts in silence and which leads to an unplanned but excellent opportunity for him to learn about current politics. The Stranger makes no comment, but the narrator describes talk among the serving men, who are unhappy with living under a long peace. War would provide the youth of the nation with an opportunity to "breed courage." The narrator makes no explicit judgement on the wisdom of men wishing for war, though his choice to deal with the topic at length and in the way that he does allows for an implied evaluation.

> They complained of their long Peace, saying, That Peace was good for nothing but to breed Laziness; and that the Youth of the Kingdom were degenerated, and become effeminate: concluding, That there ought to be a Warr.[22]

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20 Jay Stevenson, "Imagining the Mind: Cavendish's Hobbesian Allegories," in *A Princely Brave Woman: Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle*, ed. Stephen Clucas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 143–55, 143.

21 Cavendish also discusses observation and reason in *Poems, and Fancies* (1653) and includes a poem in which thoughts are travellers in that volume. Her *Philosophical Fancies* (1653) does not consider observation and does not mention observers or travellers.

22 Margaret Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 2nd ed. of *Natures Pictures* (London, 1671), 170. I retain the more familiar title, *Natures Pictures*, in the main text.

Given Cavendish's loss of family members in the English Civil War and the repeated statements about the wastefulness of military conflict to be seen elsewhere in her writing, it is difficult to escape the implication that the waiters are foolhardy. While she admired courage on the battlefield, she thought that war itself was a pestilence. If war comes, these waiters will not enjoy it.

After supper at the waiters' table, the taciturn Stranger joins the ladies and gentlemen of the court for polite conversation in the Presence Room, and there he is recorded as saying nothing at all. Rather he stands near to two lords, one of whom, the narrator says, believes that the king is unaware of the self-serving designs of royal favourites. The king, who apparently employs unfair schemes of taxation, cannot see the danger that lurks around him. The narrator does not comment explicitly, but the fact that he records such talk suggests that the danger could be serious. The Stranger goes on to mingle with the court ladies and to listen to their false professions of friendship and to their backbiting chatter. There may be more to see and hear about the politics of the kingdom, but the Stranger suddenly becomes fearful of being "infected" while thus surrounded by the ladies. The no-longer-passive Stranger leaves the court in a rush. A more diligent observer than the Stranger would have risked "infection" and followed through in watching and listening, staying until he had seen all there was to see and heard all there was to hear. The Stranger, however, executes a sudden and unexpected shift from being non-judgemental to passing a judgement that is excessive and that renders him absurd. He flees in fear from the idle chatter of court ladies. In so doing, he gives a comic twist to the ending of Cavendish's tale. "The Observer," then, points up the limitations to be found in one case of passive, uncritical observation, and the story looks forward to her disagreements with Boyle, Hooke, and many of the men of the Royal Society.

The story of the Stranger includes architectural detail of the sort that Cavendish would have noted during her stays in Antwerp and would have seen recorded in paintings and prints. After the Stranger has gained entrance to the grounds of the palace, he is guided "through a great Courtyard, wherein were many walking and talking, like Merchants in an Exchange, or as a Court of Judicature."[23]

The narrator allows for the inference that the courtyard is a place where men and women usefully employ their time pursuing matters of business or law, a place for serious discourse and healthy socializing much like the English Bourse in Antwerp. The English Bourse was often visited by travellers and commonly appeared in paintings and prints (see Figure 10.2). The useless backbiting and false professions of friendship that the Stranger encounters stand in contrast to the social atmosphere of the Bourse. So, too, the scheming and flattery that he comes across among the men in the Gallery and the Privy Chamber.

Just after the Stranger has left the courtyard, the narrator provides additional information that invites inference.

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23 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 170.

Figure 10.2. The English Bourse, Antwerp, 1670–1700. British Museum number Ee,8.100. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

> And so up a pair of Stairs into a large Room, where was a Guard of Soldiers with Halberts, which were more for shew than safety; for the Halberts lay by, and great Jacks of Beer and Wine were in their hands.[24]

In the large room, the narrator says that the guards' weapons are mostly for show, and he notes that the guards themselves are heavily engaged in eating and drinking. An obvious inference is that a group of courtiers who feel aggrieved about taxes would be able to stage a coup without much resistance from these slack guardians. But this understanding of the situation is not without competition from others, for it probably was common to find guards drinking wine and beer in antechambers during times of peace. Further, is the talk of the lord about danger just talk of the sort that was always to be found in royal courts? Certainly, soldiers drinking as their weapons lie on a floor or are leaning up against a wall are a frequent subject in paintings and prints of the time (see Figure 10.3). The large room with the guards, then, both invites inference and provides an excellent example of the uncertainties and ambiguities of interpretation linked to observation.[25]

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24 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 170.

25 See Svetlana Aplers, "Bruegel's Festive Peasants," *Simiolus Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 6 (1972–73): 163–76 at 165. The guards need not necessarily be understood as derelict in duty. Walter S. Gibson writes that, "It is widely assumed that most of Bruegel's pictures express profound philosophical or moral concepts … Unfortunately [this view is not] supported by what Bruegel's contemporaries thought about either peasants or personifications." W. S. Gibson, *Bruegel* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 11.

Figure 10.3. Christoph Murer, *Two Soldiers Drinking and a Bathing Scene Behind*. 1573–1614. British Museum number 1865,0311.166. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

III

Natures Pictures contains, in addition to the story of the Stranger, a much longer piece called "The Tale of a Traveller." In "The Tale of a Traveller," Cavendish develops her central character in considerable depth and carries her story beyond the time in which the unnamed traveller is an observer in foreign lands. We see him return to his home country, try his hand at farming, and eventually marry.

From its outset, the story examines the way in which individuals develop intellectually, including through the use of observation. For many of Cavendish's female readers in particular, the opening of the story is made unsettling by the parents of the traveller. The parents have several daughters, whose education, the narrator implies, is ignored because these children are girls. The parents, "having none but daughters, at last was borne unto them a son, of whom they were very fond … His education in the first place was … by his Mothers Chambermayd, or the like."[26]

The boy who grows up to become the traveller does not fare especially well in his education as a child. By using the phrase "or the like" in describing the tutor, the narrator implies an off-hand attitude on the part of the parents towards children's intellectual development generally. That the tutor is probably a chambermaid simply reinforces the parents' undervaluing of education. The larger Cavendish family, by contrast, was very serious about the tutors it employed, and the Devonshire side engaged Thomas Hobbes to educate the future 2nd and 3rd Earls. Margaret's own tutoring, by a "decayed gentlewoman," was modest at best, and her joking about it probably conceals regret and even resentment.[27]

When the traveller is aged 10, he is sent to a "Free School," and what follows is, if anything, worse for his mental development than the time he spends with his tutor. At the free school, he is required to learn by rote and is frequently beaten for failures in recitation. When he turns 14 and until he is 18, he studies at a university, an activity which is intellectually rigorous but conducted in an unpleasant environment. The curriculum is thoroughly impractical: the boy spends his time "conversing more with the dead than with the living, in reading old Authors."[28] The point seems to be that, given the traveller's ineffective parents and his exposure to a mediocre system of formal education, the best way for him to become educated is to travel and observe.

At the age of 18, the boy, now a young man bent on travel, decides without any encouragement or direction from his mother and father to visit foreign countries "to see … Varieties and Curiosities." Thus begins his self-education by watching and listening. After several years spent abroad, the young man decides to take stock of his "observations" and at the same time reminisce about the "curiosities" that he has seen.

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26 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 273.

27 Margaret, without suggesting any failing on the part of her parents, says in Letter 175 of *Sociable Letters* that she was taught as a child by an "antient decayed gentlewoman." Cavendish, *CCXI Sociable Letters*, 367.

28 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 273.

The word "curiosities," of course, was much associated with the Royal Society, whose members spent time examining what they took to be "curious," that is, unusual or strange.

The young traveller begins to take stock by going over his enhanced understanding of architecture. He recalls what "Piles had been so built upon the least compass of Ground, that none was lost, but every foot employed, making no vacant corners, or useless places."[29]

In a sudden and abrupt about-face, however, the traveller decides that this new knowledge has no practical value because he is not wealthy enough to be able to use it in constructing a house for himself. Any sort of observation that might have been made by the Stranger in "The Observer" becomes lost as a result of a main personality flaw: his fearfulness. The detailed and astute observations that the traveller makes in his tale are likewise lost, but as a result of a different personality defect: the traveller shows himself to be a malcontent or, as we might say today, a man who is inclined to see the worst in everything.

The traveller goes on to recall that he had considered using what he had learned about architecture to become a surveyor of buildings, perhaps a little as was the case with Inigo Jones, but decided against this course of action, saying, "But, since I cannot build for my Humour, Fancy, nor Fame; I will not trouble my self for the pleasure of others."[30] Inigo Jones, as Surveyor-General of the King's Works to James I, designed important structures, such as the Queen's House in Greenwich. Along the way, Jones gained enormous prestige, so it is not difficult to conclude that the traveller, as a malcontent, misses out on what could have been an interesting and enviable career in building for royalty. He certainly would have been in a position to gain "fame."

When he has finished considering what he has learned about architecture, the traveller describes time spent with gambling and with "mistresses and the like," but he has no sense of the morality or immorality of these activities. Rather, as a non-judgemental and practical person, he observes that if he goes to a bawdy house, "for a short Pleasure [he will get] a lasting Disease: for the Pox is seldom got out of the Bones."[31] He has learned by observation that a small amount of pleasure leads to a great deal of pain, indeed, pain that has a specific location in the human body.

As the tale progresses, the traveller continues to examine at length his life spent abroad as a watcher and listener. He recalls his visits to law courts and parliaments as an outsider, where he maintained his stance as an observer. Although he became actively involved as a soldier in a foreign army, he seems to have done so mostly in order to observe what happens in war. He now finds all of the institutions with which he came into contact of dubious merit and usefulness. Of his wartime experience, he regrets his days spent "killing those that never did [him] harm" less as a moral failing and more as a waste of time.[32] As is always the case, he tends to steer away from moral judgements. He sums up years of travel as follows:

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29 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 517.

30 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 516.

31 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 520.

32 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 520.

> Have I not spent a great Sum of Money, endangered my Life both by Sea and Land, wasted my Youth, wearied my Limbs, exhausted my Spirits with tedious Journeys … lying in Lowsie Inns, eating stinking Meat[?][33]

With this summary statement, the traveller ceases his survey of the knowledge he has gained in his journeys and resolves to return to his native country.

Upon his return, the traveller, now called the Gentleman, becomes involved in the management of farmland, and he chooses to live in a farmhouse, rather than in a building that is more grand. His interest in architecture seems to have evaporated. The narrator writes a good deal about the clothes that the former traveller chooses to wear as a gentleman farmer, probably implying that the rustic attire signals just a little too much naive enthusiasm for country life. It is as though the expert on foreign architecture has turned into one of Shakespeare's rural clowns in "Frieze Breeches." The Gentleman, who has been dismissive of what he observed in his travels, sets intellectual activity of any kind aside and immerses himself in a warm, bucolic glow: "He returned to his own Countrey, where … he … [clothed] himself (… in a Frieze Jerkin, and a pair of Frieze Breeches, a Frieze pair of Mittins, and a Frieze Mountier-Cap)."[34]

For a time, the Gentleman is a thoroughly happy man, one who no longer shows any signs of being a malcontent. He is surrounded by farm workers who are reminiscent of peasants in paintings by Peter Bruegel, the elder (ca. 1525–1569). Not only was Cavendish's Antwerp well stocked with paintings by Bruegel, her readers in England would have been familiar with such paintings, though most often through copies and prints. Generations of Bruegel family members produced large numbers of copies and also created original paintings on their ancestor's themes of peasant life.[35]

One might even say that at this point in the story Cavendish the author becomes an observer who recalls her experience with Low Countries art and shares what she has seen with her readers. Rather than understanding herself as an exile from England in "The Tale of a Traveller," she revels in the pleasures that accrue to those who are fortunate enough able to enjoy the visual arts of Antwerp. Along the way, she invokes a favourite topic of the Bruegel family, the harvest (see Figure 10.4).

> In the Summer-time [the Gentleman] would be up with the Lark … and at Noon would sit down on his Sheafs of Corn or Hay-cocks, eating Bread and Cheese … tossing the black-Leather Bottle, drinking the Healths of the Countrey-Lasses and Good-wives.[36]

The Gentleman, now a figure in a painting, loses himself in country living, and the tale pauses to give itself over to visual rhapsody.

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33 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 523.

34 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 524.

35 Cavendish's stay in Antwerp occurred just at the end of a rise in numbers of art dealers in the Low Countries in the first half of the seventeenth century. John Michael Montias, "Art Dealers in the Seventeenth-Century Netherlands," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 18 (1988): 244–56 at 245.

36 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 525.

Figure 10.4. Hieronymus Cock, after Pieter Bruegel and by Pieter van der Heyden. *The Four Seasons: Summer*. 1570. Museum number F,1.24. © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The long and glowing evocation of the pleasures of country living, however, is merely a prelude to disillusionment, for eventually the Gentleman realizes that he sorely needs to give some thought to his financial situation:

> And after he had followed this way of Husbandry two or three years … [he] found that he was rather behind hand than before hand in his estate, and that his husbandry did not amount so high, as the rents he had got from his tenants.[37]

The Bruegel-inspired country idyll comes to an end, the enthusiasm of the Gentleman is transformed into disenchantment, and he is beset by a "choleric" or "melancholy" humour.[38] A conclusion that might be drawn from the Gentleman's years spent as a farmer is that thoughtless pleasure, while enjoyable, is still thoughtless and is likely to lead to trouble. More importantly in terms of the story, the wealth of education that the Gentleman has received as an observer, especially in art and architecture, is lost

37 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 526.

38 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 526.

during his rural idyll. Although the Gentleman becomes choleric at discovering his financial miscalculations as a farmer, he does not return to being a malcontent and, in fact, develops a cautiously optimistic outlook regarding his future. He comes to believe that, with the right wife, he will be able to create a happy life for himself.

The Gentleman does go on to marry and his marriage is indeed happy, a good fortune that comes about in spite of the nature of his plans for choosing a wife. He is overly precise in his specifications, so much so that the marriage is in danger of being based on inflexible husbandly prescription.

> I will get me a Wife, who shall not be so handsome as to be proud of her Beauty, seeking ways to shew it to the World; and whilst she strives to shew her self, out of a desire to have all Eyes gaze at her, and to incaptivate all Hearts, she may chance to be catch'd in Love's Net her self with some flattering Youth, or ignorant Coxcomb, who are only crafty to lay Lime-twigs to catch simple Women.[39]

The Gentleman adheres to the commonly held belief that beautiful women are simple-minded, self-regarding, and easy prey for seducers. He also plans to have a wife who is subject to his "will." She is to understand what he thinks. He has no such obligation to her. She must have "a modest Countenance [and only] so much wit … as to learn the rules of [his] will."[40]

Although the Gentleman has been a careful observer, he is lacking in reason as that faculty was understood by Cavendish. Reason, for her, included good judgement and openness to consideration of the ideas of others. Jacqueline Broad explains that Cavendish was a believer in being intellectually flexible. Broad quotes a preface to *Philosophical Letters* (1664) in which Cavendish says, "whomsoever can bring most rational and reasonable arguments shall have my vote, although it be against my own opinion."[41] It is certainly possible to argue that Cavendish was less flexible than she claims to be in this passage, but it is clear that Cavendish did not want to be thought of as an intellectual dogmatist.

The Gentleman's marriage turns out well, then, because the woman he marries, while taking account of observation, gives primacy to reason and does not align with his specifications for a wife. In her first conversation with her husband-to-be, she characterizes herself as an observer, but one who embraces reason: "I will not bar my Eyes, but they shall stand as open, as free, though not the only passage to my Heart. And I wish Reason may rule the Objects of my Affections, that are gathered together."[42]

The Gentleman and his thoughtful bride-to-be go on to fall in love. She is quite shy, but he does not bully her, as one might have expected, and the story concludes in a rosy

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39 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 531.

40 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 531.

41 Jacqueline Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 41. Broad cites *Philosophical Letters* (London, 1664) "A Preface to the Reader," sigs. B1r–v.

42 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 539.

glow a little akin to what he felt as a gentleman farmer. The Gentleman "made her Mistris of his Estate; and whil'st he governed his outward Affairs, she governed the Family at home … they lived neat and cleanly, loved passionately, thrived moderately, and happy they lived, and piously died."[43]

This ending, with its stock phrase "piously died," is a little too sweet and conventional to be taken at face value, especially given Cavendish's views about unimaginative traditionalist thinking to be found in organized religion.[44] If not at face value, how should we understand the story's conclusion?

The ending of "The Tale of a Traveller" is not entirely serious. The Gentleman's shy wife points in a playfully comic way towards the personality that Cavendish associated with herself. The Gentleman's wife also partakes of Cavendish's willingness to be self-contradictory in the exploration of mental processes. In an instance of apparent self-contradiction, the wife is said by Cavendish to be a sceptic whose death is pious. This apparent self-contraction, one might guess, is the sort of thinking that Jay Stevenson had in mind.

IV

When she returned to England after her long stay on the Continent, Margaret Cavendish's life provided far fewer opportunities for observation of the visual arts. She and William retired to Welbeck Abbey, where there were only a few regular guests with whom to discuss various topics of intellectual interest. Lynn Hulse notes that the dramatist Thomas Shadwell was a frequent visitor, but Shadwell was William's associate and not Margaret's.[45] The single great exception to the rule of life limited to Nottinghamshire occurred in spring of 1667, when the couple paid an extended visit to London. A play by William was performed, and the city was abuzz with talk of Margaret, who was a grand presence at the Royal Society in May. For whatever reason, after they left London, they did not return.

Margaret may have found the lack of a group of intellectuals with whom to converse vexing and might have made her unhappiness known in the presence of senior household staff.[46] Whatever the case, it is likely that she created a remedy in the society of her own waiting ladies and, of course, in her conversation with her husband.[47] She writes

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43 Cavendish, *Natures Picture*, 544.

44 In her drama, only the uneducated lower classes are professedly Christian. Her upper-class characters invoke Roman gods. See James Fitzmaurice, "Paganism, Christianity, and the Faculty of Fancy in the Writing of Margaret Cavendish," in Siegfried and Sarasohn, *God and Nature in the Thought of Margaret Cavendish*, 77–92.

45 Lynn Hulse, "Cavendish, William, 1st Duke of Newcastle upon Tyne (bap. 1593, d. 1676)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online), January 6, 2011.

46 A steward wrote that Margaret would "break up the family and go to rant at London" if she were able. Douglas Grant, *Margaret the First* (London: Hart-Davis, 1957), 233.

47 See note 16 for the views of Virginia Woolf.

that she did not set the waiting ladies to tasks of cooking fashionable desserts as did other aristocratic women. Rather she and these young women sat and read together.[48] She also encouraged them to write, "which may make their Li[ves] Happy." During this period she composed *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668), a comedy about an aristocratic woman and her female entourage. It is tempting to speculate that *Convent*, which contains plays within the play, reflects actual practice, in which Margaret and her ladies read aloud or acted out scenes.[49]

When all was said and done, however, Nottinghamshire was unable to provide the sort of environment that had existed in Antwerp. Cavendish needed a way to create serious intellectual dialogue and turned to correspondence with learned men, including the Anglican divine Joseph Glanvill. Glanvill carefully read Cavendish's writing on religion and did what he could to warn her against what he called the "appearance" of atheism. According to Katie Whitaker, he argued *contra* Cavendish's scepticism in *Plus Ultra* (1668), though without naming Cavendish as his intellectual adversary.[50] For her part, Cavendish tried to convince Glanvill that malevolent supernatural forces were not active in the world. Glanvill was a firm believer in the existence of witches, a topic on which he published a great deal. Cavendish's other correspondents included the noted Cambridge Platonist Henry More, who also believed in witches, and her old friend, the physician and natural philosopher Walter Charleton.[51] Henry More either did not take Cavendish's work seriously or did not want to be seen as doing so when writing to Anne Conway.[52] *Philosophical Letters*, which Cavendish published in 1664, creates an imaginary female correspondent, to whom Cavendish writes about the published work of More, as well as that of Hobbes, Descartes, and van Helmont. It is a chatty volume that mimics the atmosphere of a salon while engaging with scientific topics. It is quite possible that it was read by many who took its ideas seriously but who, like Glanvill, were afraid of damaging their reputations by engaging with its author by name in print.

Further evidence of the response to Cavendish's writing during this period can be found in Whitaker's suggestion that arguments belonging to Cavendish were employed by Henry Stubb in an attack on the Royal Society printed in 1670.[53] The arguments, unsurprisingly, were not acknowledged as deriving from Cavendish. The closest she came to being part of an open and equal intellectual dispute conducted in print came with Du Verger's *Humble Reflections*, but that volume was printed in 1658 and largely forgotten by the time that Cavendish arrived in the north of England.[54]

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48 See the preface to *Sociable Letters*, "To His Excellency the Lord Marquess of Newcastle" and especially Letter 150 (311).

49 In Letter 80 of *Sociable Letters* (164), Cavendish discusses "Relation, Reading, and Observation."

50 Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 317–19.

51 Charleton engages with her philosophy in a letter of May 3, 1667, which is printed in *A Collection of Letters and Poems* (London, 1678), 92.

52 Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 315.

53 Whitaker, *Mad Madge*, 315.

54 Whitaker believes that the author was a Catholic Englishwoman (*Mad Madge*, 316).

Cavendish published *The Blazing World* in 1668, but this long piece of fiction is driven less by narrative movement than "The Observer" or "The Tale of a Traveller." It does, however, include a female character who becomes resident in a foreign land, or, to be exact, a foreign world. This character, who is something of a stand-in for Cavendish, is no detached observer. The character, who becomes the foreign world's Empress, takes the time to design and build two chapels. The chapels do not seem to have any connection with actual religious buildings and rather are intended by the Empress as devices to hoodwink the Blazing World's population with spectacle.[55] The observation of architecture and the writing of short fiction were now largely parts of a past life for Cavendish, but that past life had been good to her. Her time spent as an observer and, especially, an interlocutor in small-group conversation in Antwerp had prepared her for the letters she would write to people like Glanvill and provided a basis for the guidance in reading that she would give to her maids of honour. She explains in *Sociable Letters* that reading and writing will bring happiness to her waiting ladies, but it is probably true that these activities at the very least gave Cavendish herself pleasure in a life that had become more obscure than she would have wanted.

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55 In a footnote in her edition of *A Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview, 2016), Sara Mendelson connects the chapels to the writings of Machiavelli and Hobbes (102).

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