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PROTO-FEMINISMS

INTRODUCTION

During the early modern period there were no demands by women for equal political rights with men, and feminism as a self-conscious voice was not given a name until the end of the nineteenth century. Mary Astell's *A serious proposal to the ladies* (1696) and the anonymous writer of *An essay in defence of the female sex* (1696) are often seen as the first books in which women argue for political and social change on behalf of women as a distinct social group.¹ However, as this collection demonstrates, both women and men of the period did articulate conceptions, ideas and proposals which presage the development of a fully fledged feminist politics. I have called this fledgling articulation *proto-feminism*.

By proto-feminist, I mean that we may find voices, arguments, strategies, and accounts of gendered construction of power which are recognisable as essential to later feminist positions. Even where these voices are fragmentary; or placed within a framework where woman asserts equality of soul by assenting to her weakness in body; or used by male authors; they provide readers with female voices and models of female argumentation, which are used by later women in their own right.

One example of this can be seen in aspects of the long history of the *querelle des femmes* tradition.² This tradition dates back to the late medieval period, and is characterised by evolving and highly elaborate rules of argumentation. Usually texts are either a defence of women or a misogynistic attack, although many works included both defence and attack. The attacks on women usually combined both the physiological and theological versions of her inferior status, thus giving both historicist and essentialist justifications. The defences, at least until the seventeenth century, focused on the assertion and listing of female worthies who were used to prove that all women did not conform to the weak, dependent and dangerous models supplied by the attackers. Nevertheless, such women were always seen as exceptions. Another feature of the discourse was rhetorical experiment, in which a writer chose an extreme or ridiculous topic to argue, through which to demonstrate his argumentative and literary skill. Agrippa's *A treatise of*

the nobility and excellency of womankind (pp. 264–6) is one example. Nonetheless, some of the language of these debates does provide a launching point for later feminists, and this is why he is included briefly here. None of these texts, therefore, should be considered feminist since their assertions belong to a specific literary game, nor do they consider how law, education, socialisation, language and custom constructed, maintained and encouraged the weaker version of woman.

Such a consideration, when it happened, could be called proto-feminism, and Rachel Speght's *A mouzell for Melastomus* (pp. 270–7) is one example. Her text was a response to a revival of the *querelle* during James I's reign, which reached its most vitriolic peak with the publication of *The arraignment of lewd, idle and froward women* by Joseph Swetnam in 1615. Speght uses some of the traditional rhetoric of the debate, including counter-arguments by listing good women from the Bible, and in the second half of her work (not included here) she attacks Swetnam. But she goes further than this, in that she rereads biblical texts, as many later women prophets do, to show that men have misread versions of the creation and of the Pauline epistles. Thus, although she also reiterates the injunction to subjection, and hence to our modern reading circumscribes her assertion of equality, she provides an articulate consciousness and the practice of rereading male-stream thought which later feminists will recognise. This is also a recognition inherent in the writing by the pseudonymous Jane Anger (pp. 266–8).

Pre-feminist arguments and thought can be discerned in four specific areas in this period. First, in the area of education and the debate about the 'nature' of women; second, in the incipient awareness of gender as a social construct; third, in the actual demands made by some petitioners to parliament in 1649; and fourth, in the frequent assertion of a community of women readers and writers with common interests, which are not simply biological.

Bathsua Makin (chapter 6), in the preface to her work pleading for a revival of education for women (1673) wrote:

Custom when it is inveterate, hath a mighty influence: it hath the force of nature itself. The barbarous custom to breed women low is grown general amongst us, and hath prevailed so far that it is verily believed (especially among a sort of debauched sorts) that women are not endured with such reason as men, nor capable of improvement by education, as they are. It is looked upon as a monstrous thing to pretend the contrary. A learned woman is thought to be a comet, that bodes mischief whenever it appears. To offer to the world the liberal education of women is to deface the image of God in man, it will make woman so high and men so low, like fire in the house-top, it will set the whole world in a flame.

These things and worse than these, are commonly talked of, and verily believed by many who think themselves wise men: to contradict

these is a bold attempt, where the attempter must expect to meet with much opposition. Therefore, ladies, I beg the candid opinion of your sex, whose interest I assert.

Here Makin argues a basic feminist premise, that education and socialisation have bred 'women low' and constructed the belief that their nature is lesser than man's, accompanied by a plea for educational provision to equalise men and women's socialisation. In addition, Makin here asserts a community of women with similar views, aims and needs. This is typical of many of the women writers represented in this collection. It suggests an incipient consciousness of a common agenda and a common experience for women which is not simply based on the oppositional strategies of the man versus woman debate of the *querelle des femmes*. Nevertheless, many of Makin's arguments, and those of Margaret Cavendish, particularly in her address to the two universities to whom she presents a copy of her work (pp. 286–9), are to be found in the earlier debate about women, represented here by the defences of women: Agrippa, Anger, Heale (chapter 4) and Speght (pp. 264, 266, 151, 270–7). Such arguments move from polarised rhetorical strategies to assertions of rights, based on an analysis of social and economic inequity (pp. 269–70).

The second area of importance is women writers' consciousness of the social construction of gender and the power relations dependent upon that: Elizabeth I's famous speech to her soldiers at Tilbury constructed a self of two genders: the weak body of a woman, but 'the heart and stomach' of a king and hence a man. Masculine and feminine are consciously associated with certain acquired characteristics: Behn and Cavendish (chapter 8 and this chapter, pp. 286–91) appropriate their 'masculine parts' in order to speak in public, thus asserting a belief in the social construction of gendered identity and practice. Austin, for example (pp. 277–9), asserts woman's incorporation into the term 'homo' as the basis for both temporal and spiritual equality; and the anonymous author of *Eliza's babes* (pp. 283–6) utilises a complex understanding of the economies of marriage in some of her poems, to assert her prior commitment to God.

The 1649 petition to parliament (pp. 280–3) was made, as were all petitions by women at that time, on behalf of male Levellers who had been imprisoned by Cromwell. Nevertheless, the right to petition and speak in public is strongly asserted by the women. They argue:

since we are assured of our creation in the image of God, and of an interest in Christ, equal unto men, as also for a proportionable share in the freedoms of this Commonwealth, we cannot but wonder and grieve that we should appear so despicable in your eyes, as to be thought unworthy to petition or represent our grievances to this honourable house.

Have we not an equal interest with men of this nation in those

liberties and securities, contained in the petition of right, and other good laws of the land? Are any of our lives, limbs, liberties or goods to be taken from us more than from men, but by the due process of law and conviction of twelve sworn men of the neighbourhood?

Thus the language and social situation within which they position themselves is the language of equal rights: to law, to speak, to be tried, to petition. It is true that no women demand a vote, and that despite the proliferation of radical sects, such as the Levellers, none of these sects gave women any political rights;³ but it is also possible to see this first articulation of legal and speaking rights by women to parliament as the first step towards such claims.

Finally, women writers of the period continually address themselves to women readers thus constructing and asserting communities of writing, speaking and listening women, with a common identity and a common agenda (see chapter 8). Although such a community was identifiably literate and elite during this period, this recognition of common experience (for example in the writings about motherhood and marriage) and a common history is the pre-condition for recognition of a common sociological identity. The preface of Lanyer's *Salve deus rex judaeorum* (pp. 268–70), as well as the whole poem (not included here), articulates such a communal self-consciousness.

Cornelius Agrippa, *A treatise of the nobility and excellency of woman-kind*

Agrippa's defence of women, although belonging to the *querelle des femmes* rhetorical tradition, contains the seeds of future assertions of women's identity and social value. Text from: the first edition, 1542; transl. David Clapham. fos A2–F5^v. G3.

Almighty God the maker and nourisher of all things, the father and goodness of both male and female, of his great bountifulness hath created mankind like unto himself, he made them man and woman. The diversity of which two kinds standeth only in the sundry situation of the bodily parts, in which the use of generation requireth a necessary difference. He hath given but one similitude and likeness of the soul to both male and female, between whose souls there is no manner difference of kind. The woman hath that same mind that a man hath, that same reason and speech, she goeth to the same end of blissfulness, where shall be no exception of kind. For after the evangelical truth, they that rise in their own proper kind shall not use the office of their kind, but the likeness of angels is promised unto them [Luke 20: Mark 12; Matt. 22]. And thus between man and woman by substance of the soul, one hath no higher preeminence of nobility above the other, but both of them naturally have equal liberty of dignity and worthiness. But all other things the which be in man besides the divine substance of the soul, in those things the excellency and noble womanhood in a manner infinitely doth excel the

rude gross kind of men, the which thing we shall plainly prove to be true not with counterfeit and fair flattering words, nor also with the subtle sophisms of logic, wherewith many sophists were wont to blind and deceive men, but by the authority of most excellent auctors, and true writers of histories and with manifest reasons, yea with the testimonies of holy scripture and by the ordinances and constitutions of laws.

First to enter into this matter the woman is made so much more excellent than man, in how much the name that she hath received is more excellent than his. For Adam soundeth earth, but Eve is interpreted life: inasmuch as the life doth excel earth, so much the woman is to be preferred above the man.

* * *

Thou wilt say, that is now forbidden by laws, abolished by custom, extincted by education, for anon as a woman is born, even from her infancy, she is kept at home in idleness, and as though she were unmeet for any higher business: she is permitted to know no further than her needle and her thread. And then when she cometh to age, able to be married, she is delivered to the rule and governance of a jealous husband, or else she is perpetually shut up in a close nunnery. And all offices belonging to the commonweal be forbidden them by the laws. Nor it is not permitted to a woman, though she be very wise and prudent, to plead a cause before a judge. Furthermore, they be repelled in jurisdiction, in arbitrement,⁴ in adoption, in intercession, in procuration, or to be guardians or tutors, in causes testamentary and criminal. Also they be repelled from preaching of God's word, against express and plain scripture, in which the Holy Ghost promised unto them by Joel the prophet, saying, *and your daughters shall prophesy and preach*, like as they taught openly in the time of the apostles, as it is well known that Anna, the widow of Simeon, the daughters of Philip and Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, did. But the unworthy delaying of the later law makers is so great that, breaking God's commandment to stablish their own traditions, they have pronounced openly that women otherwise in excellency of nature, dignity, and honour most noble, be in condition more vile than all men. And thus by these laws the women, being subdued as it were by force of arms, are constrained to give place to men and to obey their subduers, not by no natural, no divine necessity or reason, but by custom, education, fortune, and a certain tyrannical occasion.

Furthermore there be some men which by religion claim authority over women, and they prove their tyranny by holy scripture: the which have this cursed saying spoken to Eve continually in their mouth, *thou shalt be under the power of man, and he shall have lordship over thee*. But if it be answered unto them, that Christ took away that cursed saying, they will object again

the words of Peter, with whom Paul agreeth, saying, *let women be in subjection of their husbands. Let women in the church keep silence.* But he that knoweth the divers figures of scripture and the effects of the same shall soon see that these things be not repugnant but in the mind. For this is the order in the church, that men in ministration shall be preferred before women: like as the Jews in promission are before the Greeks: yet nevertheless God is no exceptor of persons. For in Christ neither male nor female is of value, but a new creature.

Jane Anger her protection for women

Nothing is known about the pseudonymous author of this tract, nor about the tract to which she replies, other than her description of it on her title page as 'the scandalous reports of a late suffering lover, and all other like venerians that complained so to be over-cloyed with women's kindness'. This is the conclusion to her argument. Text from: the first edition, 1589, pp. 14-16.

I have set down unto you (which are of mine own sex) the subtle dealings of untrue meaning men: not that you should condemn all men, but to the end that you may take heed of the false hearts of all and still reprove the flattery which remains in all: for as it is reason that the hens should be served first, which both lay the eggs and hatch the chickens: so it were unreasonable that the cocks which tread them, should be kept clean without meat. As men are valiant so are they virtuous: and those that are born honourably, cannot bear horrible dissembling hearts. But as there are some which cannot love heartily, so there are many who lust unnecessarily: and as many of them will deserve well, so most care not how ill they speed, so they may get our company. Wherein they resemble Envy, who will be contented to lose one of his eyes, that another might have both his pulled out. And therefore think well of as many as you may, love them that you have cause, hear every thing that they say (and afford them nods which make themselves noddies) but believe very little or nothing at all, and hate all those who shall speak any thing in the dispraise or to the dishonour of our sex.

Let the luxurious life of Heliogabalus, the intemperate desires of Commodus and Proculus, the damnable lust of Chilpericus and Xerxes, Boleslaus's violent ravishings, and the unnatural carnal appetites of Sigismundus Malotesta⁵ be examples sufficiently probable to persuade you that the hearts of men are most desirous to excel in vice. There were many good laws established by the Romans, and other good kings, yet they could not restrain men from lechery: and there are terrible laws allotted in England to the offenders therein, all which will not serve to restrain man.

The surfeiters' physic is good, could he and his companions follow it, but when the fox preacheth let the geese take heed, it is before an execution. And

to kill that beast whose property is only to slay is no sin: if you will please men, you must follow their rule, which is to flatter, for fidelity and they are utter enemies. Things far fetched are excellent and that experience is best which cost most: crowns are costly and that which cost many crowns is well worth God thank you, or else I know who hath spent his labour and cost foolishly. Then if any man giveth such dear counsel gratefully, are not they fools which will refuse his liberality? I know you long to hear what that listen, the surfeiter his pen with my hand shall forthwith show you.

At the end of men's fair promises there is a labyrinth and therefore ever hereafter stop your ears when they protest friendship, lest they come to an end before you are aware whereby you fall without redemption. The path which leadeth thereto is man's wit, and the mile's ends are marked with these trees: Folly, Vice, Mischief, Lust, Deceit, and Pride. These to deceive you shall be clothed in the raiments of Fancy, Virtue, Modesty, Love, True-meaning and Handsomeness. Folly will bid you welcome on your way, and tell you his fancies concerning the profit which may come to you by this journey, and direct you to Vice, who is more crafty. He with a company of protestations will praise the virtues of women, showing how many ways men are beholden unto us, but our backs once turned he falls a railing. Then Mischief he pries into every corner of us, seeing if he can espy a cranny, that, getting in his finger into it, he may make it wide enough for his tongue to wag in. Now being come to Lust: he will fall a railing on lascivious looks, and will ban Lechery and with the collier will say, the Devil take him, though he never means it. Deceit will give you fair words, and pick your pockets: nay he will pluck out your hearts, if you be not wary. But when you hear one cry out against lawns, drawn-works, periwigs, against the attire of courtesans, and generally of the pride of all women: then know him for a wolf clothed in a sheep's raiment, and be sure you are fast by the Lake of Destruction. Therefore take heed of it, which you shall do if you shun men's flattery, the fore-runner of our undoing. If a jade be galled, will he not winch?⁶ And can you find fault with a horse that springeth when it is spurred? The one will stand quietly when his back is healed, and the other go well when his smart ceaseth. You must bear with the old lover his surfeit, because he was diseased when he did write it, and peradventure hereafter, when he shall be well amended, he will repent himself of his slanderous speeches against our sex, and curse the dead man which was the cause of it, and make a public recantation: for the faltering in his speech at the latter end of his book affirmeth that already he half repenteth of his bargain. And why? Because his melody is past: but believe him not, though he should out swear you, for although a jade may still be in stable when his gall back is healed, yet he will show himself in his kind when he is travelling and

man's flattery bites secretly, from which I pray God keep you and me too. Amen. Finis.

Aemilia Lanyer, Salve deus rex judaeorum

Lanyer's poem rereads the history of the Fall and Christ's life in a self-consciously revisionary way. This preface to the reader precedes dedicatory poems to all the eminent literary women patrons of the early Jacobean period. Text from: the first edition, 1611, fos F3^{ff}.

To the virtuous reader

Often have I heard that it is the property of some women not only to emulate the virtues and perfections of the rest, but also by all their powers of ill-speaking to eclipse the brightness of their deserved fame. Now contrary to this custom, which men I hope unjustly lay to their charge, I have written this small volume, or little book for the general use of all virtuous ladies and gentlewomen of this kingdom; and in commendation of some particular persons of our own sex, such as for the most part are so well known to myself and others, that I dare undertake fame dares not to call any better. And this have I done to make known to the world that all women deserve not to be blamed, though some forgetting they are women themselves and in danger to be condemned by the words of their own mouths, fall into so great an error as to speak unadvisedly against the rest of their sex. Which if it be true, I am persuaded they can show their own imperfection in nothing more, and therefore could wish (for their own ease, modesties and credit) they would refer such points of folly to be practised by evil-disposed men, who forgetting they were born of women, nourished of women, and that if it were not by the means of women they would be quite extinguished out of the world and a final end of them all, do like vipers deface the wombs wherein they were bred, only to give way and utterance to their want of discretion and goodness. Such as these were they that dishonoured Christ, his apostles and prophets, putting them to shameful deaths. Therefore we are not to regard any imputations that they undeservedly lay upon us no otherwise than to make use of them to our own benefits, as spurs to virtue, making us fly all occasions that may colour their vain speeches to pass current. Especially considering that they have tempted even the patience of God himself, who gave power to wise and virtuous women, to bring down their pride and arrogance. As was cruel Cesarus, by the discreet counsel of noble Deborah, judge and prophetess of Israel, and resolution of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite; wicked Haman, by the divine prayers and prudent proceedings of beautiful Hester; blasphemous Holofernes by the invincible

courage, rare wisdom and confident carriage of Judith; and the unjust judges by the innocence of the chaste Susannah: with infinite others, which for brevity's sake I will omit. As also in respect it pleased our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ, without the assistance of man, being free from original and all other sins, from the time of his conception till the hour of his death, to be begotten of a woman, born of a woman, nourished of a woman, obedient to a woman; and that he healed women, pardoned women, comforted women; yea, even when he was in his greatest agony and bloody sweat going to be crucified, and also in the last hour of his death took care to dispose of a woman; after his Resurrection, appeared first to a woman, sent a woman to declare his most glorious Resurrection to the rest of his disciples. Many other examples I could allege of divers faithful and virtuous women, who have in all ages, not only been confessors, but also endured most cruel martyrdom for their faith in Jesus Christ. All which is sufficient to enforce all good Christians and honourable minded men to speak reverently of our sex, and especially of all virtuous and good women. To the modest censures of both which, I refer these my imperfect endeavours, knowing that according to their own excellent dispositions, they will rather cherish, nourish, and increase the least spark of virtue where they find it, by their favourable and best interpretations, than quench it by wrong constructions. To whom I wish all increase of virtue, and desire their best opinions.

Daniel Tuvil, *Asylum veneris*

This work is a defence of women, part of the Jacobean *querelle des femmes* controversy. Text from: the first edition, 1616, pp. 137–62.

The epilogue

For howsoever Aristotle affirm that nature intendeth always to produce that which is most perfect and therefore willingly would still bring forth the male, counting females, it should seem, like those that are born blind and lame, or any other way defective, and prodigious errors and mistakings of her operations; howsoever likewise their adversaries would deprive them of that glorious character of God's divinity imprinted in the heart of man at his creation; because it is said in 1 Cor. 11:7. *that man is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man*; and hereupon would conclude that their whole sex is but an ample demonstration of nature's craziness, and their own unworthiness. Plato yet maintains that if there be any distinction betwixt their sufficiency and ours, it is not essential but accidental, and such a one is grounded merely upon use. And therefore, saith he, as both the hands are by nature alike for all manner of actions, till application and employment bring

in a difference of right and left, so women and men have in them the same aptitude and ability for the well managing of civil and military places, and it is exercise alone which begets dexterity in the one and the other. Which example he drew peradventure from the Pythagoreans, who divided all things into good and evil; and in the rank of those that were good, placed the right hand, the male, and that which was limited and finite: in the rank of those that were evil, the left hand, the female, and that which was infinite. But omitting this, his conclusion is that those bodies are most perfect and fitting for every action, which can of occasion require, as well apply their left hand to the business as their right: so is that commonwealth the most absolute which for good government can make use of women as well as men.

It is an axiom in schools, whereof no *quare* [inquiry] can be made, that, *substances admit not more or less*, wherefore as one stone cannot be said to be more a stone than another, so far as concerneth that essential form, which giveth a being to them both; no more can one man be said to be more perfectly man than another. And so by consequence the male shall not be thought more worthy than the female, in regard of his essence, because they be comprehended both under one kind: but if in anything he have the start, and advantage, it is merely by accident, and no way else. As concerning that fore-alleged position of Aristotle's, I confess it is true, that nature in the production of things doth continually mind the perfectest; and therefore intendeth the bringing forth of man in his kind, but not male more than female. Or if she should always produce the male, she should commit an extraordinary incongruity, because as from the body and the soul ariseth a compound more noble than his parts, which is man: so from the company of male and female doth redound likewise a compound, which is the only preserver of human generation, without which the parts would soon decay. Male and female therefore, are by nature always together, neither can the one exist without the other. One sex always is an argument of imperfection; and therefore the heathens did attribute both of them to God. Orpheus said of Jupiter that he was male and female. So that the graces and abilities which are in them, howsoever they may vary in outward traces and lineaments, are in form and substance the same with ours . . . there is but one fortitude, one prudence, one justice.

Rachel Speght, *A mouzell for Melastomus*

Speght's tract in response to Swetnam's *The arraignment of lewd, froward and idle women*, and a volume of poetry are her only published work. She dedicates her text to 'all virtuous ladies'. Text from: the first edition, 1617, pp. 3-19.

Of woman's excellency, with the causes of her creation and of the sympathy which ought to be in man and wife each toward other

The work of creation being finished, this approbation thereof was given by God himself: that all was very good. If all, then woman who, excepting man, is the most excellent creature under the canopy of heaven. But if it be objected by any, first that woman, though created good, yet by giving ear to Satan's temptations brought death and misery upon all her posterity; secondly, that Adam was not deceived, but that the woman was deceived, and was in the transgression [1 Tim. 2:14]; thirdly that St Paul saith, *it were good for a man not to touch a woman* [1 Cor. 7:1]; fourthly and lastly, that of Solomon, who seems to speak against all our sex, *I have found one man of a thousand but a woman among them all have I not found* [Eccles. 7:30], whereof in it due place.

To the first of these objections I answer that Satan first assailed the woman, because where the hedge is lowest, most easy it is to get over, and she being the weaker vessel was with more facility to be seduced. Like as a crystal glass sooner receives a crack than a strong stone pot. Yet we shall find the offence of Adam and Eve almost to parallel: for as an ambitious desire of being made like unto God was the motive which caused her to eat, so likewise was it his; as may plainly appear by that ironica, *behold man is become as one of us* [Gen. 3:2]. Not that he was so indeed, but hereby his desire to attain a greater perfection than God had given him was reproved. Woman sinned, it is true, by her infidelity in not believing the word of God, but giving credit to Satan's fair promises *that she should not die* [Gen. 3:4]; but so did the man too. And if Adam had not approved of that deed which Eve had done, and been willing to tread the steps which she had gone, he being her head would have reproved her, and have made the commandment a bit to restrain him from breaking his master's injunction. For if a man burn his hand in the fire, the bellows that blowed the fire are not to be blamed, but himself rather for not being careful to avoid the danger. Yet if the bellows had not blowed, the fire had not burnt: no more is woman simply to be condemned for man's transgression. For by the free will which before the fall he enjoyed, he might have avoided and been free from being burned, or singed with that fire which was kindled by Satan and blown by Eve. It therefore served not his turn a whit, afterwards to say: *the woman which thou gavest me, gave me of the tree, and I did eat*. For a penalty was inflicted upon him as well as on the woman, the punishment of her transgression being particular to her own sex, and to none but the female kind: but for the sin of man the whole earth was cursed. And he being better able than the woman to have resisted temptation, because the stronger vessel, was first called to account to show that to whom

much is given, of them much is required; and that he who was the sovereign of all creatures visible should have yielded greatest obedience to God.

True it is (as is already confessed) that woman first sinned, yet we find no mention of spiritual nakedness till man had sinned: then it is said, *their eyes were opened*, the eyes of their mind and conscience, and then perceived they themselves naked, that is, not only bereft of that integrity which they originally had, but felt the rebellion and disobedience of their members in the disordered motions of their now corrupt nature, which made them for shame cover their nakedness: then (and not afore) it is said that they saw it, as if sin were imperfect, and unable to bring a deprivation of a blessing received, or death on all mankind, till man (in whom lay the active power of generation) had transgressed. The offence therefore of Adam and Eve is by St Augustine thus distinguished: *the man sinned against God and himself, the woman against God, herself and her husband*. Yet in her giving of the fruit to eat had she no malicious intent towards him, but did therein show a desire to make her husband partaker of that happiness, which she thought by their eating they should both have enjoyed. This her giving Adam of that sauce, wherewith Satan had served her, whose sourness, afore he had eaten, she did not perceive, was that which made her sin to exceed his: wherefore that she might not of him, who ought to honour her, be abhorred, the first promise that was made in paradise, God makes to a woman: that by her seed should the serpent's head be broken: whereupon Adam calls her *Eve, life*, that as the woman had been an occasion of his sin, so should woman bring forth the saviour from sin, which was in fullness of time accomplished. By which was manifested that he is a saviour of believing women, no less than of men, that so the blame of sin may not be imputed to this creature, which is good, but to the will by which Eve sinned, and yet by Christ's assuming the shape of a man was it declared that his mercy was equivalent to both sexes, so that by Herod's blessed seed (as St Paul affirms) it is brought to pass, that *male and female are all one in Christ Jesus* [Gal. 3:28].

To the second objection I answer, that the apostle doth not hereby exempt man from sin, but only giveth to understand that the woman was the primary transgressor and not the man. But that man was not at all deceived was far from his meaning: for he afterward expressly saith, that *as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive* [1 Cor. 15:22].

For the third objection, it is good for a man not to touch a woman, the apostle makes it not a positive prohibition, but speaks it only because of the Corinthians' present necessity, who were then persecuted by the enemies of the church, for which cause, and no other, he saith, *art thou loosed from a wife? Seek not a wife*; meaning whilst the time of these perturbations should continue in their heat: *but if thou art bound, seek not to be loosed: if thou marriest, thou sinnest not, only increase thy care: for the married careth for*

the things of this world, and I wish that you were without care that ye might cleave fast unto the Lord without separation: for the time remaineth that they which have wives be as though they had none. For the persecutors shall deprive you of them, either by imprisonment, banishment or death; so that manifest it is that the apostle doth not hereby forbid marriage, but only adviseth the Corinthians to forbear a while, till God in mercy should curb the fury of their adversaries. For (as Eusebius writeth) *Paul was afterward married himself, the which is very probable, being that interrogatively he saith, have we not power to lead about a wife, being a sister, as well as the rest of the apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord and Cephas* [1 Cor. 9:5].

The fourth and last objection is that of Solomon, *I have found one man among a thousand, but a woman among them all have I not found*. For answer of which, if we look into the story of his life, we shall find therein a commentary upon this enigmatical sentence included: for it is there said that Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, which number maketh one thousand [1 Kings 11:3]. These women turning his heart away from being perfect with the Lord his God, sufficient cause had he to say that among the said thousand women found he not one upright. He saith not that among a thousand women never any man found one worthy of commendation, but speaks in the first person singularly, *I have not found*, meaning in his own experience. For this assertion is to be holden a part of the confession of his former follies, and no otherwise, his repentance being the intended drift of *Ecclesiastes*.

Thus having (by God's assistance) removed those stones, wherewith some have stumbled, others broken their shins, I will proceed toward the period of my intended task, which is to decipher the excellency of women: of whose creation I will for order's sake observe. First the efficient cause, which was God; secondly the material cause, or that whereof she was made; thirdly the formal cause, or fashion and proportion of her feature; fourthly and lastly the final cause, the end or purpose for which she was made. To begin with the first.

The efficient cause of women's creation was Jehovah the eternal, the truth of which is manifest in Moses his narration of the six days' works, where he saith, *God created them male and female* [Gen. 1:28]. And David exhorting all the earth to sing unto the Lord, meaning by a metonymy *earth*, all creatures that live on the earth, of what nation or sex soever, gives this reason: *for the Lord hath made us* [Psalm 100:3]. That work then cannot choose but be good, yea very good, which is wrought by so excellent a workman as the Lord: for he being a glorious creator, must needs effect a worthy creature. Bitter water cannot proceed from a pleasant sweet fountain, nor bad works from that workman which is perfectly good and in propriety none but he.

Secondly, the material cause or matter whereof woman was made was of

a refined mould, if I may so speak: for man was created of the dust of the earth, but woman was made of a part of man after that he was a living soul: yet was she not produced from Adam's foot, to be his too low inferior; nor from his head to be his superior; but from his side, near his heart, to be his equal, that where he is lord she may be lady: and therefore saith God concerning man and woman jointly, *let them rule over the fish of the sea, and over the fowls of the heaven, and over every beast that moveth upon the earth*. By which words he makes their authority equal and all creatures to be in subjection unto them both. This being rightly considered doth teach men to make such account of their wives, as Adam did of Eve, *this is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh* [Gen. 2:23]. As also, that they neither do or wish any more hurt unto them than unto their own bodies: for men ought to love their wives as themselves, because he that loves his wife, loves himself [Eph. 5:28]. And never a man hated his own flesh (which the woman is) unless a monster in nature.

Thirdly the formal cause, fashion and proportion of woman was excellent. For she was neither like the beasts of the earth, the fowls of the air, fishes of the sea, or any other inferior creature, but man was the only object which she did resemble. For as God gave man a lofty countenance, that he might look up toward heaven, so did he likewise give unto woman, and as the temperature of man's body is excellent, so is woman's. For whereas other creatures, by reason of their gross humours, have excrements for their habit, as fowls their feathers, beasts their hair, fishes their scales, man and woman only have their skins clear and smooth [Gen. 1:26]. And (that more is) in the image of God were they both created, yea and to be brief, all the parts of their bodies, both external and internal were correspondent and meet each for other.

Fourthly and lastly, the final cause, or end, for which woman was made, was to glorify God and to be a collateral companion for man to glorify God, in using her body, and all the parts, powers, and faculties thereof, as instruments for his honour: as with her voice to sound forth praises, like Miriam [Exod. 15:20], and the rest of her company; with her tongue not to utter words of strife, but to give good counsel unto her husband the which he must not despise. For Abraham was bidden to give ear to Sarah his wife [Gen. 21:12]. Pilate was willed by his wife not to have any hand in the condemning of Christ, and a sin it was in him that he listened not to her [Matt. 27:19]: Leah and Rachel counselled Jacob to do according to the word of the Lord [Gen. 31:16]: and the Shunamite put her husband in mind of harbouring the prophet Elisha [2 Kings 4:9]: her hands should be open according to her ability in contributing towards God's service, and distressed servants like to that poor widow, which cast two mites into the treasury; and as Mary Magdalene, Susannah and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward

[Luke 8], with many others which of their substance ministered unto Christ. Her heart should be a receptacle for God's word, like Mary that treasured up the sayings of Christ in her heart [Luke 1:51]. Her feet should be swift in going to seek the Lord in his sanctuary, as Mary Magdalene made haste to seek Christ at his sepulchre. Finally no power external or internal ought woman to keep idle, but to employ it in some service of God, to the glory of her creator, and comfort of her own soul.

The other end for which woman was made was to be a companion and helper for man and if she must be a helper, and but a helper, then are those husbands to be blamed which lay the whole burthen of domestical affairs and maintenance on the shoulders of their wives. For, as yoke-fellows they are to sustain part of each other's cares, griefs, and calamities. But as if two oxen be put in one yoke, the one being bigger than the other, the greater bears most weight, so the husband being the stronger vessel is to bear a greater burthen than his wife. And therefore the Lord said to Adam, *in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread till thou return to the dust* [Gen. 3:19]. And St Paul saith *that he that provideth not for his household is worse than an infidel* [1 Tim. 5:8]. Nature hath taught senseless creatures to help one another, as the male pigeon when his hen is weary with sitting on her eggs and comes off them, supplies her place that in her absence they may receive no harm, until such time as she is fully refreshed. . . . Seeing then that these unreasonable creatures, by the instinct of nature, bear such affection to each other that without any grudge they willingly, according to their kind, help one another, I may reason *a minore ad maius* [from a minor premise to a major one], that much more should man and woman, which are reasonable creatures, be helpers each to other in all things lawful, they having the law of God to guide them, his word to be a lanthorn unto their feet and a light unto their paths, by which they are excited to a far more mutual participation of each other's burdens, than other creatures. So that neither the wife may say to her husband, nor the husband unto his wife, *I have no need of thee*, no more than the members of the body may so say to each other, between whom there is such a sympathy, that if one member suffer all suffer with it. Therefore though God bade Abraham forsake his country and kindred, yet he bade him not forsake his wife, who being flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone, was to be co-partner with him of whatsoever did betide him, whether joy or sorrow. Wherefore Solomon saith, *wee to him that is alone* [Eccles. 4:10]: for when thoughts of discomfort, troubles of this world, and fear of dangers do possess him, he wants a companion to lift him up from the pit of perplexity into which he is fallen. For a good wife, saith Plautus, is the wealth of the mind, and the welfare of the heart; and therefore a meet associate for her husband; and *woman*, saith Paul, *is the glory of the man* [1 Cor. 11:7]. . . .

So husbands should not account their wives as their vassals, but as those

that are heirs together of the grace of life, and with all lenity and mild persuasions set their feet in the right way if they happen to tread awry, bearing with their infirmities, as Elkanah did with his wife's barrenness [1 Sam. 1:17].

The kingdom of God is compared unto the marriage of a king's son: John calleth the conjunction of Christ and his chosen a marriage [Matt. 22; Rev. 19:7]; and not few but many times, doth our blessed saviour in the canticles set forth his unspeakable love towards his church under the title of an husband rejoicing with his wife; and often vouchsafeth to call her his sister and spouse, by which is showed that with God is *no respect of persons* [Rom. 2:11], nations or sexes. For whosoever, whether it be man or woman, *that doth believe in the Lord Jesus, such shall be saved* [John 3:18]. And if God's love, even from the beginning, had not been as great towards woman as to man, then would he not have preserved from the deluge of the old world as many women as men, nor would Christ after his resurrection have appeared unto a woman first of all other, had it not been to declare thereby that the benefits of his death and resurrection are as available by belief for women as for men: for he indifferently died for the one sex as for the other. Yet a truth unguishable is it that the *man is the woman's head* [1 Cor. 11:3], by which title yet of supremacy, no authority hath he given him to domineer or basely command and employ his wife as a servant: but hereby is he taught the duties which he oweth unto her. For as the head of a man is the imaginer and contriver of projects profitable for the safety of his whole body; so the husband must protect and defend his wife from injuries. For he is *her head, as Christ is the head of the Church*, which he entirely loveth, and for which he gave his very life, the dearest thing any man hath in this world. *Greater love than this hath no man, that he bestoweth his life for his friend* [John 15:13], saith our Saviour. This precedent passeth all other patterns, it requireth great benignity and enjoineth an extraordinary affection, *for men must love their wives, even as Christ loved his church*. Secondly, as the head doth not jar or contend with the members, which be man, as the apostle saith, *yet make but one body* [1 Cor. 12:20]; no more must the husband with the wife, but expelling all bitterness and cruelty he must live with her lovingly, and religiously, honouring her as the weaker vessel. Thirdly and lastly, as he is her head, he must by instruction bring her to the knowledge of her creator that so she may be a fit stone for the Lord's building [1 Cor. 14:35]. Women for this end must have an especial care to set their affections upon such as are able to teach them, that as they *grow in years, they may grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ Jesus our lord* [1 Pet. 3:18].

Thus, if men would remember the duties they are to perform in being heads, some would not stand a tip-toe as they do thinking themselves lords and rulers, and account every omission of performing whatsoever they

command, whether lawful or not, to be matter of great disparagement and indignity done them. Whereas they should consider that women are enjoined to submit themselves unto their husbands no otherways than as to the Lord, so that from hence, for man, there ariseth a lesson not to be forgotten, that as the Lord commandeth nothing to be done but that which is right and good, no more must the husband: for if a wife fulfil the evil command of her husband, she obeys him as a tempter, as Saphira did Ananias [Acts 5:2]. But lest I should seem too partial in praising women so much as I have (though no more than warrant from scripture doth allow) I add to these premises that I say not all women are virtuous, for then they should be more excellent than men, sith of Adam's sons there was Cain as well as Abel, and of Noah's, Cham as well as Sem: so that of men as of women, there are two sorts, namely good and bad, which in *Matthew* the five and twenty chapter, are comprehended under the name sheep and goats. And if women were not sinful, then should they not need a saviour, but the virgin Mary, a pattern of piety, *rejoiced in God her saviour* [Luke 1:47], ergo she was a sinner. In the *Revelation* the church is called the spouse of Christ; and in *Zachariah* wickedness is called a woman [Zach. 5:7] to show that of women there are both godly and ungodly. For Christ would not purge his floor if there were not chaff among the wheat, nor should gold need to be fined if among it there were no dross. But far be it from anyone to condemn the righteous with the wicked, or good women with the bad (as the baiter of women hath done). For though there are some scabbed sheep in a flock, we must not therefore conclude all the rest to be mangy. And though some men, through excess, abuse God's creatures, we must not imagine that all men are gluttons: the which we may with as good reason do as condemn all women in general for the offences of some particulars. Of the good sort is it that I have in this book spoken, and so would I that all that read it should so understand me: for if otherwise I had done, I should have incurred that woe, which by the prophet Isaiah, is pronounced against them that *speak well of evil and should have justified the wicked, which thing is abominable to the Lord* [Prov. 17:15]

William Austin, *Haec homo*

Austin's title proclaims its message: using a feminine demonstrative, *haec* (the male 'homo'), he indicates woman's inclusion in the legal and public liberties of a corded man ('homo'). The work was issued by his executors, one of whom was his wife, after his death. Text from: the first edition, 1637, pp. 1–6.

The omnipotent in the beginning created all things for man, and unto all things were made fit and convenient for him, he was not made, but when they had received their ornaments, then was brought forth this admirable creature (the image of his creator), who was so excellently composed that his maker

had not only given him, *a face upward*, but, *a mind inward* to behold the heavens and all under them, *homo ad contemplandum creatorem suum creatus est* [*man was created to contemplate the creator*], saith Gregory. Certainly one would think that, to the making of so divine a creature, some extraordinary matter collected out of the quintessences of the celestial spheres ought to be prepared. One would scarcely believe (but that it is written where is no falsehood) that the base earth were his best apparel: nay worse, not earth, but dust (the very contemptible dust) which the least wind blows away.

But, when we behold his daily carriage, his pride and haughtiness, with what disdain he not only condemns his inferior creatures, but such as were created equal with him: we may judge him either to be made of better stuff than we have heard of, or that he very much forgets his beginning.

He was not made of heaven nor in heaven, but in earth and of dust amongst (his fellow creatures) the beasts of the field: of the same mettle, in the same place and in the same day with them.

What should make him so proud as to despise and, with so many sought-for words, condemn woman (his other self)? Doubtless it proceeds from his ignorance or forgetfulness, in that he knows not, or will not remember, his low beginnings (even out of the dust), and had need to hear this sentence again from heaven oftener than rain upon him, *nostrę tepsum* [*know thyself*]. Otherwise he would not esteem so unworthily of woman, which is his other half and part of his own bodily substance. It shows as if a man should love his head, and hate his brains: is not she he? Examine and you shall find small difference.

As first, for name: though (for necessary distinction sake) they were created male and female and two bodies: yet all (in one word) makes but *homo*, one man. Which very word, Cicero (the most eloquent of his time) thought no barbarism to bestow upon a woman, and a virtuous lady, when (remembering his commendations to her in an epistle to her husband) he calls her *homo singularis pudicitiae ac pietatis* [*a man of singular chastity and piety*].

In the sex is all the difference, which is but only in the body. For she hath the same reasonable soul, and in that there is neither hes nor shes, neither excellency nor superiority: she hath the same soul, the same mind, the same understanding, and tends to the same end of eternal salvation that he doth. In which there is no exception of sex, persons or nation: but (in the resurrection) she shall (without exception of sex) obtain like body with him according to the similitude of angels: for they were bought at the same price and shall dwell in the same glory.

She hath not only the same name with him; but they are both of one figure, made by one workman of one substance in one place in one day, so that there

is no such general difference between them that can give excuse to man to esteem basely and meanly of her but that he must needs (therein) touch himself, since she was made coequal with him, and so like him. Nor with standing, there may be observed some nice differences between them in their creation: but indeed they are such as rather much increase her praise, than detract the least scruple from her worth and excellency.

Jane Owen, *An antidote against purgatory*

Owen aims to persuade Catholic women of the need to perform good works, in order to avoid, or minimise, a stay in purgatory. She envisages spiritual and earthly independence for widows and single women, in contradistinction to her description of marriage. Text from: the first edition, 1634, pp. 178–86.

But before I end this passage I will turn my pen, but withal gentle and soften in part my style, in respect of the persons to which I will direct these few ensuing lines. To you then (great Catholic ladies) and other Catholic gentlewomen of worth (to whom in regard of my sex, I may be the more bold to speak freely) whose present widowed states by reason of your deceased husbands, stand enriched with more than ordinary affluency (during your lives) of lands, money, and other temporal goods; you I say (noble ladies and others of worth) though you be weak in nature, yet know your own strength, and what great matters during your widowhoods you are able, through God's assistance to perform, for the freeing you from the flames of purgatory: and remember that howsoever the niceness and delicacy of divers of you be such, as that in this world you can brook nothing displeasing to you: yet in the next world, admitting you die in state of salvation, you must infallibly undergo those horrible flames (so much spoken of in these leaves) except by your charitableness (and this in a most full degree) you redeem those pains.

Oh, what good works might you do during your widowhood? And yet, I fear, you are most forgetful therein. Many of you (I know) are ready to bestow a hundred marks, or more, upon one gown; and that gown must not serve two years, but another (as chargeable) must instantly be had. Again, some of you will be content to lose a hundred marks or more, in one night at Gleeck⁸ and will wear about your necks jewels worth many hundreds of pounds.

Oh, cut⁹ of these needless and fruitless charges and bestow a good part thereof upon your souls with the preciousness of good and satisfying works, though your bodies in part be deprived of such glorious ornaments. There is none of you but, besides your greater sins, you daily commit lesser sins for it is said in holy writ, *Prov. 24, The just man shall fall seven times a day. How many idle and unnecessary thoughts and words pass from you, but in*

one day? And yet you must make satisfaction for every such thought or word, either here or in purgatory, before you can arrive to heaven. For it is said, *Prov. 19. They shall render an account of every idle word, in the day of judgement.*

Now then in time of your widowhoods, lay out a great part of your riches to spiritual usury (as I may term it) for the good of your souls. I did know a good gentlewoman, now dead, she was left by her deceased father two thousand pounds and better, in portion. She intended to marry (and so before her death she did) yet before she would subject herself, and her state to any man (besides divers good acts before) she gave at one time (I speak of certain and particular knowledge) three hundred pounds of her portion away, to the bringing up of poor scholars beyond the seas; saying thus to herself, *if I shall be content to enthrall myself, and seventeen hundred pounds at least, to the will of a stranger, who I know not how he will use me: have I not reason to give three hundred pounds away to my own soul, for his sake, who will not suffer a cup of cold water given in his name, to be unrewarded?*

This is an example worthy of your taking notice of, thereby to put you in mind, to remember to prevent the flames of purgatory during the time of your widowhoods. For if you be not solicitous thereof before your second marriage, when your states are in your own disposal; it is much to be feared that your future husbands will bridle you of all such (though most necessary) charges. This example may also be worthily a precedent for all other young Catholic gentlewomen of great portions, to provide for the good of their souls before they tie themselves in marriage to anyone.

Well (worthy ladies) let a woman once preach to women, and since you are women, imitate that blessed woman so much celebrated for her charity to others, in God's holy writ, *Prov. 31 she opened her hands to those that wanted, and stretched out her arms to the poor; and thereupon it followeth of her in the said word of God, and she shall laugh at the last day.* That is, at the day of her death she shall rejoice: and so (noble ladies and others) it is in your power (if yourselves will) to enjoy the like felicity and retaliation for your works of charity, with her. And with this I give a full close to this my exhortative discourse.

To the supreme authority of England, the commons assembled in parliament

This petition aimed to secure the release of various Leveller prisoners. Text from the first edition, 1649.

The humble petition of divers well affected women of the cities of London and Westminster, the Borough of Southwark, hamlets and parts adjacent. Affecters and approvers of the petition of September 11, 1648

Showeth that since we are assured of our creation in the image of God and of an interest in Christ equal unto men, as also for a proportionable share in the freedoms of this Commonwealth, we cannot but wonder and grieve that we should appear so despicable in your eyes, as to be thought unworthy to petition or represent our grievances to this honourable house.

Have we not an equal interest with men of this nation in those liberties and securities, contained in the Petition of Right, and other good laws of the land? Are any of our lives, limbs, liberties or goods to be taken from us more than from men, but by the due process of law and conviction of twelve sworn men of the neighbourhood?

And can you imagine us to be so sottish or stupid, as not to perceive on not to be sensible when daily those strong defences of our peace and welfare are broken, and trod underfoot by force and arbitrary power?

Would you have us keep at home in our houses, when men of such faithfulness and integrity as the four prisoners our friends in the tower, are fetched out of their beds and forced from their houses by soldiers, to the affrighting and undoing of themselves, their wives, children and families? Are not our husbands, our selves, our children and families by the same rule as liable to the like unjust cruelties as they?

Shall such men as Capt. Bray be made close prisoners and such as Mr Sawyer snatched up and carried away, beaten and buffeted at the pleasure of some officers of the army; and such as Mr Blanck kept close prisoner, and after most barbarous usage be forced to run the gantlop,¹⁶ and be most slave like and cruelly whipped; and must be kept at home in our houses, as if we our lives and liberties and all were not concerned?

Nay shall such valiant religious men as Mr Robert Lockyer be liable to law martial and be judged by his adversaries, and most unhumanly shot to death? Shall the blood of war be shed in time of peace? Doth not the word of God expressly condemn it? Doth not the Petition of Right declare that no person ought to be judged by law martial (except in time of war) and that all commissions given to execute martial law in time of peace are contrary to the laws and statutes of the land? Doth not Sir Edward Coke in his chapter of murder in the third part of his Institutes, hold it for good law (and since owned and published by this parliament) that for a general or other officers of an army in time of peace, to put any man (although a soldier) to death by colour of martial law, it is absolute murder in that general? And hath it not by this house in the case of the late Earl of Strafford been adjudged high

treason? And are we Christians, and shall we sit still and keep at home, while such men as have born continual testimony against the injustice of all times, and unrighteousness of men, be picked out and be delivered up to the slaughter and yet must we show no sense of their sufferings, no tenderness of affections, no bowels of compassion, nor bear any testimony against so abominable cruelty and injustice?

Have such men as these continually hazarded their lives, spent their estates and time, lost their liberties, and thought nothing too precious for defence of us, our lives and liberties, been as a guard by day and a watch by night; and when for thus they are in trouble and greatest danger, persecuted and hated even to the death; and should we be so basely ungrateful, as to neglect them in the day of their affliction? No, far be it from us: let it be accounted folly, presumption, madness, or whatsoever in us, whilst we have life and breath, we will never leave them, or forsake them, nor ever cease to importune you (having yet so much hopes of you, as of the unjust judge, mentioned *Luke* 18, to obtain justice, if not for justice's sake, yet for importunity) or to use any other means for the enlargement and reparation of those of them that live; and for justice against such, as have been the cause of Mr Lockyer's death: nor will we ever rest until we have prevailed, that we, our husbands, children, friends, servants, may not be liable to be thus abused, violated, and butchered at men's wills and pleasures. But if nothing will satisfy but the blood of those just men, those constant undaunted asserters of the people's freedom will satisfy your thirst: drink also and be glutted with our blood and let us fall together. Take the blood of one more, and take all: stay one, stay all.

And therefore again, we entreat you to review our last petition in behalf of our friends above mentioned, and not to slight the things therein contained, because they are presented unto you by the weak hand of women, it being an usual thing with God, by weak means to work mighty effects. For we are no whit satisfied with the answer you gave unto our husbands and friends, but do equally with them remain liable to those snares laid in your declaration which maketh the abettors of the book, laid to our friends' charge, no less than traitors, when as hardly any discourse can be touching the affairs of the present times, but falls within compass of that book! So that all liberty of discourse is thereby utterly taken away, than which there can be no greater slavery.

Nor shall we be satisfied, however you deal with our friends, except you free them from under their present extra-judicial imprisonment and force upon them, and give them full reparations for their forceable attachment, &c. And leave them from first to last to be proceeded against by due process of law, and give them respect from you, answerable to their good and faithful service to the Commonwealth.

Our houses being worse than prisons to us, and our lives worse than death, the sight of our husbands and children, matter of grief and sorrow and affliction to us, until you grant our desires, and therefore, if ever you intend any good to this miserable nation, harden not your hearts against petitions, nor deny us in things so evidently just and reasonable, as you would not be dishonourable to all posterity.

Eliza's Babes

The poems here redefine woman's role on earth through faith. Text from: the first edition 1652. pp. 31. 42. 43. 45. 100-1.

The Bride

Sith you me ask, why born was I?
I'll tell you: 'twas to heaven to fly,
Not here to live a slavish life,
By being to the world a wife.
When I was born I was set free,
From mortals' thralldom here to be;
For that great Prince prepared a bride,
That for my love on earth here died.
May not I then earth's thralldom scorn,
Sith for heaven's prince I here was born?
If match'd in heaven I wear a crown,
But earthly thralldom pulls me down.

On Marriage

Lord! If thou hast ordain'd for me,
That I on earth must married be:
As often I have been foretold,
Be not thy will, by me, controlled.
And if my heart thou dost incline
Children to have, Lord make them thine,
Or never let 't be said they're mine.
I shall not like what's not divine.
I no ambition have for earth,
My thoughts are of a higher birth,
The soul's sweet *Babes* do bring no pain,
And they immortalise the name.

The Gift

My Lord hast thou given me away?
 Did I on earth, for a gift stay?
 Hath he by prayer of thee gain'd me,
 Who was so strictly knit to thee?

To thee I only gave my heart,
 Wouldst thou my Lord from that gift part?
 I know thou wouldst deliver me
 To none, but one belov'd by thee.

But Lord my heart thou dost not give,
 Though here on earth while I do live
 My body here he may retain,
 My heart in heaven, with thee must reign.

Then as thy gift let him think me,
 Sith I a donage am from thee.
 And let him know thou hast my heart,
 He only hath my earthly part.

It was my glory I was free,
 And subject here to none but thee,
 And still that glory I shall hold
 If thou my spirit dost infold.

It is my bliss, I here serve thee,
 'Tis my great joy: thou lovest me.

The Change

Great God!
 How hast thou chang'd my thoughts in me,
 For when I thought to be a wife,
 I then did think troubled to be,
 Because I saw most live in strife.

But thou a husband hast given me,
 Whose sweet discretion doth direct,
 And orders all things so for me,
 As if of heaven he were elect.

To take all trouble quite from me,
 That earth's possession here doth bring,

And so doth leave me quite to thee,
 Thy praises here to sit and sing.

*Not a Husband, though never so excelling in goodness to us,
 must detain our desires from heaven*

My heart I find upon her wings,
 Ready to flee from earthly things.
 But that the virtue lives in thee,
 On earth a while retaineth me.

Not that of life I weary am,
 For what on earth here wish I can,
 From heaven's great prince receive I do.
 I must most freely tell to you.

Great blessings from him I enjoy,
 And with him I have no annoy.
 Yet these must not retain my heart,
 Another of me claims his part.

To heaven's great prince I must away,
 No love on earth must here me stay.
 He lent me but awhile to you,
 And now I must bid you adieu.

The royal priesthood

Peace! Present now no more to me (to take my spirit from the height of felicity) that I am a creature of a weaker sex, a woman. For my God! If I must live after the example of thy blessed apostle, I must live by faith, and faith makes things to come as present, and thou hast said by thy servant, that we shall be like thy blessed son: then wilt thou make all thy people as kings and priests, kings are men and men are kings; and souls have no sex; the hidden man of the heart makes us capable of being kings; for I have heard that it is that within makes the man: then are we by election capable of as great dignity as a mortal man. But thoughts of mortals! Now adieu; I will close the eyes of my soul to mortality, and will not open them but to eternity; seeing that by thy grace and faith in thee, thou hast made us partaker of thy divine nature, by thy assistance I will live in faith; I will no more now see myself as mortal, but as an immortal king will I begin to live, that hidden man never dies, but when my immortal king, that placest me in this kingdom of felicity with him, shall see it fit time, he will raise me on a triumphant chariot,

composed of the wings of bright angels, to his immortal kingdom of glory; where I shall reign with him for all eternity, and never more desire to change. And as a royal priest must I be to thee; ever offering up the sweet incense of my praises to the divine Majesty, for thy infinite mercies to me, thy unworthy servant.

Margaret Cavendish, *The philosophical and physical opinions*

Cavendish's work articulates varying positions in relation to the constraints or otherwise upon women. The preface to this work is one place where she suggests that education and socialisation constrain all women. Text from the first edition, 1655, fol. A4^r-B2^r.

But to answer those objections that are made against me, as first how should I come by so much experience as I have expressed in my several books to have? I answer: I have had by relation the long and much experience of my lord, who hath lived to see and be in many changes of fortune and to converse with many men of sundry nations, ages, qualities, tempers, capacities, abilities, wits, humours, fashions and customs.

And as many others, especially wives, go from church to church, from ball to ball, from collation to collation, gossiping from house to house, so when my lord admits me to his company I listen with attention to his edifying discourse and I govern myself by his doctrine: I dance a measure with the muses, feast with sciences, or sit and discourse with the arts.

The second is that, since I am no scholar, I cannot know the names and terms of art and the divers and several opinions of several authors. I answer: that I must have been a natural fool if I had not known and learnt them, for they are customarily taught all children from their nurse's breast, being ordinarily discoursed of in every family that is of quality, and the family from whence I sprung are neither natural idiots or ignorant fools, but the contrary, for they were rational, learned, understanding and witty.

And when I said I never conversed an hour with professed philosophers, for indeed in this age I have not heard of many which do profess it, or an intimate acquaintance or familiar conversation with professed scholars, nor so much discourse as to learn from them, for three or four visits do not make an intimacy, nor familiarity, nor can much be learned therefrom. For visiting and entertaining discourse, for the most part, are either cautionary, frivolous, vain, idle, or at least but common and ordinary matter, and most commonly all visiting discourses are after one and the same manner, although the company be several; but I did not think my readers would have been so rigid as to think I excluded my husbands, brothers and the rest of my family, neither are they professed philosophers nor scholars, although they are learned therein; or to believe I was so ridiculously foolish, or so foolishly

vain, or so basely false, as that I strive to make the world believe I had all my experience and knowledge before I was born, and that my native language came by instinct, and that I was never taught my A,B,C; or the marks and names of several things. But I hope my book hath more spiteful enemies than faults, for I have said in an epistle before the second part of my *Ohio*,¹¹ that if I had never seen nor heard so much as I have done, should never have been able to have writ a book.

Thirdly, that I had taken feathers out of the universities to enlarge the wings of my fancy. I answer: no more than David took the wool from his sheep's backs to clothe his poetical fancies or devotion, or as I may say his devout poetry which is dressed with simulating.¹²

But it hath been known in several ages, that even poor peasants that hear nothing but the bleating of sheep, the lowering of herds, the crowing of cocks, and the like, and their ordinary discourses of nothing but of the market, or the like, have been high-flying poets, politic statesmen, wise governors, prudent soldiers, subtle philosophers, excellent physicians, and what not, even to be eloquent orators, and divine preachers, as the holy writ will make manifest to us, and I believe many more are mentioned in other histories of less authority. Thus we may observe that nature is prevalent in all qualities and conditions and since nature is so generous to distribute to those that fortune hath cast out and education hath neglected, why should my readers mistrust nature should be sparing to me, who have been honourably born, carefully bred, and nobly married to a wise man ... as I have said in some of my epistles, in my book called the *World's Ohio* ...

Likewise an objection for my saying I have not read many books: but I answer for not reading of many authors, had I understood several languages, as I do not, I have not had so much time, had I endeavoured to have been learned therein, for learning requires close studies, long time and labour.

Besides, our sex takes so much delight in dressing and adorning themselves, as we for the most part make our gowns our books, our laces our loves, our embroideries our letters, and our dressings are the tunes of our studies, and instead of turning over solid leaves, we turn our hair into curls, and our sex is as ambitious to show themselves to the eyes of the world when finely dressed, as scholars do to express their learning to the ears of the world when fully fraught with authors.

But as I have said my head was so full of my own natural fantasies, as it had not room for strangers to board therein, and certainly natural reason is a better tutor than education. For though education doth help natural reason to a more sudden maturity, yet natural reason was the first educator: for natural reason did first compose commonwealths, invented arts and sciences, and if natural reason have composed, invented and discovered, I know no

reason but natural reason may find out what natural reason hath composed, invented and discovered without the help of education . . .

To the two universities

Most famously learned,

I here present the sum of my works, not that I think wise schoolmen and industrious, laborious students should value my book for any worth, but to receive it without a scorn for the good encouragement of our sex, lest in time we should grow irrational as idiots by the dejectedness of our spirits, through the careless neglects and despicements of the masculine sex to the effeminate, thinking it impossible we should have either learning or understanding, wit or judgement, as if we had not rational souls as well as men and we out of a custom of dejectedness think so too, which makes us quit all: all industry towards profitable knowledge being employed only in low and petty employments, which takes away not only our abilities towards arts, but higher capacities in speculations, so as we are become like worms that only live in the dull earth of ignorance, winding ourselves sometimes out by the help of some refreshing rain of good education, which seldom is given to us: for we are kept like birds in cages to hop up and down in our houses, not suffered to fly abroad to see the several changes of fortune and the various humours, ordained and created by nature. Thus, wanting the experiences of nature, we must needs want the understanding and knowledge and so consequently prudence of men: thus, by an opinion which I hope is but an erroneous one in men, we are shut out of all power and authority by reason we are never employed either in civil nor martial affairs, our counsels are despised and laughed at, the best of our actions are trodden down with scorn, by the over-weaning conceit men have of themselves and through a despicement of us.

But I considering with myself, that if a right judgement and a true understanding and a respectful civility live anywhere, it must be in learned universities, where nature is best known, where truth is oftenest found, where civility is most practised, and if I find not a resentment here, I am very confident I shall find it nowhere, neither shall I think I deserve it if you approve not of me, but if I deserve not praise I am sure to receive so much courtship from this sage society as to bury me in silence: thus I may have a quiet grave, since not worthy a famous memory: but to lie entombed under the dust of a university will be honour enough for me, and more than if I were worshipped by the vulgar as a deity. Wherefore if your wisdoms cannot give me the bays, let your charity strew me with cypress, and who knows but after my honourable burial, I may have a glorious resurrection in following ages, since time brings strange and unusual things to pass, I mean unusual to

men, though not in nature: and I hope this action of mine is not unnatural, though unusual for a woman to present a book to the university; nor impudence, for the action is honest, although it seem vain-glorious: but if it be, I am to be pardoned, since there is little difference between man and beast, but what ambition and glory makes.

Poulain de la Barre, *The woman as good as the man, of the equality of both sexes*

Poulain de la Barre's text was first published in France in 1672. Text from: *the first English edition, 1677*, transl. AL., pp. 145ff.

God willing to produce men in dependence, one upon another by the concourse of two persons, for that end framed two bodies which were different, each was perfect in its kind, and they ought both to be disposed as they are at present, and all that depends on their particular constitution ought to be considered as making a part of their perfection.

It is then without reason that some imagine that women are not so perfect as men and that they look upon that (in them) as a defect, which is an essential portion of their sex: without the which it would be useless for the end for which it hath been formed: which begins and ceases with fecundity, and which is destined for the most excellent use of the world: that is, to frame and nourish us in their bellies.

The two sexes (together) are necessary to beget the like: and if we knew how it is that ours contributes thereto, we would find enough to be said against ourselves. It is hard to be understood upon what they ground themselves, who maintain that men are more noble than women in regard of children, since it is properly women who conceive us, form us, and give us life, birth and breeding. It is true, they pay dearer for it than we, but their pain and trouble ought not to be prejudicial to them and draw upon them contempt in place of esteem, which they thereby deserve.

Who would say that fathers and mothers (who labour to bring up their children good princes to govern their subjects, and magistrates to render them justice) are less estimable than they whose aid and assistance they use for to discharge themselves of their duties?

There are some physicians who have mightily enlarged themselves upon the temperament of sexes to the disadvantage of women; and have pursued their discourses out of sight to show that their sex ought to have a constitution altogether different from ours, which renders it inferior in all things. But their reasons are only light conjectures which come into the heads of such as judge things only by prejudice and upon simple appearances.

When they perceive the two sexes more distinguished by that which

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regards the civil than particular, they fancy to themselves that so they ought to be; and not discerning exactly enough betwixt that which proceeds from custom and education and that which comes from nature, they have attributed to one and the same cause all which they see in society, imagining that when God created man and woman, he disposed them in such a manner as ought to produce all distinction which we observe betwixt them.

This is to carry too far the difference of sexes: it ought to be bounded by design, which God hath had to form men, by the concurrence of two persons, and no more to be admitted but what is necessary for that effect.