

Margaret Cavendish, “A Dialogue betwixt Wit and Beauty”

Description

MARGARET CAVENDISH

“A Dialogue *betwixt Wit and Beauty*”

Mixt *Rose* and *Lilly*, why are you so proud,
Since *Fair* is not in all Minds like allow'd?
Some do like *Black*, some *Brown*, and some like *White*;
Some *Eyes* in all *Complexions* take delight.
Nor doth one *Beauty* in the World still reign; 5
For *Beauty* is created in the *Brain*.
But, say there were a *Body* perfect made,
Complexion pure, by *Nature*'s Pencil laid;
A *Countenance*, where all sweet *Spirits* meet;
A *Hair* that's thick, and long, curl'd to the Feet: 10
Yet, were it like a Statue made of Stone,
The *Eye* would weary grow to look upon:
Had it no *Wit*, the Mind still to delight,
It soon would weary be, as well as *Sight*.
For, *Wit* is fresh and new, doth sport and play; 15
And runs about the *Humour* every way.
With all the *Passions*, *Wit* can well agree;
Wit tempers them, and makes them pleas'd to be.
Ingenious 'tis, doth new *Inventions* find,
To ease the *Body*, and divert the Mind. 20
When I appear, I strike the *Optick Nerve*;
I wound the *Heart*, and make the *Passions* serve.
Souls are my *Pris'ners*, yet do love me well:
My Company is *Heav'n*, my Absence *Hell*.
Each Knee doth bow to me, as to a Shrine; 25
And all the World accounts me as *Divine*.
Beauty, you cannot long Devotion keep;
The Mind grows weary, Senses fall asleep:
As those which in the House of God do go,
Are very Zealous in a Pray'r or two; 30
But, if they must an Hour-long kneel to pray,
Their Zeal grows cold, nor know they what they say:
So *Admirations* are, they do not last;
After *Nine days*, the greatest *Wonder's* past.
The *Mind*, as th' *Senses* all, delights in change; 35
They nothing love, but what is *new* and *strange*.
But subtil *Wit*, can please both *long*, and *well*:

For, to the *Ear*, *Wit* a new Tale can tell.
 And, for the *Tast*, doth dress Meat several ways.
 To th' *Eye*, it can new Forms and Fashions raise. 40
 And for the *Touch*, *Wit* spins both Silk and Wool,
 Invents new ways, to keep *Touch* warm, and cool.
 For *Scent*, *Wit* Mixtures and Compounds doth make,
 That still the *Nose*, a fresh new *Smell* may take.
 I, by Discourse, can represent the *Mind* 45
 With several Objects, though the *Eyes* be blind.
 I'th' *Brain* I can create *Idea's*, and
 Those make to th' *Mind* seem real, though but feign'd.
 The *Mind's* a Shop, where sorts of Toys I sell;
 With fine Conceits, I fit all Humours well. 50
 I can the Work of *Nature* imitate,
 And, in the *Brain*, each several Shape create.
 I Conquer all, am Master of the Field,
 And make fair *Beauty*, in *Love's* Warrs to yield.

NOTES:

Title *Wit* “The faculty of thinking and reasoning in general; mental capacity, understanding, intellect, reason” (*OED*).

16 *Humour* “A particular temperamental inclination” (*OED*).

29 *House of God* A church or place of worship (*OED*).

50 *Conceits* “A fanciful or ingenious expression, metaphor, turn of thought” (*OED*).

SOURCE: *Poems, Or, Several Fancies in Verse: With the Animal Parliament in Prose, Part II, Third Edition* (London, 1668), pp. 117-18. [Google Books]

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