



The Convent of Pleasure" and Other Plays

Margaret Cavendish

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Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673), until recently remembered more as a flamboyant eccentric than as a serious writer, was in fact the most prolific, thought-provoking, and original woman writer of the Restoration. Cavendish is the author of many poems, short stories, biographies, memoirs, letters, philosophical and scientific works (including *The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing World*, the first work of science fiction by a woman), and nineteen plays. "The Convent of Pleasure" and *Other Plays* collects four of Cavendish's dramatic works that are among the most revealing of her attitudes toward marriage and her desire for fame. *Loves Adventures* (1662) centers on a woman succeeding in war and diplomacy by passing as a man. Similarly, the heroine of *Bell in Campo* (1662) rescues her husband at the head of an army of women in this tale of a marriage of near equals. *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668) proposes a separatist community of women and has received attention for its suggestion of lesbian sexuality. *The Bridals* (1662), a more typical restoration comedy satirizing marriage, rounds out the collection. Edited with notes and annotation by Anne Shaver, "The Convent of Pleasure" and *Other Plays* also contains a timeline, biography and bibliography of the Duchess, an appreciation of Cavendish's life and work, and a bibliography of critical essays. Also included are all of Cavendish's epistles To the Reader as well as *Other Preliminary Matter* from *Playes* (1662), and Cavendish's original preface to *Plays Never Before Printed* (1668). A valuable collection from an extraordinary writer, "The Convent of Pleasure" and *Other Plays* raises important issues about women and gender.

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