

Female Perspectives

“The Hunting of the Hare” (1653)

By Margaret Cavendish

- Betwixt two ridges of plowed land lay Wat,
Pressing his body close to earth lay squat.
His nose upon his two forefeet close lies,
Glaring obliquely with his great gray eyes.
- (5) His head he always sets against the wind;
If turn his tail, his hairs blow up behind:
Which he too cold will grow, but he is wise,
And keeps his coat still down, so warm he lies.
Thus resting all the day, till sun doth set,
- (10) Then riseth up, his relief for to get.
Walking about, until the sun doth rise,
Then back returns, down in his form he lies.
At last, poor Wat was found, as he there lay,
By huntsmen with their dogs, which came that way.
- (15) Seeing, gets up, and fast begins to run,
Hoping some ways the cruel dogs to shun.
But they by nature have so quick a scent,
That by their nose they trace what way he went.
And with their deep wide mouths set forth a cry,
- (20) Which answered was by echoes in the sky.
Then Wat was struck with terror, and with fear,
Thinks every shadow still the dogs they were.
And running out some distance from the noise,
To hide himself, his thoughts he new employs.
- (25) Under a clod of earth in sand pit wide,
Poor Wat sat close, hoping himself to hide.
There long he had not sat, but straight his ears
The winding horns and crying dogs he hears:
Starting with fear, up leaps, then doth he run,
- (30) And with such speed, the ground scarce treads upon.
Into a great thick wood he straightway gets.
Where underneath a broken bough he sits.
At every leaf that with the wind did shake,
Did bring such terror, made his heart to ache.
- (35) That place he left, to champaign plains he went,
Winding about, for to deceive their scent.
And while they snuffling were, to find his track,
Poor Wat, being weary, his swift pace did slack.
On his two hinder legs for ease did sit,
- (40) His forefeet rubbed his face from dust and sweat.
Licking his feet, he wiped his ears so clean,

- That none could tell that Wat had hunted been.
But casting round about his fair great eyes,
The hounds in full career he near him spies:
- (45) To Wat it was so terrible a sight,
Fear gave him wings, and made his body light.
Though weary was before, by running long,
Yet now his breath he never felt more strong.
Like those that dying are, think health returns,
- (50) When 'tis but a faint blast, which life out burns.
For spirits seek to guard the heart about,
Striving with death, but death doth quench them out.
Thus they so fast came on, with such loud cries,
That he no hopes hath left, nor help espies.
- (55) With that the winds did pity poor Wat's case,
And with their breath the scent blew from the place.
Then every nose was busily employed,
And every nostril is set open, wide,
And every head doth seek a several way,
- (60) To find what grass, or track, the sent on lay.
Thus quick industry, that is not slack,
Is like to witchery, brings lost things back.
For though the wind had tied the scent up close,
A busy dog thrust in his snuffling nose
- (65) And drew it out, with it did foremost run,
Then horns blew loud, for th'rest to follow on.
The great slow hounds, their throats did set a bass,
The fleet swift hounds, as tenors next in place,
The little beagles they a treble sing,
- (70) And through the air their voices round did ring.
Which made a consort, as they ran along;
If they but words could speak, might sing a song.
The horns kept time, the hunters shout for joy,
And valiant seem, poor Wat for to destroy:
- (75) Spurring their horses to a full career,
Swim rivers deep, leap ditches without fear;
Endanger life and limbs so fast will ride,
Only to see how patiently Wat died.
At last, the dogs so near his heels did get,
- (80) That they their sharp teeth in his breech did set;
Then tumbling down, did fall with weeping eyes,
Gives up his ghost, and thus poor Wat he dies.
Men whooping loud, such acclamations make,
As if Devil they did prisoner take.
- (85) When they do but a shiftless creature kill;
To hunt, there needs no valiant soldier's skill.
But man doth think that exercise and toil,

- To keep their health, is beat, which makes most spoil.
Thinking that food and nourishment so good,
(90) And appetite, that feeds on flesh and blood.
When they do lions, wolves, bears, tigers see,
To kill poor sheep, straight say, they cruel be,
But for themselves all creatures think too few
For luxury, wish God would make them new.
(95) As if that God made creatures for man's meat,
To give them life and sense, for man to eat;
Or else for sport, or recreation's sake,
Destroy those lives that God saw good to make:
Making their stomachs, graves, which full they fill
(100) With murdered bodies that in sport they kill.
Yet man doth think himself so gentle, mild,
When he of creatures is most cruel wild.
And is so proud, thinks only he shall live,
That God a godlike nature did him give.
(105) And that all creatures for his sake alone
Was made for him, to tyrannize upon.