

Female Orations

Debate by Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle



READING 6 Analyze the effect of contradiction in literary nonfiction. **8** Analyze, make inferences, and draw conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural and historical contexts. Analyze the consistency and clarity of the expression of the controlling idea and the ways in which the organizational and rhetorical patterns of text support or confound the author's meaning or purpose. **10A** Evaluate the merits of an argument, action, or policy by analyzing the relationships among evidence, inferences, assumptions, and claims in text. **RC-12(A)** Reflect on understanding to monitor comprehension.

DID YOU KNOW?

Margaret Cavendish . . .

- wrote what has been described as the first science fiction novel.
- thought it was against nature for a woman to spell correctly.
- used her own remedies to treat her illnesses, a course of action that probably hastened her death.

(background)
Rocky coast
near Newcastle

Meet the Author

Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle 1623?–1674

Margaret Cavendish was probably the first Englishwoman who wrote with the intent of being published. She desired fame, but she gained notoriety. Her many critics called her “mad, conceited, and ridiculous.” They attacked her writing style as well as the outlandish clothes she wore. Today, however, Cavendish is appreciated for her originality and for what Virginia Woolf called her “vein of authentic fire.”

Loyal Royalists Born Margaret Lucas around 1623, Margaret was two years old when her father died. Her mother, who assumed control of the family's extensive estate, proved to be a shrewd businesswoman and as a result was not well liked by the locals. The Lucases further alienated their neighbors by allying themselves with the monarchy during the political and religious conflicts between Charles I and Parliament.

When civil war broke out in England in 1642, the Lucas family fled to Oxford, where the royal court was in exile. Margaret became an attendant to Queen Henrietta Maria and traveled with her to Paris in 1645. There, Margaret met and married William Cavendish, the duke of Newcastle, a man 30 years her senior.

A Writer Is Born William Cavendish had commanded an army for Charles I and was known to his enemies as “the greatest traitor in England.” As a result, the Cavendishes were forced to live in France and later Belgium after the king was overthrown. During their exile, Cavendish completed her first book, *Poems and Fancies*.

When the monarchy was restored in 1660, Cavendish and her husband returned to England, where she began to pursue a literary career in earnest. Cavendish wrote about science, mathematics, and philosophy—subjects considered beyond the capacities of women in the 17th century—and produced numerous works of poetry, prose, and drama.

Mad Madge Cavendish's bold writings and strange manner earned her the nickname Mad Madge of Newcastle. In spite of her reputation, she became the first woman to attend the Royal Society of London, a scientific academy founded in 1660. Cavendish also enjoyed the love and support of her husband throughout their marriage. At her death, he wrote that “This duchess was a wise, witty and learned lady, which her many books do well testify.”

Author Online

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-470



LITERARY ANALYSIS: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The **historical context** of a literary work consists of the events and social conditions that inspired or influenced its creation. In 17th-century England, society placed severe limitations on women. For the most part, women were confined to the home and family. Margaret Cavendish responded to these limitations by writing sentences such as the following in “Female Orations”:

Alas! men, that are not only our tyrants but our devils, keep us in the hell of subjection, from whence I cannot perceive any redemption or getting out. . . .

As you read, look for sentences that refer to the condition of Englishwomen in the 17th century.

READING STRATEGY: READING A DEBATE

A **debate** is an organized exchange of opinions on an issue. In academic settings, *debate* refers to a formal oral contest in which two opposing teams defend and attack a proposition. Cavendish loosely uses the debate form in “Female Orations” to express seven different views on the role of women in society. Look for the **claim**, or assertion, that each speaker makes, and note how the speaker defends this claim. In addition, look for the following in each oration:

- **Counterarguments**, the arguments the speaker makes to oppose another speaker’s claim
- **Support**, such as reasons, evidence, or appeals to the audience’s values, that helps the speaker prove a claim
- **Assumptions**, the beliefs that are taken for granted by the speaker as the basis for a claim

As you read each oration, record the speaker’s counterargument to the previous argument and her own claim in a chart like the one shown.

Speaker	Counterargument to Previous Argument	Speaker’s Own Claim
I	no previous argument	Women should unite to free themselves from the control of men.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Does GENDER impose limits?

From birth, you are identified by your gender. In every society, certain traits and behaviors are considered typically masculine or feminine; for example, some of the speakers in “Female Orations” believe that women should be submissive toward men and strive only to become good housewives. Of course, attitudes toward women have changed greatly since the Renaissance, but many people feel that gender still influences how we see ourselves and how others see us.

DISCUSS With a partner of the same gender, discuss whether you feel that your gender has limited choices or opportunities. Share your conclusions with a pair of the opposite gender.



Female Orations



*Margaret Cavendish,
Duchess of Newcastle*

BACKGROUND In 17th-century England, women could not own property or vote, and most received little formal education. Their lives generally revolved around family, religion, and the responsibilities of keeping a household. Margaret Cavendish addresses some of these limitations in “Female Orations.”



Ladies, gentlewomen, and other inferior women, but not less worthy: I have been industrious to assemble you together, and wish I were so fortunate as to persuade you to make frequent assemblies, associations, and combinations amongst our sex, that we may unite in prudent counsels, to make ourselves as free, happy, and famous as men; whereas now we live and die as if we were produced from beasts, rather than from men; for men are happy, and we women are miserable; they possess all the ease, rest, pleasure, wealth, power, and fame; whereas women are restless with labor, easeless with pain, melancholy for want of pleasures, helpless for want of power, and die in oblivion, for want of fame. 10 Nevertheless, men are so unconscionable and cruel against us that they endeavor to bar us of all sorts of liberty, and will not suffer us freely to associate amongst our own sex; but would fain¹ bury us in their houses or beds, as in a grave. The truth is, we live like bats or owls, labor like beasts, and die like worms. **A**



Ladies, gentlewomen, and other inferior women: The lady that spoke to you hath spoken wisely and eloquently, in expressing our unhappiness; but she hath not declared a remedy, or showed us a way to come out of our miseries; but, if she could or would be our guide, to lead us out of the labyrinth men have put us into, we should not only praise and admire her, but adore and worship her as our goddess: but alas! men, that are not only our tyrants but our devils, keep us in

A ANALYZE DEBATE

Reread lines 12–13, in which the speaker compares the condition of women to that of lowly animals. Why might Cavendish have chosen to have the first speaker use these **similes** as **support** for her position?

1. **fain:** gladly.



Conversation of Women During the Absence of Their Husbands, Abraham Bosse. ECL 846. Oil on wood. Photo by Gérard Blot. Musée de la Renaissance, Ecouen, France. © Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, New York.

◀ Analyze Visuals

How well does this painting match the **mood** of the selection? Explain.

20 the hell of subjection, from whence I cannot perceive any redemption or getting out; we may complain and bewail our condition, yet that will not free us; we may murmur and rail² against men, yet they regard not what we say. In short, our words to men are as empty sounds; our sighs, as puffs of winds; and our tears, as fruitless showers; and our power is so inconsiderable, that men laugh at our weakness. **B**



Ladies, gentlewomen, and other inferior women: The former orations were exclamations against men, repining at their condition and mourning for our own; but we have no reason to speak against men, who are our admirers and lovers; they are our protectors, defenders, and maintainers; they admire our beauties, and love our persons; they protect us from injuries, defend us from dangers, are industrious

B HISTORICAL CONTEXT

What 17th-century social conditions help explain the sense of hopelessness expressed in lines 21–24?

2. **rail:** complain violently or speak bitterly about.

30 for our subsistence, and provide for our children; they swim great voyages by sea, travel long journeys by land, to get us rarities and curiosities; they dig to the center of the earth for gold for us; they dive to the bottom of the sea for jewels for us: they build to the skies houses for us: they hunt, fowl, fish, plant, and reap for food for us. All which, we could not do ourselves; and yet we complain of men, as if they were our enemies, whenas³ we could not possibly live without them, which shows we are as ungrateful as inconstant. But we have more reason to murmur against Nature, than against men, who hath made men more ingenious, witty, and wise than women; more strong, industrious, and laborious than women; for women are witless and strengthless, and unprofitable creatures, did they not bear children.

40 Wherefore, let us love men, praise men, and pray for men; for without men, we should be the most miserable creatures that Nature hath made or could make. **C**



Noble ladies, gentlewomen, and other inferior women: The former oratoress says we are witless and strengthless; if so, it is that we neglect the one and make no use of the other, for strength is increased by exercise, and wit is lost for want of conversation. But to show men we are not so weak and foolish as the former **D** oratoress doth express us to be, let us hawk, hunt, race, and do the like exercises that men have; and let us converse in camps,⁴ courts, and cities; in schools, colleges, and courts of judicature; in taverns, brothels, and gaming houses; all of which will make our strength and wit known, both to men and to our own selves,

50 for we are as ignorant of ourselves as men are of us. And how should we know ourselves, when we never made a trial of ourselves? Or how should men know us, when they never put us to the proof? Wherefore my advice is, we should imitate men; so will our bodies and minds appear more masculine, and our power will increase by our actions.



Noble, honorable, and virtuous women: The former oration was to persuade us to change the custom of our sex, which is a strange and unwise persuasion, since we cannot change the nature of our sex, nor make ourselves men; and to have female bodies, and yet to act masculine parts, will be very preposterous and unnatural. In truth, we shall make ourselves like the defects of Nature, and be

60 hermaphroditical,⁵ neither perfect women, nor perfect men, but corrupt and imperfect creatures. Wherefore let me persuade you, since we cannot alter the nature of our persons, not to alter the course of our lives; but to rule so our lives and behaviors that we be acceptable and pleasing to God and men; which is, to be modest, chaste, temperate, humble, patient, and pious; also, be housewifely, cleanly, and of few words. All which will gain us praise from men and blessing from Heaven; love in this world and glory in the next. **E**

3. **whenas:** when in fact.

4. **camps:** military encampments.

5. **hermaphroditical** (hər-măf'ər-ē-dīt'-ī-kəl): having both male and female characteristics in one body.

C ANALYZE DEBATE

Reread lines 34–39. What objection does the third speaker make to the positions of the first two speakers? What is her **counterargument**?

D HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Reread lines 45–50. Judging from the background information you have read, how would most readers in 17th-century England have responded to the fourth speaker's suggestions?



TEKS 6


E CONTRADICTION

As the debate progresses, each speaker begins by **contradicting**, or opposing, the **claims** of the previous speaker about the role of women in society. By disputing the previous speaker's claims, the fifth speaker attempts to strengthen her own position about the issue. Which of the previous speaker's claims does the speaker in this paragraph contradict?

VI

Worthy women: The former oratoress's oration endeavored to persuade us that it would not only be a reproach and disgrace, but unnatural, for women in their actions and behavior to imitate men: we may as well say it will be a reproach, disgrace, and unnatural to imitate the gods, which imitation we are commanded
70 both by the gods and their ministers; and shall we neglect the imitation of men, which is more easy and natural than the imitation of the gods? For how can terrestrial creatures imitate celestial deities?⁶ Yet one terrestrial may imitate another, although in different sorts of creatures. Wherefore, since all terrestrial imitations ought to ascend to the better and not to descend to the worse, women ought to imitate men, as being a degree in nature more perfect than they themselves; and all masculine women ought to be as much praised as effeminate men to be dispraised; for the one advances to perfection, the other sinks to imperfection; that so, by our industry, we may come, at last, to equal men, both in perfection and power. **F**

VII

Noble ladies, honorable gentlewomen, and worthy female-commoners: The former oratoress's speech was to persuade us out of ourselves and to be that which Nature never intended us to be, to wit, masculine. But why should we desire to be masculine, since our own sex and condition is far the better? For if men have more courage, they have more danger; and if men have more strength, they have more labor than women have; if men are more eloquent in speech, women are more harmonious in voice; if men be more active, women are more graceful; if men have more liberty, women have more safety; for we never fight duels nor battles; nor do we go long travels or dangerous voyages; we labor not in building nor digging in mines, quarries, or pits, for metal, stone, or coals; neither do we waste
90 or shorten our lives with university or scholastical studies, questions, and disputes; we burn not our faces with smiths' forges or chemists' furnaces;⁷ and hundreds of other actions which men are employed in; for they would not only fade the fresh beauty, spoil the lovely features, and decay the youth of women, causing them to appear old, when they are young; but would break their small limbs, and destroy their tender lives. Wherefore women have no reason to complain against Nature **G** or the god of Nature, for although the gifts are not the same as they have given to men, yet those gifts they have given to women are much better; for we women are much more favored by Nature than men, in giving us such beauties, features, shapes, graceful demeanor, and such insinuating and enticing attractives, that
100 men are forced to admire us, love us, and be desirous of us; insomuch that rather than not have and enjoy us, they will deliver to our disposals their power, persons, and lives, enslaving themselves to our will and pleasures; also, we are their saints, whom they adore and worship; and what can we desire more than to be men's tyrants, destinies, and goddesses? 

6. **terrestrial creatures . . . celestial deities:** earthly creatures and heavenly gods.

7. **smiths' forges or chemists' furnaces:** furnaces used by blacksmiths to heat metal or those used by alchemists to heat chemical substances.

F ANALYZE DEBATE

What flaw does the sixth speaker point out in the fifth speaker's **claims**?

Language Coach

Fixed Expressions As a verb, *wit* ("to know") is now only used in the fixed expression *to wit*, meaning "that is; namely" (line 82). Rephrase lines 81–82 in your own words.

G ANALYZE DEBATE

Speaker VII makes several **assumptions** about how men live. How do these assumptions **support** her **claim** that women should not "desire to be masculine"?

from

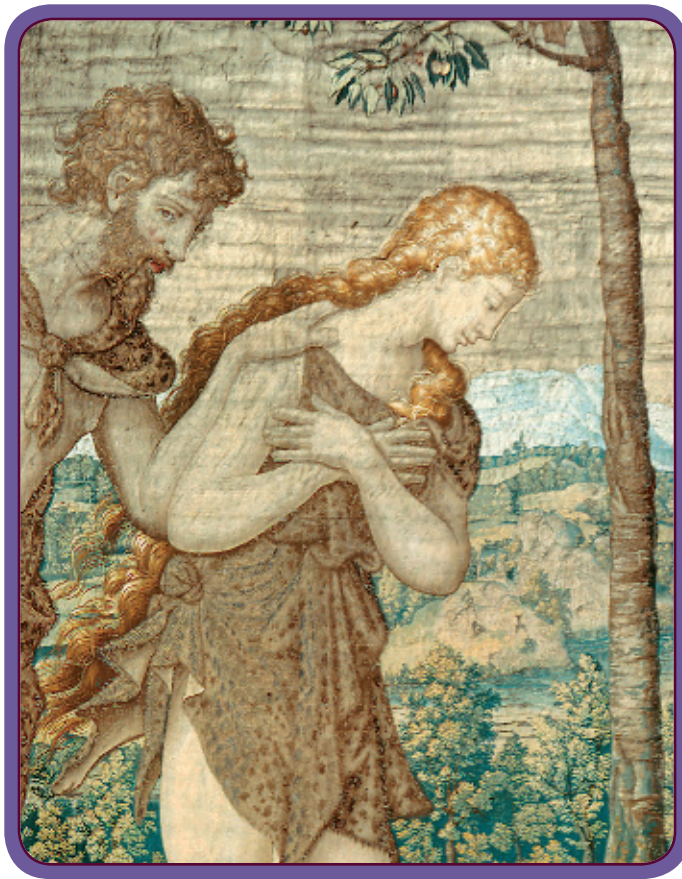
Eve's Apology *in Defense of Women*

Amelia Lanier

BACKGROUND In the biblical Book of Genesis, Eve is tempted by a serpent to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree of knowledge, and she in turn offers it to Adam. As a result of their disobedience, God expels them from the Garden of Eden, taking away the gift of human immortality. These stanzas are from Amelia Lanier's defense of Eve, in which the poet (1570?–1640?) adopts a position that was quite radical at the time.

But surely Adam cannot be excused;
Her fault though great, yet he was most to blame.
What weakness offered, strength might have refused;
Being lord of all, the greater was his shame;
5 Although the serpent's craft had her abused,
God's holy word ought all his actions frame;
For he was lord and king of all the earth,
Before poor Eve had either life or breath,

Who being framed by God's eternal hand
10 The perfectest man that ever breathed on earth,
And from God's mouth received that strait command,
The breach whereof he knew was present death;
Yea, having power to rule both sea and land,
Yet with one apple won to lose that breath
15 Which God had breathed in his beauteous face,
Bringing us all in danger and disgrace;



Detail of *Expulsion from Paradise* (1500s). Flemish tapestry from Brussels. Accademia, Florence.
© Scala/Art Resource, New York.

- And then to lay the fault on patience's back,
That we (poor women) must endure it all;
We know right well he did discretion lack,
20 Being not persuaded thereunto at all.
If Eve did err, it was for knowledge sake;
The fruit being fair persuaded him to fall.
 No subtle serpent's falsehood did betray him;
 If he would eat it, who had power to stay him?
- 25 Not Eve, whose fault was only too much love,
Which made her give this present to her dear,
That what she tasted he likewise might prove,
Whereby his knowledge might become more clear;
He never sought her weakness to reprove
30 With those sharp words which he of God did hear;
 Yet men will boast of knowledge, which he took
 From Eve's fair hand, as from a learned book.

Language Coach

Multiple Meanings The word *endure* has more than one meaning. It can mean “bear,” “tolerate,” or “last.” What does it mean in line 18? What does it mean in this sentence? *Scruffy is gone but his memory will endure.*

Comprehension

1. **Recall** Why does the second speaker doubt that women will free themselves of male domination?
2. **Clarify** Why does the fourth speaker suggest that women should hunt, gamble, and engage in other typically male activities?
3. **Summarize** How would you summarize the seventh speaker's view of limitations placed on women?

Literary Analysis

4. **Make Inferences** Reread the sixth speaker's oration. What can you infer about the speaker's values?
5. **Analyze a Debate** Review the chart you created as you read the speeches in "Female Orations." Why do you think Cavendish chose to present her discussion of women's issues in the form of a debate?
6. **Analyze Historical Context** In what ways does "Female Orations" reflect or challenge social conditions experienced by women in the 17th century?
7. **Compare Texts** Consider the view of the relationship between men and women expressed in "Eve's Apology in Defense of Women" (page 476). How is it similar to or different from the view of one or more of the speakers in "Female Orations"? Use details from the poem and from the orations to support your ideas.
8. **Evaluate an Argument** Choose one of the orations, and evaluate the argument that the speaker presents. Discuss how well the speaker uses **reasons** and **evidence** to support her **claims**.

Literary Criticism

9. **Different Perspectives** In what ways do the views expressed about gender in "Female Orations" differ from commonly accepted views in our society today? Support your response with evidence from the text.



READING 8 Analyze, make inferences, and draw conclusions about the author's purpose in cultural and historical contexts. Analyze the consistency and clarity of the expression of the controlling idea and the ways in which the organizational and rhetorical patterns of text support or confound the author's meaning or purpose. **10A** Evaluate the merits of an argument, action, or policy by analyzing the relationships among evidence, inferences, assumptions, and claims in text. **RC-12(A)** Reflect on understanding to monitor comprehension.

*Does **GENDER** impose limits?*

What are activities today that we still consider more appropriate for men than for women, or for women more than men? Why do you think this is the case?

Persuasive Techniques in Humanist Literature

Writer John Milton once said, “Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making.” The writers in this section (pages 444–478) certainly have strong opinions, and they use a variety of persuasive techniques to convince their audiences to adopt those opinions, including incorporating rhetorical devices such as

- analogies
- repetition
- rhetorical questions
- antithesis
- aphorisms
- irony
- subtlety
- counterarguments

Writing to Evaluate

Write an evaluation of the persuasive techniques used by two of the writers whose work you have read in this section by focusing on the rhetorical devices they use to make their arguments. Be sure to cite specific passages to support your evaluation. Completing a chart like the one below will help you organize your thoughts. In the conclusion of your evaluation, explain which writer you think is most persuasive and why. Include specific references to rhetorical devices used by that author.

<i>Title of Selection</i>	<i>Persuasive Techniques Used</i>	<i>Examples</i>
<i>from Utopia</i>		
<i>“Speech Before the Spanish Armada Invasion”</i>		

Extension

LISTENING & SPEAKING

With a partner, choose one of the selections from this section and stage a point/counterpoint debate. One partner will argue the writer’s position, while the other will offer counterarguments. Present your debate to the class.



WRITING 15A Write an analytical essay.