

Danielle Dutton's "Trickhouse" Submission

THREE FROM A WORLD CALLED *THE BLAZING WORLD*

INTO SHOE LANE

A dry winter and farm laborers notice the increase in traffic, roads through fields heavy with carts and horses, back to the city, back to mass graves, to bodies tossed still warm and reeking. A curse, they say. Heaps and heaps of bare feet, palms, lashes, hips—dusted with ashes to dampen down the sick. It's London dusted white and the birdmen with their leather masks who step between the corpses.

And while the King diverts his court at Oxford—dancing, silver bowls of hothouse roses, peacocks on the lawn—London bustles under low clouds speeding, blown by sea winds north. Most can't afford to flee. There are rooms to be lit and unlit. Beds to be made and slept in again. From Petticoat Lane to Old Palace Yard, apprentices wake in the dark, dress in the cold, get to work killing or cutting or mending or burnishing. Ladies sleep between linen sheets, rise, dress, go out, return. An interminable progress of shoppers and vendors crowds the streets. In and out of a coffeehouse on Cheapside, a whore on Fish Street Hill. There is an Oriental acrobat upside down at the corner. And in darkness under a freezing fog, still the city pulses.

To anyone who stops, to pick up a fallen purse or a cabbage that's rolled from the pile, to pull aside a curtain, look down into Shoe Lane, it seems the city never ceases, the river racing, the bells, clouds. In quieter streets musicians play. There is birdsong even in winter, even with open graves still gaping behind churches, red crosses on the locked doors of houses shut by plague. Icicles form as the day advances and Lord Broukner throws a party. The cook roasts mutton

with spearmint and sugar. Next-door they dine in multicolored dresses on pork with sage and currants. A gravy is made with the brains of the pig. All glasses lift on New Year's night when Samuel jumps into Mrs. Knipp's coach, plays with her breasts and sings.

NEAR THE ROYAL KITCHENS

And when the court finally returns to London in February they find: the mezerion-tree, which blossoms; crocus vernus, the yellow, the grey; primrose; anemones; early tulippa; hyacinthus orientalis; charmaïris; fritellaria. Not a week later, John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, is sworn a Gentleman of the Bedchamber, bringing the nineteen-year-old peer an annual salary of £1000. Duties include: dressing and undressing the King, serving meals in private, getting his majesty ready for bed, and occasionally sleeping on a pallet at the royal feet. Does the King suffer nightmares? Wilmot himself has been afraid of the dark since childhood. And he has also, since boyhood, had a troublesome bowel, so that “he sometimes could not have a stool for three weeks or a month together.” Or so wrote his doting tutor, Francis Giffard, who offered John early instruction in the wrath of vengeful God.

It was a pious household at Ditchley (the English name all their houses). John’s father Henry, the first Earl of Rochester, died fighting for Charles I’s return to the throne. John was therefore raised in the half-timbered Elizabethan manor house without a father and with a mother who was often from home; but there was always Aunt Isham with the falling sickness—and Aunt Joanna who treated it with powdered mistletoe—half-brothers who came and went and sometimes died, a lovely tenant’s daughter with a limp, and a series of schoolmasters anxious to lecture on sin. When Giffard, who’d trained at Cambridge, was finally installed as John’s tutor, he found a young man “ready to do anything that he proposed to him and very well inclined to laudable

undertaking.” So how did such a promising youngster grow to be reprobate Rochester? Obviously, there were John’s years at Wadham College (famously referred to as Sodom itself): the classical poetry, the scholastic Latin, late evenings playing dress up. Still Giffard would be horrified when his charge, all grown up, penned “The Imperfect Enjoyment,” infamously claiming that his “all dissolving Thunderbolt”:

Stiffly resolv’d, wou’d carelessly *invade*

Woman or Boy, nor aught its Fury stayed’

Where e’re it pierc’d, a *C - - t* it found or made.

King Charles II, on the other hand, at whose feet Rochester now sleeps, in a stuffed chair with heraldic silk covering, is not so easily offended. While he does not share John’s particular tastes, he gladly cultivates his own lusty desires—for women, if not especially the Queen. In fact, given the King’s insatiable need to fuck, the Gentlemen of the Bedchamber—eleven in all—are intimately aware of his habits and partners, hurried through secret passageways day and night. A system of stone roots beneath the palace, these tunnels stretch out in all directions: towards Charring Cross, Cannon Row, the Thames. The most heavily trafficked originates near the Royal Kitchen, at a busy spot in The Court where the palace grounds are sliced by a public right-of-way. Here, the lady hurrying through is forced to raise high her skirts—embroidered with snails and artichokes—as she hops over puddles and moss. Her little feet, shod in little shoes of cork, with square toes, and gold shoe-roses, make pleasant plunking sounds on the wet stone floor. And as moist air from the kitchens sinks down into the

passage—anchovies in claret, a fricassée of rabbits—the poor girl finds she is famished by the time she reaches the King.

BETWEEN BROAD STREET AND BISHOPSGATE

In his left hand he holds a pamphlet picked up minutes before at a stall in Threadneedle Street, a copy of one section of Hooke's *Micrographia*, regarding the moon, wherein Hooke concludes, having observed light near the Hipparchus crater, that "the Vale may have Vegetables analogus to our Grass, Shrubs and Trees; and most of these encompassing Hills as may be covered with a thin vegetable Coat, such as the short Sheep pasture which covers the Hills of Salisbury Plains." His boots echo off the quadrangle's brick and timber walls. He walks a path that scores the yard from upper left to lower right. There's another from right to left. Where they cross, a bath welcomes magpies and mice. The triangles formed are spread with golden sand, the yard lined with saplings (almond) in blossom. Gresham College—once private residence of Thomas Gresham, merchant and financial counselor to three Tudor monarchs, now home to professors in divinity, geometry, music, astronomy, law, and physic, who live in rooms (in scholarly celibacy), for "the education and practical benefit of the citizens of London"—lies not too far from St Michael's Alley, where London's first coffee-shop was opened in 1652 by Mr. Edwards the Turkey merchant, who'd earlier brought from Smyrna a youth called Pasqua Rosee to prepare the exotic brew each morning—so the sign is Pasqua's head. But Henry Oldenberg doesn't drink coffee.

Just now, Hooke spies Henry in the yard. It is the second Wednesday in March (violets, specially the single blue, which are the earliest; the yellow daffodil; the daisy; the almond-tree in blossom; the peach-tree in blossom; the

cornelian tree in blossom; sweet-briar) and Hooke has only recently returned to his rooms after fleeing the city with friend and mentor John Wilkins to avoid the worst of the plague's most recent outbreak. The men stayed at Durdans near Epsom in Surrey—a country house in the possession of a Gentleman Fellow of The Royal Society (a.k.a The Invisible College, recently renamed and chartered). They came first to a brook, then a gate, then the house, which was nearly overrun with ivy. There, Hooke managed to amass a great assortment of wonderful objects, such as “shining animals whose blood, or juices, did shine more bright than the tail of a glow-worm,” and to walk each day along the banks of the Mole River through Banstead Downs. At night he measured the progress of a stem of ivy grown through a crack in the wall. Each day he and Wilkins collaborated on the design and manufacture of an experimental conveyance: a carriage in which one man rides on a bouncing seat suspended above the horse's back. And Wilkins, for his part, at last completed his book on the Universal Character—a new language to be spoken by all, representing, perhaps, his most significant work since “Discovery of a New World in the Moon,” published and argued three decades before. It, too, was concerned with unusual modes of conveyance: a carriage to the moon able to “pass through the vast spaces of air.”

Seeing Oldenberg approach, Hooke slips his newest article—tentatively entitled “The Inflection of a Direct Motion into a Curve by a Supervening Attractive Principle”—into a drawer of his desk. Eleanor, the Dean's eldest daughter, sits on his bed quickly lacing up her stay.