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# Margaret Cavendish's *Femmes Fortes*: The Paradoxes of Female Heroism in *Bell in Campo* (1662)

Claire Gheeraert-Graffeuille

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- 1 Margaret Cavendish's plays have often been either dismissed as the weakest of her works, or studied as the "fantasies" of an eccentric mind, regardless of their cultural and historical contexts (Gallagher, Sherman). Over the last two decades, however, this approach has been questioned and completed by a number of seminal articles that have shown that her plays were also the product of her intercourse with the world (Bennett, "The Theatre of War"; Chalmers, "Dismantling the Myth of Mad Madge"; Tomlinson). As Cavendish herself points out in *The Worlds Olio* (1655), "if [she] had been inclosed from the world, in some obscure place, and had been an anchoret from [her] infancy, having not the liberty to see the World, nor conversation to hear of it, [she] should never have writ of so many things; nor had so many several opinions" (epistle between 46 and 47). *Bell in Campo*, a play in two parts dramatizing the high deeds of an army of heroic ladies, greatly benefits from a contextualized approach, since Cavendish's heroines – whom she calls "heroickesses" – share many features with mid-seventeenth-century ladies who distinguished themselves on both sides of the Channel. The Duchess was clearly aware of the achievements of her fellow-countrywomen who had to defend their homes besieged by Cavaliers or Roundheads in the English Civil Wars. Such names as Brilliana Harley, Mary Winter, Mary Bankes, Ann Cunningham, Charlotte Stanley have been advanced (Bennett, "The Theatre of War" 267-70; Chalmers, "Dismantling the Myth of Mad Madge" 44-45; *Royalist Women*; Raber). Enlightening parallels have also been drawn between *Bell in Campo*'s Lady Victoria and the English Queen Henrietta Maria or Margaret of Béthune, a woman who took an active part in Huguenot wars (Tomlinson 147-49). Equally plausible is the connection of Lady Victoria with the French *Frondeuses* such as la "Grande Mademoiselle" (Madame de Montpensier), the Duchesse of Longueville, or the Duchess of Chevreuse who played important military roles during the French Civil Wars (1648-53).<sup>1</sup>

- 2 As an English *émigrée* in France in the 1640s, Margaret Cavendish was also in close contact with the proto-feminist culture that had been imported to England by Queen Henrietta-Maria and that still prevailed at the court of Anne of Austria in the 1640s (MacLean, *Woman Triumphant* 64-87; Veevers, Britland). In that decade, the vogue for female heroism flourished and many treatises on the subject were published.<sup>2</sup> A number of studies have shown how Cavendish's work was influenced by continental feminist ideas, in particular by Pierre Le Moynes's conception of female heroism (Chalmers, "Dismantling" 332-33). Several elements make the comparison relevant. First, the Duchess was in London when the translation of Le Moynes's *Gallerie* by the royalist Marquess of Winchester was published in 1652.<sup>3</sup> Second, this richly illustrated folio, in the tradition of Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus*, was popular at the court of the Queen Regent Anne of Austria, which Cavendish frequented during her French exile (Vergnes 11-16).<sup>4</sup> Finally, and most interestingly, Walter Charleton, in a letter in praise of the Duchess's work, suggests her statue should be included in Le Moynes's pantheon: "Your Grace's Statue ought to be placed alone, at the upper end, in the *Gallery of Heroic Women*, and upon a Pedestal more advanced than the rest."<sup>5</sup> With those contextual and biographical elements in mind, I would like to argue that the ambiguous staging of female heroism in *Bell in Campo* can best be understood when related to Pierre Le Moynes's *Gallery of Heroic Women*: like the French Jesuit, Margaret Cavendish uses female heroism both as a way to explore the possibilities of female emancipation, and as a paradigm to express her own political and anthropological views. In order to highlight the Duchess's double focus on women and politics, I shall first look at the crisis of the heroic ethos, then at the making of the female warrior, before discussing the paradoxical links between heroism and female empowerment.

## Heroism in crisis

- 3 The late Elizabethan and Stuart periods have often been associated with the decline of heroic values. Such decay has been attributed to the relative peace that prevailed in England from the reign of Elizabeth to the Civil War. The marginalization of the martial ethos is assumed to have accelerated under the reign of Charles I when the culture of chivalry was progressively abandoned, when the "ideal knight" had become "the guardian of the Caroline peace" rather than "a prosecutor of war" (Adamson 170; James). The development of the nation-state under James I has also been suspected of rendering the heroic ethos problematic, glory and honour being often viewed as individualistic and as a threat to the king and state (Lowrance; Sukic 25). Nonetheless, such a decline needs to be qualified. Not only did martial and chivalric values survive in literature, but many gentlemen imbued with heroic culture and values went to fight abroad (Adamson 176-79); as Manning pointed out they "[rediscovered] their martial heritage and [asserted] these values in a measurable way in the first decades of the seventeenth century" (27-28).<sup>6</sup> Last but not least, the creation of the New Model Army in 1645 and the development of differing views on warfare complicated this already complex mental landscape.<sup>7</sup>
- 4 To a large extent, Cavendish's *Bell in Campo* illustrates the crisis of martial heroism. In the first two acts, it is epitomized by the defeat of Lady Victoria's husband, the Lord General, who is characterized as a hero, being "gallant," "valiant," "generous" (I.1.1, 107), a "good Souldier," and desirous to "conquer" (I.1.1, 108).<sup>8</sup> But after the battle against the Army of Faction (II.2.5, 145), the General's army, in Lady Victoria's own terms, is "weak and

decrepid, fitter for an Hospital than for a Field of War" (II.2.5, 146). Men are resoundingly defeated, the Kingdom of Reformation having been "doubly or trebly overcome, twice by their enemy, and then by the gallant actions of the Females" (II.2.5, 146). From that moment on, the situation is reversed and women have the upper hand over men in matters of war. Lady Victoria claims men have become women's slaves:

your power is lost, your courage is cold, your discipline disorderous, and your command sleighted, despised by your Enemies, pitied by your Friends, forsaken of good Fortune, and made subject unto our Effeminate Sex, which we will use by our power like Slaves. (II.2.5, 146)

Male soldiers eventually recognise their defeat. They submit to the ladies in a letter ratifying a topsy-turvy world where men have to obey "their directions" and accept to be governed by women. Hence their decision to be the ladies' "assistants," and "common souldiers," leaving "all the affairs of War" to the ladies' discretion (II.3.8, 151).

- 5 The demise of martial heroism is further dramatized by the presence of effeminate men who refuse to go to the wars. After the defeat of the kingdom of Reformation, Seigneur Valoroso refuses to take command of the troops although he is "so nobly Born," bears "a high Title of Honour" and is the "Master of a great Estate" (I.2.7, 116). Despite his name, he does not behave according to his rank, and he is equated with the "Effeminate Lovers and Carpet Knights" (I.2.9, 118), "those that take more care, and are more industrious to get gay Clothes, and Fine feathers, to flaunt in the Field, and vapour in their march than to get the usefull and necessary provision" (I.1.1, 108). This type of character is recurrent in Cavendish's 1662 collection of plays; it is also derided in the *World Olio* which she wrote in the 1650s at the time she was writing her plays. In several sections, she opposes the "Effeminate Bodies" of the present to the "Heroick Spirits in Masculine Forms" of the "former ages" when the art of war was properly taught:

those men that have Effeminate Bodies, as tender Youth, loose Limbs, smooth Skins, fair Complexions, fantastical Garbs, affected Phrases, strained Complements, factious Natures, detracting Tongues, mischievous Actions, and the like, are admired, and commended more, or thought wiser than those that have Generous Souls, Heroick Spirits, Ingenuous Wits, prudent Fore-cast, Experienced Years, Manly Forms, Gracefull Garbes, Edifying Discourses, Temperate Lives, Sober Actions, Noble Natures, and Honest Hearts: but in former years it was otherwaies; for Heroick Spirits in Masculine Forms had double praise, as is expressed in the Grecian and Trojan Warrs. (213-14)

Cavendish's nostalgia for a martial masculine ethos – which corresponds to the Caroline chivalrous revival described by Adamson<sup>9</sup> – permeates the representation of female heroism which is unambiguously positive in the play.<sup>10</sup> Lady Victoria's "heroickesses" are never derided; on the contrary, they soon become "a subject of Envy to the Masculine Sex" who "by [their] own valiant actions and prudent actions [...] will maintain [their] power by [their] own strengths." When masculinity is in crisis – and the sense of a crisis of gender relations reached a climax during the English Revolution (Fletcher 283) – women become the refuge, the last recipient of martial and heroic values.

## The making of a female warrior

- 6 Female heroism, Le Moyne argues, does not always have "a Helmet on its Head and a Pillar on its shoulders" (*The Gallery*, "Preface," unpaginated); all *femmes fortes* are not martial heroes and there may be "generous Spirits and vigorous Souls in tender Bodies" (124).<sup>11</sup> "[A]rmed and robustious Fortitude," he claims, "is but subordinate to another

general one which assists all the Vertues; which is present in all great Actions, which supports all good Works, which is the Directress of all Heroes both in Peace and War" ("Preface," unpaginated). In other words, feminine virtues, as much as the adoption of a martial masculine conduct, may lead to heroism; a femme forte is not necessarily a warrior.

- 7 In *Bell in Campo*, however, Cavendish favours martial heroism, having her heroine Lady Victoria distance herself from the figure of Penelope whom she yet describes as "the perfectest and constantest wife in her Husbands absence" (I.1.2, 110). An obvious incarnation of Penelope in the play is Lady Jantil, a war widow, faithful to her late husband, who refuses to follow Lady Victoria on the battlefield. She is characterized by her patience, a form of fortitude according to Cavendish,<sup>12</sup> and eloquently described by Pierre de la Primaudaye as "a branch of Magnanimitie, Fortitude, and greatnes of courage" (312-13).<sup>13</sup> One of her friends, Madame Passionate, praises her moral qualities as heroic: "I wonder at your Fortitude, that you can bear such a Cross as the loss of your Husband so patiently" (I.5.25, 137). Doll Pacify, Lady Passionate's maid, thinks that her conduct partakes of warlike heroism: "the young Lady Madam Jantil [...] bears out the Siege of Sorrow most Couragiously, and on my Conscience I believe will beat grief from the fort of her heart, and become victorious over her misfortunes" (II.1.1, 141). Her decision to live as an "anchoret" (II.3.10, 154), that is to say to lead a retired life, can be taken as further evidence of her heroic fortitude. It echoes the conduct of the French *Frondeuses*, the Duchess de Longueville and the Duchess de Chevreuse, who, in the years Cavendish was writing her plays, withdrew to Port-Royal.<sup>14</sup> However, in *Bell in Campo*, this type of heroism is derided as individualistic and morbid: "When I have interred my Husbands body, and all my desires thereunto finished, I shall be at some rest [...] for from Earth I came, and to Earth I would willingly return" (I.4.21, 134). Likewise, Lady Jantil's plan to erect a mausoleum in honour of her late husband, the Seigneur Valoroso, as well as the ceremony she organises to commemorate his death, point to her desire to end her life (I.4.21, 131; II.2.7, 148). Ultimately however, her melancholy songs work against any possibility of a positive interpretation of her conduct, bringing her suicidal longings to the fore: "O Death hath shakt me kindly by the hand [...]. Thy hollow eyes I am in love with [...]. But thou art slow, I prethee hasten Death / [...] Oh could I now dissolve and melt, [...] Steal gently O soul, and let me dy" (II.4.19, 164-65). She eventually dies singing a similar song (II.4.19, 166). Clearly, Lady Jantil's conduct is not staged as a desirable form of heroism; on the contrary, her death, which resembles a stoic suicide, seems to highlight the limits of domestic heroism.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, Lady Victoria's "robustious fortitude," clearly based on the appropriation of masculine values, is presented in a highly positive way, implying that only a break with traditional norms of femininity allowed women to distinguish themselves as true heroes, leading their nation to victory and themselves out of domestic slavery.
- 8 Logically enough anger, the distinctive mark of true masculine heroes, is celebrated by Lady Victoria (Gwynne). Like Aristotle (whose tenets are summed up by La Primaudaye), she believes "choler was as a whetstone to sharpen and set an edge vpon Fortitude and Generositie," but she distances herself from the stoic views of "Cicero and Seneca, who say, that forasmuch as choler is a vice, it cannot be the cause of vertue, seeing they are two contrary thinges that haue nothing common together" (*La Primaudaye* 313).<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, Cavendish, who was a reader of Descartes,<sup>17</sup> praises anger as a legitimate

passion in *The Worlds Olio*, but she is suspicious of the extremes of passion, and considers “anger” to be a good middle-way between fury and patience:<sup>18</sup>

The way to a mans happiest condition of life in this world, and for the way to the next, is, by the straight way of moderation; for the extreams are to be shunned; [...] For the passions; as for example, a man that is extraordinary angry makes him run into fury for the present, as many times to commit so rash an action, as to make him unhappy all his life after, by killing a friend, or at least losing a friend: [...] but in many things or actions anger is required when fury would be too much, or patience or silence too little, and so the like in all other passions. (34)

A similar typology of passions is to be found in *Bell in Campo*: Lady Jantil’s patience proves an inadequate choice (she dies at the end of the play), while a gentleman refers to his furious wife as a shrew who “from the Army of her angry thoughts [...] sends forth such vollies of words with her Gunpowder anger, and the fire of her fury, as breaks all the ranks and files of content” (I.1.4, 112-13). On the contrary, Lady Victoria is driven by the noble heroic anger which Cavendish calls for in *The Worlds Olio*. Modelling herself on ancient heroes, she puts anger to good use<sup>19</sup> as she deems it indispensable “to prove our love to our Friends, our hate to our Enemies, and an aspiring to our honour and renown” (I.4.17, 128-29). In this speech, anger serves the passion of revenge: “wherefore take courage, cast off your black Veil of Sorrow, and take up the Firematch of Rage, that you may shoot Revenge into the hearts of their Enemies” (I.4.17, 128). Lady Victoria’s vehement invocation to Mars is a violent prayer for revenge:<sup>20</sup>

Great Mars thou God of War, grant that our Squadrons may like unbroaken Clouds move with intire Bodyes, let Courage be the wind to drive us on, and let our thick swell’d Army darken their Sun of hope with black despair, let us powre down showers of their blood, to quench the firy flames of our revenge. (II.1.3, 144)

On the battlefield, anger proves an effective passion as it leads Lady Victoria’s army to victory: “[the Kingdom of Faction] found their charge so hot and furious as made them give place, which advantage they took with that prudence and dexterity” (II.2. 5, 145). According to Le Moyne, this is no wonder as cholera, the humour that provokes anger, is “more quick and sudden in women than men”:

Choler according to the saying of the Philosopher, must be whetted that it may become Valour and serviceable for War. Now it is certain and experience shews it, that this Choler which excites Courage, and gives it the title of Valour, is more quick and sudden in Women than Men. (123)<sup>21</sup>

Le Moyne adds that “[women] are not less capable of making good use of anger, of purifying its fire by a more spiritual fire, of guiding it to the supream degree of Honour, by an Heroick transport” (131), hence they should not be excluded from the battlefield.<sup>22</sup> He considers their inability to be as good soldiers as men neither moral nor physiological; it “proceeds from the ill Education of Women and not from their temper” (123), in other words it is the result of custom. This lack of education, Lady Victoria argues, is the reason why women are excluded from the realms of politics, war and knowledge:

had our educations been answerable to theirs, we might have proved as good Souldiers and Privy Counsellors, Rulers and Commanders, Navigators and Architects, and as learned Scholars both in Arts and Sciences, as men are. (I.2.9, 121)

Victoria’s argument against custom is far from new – it had already been put forward by Cornelius Agrippa who, following Lycurgus and Plato, considered that women were as capable as men of bearing arms (94).<sup>23</sup> Contrary to the German champion of women, she does not remain speculative but encourages women to “practise” and “endeavour” in order to “become learned in the disciplines of war” (I.2.9, 119). Through daily exercise and martial discipline, the weak female bodies should be turned into strong bodies,

capable of handling arms and of fighting, as the first law enacted by the female general stipulates: “that no woman that is able to bear Arms, shall go unarmed, having Arms to wear, but shall wear them at all times, but when they put them off to change their linnen; they shall Sleep, Eat and Rest, and march with them on their Bodies” (I.3.11, 121). Yet the training of the she-soldiers is not only aimed at building robust, resilient bodies, capable of waging war. It should also develop in each of them the mindset of a hero. According to Lady Victoria’s twelfth law “be it known, observed and practised, that when the Army marches, [...] the Souldiers shall sing in their march the heroical actions done in former times by heroical women” (I.3.11, 124). In other words, female warriors should be taught their own history, through lists of heroic women, like those compiled by Plutarch, Boccaccio or, in the seventeenth century, by Heywood and Le Moyne. The culture of heroism should stir up courage, which is one of most important virtues for heroes, be they men or women.<sup>24</sup> Commenting on the twelfth law, Lady Victoria explains “that the remembrance of the actions of gallant persons inflames the Spirit to the like, and begets a courage to a like action” (I.3.11, 124).

- 9 The climax of the heroization process comes with Lady Victoria’s triumph at the end the play when she becomes the centre of attention, an object of veneration and worship for the whole Kingdom of Reformation.<sup>25</sup> According to the long stage direction, the ceremony strictly followed the Roman protocol, which was reserved for victorious generals:

Enter many Prisoners which march by two and two, then enter many that carry the Conquered spoils, then enters the Lady Victoria in a gilt Chariot drawn with eight white Horses, four on a breast, the Horses covered with Cloth of gold, and great plumes of feathers on their heads. (II.5.20, 166-67)

The stage direction then provides a detailed description of Lady Victoria herself: the ceremonial clothes, the wreath of laurel, the Crystal bolt, and the chariot. All these elements are drawn from the masculine Roman tradition and except for the “curl’d and flowing hair,” the femininity of the female general is obliterated. This is consistent with the duchess’s understanding of heroic virtues as martial and masculine:

The Lady Victoria was adorned after this manner; she had a Coat on all imbroidered with silver and gold, which Coat reach’d no further than the Calfs of her leggs, and on her leggs and feet she had Buskins and Sandals imbroidered suitable to her Coat; on her head she had a Wreath or Garland of Lawrel, and her hair curl’d and loosely flowing; in her hand a Crystall Bolt headed with gold at each end. (II.5.20, 167)

This tableau, which acts a substitute for a theatrical performance, draws on the iconography of the *femme forte* and a number of parallels can be drawn between this description and a number of contemporary paintings. For example, Lady Victoria’s embroidered coat and her Crystal bolt may recall Marie de Medici’s long coat and sceptre in Rubens’s *Victory at Jülich*.<sup>26</sup> Like the French Queen of the painting, Victoria is offered a laurel wreath and holds a sceptre (her “crystal bolt”). Furthermore, her buskins and her hair may echo another heroic portrait of Marie de Medici by Rubens, where the queen is portrayed as Bellona, the Roman goddess of war, logically dressed according to the Roman fashion.<sup>27</sup> Susan Wiseman suggests that the procession could be an allusion to Henrietta Maria’s spectacular entry into Oxford in 1643, which Cavendish herself (who was then in Oxford) must have watched with her family and the rest of the court (108). The procession ends with the king’s proclamation of a law, in which Lady Victoria is solemnly turned into a *femme forte*, and officially enthroned in the pantheon of heroic women:

As for you most gallant Lady, the King hath caused to be enacted, that  
First, All Poets shall strive to set forth your praise.



Secondly, That all your gallant acts shall be recorded in story, and put in the chief Library of the Kingdome.

Thirdly, That your Arms you fought in, shall be set in the Kings Armory.

Fourthly, That you shall always wear a Lawrel Garland.

Fifthly, You shall have place next to the Kings Children.

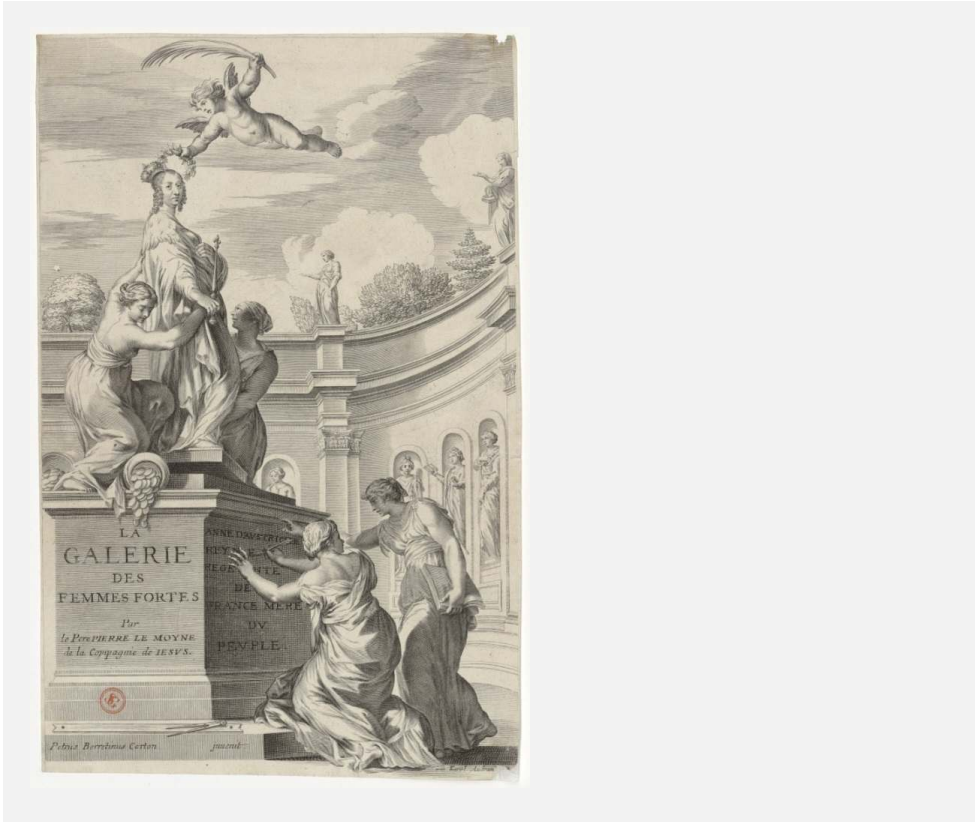
Sixtly, That all those women that have committed such faults as is a dishonour to the Female Sex, shall be more severely punished than heretofore, in not following your exemplary virtues, and all those that have followed your example shall have respective honour done to them by the State.

Seventhly and lastly, Your figure shall be cast in Brass, and then set in the midst of the City armed as it was in the day of Battel. (II.5.20, 168)

Like Le Moyne's *femmes fortes*, Lady Victoria should be praised (item 1); like their exploits, hers should be chronicled (item 2); like them she should receive the honours due to a national hero (items 3, 4, 5) – a patriotic element that is also characteristic of Le Moyne's *Gallery*; like them, she should be a model of virtue for other women (article 6). The seventh article is probably the most important as it turns the female general into a statue, which brings to mind other statues, in particular that of victorious Anne of Austria (crowned with a laurel wreath, holding a sceptre and standing on a pedestal) on the frontispiece of Le Moyne's *Gallery* (Fig. 1) or that of Cavendish herself, on the frontispiece of her *Playes* (1662).<sup>28</sup> To be sure, Cavendish is not “armed as it was in the day of Battel,” but her obsessive desire of fame in her work resembles Lady Victoria's,<sup>29</sup> and raises several acute questions of interpretation (Gagen).<sup>30</sup>

## Women triumphant: issues of interpretation

- <sup>10</sup> Lady Victoria's triumph is undeniable, but when re-contextualized, the meaning of her heroism remains problematic. Although she is likened to other heroic ladies, both past and present, the scope of her heroism is more restricted than is suggested by her lyrical speeches against custom. In *Bell in Campo* the adoption of heroic values empowers women, but their emancipation remains circumscribed.<sup>31</sup>



- 11 Fig. 1: Anne d'Autriche Regente de France Mere du Peuple.  
 [Illustration pour] *La Galerie des femmes fortes* par le Pere Pierre Le Moyne. Petrus Beretinus Corton invenit. Karol. Audran sculpsit.  
 <[https://archive.org/details/EST83RES\\_P2](https://archive.org/details/EST83RES_P2)> (accessed 11 Dec. 2016)
- 12 First, female heroism is limited in the play to certain exceptional circumstances, just as it was in mid-seventeenth century Europe. Only when male heroism fails, when men fall short of their political and military responsibilities, can heroic women distinguish themselves. Only when men are cowards, can women become the saviours of their nation, occupy positions of power, and lead armies. Heywood thus states that he cannot “more plainly illustrate the valor of one sex than by putting [the reader] in mind of the cowardice of the other” (*General History of Women* 316). As for Le Moyne, focusing on the biblical figure of Judith, he reminds us that God has often “chosen the hand [...] of Women either to establish tottering States, or to support their [ruins]” (37). Paraphrasing the paradox of strength in weakness (again a Christian *topos* in feminist treatises<sup>32</sup>), he applies it to heroic women of all ages:

Et en des occasions où les bras des Forts étaient abattus, & les sages Têtes se trouvaient épuisées, il a suscité des Femmes, qui ont fait les fonctions des Forts & celles des Sages, qui ont ôté le joug et l'épée de dessus la teste des Nations, qui ont chassé des villes prises les Armées déjà victorieuses, qui ont rendu la force & le courage aux Roys vaincus. (47)<sup>33</sup>

Women's actions follow a similar course in *Bell in Campo*: when Lady Victoria becomes aware that that “time is well altered” (II.3.8, 150), she decides to raise an army, and her decision perfectly fits the codified pattern of women's heroic action as defined by Heywood and Le Moyne: just as in their treatises her intervention is determined by an exceptional historical context of crisis. Nevertheless, Victoria breaks new ground when

she links her war project to a proto-feminist agenda, urging her she-soldiers to free themselves from centuries of slavery and oblivion:

wherefore *now* or never is the time to prove the courage of our Sex, to get liberty and freedom from the Female Slavery, and to make our selves equal with men: for shall Men only sit in Honours chair, and Women stand as waiters by? shall only Men in Triumphant Chariots ride, and Women run as Captives by? shall only men be Conquerors, and women Slaves? shall only men live by Fame, and women dy in Oblivion? (I.1.3, 143)

One can obviously see in Victoria's speech the possibility of female empowerment, and some connections have been made between her scheme and Leveller women's petitions.<sup>34</sup> However, Victoria's proto-feminist speeches are degraded in the final act of the play with the jarring voices of the citizens' wives, which debase the nobility of her ambitions, claiming that her victory will allow them to have several husbands:

I hope Neighbour none will stand before us, for I would not but see this Lady Victoria for anything, for they say she hath brought Articles for all women to have as many Husbands as they will, and all Trades-mens Wives shall have as many Apprentices as they will. (II.5.20, 166)

The citizen's wife is not far from the truth as the king enacts a special law for *all* women, which meets their basest desires. Highly satirical and only concerning mundane matters, it provides an ironical counterpoint to Lady Victoria's Spartan rules which all the she-soldiers had to observe earlier in the play (I.3.2, 121). This legislation takes for granted that all women are potentially shrewish and unruly, and depicts them as only interested in becoming queens at home, with no care whatsoever for their family, with even less interest in matters of state. Whereas Lady Victoria stressed the necessity of discipline and order, the new law "granted to all [the female] sex" turns liberty into licence, instituting anarchy and chaos:

First, That all women shall hereafter in this Kingdome be Mistriss in their own Houses and Families.  
Secondly, They shall sit at the upper end of the Table above their Husbands.  
Thirdly, That they shall keep the purse.  
[...]  
Seventhly, They shall wear what fashioned Clothes they will.  
Eightly, They shall go abroad when they will, without controul, or giving of any account thereof.  
Ninthly, They shall eat when they will, and of what they will, and as much as they will, and as often as they will.  
Tenthly, They shall go to Playes, Masks, Balls, Churchings, Christenings, Preachings, whensoever they will, and as fine and bravely attired as they will.  
Lastly, That they shall be of their Husbands Counsel. (II.5.20, 167)

In this law, heroic passions and aspirations are degraded and eclipsed by low passions: lust, appetite and greed. A carnivalesque vision of female government is conjured up, far removed from Lady Victoria's ambition for the female sex. It is reminiscent of the scurrilous pamphlets satirizing women that poured from the presses during the Civil Wars (Wiseman 109, Gheeraert-Graffeuille 366-80). For instance, in the *Parliament of Women*, the first law enacted by the ladies stipulates that "instead of allowing men two wives, women, especially the greater and stronger vessels, should have two or three husbands" (*The Parliament of Women*, sig. [B4-B4<sup>v</sup>]). Such a proximity between the demands of the citizens' wives and popular pamphlets accentuates the social opposition between aristocratic ladies and the rest of womankind in *Bell in Campo*. It is as if Cavendish, through such a satirical ending, toned down the proto-feminist implications of Lady Victoria's heroic scheme.

- 13 The contrast between the two legislations – one for heroic women and one for the rest of the sex<sup>35</sup> – is here to remind us that heroic values were not accessible to all the female sex, but only to women who were “above all others” and “have out-done all their Sex” (II.2.5, 146). This is in keeping with the elitism of the Duchess who thought women’s heroism acceptable as long as it was exceptional and reserved for an aristocratic minority. It also makes sense in the context of early modern heroism well summed up by Lucien Braun:<sup>36</sup> “A heroic deed cannot be understood in continuity with common reality and ordinary existence [...]. There is no transition from the normal to the heroic” (22, my translation). Le Moyne had already developed a similarly elitist view of heroic passions:<sup>37</sup> “Love and anger [...] the predominant Passions of Heroes [...] cannot be well purified but by a more Sovereign and Imperious Vertue then themselves.” Those passions, he explains, “contribute to the dignity of Heroick Vertue, and raise it to a superior Order, where common Vertues are not admitted” (128). Hence, despite his radical assertions against custom, the French Jesuit ultimately concedes that not all women should go to war; on the contrary, the patriarchal distribution of gender roles should be left unchallenged:

I dispute not here against the general practise; nor pretend by private authority to discard an Immemorial Discipline, and a policie as antient as Nature. Lesse also is it my designe to publish an edict by which all Women should be summoned to War. They ought to keep themselves to the distribution which Nature and the Laws have made, and Custome received; and to content themselves with that part which hath been assigned them in oeconomie and houshold affair. (122)

- 14 Consequently, the re-distribution of gender roles in *Bell in Campo* as well as in *The Gallery* is limited; female empowerment remains codified, restricted to certain circumstances, and reserved for an elite of women. It should also be noted that such an ambiguous status of heroism is consistent with the duchess’s patriarchal views in her non-fictional works.<sup>38</sup> The high deeds of Lady Victoria may not signify that all women should go to the wars and assume male roles, but suggest instead that those responsibilities should be the privilege of exceptional women like herself who longed for fame and glory.<sup>39</sup>

15 \*

- 16 In the light of the final scene of triumph attended by the citizens’ wives, Lady Victoria’s achievements remain ambivalent, illustrating both women’s ability to fight like men and the author’s ultimate reluctance to give to all the female sex access to heroism. I do not wish to resolve the internal tensions of Cavendish’s writing, but I would like to conclude by suggesting that Lady Victoria’s elitist heroism can additionally be understood in the Civil War context as a defence of royalist and aristocratic values in times of political uncertainty.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, Cavendish’s representation of Lady Victoria as a *femme forte* closely associates her with the cause of the monarchy; Le Moyne’s *Gallery* was dedicated to the French Queen Anne of Austria, and in his “Address to the Ladies of this Nation,” the Marquess of Winchester presents his work as a manifesto of resistance in a “land of trial”:

Their gallantry is so perfect, as you need not doubt but they will gladly suffer your noble hands to take some flowers out of their garlands; which, if well applyed, crowns may be formed of them, and one day placed upon your heads by some worthy person of our countrey, who taking notice of your vertuous carriages and improved actions in this land of trial, may hereafter erect a new gallery, in which your statues and names will remain a spectacle of honour and imitation to posterity. (unpaginated)

Such a reading is corroborated by the fact that the historical context is omnipresent in the play. Lady Victoria’s “heroickesses” are evocative of the Civil War heroines. Parallels

can be drawn between the Kingdom of Reformation and royalist forces, and between the Kingdom of Faction and the supporters of Parliament, but it is also possible to make connections between the female army of “Reformation” and the New Model Army. The reference to the “council of war” (I.2.8, 117) may well echo the councils held by Charles I as well as by General Fairfax (Pasupathi 659, 662).<sup>41</sup> As for the Lord General and his wife, they resemble the Cavendishes themselves: like them, they were separated by war, before being reunited once the kingdom of Reformation had been saved by the female army (Suzuki 89-190).<sup>42</sup> William, like the Lord General, was a defeated general, and Margaret, like Lady Victoria, staunchly defended the heroic heritage of her husband, who was regarded as a traitor after the defeat of his army at Marston Moor both by the supporters of the Commonwealth and by some of his fellow-royalists. Hero Chalmers interestingly links this heroic ethos to Margaret Cavendish’s own status as a *feme covert*, that is to say as the legal property of her husband (*Royalist Women Writers* 4-5).<sup>43</sup> She contends it is the moral and legal protection of William Cavendish that paradoxically gave his wife the authority to write, publish, and also to act as his “surrogate,” to defend his interests, at a time when he was exiled and reduced to silence (Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers* 22, 28).<sup>44</sup> Given the porosity between Cavendish’s characters and her own self, I would argue with Chalmers that the heroism of Lady Victoria – whose action is *in fine* approved and supported by her husband (II.2.5, 147) – articulates the Duchess’s authorial ambition as well as her involvement in the royalist politics of the Interregnum (Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers* 27).

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## NOTES

1. Scott-Douglas assumes that the story of Margaret of Béthune was the basis of *Bell in Campo*. Another possible model for Lady Victoria could be Barbe d'Ernecourt, Comtesse de Saint-Baslemont. She was described by Jean-Marie de Vernon in *L'Amazone chrestienne, ou Les aventures de Madame de S. Balmon* (Paris: chez Gaspar Meturas, 1678). On these women see DeJean 121-23.
2. See François de Grenaille, *La Galerie des dames illustres* (1642, no translation), Georges de Scudéry, *Les femmes illustres ou les Harangues héroïques* (1642 and 1644, translated into English in 1681), Jacques Du Bosc, *La femme héroïque* (1645, no translation), and Pierre Le Moyne, *La Galerie des femmes fortes* (1647). Le Moyne's book was translated into English by the Marquess of Winchester, the Catholic John Paulet, as *The Gallery of Heroick Women* (London, 1652). On Cavendish being a reader of French books, see Scott-Douglass 155-56.
3. On this translation see Chalmers, *Royalist Women Writers* 40-42. Similar encouragements to heroism can be found in Thomas Heywood, *The General History of Women*: "Since the most powerfull argument that could be invented, to incite men to vertue, hath been the remembrance of their forefathers achievements, what properer objects can there be of womans emulation than the deeds of other famous women, who no lesse then men have ever afforded examples of all sorts of gallantry" (sig. A3<sup>v</sup>). See also, by the same author, *The Exemplary Lives and Memorable Acts of Nine of the Most Worthy Women of the World* (London, 1640).
4. On the importance of Anne of Austria as a model for heroic ladies, see Vergnes 11-16.
5. *A Collection of Letters and Poems: Written by several Persons of Honour and Learning, Upon divers Important Subjects, to the late Duke and Dutchess of Newcastle* (London, 1678), 7 May 1667, 118-19. Cavendish did not wait for Charleton's advice to have herself represented as a heroic statue on the frontispieces of her works. Her *Playes* (1662) is a case in point: the frontispiece can be seen on EEBO.
6. Manning speaks of the "rechivalrization" of English aristocratic and gentry culture (19).
7. On the possible links between *Bell in Campo* and the New Model Army, see Pasupathi.
8. All lines from the first and second parts from *Bell in Campo* are taken from *The Convent of Pleasure and other Plays*.
9. On nostalgia, see Adamson 182-93. On the positivity of heroism, see Lowrance 2. The positivity of female heroism in *Bell in Campo* is inseparable from the Duchess's belief in the superiority of masculinity over femininity: "It is not so great a Fault in Nature for a Woman to be Masculine, as for a Man to be Effeminate: for it is a Defect in Nature to decline, as to see Men like Women; but to see a Masculine Woman, is but onely as if Nature had mistook, and had placed a Mans Spirit in a Womans Body" (*The Worlds Olio* 84).
10. According to Boyle, Cavendish's works reflect "the contemporary honor culture" (272-73).
11. Moral heroism is called "fortitude" by Le Moyne who celebrates it as much as martial heroism. Marc Fumaroli highlights two forms of magnanimity: stoic magnanimity and martial magnanimity (61).
12. "Fortitude of the Mind we call Valour, when it is put into Action; and in Suffering we call it Patience" (Cavendish, *The Worlds Olio* 152-53).
13. Pierre de la Primaudaye's *Academie française* (1577) was translated into English and published several times in England. It offered a summary of the medical and philosophical knowledge of his time.
14. For this tension between military heroism and moral fortitude – another form of heroism –, see Vergnes 16 and Beugnot 174-82.
15. The models of this kind of female heroism were Dido and Lucretia. See Bousquet 183-200. Le Moyne devotes a section of his treatise to Lucretia.



16. See Sukic 63-65. For a defence of anger, see Edward Reynolds, *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man* (London, 1640).
17. In *The Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (sig. B3<sup>v</sup>), Cavendish claims to have read half of Descartes's treatise *The Passions of the Soule* (London: 1650).
18. The distinction between different sorts of anger was recurrent in treatises of the passions. See Kennedy 276.
19. "In early modern England [...] women are believed to get angry more often and more easily than men because of their physiological, intellectual and moral inferiority to men" (Kennedy 3).
20. The two passions are close: "Cicero saith, that that which the Latines call Anger, is named of the Grecians desire of reuenge" (La Primaudaye 312).
21. Pierre de La Primaudaye argues that "women are commonly sooner driuen into choler than men" (312).
22. On Le Moynes's *bienséante* conception of female anger, see Conroy 10-12.
23. For an opposite view, see Castiglione: "But certes me thought I had spoken sufficient, and especiallie beefore such audience, that I beleaue none here, but vnderstandeth concernynge the exercises of the body, that it is not comlye for a woman to practise feates of armes, ridinge, playinge at tenise, wrestling, and manye other thinges that beelongs to men" (*The Thirde Booke*).
24. Pauline Schmitt-Pantel demonstrates that bravery was an essential component of female heroism.
25. The elevation of Lady Victoria is reminiscent of the "Platonic love fashions which had been encouraged by Charles I's queen, Henrietta-Maria, during the 1630s" (Chalmers, *Royalist Women* 36). See also Veevers 18-19.
26. Cavendish probably saw that painting which was part of a series of by Rubens that hung in the Luxembourg (Scott-Douglass 148). The twenty-four paintings had been commissioned by Marie de' Medici. See Whitaker 89-90. It can be seen at <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peter\\_Paul\\_Rubens\\_043.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peter_Paul_Rubens_043.jpg)> (accessed 11 Dec. 2016).
27. It can be seen at <[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peter\\_Paul\\_Rubens\\_-\\_Marie\\_de\\_Medicis\\_as\\_Bellona2.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Peter_Paul_Rubens_-_Marie_de_Medicis_as_Bellona2.jpg)> (accessed 11 Dec. 2016).
28. A female heroic statue is also to be found on Jacques Du Bosc, *La Femme Heroique, ou Les Heroines comparées avec les Heros* (Paris, 1645). <<http://web.sbu.edu/friedsam/lafemme/>> (Accessed 19 July 2016).
29. For instance, I.1.3, 143: "shall only men live by fame, and women dy in oblivion?"
30. In *The True Relation of My Birth* published in *Nature's Pictures*, Cavendish's claim to reach Fame's tower echoes Victoria's ambition: "I am very ambitious, yet 'tis neither for Beauty, Wit, Titles, Wealth or Power, but as they are steps to raise me to Fames Tower, which is to live by remembrance in after ages" (389).
31. For an interesting study of Lady Victoria's ambiguous scheme, see Holmsland.
32. On this *topos* see for instance Maclean, *Renaissance Notion* 22-26 and "Mary's Song of Praise," Luke 1:46-53.
33. The English translation is incomplete and hardly legible: "And in occasions wherein the Arms of the strong were [...and their] Heads exhausted, he hath raised up Women, who [...] the valiant and [...], who have taken away [the Yoke] and the Sword held over the Head of Nations: who have chased away from surrendred [t]owns Armies already victorious; who [have restored force] and Courage to vanquished Kings" (36).
34. See Suzuki 192, and DeJean 117, 120, on the connections between women's extraordinary deeds and an increased agency for women.
35. "Though it seems to be natural that generally all Women are weaker than the Men, both in body and understanding, and that the wisest of Women is not as the wisest of Men [...] Yet some are far wiser than some men" (Cavendish, *The Worlds Olio* [sig. A5<sup>v</sup>]).

36. This type of situation is recurrent in Cavendish's work, more particularly in the 1662 collection of plays, where heroism, whether intellectual or martial, is striking but remains limited (Gheeraert-Graffeuille 295-310).
37. On elitism, see Vergnes 115, MacLean, *Woman Triumphant* 7.
38. See for instance, *The Worlds Olio*, "The Preface to the Reader," unpaginated: "[Men and women] [...] may be compared to the Sun and Moon, according to the discription in the Holy Writ, which saith, *God made two great Lights, the one to Rule the Day, the other the Night*. So Man is made to Govern Common Wealths, and Women their privat Families."
39. See for instance Cavendish, *The Worlds Olio*, 37: "to die for fame is to live longer in the memory of other men." On that issue see Boyle 262-64.
40. For a political interpretation of Le Moyne's *Gallery*, see Conroy 12: "Clearly the volume can be read as a glorification of monarchy, as a panegyric portrait of the queen, a monument to her vies," and Chalmers, *Royalist Women* 46: "the martial heroines of her fiction and drama [...] were penned during the 1650s when the need to reassert the semiotics of royalism was most pressing."
41. Royalists often associated "Reformation" with the Parliamentarians.
42. See Bennett, "The Theatre of War," for a historical interpretation of the play.
43. Cavendish stresses her status as a wife. In *The Worlds Olio* that is contemporary with *Bell in Campo*, she writes: "If had never married the person I have, I do believe I should never have writ so, as to have adventured to divulge my works" (sig. E3<sup>v</sup>).
44. This defence is most striking in Cavendish's biography of her husband, *The Life of the Thrice Noble High and Puissant Prince William Cavendish* (London, 1667, 1675).

## ABSTRACTS

This paper proposes to read Margaret Cavendish's *Bell in Campo* (1662) in the light of Pierre Le Moyne's *Gallerie des femmes fortes* (1647). It shows how this celebration of women's high deeds sheds an interesting light on the the ambiguous staging of female heroism in *Bell in Campo*: like the French Jesuit, Cavendish uses female heroism both as a way to explore the possibilities of female emancipation and as a paradigm to express her own political and anthropological views. In order to highlight the Duchess's double focus on gender and politics, the article looks in turn at the crisis of the heroic ethos, at the making of the female warrior, at different possible interpretations of Lady Victoria's triumph. It ultimately shows that Lady Victoria's heroism may be understood in the Civil War uncertain context as a defence of royalist and aristocratic values.

Cet article se propose de lire la pièce *Bell in Campo* (1662) de Margaret Cavendish à la lumière du traité de Pierre Le Moyne, *La Gallerie des femmes fortes* (1647). Il montre de quelle manière ce traité à la gloire des femmes éclaire la mise en scène ambiguë de l'héroïsme féminin dans *Bell in Campo*. Comme le jésuite français, Cavendish utilise les exploits de femmes à la fois pour mettre en évidence les enjeux de l'émancipation féminine et pour donner forme à ses propres réflexions politiques et anthropologiques. Afin d'analyser ce double regard porté sur le genre et la politique, l'article étudie successivement la crise de l'éthos héroïque, la construction du personnage de la guerrière, et les différentes interprétations possibles du triomphe de Lady Victoria. Il montre enfin que dans le contexte incertain de la Guerre Civile, il est possible de comprendre l'héroïsme féminin de Lady Victoria comme une défense des valeurs royalistes et aristocratiques.

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