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Cavendish's Female Warriors between Military
Victory and Political Defeat

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المحاربات بين الانتصار العسكري والهزيمة السياسية

Dr. Samia AL-Shayban
Associate Professor
Department of English Language and Literature
King Saud University-Riyad

د. سامية آل شيبان
أستاذ مشارك - قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها
كلية الآداب - جامعة الملك سعود - الرياض - المملكة العربية السعودية

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Critics tend to oversimplify Margret Cavendish's *Bell in Campo* (1662) and read it as a celebration of women's empowerment. This paper challenges the validity of such critical interpretation and attempts to prove that Cavendish stages women's spectacular failure to defeat patriarchy and move from the margin to the center of power. The women's doomed pursuit of equality, in spite of their life-changing achievements can be traced through three elements, ultra patriarchal system, the ancient Greek mythology of Amazon warriors and traditional rhetoric. Thus, the Amazons' ideological and rhetorical tragic failure to leave the margin is caused by the deep and effective mechanism of the patriarchal system. They lost not because they are weak but because there is no equal powerful system that can be an alternative to the oppressive patriarchy.

Keywords: amazon, patriarchy, mythology, margin and center

الذكورية المتجذرة في *Bell in Campo* نساء مارغريت كافندش المحاربات بين الانتصار العسكري والهزيمة السياسية

يوجد العديد من القراءات النقدية لمسرحيه مارغريت كافندش "الجرس في المرج" ولكنها في أغلبها اتسمت بالتبسيط. لقد أجمعت الدراسات النقدية أن المسرحية هي احتفالية بقوه المرأة وتمكينها. ولكن هذا البحث يعرض قراءه مختلفه ويؤكد على أن الكاتبة عرضت فشل المرأة الصارخ في هزيمة الذكورية، تمكين نفسها، مغادره الهامش واحتلال المركز كترجمة لقوتها. لتوضيح الفشل استعانت الكاتبة بثلاثة مكونات: الذكورية المتطرفة، الأسطورة اليونانية للمحاربات الأمزونيوات والخطاب الذكوري. فشل المرأة في إيجاد صوت خاص بها بعيدا عن الايديولوجيا واللغة الذكورية يوضح قوة وتجذر أدوات الرجل للسيطرة. من هنا يتضح أن الموقع الهامشي للمرأة ليس بسبب عدم كفاءتها أو ضعفها بل بسبب سيطرة النظام الذكوري ونزعه الرجل نحو السلطة وجعل المرأة تابع بغض النظر عن إمكانياتها وقدراتها. وكذلك بسبب غياب قوه متكافئة قادرة على فرض التغيير والمساواة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أمازون- الذكورية-الأسطورة-الهامش والمركز

Rooted Patriarchy in *Bell in Campo*: Margaret Cavendish's Female Warriors between Military Victory and Political Defeat

Margaret Cavendish's *Bell in Campo* (1662) is considered by many a successful attempt to empower women in the face of the dominating patriarchy. However, this paper offers different reading and argues that the play stresses women's spectacular failure to challenge patriarchy and successfully end their marginal position. Indeed, the play gives the marginalized women the space not only to voice their concerns but most importantly to act their aspiration. Cavendish's heroine Lady Victoria creates her own army of female Amazon warriors who participated in the war against their Kingdom's enemy and emerge victorious. Their military victory and its dramatic consequences convince many critics that women in the Kingdom of Reformation manage to move from the margin to the center of power. Anna Battigelli perceives Cavendish's heroine Lady Victoria with her Amazonian experience as an "active cavalier who engages with her world, using language and actions to change it" (26). Pilar Cuder-Dominguez endorses such reading and believes that the play, "achieves its purpose-in valorizing female heroism... not only for an isolated individual, but for women as a group" (49). In her turn, Vimalac Pasupathi argues that the Amazonian army stands for the collective support given to women in their quest for autonomy. Pasupathi affirms that Cavendish executes such an achievement, by stating that she:

brings to the field a third armed collective of [women] led by Lady Victoria, the wife of Reformation's Lord General. This Amazonian army not only defeats faction, but also bends the Reformers to reform. Dramatizing war and interrogating her country's lack of roles for women in national governance, Bell in Campo is fantasy of triumphant militarism that rewrites the outcome of England's civil wars, while simultaneously authorizing women's participation in state affairs. (657)

Pasupathi believes that during the English Civil War (1642-1651), women's achievements were unrewarded by the patriarchal system. Thus, to her the dramatic victory of the Amazonian female army and the recognition they received are a compensation for all women and their forgotten achievements. Erin Lang Bonin argues that the ability of Cavendish's female characters to participate in war as warriors along with their men, turns them into political agents. She states that "*By playing war games that question what is "natural" for both sexes, the play's women utopians piece together a political authority and agency usually available only to men*" (339). Bonin's reading of *Bell in Campo* as a reflection of Cavendish's desire to create utopian world for women is endorsed by Oddvar Holmesland. He states that the play;

envisages men and women as equal members of a utopian Restoration England. Its natural principle is reciprocity between the conjugal and public sphere. On this basis, the play represented Cavendish's dialectical quest for mediation-between gender roles as well as between ideological positions at large. (53)

To Holmesland, Cavendish's dramatization goes beyond a female utopia to explore the political role of gender positioning. Alexandra Bennette considers the play to be a "utopian fantasy" with a "*central plot in which the remarkable achievements of Lady Victoria and her adherents are presented as admirable configurations of female ability, nobility and courage*" (183). The various critical readings hail the play as a celebration of female heroism and empowerment. There is no doubt that Cavendish dramatizes women's heroism and their right to end their marginality. However, this argument challenges the validity of the critical interpretation of such dramatization. The re-reading of the play attempts to prove that Cavendish stresses women's spectacular failure to defeat patriarchy and move from the margin to the center of power. The women's doomed pursuit of equality, in spite of their life-changing achievements can be traced through three elements, ultra patriarchal system, the ancient Greek mythology of Amazon warriors and traditional rhetoric. The theoretical discourse to be used in this argument involves, feminism and theory of rhetoric. Feminism is most suitable to expose the

dominant patriarchal ideology along with its underlying mechanism that prevents women from empowering themselves. Theory of rhetoric helps to expose the deeply rooted connection between language and patriarchy and by extension women's voiceless existence.

The play's opening and closing: the fantastical dominion of patriarchy

Cavendish creates the imaginative ultra-patriarchal Kingdom of Reformation, as a factor that can explain women's inability to achieve autonomy. The opening and end of the play which take place in the fantastical Kingdom of Reformation reveal men's central position and the marginality of women. Significantly, Cavendish's imaginary dramatic space, is introduced through two males. The first gentleman tells the second gentleman, "*You hear how this Kingdome of Reformation is preparing for war against the Kingdom of Faction*" (1:1.1). To such announcement the second gentleman responds, "*Yea, for I hear the Kingdome of Faction resolves to War with this Kingdome of reformation*" (1:1.1). The two gentlemen refrain from giving any details regarding the geographical location of the named kingdoms or indeed their historical era. However, there is a familiar element which transcends all dimensions of time and space; this element is war. Such approach makes it easier for the audience not only to recognize the system but most importantly to relate to it. Carol Christ gives a feminist interpretation of war through revealing its connection with the patriarchal ideology. She asserts that;

Patriarchy is a system of male dominance, rooted in the ethos of war which legitimates violence, sanctified by religious symbols, in which men, who are heroes of war, are told to kill men, to seize land and treasures, to exploit resources, and to own or otherwise dominate conquered people. (214)

According to Christ, war is the ultimate patriarchal show where men indulge their strong desires for dominance. Since war is a patriarchal necessity to achieve dominance, men turned it into a cult where they compete in bloody and violent practices. The moral controversy of wars and its inhuman consequences are unscrupulously solved through disguising killing as heroism. Betty Reardon goes even further in

analyzing the relationship between patriarchy and war. She insists that patriarchy “*produced war, and not that war produced*” patriarchy (12). She further explains that “*authoritarian patriarchy, which seems to have emerged with the major elements of “civilization”, and male domination-invented and maintains war to hold in place the social order it spawned*” (12). Since patriarchy uses war to maintain its presence and dominance, it is natural that it encourages machismo. Reardon argues that “*militarism manifests the excesses of those characteristics generally referred to as machismo, a term that generally connoted the strength, bravery, and responsibility necessary to fulfill male social function*” (15). Having connected war and patriarchy, Reardon reaches the conclusion that any society with such a “*basic paradigm*” is inevitably sexist. Annette Weber endorses Reardon’s view and argues that “*war and conflict*” are essential paradigms of patriarchy (2).

To accentuate the connection between patriarchy and war, on one side and the dominance of the male voice on the other, the Lord General of the Kingdom of Reformation is the first character to be introduced to the audience. The first gentleman elaborates that the General is

one of the gallantest and noblest persons in this Kingdom, which is made General to command in chief; for he is a man that is both valiant and well experienced in Wars, temperate and just in peace, wise and politick in public affairs, careful and prudent in his own Family, and most generous person. (1:1.1)

The Lord General has the most important quality associated with the superior male in a patriarchal context which is military heroism. As a warrior, the General has the characteristics of a classical hero, he is brave and deadly. In time of peace his conduct is not less impressive as he is marked with political prudence and wisdom. As a family man he is kind and generous. Reardon argues that “*the military,... is the distilled embodiment of patriarchy; the militarization of society is the unchecked manifestation of patriarchy as the overt and explicit mode of governance*” (15). With the help of Reardon’s perception, one can see that above all the Lord General is a man of war. This factor renders him the ideal representative of patriarchy. One can notice that the Lord General has a

military title but not a name. This allows him to be considered not as a specific individual but emphasizes his position as a representative of the patriarchal system. The fact that we are introduced to the Kingdom of Refromation through war and a General reveals that the dramatic domain is a militarized context. This also strengthens Christ, Reardon and Webber's feminist reading that war is the essential paradigm of patriarchy.

In this highly charged macho context, the female voice represented by Lord General's wife, Lady Victoria is marginalized. The first gentleman speaker states that the General "*Hath a fair young and virtuous Lady that he must Leave behind him*" (1:1.1). The first-time the General's wife is mentioned, she is identified through her husband and not in her own capacity. Simone de Beauvoir argues that it is a common patriarchal practice to perceive women in connection to the men in their lives. She clarifies that a woman "*is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other*" (26). As the "Other" Lady Victoria does not possess a voice of her own and by extension power. Allan Johnson argues that "*male dominance creates power difference between men and women*" (6). He further clarifies that the power difference between men and women "*promotes the idea that men are superior to women*" (6). Being inferior, the most suitable place to the General's wife is in his shadow. This marginal position takes further dimensions through the discourse employed to describe her. As a wife, Lady Victoria is described as young, fair and virtuous. The first gentleman says that the general "*hath, a fair young and virtuous Lady that he must leave behind him*" (1:1.1). According to the French feminist Luce Irigaray, a male's logic is based on the "*predominance of the visual*" (25). This means that men judge women through their external appearance. As a result, the used language to describe Lady Victoria is visual. She is identified through the masculine language of the patriarchal system that confines her within her young and beautiful body. With such a perspective, man objectifies the target (the woman), who is endowed with the physical characteristics he deems fit. Lois Tyson explains that to men;

the woman-is merely an object to be seen. Thus, in patriarchy women are merely tokens, markers ...in male economy. In other words, women function to display men's relations to other men ...a patriarchal man, who feels he must have a beautiful woman on his arm in order to impress other people is not interested in impressing other people. He is interested in impressing other men. (102)

Lady Victoria is labelled "virtuous" which is another quality conventionally given to women who accept their patriarchal gender roles. Tyson argues

Patriarchal ideology suggests that there are only two identities a woman can have. If she accepts her traditional gender role and obeys the patriarchal rules, she's a "good girl"; if she doesn't, she's a "bad girl." These two roles

—also referred to as "madonna" and "whore" or "angel" and "bitch"—view women only in terms of how they relate to the patriarchal order. (89)

According to the patriarchal system, women's beauty, youth and virtue are of no value in their own. They need to be appreciated and possessed by the male to gain recognition and consequently value. De Beauvoir argues that a "man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself. She is not considered an autonomous being" (22). Johnson clarifies that "women are often prized for their beauty as objects of male sexual desires, ... but as such they are often possessed and controlled in ways that ultimately devalue them" (7). With such a perspective, Victoria derives her value not from herself as a gifted and beautiful individual but rather from her illustrious husband who needs a wife with such qualities.

By examining the closing scene of the play, one notices that the center of power remains under the firm control of patriarchy while women continue to occupy the margin. In spite of the fact that Lady Victoria and her female army have participated heroically in the war and emerge victorious, yet they fail to change their position or indeed the way they are viewed by the patriarchal system. In an exact repetition of the

opening scene a male voice represented by the first Gentleman informs the audience that, "*The Lord General seems to be very proud of his Lady, methinks he Looks upon her with a most pleased Eye*" (2:5.22). Lady Victoria remains an object to be looked at with "*a most pleased Eye.*" The second Gentleman explains that Lord General has every reason to be proud of his Lady, "*For never man had so gallant and noble a Lady, nor more virtuous and loving Wife than the Lord General hath*" (2:5.22). In spite of the fact that Lady Victoria is "*at Court, and hath had a public audience*" to celebrate the Amazons' victory, she is perceived as a wife to the illustrious General and not as a woman with an outstanding military heroic achievements similar to those of her husband (2:5.22). She is praised as a "*virtuous and loving wife*" but not as a brave warrior. According to De Beauvoir, a woman is "*nothing other than what man decides*" (26). The patriarchal system decides that Lady Victoria is not a warrior but a virtuous and loving wife and she remains so in spite of her achievements. Thus, when the King rewards Lady Victoria along with her female army, he remains true to the patriarchal concept. The Recorder of the King declares the new given privileges:

All women shall be Mistress on their own Houses and Families.... They shall sit at the upper end of the table...they shall keep the purse. They shall order their servants.... They shall buy in what provisions they will. All jewels, and Household furniture they shall claim as their own; ...they shall wear what fashioned clothes they will. They shall go abroad when they will...they shall eat when they will and of what they will. They shall go to plays, Masks, Balls, Churching, whomsoever they will...they shall be of their Husbands Council. (2:5.20)

Obviously, the granted reward is designed to keep the female warriors firmly located inside their houses and away from the public sphere. Yet, Dominguez believes that these gains are great reward for the female's military achievements and heroism. She states that the play "*achieves its purpose in valorizing female heroism, not only for an isolated individual but for women as a group*" (32). Hero Chalmers argues that men in the Kingdom of Reformation show "*genuine pride in the female heroic action*" (45). Indeed, the play displays the female

heroism and the patriarchal system appreciation of the achieved victory. Yet, the system is not impressed enough to share the power with the female population. To judge the new domestic privileges a suitable reward for a military victory is rather odd. Cavendish does not seem to be impressed by the reward her Amazons receive but rather implicitly ironical. This is clear through the detailed listing of the insignificant newly acquired privileges. In fact, she is mocking the female heroism as it gains nothing of significance worthy of their glorious military victory. By saying that, it does not mean that Cavendish was not a strong defender of women's right for equal opportunities. Her belief in women's ability to excel in the masculine world of politics and science is well discussed and documented. Lisa Walters writes that Cavendish "demonstrates a profound engagement with, and radical critique of her intellectual and cultural milieu" (4). It is this profound knowledge of the cultural and intellectual context of her time that makes her realistic and pragmatic enough to see the difficulties to attain such ideal endeavor. To draw attention to the unfair treatment her Amazons receive, she introduces trivial changes that reveal the slave-like condition of women in the Kingdom of Reformation. She also induces her female audience in particular to be aware of the insignificant reward the Amazons receive. Women from various classes and social levels in the seventeenth century England, were deeply involved in the running of their household. This means that they had more domestic power than the women in the Kingdom of Reformation (Crawford and Mandelson 256-344; Walters 3-4). By showing the slave-like condition of her Amazons and the minor improvements that happened in return of risking their lives, Cavendish highlights patriarchy's aggressive refusal to share their power.

Early in the play and before their military victory, Lady Victoria tells her female army that their goal in fighting the war is to change their status from slaves to co-partners. They desire men "*In so much as to believe we are fit to be Copartners in their Governments, and to help to rule the World, where now we are kept as slaves forced to obey; wherefore let us make ourselves free*"(1:1.9). Lady Victoria and her army make it clear that they seek political power based on equality and cooperation. In his *Politics*, Aristotle writes, "*Everywhere inequality is the*

cause of revolution, and always it is the desire of equality which rises in rebellion” (v). The females’ act of defiance is the result of a strong resentment of their marginal position. Aristotle explains further, “When the government is very exclusive, the revolution is brought about by persons of the wealthy class who are excluded” (v). Lady Victoria who belongs to the wealthy elite of the Kingdom, feels excluded from the power structure. As a result she enlists the help of the female population to stage a revolution and move to the center of power next to men. Needless to say that there is an abyss between the female population initial aim and what they have gained by the end of the paly. They have competed with competence in patriarchy’s most sacred game, which is war; yet they are denied the treatment of victors. The fact that they are denied access to power, proves that patriarchy’s discrimination against women is not a matter of competence, but a sexist attitude. Thus, being a female is in itself the problem. Nathalie Rivere de Carlos argues that Amazon warriors on the seventeenth century English stage, “can be tolerated only in terms of crisis and its necessary consequences.” (“Acceptable Amazons?”). The unwillingness of the male population to share the power with the females, is explained by Johnson’s view on patriarchy and power. He writes that patriarchy “*is male centered*” and territorial ideology. As such, it is a matter of principle that women can never be allowed into the center which is strictly a male territory. This is one of Cavendish’s important messages to her female audience who during the Civil War had firsthand experience with such patriarchal attitudes. Ann Hughes stresses that recent historical studies start to review women’s role during the Civil War which has been largely ignored and underestimated (30-37). It is proven that they had played military and civil roles to protect their communities. Furthermore, they asked the parliamentary government to acknowledge their roles and grant them the chance in decision making. In return they were asked to go back to their kitchens and children (49-54). This echoes Lady Victoria and her Amazons’ situation as females who are not suitable candidates for the center regardless of their achievements. The fact that the patriarchal system stages a superficial reward for the female warriors, is a way of guarding its power against intruders. Johnson explains that one of the

essential, “*characteristics of patriarchy is an obsession with control as a core value around which social life is organized. Men maintain their privilege by controlling women and anyone else, who might threaten it*” (14). To maintain their control, men need to be flexible when they are under attack. As a result, Johnson elaborates that they introduce “*superficial change as a defense against deeper challenges*” (14). To manage the pressure staged by Lady Victoria and her warriors, the system needs to absorb the pressure through “*allow[ing] some change to occur*” (14). Such critical technique allows patriarchy to “*maintain the status quo by fostering illusions of fundamental change, and it deflects the power*” (14). Women can challenge the system, but it can always manipulate and contain the challenge. Indeed Cavendish’s dramatic patriarchal system succeeds in giving the female population the illusion of change. They accept the minor improvements without any challenge leaving the entire oppressive system untouched. Johnson argues that to disfunction the system’s ability to defend itself against the female intruders and maintain supremacy, “*We need to take the risky deeper journey that leads to the Heart of patriarchy.*” Cavendish proves to be a head of her time as she has taken this journey through *Bell in Campo*. The play does not celebrate women’s empowerment or indeed anything else. Through women’s unsuccessful attempts to gain power, Cavendish exposes the complex mechanism of control and oppression practiced by patriarchy against women.

Amazon warriors: between ancient mythology and dramatic reality

Significantly, to Cavendish, the failure of Lady Victoria and her Amazon army to move from the margin to the center is not the result of their weakness but rather the power of the patriarchal system. To prove her point, Cavendish employs the ancient mythology of Amazon warriors. Before we proceed with the argument we need to introduce the mythology of the Amazon warriors. Adrienne Mayor explains that Amazons of ancient Greek mythology “*were fierce warrior women of exotic Eastern lands, as courageous and skilled in battle as the mightiest Greek heroes*” (10). Gerhard Pollauer stresses their exceptional warring skills. He writes, “*they are believed to be insomuch dangerous in battle that the most*

famous heroes of Greek mythology need to measure their strength with them to prove their heroism” (16). Significantly, Greek mythologies are a prominent feature in Old Comedy. Angus Bowie writes that the Greeks introduced mythology in Old Comedy as a fantastical solution to their contemporary complex problems (190-208). However, the dramatic manipulation of Greek mythologies reflects outrageous mockery of the mythological figures (191). As such mockery is staged to belittle the myth, highlights the complexity of the problem and confirms the impossibility of any solution. Emmanuela Bakola explains that the Greek dramatist Carinus’s (519-422 BC) *Nemesis* and *Odysseus* are good examples of such practices (220; 224; 230-233). Cavendish adopts Old Comedy’s approach and employs the ancient Greek mythology of Amazon warriors. To her heroine Lady Victoria, an Amazon army is meant to empower women and end their marginality. Unlike her enthusiastic heroine, Cavendish is rather pragmatic as far as women’s position is concerned. She turns the mythology into the key component to expose the obstacles that prevent women from gaining the power they deserve. To that end, Cavendish constructs an implicit and explicit contrast that involves the dramatic female warriors, the mythological Amazons and the anti-Amazons characters.

It is important to mention that Cavendish’s contemporaries were familiar with the mythology of the Amazon warrior. Early modern stage was not a stranger to warrior women. (Rubik 147-156; Carney 117-131). As a Lady in Waiting to Queen Henrietta Maria, King Charles I’s consort, Cavendish must have been exposed to the myth in more than one occasion (Britland 165). The queen herself acted as an Amazon in William Davenant’s *Salmacida Spolia*, a masque which was staged in 1640 (Britland 176-77; 183). Many poems and masks were written in which Diana, the warrior goddess was represented as an incarnation of the queen (Britland 164-170; 186). The queen’s association with Amazon warriors took more realistic presence in 1643 when she headed an army to aid her husband who was in Oxford (Wedgwood 1970-p. 166). The fact that the Amazon warriors were dramatized in various themes that conveyed complex allegories and images, reveal that seventeenth century dramatists and audience had a deep understanding of the mythology and

its endless multilayered functions. Thus, the underlying message of Cavendish's manipulation of the mythology can be understood by her contemporary audience and readers.

The most important factor about the mythological Amazons is their reputation as a fierce and formidable female warrior (Mayor 10). It is this warring nature which is at the heart of Cavendish's implicit and explicit contrast that is designed to expose the obstacles that deny women equality. Cavendish places her female warriors against the formidable and challenging image of the mythological Amazons. To show their contrasting situation, Cavendish allows Lady Victoria's decision to create an Amazon army and join the war to evolve through three stages. The first stage emerges as Lady Victoria's impulsive decision to accompany her husband as wife and not as a soldier. The second phase involves creating an Amazonian army as a reaction to the War Council's decision to send women back home. The last stage witnesses conducting military training to be to join the war in a fighting capacity. As a result, she makes it uneasy task for her aspiring warriors to match the illustrious and independent Amazons. At the beginning Lady Victoria decides to accompany her husband to war not as a warrior but rather as a wife. Her husband informs her, *"My dear heart, you know I am commanded to the Wars, and to leave you is such a Cross as my Nature sinks under"* (1: 1...2.). To that Lady Victoria responds, *"I must partake of your actions, and go along with you"* (1:1.2). Lady Victoria's desire to accompany her husband as a wife and not a warrior, allows her to stand in sharp contrast with the mythological Amazons. The Greek historian Diodorus of Sicily (65-50 BC) writes about the Amazons and war. He records that they are *"a race superior in valour and eager for war...it was the custom among them that the women should practise the arts of war and be required to serve in the army for a fixed period"* (251). In his summary of the Celtic historian Pompeius Trogus's history of the Amazons, Marcus Junianus Justinus states that the Amazons,

were very great and glorious...for they had a rise not less illustrious than their empire; nor were they more famous for the government of their men than for the brave actions of their women as the men were founders of the Parthians and Bactrians, the

women settled the kingdom of the Amazons; so that to those who compare the deeds of their males and females, it is difficult to decide which of the sexes was more distinguished. (1)

What concerns us in this particular context is the ultra-egalitarian environment in time of peace and war in which the mythological Amazons lived. The Amazons, like their men played active public roles and participated in wars. Significantly, they emerged to be fierce and distinguished military power to be reckon with. Thus, the distance that separates Lady Victoria from the mythological Amazons could not be more obvious. To further expose the distance between Lady Victoria and the Amazons, Cavendish allows her heroine to make a reactionary step and emulate their best-known practice, war. Lady Victoria's decision to create her own army, is not a matter of convention but rather a reaction to the Council of war decree which states "*that all women should be sent into one of their Garrison Towns*" (1:2.8). The Second Gentleman explains that the Council is concerned that "*if they should be overcome by them by their Enemyes, women might be...made Slaves, using or abusing them*" (1:2.8). Unpleased with the decree issued by the Council of war, the defiant Lady Victoria opposes the decision and form a female army. She tells her fellow females,

Let us return, and force those that sent us away to consent that we shall be partakers with them, and either win them by persuasions, or lose our selves by breaking their decrees; for it is were better we should die by their angry frowns, than by the Tongue of Infamy". (1:2.9)

One might think that Lady Victoria's decision to participate in the war against the kingdom of Faction brings her closer to the mythological Amazons. Lady Victoria along with her army realize that they do not know how to fight and use weapons. As a result, they organize a training camp where they exercise to gain the needed physical strength and fighting skills. Lady Victoria suggests: "*let us practice I say and make these Fields as Schools of Martial Arts and Sciences, so shall we become learned in their disciplines of War*" (1:2.9). The solution though practical and admirable, simply stresses the profound difference between the

dramatic and the mythological Amazons. To the mythological Amazons, warring practice start at an early age. Mayor clarifies that Amazons

started their training at an early age;... toddlers would have ridden horses with their parents and been able to ride alone by age five... children dressed and ate alike, all learned to tame and ride fast horses, shoot deadly arrows.(83)

By the time they reached adulthood,

Scythian women took on military obligations, could ride out to war whenever needed alongside the men.... This parallels the statements of Herodotus and Hippocrates, that it was customary of young women to prove themselves in battles, and that older women fought by choice or whenever necessary. (83)

The Scythian women embraced war as one of their obligation and this explains the early training. Thus, when war occurs they are ready to join the fight. They do not need to act like Lady Victoria and her army and train in the middle of the war. Women in the patriarchal system are not naturally equipped like the Amazons to live in an egalitarian society. This explains Lady Victoria's gradual movement towards her victorious Amazons army. However, it must be stressed that Cavendish's house wives evolution into a victorious Amazons serves her message brilliantly. She asserts that women can be Amazons and compete with men successfully in their favorite game, war. Yet, unlike the mythological Amazons they lacked the egalitarian context that does not turn their experience into a novelty. They need an Amazon-like environment where their military action is part of an extended context marked by equality. Thus, the ability to carry weapon and use them efficiently at war is not the miraculous solution for women's marginal position. During the English Civil War, women carried arms to defend their houses and neighbors (Hughes, 38). In 1642 the pro-parliamentarian news sheet, *The Scots Scouts*, writes, "since the King's departure from London, Whitehall is became an Amazonian castle" (Potter 79). Significantly, royalists and parliamentarians alike did not tolerate women who took active part in the fight (Hughes 49-54). Women who were caught participating in the fight or directly challenging the feminine norms "risked terrible revenge."

(Hughes 41). In many cases they slit their noses which was a standard punishment for a whore. In other cases they were killed and thrown into the sea or river, which “echoes the community punishment for witches” (Hughes 41). Living during such times, Cavendish realized that the problem is not women’s abilities, but the patriarchal system that perceives women not as partners but as a serious threat to their power. Such perception explains the system’s refusal to grant women equal treatment and end their marginal position.

Lady Victoria and her female army are seriously undermined not only through the contrast with the mythological Amazons, but also through what this study calls the anti-Amazon ladies of the Kingdom of Reformation. The anti-Amazon ladies show a complete indifference towards Lady Victoria’s endeavor. Furthermore, they express their comfort to live under the patriarchal system. The ladies under consideration are Madam Whiffell, Madam Ruffell and Madam Jantil. Unlike Lady Victoria’s Amazons, they are not faceless and nameless. They are social elites whose husbands are military figures with hereditary wealth and a long history of heroic achievements. When Captain Whiffell informs his wife that the General’s Lady who is “fine” and “*young ventures to go*” with him to war, Madam Whiffell responds, “*There let her venture, for you must excuse me, for I will stay at home, go you where you please*” (1:2.5). Lady Whiffell fails to show any understanding of Lady Victoria’s attempt. She explains to her husband, “*Alas...I am so tender, that I am apt to catch cold if the least puff of wind does but blow upon me; wherefore to lie in the open Fields will kill me the first Night, if not, the very journey will shatter my small bones to pieces*” (1:2.5). To justify her lack of interest, Madam Whiffell invokes the conventional patriarchal sexist concept which promotes the delicacy of the female constitution. Conventionally, Patriarchy associates qualities like, “*vulnerability, emotional expressiveness, and other nonlinear way of thinking with femininity and femaleness*” (Johnson 6). In her turn, Madam Ruffell adheres to the same patriarchal perception of femininity. When her husband asks her “to follow the Army,” she responds, “*I will not disquiet my rest with inconveniences, nor divert my pleasures with troubles, nor be affrighted with the roaring Cannons, nor endanger my*

life with every pot gun, nor be frozen up with Cold, nor stews to a gully with heat, nor be powdered up with dust” (1:2.5-6). Lady Ruffell detailed description of the damages befalling her should she join her husband shows her self-interest. The same lack of interest in Lady Victoria's proposal is expressed by Madam Jantil who decides to follow her husband's advice and stay home. He tells her, *“I will leave thee safe at home; for I am loth to venture ally wealth and happiness in Fortune Inconstant Bark, suffering thy tender youth and sexton float on rough waves of chance, where dangers...may come, and overwhelm thee, wherefore for my sake keep thy self-safe at home” (1:2.7).* To that she responds, *“I shall obey you” (1:2.7).* Obviously, Lady Victoria's powerful friends are satisfied to live within the privileged comfort of their marginal position imposed by the patriarchal system. This shows patriarchy as a serious obstacle that prevents women's empowerment, goes beyond the conscious level to embrace the subconscious. Conventionally, De Beauvoir blames women and women only for their failure to empower themselves. She argues

“If woman discovers herself as the inessential and never turns into the essential, it is because she does not bring about this transformation herself

.... They live dispersed among men, tied by homes, work, economic interests,

and social conditions to certain men fathers or husbands more closely than

to other women.” (33)

To show the peculiar position of women as far as power is concerned, she explains that the oppressed groups changed their situation from being the Other to the Self; from the Object to the Subject. (28). Unlike Beauvoir, Cavendish does not blame the female population for their inessential position. It is true that she stages an anti-Amazon women, but she also makes it clear that women have staged a revolution, executed their decisions and proved that they are not inferior to men. Tragically, they fail to bring the needed and deserved fundamental change. Patriarchy which is deeply rooted to system that controlled their lives for thousands of years obstructs the change.

Rhetoric and gender: Masculine Discourse and Feminine Voice

To stress patriarchy's devastating ability to disempower the dramatic Amazons, Cavendish allows Lady Victoria to employ the art of rhetoric as a means of communication. James Herrick writes that rhetoric is "*a field that was shaped largely by men*" (238). In ancient Greece, rhetoric shaped the patriarchal power structure of the society. Josiah Ober writes, "*All native free-born males, irrespective of their ability, were politically equal, with equal rights to debate and to determine state policy*" (7). The connection between rhetoric and patriarchy in ancient Greece is obvious through the fact that "*women, slaves and foreigners were conspicuously excluded from power*" (Herrick 238). This factor motivates Leslie Di Mare to argue that "*rhetoric has stood as the condition for the emergence of patriarchy.*" She elaborates, "*Although other disciplines have been used by the patriarchy to create the perception that women function best biologically, none has been used so effectively as the discipline of rhetoric*"(88; 47). Ironically, rhetoric, which is one of the patriarchal tools used to oppress women, turns out to be Lady Victoria's weapon to empower herself in both private and public domains. On the private level, she attempts to gain her husband's permission to accompany him to war through the usage of complex and multifaceted rhetoric. Significantly, her rhetoric endorses the sexist concept which is at the heart of patriarchy. The rhetoric Victoria utilizes presents her as a woman who suffers from identity crisis. She tells her husband, "*I must partake of your actions, and go along with you*" (1:1.2). To strengthen her position, she confirms "*my life lives in yours, and the comfort of that life in your company*" (1:1.2). She provides a detailed picture of her condition away from her husband. She explains: "*If I stay behind you, the very imaginations of your danger will torture me, sad Dreams will affright me, every little noise will sound as your passing Bell, and my fearful mind will transform every object like as your pale Ghost, until I am smothered in my Sighs, shrouded in my Tears, and buried in my Griefs*" (1:1.2). The fact that Lady Victoria cannot find peace away from her husband can be perceived as one of the patriarchal system effects. Women do not perceive themselves as independent individuals. De

Beauvoir argues that “*Man thinks himself without woman. Woman does not think of herself without man*” (26). Ironically, while trying to present herself as an essential figure, Lady Victoria emerges inessential, thus, endorsing the sexist perception of women. To further endorse her argument, Victoria adopts another sexist concept of lacking in women. She threatens to dishonor her husband should he leave without her. Robert Nye explains the relationship between the code of honor and patriarchy. He asserts that the “*concept of honor originated in an ideology of noble military service*” (15). Since women are not perceived as an independent entity but rather in connection to men, it is natural that “*a woman's honor is included within the larger sphere of a man's which it is his duty to superintend*” (15-16). Significantly, Lady Victoria adopts the patriarchal concept and confirms that unlike men, women are incapable of protecting their honor; they need a man to perform this task. To explain her stand she cites Penelope, Ulysses' wife as an example. She reminds her husband of Penelope behavior towards her numerous suitors,

The most perfects and constants wife in her Husband's absence was pene-lope...she did not Barricade her Ears from Loves soft alarums; but parle + and received Amorous Treaties... and questionless there were Amorous Glances shot from loving eyes of either part;... though she kept the fort of her Chastity, she lost the Kingdom,... which was a dishonor both to her and her Husbands.” (1:1.2)

Penelope is known to be an exemplarily faithful wife who waits twenty years for the return of her husband Odysseus. Throughout the twenty years, she was surrounded by suitors who exploited and damaged her absent husband's wealth and kingdom. According to Victoria's version of the myth, Penelope plays an essential role in dishonoring her husband as she fails to be firm and rejects the suitors' proposals. Marilyn Kats confirms that Penelope “*neither refuses the hateful marriage nor does she bring matters... [to an end]*” (7; 9). Kats argues that Penelope plays with success, the amorous game along with tricks and contradictory attitudes. Aristotle believes that such crafty, inconsistent behavior is typically female. In *The History of Animals*, he insists that compared to men, women are “*more void of shame or self-respect, more false of*

speech, more deceptive" (9: 1). Aristotle's unsympathetic attitude towards women's behavior is in harmony with the patriarchal perception of the female's "*nonlinear way of thinking*." According to such patriarchal perception, Penelope's behavior is typical of her sex. Since the protection of honor falls upon men, she waits for twenty years for Odysseus to come back home to rescue his honor and by extension hers (Pomeroy 120-122). By choosing Penelope, Victoria assimilates the patriarchal rhetoric and turns her female self into an agent of femininity. The contradiction between what she wants to achieve and how she is achieving it, is the result of the fact that "*women's voices are not heard in language*" (Foss 151). According to Michael Foucault, women "*are denied a voice in culture, because their discourse has been excluded from public realm*" (Foss 152). What is peculiar about Lady Victoria's complex position is the fact that she does not have a cultural voice as a woman. Thus, she borrows the available sexist rhetoric conventionally associated with the oppressor (man) to express herself.

In need of a voice for the public domain, Victoria once again borrows the masculine rhetoric of patriarchy. Paul Linke argues that patriarchal system endorses male rhetoric "*as the primary authority figure, central to a social organization. It [promotes]...male rule and privilege, what is opposite to women authority*" (60). Through rhetoric, Victoria emulates the patriarchal male figure and appoints herself as the source of lawmaking and the tool of executive authority at the same time. She names herself the Generaless to her newly found army. She informs her female companions, "*If you please to make me your Tutoress, and so you're Generaless, I shall take the power and command from your election and authority*" (I: 2.9). Like a sexist patriarchal figure, Lady Victoria fails to embrace an egalitarian style, regarding law making and execution of power. She denies women the right of choice, decision making while expecting complete obedience. After appointing herself as the Generaless, she proceeds to set the rules the female army would follow. She instructs them, "*Worthy Heroickesses, give me leave to set the Laws and Rules I would have you keep and observe, in a brass Tablets*" (I: 2.9). Indeed, the Generaless provides the army with fifteen rules "*to observe and keep*" (I: 2.9). Significantly, none of the fifteen

rules is introduced by Lady Victoria female peers. According to Foss' analysis of male rhetoric, it can be concluded that Lady Victoria "*features men's perspectives and silences women*" (152). Victoria's masculine rhetoric can be also be perceived through the oppressive and commanding language she employs in addressing the female army. Johnson argues that in patriarchal system assuming the position of authority creates power difference resulting in creating superiors and inferiors/ central and marginal (95-96). Herrick argues, "*The exclusion of women from the rhetorical mainstream has resulted in the loss of women's meanings, and thus, it is argued, in the loss of women themselves*" (238). The lost Victoria borrows the masculine/patriarchal language to command, rule and silence women. As a voiceless and powerless figure, she imitates the patriarchal rhetoric, which is the only power-language available. Like most oppressed groups, Lady Victoria's oppressive behavior towards her female army can be read as a compensation for her disadvantageous position as a female living in a patriarchal society (Johnson 95-96; 102).

Conclusion

Critics tend to oversimplify Cavendish's *Bell in Campo* and consider it as a celebration of women's empowerment. Indeed the play highlights women's power to stage a revolution against patriarchy and condemn their marginal position. However, Cavendish's concern is more profound than the ability to be an Amazon warrior. She proves to be a pioneer in her particular critique of patriarchy and women's marginal position. Cavendish avoids the conventional debates about women's physical and mental abilities to compete efficiently with men. She actually employs the mythology of the Amazon warriors as a bridge to cross to her main aim and examines the factors behind's women's inability to move from the margin to the centre in spite of their abilities. This approach takes us directly to the patriarchal system and its mechanism to keep women away from power. Cavendish employs a complex and multifaceted dramaturgy to prove that women fail to empower themselves not because they are weak but because of the formidable and deeply rooted patriarchal system. The complexity of her approach is perceived through the manipulation of the mythology against an ultra-patriarchal context. She creates the fantastical Kingdom of

Reformation where the patriarchal system is in complete control of the social, military and political aspects. The fantastical element gives the illusion of a light hearted side to the play. However, this artificial mask hides an oppressive and territorial system that goes beyond the imaginative Kingdom to embrace Cavendish's real kingdom and shapes the lives of its female inhabitants. In an attempt to leave the margin, Cavendish's heroine Lady Victoria emulates the mythological Amazons and creates an army that participates in the war and emerges victorious. Apparently, Cavendish follows the ancient Greek comedy which used mythologies to stress the impossibilities of solving their contemporary problems. In an attempt to reveal the factors behind women's failure to leave the margin, Cavendish constructs a contrast between the dramatic and the mythological Amazons. The dramatic Amazons fails to win the needed recognition because unlike the mythological Amazons, they do not live in an egalitarian context. The patriarchal system exercises a conscious and subconscious forms of oppression. On the conscious level, the patriarchal system refuses to allow women a space at the center in spite of their outstanding military victory. On the subconscious level, the patriarchal system controls the way women thinks. This s clear through the evolution process of forming the Amazon army, the anti-Amazons ladies and the masculine rhetoric that Lady Victoria uses with her female army. Just like the anti-amazons who are comfortable to live under oppression, Lady Victoria is as comfortable using the language of the oppressors. Thus, the rooted patriarchy emerges as the key factor in keeping women at the margin. Women prove themselves to be dynamic power and not selfish and indifferent as De Beauvoir believes. For women to defeat a deeply rooted system like patriarchy, they need similarly effective tools. An egalitarian community like the Amazons is attractive prospect but it does need a context to survive and thrive. Unfortunately, Cavendish believes that it is impossible for such context to exist during her time.

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