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"NEXT UNTO THE GODS MY LIFE SHALL BE SPENT IN CONTEMPLATION OF HIM": MARGARET CAVENDISH'S DRAMATISED WIDOWHOOD IN *BELL IN CAMPO* (I&II)

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ABSTRACT

Margaret Cavendish (1623–1673) is nowadays remembered as one of the most outspoken female writers and playwrights of the mid-seventeenth-century; one who openly promoted women's right to education and public displays of creativity. Thus she paved the way for other female artists, such as her near contemporary, Aphra Behn. Although in her times seen as a harmless curiosity rather than a paragon to emulate, Cavendish managed to publish her plays along with more philosophical texts. Thanks to the re-discovery of female artists by feminist revisionism, her drama is now treated as a valuable source of knowledge on the values and norms of her class, gender, and, more generally, English society in the seventeenth century.

Cavendish's two-partite play *Bell in Campo* (1662) is a fantasy on the world where women can fight united not only against misogyny but also against an actual enemy. While the two plays seem to be focused on the valiant Lady Victoria and her female "Noble Heroicks", *Bell in Campo* likewise offers an odd subplot featuring two widows and their lives without their beloved husbands. In the secular discourse of the seventeenth century, widowhood has been seen as either liberating – as when the woman became the sole owner of her husband's estate and goods, or regained her own, and thus more independent – or degrading – when she became the not-so-welcomed burden on her children's shoulders and pockets. Other studies on widowhood likewise state its symbolic function, showing women as the bearers of memory, predominantly of the husband and his virtues, and often attending to the spouse's site of memory. While discussing the cultural history of properly performed widowhood, seen as the final (st)age of a woman's life, and taking into account Cavendish's remarkable biography, the present paper offers a close study of her propositions for appropriate widowhood and its positioning in contrast to other states of womankind as presented in

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Bell in Campo.[1] It will likewise take into account the more or less sublimated evidence for gerontophobia, particularly in relation to women, as shown in Cavendish's play and seventeenth-century culture.

Keywords: Margaret Cavendish; humanist gerontology; Restoration; widowhood; ageing; old age; theatre.

Margaret Cavendish[2] is one of the many English female authors whose life and work have been recovered and reinterpreted within feminist research, which, among others, aimed to correct the conviction that there were not many female playwrights before the eighteenth century, or at least before the Restoration's Aphra Behn.[3] And even among these first female playwrights Cavendish has proved to be quite extraordinary. Virginia Woolf, relating Cavendish's early life under the supervision of an elderly dame, points out that she grew beyond personal and cultural limitations placed on a woman like her: "Such a training, at once so cloistered and so free, should have bred a lettered old maid, glad of her seclusion, and the writer perhaps of some volume of letters or translations from the classics, which we should still quote as proof of the cultivation of our ancestresses" (Woolf 1948: 100). Although critical of Cavendish in general,[4] Woolf was right that her literary legacy is far more varied than it could be expected, ranging from orations and essays to short fiction, plays, and a utopian vision. Such a diverse literary output should be seen as even more extraordinary in the context of seventeenth-century England because, in contrast to many other creative women who rather wrote for themselves or their friends, Cavendish insisted on being publicly acknowledged as the author of her works. Alexandra G. Bennett points to the importance of Cavendish's ways and means of self-presentation and self-promotion as an author, stressing that "not only did she

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2 To avoid confusion, Margaret Cavendish will be referred to as Cavendish or the Duchess, if necessary even before her marriage; while William Cavendish will be denoted as the Duke of Newcastle.

3 Judith Peacock offers a very interesting comparison between Behn and Cavendish. See her "Writing for the brain and writing for the Boards: The producibility of Margaret Cavendish's dramatic text" (2003). For more on Cavendish's life and art see the invaluable *A Princely Brave Woman. Essays on Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle* (2003a), edited by Stephen Clucas.

4 See her review of Cavendish's work in Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1989). Lara Dodds addresses this criticism in "Bawds and housewives: Margaret Cavendish and the work of 'Bad Writing'", *Early Modern Studies Journal* 6 (2014).

present copies of all of her works to prominent institutions, including universities of Oxford and Cambridge, but she addressed herself specifically to her readers…, frequently responded to comments or criticisms in subsequent works, and ultimately succeeded in becoming a publishing innovator in a number of original genres" (Bennett 2002: 10). This willing exposure earned her credit as well as contributed to her ambiguous reputation.

Cavendish herself insisted that there is nothing dishonourable in her career and her art. Both in her private life and within her literary creations she strived to show that devotion to writing "possesses the seriousness appropriate to a married woman" which ultimately keeps her away from sinful temptations (James 2003: xix).[5] Susan James also suggests that this stress on honour and legitimacy of her creativity was aimed at influential men whose acceptance Cavendish was keen to receive. Similar insistence on recognized authorship pertains to her plays in particular. Stephen Clucas says: "Margaret Cavendish's plays are amongst her most adventurous and paradoxical literary endeavors, adventurous because of their potentially conspicuously public nature, and paradoxical because of Cavendish's (possibly disingenuous) insistence that her works were designed for publication rather than performance: written for the 'Brain' rather than the 'Stage'" (Clucas 2003b: 7). It took a while for her dramas, never staged in her times, to be fully appreciated and treated both as a collection of scenic installments of value to cultural studies and feminist research and a significant part of literary, theatrical, or dramatic history. The present paper hopefully adds to the wealth of studies on Cavendish's contribution to English literature and culture, herein offering a close reading and analysis of the two-partite *Bell in Campo* (1662),[6] a dramatic narrative of ambiguous genre.[7] However, rather than focusing on its main heroine – Lady Victoria, the victorious Generalness – the paper shifts the attention to the subplot, or the fate of two widows, Lady Jantil and Lady Passionate. Basing the analysis on the playtext, Cavendish's biography as well as cultural intertexts pertaining to the proper performance of widowhood, the paper comments on the socio-cultural perception of widows, stressing their chronological, or calendar ages,[8] as well as Cavendish's personal opinion on the post-marital future of women. It thus strives to place the play's analysis within feminist and humanist gerontology as well as ageing studies, to answer the

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5 See the Preface to *Observations upon Experimental Philosophy* (1666). Herein she also anticipates others calling her "much writing" an illness. See Cavendish (1995: 13).

6 While the folio comes from 1662, the play itself might have been written earlier (Bennett 2002: 12).

7 *Bell in Campo* has been variously labelled a 'heroic romance', a 'dramatic utopia', a comedy, and a tragicomedy (Cuder-Domínguez 2016: 47).

8 Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane distinguish between chronological, functional, and cultural old age in their *Women and Ageing in British Society since 1500* (2001).

question of whether the playwright condoned or criticised the types and patterns of widowhood presented in *Bell in Campo*[9] and observed in early modern England.

Cavendish's works show that she was an acute observer of the lives and manners of the higher classes, which became an even more invested hobby when she joined the Royal court of Henrietta Maria and married the Marquess of Newcastle, later Duke, William Cavendish. Being ambitious, open minded, and well-read, she was shocked by the foibles and ridiculousness of some of the high born ladies she came across. Simultaneously, she searched for the reasons of such a mental and behavioural discrepancy among those of her own sex, and, thus, investigated the foundations and politics of gender inequality. Consequently, her works often focus on the importance of a more serious as well as liberal education for ladies,[10] preferably in seclusion from the hustle and bustle of the outside patriarchal world.[11] However, what bothered her even more was (learnt) passivity and the social and cultural imprisonment of women in particular social roles – especially as wives – as well as the lack of recognition and respect women were experiencing for the performance of these roles. Anonymity, or total obscurity, were not acceptable to Cavendish,[12] so much so that she even created her own fashion style rather than followed the fanciful dress code of the period. The autobiographical and critical studies concerning the Duchess[13] always allude to this peculiar self-presentation,[14] reiterating the nickname of "Mad Madge", due to her behaviour and lifestyle. Surprisingly, this, as Janet Todd (1989: 55) terms it, "monstrous self-expression" was condoned, perhaps even encouraged, by her aristocratic husband. While it seems somewhat inappropriate in an inevitably feminist-oriented paper, the

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9 All quotes from the plays come from Margaret Cavendish, *The Convent of Pleasure and Other Plays,* edited by Anne Shaver (1999). The references include the part number, followed by act, scene, and page number.

10 See more in Janet Todd's *The Sign of Angelica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660–1800* (1989) and Margaret Ezell's *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (1987).

11 See *The Convent of Pleasure* for some of these ideas.

12 Her motto was "It is better to be Envied, than Pitied". See *The Cavalier in Exile, Being the Lives of the First Duke and Duchess of Newcastle written by Margaret the Duchess of Newcastle* (1903: xv). Kate Lilley says: "Fear of anonymity and oblivion – of being mistaken for, or judged less worthy than, a past or future wife of Newcastle; of being charged with plagiarism or of being plagiarised; of being forgotten or lost to the historical record – are everywhere thematised in Cavendish's writing and ameliorated through her strenuous attention to publication, distribution and prefatory instruction" (Lilley 2003: 21).

13 See for example Janet Todd's *The Sign of Angelica: Women, Writing and Fiction, 1660-1800* (1989).

14 For more on Cavendish's methods and meanings of self-fashioning within and without her dramas, see Rebecca D'Monté's "'Making a spectacle': Margaret Cavendish and the staging of the self" (2003).

influence of Cavendish’s husband on her life and work needs to be stressed. It will not only explain her prolific writing career, but also, as I hope to show, the dramatic story within her 1660s drama, *Bell in Campo*. Margaret met William Cavendish, a wealthy, aristocratic patron of the arts, a courtier and playwright, in 1645. She was his second wife and thirty years younger than him. Cavendish never ceased to promote her husband’s personal and public virtues,[15] his wisdom and literary talent, just as much as he encouraged and validated her artistic and intellectual endeavours. The study of her autobiographical narratives and dedications (and not necessarily critical studies) suggest that they were a perfect match,[16] with Margaret willingly seeing him as her master in all possible meanings. While striving to be a perfect wife, however, she never gave up on her wish to become her own person; she did not find these mutually exclusive as patriarchal ideology taught. Being her own person in Cavendish’s case included an independent literary career.[17]

As Pilar Cuder-Domíngues relates, for Cavendish theatre was “a site of moral learning and good examples, ... a medium for education” (Cuder-Domíngues 2016: 38). While deliberating on all social interactions, she focused her dramatic pieces on lessons on women’s fate and rights. In all of her plays, Cavendish writes about the freedom and agency of women of all social states (which does not equal classes), as well as their right to self-expression, almost always in necessary isolation. *Bell in Campo* is different in that it imagines women’s access to the masculine sphere of brutal military action. The main event of the play is the final throes of the war between the Kingdoms of Faction and Reformation. The army under the Lord General decides to leave the women at home, allegedly where they belong, and engage in the masculine affair of warfare.[18] Some of the wives demand to go with the army, although the men treat this as a setback and an unnecessary distraction. Lady Victoria, the Lord General’s wife, is more insistent

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15 She is not shy to mention how much she appreciates his acceptance of her barrenness, despite wanting more (male) children (Cavendish 1903: 56).

16 In *A True Relation of the Birth, Breeding, and Life of Margaret a Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, Written by Herself* (1814) she says that “…it was not Amorous Love, I never was infected therewith, it is a Disease, … but my Love was honest and honourable, … being placed upon Merit, which Affection joy’d at the fame of his Worth …” (Cavendish 1814: 220).

17 Valerie Billing analyses the dynamics between the spouses and its influence on Cavendish’s artistic individuality: “This acknowledgment of her husband’s hand in a volume that includes only her name on the title page allows Cavendish to construct a collaborative marriage through collaborative authorship while asserting her own individual identity within those two relationships. Indeed, this individuality is the key difference between collaborative marriage and companionate marriage: souls, bodies, and brains all exist in the plural in a collaborative marriage, eliding the traditional ‘two become on’ marriage paradigm” (Billing 2011: 100).

18 For more on Cavendish’s ideas on warfare or her expertise, see, for example, Joanne H. Wright’s two articles: “Not just dutiful wives and besotted ladies: Epistemic agency in the war writing of Brilliana Harley and Margaret Cavendish” (2009), and “Questioning gender, war, and ‘The old lie’: The military expertise of Margaret Cavendish” (2011).

than the other women, convincing her husband that her place is by his side and there is no other way for both of them to preserve the family's honour. The General has to agree, even though in his opinion: "Nature hath made women like China, or Purselyn, they must be used gently, and kept warily, or they will break and fall on Death's head" (*Bell* I, 1.2, 110). Eventually, some of the women are allowed to station with the army, until a more serious fight ensues and they are pushed aside. This incenses Lady Victoria who renders it an act of disrespectful male chauvinism. In her speech to the rest of the women she reconceptualises the seeming protectionism into the jealousy-motivated obliteration of female potential:

> …the Masculine Sex hath separated us, … either out of their loving care and desire of preserving our lives and liberties, … or else it must be out of jealousy we should Eclipse the fame of their valours with the splendour of our constancy… .
>
> (*Bell* I, 2.9, 118)

Quoting the nature/nurture basis of gender bias, and nowhere more powerful than in politics, Victoria calls for proper offensive action to prove that women are not only fit to breed children (*Bell* I, 2.9, 119), but can face the enemy just as fiercely as men. Eventually, she manages to create her own army of the "Most Heroical Spirits" (*Bell* I, 2.9, 118), "Noble Heroickesses" (*Bell* I, 2.9, 120), and "Effeminate Army" (*Bell* I, 3.11, 125), the latter in a positive sense. Eventually, becoming something of a despotic leader, Lady Victoria's army manages to win most of the clashes they engage in, only to grant all the victorious splendor to the men in the end. This is on the condition that the female sex is given many personal and legal rights, and their social and cultural position is to be altered forever. These prerogatives are, however, only available to the female fighters, although the play features two other women who did not engage in the war – the young Madam Jantil and the elderly Madam Passionate. While the first was more than keen to follow her husband to the Garrison Town, Madam Passionate even questioned her old husband's (Monsieur la Hardy) qualification for warfare. Soon after, both men are killed, leaving the women widows, and, as the play shows, placing them back on the marriage market or, in the context of the play, making them newly available boons of amorous warfare.

Before enforcing her military mission, Lady Victoria explains to the General that without him, her spouse and master, she is no one, because they constitute a unity only in marriage. She further explains: "whatsoever is joyned with true love, will dye absented, or else their love will dye, for love and life are joyned together" (*Bell* I, 1.2, 110). As widows, both Madame Jantil and Passionate should prove this statement right, and indeed both realize this threat of annihilation, though in different ways, and not necessarily once the grieving period is over. The play sees Madame Passionate giving in to the ambiguous social convention of remarrying,

while Jantil decides for a more spiritual ideal of widowhood. And yet both women, according to Cavendish, make a mistake in designing their futures, and may act as the negative counter-examples to the valiant and active Lady Victoria.

In many socio-cultural studies,[19] widowhood has been presented as either liberational or restrictive, the latter especially for poorer classes. Allison Levy sees this ambiguous positioning thus: “Upon widowhood, there were many expectations but just as many opportunities – conflicting and consensual, desirable and devastating, ephemeral and eternal” (Levy 2003: 3). More often than not, as Alannah Tomkins (2005: 157) reminds, “a husband’s death represented economic disaster, since it frequently either initiated or exacerbated poverty. Remarriage was a route to economic survival, but the majority of widows found remarriage difficult because widowhood had rendered them too poor to be attractive in the marriage market”.[20] On the other hand, as studies of the early modern period suggest, no longer *femme covert* after their husbands’ deaths, women of better standing could gain enough power and means to live a comfortable and independent life. For the remaining years they finally could decide about their own wealth, households and, generally, their futures, and another marriage was not necessary or even desired. This, however, was also dependent on the number of dependents, such as children, and the widow’s age. Having children meant both a further struggle to raise them to successful adulthood and, later on, a more or less welcomed (on both sides) dependence on the offspring’s care and charity in old age. While younger, childless women could enjoy or had to opt for another relationship, “[a]n aged woman, one past childbearing, had outlived her usefulness, was once again ‘out of order,’ and consequently entered into a transgressive category” (Botelho 2002: 235). In general, then, widowhood was both a personal tragedy and a social issue, because “these were women alone, some in command of money and assets, others so poor without a man to support them that they might threaten public morality” (Hufton 1995: 221). The moral threat was likewise suggested in relation to the widow’s experience, to the fact that “the widow brought with her into a second or later marriage not only experience of financial and legal transactions, but her previous marital and sexual experience as well” (Cavallo & Warner 1999b: 10). This experience was problematic not only due to patriarchal rules of normativity in relation to female conduct but also due to the decorum expected of a widow, especially her physical, mental, and sexual retreat from the hustle and bustle of life.

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[19] See for example Judith M. Bennett & Amy M. Fronde (eds.), *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800* (1999); Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe*. Vol. 1. *1500–1800* (1995); Sandra Cavallo & Lyndan Warner (eds.), *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (1999a); while Jennifer Panek’s *Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy* (2004) discusses the reflection of the sociopolitical reality in drama.

[20] Only a quarter of widows remarried in the late seventeenth century (Tomkins 2005: 157).

Many feminist studies point to widowhood's cultural and religious equivalence or even higher value than virginity.[21] Physical, mental, and spiritual withdrawal was advised for both socio-biological states, but it was the experienced widow's sexual restraint that was considered more challenging and therefore more praiseworthy. While there seems to be an overabundance of narratives on the proper comportment and management of maidens in every period, widowhood likewise engendered some important texts of conduct, both of a religious and secular nature. The most well-read and republished book of conduct that thoroughly commented on the appropriately performed female widowhood was Juan Luis Vives' *The Instruction of a Christen Woman* (originally published in Latin 1523; English translation 1529).[22] While the text was not available to everyone at that time, it is one of the most foundational humanist narratives of the European Renaissance, and it may function as a compendium of ideas concerning early modern ideals of femininity, which would still be considered the ideological ideal in Cavendish's times. A similar function could be attributed to the English *The Law's Resolutions of Women's Rights* (1632),[23] which, as Joan Larsen Klein (1992: 27) stresses, "is important to us because it provides in one convenient place … all the laws regarding women's legal rights and obligations which obtained in England during the early modern period".

The death of a spouse seemed to have different consequences for men and women. Death was, of course, traumatic for both sexes, or as J. S. W. Helt states: "[d]eath's devastating arrival opens up spaces in personal and social relationships by fragmenting identity and authority, and this destructive power challenges stability on both a personal and communal level through the process of 'alienation'" (Helt 2003: 41). Both the third book of Vives' "rules of lyvyng" (2002 [1529]: 8), as he says in the Preface, and the fourth of the anonymous legal text with "profitable and useful learning" recognize the gravity of the widowed state but stress the tragedy as experienced by women. Margaret Pelling (1999: 43) opines that men's lives were not dramatically altered or transformed by the loss of their wives; women, on the other hand, according to Vives, experienced "greattest losse and dammage, that can bechaunce her in the worlds: … and that she hath loste nat only the one halfe of her owne lyfe … but her selfe also to be taken from her selfe all to gether, and perished" (Vives 2002 [1529]: 161). *The Law's Resolutions* is even more graphic: "… her

[21] For more on the comparisons and contrasts between virginity and widowhood, see, for instance, Cindy L. Carlson & Angela Jane Weisl (eds.), *Constructions of Widowhood and Virginity in the Middle Ages* (1999).

[22] Juan Luis Vives, *The Instruction of a Christen Woman*, edited by Virginia Walcott Beauchamp, Elizabeth H. Hageman & Margaret Mikesell (2002).

[23] Joan Larsen Klein (ed.), *Daughters, Wives and Widows: Writings by Men about Women and Marriage in England, 1500–1640* (1992).

head is cut off, her intellectual part is gone, the very faculties of her soul are (I will not say) clean taken away, but they are all benumbed, dimmed, and dazzled…" (quoted in Klein 1992: 50). Vives' words in particular resonate with Cavendish's Lady Victoria's statement quoted above, and, further on, the playwright even unknowingly elaborates on Vives' subsequent opinion that mourning has to be properly performed. In the *Instructions*, he states that it is wrong when women "mourne to moche, and those that mourne to lyttel" (Vives 2002 [1529]: 161), and indeed *Bell in Campo*'s two widows do just that – their grief reaches these two extremes. As will be shown, Cavendish offers a rather implicit suggestion that neither version of widowhood is necessary or recommendable for women.

The older character, Madam Passionate, was probably modelled on the few, although stereotypical, rich widows, desperate to remarry as soon as possible, preferably to someone much younger. While Cavendish could have used a character resembling self-sufficient matrons that did not need or want to marry, or widows who married out of genuine affection – considering that her husband's grandmother was the (in)famous Elizabeth (Bess) Hardwicke, married and widowed four times, which helped her not only to accumulate some wealth but also meddle in politics,[24] – she chose the comic stereotype of an old lusty, loud, and foolish widow, who becomes the victim of the desperate schemes of the younger, money-oriented generation of men. Vives warned in his book of conduct that widows should never be glad that they are "ryd out of yocke and bondage" (Vives 2002 [1529]: 163), and indeed Passionate seems devastated by the loss of Monsieur la Hardy. However, after a brief period of alcohol-infused grief, she begins to rethink her solitary future, and Cavendish's play becomes a marvellous source of contemporary convictions on widow re-marriage, and in particular those involving older women and younger gentlemen, usually the younger sons, which seemed to be as much a stereotype as a social fact. Madame Passionate's servant, Doll Pacify, says that "old Maid and musty Widows are like the plague shun'd of by all men…" (*Bell* I, 5.25, 138); however, both culturally and within the play remarrying seemed to be a necessary evil.[25] Seventeenth-century ballads,

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24 See more about the Queen Mary-Arabella Stuart history here: http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/bess-of-hardwick.htm. Hufton offers Bess as an example of how important the dead spouse's will was for a widow — if it was not done right, or at all, she faced a life of despair; if the husband was rich, generous, and caring, she could gain social and political power (Hufton 1995: 232). When describing Cavendish's lineage, Margaret mentions that William's grandfather married the much younger Bess for her Beauty (Cavendish 1903: 150).

25 Comerade explains why younger brothers have to marry old ladies: "Poverty is the Slave and druge, the scorn and reproach of the World, & it makes all younger Brothers Sherks, and meer Cheats, whereas this old Ladies riches will not only give an honourable reputation in the World; for every one will think you Wise although you were a Fool … and if your old Lady day, and leave you her wealth, you shall have all the young beautiful Virgins in the Kingdome …" (*Bell* II, 3.12, 158).

such as *A Proverb Old, Yet Nere Forgot, Tis Good to Strike While the Irons Hott. Or, Counsell to All Young Men That Are Poore, To Marry with Widowes Now While There Is Store*, playfully promote but also describe age-mixed marriages and their seeming popularity. While the ballad jokingly stipulates that it is no shame to marry for money –

> If a poore Younge-man be matched
> With a Widdow stord with gold,
> And thereby be much inritched,
> Though hes young and she is old,
> Twill be no shame
> Vnto his Name, …
> (*Tis Good to Strike While the Irons Hott,* 55)[26]

– other narratives do notice the negative consequences of older widows' remarriage. There are even proverbs suggesting its unfavourable potential, for instance: "Long a widow weds with shame" (Howell as quoted in Botelho 2016: 48).[27]

In Cavendish's play, these arguments for and against are debated on by three bachelors, who decide to wage an attack on the newly single Passionate, following yet another proverb, "Marry a widow before she leaves mourning" (Howell as quoted in Botelho 2016: 46). Neither of them even likes or respects her, and they elaborate on the negative attitudes towards elderly women and widows in particular. Their conclusions point to the deep fear or even hatred of elderly women, and include reasons, such as biological decay, devilish connotations,[28] ugliness, and the drive for power experienced in the previous life or marriage more specifically. While most of these arguments could be descriptive of the other sex as well, the young Monsieur Compagnion quickly elaborates on the gendered nature of ageing:

> An ancient man is a comely sight, being grave and wise by experience, and what he hath lost in his person, he hath gained in his understanding; besides, beauty in men looks as unhandsome as age in women, as being effeminate; but an old woman looks like the picture of Envy, with hollow Eyes, fallen Cheeks, lank Sides, black pale Complexion, and more Wrinkles than time hath Minutes.
> (*Bell* II, 3.9, 153)

26 In Hyder E. Rollins (ed.), *A Pepysian Garland: Black Letter Broadside Ballad of the Years 1595–1639* (1922).

27 The proverbs come from James Howell's *Paroimiographia Proverbs, or Old Sayed Sawes and Adages in English* (1659) in Botelho's (2016) collection of texts on old age and ageing.

28 The opinion is as follows: "that is because they [old women] are grown ill-favoured with Age, and all young people think whatsoever is ill-favoured belongs to the Devill" (*Bell* II, 3.9, 153).

To this Monsieur Comerade adds: “some old women look like the full Moon, with a red, swell’d, great, broad face, and their Bodies like as a spunky Cloud, thick and gross” (*Bell* II, 3.9, 153). The disgust is obvious in all their conversations, but it does not prevent them from courting Passionate and, to her own detriment, she indeed chooses Compagnion, instead of her age peer, La Gravity. Vives suggested that if a helpless woman really needs to remarry – for instance if she is young and childless or requires assistance when older and none of her kin can help, – it should not be “yong men, wanton, hote, and full of playe, ignorance, and riotous… but … an husbande some thyng past mydle age, sober, sad, and of good wyt, experte with great use of the worlde” (Vives 2002 [1529]: 178). Though making such suggestions himself, La Gravity has to finally give up, saying “I perceive she hath a young Tooth in her old head by refusing me…” (*Bell* II, 3.12, 159). Unsurprisingly, Passionate pays for her reawakened lustiness and for forgetting her age. Reawakened lust in particular was of interest to various moralizers who usually cautioned against the forceful female sexual drive and in particular its rekindled power once released from the sanitizing confines of marriage, especially in old age. Cavendish does not openly suggest that there is any truth in such pseudoedicts or that women who think they can be genuinely desired by younger men have to be punished with a miserable life, but both ballads and conduct texts of the time put a lot of blame on the older person for whatever unhappiness ensues in such situations. Thus, Passionate is definitely not the “ideal Protestant widow [who] may have had the opportunities to exercise her independence” or to redirect “her energies into spiritual matters, salvation and the attainment of Christian virtues” (Cavallo & Warner 1999b: 7). She chooses the tumult of life and wants its pleasures; therefore, misery is the consequence of her refusal to withdraw from society as expected of a widowed woman, an older person and a Christian.

As suggested earlier, secular and religious conduct texts taught that ideal widowhood denotes life in solitude, charity, and spiritual contemplation. These three purposes of widowed life are practiced by Madame Jantil, but her retirement is taken to extremes – instead of a peaceful life on the margins of society, a life devoted to spiritual self-examination, Jantil opts for a literal self-annihilation after her beloved husband’s death. The three gentlemen bachelors find it not only ridiculous but also a social waste that the young widow decided to shut herself away and dwell in misery and grief, contemplating the loss of her husband, sharing the seemingly common idea that wealthy women of marriageable age should be “repossessed and renegotiated” (Hufton 1995: 218). In the play, however, Cavendish presents their opinion only to satirize them in her readers’ eyes. She does not support the notion that widows need to be immediately snatched by suitors, or as the gentlemen joked, courted even before the husbands’ death just in case. Although texts of conduct reminded that after the earthly husband’s death, the widow should devote her life to the “Heavenly Spouse”,

Jantil cannot detach herself or her existence from her husband's, and insists on participating in "the ritual performance of remembering" (Helt 2003: 39) devoted to him.[29]

Madame Jantil could have been inspired by the actual widows that Cavendish might have personally known or heard of. She could have likewise been an over-exaggerated creation of her vivid imagination. However, something that other studies of the play do not mention, is that she could have been likewise modelled on Margaret's beloved mother, who never stopped grieving after Cavendish's father died (Whitaker 2003: 24). In her autobiography, Cavendish's father indeed grew to be an almost legendary hero, whose loss was not only invaluable,[30] but also must have created a subconscious pattern of masculinity to aim for. In this context, Cavendish's bombastic glorification of the Duke of Newcastle seems even more understandable. While Cavendish herself managed to create artistic eulogies of her husband while he was alive, she made Jantil even refashion her house into a temple devoted to her husband. The tomb of memory, full of artifacts and representations of Jantil's husband's heroic deeds, seems to be an attempt at preserving the carefully fashioned version of Lord General's life, making Jantil the guardian of his memory, but it might also be associated with Cavendish's personal opinion on remembrance. In her autobiography,[31] the Duchess offers some of her reflections on loss and memory, such as, for instance, "time is apt to waste remembrance as a consumptive body, or to wear it out like a garment into rags, or to moulder it into dust" (Cavendish 1814: 224). Jantil's commemorative artifacts are purposefully designed to withstand the corrosive lashes of time, but even such a monumental reification of her husband's glory does not seem enough. In the tomb, shut away from reality, she progressively sheds her own identity as a person, not as a woman, to function as an embodied site of memory for her husband. J. S. W. Helt (2003: 40) explains that "the widow's role in actively shaping remembrance can be most clearly seen in her participation in the rites of death and burial for her spouse, which served to create a memory of his 'good death' within *memento mori* tradition". Hufton (1995: 220) further reminds that "[a] woman's first task after her husband's death was to demonstrate to society that she venerated his memory". In Jantil's version this veneration is even more elaborate as she not only memorializes his life (and not just death), but her ritual performances of remembering which Helt discusses in her study of the early

[29] J. S. W. Helt, "Memento mori: Death, widowhood and remembering in Early a Modern Europe" (2003).

[30] For more on Cavendish's understanding and attitude towards grief see Joanne H. Wright, "Darkness, death, and precarious life in Cavendish's sociable letters and orations" (2014).

[31] Cavendish explains the reasons for writing her autobiography. She wanted to remain in public consciousness the way she wants to be remembered and even more importantly, to be distinguished from William's first wife and, if it happened, his third.

modern era are even more elaborate and more physical. For instance, the process of mourning as performed by Jantil requires a literal change of garment, from the rich crimson mantel of the happy wife to a white sheet of chaste widowhood. In one of her monologues, Jantil explains:

> Now I depose my self, and here lay down,
> Titles, not Honour, with my richer Crown;
> This Crimson Velvet Mantle I throw by,
> There ease and plenty in rich Ermins lie;
> Off with this glittring Gown which once did bear
> Ambition and fond pride lay you all here;…
> Thus all these Wordly vanities I wave,
> And bury them all in my Husbands grave.
> (*Bell* II, 2.7, 149)

It is important to note that this monologue as well as almost all other speeches of Jantil after her husband's death have been written by the Duke himself, which Cavendish openly admits as yet another act of praise. One can surmise, then, that this affective if not bombastic farewell to the world is what the Duke thought appropriate of a mourning spouse, and perhaps in a genre *Bell in Campo* represents.[32]

Whatever the expectations of the Duke of Newcastle, none of the Christian texts on widowhood required of the widowed person a purposeful demise in memory and honour of the spouse, and yet this is what Cavendish makes her Jantil do. The final scenes of the subplot show the withered body of Jantil entombed and buried alongside her husband. Rebecca D'Monté sees this in more elegiac terms: "She lies on the ground, trying literally to bury herself in the earth as she proclaims her own elegy" (D'Monté 2003: 116).[33] As such, Lady Victoria's warning that "love and life are joyned together" (*Bell* I, 1.2, 110) has been fulfilled. Jantil's life was irrevocably conjoined with her husband's, for 'she was he',[34] as marriage conduct texts like to remind. Jantil, then, gives proof to Vives' earlier quote that a widowed woman has 'her selfe' taken away from 'her selfe all to gether' (Vives 2002 [1529]: 161). As such, of the two widows it is

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32 While it was suggested that royalist women shared the ideas of their husbands (see Hero Chalmers 2004), it is important to understand how much these spouses differed in their political idea(l)s, see Hilda L. Smith "'A General War amongst the Men . . . But None amongst the Women': Political differences between Margaret and William Cavendish" (1997). Margaret Cavendish's royalism is explained by Elizabeth Walters in her "Gender and Civil War politics in Margaret Cavendish's 'Assaulted and Pursued Chastity'" (2013).

33 Importantly, however, D'Monté also stresses the fact that despite this "dis-placement" of the body, the act itself is very spectacular – she is making herself a spectacle (D'Monté 2003: 116).

34 The idea appears, for instance, in William Whately's "A Bride Bush" (1617).

Passionate that is left to experience the life anew, but hers is an existence worse than death. She wails:

> …I was rich, and lived in plenty, none to control me, I was Mistriss of my self, Estate and Family, all my Servants obeyed me, none durst contradict me, … but now I am made a Slave, and in my old Age which requires rest and peace, … for the minstrels keep me waking, which play whilst my Husband and his Whores dance, and he… but sits amongst his Wenches and rails on me, or else comes and scoffs at me to my face; … for this idle young fellow which I have married first seized on all my goods, … and sells all my Lands of Inheritance, which I foolishly and fondly delivered by deed of gift, the first day I married, devesting my self of power, … I find I cannot live long, for age and disorders bring weakness and sickness, and weakness and sickness bring Death, wherefore my marriage Bed is like to prove my grave…
>
> (*Bell* II, 4.17, 162)

Sooner or later, and in much less romantic conditions, Passionate will join Jantil as well, although the play suggests that such elderly widows do live a long time and thus such suffering is prolonged.

With such a tragic ending to the widowhood subplot, one may conclude that Cavendish did not condone any of the decisions made by her widowed heroines. At the conclusion of her discussion on *Bell in Campo*, Bennett suggests that "a play-world can provide the opportunity for some women to take control over their own destinies in new ways" (Bennett 2003: 187), and the widows failed to do so, or made the wrong choice. As seen, Passionate's plot thread is a clear warning for older women who insist on participating in the life designed to younger ones, and enliven their passions rather than progressively subdue them. The widowed body is to be a regained seat of chastity, as medieval theologians reminded, and not a hotbed of rekindled lust. Passionate made the mistake of falling for "that which hath most life, which is a young man" (*Bell* II, 4.15, 161), and this 'winter and spring' relationship, based on desire, cannot work. This would suggest that Passionate's newly found freedom could have been used in many other ways, although, interestingly, Cavendish does not specify which ones. Passionate's body bears a different kind of memory than Jantil's – her wasted body is a reminder of the sociocultural and religious rules of normativity which require the older woman to remember her (happy) past rather than re-create it. Simultaneously, the Duchess does not seem to say that the suicidal drive of Jantil should be treated as aspirational, even though Cavendish was clearly personally invested in some spousal commemorative practices herself. Instead Jantil may have been praised for her role as a "memorializer" (Miller 2006: 21; Nelson & Alker 2008: 13–35),[35] and not necessarily understood only as "the poet who can

[35] See more in Holly Faith Nelson & Sharon Alker, "Memory, Monuments, and Melancholic

create 'monument' out of 'words'" (Miller 2006: 21). Furthermore, and more in artistic terms than in real life, Jantil may also have been admired as "an embodied site of memory", a body that posthumously, literally becomes part of the time-resistant monument glorifying her husband. Yet Cavendish, in my opinion, asks to see Passionate's mistreatment and unhappy life and Jantil's extremely romantic death as a waste of female potential, because the play finishes with both widows forgotten. Their identity, the memory of them, is erased, with Jantil becoming the vessel for her husband's glory and Passionate the shadow of her former self. The two plot threads, widows versus Lady Victoria, do not even come together at any point. Instead, great praise and the conclusion of the play is given to the female soldiers for their valiant action and courage to engage in warfare, both literal and ideological. In contrast to the many prerogatives granted for women thanks to Lady Victoria's military prowess, neither Passionate nor Jantil gained anything for the rest of the female kind, choosing a slow death over revolutionary and permanent transformations in the seventeenth-century gender hierarchy. While Cavendish respected and promoted wifely obedience, she never saw it as blind submission, especially to the point of self-obliteration. Thus, when Lady Victoria specifically wishes for her name to be remembered, in her plea, or rather demand we can hear Cavendish's call for the recognition of the validity and value of her artistic drive and her lifestyle.

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