

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: CABALAS AND CABALS IN RESTORATION  
POPULAR LITERATURE

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Cabala, a mystical Jewish intellectual system, and cabal, a derogatory term for small groups, reflect the political, philosophical, and social crises of the Restoration and illustrate the conflicted environment of these unstable years. Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn seize upon the power and flexibility these words and their associations afford to turn them into generative devices to create and seize authority for themselves and for their opinions. In this process, Cavendish and Behn expand the ways the words are used in popular literature.

Few authors use “cabala” and “cabal” in their popular works during this period but Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn stand out for their repeated and extended use of these terms in their popular writings. Margaret Cavendish, denied a place in the intellectual circles of her time, uses a derivation of the traditional, philosophical cabala in her work Blazing World as an avenue to the authority

necessary to create worlds in which she, through a cabal, can control the exploration of scientific theories and establish a monarchy that brings about peace. Cabala also shapes Blazing World's structure and plot as a generative, positive means of creation for the fiction and its practitioners.

While Cavendish's use of "cabala" is theoretical and "fantastical," Aphra Behn uses both "cabala" and "cabal" to illustrate the dangers of actual events and the impact of the threats present in the world around her. Behn uses these words in her later works, pieces that portray devolving political and social systems and personal honor. In Behn's works, "cabala" and "cabal" become powerful means of expressing the dire consequences of private and public actions, revealing the hopelessness of the late Restoration.

By understanding Cavendish's and Behn's use of "cabala" and "cabal," their modern readers can better comprehend the Restoration's similarly conflicted, disintegrating environment as well as the power these words possessed at the time. Once the hope of the early Restoration dissipates, "cabala" and "cabal" signify existing societal and political failings in early eighteenth century literature, with a revival of traditional cabalistic form in later literature.

CABALAS AND CABALS IN RESTORATION POPULAR LITERATURE

by

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## DEDICATION

First and most of all I want to thank my family for their love and support. I would also like to thank my committee for their help throughout this process. Additionally, I want to thank the people in the University of Richmond School of Arts and Sciences Dean's Office for their understanding and good humor in this final year.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

During the Restoration, a period of great social, political, and philosophical turmoil, the words “cabala” and “cabal” and their multitude of associations emerge in the writings of Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn as powerful literary devices that enable these authors to navigate the confusion of their times and to recreate and critique their worlds. “Cabala,” an intellectual tradition and practice, and “cabal,” meaning a small, intriguing group, are linked through their history and associations to politics, learning, and religion, the most immediate and powerful concerns of the Restoration. The many meanings and associations connected with “cabala” and “cabal” give them a range of expression to fully communicate the danger, hope, and uncertainty that marked this conflicted period. It is the mystery of these words, their ability to avoid a fixed and certain meaning, that gives “cabala” and “cabal” and the writers who use them the power to destabilize order and to create worlds of their own outside contemporary authority.

Cabala, literally meaning “receiving,” is a Jewish intellectual tradition dating from at least twelfth century Spain.<sup>1</sup> Cabala is concerned with the study and interpretation of the Scriptures as a means of coming to a greater understanding of God and of reconciling humanity’s broken relationship with him. Growing out of the belief that God gave to Moses a secret interpretation of the Law, cabala began first as an oral tradition practiced by a few learned men. Over time, cabala spread throughout

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<sup>1</sup> See [The Essential Kabbalah](#) by Daniel Matt (Edison, New Jersey: Castle Books, 1997) 1.

Europe with the dispersion of the Jews and came to be part of established scholarly practice in the Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup>

At first the association between cabala and secret knowledge and learning did not stigmatize the traditional practice. It was popularly accepted and believed to employ legitimate, if secret, methods.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, however, cabala and cabalists came to be viewed suspiciously as did other early intellectual and natural philosophical methods.<sup>4</sup> Though still practiced in the late seventeenth century, cabala increasingly became associated with magic, suspicious behavior, and secret knowledge and thus grew into an easy target for attack.<sup>5</sup> While both Cavendish and Behn discredit cabala to varying degrees, it is the ambiguous standing cabala has in common thought as both powerful and suspect and these writers' recognition of this opinion that provides them with authority *and* protection from attack.

Though most popular uses of cabala in the seventeenth century link it with scholarship or science, its history and connections with secret information and knowledge provide for easy connection to dangerous activity. For example, in the long-running "Cabala, sive, Scrvia sacra: mysteries of state and government, in letters of illustrious persons, and great ministers of state . . .," cabala is connected to politics, power, and suspicious behavior, some of the most troublesome issues of the

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<sup>2</sup> See Gershom Scholem's Origins of the Kabbalah (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) 354 and Kabbalah (New York: Meridian, 1978) for a more complete description of the how cabala is communicated and spread.

<sup>3</sup> See Joseph Blau's The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc, 1941) 99 where he argues that cabalists did not have an "isolate character" nor were they "isolated peak figures." Instead, they were "men of their times" and cabala a common practice.

<sup>4</sup> See Blau 106. Also see Bernard Capp's English Almanacs 1500-1800: Astrology and the Popular Press (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977) for the conflicting growth and demise of almanacs (279, 281 for reasons of its fall from popularity) and for its connections to politics, printing, popular learning.

<sup>5</sup> Blau 15, 106 and Frances Yates The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979).



Restoration and eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> This link can also be seen in the increasing number of applications of the word “cabal,” the appellation given to small, secret groups dealing in private information and, most often, dangerous behavior. The most famous example of this connection between “cabal” and suspicious activity was Charles II’s Privy Council which was given the name “The Cabal,” the likely root of the word’s popularity during the Restoration.<sup>7</sup> This group was known for their intriguing and secretive behavior. They were also known to wield great power and could not be trusted. The fact that their initials spelled out “Cabal” (Covington, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley, and Lauderdale) and the private nature of their actions demonstrate the strong connection between mystical or supernatural power and the word “cabal” and thus with “cabala.”<sup>8</sup>

The Cabal is only one example of a variety of complex, mysterious groups and events an Englishman or woman needed to decipher to adapt to his or her age. The 1660s through the 1680s were awash in political intrigue and the unsettling possibility that the nation would again go through a religious and governmental sea-change of tremendous proportions. As government and religion were the foundations and guideposts for all of life – law, social order, knowledge, belief, mortal and immortal life – their impact on the mind and sensibility of the people cannot be

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<sup>6</sup> This anonymous pamphlet calls attention to the same state leaders throughout its publication history. It was published off and on from 1654 to 1691. There were also pamphlets linking cabala to dissenters in the mid-1660s, for example: “Cabala or the mystery of conventicles unvail’d in an historical account...”

<sup>7</sup> See Marice Lee’s *The Cabal* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1965). Also see “The Quest for Consensus: The Lord Mayor’s Day Shows in the 1670s” by John Patrick Montano for further historical details about the Cabal and its influence in *Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration: Literature, Drama, History*, ed. Gerald MacLean (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 31-51.

<sup>8</sup> Acronyms and acrostics have been linked to cabala through its close connection with language and the power of the Hebrew alphabet. Because acrostics are by nature connected to secret knowledge and coded meanings, acronyms were a cabalistic feature often targeted by “rationalist” satirical writers trying to expose mystical systems. See Scholem’s *Kabbalah* 25-27.

overstated. In The Age of Exuberance: Backgrounds to Eighteen-Century Literature, Donald Greene marks the effect of these times: in the “minds [of those] formed in the earlier period, one often detects a nervousness, an underlying insecurity, as if they were never sure when the structure of their society might dissolve beneath their feet.”<sup>9</sup> To comprehend the significance of these anxieties one must examine the challenges to government, religion, and learning present during this period.

### Challenges of the Restoration - Religion and the Monarchy

When Charles II returned to the throne in 1660, for the second time in less than twenty years the British people had to change their understanding about and loyalty to government, and with it, religion. The beginning of Charles’s reign brought an illusion of English political unity – and so social rest – that was never quite complete and dissipated slowly.<sup>10</sup> Along with this blush of peace came a renewed hope in the monarchy and a sense of jubilation.<sup>11</sup> From all accounts, England was in love with its bright and beautiful king at the beginning of his reign. The return of Charles II and his government was a “restoration” of an earlier time and an earlier king, his father, who had gained something akin to martyr status in the popular consciousness by the end of the Interregnum. Adding to the charm of his coming to power, Charles II’s bloodless and victorious ascension to the throne, like his escape during the Civil War very literally through the middle of enemy lines, was

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<sup>9</sup> Greene (New York: Random House, 1970) 52.

<sup>10</sup> Greene argues that while the King’s return to power was “hailed with delight by the vast majority of the English,” the conflicts that brought about the Civil War “were not healed by the Restoration” (62). Also see The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1650-1740, ed. by Steven N. Zwicker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) for scholarly perspectives on the unstable and changing period and its impact of the English people and literature.

<sup>11</sup> See Historicizing Milton: Spectacle, Power, and Poetry in Restoration England by Laura Lunger Knoppers (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1994) 1-2.

miraculous. His homecoming at the age of 30 was likened to the beginning of Christ's ministry at the same age.<sup>12</sup> Society's relief at returning Charles II to his place, to have righted what might have been a wrong against not only King but God by beheading Charles I, must have been enormous and surely added feeling to the celebrations at his coronation. These additional signs of providence must have also increased the public's expectation of what this return would mean for their happiness. The King bolstered this good will by appearing often in public and confirmed his people's hope in him by favoring religious tolerance.<sup>13</sup> For example, Charles forgave the majority of those who participated in the uprising against his father's government and who took part in the Commonwealth. Instead, he only prosecuted those who were involved in the actual murder of his father.

Many of the King's courtiers, however, were less forgiving.<sup>14</sup> Though the loyal nobility were given back their lands and titles, they pursued those who had usurped Charles I's monarchy and their own place in the court by working to limit religious toleration through legislation. The nobility's retaliation ultimately led to the Test Act (1672) and to the Exclusion Bill (1678-82), which, ironically, not only brought trouble to Charles's administration but ultimately forced James II's demise and exile. The king's religion, his power in relation to Parliament's, and the question of succession would remain dangerously intertwined throughout this period.

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<sup>12</sup> Knoppers 2, 32-33.

<sup>13</sup> For an overview of Charles II's legislation in favor of tolerance and its impact, see "'Meer Religion' and the 'Church-State' of Restoration England: The Impact and Ideology of James II's Declarations of Indulgence," *A Nation Transformed: England after the Restoration*, ed. Alan Houston and Steve Pincus. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 41-70

<sup>14</sup> See Christopher Hill's *Century of Revolution: 1603-1714* (New York: Norton, 1982) 200; and Greene 63.

The unstable peacefulness of Charles' restoration could not hold up under the force of the country's religious, economic, and political conflicting pressures.<sup>15</sup> Not only did factions left over from the Civil War and the Commonwealth pull at the delicate peace, but unrest grew in response to Charles II's government, especially the debate over succession.<sup>16</sup> The growth of political parties, tangible representations of the divisions within England, was a sign of the nation's instability.<sup>17</sup>

The continuation and growth of religious sects further complicated the question of religion and how to manage it as a public issue.<sup>18</sup> In some respects, the Civil War was an important moment, but still just a moment, in England's long battle to find a cultural agreement on the proper place, power, and boundaries of religion. Debate over religion would remain the single most powerful issue throughout Charles's reign. Containment and free practice are only two of these issues; the return of a monarchy certainly suggested that there was a "God's anointed." The poetry of Katherine Phillips articulates the sympathetic feelings toward Charles II and his father while published reports of crowds searching for healing through the touch of the King confirms that the broader public still believed in a special connection between the monarchy and God.<sup>19</sup> With both faith and political power at stake, zealots invested in both causes created a culture of suspicion and distrust evidenced

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<sup>15</sup> See Hill's Century of Revolution for a detailed account of how the forces worked individually and in tandem to perpetuate disorder, 166-218.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid 199-201.

<sup>17</sup> See Gary S. DeKrey's "Radicals, reformers, and republicans: Academic language and political discourse in Restoration London" in A Nation Transformed, eds. Alan Houston and Steve Pincus (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 71-99 and Melinda Zook's Radical Whigs and Conspiratorial Politics in Late Stuart England (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University, 1999).

<sup>18</sup> Zook 210-212.

<sup>19</sup> For example, see Phillips' poem "Upon the double Murther of King CHARLES I" in The Other Eighteenth Century: English Women of Letters 1660-1800, ed. Robert W. Uphaus and Gretchen M. Foster (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1991), 152.

by the Popish Plot (1678), the Rye House Plot (1683), and the Monmouth Rebellion (1685). The destructive consequences of this culture of fear and recrimination demonstrate the magnitude of the threat during the Restoration. Yet there was also a sense of a potential for good and a possibility for peace.<sup>20</sup> This hopefulness is a part of the cultural voice and perspective that sounds in the literature of the period. By the end of the century, however, the tone and language of possibility is overcome by the feelings of inevitable conflict.

A second transition in government without wide-spread revolt or bloodshed in 1689, the Glorious Revolution, installed William and Mary in the monarchy and began the process of successful resolution to the questions about royal prerogative, religion, and succession.<sup>21</sup> However, the strife over religion did not start to abate until after the Toleration Act of 1689, which recognized faiths outside of the Anglican Church; this leniency did not extend to Catholicism or Judaism. However the concern over the monarch's religion and the question of succession remained important into the eighteenth century, most violently displayed in the uprisings in 1715 and 1745.<sup>22</sup>

### Challenges of the Restoration - The State of Natural Philosophy

In addition to the struggle to settle religious and political unrest, a third important cultural touchstone was in conflict – how the world was understood, or the study of natural science. The refutation or acceptance of the new scientific method,

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<sup>20</sup> See Zwicker's The Cambridge Companion to English Literature, 1650-1740 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 26-28.

<sup>21</sup> See Greene 66-67 and Hill's Century of Revolution 220-262.

<sup>22</sup> See Zwicker 14-16.

formulated and advocated by Sir Francis Bacon at the beginning of the century, was still being played out.<sup>23</sup> The changes in science, the growing popularity of the scientific method, and the new questions and their resulting challenges to traditional understanding also had the effect of unsettling trusted principles and thus of further destabilizing the common understanding of the world, its order and nature.

As information was shared with more of the general population and more easily communicated through improvements in publication and the relaxing of the censorship laws, knowledge increased exponentially.<sup>24</sup> Science became a public pastime and courtiers pursued it as eagerly as they once did poetics.<sup>25</sup> Charles II also furthered this attention to science by, forming the Royal Society in 1660, modeled the Academy in France, which was devoted to exploring the world through the method of the new science – observation. The Royal Society would become a hothouse for the trial of new technologies such as the microscope and the air pump.<sup>26</sup> Over time, the Royal Society would become so popular as to have as many courtiers with no scientific aspiration as it had scientists.<sup>27</sup> However, the Society remained an important environment for experimental exploration and collaboration. These early experimentalists were often ridiculed for their odd investigations and appeared

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<sup>23</sup> See Steven Shapin's The Scientific Revolution (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); and Michael Hunter's Science and Society in Restoration England (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>24</sup> See MacLean, especially 10-11.

<sup>25</sup> See "Natural Philosophy and Political Periodization: Interregnum, Restoration and Revolution" by Barbara Shapiro in A Nation Transformed 299-327.

<sup>26</sup> Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer's Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987) details the debate over new instruments inside and outside the Royal Society.

<sup>27</sup> See Thomas Sprat's History of the Royal Society, eds. Jackson I. Cope and Harold Whitmore Jones (St. Louis: Washington University Press, 1958).

frequently as objects of popular satire.<sup>28</sup> Because the study of nature through experiment and the establishment of the Royal Society coincided with and/or brought with them a greater sense of humanity's ability to comprehend and solve the secrets of the world, they also provoked feelings of apprehension as well as power.<sup>29</sup>

Adding to this atmosphere of uncertainty and mystery were several significant "accidents" of timing, nature, and what one could call bad luck. Millenarianism, religious enthusiasm, the Great Plague (1665), Great Fire of London (1666), and a comet clearly seen in London in 1682 were all considered ominous signs.<sup>30</sup> The English were a people living with the memory of the Civil War's devastation, trying to adapt to upheavals in governmental control and structure and forced to negotiate changing religious policy and practice. In Ideas of the Restoration in English Literature, 1660-71, Nicholas Jose writes that "The literature of the Restoration is tied to its society so intimately and so peculiarly that our sense of the period historically is always mediated by our literary experience of it . . . The Restoration is an extraordinary instance of the relationship between culture and society."<sup>31</sup>

Deciphering how "cabala" and "cabal" express these struggles and anxieties and how Cavendish and Behn use them to negotiate these changes and present criticisms of them or alternative solutions to them becomes a way of understanding the Restoration as well as Cavendish and Behn more completely. The connections "cabal" and "cabala" have to authority, politics, knowledge, learning, and religion –

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<sup>28</sup> Shapiro 312-314.

<sup>29</sup> See New Science, New World by Denise Albanese about this atmosphere of uncertainty surrounding early modern science (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>30</sup> See Christopher Hill's The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution (London: Penguin Books, 1972) 35, 287-90.

<sup>31</sup> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) xiv.

the most critical issues of the time – remain central throughout the seventeenth century. Invoking “cabala” and “cabal” allowed Cavendish and Behn to call up associations with mystical traditions, natural philosophy, secret knowledge, coded language and communications, political intrigue, suspicious behavior, and powerful, productive knowledge. Because of this multitude of potential meanings and of their conflicting positive and negative connotations, they were able to imply meaning without committing to it, an advantageous stance in a period of swiftly shifting power.

#### Scholarly Perspectives: Cabala in the Seventeenth Century and in Literature

To date, most scholarship focused on cabala details a history of its development and association with philosophers and the pursuit of knowledge, religious and secular. The most complete works on the historical development of cabala are Gershom Scholem’s body of work, such as Kabbalah, Joseph Blau’s The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance, and Daniel Matt’s The Essential Kabbalah.<sup>32</sup> These works also provide the reader with a strong foundation in the central tenets and practices of cabalistic systems and its major figures.

Philip Beitchman’s Alchemy of the Word is the only significant examination of cabala in the early modern period that both brings to light major as well as minor philosophical figures who used cabala and also begins the necessary discussion on cabala’s impact on early modern culture.<sup>33</sup> Beitchman’s study traces the dissemination of cabala across Europe during the Renaissance by focusing on

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<sup>32</sup> Scholem (New York: Quadrangle, 1974); (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, Inc, 1941); and (New Jersey: Castle Books, 1997).

<sup>33</sup> Beitchman (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).



philosophical and “magical” practitioners and the invocation of the word in these texts. By tracing the lineage of cabala through the Renaissance, Beitchman demonstrates how cabala is “of the Renaissance and a Renaissance creation,” especially through *The Zohar*, a principal text of cabala.<sup>34</sup> While Beitchman “perused . . . some collections” in order to “acquire a sense . . . of how deeply into the culture cabalistic themes, styles, and practices had penetrated,” he only takes up these concerns as a secondary consideration of his study.<sup>35</sup> For example, while he references the idea that Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton may have used cabala or cabalistic imagery in their works, he only briefly examines Shakespeare’s Love’s Labour Lost and Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus, drawing heavily on Frances Yates’ earlier reading of the plays as an attack on Sir Raleigh’s mysticism in the first and shortly claiming cabalistic imagery in the second with minimal support.<sup>36</sup>

Beyond Beitchman, scholarship on cabala in literature in the seventeenth century is scant and is focused on the mystical force of cabala. For example in The Occult Philosophies Frances Yates discusses Shakespeare’s use of cabala and cabalistic imagery as mystical properties.<sup>37</sup> While there are greater numbers of scholars who examine the use of cabalistic imagery and systems in later eighteenth century and beyond, these, too, examine the mystical force of cabala in literature.<sup>38</sup>

By building on the considerable history of cabala established by Scholem, Blau, Matt, and now Beitchman, I will illustrate how these words were employed in

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<sup>34</sup> See Beitchman’s “Preface” ix.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid xi-xii.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid 211-214.

<sup>37</sup> See The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979) in particular 30-36 and 127-160.

<sup>38</sup> Blake, Yeats, Kafka, and Derrida are among those writers whose connection to cabala has been considered. This is a topic I take up in greater depth in the conclusion.

popular fiction during the Restoration. Moving beyond the discussion of the use of cabala use within early modern scholarship, I argue our consideration of its employment in popular works will increase our comprehension of how it was perceived and understood outside of scholarly circles. The intersections of cabala and cabal with the political, religious, and philosophical environment of the Restoration and how cabala and cabal may represent these topics also needs to be explored. Additionally, there is no scholarship that particularly discusses the use of “cabal” during the Restoration or considers its use by authors who also actively engage “cabala” in their works. These circumstances offer an opportunity to examine the interconnectedness of “cabala” and “cabal” and what they represent about society and the writers who employed them in the Restoration.

#### Natural Philosophy, Cabala(ists), Jews, and Small Groups

Beyond the historical development of the practice and the fundamental tenets of cabala, cabala does emerge as a topic in scholarly examinations of early modern philosophers. Two examples of these studies are William Sherman’s John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing in the English Renaissance and Flora Isabel MacKinnon’s The Philosophical Writings of Henry More.<sup>39</sup> In their discussions of these men, Sherman and MacKinnon give the reader a context to understand how and for what purposes a philosophical practitioner may put cabala and its systems to use.

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<sup>39</sup> Sherman’s John Dee (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995) argues a radical departure from the occultist, magical figure Dee was traditionally assumed to be. Sherman’s work reveals the fallacy of confusing a magician with one who put to use a variety of methods, some of which we may conceive of as mystical. Cabala and cabalistic practices are among those mislabeled practices. MacKinnon’s work (New York: Oxford University Press, 1925) describes how More privileged the relationship between God and Creation depicted in cabala as a way to counter the mechanistic view of God and of creation that was widely discussed in his day. Like Sherman, MacKinnon notes that cabala was one method among many More used to navigate the conflicting views and findings of his day.

The reader should gain a clear understanding that cabala was a system whose methods were practiced by reasonable philosophers and scientists, and was not a means of dark magic. These perspectives also provide us with an understanding of the influence of cabala on the development of the sciences as well as how it was used in conjunction with other methods.

Since the state of science was in transition during the Restoration and there were considerable debates on the best methods of its practice, the connection between cabala and science was a particular point of conflict.<sup>40</sup> Throughout the seventeenth century Baconian science and the observational method were growing in popularity and was becoming more available and directed at the public. For instance, in the introduction to The History of the Royal Society, Thomas Sprat contends that the Royal Society and the new scientific method of experimentation could make people more responsible and intelligent subjects of the state.<sup>41</sup> Yet science remained a quest to understand God the Creator and his Creation. In Principia, Isaac Newton offers scientific proofs of the “Prime Mover,” or God as the Creator and force behind scientific theories, and thus defends the discussion of God as a proper topic of natural philosophy.<sup>42</sup> As Newton’s thoughts reflect and Henry More’s clear use of cabala demonstrates, cabala did not disappear from scientific practice.

Cabala as a scientific method and particularly the treatment of cabalists in popular thought and literature during the seventeenth century demonstrate a growing tendency to either dismiss practitioners for their use of cabala or to satirize them.

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<sup>40</sup> In New Science, New World Albanese argues that the modern science was built upon ancient rhetoric while distancing itself from ancient forms of knowledge, occult methods, and magic. Also see Shapin and Schaffer.

<sup>41</sup> Eds. Jackson I. Cope and Harold Whitmore Jones (St. Louis: Washington University, 1958) 75.

<sup>42</sup> See the “Preface” of Principia as well as 545-546 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

This point is argued in Sherman's John Dee as well as MacKinnon's text on More and is illustrated in works of the period such as Samuel Butler's Hudibras (1663-1678), Thomas Shadwell's play The Virtuoso (1676), and Behn's scientist in The Emperor of the Moon.<sup>43</sup>

There was also considerable anxiety during the Restoration about small groups such as political factions and religious groups, an understandable caution given their role in bringing about the Civil War. In The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace, 1678-1730, Paula McDowell considers a few of these groups. She pays particular attention to Quakers<sup>44</sup> and the Philadelphia Society, most especially one of their leaders, Jane Lead.<sup>45</sup> The Philadelphia Society, led by the rector Dr. John Pordage and Lead, was a philosophical society exploring questions of religion and learning, often following Jacob Boehme's mystical thought.<sup>46</sup> Another group that has received considerable attention is the secret society of the Rosicrucians, with whom mystic, cabalist, and philosopher Robert Fludd associated.<sup>47</sup> These groups' pursuit of knowledge and their use of a variety of suspicious methods, cabala among them, provoked a general

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<sup>43</sup> See Butler's treatment of Sidrophel in Canto III of Hudibras: Written in the Time of the Late Wars, ed. A.R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905). Also see The Virtuoso, eds. Marjorie Hope Nicholson and David Stuart Rodes (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966). I will have an extended discussion of Behn's Emperor later in this work.

<sup>44</sup> As Moira Ferguson points out "The Quaker Act of 1662 that forbade religious assemblies of over five members incited soldiers to invade Friends' meetings" (222). "Seventeenth Century Quaker Women: Displacement, Colonialism, and Anti-Slavery Discourse" in MacLean's Culture and Society in the Stuart Restoration: Literature, Drama, History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 221-241. See also Hill's The World Turned Upside Down 233-248.

<sup>45</sup> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). For discussion of Lead see 167-178 and for Quakers see 145-146 and 183-184.

<sup>46</sup> In addition to McDowell, see Desiree Hirst's Hidden Riches: Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake for this discussion (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964).

<sup>47</sup> See Frances Yates' Rosicrucian Enlightenment (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

distrust of their methods and their purposes.<sup>48</sup> While their intentions may not have been to threaten the social or political order, the uncertainty of their goals incited negative feelings towards them among some of the public.

The same suspicion which was directed at small groups and their practices during the early modern period had long been a fear directed towards Jews and Judaism. While cabala had become fully accepted by Christian practitioners, its historical practice by Jews and origins in Judaism remained part of its association. In Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660-1830 Frank Felsenstein traces textual evidence of anti semitism and anti-Judaism (hostility to Judaism) in early modern texts, mainly pamphlets. Felsenstein argues that early modernists thought “religious ritual [was] devised specifically to undermine the moral foundation of the church and state” and that “Jewish ritual” in particular was “depicted as subversive and persecutory.”<sup>49</sup> Given the perceived threat of other small groups as well as religious and philosophical practices, including cabala and even scientific instruments, an increased anxiety about Jews and Judaism in English society is not surprising. At the same time, the popular trope of depicting the British as the lost children of Israel and the beginning of the process to readmit Jews to England also probably inflamed existing suspicions and yet kept some positive feelings about Jews and Judaism in the culture.<sup>50</sup>

Adam Sutcliffe takes into account this mix of positive and negative feelings toward Jews and Judaism and advances a more complex interpretation of feelings

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<sup>48</sup> See McDowell 29-32, 170-178.

<sup>49</sup> (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) 10, 123 and 37-39 for extended discussion.

<sup>50</sup> See Nigel Smith’s Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660 (Yale University Press, 1994) 14.

toward Judaism during the period in Judaism and Enlightenment.<sup>51</sup> Sutcliffe notes that “While rabbinic Judaism was frequently derided, ancient Judaism was commonly believed to encapsulate the essence of the perfect polity.”<sup>52</sup> He warns against “any one-dimensional positive-to-negative spectrum” explanation of feeling towards Judaism and Jews, arguing that such thinking “obscures the embeddedness of ‘anti-Semitic’ attitudes within diverse wider structures of thought.”<sup>53</sup>

These conflicted feelings toward Jews and Judaism are similar to those toward cabala. They are also like the uncertain attitudes toward small groups and the emerging science. Politics, learning, religion, and the affiliated anxieties thriving in the period are intertwined by common events as well as associations and shared feelings. Coming to a better understanding of how “cabala” and “cabal” were used and what meanings they conveyed when used in fictional writings will also increase our knowledge about feelings toward these other topics.

Margaret Cavendish’s The Blazing World and Aphra Behn’s “The Cabal,” “The Cabal at Nickey Nackey’s,” The Emperor of the Moon, and Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister give us an opportunity to consider the more popular uses and implications of “cabala” and “cabal.” Because both Cavendish and Behn use cabala and cabal in an extended manner, unlike other writers of the period who typically invoked the terms only briefly, we can come to a better understanding of how these words could build authority while critiquing it. Cavendish’s explicit examination, dismissal, and then the Empress’s employment of cabala is a unique and fascinating invocation of the term. Her use of cabalistic systems to frame, build, and

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<sup>51</sup> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid 8.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid 9, 8.

further the story of Blazing World is intriguing and sets Blazing World apart from all other works using “cabala.” Behn’s use of “cabala” and “cabal” are more similar to other popular writers’ use because the words are figured into the action while not shaping the writing itself. However no Restoration writer other than Behn uses “cabala” and “cabal” in a variety of works and employ the full range of definitions and associations of these words from mystical to satirical, political, and social.

Cavendish’s and Behn’s reliance upon cabala and cabal, while others use it incidentally, can be attributed in part to their shared experiences as women, writers, and Royalists.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, both women enjoyed privileges unusual for women, Cavendish as a Duchess with a supportive husband and Behn as a popular playwright. Both women also experienced life as outsiders. As Stuart loyalists, for example, both Cavendish and Behn suffered personally. Cavendish’s exile with Queen Henrietta Maria, the loss of her family during the War, and the loss of a substantial portion of her husband’s estate, which Charles II failed to have returned, were heartaches Cavendish never overcame, as evidenced in her writings.<sup>55</sup> Behn also suffered in the service of her King when, as a Royal spy, she was sent abroad without financial support, denied requests for funds, and ultimately imprisoned for her inability to pay her debts.<sup>56</sup> As women who made their writings public, both Cavendish and Behn

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<sup>54</sup> John Dryden's Aureng-Zebe: A Tragedy (1676) and The Way of the World (1700) by William Congreve both label powerful and suspicious groups of women as “cabals.” Neither Dryden nor Congreve develop the notion of cabal beyond a label nor do they take up “cabal” throughout their works, two qualities of Behn’s works.

<sup>55</sup> See Cavendish’s episode of intermingling souls with “the Duke” in The Blazing World & Other Writings, ed. Kate Lilley (London: Penguin, 1992) 192-202 and her The Life of William Cavendish Duke of Newcastle, ed. C.H. Firth (London: Routedledge, [n.d.]).

<sup>56</sup> Women Writers of the Seventeenth Century, eds. Katharina M. Wilson and Frank J. Warnke (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989) 343.

also eagerly participated in the male dominated world of literature. Both were publicly mocked for their work.<sup>57</sup>

While their gender was a significant challenge to both Cavendish and Behn, their experiences, including those brought on by their gender, their disappointments, and efforts to restore a strong nation were common ones. Peter Burke reminds us that women “were excluded from guilds, and often from fraternities as well. The world of the tavern was not for them either.”<sup>58</sup> But their difference and experience was not, as Burke claims, “the culture of the inarticulate.”<sup>59</sup> As many scholars have shown, early modern women were not “inarticulate.”<sup>60</sup> Behn and Cavendish were not only not “inarticulate” but very audible in their times.

Cavendish and Behn purposefully engaged men *and* women as part of their audience and as part of their writing as evidenced by their pursuit of publication, performance, and public attention for their work. Their use of “cabala” and “cabal” is not that of only outsiders but also articulates the position of the insider. Like many in the Restoration – exiled court members, even King Charles II, non-Anglicans, Puritan Interregnum leaders – Cavendish and Behn moved between the uncertain positions of privilege and non-privilege. In a world of shifting power structures, whose position “inside” is assured or complete?

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<sup>57</sup> Jane Spencer’s *Aphra Behn’s Afterlife* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 5, 22, 24. See Lilley’s “Introduction” to her edition of *Blazing World* xii-xiii. For more complete biographies of Behn and Cavendish see Janet Todd’s *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1996) and Kathleen Jones’s *A Glorious Fame: The Life of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, 1623-1678* (London: Bloomsbury, 1988).

<sup>58</sup> See *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) 49.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> See *Tudor & Stuart Women Writers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994) by Louise Schleiner and Moira Ferguson’s *First Feminists: British Women Writers 1578-1799* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985).



Cavendish and Behn both employ the established, traditional use of cabala and its connection to mystical knowledge as a means to garner authority in order to examine their world and the social order of their day. In their hands, cabala becomes a way to reprove ineffectual or inappropriate use of power. Cabal, too, is a power and voice. Cavendish expresses positive relationships in Blazing World through the cabal shared by the Empress, the scribe Margaret Cavendish, and for a brief time, Cavendish's husband, the Duke. Even Behn's first use of "cabal," a coy pastoral called "Our Cabal," reflects positive aspects of being part of a cabal. Yet through her later portrayals of cabal in "The Cabal at Nickey Nackeys," The Emperor of the Moon, and Love Letters Behn creates grotesque worlds of personal and political betrayals and dissipations. These later cabals are the means through which Behn illustrates the world eroding from the inside and corruption progressing through all institutions.

#### Cavendish, Behn, and Scholarship

Cabala and cabal are generative, powerful, and world-building means for Cavendish. The story of the Blazing World is one of a woman creating a world of fulfillment for herself and peaceful existence for all. Through cabalistic patterns and imagery the Empress emerges from being a victim to becoming an absolute ruler. In this position she is able to ensure peace in her kingdom, take part in and lead scientific investigations, and is united with a companion to explore and create other worlds. By using traditional cabala and its systems to shape her writing, Cavendish

challenges and then solidifies authority – a monarchy – in order to recreate a more favorable, peaceful, and productive world thereby ending internal national conflict.

Significant work has been done and continues to establish Cavendish's authority as a scientist in her day. Eileen O'Neill's edition of Cavendish's Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy places Cavendish in the context of other scientists of her time, explaining her position in the rapidly changing environment of natural philosophy.<sup>61</sup> More of this same type of contextualizing needs to be done for Cavendish in her religio-political environment. In Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition, Hilda Smith describes "political space" in the early modern world as broader than our modern definition and as including family or home as part of the political arena.<sup>62</sup> This expanded explanation of the "political" further confirms for the reader of Blazing World that Cavendish could and did address the broader political and cultural context than one person's desire. Within Smith's edition, Anna Battigelli argues that Margaret Cavendish's dilemma as a writer was to challenge "women's problematical political status" while carefully negotiating the dangerous but "inevitable conflict of opposing and often unverifiable moral, political, and religious beliefs" that were at issue in her society.<sup>63</sup> In other words, Cavendish must disturb the systems of authority enough to establish herself within them while simultaneously maintaining order in the primary institutions (government, religion, science or how we understand the world), thus avoiding anarchy. As I will argue, the structure and symbols of cabala and the support of a

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<sup>61</sup> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>62</sup> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 4-6.

<sup>63</sup> See Battigelli's "Political Thought/Political Action: Margaret Cavendish's Hobbesian Dilemma," ed Hilda Smith, Women Writers and the early modern British political tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 52.

non-threatening cabal permit Margaret Cavendish to accomplish this unsettling and recreating of authority. Cabala and cabal are the means through which Cavendish reconceptualizes authority and recreates social and scientific order throughout the work The Blazing World.

For Behn, cabala and cabals are not redemptive, positive creative devices. They are dangerous means through which social, political, and familiar order is destroyed, and by using them Behn is able to bring the reader's attention to the devolution in England. In "The Cabal at Nickey Nackey's," The Emperor of the Moon, and Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister, Behn demonstrates how cabala and cabals actively challenge authority and ruin established order. This difference from Cavendish, these bleaker images of cabala and cabal and of those who practice it, speaks to Behn's perception that hope in and possibility for the Stuart line and for the restoration of social order is deteriorating.

Though recent scholarship has examined Behn's interest in impacting the political environment of her day, I argue that Behn's interest went beyond party politics and was directed more broadly than to addressing the recurring crises of party disputes.<sup>64</sup> Behn draws on the mystical/traditional cabala and even expands the context of "cabal" to shed light on the erosion of the principal institutions of order and authority. Through her cabals, Behn expands the scope of who and what was

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<sup>64</sup> For examples see Susan Owen's "'Suspect my loyalty when I lose my virtue': Sexual Politics and Party in Aphra Behn's Plays of the Exclusion Crisis, 1678-83" in New Casebooks: Aphra Behn, ed. Janet Todd (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999) 57-72; Melinda Zook in "Contextualizing Aphra Behn: Plays, Politics, and Party, 1679-1689" in Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition, ed. Hilda Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press) 75-93; and Toni Bowers in "Seduction Narratives and Tory Experience," *Eighteenth Century Theory and Interpretation* 40.2 (Summer 1999): 128-154. Bowers does consider greater implications for Behn's political commentary than party, thus beginning a conversation beyond Whig-Tory conflict, but falls short of pursuing the idea that the "violated" are not Tories with no other feeling than loyalty to the Stuart regime.

unstable and problematic in Restoration England. By involving characters in all classes and by addressing familial as well as public politics, Behn demonstrates the pervasiveness of the decline in order.

Though Ellicott Visconsi has made an argument that Behn's view of a society in decline reflects her view that the English race is systemically flawed, most scholarship on Behn and politics is more focused on Behn's role in party politics.<sup>65</sup> While I do not agree with Visconsi's stark analysis, the more tempered view of Behn's examination of and critique of the politics of her day is too limited. Rather than party failings, Behn depicts a variety of societal failings, the more general and fundamental weaknesses around her. Behn portrays each cabalist as someone in unreasonable pursuit of undue authority, drawing a dark view of society rather than of certain political figures only. With a clearer understanding of the implications as well as the power of the words "cabala" and "cabal," the reader can better see how Behn portrays greater crisis than two-party conflict as well as how she problematizes the issue of who is and is not at fault.

#### Chapter Summary: Chapter 1 – Cabala in Context

"Cabala" and "cabal" emerge in the Restoration as recurring illustrations of the shifting environment and of the multitude of conflicts, meanings, and issues in play during these decades. As I will argue, the complex meanings of these words and their close connection to the issues of the period make them powerful tools for writers to illustrate their world or to recreate it. In both cases, "cabala" and "cabal" provide

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<sup>65</sup> See "A Degenerate Race in *Othello* and *The Widdow Ranter*," *ELH* 69.3 (2002): 673-701.

the reader with a clearer view of the fragile order of the early Restoration and the political and social decay of the last years of the Stuart regime.

The repeated appearance of cabala and cabal in popular literature of the time demonstrates their renewed power among the public, most likely resulting from two causes: 1) the elevation in the interest in scientific exploration and its character as an increasingly public enterprise and 2) the naming of Charles II's Privy Council as "the Cabal." Both occurrences increased the awareness of these terms as well as their meanings and associations. Using these words in a time when the connections to politics were more prevalent than ever before or since, the writers of the 1660s and 1680s are provided a greater range of meaning since the words carried with them so many associations.

In spite of a growing reliance on the experimental method, several scientific practitioners continued to subscribe to cabalistic practices, keeping cabala and its systems in contemporary scientific conversations.<sup>66</sup> From the use of cabala in general texts, we can conclude that people beyond the learned were familiar with cabala's general purpose and had some knowledge of its practices.<sup>67</sup> Yet, increasingly, "cabala" and "cabal" and the people and practices associated with them emerge in popular texts as something derogatory and reflect a number of current social anxieties: the dangerousness of small groups, of secret information, and the frequent pursuit of private, self-interested desires.

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<sup>66</sup> Henry More, Mercury van Helmont, and Thomas Vaughn are among the most well known of those intellectuals of the time who continued to employ cabala and pursue knowledge through it.

<sup>67</sup> Beitleman's *Alchemy of the Word* confirms the presence of a significant amount of cabalistic literature circulating in seventeenth century England.

As an authentic system of divining religious and scientific knowledge as well as a suspicious and potentially dangerous practice involving mysticism, cabala represented the political, religious, and philosophical conflicts of the Restoration period. Many established systems were brought into question: the new science challenged and at times disproved accepted beliefs about the world and nature; the Civil War and the Commonwealth proved that government, kingship, and social hierarchy were not fixed; it followed, then, that the individual's place in this world and role in society were unstable as well. Its controversial history and flexibility enabled cabala to become a byword or way to express an aggregate of meanings – and so the status and temper of Restoration society. By its very nature "cabala" means clandestine and symbolic, and its use in the Restoration made it into a code. "Cabala" symbolized the unknown and the known but incomprehensible, what should be feared and what, though threatening, was comic. Cabals and caballing were about the hidden, usually forbidden, and about what potentially should not be trusted.

The associations with small groups and secret knowledge in the scholarly world that were so connected with cabala easily transferred to the political arena during England's turbulent seventeenth century. As the word became popularized, it grew to designate small groups of many kinds and no longer pertained to the political or mystically suspicious. Yet even in these more general associations, the insinuation of secret knowledge, encoded language, or suspicious behavior – holdovers from the word's original meaning and the darker evolution of the term – remained embedded in the word. In a time of plotting and counterplotting, secretive meetings and behaviors raised understandable concerns for the safety of individuals and for the state.

Furthermore, scholarly cabala still was thought to have the potential for clandestine interaction with supernatural power just as social and political caballing suggested involvement with man-made evil. Though some applied the term "cabal" to innocent groups of supporters or friends, the larger cultural associations of the word and its historical meaning implied some stigma even in these benign instances. As a result of these charged political and intellectual environments, we must consider what resonances even casual uses of "cabala" and "cabal" would spark in audiences and thus why authors choose to use it where and how they do.

Chapter Summary: Chapter 2 - Margaret Cavendish- Cabala as literary, political, and philosophical device

Using the authority provided her by cabala's traditional form, Margaret Cavendish is able to create a utopia in Blazing World in which a kingdom is at peace, religious questions are resolved, and women can pursue knowledge without intellectual barriers based on gender – the most critical issues she faced. Blazing World is a tale of fantastic voyages and experiences beyond the limitations of Cavendish's everyday existence and in which the most pressing issues of Cavendish's society are resolved. In making "the Jews' cabala," Cavendish at once rejects the system as a reasonable scholarly avenue while still employing it to achieve her ambitions. Without the systems of cabala and its power, Cavendish would not be able to achieve her perfect kingdom, ideal friendship, or productive intellectual exchange.

Because cabala is a generative system concerned with creation and thus the natural world and divine order, employing it allows Cavendish to participate in

scientific discourse, explore questions of natural philosophy, and offer governing remedies, creating solutions to the impediments that seemed to give her the greatest concern. In Cavendish's hands, cabala is a powerful and positive creative agent, liberating and fulfilling the cabalist. Extensively employing traditional cabala, Cavendish demonstrates scholars have underestimated her abilities as a scientist and a writer.

Cavendish constructs her narrative following the traditional three world system. She uses the symbolisms of cabala to create a religion that is balanced between judgment and love, as is found in cabala's *serifot*. She ensures peace by employing cabalistic symbols associated with mysticism. Using cabala, the Empress brings a companion and fellow intellectual to herself, the Duchess, with whom she can explore and test social as well as scientific theories in a personal cabal. The Blazing World functions only with the support of cabalistic systems and the possibilities they afford both in structure and in its story.

#### Chapter Summary: Chapter 3 - Aphra Behn – Cabala, Revealed Reality

While Margaret Cavendish used cabala as a theoretical and imaginative literary device in order to form her own worlds, Aphra Behn uses "cabala" and "cabal" to communicate the disturbing reality of the world already in existence around her. Behn's works use the full range of meaning available to "cabala" and "cabal," thereby revealing to the reader the dire situation of the society and people in the writings. By portraying a variety of "cabals" and "cabalas," Behn illustrates the



extent of the instability and change during the Restoration and shows the reader the anxiety and gradual disintegration of her society.

Behn's first use of cabal, her poem "Our Cabal," is a playful and allusive piece that remains a mystery to us. Using coded names but alluding to people we know to have been in her circle, she teases the reader with the possibility that he or she may be able to connect the characters to real people and thus the actions to real events. The literal connections, if they are there, elude us in the end.

Behn's poem "The Cabal at Nickey Nackey's" and her play The Emperor of the Moon: A Farce both portray the attempts of children to overthrow authority. "The Cabal at Nickey-Nackey's" is a darkly comic scene drawn from Otway's tragedy Venice Preserv'd, and The Emperor is a comical marriage play. Though The Emperor focuses on one family's conflict rather than a national political struggle, the dynamics are the same. Both works also show the authority figures being made fools of by their own tendencies and with the help of their younger rivals. "The Cabal at Nickey-Nackey's" presents both the Roman rebels' and the Senator's actions using similar words, indicating that there is no real difference in the established power and those who are attempting to replace it. While the rebels are executed in Venice Preserv'd, the rebellious children of The Emperor live as successful models of rebellion and excess.

In Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister, Behn again uses cabals to create and perpetuate the action of the story as well as to bring about the disintegration of society. In Love Letters, cabals are the methods used by the greedy hero, Philander, and heroine, Sylvia, to challenge and unseat rightful authority in the

pursuit of base desires. In their caballing, Philander and Sylvia erode political stability, familial peace, and their own honor. By the end, Sylvia has become a cabalist and parasite, trading herself for financial gain – and doing so with no regret. Her innocence, faith in love, and honor are willingly sacrificed to her greed for money and the most vile kinds of appreciation. More shocking than these atrocities is Behn’s revelation of society’s acceptance of the most offensive cabalist back into their company when Philander returns home and is welcomed by his peers.

“Cabala” and “cabal” operate in Behn as the means to undo authority, destabilizing the most fundamental institutions of society and government. Cabalists become increasingly destructive through Behn’s writing, and they are more acceptable to the society around them. As a result, Behn’s readers are left with a growing sense of foreboding that government and civilization are in peril.

#### Chapter Summary: Conclusion: Looking Forward to Cabala and Cabals in Literature

In the conclusion, I look forward to some of the needed further exploration into cabala and cabal in popular literature by going beyond the Restoration to briefly consider Jonathan Swift, Delvariviere Manley, and William Blake as well as to comment on present day activity around “cabala” and the continued use of “cabal.” Manley’s three cabals in The New Atalantis, while scintillating escapades, are not as substantive as Behn’s use of the word nor do they indicate or develop its dangerous nature. Instead, “cabal” remains a nearly innocuous word. Swift employs the complete range of “cabala” and “cabal” to illustrate the degraded condition of his society, like Behn. Like Cavendish, Swift uses cabala’s systems as a means to shape

his writing in Tale of a Tub. In Swift we see the results of the world Behn began to illustrate and predict at the end of her life as cabalistic methods and caballing are accepted as the status quo in learning and politics in Gulliver's Travels. Unlike Behn's worlds, however, the struggle for nobility and right is over – caballing is part of the worlds Gulliver finds.

Blake renews the connection between literature and traditional cabala as a mystical, religious, and intellectual system. Blake's visual and written works are a means to critique the world around him and to recreate it closer to the Maker's perfect vision. Blake's works appear as true imaginative cabalistic works.

While “cabal” has lost its dangerous denotation in present day, “cabala” remains a powerful mystical, creative, and intellectual force. Cabala and cabalistic study continue in earnest and in popular art. Present day literature and music as well as centers, websites, and books illustrate the creative power and keep alive the history and traditions, mystical and intellectual of cabala.

## Chapter 2: Cabalas and Cabals in Context

By the seventeenth century, cabala was well established as a method of scientific discovery and discourse. Historically, it had long been linked with secrecy and special knowledge. During the mid-seventeenth century, however, its connotations and representations increased. Due to a recurring flurry of pamphlets linking cabala to political secrets of government leaders and to suspicious religious sects from the middle of the century forward, cabala develops an additional resonance of hidden power and meaning.<sup>68</sup> The uniquely complex association of cabala with religion, learning, and politics and increasing public exposure coincide with and result from an explosion in learning, a reconsideration of scholarly methods, and a consistently tumultuous religio-political environment. This confluence of circumstances makes cabala a powerful device through which writers could represent and express equally complex feelings about their society with great variety of meaning and with the protection multiple positive and negative meanings offer. Similarly, “cabal” had increasing connections with politics and was growing in popularity during the period, making it more available for use and powerful expression. Though several Restoration writers invoke the words briefly in their works, Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn take advantage of the great variety of meanings and connections to science, Creation, and politics to use cabala and cabal as means to achieve authority and to enhance her creativity.

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<sup>68</sup> See earlier reference to *Scrvia sacra, secrets of empire, in letters of illustrious persons a supplement of the Cabala*, 2.

To apprehend the power the words “cabala” and “cabal” commanded during this period, one must understand the history of the words as well as their context and associations during the Restoration. This understanding must include an appreciation of the links between cabala and philosophy in this period and the dual perceptions of it as a positive method as well as a dangerous practice. “Cabal” and its associations were also in transition and reflected the increasing anxiety prevalent in Restoration society and politics. The full meanings of both “cabala” and “cabal” as they are used in popular literature in the late seventeenth century impact and are influenced by each other. Comprehending their meanings requires that the modern audience understand the relatedness of “cabala” and “cabal,” their histories, and the social and political resonances that each evoked during the period. Without an understanding of both words and the connections and emotions they evoked, the modern reader cannot appreciate either their full meanings or what influence they possessed over authors and their contemporary audiences.

### Ideas and Traditions of Cabala

Cabala is a Jewish scholarly tradition which began in the twelfth century with the general purpose of reconnecting the Creator and his Creation.<sup>69</sup> Cabala has two aspects: the theosophical portion of cabala is concerned with understanding and knowing the Creator, and the second or mystical portion employs cabbalistic methods to achieve a mystical experience. In cabala, one element is not practiced to the exclusion of the other, but both are a means to better comprehend God and to achieve

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<sup>69</sup> The spelling of the word has several variations: qabbalah, kabbalah, cabbala, cabala. Cabbala or cabala are the forms most associated with Christian practices and most often found in English texts while kabbala or kabbalah are the more traditional, Jewish spellings.

understanding beyond the intellect. Though the guiding principle behind cabalistic practice is recognition that human reason is not sufficient to understand God and his Creation, cabala requires intense commitment to scholarship and vast knowledge.<sup>70</sup>

Cabala, literally meaning "received" or "tradition," is "the traditional and most commonly used term for the esoteric teaching of Judaism and for Jewish mysticism."<sup>71</sup> It is the secret interpretation of the Law or the oral part of the Law given to Moses on his second ascension at Sinai and can have as its goal the "complete revelation of the secret wisdom" through the study of, meditation on, and interpretation of the Torah.<sup>72</sup> This interpretation is necessary because humans are disconnected from God by the fall which occurred during Creation. Cabalists believe a mishap during Creation caused four levels of understanding or existence to separate humans from God. The literal world and words of the Torah, the first sphere of understanding, are mere "garments" that cloak the brilliant, pure knowledge of God as well as God himself.<sup>73</sup> Through interpretation of the Scriptures, which can be accomplished by intensive study as well as "mystical" methods such as numerology

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<sup>70</sup> The descriptions of cabala and its tenets discussed in this chapter are drawn primarily from Scholem's works as well as from Daniel Matt's The Essential Kabbalah: The Heart of Jewish Mysticism (New Jersey: Castle Books, 1997). Other excellent introductions to cabala and its history are Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken Books, 1946) and God is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practice of Mystical Judaism by Rabbi David A. Cooper (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997). For a general understanding of the tenets of cabala, see Scholem's "Basic Ideas" in Kabbalah (New York: New York Times Book Co., 1974) 87-189. This chapter discusses the fundamental concepts and accepted history of cabala, largely as it relates to the early modern period, all that is necessary for a general understanding of this system to examine its use in the works of Behn and Cavendish. Where discussing specialized or particular information about cabala, Christian cabala, or their history, I have cited the source specifically.

<sup>71</sup> For this reference, see Scholem's Kabbalah 3.

<sup>72</sup> See Kabbalah 5

<sup>73</sup> See Kabbalah 96-105.

and meditation, each sphere of knowledge can be explored and understood, leading finally to a comprehension of the innermost, holy part of God.<sup>74</sup>

Because Cabala emphasizes textual interpretation as a method of achieving knowledge, it is akin to literary scholarship, as Harold Bloom notes in his Kabbalah and Criticism.<sup>75</sup> Bloom describes cabala as a mixture of parable and figurative language, emphasizing that both the creative moment of emanation, when God separates parts of himself to achieve Creation, and the *sefirot*, the separated characteristics of God, are language.<sup>76</sup> Bloom also sees cabala as a "mode of intellectual speculation" as well as a theory of "writing before writing . . . and speech before speech" because, unlike other mysticisms, it emphasizes interpretation of texts.<sup>77</sup> Though Bloom includes a brief history of cabala in his work, he neglects the growth of cabala outside of esoteric philosophies, leaving out its role in scientific theoretical development as well as popular culture. Bloom rightfully acknowledges the power cabala possessed over words and in language and texts; I will discuss its power as a word, in a small but essential moment of its history that changed the meanings of both words.

### The Creation

The central topic of cabala is the Creation and its principal purpose is to reestablish the harmony within God as well as within the universe and so reunite God and his fallen Creation. The distance between God and people, their broken

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<sup>74</sup> Not all cabalists practice or support "magical" methods such as numerology. I will later discuss this separation between "practical" cabala and esoteric cabala, as does Scholem's Kabbalah 4.

<sup>75</sup> See Harold Bloom's Kabbalah and Criticism (New York: Continuing Publishing Co., 1975).

<sup>76</sup> See Bloom 23, 25

<sup>77</sup> Ibid 47, 52.

relationship, is negotiable and is the reason that cabala is necessary. As cabalists understand it, Creation is a mystery that can only be explained symbolically; the symbols of Creation are attributes of God called the *sefirot*. In cabalistic cosmology, Creation took place when *Ein Sof* (literally, "Infinite"), the transcendent God who is all space, withdrew into himself leaving a space or vacuum which he surrounded. It is within this space that Creation took place. After withdrawing in order to create space, *Ein Sof* sent out emanations of himself, vessels containing the light, or his essential characteristics. Prior to this moment, God was completely transcendent and undifferentiated.<sup>78</sup> With the sending out of the emanations, God differentiated among his attributes, allowing for some aspects of his nature to become comprehensible to humans. These characteristics, locked in vessels, combined together and working in balance, would create and sustain the world, a perfect creation. But during this process the vessels carrying the emanations broke, releasing the divine light and creating an imbalance.

### The Sefirot

The vessels containing the divine sparks are also called the *sefirot*, ten creative *logoi* (words) or divine powers.<sup>79</sup> The *sefirot* (which literally means "numbers") are a part of the larger configuration of God and are expressions of "aspects of the divine personality."<sup>80</sup> The sefirot are configured as the primordial man or as a tree to represent God the Creator and God who reveals himself to us. As Genesis states, man was created in the image of God; the sefirot is the archetype of

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid 88-96.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid 105-116.

<sup>80</sup> See Matt 5.



the original man, *Adam Qadmon*. *Keter*, or Crown, is the head of this body or the root of the sefirot from which the rest of the reversed tree grows. Out of Keter comes the second tier of the sefirot, *Hekhmah*, Wisdom, and *Binah*, or Understanding. Binah, the Divine Mother, is impregnated by Hekhmah and conceives the seven lower sefirah. Keter, Hekhmah, and Binah together are the upper realms of the sefirot, representing the transcendent aspects of God and are thus less knowable for humans.

*Hesed*, Love, and *Gevurah*, Power, also called *Diḡor* Judgment, are the first attributes of the next tier of the sefirot and are the right and left arms of God. The balance between God's mercy and his righteousness is essential for the world to exist. When Hesed and Gevurah are in balance, they create *Tif'eret* (Beauty), also called *Rahamim* (Compassion).

The right and left legs of God are formed by *Netsah* (Eternity) and *Hod* (Splendor). *Yesod* (Foundation), or *Tsaddiq* (Righteous One), is the phallus or procreative life force of the sefirot. The body continues as "The light and power of the preceding sefirot are channeled through [Yesod] to the last sefirah, *Malkhut*."<sup>81</sup> *Malkhut* (Kingdom) is also known as *Shekhinah* (Presence), "the daughter of Binah, bride of Tif'eret, the feminine half of God. Shekhinah is 'the secret of the possible,' receiving the emanation from above and engendering the varieties of life below . . . Human righteous action stimulates Yesod, the Righteous Once, and brings about the union of the divine couple."<sup>82</sup>

The names of the ten attributes sometimes vary, depending on the cabalist. The sefirot are the instruments God used to create and govern the world. These

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<sup>81</sup> See Matt 9.

<sup>82</sup> See Matt 9 for the quotations in this paragraph.

qualities can and should exist in balance with each other, but their disharmony is produced by people's disobedience to God. Harmony and balance are two important aspects of cabala and cabalist thought since the divine harmony was disturbed during creation when the vessels were shattered. However, the balance can be restored "[b]y performing the commandments with the proper qabbalistic intention."<sup>83</sup> The cabalists' "task . . . [is] to reconstitute the divine configuration, the primordial man (*adam qadmon*)."<sup>84</sup> Since cabalist philosophy maintains that humans can influence the divine balance, the power of cabala rests in its ability to bring about this balance by increasing people's understanding of and relationship with God. In cabalistic doctrine, "every human action here on earth affects the divine realm, either promoting or hindering the union of Shekhinah and her partner – the Holy One, blessed be he. God is not static being, but dynamic becoming."<sup>85</sup>

Cabalistic philosophy distinguishes at least three and sometimes four worlds, of which the sefirot, "the world of emanation," is one; the other three are "the world of creation . . . , consisting of the divine chariot and higher angels; the world of formation . . . , in which the angels are found; and the world of action . . . , the celestial and terrestrial material world."<sup>86</sup> In the three-world universe, which is most often used by Christian cabalists and philosophers, no distinctions between the second and third world are made: the first world is inhabited by God, the world of divinity; the

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<sup>83</sup> See The Encyclopedia of Religion, ed. Mircea Eliade, v.12 (New York: MacMillan) 116.

<sup>84</sup> See Eliade 118

<sup>85</sup> See Matt 1.

<sup>86</sup> See Eliade 121.

second world is the sphere of angels and spirits; and the third world is the material or elemental world.<sup>87</sup>

Understanding the sefirot is essential and basic to beginning to study cabala because they are the building blocks of its doctrines. To study the sefirot is to begin to unwrap the essence of cabala and to uncover its key elements. Though cabala is credited with reinstating the balance of the sefirot, it is also described as a quest for revelation and knowledge, or truth. While the merging of the human soul with God was considered a possibility by many cabalists, most practices focus on achieving insight into God, creation, or bringing about a prophetic revelation. The search for truth, or reuniting with the transcendent God, required that the mediating cabalist supersede his/her reason and rely on his/her faith. There are two traditions in cabala: one emphasizes the union of the human *soul* to God, and one believes in a joining of the human *intellect* with divine intellects. The tradition of intellectualmerging "borrowed Aristotelian concepts of intellect, intellection, and intelligibles (which form a unity during the act of thinking) to describe mystical union"; both versions of cabala relied on faith rather than reason alone.<sup>88</sup>

There are also two methods of interpretation in cabala, symbolic and mathematical. Symbolic performance of cabala considered holy texts and events occurring in society as evidence of changes or the workings within God. Thus, every event in life was available for interpretation, just as the scriptures were open for various readings. In addition to this symbolic interpretation, hermeneutic devices such as *gimatriyyah*, "the calculation of the numerical value of letters; *notariqon*, the

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<sup>87</sup> See Yates 33.

<sup>88</sup> See Eliade 122.

use of letters as abbreviations for whole words; and *temurah*, the interchanging of letters" were also used in some cabalistic practices and contributed to early modern progress in mathematics.<sup>89</sup>

### History

The history of cabala is rich with eminent scholars, theologians, and philosophers as well as influential texts. Though now it is open to study by a variety of scholars and lay people, originally cabalistic study was restricted to an elite few groups of well-trained and proven scholars. I have also found in researching cabala that its history is the story of a people's quest to understand humans' relationship with God and their place in this world, as Scholem says in his description of the *Zohar*.<sup>90</sup> This brief historical outline is only a sketch, highlighting certain moments in the history of cabala that are important to know in order to understand the uses and reputation of cabala generally and cabala in late seventeenth and early eighteenth century popular texts in England. Communicating this rich heritage and philosophy of cabala is beyond the scope of this project, which focuses on the impact and power of the word as it is used in popular literature of the late seventeenth century.

Since cabala grew out of Jewish mysticism, defining a moment of original "cabalistic" thought is difficult, if not impossible.<sup>91</sup> However, by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, cabala had emerged in Europe as a distinguishable theosophy with specific practices. Though the doctrines of cabala were often considered radical due to their mystical nature and their basis in competing interpretations of the Torah,

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<sup>89</sup> See Eliade 122.

<sup>90</sup> See Kabbalah 58

<sup>91</sup> The ideas of cabala are present in "antiquity," according to Scholem, Kabbalah 8.

cabalists were true to Jewish traditions and law, offering its practitioners and practices some protection from reproof and attack. There has been, however, a sustained opposition to cabala throughout its history, as with most methods rightly or wrongly associated with mysticism.<sup>92</sup>

The expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1497 caused the spread of cabala throughout the Mediterranean, Africa, and Italy. As a result of this exile, Jerusalem emerged as a core site of cabalistic study and nurtured two of the most influential early cabalists: Moses Cordovero (1522-1570) and his student Issac Luria (1534-1572). Cordovero's grasp of cabalistic philosophy at an early age made him a powerful influence in its circles. His work was "a major attempt to synthesize and to construct a speculative kabbalistic system."<sup>93</sup> Cordovero combined the cabala of the *Zohar* with ecstatic cabala in his teachings and writings and what became the central text of cabala from the twelfth century on.<sup>94</sup>

Before Cordovero's death, his student Luria was developing his own innovative cabalistic system. Though Luria wrote down few of his philosophies (he died suddenly after teaching fewer than three years), his disciples wrote and preserved his thoughts, some of which were later distorted and misused. His teachings and cabalistic system, particularly his theosophy of Creation, "remained the crucial factor for the development" and shaping of cabala from the Renaissance to the present.<sup>95</sup> Luranc cabala spread beyond the elite in the seventeenth century and was

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<sup>92</sup> Kabbalah 66

<sup>93</sup> Ibid 401

<sup>94</sup> See Matt 5-7 on the *Zohar*.

<sup>95</sup> Kabbalah 426

practiced by the less-educated masses.<sup>96</sup> And in the eighteenth century, Lurianic cabala was a basis for Hasidism.

Beyond the *Torah*, the *Zohar* is the most influential text in cabala. Moses b. Shem Tov de Leon, a Jewish mystic from Spain, claimed to be the "scribe" for writings he circulated around 1280. These esoteric texts eventually became *Ha-Zohar ha-Qadosh*, *The Holy Zohar*, and "most subsequent Kabbalah was based on its teachings."<sup>97</sup> Unlike previous cabalistic texts, the *Zohar* addresses mysticism and the questions taken up in cabala in a more sustained and general way, in addition to considering "the actual religious situation" of Jews.<sup>98</sup> According to Scholem, "The explanations in the book revolve round two poles – one consisting of the mysteries of the world of the *Sefirot* that constitute the life of the Divine, which is also reflected in many symbols in the created world; and the other of the situation of the Jew and his fate both in this world and in the world of souls."<sup>99</sup> Though the *Zohar* is the principle text of cabala, cabalistic writings encompass several genres and a host of texts, including commentaries on the sefirot, rationales for the commandments, and moralistic literature.

Because cabala is a blend of ideas, it was easily accessed and co-opted by non-Jewish, non-religious scholars.<sup>100</sup> Original philosophies of the ancients influenced cabala as new and revived ancient philosophies, such as Neo-Platonism,

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<sup>96</sup> Throughout the history of cabala, there were various requirements which restricted those who could practice or even know about cabala. Age and educational status were two such requirements. At different times, various people challenged this exclusiveness. It was not until the seventeenth century that cabala was consistently less restrictive.

<sup>97</sup> See Matt 6

<sup>98</sup> See Kabbalah 58.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Scholem describes cabala as "not a single system" but as made up of "a multiplicity of different approaches, widely separated from one another and sometimes completely contradictory" (Kabbalah 87).

and the scientific explorations of the Renaissance shaped and were shaped by cabala. Separating cabalistic thought from other philosophies, then, becomes difficult because of this intertextuality and the reliance on or experimentation with cabala in certain communities and discourses. In fact, in some cases like gnosticism and Neo-Platonism, scholars continually disagree which philosophy most impacted the others.<sup>101</sup>

### Christian Cabala

There were two branches among the first propagators of Christian cabala: converted Jews, whose impact on Christian cabala may have depended upon the expulsion of the Jews from Spain (1492) and Portugal (1497), and groups of speculators who emerged in Renaissance Platonism. Of this second group, Scholem writes that "[t]hese Florentine circles believed that they had discovered in Cabala an original divine revelation to mankind that had been lost and would now be restored, and with the aid of which it was possible not only to understand the teachings of Pythagoras, Plato, and the Orphics, . . . , but also the secrets of the Catholic faith."<sup>102</sup> Christian cabala retained many of the basic tenets or principles of the original cabala. Christian cabalists argued that cabala enabled them to find Christian doctrines in Jewish texts and were particularly interested in "confirm[ing] the doctrine of the trinity."<sup>103</sup>

The first Christian cabalist of note was the Italian Christian humanist Giovanni Pico della Girandole who was taught by Jewish cabalist Flavius

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<sup>101</sup> See Origins of the Kabbalah 316-320, 363-364 and 389-390.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid* 197.

<sup>103</sup> See Bosker Ben Zion's The Jewish Mystical Tradition (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1981) 22.

Mithridates. Flavius translated many cabalistic works which became "the most important source for Pico's *Theses*, the first cabalistic composition written by a Christian".<sup>104</sup> Pico interpreted cabala philosophically, using Neoplatonic sources. He introduced the division between the "high form of legal magical lore and a low form of demonic magic," a separation of good and evil which was an important distinction.<sup>105</sup> Unfortunately, Pico's distinctions became increasingly suspect and eventually most "magic" was condemned as "bad." In general, Pico's writing, particularly the *Theses* section entitled "Oration on the Dignity of Man," became important bases of Renaissance thought and influenced the introduction of cabala into Christian and Western secular philosophy.<sup>106</sup> Many of Pico's followers expanded upon his philosophies and writings, which further widened the impact of his thought. Johannes Reuchlin,<sup>107</sup> for instance, whose *De arte cabalistica* introduced cabala to the European public, was Pico's follower.

In the early sixteenth-century, Pico's ideas were expanded upon by prominent theologians who in turn disseminated cabalistic philosophies in religious treatises. By the late sixteenth century, cabala can be found in French and English literature and art. In the seventeenth century, many European scholars read the works of German cabalist and mystical poet Christian Knorr von Rosenroth. Knorr's *Cabbala denudata* (1677-84) "had widespread influence" and "gave non-Jewish readers a broad view of the first sources to be translated into Latin, and these were accompanied by

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<sup>104</sup> See Eliade 199.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid 119

<sup>106</sup> See Beitchman's *Alchemy of the Word: Cabala of the Renaissance* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998) 65-72 and Blau.60-61, 77, and 100 112.

<sup>107</sup> Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522) was a German humanist, scholar, and attorney who studied Hebrew and translated Hebraic texts, impacting Christian theology.



explanatory notes," which further disseminated knowledge of cabala.<sup>108</sup> To this original work were added commentaries by Henry More and Mercury van Helmont as well as Knorr's responses to them.

Scholem argues that "Christian Cabala occupied an honored place both in the 16th century, primarily in Italy and France, and in the 17th century, when its center moved to Germany and England."<sup>109</sup> Though cabala was a philosophy examined and utilized by leading scholars, its reliance on faith, not education or reason, and its traditional questioning of canonical thought, made it available to the "untrained" populous. For these reasons, cabala is also seen as an influence for the Reformation and later changes to Christian doctrine.<sup>110</sup>

As the ideas of cabala spread more widely, the identity of "cabalists" changed during the early modern period. Because cabala was both an ancient, mystical method and part of the more objective science and experimental methods, cabala continued to be practiced even as suspicions of non-rational methods grew. As more and more scholarship demonstrates the connections between ancient philosophies and emerging practices in the sciences during the early modern period, we can appreciate how "modern" science did not grow in opposition to what we presently consider "occult," "fanatical," and mystical methods. Instead, early scientists drew upon and employed these ancient systems while developing modern methods. Though the move toward rationalism raised different and new questions about scientific study and did cast suspicion on less objective disciplines, the Scientific Revolution did not annihilate these earlier methods. In fact, the popular representations of the new

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<sup>108</sup> *Origins* 416

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid* 200.

<sup>110</sup> See Beitchman 230-232.

science tell us that most of its practices and theories were viewed with suspicion as well. In Ben Jonson's The Alchemist and Samuel Butler's Hudibras, for example, it is the extremist virtuosos and their "scientific" methods and materials, like the new scientific discourse and the microscope, that are satirized, along with the traditional sciences of astrology and alchemy.

Part of understanding the relationship between what became our modern science and those techniques not relying upon pure rationalism is reassessing our judgments of the people who practiced them. Figures like John Dee and Henry Cornelius Agrippa as well as Mercury van Helmont and Jacob Boehme – all of whom have been associated with cabala – need to be reconsidered without the stigmatic haze of labels like "magician" or "mystic" clouding our appraisals. These men were remarkable for their genius and for their contributions to science and to their times, politically, socially, and in literature. As the works of Frances Yates and, more recently, of William Sherman argue, they were not madmen, but scholars – of natural philosophy, politics, and religion.

Much of our current appreciation for the significance of occult and esoteric practices in the early modern period is due to the ground-breaking work of Frances Yates. After dismissing this part of our intellectual past for decades, scholarship began to consider other possibilities. Yates began this process of reestablishing the legitimacy of studying the "other side" of modern science. But Yates' work increased the mystique of these methods and of those who used them and, ironically, has kept these figures and their work outside of mainstream consideration. More recent scholarship such as Sherman's study, John Dee: The Politics of Reading and Writing

in the English Renaissance, which establishes Dee and his work within their historical context more clearly, and Brian Vickers' collection, Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance, draw upon and critiques Yates' findings. These studies and others constitute a movement to resituate early scientists within a historical framework which considers the substantial role of non-rational methods in scientific development during the early modern period.

For their parts, cabalistic methods and philosophies were a part of the emerging, "modern" scientific theories and philosophies. The cabalist Ramon Lull theorized a precursor to the modern scientific method which has cabalistic elements in his vision of Mt. Randa (1275). Two Renaissance scientist-philosophers, Francesco Giorgi and Henri Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, were also cabalists.

Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia*, written around 1533, which also describes a three-world structure, brought the "magical interpretation of Qabalah [to] its peak."<sup>111</sup> This work is a summary of Renaissance occult disciplines that claimed that it was possible to reach intellectual magic through cabala. It also works towards a "supercelestial world, to the presentation of the Name of Jesus as now all-powerful . . . 'as is confirmed by Hebrews and Cabalists skilled in the Divine Names'. He is quoting from Pico's Cabalist Conclusion."<sup>112</sup> In an earlier work, *De vanitate scientiarum* (1526), Agrippa declared that all past knowledge, except the Scriptures, was without value or true meaning. Eventually Agrippa was associated with extremism and black magic, and by the late sixteenth century, his work was increasingly censored.

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<sup>111</sup> See Eliade 120.

<sup>112</sup> See Yates 37.

Giorgi used cabalistic principles to construct his theory of "a practical application of the harmonies of macrocosm and microcosm" in his *De harmonia mundi* (1534), which was translated into French in 1578 (*L'Harmonie du monde*) and had a strong impact on the French Renaissance. In this text, Giorgi describes an architect who makes a plan for a building, which is the model of the universe, a metaphor for understanding the Scriptures and God, a metaphor later artist and writer William Blake would also employ. Giorgi relies on cabalistic methods, such as the three-world model, numerology, and meditation, to produce and explain this symbol. In Giorgi's system, a person pursued wisdom into the astrological world with the help of the "world of intelligences or angels," just as Pico and Lull had argued before him.<sup>113</sup>

John Dee, the Elizabethan mathematician and so-called "conjurer," fell to the same fate as Agrippa. Dee and his follower Edward Kelley believed in the power of angels and in a three-world system, but a system whose mysteries could be resolved through mathematical resolution.<sup>114</sup> These theories were popular in an age fixed on the idea of Providence and when cabalists or "earnest seekers" were seen as "intermediaries by means of which God's intervention in human affairs [took] place."<sup>115</sup> Dee was accepted and consulted by nobility, scholars, and writers, several of whom we know visited his library which contained many cabalistic texts (Pico, Giorgi, Agrippa). Even though Dee spent much time serving Elizabeth I as an intellectual advisor, eventually he faced public disgrace for his one-time popular mystical beliefs.

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<sup>113</sup> See Sherman 12, 43, 81, 95-96, 136 and 149.

<sup>114</sup> Yates makes this argument, *Occult* 80-81.

<sup>115</sup> See Blau 4.

The increasing popularity of witch-hunts and skepticism of the mystical certainly had some dampening effect on the study of esoteric systems like cabala. Our traditional scholarship and history of the late Renaissance would agree that "occult" systems and faith-based philosophies gave way to "rational," experimental methods. Yet textual evidence shows a sustained presence of cabalistic writings in Europe into the eighteenth century. Philip Beitchman in Alchemy of the Word: Cabala of the Renaissance and Brian Vickers as well as other scholars included in Vickers' collection, Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance, roundly criticize Frances Yates' work, particularly her arguments that occult philosophies were attacked and banished in respected circles in the late Renaissance. Mordechai Feingold's essay in Vickers's collection, "The occult tradition in the English universities of the Renaissance: a reassessment," argues that "At least until the middle of the seventeenth-century the occult tradition was essentially an intellectual tradition" (89). Citing works as late as 1631, Feingold presents "evidence concerning the attentiveness of the university official to the interest in the occult sciences is to be found in the large numbers of questions relating to the occult approved each year by convocation for disputation. There exists an uninterrupted succession of questions dealing with astrology, alchemy, and magic" (78). The ideas of cabala continue to appear in philosophical and scientific writings as well as Christian and Western philosophy, literature, and art through the eighteenth-century until the present.

Further, cabalist leader and self proclaimed Messiah Menasseh ben Israel's visit to England in 1655 at the invitation of Cromwell indicates some willingness to

accept the practice and its practitioners.<sup>116</sup> It is evident, however, that cabala and its system give way in this “scientific revolution” to reliance on observation and the experimental method. At what point or even if the connection between cabala and modern science is severed needs to be considered further.

### Cabal and Emerging New Science

Since cabala sought God in part through examining his Creation, the practices and goals of cabala were applicable to secular scholarly pursuits. Cabala was an ideal method for exploring the mysteries of the natural world since its focus was understanding the Creation and the Creator. Its principal concern with understanding the Creator and its associations with numbers drew mathematicians and Renaissance scientists to study cabala and employ its methods when developing their postulates and theories. Though in the late seventeenth century status of cabala as a legitimate philosophic method was waning, many scholars and scientists continued to use its symbolic systems in their investigations. In fact, cabalistic methods and philosophies remained connected to natural philosophy even as it emerged into "modern" scientific philosophies.

In modern scholarship we have typically associated the seventeenth century with the disappearance of faith-based and mystical practices, attaching exclusionary significance to historically popular philosophies like those of Frances Bacon and Issac Newton, which emphasize the power of rationalism over supernatural or occult

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<sup>116</sup> In 1655, Manasseh Ben Israel (1604-1657) visited Cromwell to ask him to consider readmitting Jews to England, lifting the ban established in 1290. Ben Israel was a well-known, though not universally well-liked, scholar and leader in the continental Jewish community. His efforts were not immediately successful, but he is credited with beginning the process for the readmission of Jews to England.

methods.<sup>117</sup> As increasing numbers of scholars have noted, there was not a total abandonment of mysticism in the early modern period. Despite research to the contrary, for the most part our opinions of the "Scientific Revolution" and the "Age of Reason" depend upon the assumption that mystical, "occult," and superstitious ideologies were stamped out by rational experimentation and theory. Examples such as Blazing World, then, are especially important to study since they demonstrate collusion between mystical practices and "modern" experimentation and indicate the complex and cooperative relationship that still existed between the new science and traditional scholarly methods in the early modern period.

In fact, Beitchman's study of cabalistic texts in the late Renaissance illustrates the proliferation of cabalistic texts in English translation during the seventeenth century. Where heretofore scholars traditionally accepted that esoteric methods such as cabala were on the decline, giving way to more "rational" and objective views of religion and natural philosophy, Beitchman's study demonstrates the opposite. Instead of a decline in the translation of cabalistic texts, he finds an increase. The halt of government censorship of publications at the fall of Charles I's monarchy permitted a greater number of "irreligious" and mystical texts and their translations to be published in England. Yet the temporary disarming of the importation and censorship laws cannot completely account for the great demand for these works during the Interregnum and later, indicating a sustained interest in the mystical and in cabala in particular. Other recent scholarship that acknowledges the continued use of non-rational, esoteric, or "superstitious" methods by early practitioners of the

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<sup>117</sup> This point is not to say that the studies of Bacon, or even Locke, are not in some ways associated with cabala or cabalistic methods.

scientific method bolsters the earlier assertions of Christopher Hill and Keith Thomas: "rationalism" did not annihilate superstition, leading to the Age of Reason; rather, mysticism and the "new," "modern" methods developed in tandem.<sup>118</sup>

While cabala maintained some of its legitimate status throughout the seventeenth century, its meaning varied in other ways. During the Restoration "cabala" and cabalists were increasingly associated with two disparaging images. First, though mystical and occult practices were still in practice during the early modern period, satirizing the mystical scientist and his or her methods continued to be in vogue.<sup>119</sup> Criticism of revelations and knowledge obtained through means other than the increasingly popular "rational" methods grew in step with the new reliance on rationality and observation, the scientific method, which was propagated and symbolized by the Royal Society.

The center of English scientific study, the Royal Society, established by Charles II in 1660, determined to rid the English public of misleading fantastical notions and thus set itself in direct opposition to methods associated with mystical knowledge or systems. In an encomium of the Royal Society, Abraham Cowley depicts Bacon as the embodiment of his new "science" of experimental method who rescues "the injured pupil" (40) from the "old giant's more gigantic ghost" of old

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<sup>118</sup> For additional studies of mystical scholarly pursuits in the early modern period see: Bernard Capp's English Almanacs 1500-1800: Astrology and the Popular Press (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977); and Ann Geneva, Astrology and the Seventeenth Century Mind: William Lilly and the Language of the Stars (New York: Manchester University Press, 1995). Christopher Hill and Keith Thomas's works are fundamental in the study of early modern religion, politics, learning, and society.

<sup>119</sup> Ben Jonson's Alchemist (1610), a satirical depiction, possibly of cabalist John Dee, is one example of satires on science and its practitioners. In the mid and late seventeenth century, this play was still performed and remained popular. One canto of Samuel Butler's Hudibras (1663-1678) is devoted to poking fun at the mystic and astrologer Sidrophel. Charles II was rumored to have carried a copy of Butler's work in his pocket.



philosophy (43). In Cowley's account of the developing science scene, Bacon heroically rescues society from the unreasonable hold of magical methods: "With the plain magic of true reason's light / [Bacon] chased out of our sight, / Nor suffered living men to be misled / By the vain shadows of the dead" (45-48). Bacon's science releases "Children and superstitious men" from "Ridiculous and senseless terrors" (56, 57). He accomplishes this by focusing knowledge away from traditional methods of logic and speculation or "words, which are but pictures of the thought" (68) and bringing attention to "things, the mind's right object" (71).<sup>120</sup>

For the Royal Society language was an instrument of spreading either reason or fanaticism and so was targeted as an essential key to managing belief and knowledge. In History of the Royal Society (1667), Thomas Sprat writes: "They [the Royal Society] have attempted, to free, [language] from Artifice, and Humors, and Passions of Sects; to render it an Instrument, whereby Mankind may obtain a Dominion over *Things*, and not only over one another's *Judgements*" (62). By controlling language and the direction of intellectual pursuits, the Royal Society hoped to keep the country from another devastating experience like the Civil War. This fate could be averted, they argued, by rational discussion of reasonable topics, theories that could be proven by observation, not ideas which were connected to potentially fanatical beliefs.<sup>121</sup> Since cabala was associated with mysticism as well as with interpretation – the manipulation of language – it stood in direct opposition to the plans and philosophies of the Royal Society and the new experimental method.

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<sup>120</sup> Cowley wrote "To the Royal Society" at Sprat's request as an introduction to his History; the two were published together in 1667.

<sup>121</sup> For further discussion and more detailed illustrations of these philosophies distinguish between Hobbes and the modernists, see Shapin and Schaffer's Leviathan and the Air Pump on the Hobbes-Boyles debates.

Not only did cabala have troublesome connections to issues in the debate over learning raised by the Royal Society but also other of its associations touched on unsettling political concerns. Cabala and its association with small groups and secret knowledge in the scholarly world translated easily into the political arena with similar satirical and paranoid references. In the wake of Civil War betrayals, the word "cabal" became increasingly linked in popular language to secret, political, and sinister small groups. According to the OED, "cabala" and "cabal" lose their restricted association with Jews, Judaism, and religious texts by 1637 and are defined instead generally as any "tradition" or "special private interpretation."<sup>122</sup> "Cabal" remains linked to secrecy. By 1646-47, a "cabal" is a "secret, private intrigue of a sinister character." "Cabal" in the 1660s is a small group of "people involved in secret machination."

In the mid-eighteenth century Samuel Johnson's A Dictionary of the English Language defines "cabal" first as "The secret science of the Hebrew rabbins," secondly as "A body of men united in some close design," and lastly as an "Intrigue." Johnson distinguishes between a "Cabalist," or "One skilled in the traditions of the Hebrews," and a "Caballer," who is "He that engages in close designs, an intriguer."<sup>123</sup>

Though "cabala" lost its isolated association with Jews and Judaism by the mid-seventeenth century, Johnson's definition indicates that there remained some awareness of the connection between Judaism and cabala. But what impact do the origins of "cabala" have on its development in England as a word that signifies

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<sup>122</sup> Oxford English Dictionary 746 and 744.

<sup>123</sup> See Johnson's Dictionary, v. 1 (New York: AMS Press, 1967).

anxiety, mystery, and plotting, generally a threat to order? Is it a coincidence that "caballing" became a popular term for secretive behavior shortly after the readmission of Jews into England (1655)?

To date, no scholars have connected the popularization of the term "cabal" as a suspicious grouping with the reintroduction of Jews into England or specifically with anti-Semitic activity in early modern England. In fact, in the primary sources I have studied, only one overtly connects cabala with Judaism, Margaret Cavendish's Blazing World. In this example, Cavendish distinguishes between types of cabala and dismisses "the Jews' cabala" as an unproductive method for scientific exploration.<sup>124</sup> But in Frank Felsenstein's examination of Jews in England during this period, he notes the rhetoric and textual examples of anti-Semitism present during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, which may suggest a relationship between the change in the definition of "cabal" and the reaction of Christian England to these new immigrants.<sup>125</sup> Though Felsenstein does not link anti-Semitism with cabala or cabalistic texts, what he identifies as targets or topics within Judaism which produced anxiety and hate are also common themes associated with cabala.

For instance, Felsenstein draws attention to the commonly held belief that Jewish "religious ritual is devised specifically to undermine the moral foundation of the church and state of their host country" (10). For this reason, rituals set Jews apart from Christians, especially Protestants, a point which could be abused to produce

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<sup>124</sup> I discuss further the terms on which and implications of Cavendish's discrediting of traditional, or "the Jews cabala," in my chapter on Cavendish and her work, Blazing World 182.

<sup>125</sup> Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture, 1660-1830 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

anxiety and misinterpreted to persecute people, groups and individuals.<sup>126</sup> Similarly, the traditional rituals of cabala and its limited practice by only a small group or by individuals also must have raised suspicions about it and those who practiced it, whether Jew or Christian.

Concern about religion eroding state and church is connected with cabala in attacks on non-conformists. In 1664 David Lloyd writes *Cabala, or, The Mystery of conventicles unvail'd in an historical account of the principles and practices of the nonconformists, against church and state* which discusses this activity from the time of “King Edward VI to the present.” In 1663, Sir John Birkenhead writes the pamphlet *A Mystery of godlinesse and no cabala* in response to an earlier tract attacking non-conformists. Though these texts appear to be targeting and defending non-Anglican, Protestant Christians and not Jews, one could argue that long-held anti-semitic anxieties about religious activity have been transposed onto non-conformists. While religious sects and concern about them, especially their role in starting the Civil War, would understandably justify concern about non-conformists, the choice to link this anxiety with cabala, a Jewish tradition, also indicates a connection in the social consciousness between suspicious religious groups and Jews.

### Politics and Cabals

But it was the foreign affairs committee of Charles II's Privy Council, commonly known as "the Cabal," that made the term common for political use.<sup>127</sup> In The Cabal, Maurice Lee details the history of the Cabal period and the part each

<sup>126</sup> See Felsenstein 37-39 for specific discussion of examples of these trends.

<sup>127</sup> For details about the Cabal, see Hill's The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714 167-168.

Cabal member played in these events. According to Lee, the first written, public reference to this group as "the Cabal" occurred in the pamphlet, "England's Appeal from the private Cabal at White-hall to the Great Council of the nation . . . by a true lover of his Country" (1673-75). Pepys's diary, however, tells us the appellation existed by word of mouth in society before this printing.<sup>128</sup> Since the names of these five committee members make an acronym that spells out "cabal" – Clifford, Arlington, Buckingham, Ashley, and Lauderdale – and each member was involved in secret machinations against each other, for the state, and some against the King, the term seems aptly applied.

### The Treaty of Dover

The Cabal period ran from 1667 to 1673 and is defined at one end by the fall from power of Charles II's first principal advisor, Lord Chancellor Clarendon, and at the other by Charles's change in foreign policy and his forced reliance on Parliament. The pivotal issue of this period was the Treaty of Dover, the details of which offer insight into the nature of the group, the king, and the period. Lee writes:

The treaty of Dover was the key to the Cabal year. Its purpose was to achieve the king's domestic objectives; Charles's principal intended victim was Parliament and only secondarily the Dutch. The treaty was the king's doing. Of his advisors only the mediocre Clifford and the obtuse James were enthusiastic; Arlington had serious misgivings, and the others did not know all that was involved. The odds against the king's success were enormous, owing

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<sup>128</sup> For further details of these accounts, see Maurice Lee's The Cabal (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965).

chiefly to the financial stringency which precluded military preparations adequate for the swift and overwhelming victory which was indispensable to Charles's purposes. And, when things began to go wrong, Parliament did what the king feared it would: it stopped him. (252)

In the wake of failed negotiations to formally ally England and France, Charles II's secretary, Arlington, negotiated the Triple Alliance in order to stave off an unpopular and costly war with Holland and for commercial gain. This alliance was an agreement to side against French encroachment in the Spanish Netherlands by uniting England with Sweden and Holland. This coalition soothed popular and parliamentary anxieties about the king's connection to France, but in reality, this union was only Charles's "public policy," a front for his dealings with France.<sup>129</sup> The Triple Alliance prompted France to make peace with Spain. With France no longer threatening Spain, an enemy England could not afford to engage, there was an opening for the Anglo-French alliance that Charles and Louis XIV wanted.

Though the Triple Alliance was popular with the people, it did not increase Charles's power or give him enough money to act independently from Parliament – his main objectives, according to Lee. With the help of Arlington and Thomas Clifford, and without the knowledge of the other foreign committee members, the secret Treaty of Dover was negotiated in 1670. In this agreement, Charles pledged to announce his Catholicism, the motivating factor for Louis; in return, the French agreed to support the English in a forthcoming war against the Dutch (1672), and Louis consented to financially support Charles's government. In order to account for the Anglo-French alliance but disguise the terms of the agreement and the money it

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<sup>129</sup> See Lee 124.

brought, Charles instructed an unwitting Buckingham to negotiate a decoy settlement with Louis. Assisted by Arlington, who played the part of reluctant participant, Buckingham brokered the false treaty, one without the Catholic clause or terms of the war against the Dutch. In 1671, all the Privy Council members signed this false treaty.

But in 1673, when the Dutch war was going badly, Charles had to rely upon Parliament for financial backing. The reconvened Parliament was upset with the King's use of the royal prerogative, his Stop of the Exchequer, and especially his Declaration of Indulgence.<sup>130</sup> Rather than approving the necessary funds for the war, as Charles needed, Parliament focused instead on the Indulgence and the legal questions surrounding the royal prerogative. Parliament's strong coalition of opposition to indulgence left the king with only two options: to disband Parliament and so be forced to end the war with the Dutch, which would anger the French, or to withdraw his Declaration. Among the Cabal were fierce supporters of the Declaration. Shaftesbury, with the help of his secretary, John Locke, had earlier written legal arguments establishing the king's right to act without Parliamentary approval in ecclesiastical matters. Buckingham also supported the declaration and urged the king to disband Parliament. Instead, the king ended the Declaration of Indulgence and received his money. In so doing, Charles alienated Buckingham and, more to his detriment, Shaftesbury. In fact, this step in supporting Anglicanism was only the first Parliament would require of the king. To prove his allegiance to the

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<sup>130</sup> The Stop of Exchequer (1672) was Charles's attempt to increase funds by paying only the interest on loans and not the principal. In creating the Declaration of Indulgence Charles suspended the penal laws against dissenters and Catholics, allowing non-Conformists greater freedom of religious expression and practice. This action was taken without parliamentary consent and was enacted as part of the king's royal prerogative.

state church, the king would agree to the Test Act, a move which endangered his closest advisors and even his brother and the Stuart monarchy.

### The Cabal (1667-1673)

The Cabal formed after the demise of Edward Hyde, the first Earl of Clarendon (1609-1674). Before the group was formally linked together, its members were joined by a mutual resentment of Clarendon and worked to undermine his position. Clarendon was a faithful royalist of Charles I who helped Charles II begin his reign. When Charles II assumed the throne, Clarendon was the automatic premier advisor, serving him as secretary of state and lord chancellor. He was a religious conservative and a monarchical zealot who advocated limiting Parliamentary powers. Charles II's faith in and reliance upon him was virtually unshakable, provoking the other Privy Council members to plot against him. When the Dutch wars were unsuccessful, truly due in part to Clarendon's mistakes, his political enemies used these failings as an excuse to attack him. In 1667 Clarendon was dismissed by Charles on the grounds of mismanagement and then impeached by Parliament; he fled to France and was banished.

The remaining Privy Councilors, the Cabal, jockeyed to fill the void of premier advisor caused by Clarendon's fall. No one of them, however, ever assumed a position of solitary influence over Charles II as Clarendon had. As a group, however, their impact on the State was as great as they were infamous. Though intriguing and secret groups were not the invention of Restoration England, this group of five stands out for their secretive plottings and duplicitous natures. Perhaps they



are memorable because they were not consistent, either as a group or as individuals, in their allegiances to king, faith, or political faction. Perhaps it is because they were equally involved in international as well as national scandals. Or perhaps it is because the suspicions and rumors about them were proven, confirmed publicly, and written about in a variety of genres.

In The Cabal, Lee explains that there was a sense of superstition and mystery that surrounded Charles II: he was the son of a martyr who miraculously escaped death in Worcester and was just as incredibly restored to his rightful place as king without bloodshed. As Lee notes, this blessed, "sentimental enthusiasm . . . had evaporated" by 1667.<sup>131</sup> Though a glimmer of this mystery remained around Charles, some might say until his death, the criticism of the king and his government became more serious over time. The distrust and cynicism generated by the Cabal certainly contributed to this change.

The list of infractions and crimes committed by the members as the Cabal is substantial. Whether acting alone, as a small sub-cabal within their group, or collectively as "the Cabal," the Cabal members' struggles were a microcosm of those conflicts within the nation: religious debates over toleration; disagreements over commercial policy involving trade and colonial development; disputes about the distribution of power and the exercise of political authority like the royal prerogative and Parliamentary power; the advantages and threats of international alliances with Catholic France and commercial competitor Holland.

The intrigues within the group and their efforts to conspire against each other made them most dangerous. Though suspicions persistently surrounded the group

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<sup>131</sup> See Lee 8.

during their collective time in power, it was the unsuccessful war with the Dutch in the early 1670s that prompted serious hostility toward the group. Lee notes the propaganda surrounding the war and observes "More and more, the five were being thought of, by the opponents of the war and the policies that went with it, as a cabal linked together to undermine the foundations of church and state. This sort of opinion was sufficiently widespread for the government to issue a proclamation in June, 1672, against the retailing [sic] of false news and licentious talk on matters of state."<sup>132</sup>

The story of the Cabal is one of powerful men involved in the most sensitive activities and possessing the most secretive information. It is not surprising, against this tumultuous backdrop, that "cabal" grew to be a word designating small groups of many kinds, not just political and not just dubious, nor that "cabala" was linked to suspect activity and remained connected to secret knowledge, encoded language, and suspicious behavior. As both instances demonstrate, knowledge and the transmission of knowledge remain critical issues during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In a society whose literacy rate is growing, that is moving toward a more representational government in which this new entity, "the public," is an influential force, and at a time when printed material is being produced in quickly multiplying numbers, information is the key to political power and national security. With such complexity in these terms, they are uniquely situated to powerfully and fully communicate the conflicted and shifting Restoration environment.

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<sup>132</sup> Lee 215-216.

**Chapter 3: "to make a Cabbala": Cabala as Creative Catalyst in Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World***

In the midst of the transition between the Commonwealth and restored monarchy, when cabala was practiced by respected philosophers as well as by those of suspicious reputation, Margaret Cavendish draws on the power and authority of cabala, blending its intellectual nature and condition with the uncertain circumstances of England to create a peaceful, generative world. In this world not only does Cavendish “recreate the mind” but also envisions a powerful monarch who establishes peace, sets religion beyond conflict, and explores complex questions of science.<sup>133</sup> Cavendish creates this place through the traditional systems of cabala and by a collaborative, generative cabal between the monarch and her conjured soul mate, the Duchess.

Cavendish invokes cabala plainly in a dramatic episode near the middle of The Description of A New World Called the Blazing World (1666) which follows an extensive examination of cabala, its tenets and viability. During this examination, the heroine, the Empress, quizzes her guiding spirits about cabala. They repeatedly express negative answers or opinions to the Empress’s questions about the nature of cabala, telling her that while “several had endeavoured it” those that had come close were “mere cheats” and that “Cabbalists have nothing else to do but to trouble their

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<sup>133</sup> See Margaret Cavendish, The Description of a New World Called the Blazing World in The Blazing World and Other Writings, ed. Kate Lilley (London: Routledge, 1992) 124. All subsequent quotations are taken from this edition and cited parenthetically

heads with such useless fancies” as numerology (166, 171). In spite of their discrediting cabala, the Empress proclaims

I have a great desire . . . to make a Cabbala. What kind of Cabbala asked the spirits? The Empress answered, the Jews' Cabbala. No sooner had the Empress declared her mind, but the spirits immediately disappeared out of her sight; which startled the Empress so much, that she fell into a trance, wherein she lay for some while. (179)

By Cavendish’s time, cabala was commonly known as an intellectual method of obtaining knowledge and had been connected to secret political behavior and damaging religious activity earlier in the century. This myriad of associations, their particular connections to secret, powerful knowledge – scientific, religious, and political – makes cabala a uniquely potent creative device with the ability to communicate a multitude of meanings and at the same time no exact meaning. The ambiguousness and powerful traditions of cabala give Cavendish the flexibility to experiment with potentially dangerous concepts within the safety of its history and uncertainty.

Cavendish seizes this opportunity. Employing cabala as a fictional device, Cavendish overcomes real personal obstacles and public political challenges in her society to become "mistress," scientist, and peacemaker, assuming an authority and power to resolve the conflicts that plagued her and her society. In using cabala in this way, Cavendish expands the possibilities cabala offers to writers. Through Blazing World, Margaret Cavendish demonstrates how cabala can allow a person to create his or her own kingdom, to retain the monarchy of his or her own mind. As a fictional

device, cabala provides the system upon which Cavendish can build and explain her theories of natural philosophy and governance as well as correct societal norms. Through cabala, Cavendish is both liberated from the failings of the society around her and unencumbered by the defects that keep her from achieving the level of work and esteem she desires. Cabala, then, provides Cavendish the power that allows her to resolve the conflicts of her own world. The political nightmare of the Civil War and the uncertainty of Charles' new reign, the disappointments of being excluded from philosophical discussion and exploration, and the instability of religious circumstances weighed on Cavendish and, quite literally, robbed her of a fulfilling life. The diversity and power of cabala free Cavendish to create a better world, to reclaim peace as a citizen and establish her place among scientists.

In "making" a cabala, Cavendish creates a text as multi-layered and diverse as cabala itself. The various layers of Blazing World have earned it and Cavendish many critiques, such as accusations of authorial confusion and inadequacy. However, reading Blazing World with an understanding of cabala allows the reader to see these supposed shortcomings as intentionally disguised declarations of political and scientific theories and personal power. Understanding how cabala was used in science and in Cavendish's society increases the reader's comprehension of the text and provokes a reassessment of Cavendish's work.

To understand the significance of cabala for Cavendish and the Blazing World, we must first identify the symbols of cabala that Cavendish employs as well as how the links between philosophy and cabala help Cavendish establish herself as a legitimate scientist. Furthermore, with an understanding of how Cavendish employs

cabala and its systems, issues raised in Cavendish scholarship, such as questions of identity and the Lady's travel through worlds, can also be readdressed with new insight.

### Cavendish in Contemporary Criticism

Early commentators and critics of Cavendish and her writing underestimated or dismissed her abilities. As Douglas Grant, Virginia Woolf, and Marjorie Nicholson demonstrate, Cavendish did not easily shake her reputation as “Mad Madge,” a failing writer who led an interesting life.<sup>134</sup> In these early biographies and commentaries of Cavendish, her life was seen as fantastic and her writings as ridiculous, even incomprehensible, and there was little credible consideration of her science.

Even after Cavendish was reexamined by feminist re-visionaries and she and her writing were seen more sympathetically,<sup>135</sup> scholars continued to vary between appreciating her work and denigrating her accomplishments in their struggle to place her among other writers and philosophers of the period and to account for her unusual circumstances and literary choices. As a result of these challenges, critics often opt to focus on the restrictions of Cavendish's life and work, explaining away or valuing

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<sup>134</sup> See Grant's Margaret the First: A Biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, 1623-1673 (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1957); Woolf's "The Duchess of Newcastle" in The Common Reader: First Series (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984); Nicholson's "'Mad Mage' and 'The Wits'" in Pepys Diary and the New Science (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia, 1965).

<sup>135</sup> Among these see A History of Women Philosophers, ed. Mary Ellen Waite, v. 3 (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991); Hilda Smith's Reason's Disciples: Seventeenth-Century English Feminists (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Sylvia Bowerbank's "The Spider's Delight: Margaret Cavendish and the 'Female' Imagination" *ELR* 14 (1984): 392-407; Sophia Blaydes' "Nature is a Woman: The Duchess of Newcastle and Seventeenth-Century Philosophy" in Man, God, and Nature in the Enlightenment, ed. Donald C. Mell, Theodore E. D. Braun, and Lucia M. Palmer (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1988).

only parts of her writing and philosophy. One example of how these readings limit our appreciation of Cavendish's writing is their depiction of Cavendish as an outsider and a victim, particularly of her gender, using The Blazing World as evidence of this position.

For instance, Catherine Gallagher argues that the Blazing World is a series of "regression(s)" and so Cavendish's exploration of new worlds and peoples, governments and knowledge is a withdrawal.<sup>136</sup> Gallagher repeatedly characterizes Cavendish's creation of the Blazing World as a female "retreat," a way to achieve "isolation," "a private, sequestered place," and an "utterly private self" achieved through "a process of infinite regression."<sup>137</sup> For Gallagher, a woman's bid for authority must be isolated since "Exclusion from political subjecthood allows female subjectivity to become absolute."<sup>138</sup> Sandra Sherman continues this line of argument, describing Cavendish and Blazing World as a "self-in-isolation" and an "unstable" self, and a "political withdrawal."<sup>139</sup> While John Rogers casts many of Cavendish's scientific arguments in a favorable light, he contends that her "liberal feminism . . . falls prey to the same pressures of contradiction that beset all the theorists of liberal vitalism."<sup>140</sup> Ultimately, Rogers concludes that the Empress of the Blazing World cannot rule effectively because she acquiesces rather than rules, her will inadequate to make and sustain systematic or political change.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> See Gallagher's "Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England," *Genders* 1 (Spring 1988): 31.

<sup>137</sup> See 27, 29-32.

<sup>138</sup> See 28.

<sup>139</sup> See Sherman's "Trembling Texts: Margaret Cavendish and the Dialectic of Authorship," *ELR* 24(1994): 184-210.

<sup>140</sup> See Rogers' The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1996) 181.

<sup>141</sup> Rogers 207-208.

Lisa Sarasohn argues that Cavendish's attack on the new science was "a weapon in her battle for the recognition of female intellectual equality."<sup>142</sup> Sarasohn also explains that some attacks on Cavendish's view of atomism are like "a complaint often made against Hobbes himself."<sup>143</sup> While Sarasohn helps situate Cavendish among scientists of her time, placing her within the heated debate of how to pursue scientific work, she still does not credit her intellect, asserting that Cavendish "was unable to develop a systematic understanding of the work of others" and describing her work as "extravagant imagination and uncritical thought."<sup>144</sup> Sarasohn speaks of Cavendish occupying an "ambivalent position" that gives her only the "recourse" of "fantasy," "taking refuge with herself," which is evidence of her "sense of isolation and forced reliance on herself."<sup>145</sup>

This scholarship does little to move beyond Cavendish's shortcomings and difficulties as a writer, intellectual, and woman to fully represent her complicated position and her ability to exploit the opportunities of her multiple stations. As we acknowledge Cavendish's lack of formal education, just as she was compelled to do, we must understand Cavendish's limitations in her context, appreciating the social and political nature of her position while also fairly assessing her successful employment of scientific principles and literary forms along with her inventive manipulation of each. For instance, while Sarasohn's argument that Cavendish's use of fantasy results from her "ambivalent position" in society helps us appreciate the obstacles Cavendish faced as a writer and scientist, it also diminishes her as a thinker

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<sup>142</sup> See Sarasohn's "A Science Turned Upside Down: Feminism and the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 47 (1984): 289.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid* 291.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid* 292, 293 especially.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid* 301-302.



and writer by portraying her as *only* an outsider. Cavendish's relationship to and position within her culture – scientific, political, and social – were more complicated than that.

Scholars have traditionally linked Cavendish's limitations to her gender, and certainly one could argue that, as a man of her class, Cavendish would not have encountered the same kind of derision as a philosopher or struggled to educate herself as she, as a woman, was forced to do. However, without complicating these readings by crediting Cavendish's achievements and privileges, these arguments restrict the power of Blazing World for the reader by portraying Cavendish as acquiescing to the limitations placed upon her rather than as struggling against and at times overcoming them. A woman who named herself "Margaret the First" and was confident enough in her thinking and writing to repeatedly put both on public display, even critiquing and attempting to engage other philosophers in printed debates, is not a person in isolation or withdrawal nor is she someone occupying an exclusively private space (124). She is actively, forcefully claiming authority.

Cavendish's position outside the circles of governmental and scientific power is undeniable, but it is the nature of this position that must be considered. In addition to Gallagher's and Sherman's arguments that Cavendish cannot find a place of fulfillment within her society and chooses an outsider's position, we must consider how Cavendish created a space for herself inside society, political and scientific, and furthered her desires through these avenues.<sup>146</sup> Recent scholarship follows this vein

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<sup>146</sup> Judith Moore's article "Twentieth-Century Feminism and Seventeenth-Century Science: Margaret Cavendish in Opposing Contexts," *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700*, 26.1 (2002): 1-14, reviews contemporary criticism and also argues for a more balanced consideration of Cavendish's accomplishments as a writer in addition to her shortcomings.

of thought by placing Cavendish within the scientific milieu of her time, and by arguing her theories were plausible explanations for what was known in her day, giving her philosophies greater credence.<sup>147</sup> Furthermore, the articles in Gulshan Taneja's collection In-between: Essays and Studies in Literary Criticism repeatedly demonstrate Cavendish's connection to the literary traditions of the seventeenth-century, the masque tradition, and to other traditional forms and writers, establishing Cavendish's place among writers and writing rather than solely noting the attributes of her writing that portray her as the exception and thus outside of literary traditions.<sup>148</sup>

Cavendish's desire for fame has long forced scholars to consider the questions of political authority raised in her writing and thus conceive of Cavendish and her work with greater complexity. As a royalist exiled during the Civil War with Queen Henrietta Maria, Cavendish repeatedly argues for faithful loyalty to the absolute monarch. In her social hierarchy, she subjugates women to men and all people to their ruler. Yet, as Catherine Gallagher, Dolores Paloma, and Anna Battigelli, among others, have argued, Cavendish does not simply relegate women to a weaker status nor leave the kings' right to govern without critique.<sup>149</sup> These critics argue that

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<sup>147</sup> Lisa Sarasohn's A Science Turned Upside Down begins to argue this line. See Eileen O'Neill's introduction to her edition of Cavendish's Observations for a more complete defense and rationalization of Cavendish's science. Also see Richard Nate's "'Plain and Vulgarly Express'd': Margaret Cavendish and the Discourse of the New Science," *Rhetorica* 19.4 (2001): 403-417; Londa Schiebinger's "Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle" in A History of Women Philosophers; Eve Keller's Producing Petty Gods, *ELH* 64.2 (1997); Sue Wiseman, Margaret Cavendish Among the Prophets, *Women's Writing* 6.1 (1999): 95-111; and Jay Stevenson's "The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish," *SEL* 36.3 (1996): 527-543.

<sup>148</sup> See In-between: Essays and Studies in Literary Criticism, 9.1 & 2 (March and September 2000).

<sup>149</sup> See Paloma's "Margaret Cavendish: Defining the Female Self," *Women's Studies*. 7.1-2 (1980): 55-66; Battigelli in Hilda Smith's Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 40-55. See also Sylvia Brown's "Margaret Cavendish: Strategies Rhetorical and Philosophical Against the Charge of Wantonness, Or Her Excuses for Writing So Much," *Critical Matrix* 6 (1991): 20-39.

Cavendish's methods and style subvert the patriarchal system that limited Cavendish as a writer and as a philosopher. Though Gallagher conceives of Cavendish's challenge as one made by removing herself from the scene, Cavendish balances a true loyalty to monarchy and monarchical order with a story that creates a space for herself within this system<sup>150</sup> Furthermore, Lisa Anscomb explains how Cavendish's use of scientific discourse created a space for her voice within its society, claiming some power within its constrictive culture.<sup>151</sup> This line of reading better represents Cavendish's position as both an insider and an outsider and is a better context through which to understand her life as a scientist and as a woman writing.

As Hilda Smith's introduction to Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition discusses, women are one among several groups whose position and power within society is constantly renegotiated during and after the Commonwealth and Restoration periods. Cavendish has a unique position in this tradition. She is loyal to both king and husband and, deeply wounded by the war and social reconfigurations during her life, is not eager to advocate any measure that would endanger either public or private domestic happiness. In understanding her position, we must also acknowledge that her husband was a tireless supporter of all her endeavors and that her brother Charles also contributed to her education and her pursuit of science. Because Cavendish benefits from the social order, she can defend a monarchical and patriarchal system even as she critiques and re-imagines it, as she

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<sup>150</sup> Randall Ingram's analysis demonstrates how Cavendish achieves this space for herself in his argument about her relationship with readers in "First Words and Second Thoughts: Margaret Cavendish, Humphrey Mosely, and 'the Book'," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30.1 (2000): 101-124.

<sup>151</sup> "'A Close, Naked, Natural Way of Speaking': Gendered Metaphor in the Texts of Margaret Cavendish and the Royal Society," *In-Between: Essays and Studies in Literary Criticism*, 9.1-2 (Mar-Sept. 2000): 161-77.

does in Blazing World. While it is clear Margaret Cavendish as a woman was limited by her gender-biased society, as a wife and sister she was blessed. Likewise as a survivor – albeit a vastly wounded survivor – of the Civil War, Cavendish has ample and understandable reason to promote loyalty to king as well.

Following Smith's example, I further establish Cavendish within her literary and scholarly traditions by examining her use of cabala as a means to create a space for herself in the conversations and traditions of literature, science, and political commentary, thereby gaining authority. Later I will show that Cavendish builds her arguments from within as well as outside the power structures, seizing power in a way that would have been recognized during her time as assuming authority, not abdicating it. For example, by claiming weaknesses and pleading for understanding from her audience, frequent occurrences in her writings, Cavendish at once submits to the authority of accepted philosophers and writers, a group she does not and cannot number herself among, and makes a space for herself in scientific discourse as a self-conscious "other." By demonstrating a knowledge of others' methods and arguments, even critiquing them, Cavendish is able to use the status held by these accepted authors and their theories in order to position herself within their circle. Because cabala was understood to be a means of accessing power, the power of God, the Creator, employing it becomes another way Cavendish proves her knowledge, and places herself within a tradition. By doing so Cavendish positions herself inside the scientific discourse and claiming the authority and power inherent in the knowledge of cabala. The mystical traditions of cabala and its idea of direct access to God

enables Cavendish to claim power for her characters and, more importantly, for herself as a writer and philosopher.

In writing the Blazing World, Cavendish creates a unique example of how cabala furthers scientific exploration while subverting the restrictive methods the emerging "modern," empirical science placed upon scientists. Additionally, as the foundation of cabala is in the story of the Old Testament Creation, with God the Father as Creator and King, using it opens avenues for writers such as Cavendish to address issues of kingship and social order. Cavendish seizes the opportunities cabala provides to address a myriad of questions and issues prevalent in her society through writing Blazing World. Cavendish explicitly, and in detail, discusses cabala and the reasonableness of its practice for nearly twenty of the one hundred pages of Blazing World. Not only does Cavendish have her main character and heroine, the Empress, examine cabala, its methods and history, but also Cavendish repeatedly employs the systems and symbols of cabala to propel and form the narrative. In so doing, Cavendish further expands the uses and meaning of cabala, making it into a literary device. In Blazing World, cabala is the means to writing and governing one's own world. Cavendish puts into practice the creative story of cabala in which the Creator's retraction – in this case, moving from reality to fiction – opens a space for her emanations (words and characters) to build a world and generative relationships through forming a cabal. By exploring the presence of cabala and cabal in Blazing World, the reader can better understand Cavendish's philosophies of science and social organization as well as see a reason for the text's fantastical nature.

Blazing World is a relatively short narrative, a combination of philosophical treatise, romance, and fantasy. As a romance, Blazing World is the story of a Lady, kidnapped by sailors, who travels through three separate worlds and is miraculously rescued first by natural forces and finally by animal-men. Once she is saved by the animal-men, the Lady is taken to the Emperor of the Blazing World who instantly falls in love with her and makes her his Empress. The Empress is an exemplary ruler who ensures peace and order in the kingdom and establishes academies to study the world's mysteries. It is while performing her duties supervising the academies and experimenting with her own philosophies that the Empress explores and questions the practice of cabala. During her attempts to "make a cabala," the Empress makes a cabal by calling up the soul of the "Duchess of Newcastle" to assist in the cabala. The two ladies develop an intimate relationship that leads to further adventures. The Empress and the Duchess proceed to create worlds of their own, not physical worlds, but worlds in their minds. The final episodes of the text involve visits by the two women to their original homes. The Duchess takes the Empress back to the Duchess's world (England), and a review of England, its court and theatre follow. Finally, the Empress returns to her original world to help her people overcome invading armies through the use of her advanced science.

Published together with Cavendish's Observations Upon Experimental Philosophy, Blazing World is but one of several writings in which Cavendish addresses philosophic questions at length. Of all these writings, only in Blazing World does Cavendish devote significant attention to cabala as a method of scientific and philosophical exploration. As Cavendish informs the reader from the beginning,

she has several objectives for creating Blazing World. As a scientist, Cavendish attempts "to recreate the mind, and withdraw it from its more serious contemplations" through Blazing World (124). As an "ambitious" member of her sex, Blazing World is her "endeavor to be *Margaret the First*" (124). Science and authority are the two central issues of this text and are inextricably bound up with cabala. Cavendish relies upon cabala's traditions and structure to bring about her own and her characters' roles as Creators, the ultimate scientists. The traditions and symbols of cabala are also essential to the Empress's successful management of her subjects in the orchestration of a peaceful kingdom.

#### Cavendish and Cabal

While Cavendish goes to great lengths to demonstrate how to create a peaceful kingdom in Blazing World, in the process she recalls one of the most disruptive circumstances of her age – the King's Privy Council, the Cabal – by portraying such a close relationship between the Empress and the Duchess. Though Cavendish does not refer to the relationship between the Empress and the Duchess as a "cabal," the creation of such an intimate and interdependent relationship between a monarch and one of her advisors at a time when Charles II's Cabal of ministers was such a prevalent image makes this relationship even more intriguing. Furthermore, rather than avoid issues of power between the Empress and the Duchess, Cavendish repeatedly draws the conversation to their mutual ambitions to rule and to obtain knowledge.

For example, the Empress, sensing the Duchess is sad, asks the Duchess to tell her what is wrong. Given that “between dear friends there’s no concealment, they being like several parts of one united body,” the Duchess confesses that her sadness is due to “extreme ambition” to “be a great princess,” more particularly, “an Empress of a world” (183, 184). After discussing the considerable power the Duchess has in her present rank and learning that this does not appease the Duchess’s ambition, the Empress and her spirits begin to consider ways in which the Duchess can obtain her own world. As this scene shows, Cavendish repeatedly portrays the Empress’s relationship with the Duchess as a means for the Empress and the Duchess to improve their knowledge and increase their power with no perceived threat to either of them or to the order of the Blazing World. Just as she dismisses the negative feelings toward cabala circulating in her society by employing the system to create worlds and discover knowledge – though she does acknowledge the existence of these unflattering ideas through the spirits’ and the Duchess’s commentary on cabala – Cavendish moves beyond the stigma a monarch’s close relationship with advisors holds in order to portray their positive power and effects.

Cavendish also directly employs “cabal” in her play “Wits Cabal” (1662).<sup>152</sup> The play, a satire, is about negotiating the power in male-female relationships, particularly marriage. With characters like “Madamoiselle Ambition” and “Monsieur Vain-glorious,” Cavendish provides vignettes of stock discussion and warnings about the nature of men, women and marriage. The play does not depict any cabal of characters plotting against each other or against marriage, and no pervasive manipulations. The play is a study of and from different perspectives on marriage,

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<sup>152</sup> For full text see *Early English Books*, 502:11.



children, love, beauty, wealth, courtship, and the hierarchy of family. In this series of conversations and monologues, Cavendish does not resolve these issues, only raises them. As Mihoko Suzuki points out, through the “Wits Cabal” Cavendish asserts that “with words rather than swords as weapons, women can enter the lists [of writers] on equal footing with men.”<sup>153</sup> Suzuki sees Cavendish’s use of satire not her use of “cabal,” as her means to power.

The anxieties about the Cabal as well as about groups of women, as is evidenced in the reaction to Quaker women, would certainly have been two reasons to distrust the relationship between the Empress and the Duchess.<sup>154</sup> Yet Blazing World as a whole is replete with examples of Cavendish reconceptualizing institutions and relationships in order to create a better world, for the Empress and Duchess as individuals and for the people of the Blazing World. Her reinterpretation of the monarch’s advisors as a positive force, like her use of cabala as a creative device and philosophical method, is another example of this practice.

### Cabala and the Scientific Milieu

The negative connotations associated with cabala did not dissuade philosophers from practicing it. Cavendish was only one of the early modern scholars to apply esoteric methods in the study of natural philosophy and to use cabala specifically.<sup>155</sup> Scientists of the seventeenth century, like Cavendish, used traditional

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<sup>153</sup> Suzuki’s “Margaret Cavendish and the Female Satirist,” *Studies in English Literature* 37.3 (1997): 491. Though Suzuki studies this piece, she does not investigate the implications of Cavendish’s use of “cabal” or its potential connections to politics.

<sup>154</sup> See earlier notes on this point, especially as they are argued in McDowell and in Hill’s World Turned Upside Down 200-201, 203-204.

<sup>155</sup> See Beitchman’s work on the subject and Scholem’s Kabbalah 200.

and ancient cabalistic forms consistent with the original philosophies of cabala. One of the most prominent practitioners of cabala in Cavendish's time was Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-1698) who, along with fellow scientist Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, edited Kabbala Denudata (1677-84), one of the most influential collections of Luriantic kabbalistic texts for Christian thought.<sup>156</sup> Mercury van Helmont was the son of Jan Baptista van Helmont (1577-1644), a chemist and well-known medical doctor who is credited with being the first to give the name "gas" to this classification of substances. Like his father, Mercury is also associated both with theology and science, though his connection to mystical practices seems more established. Along with van Helmont, the renowned scholar and Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614-87) and his collaborator, Lady Anne Finch Conway (1631-79), also relied upon cabalistic features in their writing and study.<sup>157</sup> Van Helmont lived with Conway the last several years of her life and More's frequent visits gave the three a close community through which to develop their scientific, mystical, and cabalistic knowledge. More's Conjectura Cabbalistic (1662), which follows the traditional three part pattern of cabalistic texts, is an excellent example of a typical Christian cabalistic philosophical text.

Blazing World is a unique example of the use of cabala in scientific pursuits and literature because it is so consciously fictional. Like Cavendish's other philosophical works as well as those of other philosophers, Blazing World

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<sup>156</sup> See Gershom Scholam's Kabbalah 201

<sup>157</sup> For complete discussion on Anne Conway, Henry More, and van Helmont's work, philosophical and mystical, see The Conway Letters: The Correspondence of Anne, Viscountess Conway, Henry More and their Friends, 1642-1684, ed. Sarah Hutton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Sarah Hutton's Henry More (1614-1687): Tercentenary Studies (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990); and Henry More: The Rational Theology of a Cambridge Platonist, Aharon Lichtenstein (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

participates in contemporary conversations about science by addressing, among other things, questions of materialism and the nature of the human soul, as well as critiquing the scientific method. Though using fiction to better understand natural philosophy was not a new idea, to use cabala to create a fantastical work was. Typically, cabalistic works of Cavendish's time were philosophical treatises which hypothesized and argued points without adding fictional elements. Traditional cabalistic texts, such as the Zohar,<sup>158</sup> used stories as allegories in order to illustrate cabalistic principles. Even though these texts might contain some of the mystical figures and components which make up the mythology of cabala, they are not science fiction or fantasy as Blazing World is. This departure from traditional and contemporary cabalistic generic form is an example of Cavendish's merging of the ancient form and her own original style in symbolism and philosophy.

Cavendish's eclectic borrowing and the intertextuality and wide-spread influence of cabala, and the reliance on or experimentation with cabala in several communities and discourses make separating cabalistic thought from other philosophies difficult in her work. Cavendish's explicit creation of a "Cabbala" and repeated use of key symbols and methods in the first portion of Blazing World, however, clearly indicate her interest in and familiarity with this tradition. It is the combination of these elements – the three world system, Cavendish's repetition of cabalistic textual structure, her invocation of cabalistic symbols and systems, among others – that illustrate the necessity of considering the influence of cabala in this text.

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<sup>158</sup> See Gershom Scholem's edition of selected readings from the Zohar: The Book of Splendor (New York: Schocken Books, 1963). The Zohar is "the most important literary work of the Kabbalah" (7).

### Creation, Cabala, and Identity

As an intellectual who was limited in education and community, Margaret Cavendish struggled to establish authority as a scientist. Since cabala was still practiced as a scientific method during Cavendish's lifetime, she could use cabala to establish her authority as "mistress" of her own world and attempt to resolve societal issues and philosophical questions of her material world while working within an acceptable scientific medium.<sup>159</sup> Often, current scholarship on Blazing World raises questions of authority by focusing on issues of identity. Because the main characters of the narrative resemble Cavendish and/or share her name, discussions of authority and identity are interrelated. Looking at cabala as a device which frames and organizes Blazing World and at Cavendish's invocation of cabala's cosmology will answer some of the questions of identity that arise from this unusual text. For example, the creative characters in Blazing World reenact parts of the Creation as it is explained in cabalistic texts, providing new possibilities for understanding how Cavendish constructs identity. Cavendish uses cabalistic traditions concerning the Creation and the flexible textuality inherent in cabala to overcome her limitations and to create authority for her arguments. After all, a fantastical, obviously fictional world is difficult to argue against, and who can attack the God-Creator?

In a description matching Cavendish's own conflicted adherence to form coupled with subversiveness, scholars describing the nature of cabala claim, "Kabbalah owes its success to this piquant blend of tradition and creativity, loyalty to

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<sup>159</sup> For a fuller explanation of the extent to which cabala and its practitioners were accepted and criticized in the Renaissance, see Yates and Blau.

the past and bold innovation."<sup>160</sup> Cabala also is based in and supports the oldest, most foundational of Jewish traditions, the Creation story. Cabala must also be "innovati[ve]" because its premise is that present knowledge is not enough. Cavendish, like cabala, remains a conservative figure with traditional beliefs even as she proposes and behaves in untraditional ways. Cabala suited Cavendish in other ways. Though cabala was a philosophy examined and employed by leading scholars and writers,<sup>161</sup> its reliance on faith as opposed to education or reason exclusively and its traditional questioning of canonical thought made it available to the "untrained." Furthermore, its scholarly tradition of small groups and its accessibility to those lacking in education suited Cavendish's nature, desires, and situation: Cavendish had no formal training and her access to philosophical conversations, most often held in exclusively male gatherings, was limited; as her numerous publications indicate, she wanted to take part in these debates.

Margaret Cavendish struggled against the intellectual limitations caused by her lack of formal education and the restrictions placed upon her gender. From the writings and correspondence that survive, it appears that no Restoration scholar took Cavendish seriously enough to rebut, concur with, or answer her ideas at length. Though Cavendish exclaimed that she was "all admiration" at the Royal Society's exhibition on the occasion of her visit, she was open in her criticism of the group and of its new experimental method in many of her philosophical writings. Cavendish

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<sup>160</sup> Matt 2.

<sup>161</sup> Previously cited sources on cabala such as Beitchman, Yates, and Blau provide a substantial list of examples to support my claim. Cavendish names John Dee and Edward Kelly as cabalists of the sixteenth and early seventeenth-century. Henry Vaughan and Henry More are among those who explored cabala during Cavendish's lifetime. Though Cavendish lists More as one of the recent scientists the Empress considers as a potential scribe for her cabala, she does not discuss More as a cabalist or his work as cabalistical. See [Blazing World](#) 181.

was not alone in her opposition to experimental science's theories nor was her science outdated in her time.<sup>162</sup> As a materialist like Thomas Hobbes, Cavendish's conflict with the Royal Society was not based exclusively on gender and her exclusion from its ranks but also on differences of opinions about natural philosophy.

By publishing and boldly inserting herself into philosophical conversations among leading scientists, Cavendish made herself and her theories even more vulnerable to criticism. Like other writing women, Cavendish had a natural inquisitiveness that would not allow her to easily accept the intellectual constraints of her society. In order to be taken seriously as a philosopher, Margaret Cavendish produced typical philosophical texts such as Philosophical Orations. But it is through Blazing World, especially through her use of cabala in the text, that Cavendish is able to cope with and briefly overcome these limitations. Using cabala in its mystical sense not only suited Cavendish's interest in science but operated as an empowering coding device that enabled her to overcome the obstacles keeping her from being accepted into scientific circles and debating her ideas. By invoking cabala, which has a complex nature and was perceived as both a legitimate and an illegitimate practice, in Blazing World, Cavendish creates a coded and shielded text which extends its legitimacy to other of her ideas. As a scientist working outside of the

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<sup>162</sup> As recent scholarship has begun to establish Cavendish's affiliations within the seventeenth century scientific milieu and to justify her philosophical and scientific theories, we can better evaluate Cavendish's place in science within her own context. See John Rogers in The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry and Politics in the Age of Milton (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996) 180; Jay Stevenson, "The Mechanist-Vitalist Soul of Margaret Cavendish," *SEL* 36.3 (Summer 1996): 527-543, and Lisa Sarasohn, "A Science Turned Upside Down: Feminism and the Natural Philosophy of Margaret Cavendish," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 47 (1984): 289-307 for in-depth discussions of Cavendish's science.

Sarasohn argues for the legitimacy of Cavendish's science and discusses the impact her lack of education had on her ability to adequately engage in scholarly debate, while Jay Stevenson asserts that rather than contributing Cavendish's confusing rhetoric to shortcomings in her education, her conflicting theories and explanations "disguise" the truly "unorthodox" (528) and potentially threatening claims she makes.

Royal Society's collaborative influence and protection, Cavendish knew the difficulties of opposing their theories.<sup>163</sup> Add to these qualities Blazing World's mixture of fact, fiction, and fantasy in the narrative and the distinctions between the real and the fantastic become blurred, further shielded. Cabalistic traditions and symbols offer a key to reading Blazing World while providing a shield for Cavendish and her world(s) from the critical, potentially harmful (mis)understanding of her contemporaries.

In her effort to create authority and a place for herself in public and scientific conversations, Cavendish's unique invocation of the traditional sense of cabala as a fictional device is a reinterpretation of its methods. Through the Duchess, Cavendish quickly sets aside "the Jews' Cabbala," "a philosophical Cabbala," "a moral Cabbala," and a "political Cabbala," settling instead on "a poetical or romancical Cabbala" (182, 183). In so doing, Cavendish avoids recent scandalous implications associated with cabala while retaining the serious and scholarly reputation of the word.

What seems to be complete fantasy, when read through the frame of cabalistic traditions, is an experiment in an ancient philosophy. The Lady's journey from the end of one world to two others, for instance, is a replica of the cabalist's meditative ascension from the earthly to the heavenly sphere, transcendence required for her or him to achieve wisdom. Though Cavendish may not be the earliest female cabalist, as Lee Cullen Khanna suggests,<sup>164</sup> Cavendish's extended and serious treatment of

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<sup>163</sup> As James Fitzmaurice points out, Cavendish "was well aware that the last aristocratic woman to send a book to the press, Lady Mary Wroth, was thoroughly vilified" (297).

<sup>164</sup> In a footnote to her article, Lee Cullen Khanna briefly elucidates the role of cabala in the text. She asserts that Cavendish "appropriate[ed]...a special form of knowledge, a form associated with great

cabala in a fictional text is extremely rare for a man or woman of that time.<sup>165</sup>

Yet, Cavendish's treatment of cabala is not wholly positive. To begin, she offers both a critique of the method through the voice of the spirits before a demonstration of its productiveness in the work of the Empress and the Duchess. In her discussion with the spirits, the Empress “enquire[s] after the most famous students, writers, and experimental philosophers in that world, which they gave her a full relation of” (166). Then the Empress asks “whether there were none that had found out yet the Jews’ Cabbala” (166). The spirits tell the Empress about John Dee and his assistant Edward Kelly, that they “came nearest” but were “proved at last mere cheats” (166). The Empress asks for specifics about Dee and Kelly’s cabala as well as about the basic tenets and ideas of cabala: whether it is two- or three-fold; if it was a “work of only natural reason, or of divine inspiration;” whether natural philosophers could be cabbalists. The Empress also asks about the composition of God, if “there was any Cabbala” in him or “whether God was full of Ideas” (167). The Empress asks about the nature of faith, its origin, and about the location of Paradise, and the nature of the spirits. The Empress continues to explore fundamental questions about God and faith as well as about numerology and Creation, inquisitive to understand the nature and value of cabala, it seems. The spirits answer her questions directly; she takes it all in, only asking other questions, never commenting on their answers. As in the visits with the animal-men in their academies, the

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power and yet never before, despite its complexity and eclecticism, taken up by a woman” (210). See “The Subject of Utopia: Margaret Cavendish and Her *Blazing-World*,” Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: World of Difference, ed. Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerton (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994) 15-35.

<sup>165</sup> Some scholars have noticed cabalistic elements in other fictional texts, most notably Edmund Spenser's *Fairie Queene* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. What distinguishes *Blazing World* from these texts is Margaret Cavendish's explicit invocation of cabala and examination of it as a method.



Empress is an investigator.

In addition to these answers about faith and the spirit world, the spirits divulge further information about Cabbalists, confessing to the Empress: “Many . . . that write Cabbalas pretend to divine inspirations” (167), “not all Cabbalas are true” (170), “Cabbalists have nothing else to do but to trouble their heads with such useless fancies” (171), “there are no more atheists then [sic] what Cabbalists make” (173). Clearly Cavendish wants the reader to understand that cabalists are not to be trusted. In spite of these remarks, the Empress still embarks on her own cabala.

The Empress’s conflicted feelings and the disparaging reports from the spirits are appropriate for Cavendish’s time. Though mystical methods were still used in early modern England, there was a trend in popular opinion to distrust practices associated with magic or supernatural methods. Beitchman's work documents this dichotomy by demonstrating the persistent use of cabalistic methods in philosophical and religious texts even as people come to view it more suspiciously as dangerous or demonic. Beitchman's ever-growing list of texts and authors who explicitly address or use cabala and cabalistic methods make dismissing its importance and pervasiveness even through the seventeenth century impossible. Some early modern writers clearly considered cabala a legitimate, rational study though others viewed it as a false holdover from a less informed time, at best, and malicious witchcraft, at worst. But the history of cabala as a method of scientific exploration, though spotted with accusations of heresy and black magic, still left the practice with credibility as a legitimate resource and technique.

Its dual nature as an accepted, scientific method and an uncertain mystical practice allow Cavendish to propose potentially viable philosophical theories within a fantastic narrative. It is the inventiveness of cabala that allows Cavendish to argue points of philosophical debate much of the time outside the formulaic constraints of scientific discursive structure. The unique blend of scholarship and mystical techniques found in cabala enables Cavendish to balance scientific reasoning with a personal exploration of identity and relationships, and to propose solutions in the Blazing World to conflicts and questions in Restoration England. Through its complex form and growing reputation as suspicious, cabala provided Cavendish with an artful disguise and a foundation from which to present her theories and critiques. In other words, cabala allowed Cavendish opportunities that methods practiced by the Royal Society and the confines of her social position or situation could not offer her.

Cabalistic traditions, symbols and forms, and the cabalaistic theory of creation are the model by which the new worlds of "Margaret the First," the Duchess and the Empress of the Blazing World are created. Cabala is also the philosophy which frames and determines how the Empress rules Blazing World, and it is the means Cavendish uses to refute other writers/philosophers and theories. For instance, the Empress relies upon cabalistic traditions of balance and notions concerning the relationship between Creator-God and ruler as she manages her kingdom.

It is nearly perfect suitability of cabala for Cavendish's situation that may explain her unique phrase: "to make a Cabbala" (179). Cabalas are not "made." Cabala is a practice, a system of belief, a scholarly method, not an occasion or an event one can "make." Certainly, it is not a thing, though cabala is a system

intricately built upon faith and an elaborate system of balances. The Empress views it as an experiment: if a certain element is plugged into the systems of cabala, a certain result will occur. The Empress assumes success, a product that can be and will be "made" with the help of the spirits; in Cavendish's Blazing World, she is right. This use of cabala, of a "poetical or romancical Cabbala," stripped of its religious associations, indicates that Cavendish saw it simply as another method of scholarly pursuit, one that it is neither magical nor sacred to her. The Empress, after all, is not in search of a greater spiritual understanding of God; instead, she creates herself as the divine figure of the Blazing World and focuses on understanding the secrets of that universe. Rather than communicating with God, she deals exclusively and happily with only spirits. Where traditional cabala is the quest for knowledge that ultimately leads to spiritual growth, the Empress's cabala is exclusively intellectual and material.

Cavendish also portrays cabala as a product which can be reproduced or a method that can be repeated: the Empress repeats, (re)"makes" the Jews' cabala. In fact, the Empress is successful, creating in her cabala an intimate friendship with the Duchess as well as worlds in her head and travels to other worlds. Cavendish also successfully escapes the confines of her society in creating Blazing World. Rather than simply "mak[ing]" a cabala, Cavendish makes a world and worlds in which a kingdom is at peace, scientific communities research and consider her philosophies, and an Empress rules with the respect of her husband, the adoration of her people, and the love of a close friend.

The fantastic worlds and unreal creatures of Blazing World act as a narrative screen to buffer Cavendish's critiques of contemporary institutions. Despite scholarship that accuses Blazing World of being a self-indulgent fantasy, this new world is not an exclusively private world.<sup>166</sup> Fantasy is a subtle way for an author and her opinions to *appear* innocuous so that Cavendish's seeming "retreat into fantasy" is actually no retreat at all.<sup>167</sup> The "fantastical" nature of Blazing World allows Cavendish to consider and comment upon debates and issues that would have been difficult for her to address in a more direct manner without potentially harmful repercussions. For instance, she is able to construct a potentially controversial vision of a ruler's responsibilities and to hypothesize about the function of religion and science in society while remaining, literally, at a safe narrative distance from such debates by the impossible nature of the Blazing World. Later, I will more fully address Cavendish's political and social agenda as she presents it in Blazing World.

### Cabala and Structure in *Blazing World*

One way in which Cavendish creates this protective screen is through the cosmology of cabala. Cavendish connects cabala and Blazing World in two significant ways. Just as the Creation is a central focus of cabala, creating ideal

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<sup>166</sup> For instance, Catherine Gallagher asserts that "restrictions on [Cavendish's] worldly ambitions have directed her inward, toward the microcosm of the self" and indicate a "feminization of the writing subject, who is isolated and complete unto herself" (27). Ultimately Gallagher speaks of the "restriction" in terms of "regression," "privatization," and "frustration" that are connected to the feminine and private. Sylvia Bowerbank, speaking in the same terms, qualifies Blazing World as a "response to [Cavendish's] failure as a natural philosopher...a retreat into fantasy" (402). In this world where the "female" imagination is a madness and where Cavendish has given up control, "the independent, intelligent Empress gets lost in the oblivion of Cavendish's prose" (Bowerbank, 403). See "Embracing the Absolute: the Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England," *Genders* 1(Spring 1988): 24-39 and "The Spider's Delight: Margaret Cavendish and the 'Female' Imagination," *English Literary Renaissance* 14 (1984): 392-407.

<sup>167</sup> See Bowerbank 402.

worlds and the freedom to create are emphases of Blazing World. But the connection between Blazing World and cabala and its texts is not limited to their common, central subject matter but also exists in their forms. In both the theme and narrative framework of Blazing World, Cavendish mimics the traditions and structures of cabala. For instance, Blazing World has three distinct sections: "the first part whereof is *romancical* the second philosophical and the third is merely *fancy* (or as I call it) *fantastical*" (124). This organization follows the three-part structure of cabalistic texts in Cavendish's time<sup>168</sup> just as it follows cosmological structure of cabala, at least three and sometimes four worlds.

In the three-world universe, which is most often used by Christian cabalists and philosophers, the first world is inhabited by God, the world of divinity, the second world is the sphere of angels and spirits, and the third world is the material or elemental world.<sup>169</sup> Cavendish appears to follow this standard: her first world is the romance portion in which "Margaret the First" and the Empress are creators; the establishment of the scientific communities, their experiments and the Empress's creation of a cabal comprise the second, philosophical portion of Blazing World. To fulfill the material world, Cavendish and the Empress return to their own worlds and observe Restoration society and court and then assist the Empress's kingdom in a remarkable naval battle. Rather than discussing three topics in her texts, Cavendish instead places the emphasis on the type of genre she creates – romance, philosophy,

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<sup>168</sup> For an example of this three part cabala during the seventeenth century, see *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings of Dr. Henry More* (1662), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, *Early English Books 1641-1700* 14:1. Specifically, More's "Conjectura Cabbalistica" is a threefold, "Judaical Cabbala" which defines cabbala, gives its history and refutes scientific theories, particularly attacking Descartes.

<sup>169</sup> See Yates 33.

and fantasy. Within each of these worlds are cabalistic elements that influence the narrative, occurring mostly prior to and in the cabal.

### Cabalistic Elements – Narrative Details

In Cavendish's address "To the Reader" she speaks as the Creator, offering justification for the text and a description of what she hopes to accomplish. In this section Cavendish explains the addition of a fictional text to her philosophical work, making the distinction between fiction and philosophy very clear and yet complicating her own definitions by demonstrating their relatedness. In explaining herself and justifying her fictional work, Cavendish repeatedly points to the problem of separating fact from fiction and reason from fancy. Cavendish insists that the two can be differentiated, cautioning the reader to "think not that it is out of a disparagement to philosophy; or out of an opinion, as if this noble study were but a fiction of the mind" (123). But Cavendish repeatedly causes the reader to reconsider the borders of each and so their relationship to each other. Though she defines philosophy against "mere fiction," she problematizes this solution by revealing that "though philosophers may err in searching and inquiring after the causes of natural effects, and many times embrace falsehoods for truths; yet this doth not prove, that the ground of philosophy is merely fiction" (123).

Cavendish was not alone in representing philosophical principles in "literary" forms.<sup>170</sup> But she is not only mixing genres but inquiring into the boundaries that

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<sup>170</sup> Deborah Taylor Bazeley also addresses Cavendish's mixing of genres in An Early Challenge to the Precepts and Practice of Modern Science: The Fusion of Fact, Fiction, and Feminism in the Works of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-1673), diss. 1990 (University of California, San Diego). See particularly 139-140.

separate fact from imagination. Through this discussion of fancy and reason, writing fiction and writing philosophy, Cavendish questions the nature of both fields. She accomplishes two tasks with these words to her audience. First she hints to her reader that Blazing World, as a work of fancy, should not be overlooked as a reasonable text. By doing this, Cavendish alerts the reader to expect philosophical ponderings in the midst of her fantastical tale. Second, by taking up issues of genre and literary criticism, Cavendish is again taking part in larger debates of the time concerned with issues of language and knowledge.<sup>171</sup> By her use of rhetoric and language, Cavendish also comments on the relationship between language and its role in government through its ability to control behavior.

This discussion is not only a debate on literary form but also another instance in which Cavendish establishes her position within the larger philosophical and scientific conversation of her time about language, its form and role. This conversation put Hobbes at odds with the Royal Society. Cavendish's claims about language in the Blazing World reinforce Hobbes' arguments. I have previously pointed out similarities in Hobbes's and Cavendish's scientific stances, specifically their common belief in materialism.<sup>172</sup> What is equally significant is the way in which Cavendish brings to life Hobbes's theory of language from Leviathan. First, Hobbes's argument that knowledge was a product of social consent, not private assertion, is echoed in Cavendish's clarification that her fictional world was "an issue

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<sup>171</sup> Leviathan and the Air Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life by Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987) details the intense debate between Hobbes and Boyle concerning how to best present and contest scientific theories. Though Cavendish's opinions in Blazing World align with Hobbes's point of view, it does not appear that she was entering this debate.

<sup>172</sup> See Sarashon and Stevenson for further discussion on this issue.

of man's fancy, framed in his own mind" (123).<sup>173</sup> Also, the entire experiment of Blazing World validates and is validated by Hobbes's theory that factual knowledge, that which was "nothing but sense and memory," made by observation, is less than philosophy (71). Certainly Cavendish's emphasis on systems, process, and results rather than observational data resemble Hobbes's definition of philosophy or science more than Boyle's competing theory. This is not to say that Hobbes would have supported Blazing World as a philosophical work. However, the correlation between Hobbes's philosophies and Cavendish's theories of language and the world in Blazing World should at least be seen as another instance in which Cavendish is participating in the discussions and working through the ideas of her day. This acknowledgment demonstrates again her abilities and position as a philosopher.

During this same period, experimental scientists, particularly the Royal Society, advocated clear divisions in knowledge and definition of practices. In their attempts to control the pursuit of scientific knowledge, they also insisted that language and expression be governed. In this increasingly restrictive environment, cabala served an important function for a scientist and writer. Part of Cavendish's work and argument concerning genres and disciplines was her struggle, as a writer and scientist, against the limitations of experimental science. Because cabala is dependent upon many texts, it is by its nature a more flexible and inventive method of investigation. Margaret Cavendish, like other scientists who practiced cabala, looked for alternative paths to knowledge when confronted with the limitations of observation.

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<sup>173</sup> See Leviathan by Thomas Hobbes, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1991) 30, 35, 52-53.



But rather than using cabala to assert a new method of philosophy or science (her criticism and mockery of John Dee and Edward Kelly demonstrate her suspicion in this supposed ability of cabala), Margaret Cavendish portrays cabala as an example of exploratory fiction-making to reconsider science, self, and philosophy.<sup>174</sup> Implicit in her defense of fancy as rational is Cavendish's defense of traditional and esoteric methods of natural philosophy, ideas that were losing their place in respected circles with the increasing influence of the Royal Society and its experimental method. Cavendish recognized the constraints of working solely within experimental methods and the possibilities of more inventive systems. Reason, "because material," is the product of finding the "one truth in nature" (123). Yet

*fictions* are an issue of man's fancy, framed in his own mind, according as he pleases, without regard, whether the thing he fancies, be really existent without his mind or not; . . . The end of reason, is truth; the end of fancy is fiction: but mistake me not when I distinguish *fancy* from *reason*; I mean not as if fancy were not made by the rational parts of matter; but by *reason* I understand a rational search and enquiry into the causes of natural effects; and by *fancy* a voluntary creation or production of the mind, both being effects, or rather actions of the rational parts of matter. (123)

According to Cavendish, fancy creates a material world while reason searches

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<sup>174</sup> Dr. John Dee was a sixteenth century mathematician and cabalist who enjoyed some time as a well-known and respected scholar before falling into disrepute. Edward Kelly was Dee's assistant. Dee's library was known for its expansive collection of books, many of which dealt with occult matter. The library was visited frequently by philosophers, writers, and well-known Renaissance court figures.

material existences for "the causes of natural effects."<sup>175</sup> But, because reason is both "more profitable" and "more laborious," it "requires sometimes the help of fancy, to recreate the mind, and withdraw it from its more serious contemplations" (124). In short, Cavendish explains the importance of fiction-making, even to the philosopher, for rational considerations alone are limited to the material, the confines of the world, and thus reason alone is limited, too.

For Cavendish, these worldly confines were all too clear in the limitations of her gender, her lack of formal education, and her inability to establish an intellectual community which prevented her from fully participating in or realizing the intellectual role she desired. On a broader scale, many early modern philosophers/scientists struggled with the emerging scientific method that held so much promise yet created such frustration and debate. Records of disputes within the Royal Society and over More's work on otherworldly events and practices are just two examples of opposition to the new science. In addition to debates over correct scientific methods and topics, philosophical questions arising from scientific theories not drawn from Scriptures or ideas which contradicted commonly held ideas of the world continued to give pause to many scholars. Cavendish must have doubly felt these threats in her isolated state.

One way Cavendish escaped this isolation was by insinuating herself into an ancient tradition, particularly one that insisted on individual, sequestered work. By invoking cabalistic forms and symbols – such as the cabala's Creation story and

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<sup>175</sup> Cavendish's explanation here suggests further interesting connections to Hobbes's theory of language. Hobbes opposes Plato, arguing that names are not universal but vary according to place and culture. Hobbes's theory depicts a greater creative power of words and thus makes Cavendish's worldly construction seem reasonable.

sefirot, as I will later discuss – Cavendish establishes a community and authority. The creation narrative of cabala also lends itself to Cavendish's solitary situation by providing her with a model of one being creating the universe by her words and thoughts alone. Margaret Cavendish has only her imagination and her words to create a world – material, political, social – which she can explain and control. To achieve this, according to cabalistic tradition, she must withdraw.

### Cabbalistic Cosmology and the First Creation

As discussed earlier, in the cabbalistic traditions of Issac Luria (1534-1572)<sup>176</sup> and his followers, the first step of Creation was made when God, who was all space, withdrew into himself. As part of this withdrawal, God left behind emanations, literally pieces or characteristics of himself, of his nature, pieces which made up the world. In the process of creation, the vessels containing the emanations broke, loosing the divine sparks. One purpose of cabala is for the cabalist to retrieve these sparks and recreate the intact emanations through her search for knowledge and wisdom. Cavendish employs cabala in a manner consistent with these traditional philosophies and uses by modeling the original Creator's act of withdrawal and creation through language. It is by "withdrawing" into the interior of her mind that she is able to make "this piece of fancy," the Blazing World, and form a more acceptable life for a woman of her ambitions (124). Cavendish repeats this creation of speaking worlds into existence with the Duchess and the Empress (186-190). Each woman creates worlds within her own mind using her knowledge, experience, logic, and desire to make a personalized Paradise.

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<sup>176</sup> Luria is still considered one of the most influential kabbalists.

This cabalistic model of creation shapes Blazing World and impacts issues of Cavendish's authorship and questions of narrative interpretation. The first issue concerning withdrawal and creation is the vexed question of identity, Cavendish's and her characters'. Cavendish's first Creator-form is "Margaret the First," the narrator and author of "a world of [her] own" (124). Within this larger world, Blazing World, are two other characters who also create their own worlds: the Empress, the romantic heroine, and the Duchess, the Empress's scribe for the cabala and her "platonic friend." For the Empress, there are two creative periods: one takes place as she orders the world she drifts into and the second when she creates worlds in her head. These creations and the Empress's establishment of a religion to govern and control the people of Blazing World have special significance when read with cabalistic beliefs in mind.

Critics have viewed "Margaret the First," the Empress, and the Duchess as Cavendish clones, indulgences of both "Mad Madge's" problematic rhetorical style and her typical self-promotion. Considering the Duchess as Cavendish or the Empress as a personality of Cavendish is problematic and limiting, reducing Blazing World to an autobiographical wish-fulfillment without alternative positions as fiction, scientific exploration, or political commentary. Instead, as I will later discuss, these characters are like God's emanations or agents of creation and of cabalistic philosophy.

Also, these arguments lumping Cavendish, the Empress, and the Duchess together have not considered cabala's effect on Blazing World. Examining Blazing World as a text influenced by a genre based on the interpretation of texts or as part of

a philosophy that believes language is the basis of creation leads us to understand a different story. In a cabalistic reading of Blazing World, the writer's supposed artistic failures become authorial control and manipulation. Cavendish's intertextuality mimics that of Cabala; following this pattern, she reads other "texts," refutes or reinterprets them, and creates her own texts, new interpretations or worlds, all in pursuit of knowledge.

What critics term an "infinite regress[ion] into private mental space" is not a "strategy . . . of the female with no access to literary/scientific discourses," but rather a direct imitation of the original creation myth as told by cabalists, and so an active participation in literary and scientific discourses.<sup>177</sup> Rather than a "regress[ion]" into a constricted self, Cavendish's layers of discursive extension indicate an expanding self, a reading that lends itself to the multi-textual possibilities associated with cabala. This "breaking of the fictional frame" is the combining of scientific and mystical, rational and fictional forms. This "deliberate confusion, not only of author and character, historical and fictional subjects, but also material and immaterial societies, inner and outer worlds" is "a relational subjectivity."<sup>178</sup>

Cavendish balances her fantastical adventures with philosophical orations. For instance, the Lady moves between worlds and is helped by talking animal-men, a fantastic tale. This portion of Blazing World is followed by intense scientific exploration by the animal-men with the Empress "declar[ing] her mind" and "giving them better instructions" for further work (155). The questions they explore, like those of chemistry and anatomy, are those common during Cavendish's day, making

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<sup>177</sup> See Sandra Sherman 191.

<sup>178</sup> See Khanna 24-25.

the conversations quite literal and meaningful in a scientific context. Having such a diverse group of animal-men allows the Empress to explore a range of topics rather than limiting herself to one subject and for Cavendish to mingle several types of knowledge and ways of knowing as a better, less constricted way of arriving at truth. For instance, the animal-men mainly rely on their natural senses, as demonstrated by their manner of reporting and exploring to understand nature, but the bear-men use instruments, like microscopes (144). Cavendish's means of responding to the questions raised in the Blazing World follows cabalistic traditions since cabalistic texts are works constantly interpreting the Scriptures and earlier cabalistic writings, or established knowledge.

Furthermore, cabalistic texts typically had three sections; Cavendish follows this model. In the first section of Blazing World, the "romancical" part, the Lady (soon to be Empress) becomes the narrator or authorial voice, "Margaret the First's," emanated vessel, an attribute or portion of the authoring narrator. Just as God's emanations come into being as a result of his desire to create the Universe, so the emanations are made by "Margaret the First's" ambition. As in the original Creation, the emanating attributes, though part of the Originator, become independent agents, completely separate from their source. The narrator declares in her address "To the Reader" that she wishes to create her own causes of nature through fiction (123) and indulge her ambition to rule. The Lady-turned-Empress lives out these desires.

The Lady has her own withdrawal, leaving her original world and traveling to two others before stopping in the world of animal men. As the Lady floats into three worlds, the narrator, the voice of "Margaret the First," drifts from the story into an

explanation of how one could travel from pole to pole, mixing the romantic tale with theories of natural philosophy, a blend of story-telling and scholarly postulating. Once in Paradise, the city of the Blazing World, the Lady is believed to be a goddess by all who see her.<sup>179</sup> The Emperor, when convinced she was mortal, "made her his wife, and gave her an absolute power to rule and govern all that world as she pleased. But her subjects, who could hardly be persuaded to believe her mortal, tendered her all the veneration and worship due to a deity" (132).

Beginning with this reaction to the Lady, Cavendish sets up the Empress as an absolute monarch, placed upon the throne by a miracle and by her own innate, natural divinity.<sup>180</sup> As a monarch, Cavendish's heroine, the Empress, is set above attack and reproach, a position Cavendish knew was required for a woman to explore scientific pursuits in the company of men. These events, particularly as part of a "feminist" text, have brought Cavendish under attack. For instance, Rachael Trubowitz argues that "[w]hile her royalism and feminism converge to produce the ideal of female monarchy . . . as a model for both social and personal experience, the Duchess's feminist desire for self-government and female community is finally undermined by her aristocratic investment in monarchy."<sup>181</sup> While Blazing World is a departure from Cavendish's typical consideration of women's relationships, in "making" her "Cabbala" the Empress creates a powerful relationship by conjuring a woman of equal ambition and intellect, a relationship that should not be devalued.

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<sup>179</sup> When the animal-men first see her, they "flocked together to see this Lady, holding up their paws in admiration" (127).

<sup>180</sup> Even the Emperor "conceived her to be a goddess" while her subjects "could hardly be persuaded to believe her mortal" (132).

<sup>181</sup> See "The Reenchantment of Utopia and the Female Monarchical Self: Margaret Cavendish's Blazing World," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 11.2 (Fall 1992): 241.

In *Bell in Campo* (1662), *The Female Academy* (1662), and *Convent of Pleasure* (1668) Cavendish experiments with all-female communities. Though these plays also do not cross class boundaries, each play considers the lives of more than two or three women at length. The two early plays depict successful female communities, but because of their enclosure and gender restriction, the women have no influence or power in the larger world. In the later *Convent of Pleasure*, like many writers before and after her, Cavendish arrived at the conclusion that all-female communities could not work in this world because the attacks by society would be too disruptive and too invasive and the women within them would lack the power to successfully protect their society. Blazing World does not abandon female communities entirely, but the communities within it are not the typical, enclosed environments usually depicted by early modern writers.

The Blazing World and its monarchy should not be underestimated as an empowering text and convention for women. By creating a whole world and one that exists beyond the confines of her society, Cavendish made a place in which women lived and worked with tremendous autonomy and were not enclosed either by force or by choice. Instead, they traveled and explored many worlds. Cavendish encourages others to experience this sovereignty by advocating every one to make their own worlds. Blazing World illustrates that worlds in your mind are powerful. For Cavendish, alternate worlds were a way to express herself, explore scientific philosophies and relationships – and to be the ultimate ruler. Rather than being hindered by the monarchical system, Cavendish used it and all the prerogatives that came with it to make worlds the Empress and the Duchess could rule over as well as



participate in political, religious, and scientific discussions. Through her example, Cavendish demonstrates how to gain authority and encourages her readers to become “mistress” of a world of their own (124). Imagining herself as "Margaret the First" and creating the Empress was a way for Cavendish to insert women, give herself a voice, in the primarily masculine power-structure of government. If we agree that Cavendish most likely earned her one-time admission into the Royal Society by her rank through birth and marriage, we must acknowledge that Cavendish probably understood this as well – realistically, without political and social turmoil, social rank was access and power. Should Cavendish not capitalize on this?

We must also credit Cavendish with understanding her world turned upside down. She experienced a Hobbesian world in which greed for power, whether political or that which is driven by religious righteousness, brought about social and political devastation. Like the Empress's miraculous entrance into the Blazing World, Charles II's return and with it the reintroduction of the monarchy was perceived as a salvation which reinstated peace and order. While it might be our impulse to condemn her for her classism, we should remember that even Cavendish's own social and political status was not enough for her to be admitted regularly to the philosophical and political discussions she wanted to take part in. To allow female characters to achieve the intellectual and political status she dreamed of, she understood that they must be monarchs; and to imagine and build this textual world, Cavendish needed to be the Creator. Cabala and its patterns provide Cavendish with the means to be the ultimate Creator and ruler and to create this open world for women.

"Margaret the First," as narrator, creates a world of political and domestic peacefulness. Because the people of Paradise offer their willing obedience to the Emperor and neither fight among each other nor are divided by language, they have no political or social unrest. The Emperor also recognizes what he must do, freeing the Empress "to rule . . . as she pleased" (132). Cavendish makes clear that in order for the Empress to perform her duties and to pursue her work in science she must be unencumbered. The lack of social or familial disturbance allows the Empress to begin a quest for knowledge and a series of experiments, the "philosophical" portion of "Margaret the First's" world. In this second part of the creator phase, the (now) Empress becomes the creator, organizing Paradise and orchestrating the behavior and responses of her scientists and subjects.

#### The Second Creation: Empress as Creator

Despite the potential danger Cavendish could see resulting from intellectual communities, one of the first actions the Empress takes when she comes to power is the organization of scientific societies. While much of Blazing World is concerned with containing controversial behavior and ensuring order, nevertheless, Cavendish's experiences emphasized to her the importance of communal scientific studies in spite of the risks. The Empress assigns each society its own function, allowing her to test and discuss her own theories as well as to enter into conversations with other scientists. Though critics have argued that Cavendish portrays a self-creation by self-in-isolation, in the text the Empress's identity is constructed by her conversation with others. Rather than an isolated or sequestered personality, the Empress is actively

engaged in a community of scientists investigating their world as well as many scientific theories. Instead of an "infinite regression" from "Margaret the First" into a series of "interior" worlds, Cavendish shows the Empress traveling *out* of her own world into two others, an expansion modeled on cabala's explanation of the original creation.<sup>182</sup>

The criticism of Cavendish as a scientist by her contemporaries and her exclusion from scientific discussions have led scholars to maintain that Cavendish was also without scientific community or contact. While it is true that Cavendish's exclusion from the Royal Society and more formal collaborations did limit her exposure to scientific community, these exclusions did not completely obstruct her from taking part in philosophical debate. Her early association with Hobbes and Descartes and her continued association with scientists via her social position and self-promotion kept her mingling among the scientific elite. Cavendish certainly recognized her dilemma of being both acceptable and unacceptable to gatherings of scientists. As illustrated by the creation of Blazing World and the imaginary conversation between the Duchess and her "friend" in Philosophical Letters, Cavendish published and read widely, inserting herself into conversations by publishing and gathering information by reading. Because she was a woman and because her philosophical theories were not, it appears, taken seriously, Cavendish certainly lacked a constant collaborative environment. Through Blazing World Cavendish again works around these impediments. Invoking the long-standing authority of cabala, allows Cavendish to gain some validation by participating in its forms. For instance, Cavendish enhances her authority by relying upon cabala's text-

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<sup>182</sup> See Sandra Sherman 191.

based tradition of achieving knowledge through her own publishing. Also, the cabalistic traditions of forming knowledge in small groups, through dialogue, and individual exploration rather than formal, large groups offers another opportunity for Cavendish to enhance her professional stance within the confines of her position.

In the perfected world, the *Blazing World*, Cavendish provides the Empress with the power to organize and command her own communities and resources as well as to discover knowledge without them. The Empress's use of her monarchical power – that is her decision to work autonomously, to give commands – should not be misconstrued as isolation. Rather, the Empress is always described as being surrounded by people, with the exception of her voyage through the second world when her kidnappers are dead and she has not yet met the bear-men. Her life is only recounted in her dealings with others, her intellectual societies, the spirits, the Duchess, the Duke, and the Emperor, contacts for the most part orchestrated through her caballing.

The Empress's monarchical position also allows her to secure the state and manage her societies in such a way as to ensure peace. This resolution is a necessary preparation for the coming creations of the Duchess's and the Empress's new worlds and for the creation of the Empress's cabal. Cabala itself requires peace before the practitioners can proceed to the stage in which knowledge is pursued. Because cabala is an individual endeavor, the peace required to practice cabala comes about through a personal meditative state. Yet in *Blazing World*, the Empress's actions, as those of the head of state, are more than one person's response but must also be seen as acts of state. Since this is the case, the Empress must secure a national and social peace

before she can begin her cabala. In the conclusion of her review of the virtuoso communities, the Empress takes up again the issues of language's impact on knowledge. She warns the bird-men, specifically the parrot-men, to follow a "natural" discourse instead of an "artificial" rhetoric which "disorders men's understandings . . . and leads them into a labyrinth whence they'll never get out, and makes them dull and unfit for useful employments" (161). Here again Cavendish criticizes the flaws of the regulated disputes propagated by the Royal Society and contrasts these unproductive or disruptive methods with the successfulness of her cabala. By contrast, in the Empress's cabala which follows this episode, the Empress's discussion with the spirits is a natural, free discourse with open exchange, even disagreements and corrections, and illustrates a more stable and productive method of learning than the bird-men's disruptive rhetoric.

Earlier in the text, Cavendish emphasizes the failures of observational methods and the new science by introducing the problems of telescopes and microscopes. In her quest to understand the stars, the Empress urges the bear-men to use telescopes to gain knowledge. Unfortunately, the telescopes "caused more differences and divisions amongst them, than ever they had before" (140). This debate grows so intense that the Empress comprehends "that your glasses are false informers, and instead of discovering the truth, delude your senses; wherefore I command you to break them, and let the bird-men trust only to their natural eyes, and examine celestial objects by the motions of their own sense and reason" (141). Though she argues that "nature has made [the bear-men's] sense and reason more regular than art has your glasses," calling them "deluders," the bear-men beg the

Empress not to make them break their telescopes (140-141). The bear-men confess, we take more delight in artificial delusions, than in natural truths. Besides we shall want employments for our senses, and subjects for arguments; for were there nothing but truth, and no falsehood, there would be no occasion for to dispute, and by this means we should want the aim and pleasure of our endeavours in confuting and contradicting each other . . . (142)

Though the Empress allows the bear-men to keep their telescopes, she warns them that "their disputes and quarrels should remain within their schools, and cause no factions or disturbances in state, or government" (142).

When the bear-men next bring a microscope before the Empress, they do not disagree about their findings but the conclusions they have drawn from their microscopic observations do not make sense. When the Empress questions their conclusions the bear-men respond that her questions asked for information beyond the function of the microscope. They answer that her inquiries "belonged to physicians more than to experimental philosophers, to give reasons hereof; for they only made microscopical inspections, and related the figures of the natural parts of creatures according to the presentation of their glasses" (144). To her inquiries into how the information gathered from their glasses might be put to public use they answer "that such arts were mechanical and below that noble study of microscopical observations" (144).

These episodes are important critiques of the Royal Society and of the new science's reliance upon mechanical instruments rather than natural senses. Obviously,

the new technology leads reasonable men into arbitrary arguments and scholars into the perverse enjoyment of delusion over truth. There is no indication that the bear-men's disputes will lead to knowledge or understanding. Their unproductive and indulgent arguments are a reproach to the Royal Society's methods. Through the bear-men's inability to counter the Empress's questions concerning their microscopic findings and their lack of interest in how this information might be helpful, Cavendish raises questions about the utility of the Royal Society's work and their purpose.

These critiques of the "new" science, its technology, and the objectives of its institution, the Royal Society, are not just reprimands or even philosophical attacks on scientific method. Since these events precede the Empress's exploration of cabala and production of a cabala, the failures of the new methods are even more damning in the face of the successes of traditional, mystical scientific means. Ultimately, the Empress realizes the academicians' disputes could spread beyond their community and commands them to "confine [their] disputations to [their] schools, lest besides the commonwealth of learning, they disturb also divinity and policy, religion and laws, and by that means draw an utter ruin and destruction both upon church and state" (162). By contrast, the Empress's cabala resolves disputes, rather than produces them, a point I will elaborate on later. Through cabala, the Empress and the Duchess, her partner in cabalistic activity, find solutions and answers, truth.

### Religion and Control

Admittedly, Cavendish's insistence on peace prior to pursuing knowledge is not an exclusively cabalistic element. The Royal Society's emphasis on regulated and

communal language and rules for dispute grew out of memories of the Civil War and anxieties about communicating clearly in order to avoid another social upheaval. However, the way in which the Empress maintains the peace repeats a cabalistic pattern through its focus on balance and demonstration of mystical power. The Empress creates this balance through manipulation of religion, specifically presenting herself as a god and creating illusions of opposing divine forces in two temples to maintain control of her subjects.<sup>183</sup> These circumstances mimic the creating and governing structure of cabala, the *sefirot*, ten divine attributes which exist in opposition to and so balance each other. The attributes of mercy (*middat ha-rahamim*) and its opposite, stern judgment (*middat ha-din*), are often the focus of cabalists because they are considered integral to the creation of the world and its governance. Because one chapel is the place of mercy and the other the site of judgment, the two contrary chapels the Empress creates and the messages she delivers in and through them represent the opposition and balance of the *sefirot*. The people are kept in check, in balance, by the coexisting forces of intimidation and acceptance.

After hearing the logicians argue about the art of logic, the improbability of truth, and the imperfection of natural philosophy, the Empress "considered by herself the manner of their religion, and finding it very defective, was troubled that so wise and knowing a people should have no more knowledge of the divine truth" (162). For the attainment and dissemination of divine truth, the Empress decides "to convert them all to her own religion" (162). To accomplish this, the Empress allows women to participate in religion, and, to prevent "the inconstant nature of mankind" from "deserv[ing] the divine truth" (163), she decides to build two temples. The narrator

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<sup>183</sup> See 162-165.



exposes the Empress's logic behind this decision, indicating that she uses science and rhetoric to manipulate the people. In the first chapel the fire stone burned with light as long as it remained wet; hence, the Empress

would have that chapel where the fire stone was to appear all in a flame, she had by the means of artificial pipes, water conveyed into it, which by turning the cock did, as out of a fountain, spring all over the room, and as long as the fire stone was wet, the chapel seemed to be all in a flaming fire . . . In the chapel which was lined with the fire stone, the Empress preached sermons of terror to the wicked and told them of the punishments for their sins . . . (163-164)

The other chapel, however, "was lined with the star stone, did only cast a splendourous and comfortable light" and in it "[the Empress] preached sermons of comfort to those that repented of their sins and were troubled at their own wickedness" (164).

Cavendish systematically explains these phenomena and describes them as "artificially contrived": "Thus the Empress, by *art* and *her own ingenuity*, did not only convert the Blazing World to her own religion, but kept them in a constant belief without enforcement or bloodshed" (164, italics mine). This balance is clearly the production of scientifically explained illusions and yet is perceived by the Blazing World's people as a miracle. The Empress and "Margaret the First" utilize mystical beliefs and esoteric systems to achieve their ends: a creation of worlds, scientific exploration, and a peaceful, docile kingdom. However, they are not believers themselves, nor do they have faith invested in these rituals. Instead they speculate

about the necessity of these illusions and their usefulness to their cause.

The Empress's control of religion, so often a site of current criticism of Cavendish, is also a response to Hobbes's philosophy. If knowledge and thus order are made by social consent and individual opinion is the greatest potential threat to peace, especially in religion, there must be strict control of dispute or contradiction.<sup>184</sup> By creating a god-like Empress who controls her subjects' religious beliefs through rhetoric and "miracles," Cavendish follows Hobbes's arguments for controlling behavior, even by coercion. While Hobbes presents the responsibilities of the subject to the monarch in Leviathan, Cavendish proposes ways in which the monarch can evoke loyalty in Blazing World; both texts aim at empowering the monarch and preventing civil uprising.

### The Questions of Cabala

With the religious conflict resolved and a balance set, the Empress calls on the spirits to continue her search for knowledge. The information the spirits give her is very general until she asks "whether there were none that had found out yet the Jews' Cabala" (166). The next several pages are an exploration into the particulars of cabala and the conflicts among competing philosophies with apparent digressions into questions concerning the nature of the spirits' powers and abilities. A close examination of this portion of Blazing World and a comparison to cabalistic theories reveal that Cavendish is taking up and answering the central questions concerned in cabala.

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<sup>184</sup> See Leviathan 37.

For example, the spirits tell the Empress that Dr. Dee and Edward Kelly have come nearest to "finding" or understanding the Jews' Cabala though "they proved at last but mere cheats" (167). The spirits reveal that

[m]any . . . that write Cabalas pretend to divine inspirations, but whether it be so or not it does not belong to us to judge; only this we must needs confess, that it is a work which requires a good wit and a strong faith, but not natural reason, for though natural reason is most persuasive, yet faith is the chief that is required in Cabalists. (167)

The spirits warn the Empress that reason is natural and only faith is divine. Problems occur when humans, who are "so puzzled about this divine faith, and natural reason, that [they] do not know well how to distinguish them, but confound them both, which is the cause [they] have so many philosophers who make a gallimaufry both of reason and faith" (167). This pronouncement supports Cavendish's point about separating faith and reason as demonstrated in her creation of the temples and by her decision to sequester the academic societies away from religion or politics. The spirits also add that cabalists "study beyond sense and reason" (167) and that of "the natural, or theological" cabala, the theological is "most approved" because it "is mystical, belongs only to faith; but the natural belongs to reason" (168). By interrogating cabalistic theory and clarifying components of it through the Empress's questions, Cavendish affirms many of its traditions and presents it as a productive method of intellectual exploration. Her repeated insistence on separating types of cabala from each other and discussing their individual benefits

also demonstrates cabala's adaptability and so its potential use by "rational" as well as mystical scientists.

In her exploration of cabala, the Empress also questions the nature of God, who, the spirits answer, is "an unexpressible being beyond the conception of any creature, either natural or supernatural" (168). The spirits cite the "several opinions your mortals have of God . . . [as] sufficient witness" that God cannot be known (168). This acknowledgment, noting the lack of human knowledge and the inability of humans to know God, demonstrates the limits of human senses. It is because humans are limited in their understanding through their natural senses and their interpretive abilities that a supernatural method of understanding is required – cabala. Early cabalists searched out knowledge of God to answer questions about his Creation in order to better understand themselves, their world and their God. These integral and interrelated questions were, and remained in the seventeenth century, central to the pursuit of what came to be called "science." Early failures to understand nature and the world by natural sensory means led to a need for supernatural intervention and the inclusion of mystical methods, methods that superseded the abilities of human senses, in the search for knowledge. This reliance on mysticism and the ideology that initiated it continued through the seventeenth century. Though other methods, especially the scientific method based on sensory observation, grew to dominate the field, the reliance on supernatural methods did not easily disappear. During the beginning of the Royal Society and the rise of the scientific method, the practice of and faith in alternative, supernatural methods

continued – and not simply because the ideologies still remained part of the scientific framework, but also because observation and the experimental method failed at times.

The close examination of cabala in Blazing World relates many of the arguments and complexities in developing science. While the spirits reinforce conventional understandings of God and his relationship with his Creation as well as cabala as a traditional intellectual method, their discourse illustrates the growing separation between religion and "science" or natural reason. Cavendish is treading on hotly contested ground and, as so often is the case in this text, attempts a peaceful compromise, this time between faith and rationalism. In mediating this relationship, Cavendish defends the use of cabala as a philosophical method and defines its appropriate parameters.

In contrast to the bear and bird-men's unsolved questions provoked by the new technology, when the Empress questions theories surrounding cabala, the spirits can distinguish the true from the untrue for her. For instance, on the issue of the significance of numbers to cabala, the spirits remark that "numbers are odd and indifferent, and would make a disagreement in Cabala" (171). This further suggests that there is no mystery in numbers, for they are "only marks of remembrance" (171). Just as with the Empress's earlier scientific explorations, she examines cabala to refute or verify certain cabalistic elements. Through the Empress's response to the spirits' answers, Cavendish dismisses this practical application of cabala and reinforces her stance that its use should remain restricted to the exploration of the mind, that is, fiction or fantasy making, and cannot reasonably be extended into literal forms.

### The Empress's Personal Cabala

The Empress continues to ask many more questions of the spirits concerning God, the Creation, and the structure of the world. She particularly investigates the legitimacy of cabala and cabalists' theories, searching for some validation of the practice. Despite the spirits' repeated denouncements of certain parts of cabala, the Empress ends her questioning with the pronouncement, "I have a great desire . . . to make a Cabbala." This decision causes "the spirits [to] immediately disappear . . . which startle[s] the Empress so much, that she f[a]ll[s] into a trance" (179).

Once again, Cavendish follows cabalistic form by depicting the Empress in a meditative state prior to beginning her cabala. In cabalistic tradition, meditation is an essential precursor to spiritual revelation and greater knowledge.<sup>185</sup> In order to achieve the concentration required for a successful cabala, the cabalist must move beyond exterior levels, making her way toward the inner part of God and thus deeper understanding. This is accomplished through study and deep meditation on language and/or numbers. Cavendish reproduces this process in Blazing World by having her cabala begin only after the Empress's intensive study with the animal-men and in having her "f[all] into a trance, wherein she lay for some while" before beginning her cabala (179).

When the Empress revives from her trance, she must seek out the spirits and, despite their sudden departure, the spirits reappear to execute the Empress's will. Though the spirits discredit most of the traditions associated with cabala, the last

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<sup>185</sup> See Scholem's Kabbalah for a more detailed explanation of the development of kabbalistic meditation 32, 38 and 369-372.

events of the philosophical portion of Blazing World reinforce the legitimacy of cabalistic traditions. Asking first "whether she would have a scribe, or whether to would write the Cabbala herself" (180), the spirits reject the Empress's suggestions of ancient and contemporary philosophers, cabalists among them, for "they would scorn to be scribes to a woman" (181). Instead of these disapproving men, the spirits recommend "the Duchess of Newcastle, which although she is not one of the most learned, eloquent, witty and ingenious, yet is she a plain and rational writer, for the principle of her writings, is sense and reason" (181). The Empress's willingness to interact with these classical and contemporary male scholars and her desire to take her place in the ageless pursuit of knowledge only to be "scorn[ed]" by history poignantly illustrates Cavendish's view of the scholarly past and present and her own exclusion from it. The men have a lineage they can draw from and in which they have a place. The Empress, because of her gender, has no history but can, through the use of cabala, create a community in the present.

The Duchess is chosen on the spirits' recommendation. Interestingly, the Duchess understands the details of cabala without the instruction of the spirits. Obviously, she has a great deal of learning even if she is not "one of the most learned" (181). In fact, she takes over the role of advising the Empress from the spirits, instructing her concerning the cabala, how to proceed, and which one to make.

Immediately following the demonstration of a traditional cabala, the Duchess discredits religious cabala:

. . . "If your Majesty will be pleased to hearken to my advice, I would desire you to let that work [of cabala] alone, for it will be of no

advantage either to you or your people, unless you were of the Jews' religion. Nay, if you were, the vulgar interpretation of the holy scripture would be more instructive and more easily believed than your mystical way of interpreting it; for had it been better and more advantageous for the salvation of the Jews,<sup>186</sup> surely Moses would have saved after ages that labour by his own explanation, he being not only wise but a very honest, zealous and religious man. Wherefore the best way," said she, "is to believe with the generality the literal sense of the scripture, and not to make interpretations everyone according to his own fancy, but to leave that work for the learned, or those that have nothing else to do. (182)

Just as the Empress questioned the spirits about one objection after another concerning cabala, the Duchess addresses controversial points of who uses cabala and for what reason. At first she restricts productive cabalistic work to Jews only. Then she clarifies that even this restriction is problematic, arguing the mystical interpretation of the Scripture is never valid. By this means Cavendish separates cabalistic form from a potentially volatile topic, religion. Emphasizing the secular possibilities of cabala, Cavendish suggests how it can be useful without being disruptive to society, government, or philosophy.

Though the Duchess denounces the Jews' Cabala, she argues for a "poetical or Romancical Cabala, wherein you may use metaphors, allegorie, similitudes etc and interpret them as you please" (183). The lengthy analysis of cabala by the Empress

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<sup>186</sup> Early Christian cabalists argued for the use of cabala because it could be another way to convert Jews to Christianity, an important goal in early Christianity.



and the spirits as well as a performance of it by them appears to be a mere experiment when followed by the complete and uncontested denouncement of cabala by the Duchess. Yet the Empress's cabala, after all, was successful: she received answers to her questions, discovered truths, and was directed to employ the Duchess as her scribe in the next cabala. Also, even though cabala, or the Jews' Cabala, is dismissed, the idea of a cabala is explained to be applicable to philosophy, morality, politics, and poetry or Romance. So while Cavendish, through the Duchess and the Empress, explores and verbally rejects the possibility and logic of the religious or Jews' Cabala, she retains much of its essence and ideas. By discrediting only the religious form of cabala and separating religion from other cabalistic applications, Cavendish opens the system up for more secularized and literary uses. As a substantive component of Blazing World as well as a thematic focus, cabala is rescued from its reputation as a suspicious, potentially dangerous practice and reformed into a powerful literary device. It is a new science for textual creation and interpretation.

As abruptly as Cavendish invoked the Empress's "Cabbala," she leaves it behind to have the Empress and the Duchess pursue other challenges. The Duchess and the Empress experiment with making new worlds in their minds. In their attempts, the Empress realizes that she cannot create a world more perfect than the Blazing World while the Duchess struggles to create her own world by exploring ancient philosophies. As unsatisfied with these experiments as the Empress was with her consideration of philosophers as guides through her cabal, the Duchess finally creates a world entirely her own. Despite the repeated invocation of cabalistic

elements throughout the text, the methods and symbols of cabala are not reintroduced in the explanations of this creative process.

Though the Empress "received oftentimes visits from the immaterial spirits, who gave her intelligence of all such things as she desired to know, and they were able to inform her of" (203), Cavendish does not employ the cabalistic forms and methods in the latter portion of Blazing World. Instead, the Duchess and the Empress venture into the Empress's world through the physical and literal though fantastic means of a submarine and use scientific devices such as the telescope and the explainable phenomenon of the burning stones to save her original nation. Cavendish does not rely upon cabalistic elements to construct the end of her text. In the end the cabalistic frame is discarded for a purely fictional narrative, with devices and adventures created and run without the aid of supernatural forces. Having gained authority through the power of cabala, the narrative ends with the abilities and powers of the Empress, the Duchess, and the inhabitants of Blazing World fulfilled.

In her address to the reader at the beginning of Blazing World, Margaret Cavendish announces, "I have made a world of my own, for which nobody, I hope, will blame me, since it is in everyone's power to do the like" (124). Rereading Blazing World as a cabalistic text, we can see how Cavendish finds the power to use this world of her own and the character of the Empress to consider and sometimes accomplish what she could not in Restoration England. Frustrated by the pursuit of scientific theories and her own limitations caused by a lack of education and gender bias, Cavendish reinvents her existence as a more free and vigorous intellectual and political life in Blazing World. Though Cavendish draws upon events from her own

life to create the narrative of Blazing World, she also exceeds the boundaries of those events through fiction and fantasy in order to critique the institutions of the monarchy, religion, and science existing around her. The traditions of cabala provide Cavendish with the authority to mix reason and science with fantasy and faith to create peaceful worlds; happy, secure monarchs; and to provide scientists with communities and solutions to their questions.

**Chapter 4: “to fancy Authority which he durst not assume”: Cabalas and  
Cabals in the Writings of Aphra Behn**

Margaret Cavendish is not alone in calling upon the power of cabala as a creative literary device. Building on the contemporary associations of cabala with the scientists who, in her time, were beyond reason, Aphra Behn cautions against blind devotion to science and the disabling potential of all-consuming desires. Behn also expands the contemporary uses of “cabal” to illustrate the corrosion of England’s society within families, between romantic partners, and within the state. “Cabala” and “cabal” continue to be powerful, meaning-laden terms in Behn’s works, attesting to their continued force during the late Restoration. But for Behn their power is social and destructive rather than individual and constructive as in Cavendish’s intellectually mystical and generative system. Behn’s warning is against the consuming desire for “Authority” one “durst not assume,” a description of Brilljard’s wishes in Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister to violate his relationship with his friend and master and to distort love into possession.<sup>187</sup> “Authority,” in this case and in those discussed in this chapter, is better understood generally as power: political, romantic, personal, and intellectual. “The Cabal” (1682), “The Cabal at Nickey-Nackey’s” (1682), The Emperor of the Moon (1687), and Love Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister (1684-1687) each illustrate how the cabalist – whether participating in a cabala or in a cabal – uses his or her power to manipulate others to realize his or her desires, regardless of the costs to others.

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<sup>187</sup> Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister, ed. Janet Todd (London: Penguin Books, 1996) 125. All citations are taken from this edition and following references will be cited parenthetically.

In “Love Letters and Critical History,” Janet Todd claims “For Behn, writing was closely associated with ciphering, on a very elemental level, reading, especially of letters, was deciphering, and, through the rest of her life, Behn was haunted by a link between letters and codes, the need to decipher.”<sup>188</sup> Following Todd’s argument, Behn is a natural literary cabalist, searching for and creating coded messages to reveal a greater understanding of her society. Behn’s use of cabals, caballing, and cabala in her writing instructs her reader to decipher and look for a greater, interpreted understanding. Reading Behn’s texts in which cabals or cabala are central not only reveals additional interpretations of these writings but uncovers Behn’s increasingly dark portrayal of her society and the hopeless light in which she came to see it.

Too often, scholarship on Aphra Behn’s writing has restricted its range of impact and scope. For instance, her illnesses and poverty at the end of her life and how the political upheavals contributed to both are nearly exclusively cited as the reasons for the increasingly dark action and tone in her works. Even recently scholars have restricted the scope of Behn’s critiques to the “household” rather than attributing any to the public sphere.<sup>189</sup> Melinda Zook claims “Behn was a full participant in this highly disputatious political culture” yet then limits the greater impact of her work by claiming her purpose was “glorifying and defending the Cavalier culture.”<sup>190</sup>

Others, however, have demonstrated the greater impact and scope of her work. M.L. Stapleton, in “Aphra Behn, Libertine” shows Behn employing Thomas Hobbes’

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<sup>188</sup> From Todd’s conference paper reprinted in *Aphra Behn: Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity*, ed. Mary Ann O’Donnell, Benard Dhuicq, and Guyonne Leduc (Paris: Harmattan, 2000).

<sup>189</sup> See Rachael Carnell’s “Subverting Tragic Conventions: Aphra Behn’s Turn to the Novel.” *Studies in the Novel* (Summer 1999): 133-151.

<sup>190</sup> See Melinda Zook’s “Contextualizing Aphra Behn: Plays, Politics, and Party, 1679-1689” in *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition*, ed. Hilda Smith (Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press) 76, 78.

philosophy while Anne Baratch sees Oronooko and Behn's translation of Fontenelle as "subjects and objects of scientific observation and investigation" and so shows Behn participating in the central conversations of her time on science and the world beyond London society and politics.<sup>191</sup> John Richetti sees Behn's heroines as greater than individual characters and instead describes them as universal types.<sup>192</sup>

Toni Bowers and Ellicott Visconsi follow this broader line of argument, pointing to more systemic and pervasive and less personal reasons for this change in Behn's view of her society. In "Seduction Narratives and Tory Experience," Bowers argues that Tory writers seize and form amatory fiction as a way of representing the Whig party's growing control over English government as well as the Tories' means of negotiating a new role in this changing society. Tories, Bowers argues, are the violated heroines who are not-quite innocents in a game of domination and submission in which Whigs are the rapacious males. Furthermore, both men and women are responsible for their fate, further destabilizing the gender role trope of women as helpless victims. This reconfiguration of sexual role norms causes "Every page of the Love Letters [to be] constructed to frustrate attempts to locate stable sexual agents and agencies . . ." <sup>193</sup> Bowers argues that all Augustan seduction narratives are "duplicitous . . . In their pages, deeply troubling – even dangerous –

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<sup>191</sup> In *Restoration: Studies in English Literary Culture, 1660-1700* 24.2 (Fall 2000): 79. And "Following the Intrigue: Aphra Behn, Genre, and Restoration Science," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 26.3: 210.

<sup>192</sup> "Love Letters Between and Nobelman and His Sister: Aphra Behn's Amatory Fiction" in Augustan Subjects: Essays in Honor of Martin C. Battestin, ed. Albert J. Rivero (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997) 15.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid* 133.

public questions could be framed and debated under the diaphanous cloak of the private, with its promising tendency to reveal more than it concealed . . .”<sup>194</sup>

Ellicott Visconci sees an even more basic and pervasive degeneration in Behn’s view of English society: “Behn sees the English people as possessing a collective genetic predisposition towards violence, greed, and restless disobedience.”<sup>195</sup> In a culture that is arguing its way to a new theoretical political logic, “Behn inverts that narrative of political origins to display the dangerous tendencies of the English race.”<sup>196</sup> The result of Behn’s portrayals? An “anxiety”: the “affective force of the tragic plot is a medium of political education, *mobilizing the fear, pity, and anxiety* of the reader to promote absolute monarchy as the only defense against the latent barbarism of the English race.”<sup>197</sup> Ultimately, Visconci argues that there is not “much tangible hope of deliverance or redemption” in Behn’s fictions.<sup>198</sup>

Both Bowers and Visconci argue Behn illustrates and “mobiliz[es]” societal anxiety: Bowers through an evolving destabilization of political order by the challenge to the monarchy and Visconci in the fundamental weakness within the whole of English society, a disability that necessarily erodes political structure. Behn’s vision is not only barbaric, dangerous, and duplicitous in regards to politics, however. Behn creates worlds in which there is broad and pervasive disorder, a societal devolving that gains momentum in her narratives. Though Behn, as a loyalist, still expresses her commitment to the Stuarts, clearly her faith in the success

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid 128.

<sup>195</sup> See Visconci’s “A Degenerate Race in *Othello* and *The Widdow Ranter*,” *ELH* 69.3 (2002): 673.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid 672.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid 674, 677, italics mine.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid 681.

of the monarchy and the Stuart line is depleted by her last years. Her sentiment is reflected by the increasingly demoralized state of the societies she portrays. Behn communicates this pessimism and her view that the disintegration of society pervades many social circles through her dark portrayal of family and political life. Though Visconsi pointed to the “ignorant . . . rabble” and “lower classes” as the culprits of disorder, Behn’s most destructive agents are the cultivated and learned, and it is through their cunning and intellect, not their ignorance, that the de-stabilization of English society is wrought.<sup>199</sup>

Nowhere is the conflicted chaos, instability, and ultimate disintegration of society prevalent in this era demonstrated more clearly than in tracing Aphra Behn’s varied use of “cabala” and “cabal.” Unlike other writers of the period who used these terms, Behn employs their range of definitions and relies on their variety of associations in order to relate the destabilization of English society which resulted from the confusing and disheartening events of the late seventeenth century. As terms whose definitions were fluid, their changing status mirrors the volatile Restoration culture. By tracing Behn's use of “cabala” and “cabal,” one can journey through the upheavals in political power and the personal betrayals that accompany them; examine the awkward and unfinished shift from “revealed,” mystical scholarship to experimental science; and listen in on the anxiety that small groups and their secrets inspired.

In the introduction to her edition of Aphra Behn's Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister, Janet Todd writes: “The liberation of Silvia and Philander

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<sup>199</sup> See Visconsi 686.



from constraints of language and symbol has thrust them into a Hobbesian world."<sup>200</sup> This libertinism, the world of the rake ruled only by the individual's desire in that moment, is a world out of control. In the time of the Popish Plot, the Rye House Plot, and the Monmouth Rebellion, the power of words to disorder society – through propaganda, innuendo, and rumors – is indisputable. Cabala is a system based upon the interpretation and the "true understanding" of language and symbol and lends itself well to portraying this contradictory period because of its own contradictions and fluidity. Cabala uses language to explode authority and limitations and yet is founded on a complex, hierarchical system of controls and balances. The purpose of cabala is not to remain within the appropriate sphere of understanding but to supersede it, to ultimately achieve the secret knowledge of God. Yet this end is not to challenge God or his established system but rather to help us become better subjects in God's world and ultimately to return this fallen world to the perfect world God originally designed.

This pattern of breaking through hierarchical barriers and yet building upon and reinforcing the hierarchy is very much like Behn's own attempts to influence the systems around her. While Behn's characters and plots certainly challenged acceptable norms – political, social, romantic – and would have caused the reader to examine his or her social and political context, Behn's texts did not further jeopardize the monarchy. Rather, Behn's writings, whether overtly or quietly political, argue for loyalty to the monarchical system and to the divinely appointed ruler. At the same time, Behn's characters, especially her women, choose to be unusually independent

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<sup>200</sup> (London: Penguin Books) xxxi.

and act to subvert the patriarchal order. Behn's texts emphasize the importance of exercising one's own will, the libertine mode that Todd and others describe as Hobbesian. In her own time, Behn was criticized for portraying the libertine and rake as heroic and sympathetic characters. Though her works do at times portray the libertine's life as romantic, many of Behn's writings ultimately illustrate the dangerousness of "brutish" desires running unrestrained, for the individual and for society. "Cabal" is her means of delivering this message.

### "Our Cabal"

Behn's earliest exploration of cabal and cabala, the witty and seductive poem "Our Cabal" (1684), is a seemingly benign and comic application of the term, tweaking the readers' noses, teasing them with the hint of scandal in the midst of the idyllic scene. "Our Cabal" is a pastoral poem in which each stanza praises and addresses one of Behn's friends whose identity is obscured by the use of a code name.<sup>201</sup> There was no "key" to this poem, and though scholars have guessed at the identity of some of the poem's characters, for the most part these people still remain unknown. In this application, "cabal" resembles its early ambiguous definition: Behn is referring to a small group and the use of pseudonyms links the poem to the history of cabala and development of cabal and their hidden meanings and associations with secrets. This poem and its use of cabal appear to be teasing and innocuous. This generally playful and coy use of this potentially explosive word could be one indicator of the depth of Behn's sense of humor and ability to toy with current

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<sup>201</sup> This poem was published in Behn's 1684 edition of Poems On Several Occasions.

conventions and inventively flirt with danger.<sup>202</sup> Though at this time we have no evidence of any serious subtext or subject of the poem, the explanation that "cabal" is relatively innocent does not fit in with the currency of the word at the time. This fact alone suggests that further consideration of the potential seriousness of the poem needs to be done. In a rare discussion of this poem, the pro-Behn The Memoir of Mrs. Behn (1914) by Montague Summers argues that "Our Cabal" is Behn's dismissive and comic response to the group(s) of people attacking her sexual license and lifestyle. However, scholars have generally remained puzzled or at least quiet on the meaning and purpose of this work.

But the poem "The Cabal at Nickey-Nackey's" (1684) and the play The Emperor of the Moon (1687) are less enigmatic to scholars and readers as are their uses of "cabal" and "caballing." In both cases, Behn plays upon current trend of mocking leaders and political figures and satirizing cabala in order to infuse the political and social storylines with comedy. Though the reader or audience will recognize the humor created by caballing, he or she must also see its darker consequences, for the humor only lightly covers the disintegration of society, institutions, and people that is the real action of the plot.

"The Cabal at Nickey Nackey's" and Otway's *Venice Preserv'd*

Behn's poem "The Cabal at Nickey Nackey's" originally appeared untitled as a

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<sup>202</sup> Of course further research may reveal more about this poem, including the identities of those who are hidden by Behn's coding or about the occasion of the poem. These pieces of information would most likely offer a very different reading. The mystery of not understanding all of Behn's allusions and the complicated nature of "cabal" as a term leave room for interpretation and revelation. At this point, however, there is no evidence to indicate that this verse is anything other than an innocent pastoral praising friends.

song in her play The Roundheads (1682).<sup>203</sup> When Behn republished the poem in her 1684 collection, Poems for Several Occasions, she added the title and thus connected her poem to Otway's play Venice Preserv'd (1682). Otway's play portrays a conspiracy and rebellion against the senators of Venice led by a gallant and honorable young military hero, Pierre, and supported by Senator Pruli's son-in-law, Jeffeir. Prior to Jeffeir's marriage to Pruli's daughter and only child, Belvidera, Pruli had welcomed Jeffeir into his home and treated him as a son. On account of Jeffeir's betrayal and Belvidera's disobedience by marrying without his consent, Pruli disowned the young couple. During the three years between the elopement and the beginning of the play, Jeffeir and Belvidera became bankrupt, nearly beggars; in Act I, Pruli signs an order of eviction which places his daughter, son-in-law, and grandson on the street.

Like Jeffeir, Pierre has many complaints against the Venetian government and the corrupt Senate in particular. Like Jeffeir, Pierre has a personal grievance against Senator Antonio because they both profess to love the same woman, the courtesan, Aquillina. Pierre introduces Jeffeir to a group of anti-government conspirators and involves him in their plot against the senators. The rebels' plan is to kill the senators and their families and to burn much of the city, both government buildings and the estates of governing officials. Jeffeir swears a sacred vow of allegiance to protect and support his dearest friend, Pierre, and Pierre's interests. In order to prove his loyalty to the group, Jeffeir hands Belvidera over to one of the conspirators, Renault, without explaining to his wife his plans or this action.

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<sup>203</sup> See The Roundheads in The Works of Aphra Behn. The Plays 1678-1682, ed. Janet Todd (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992).

Once she is in his custody, Belvidera is attacked and nearly raped by Renault, a leader of the conspiracy. Angered by this violation and torn by guilt from offering Belvidera as collateral for his own honor, Jeffeir breaks his vow of silence and tells his wife the conspirators' plan. Belvidera, who is still a devoted daughter, begs Jeffeir to uncover this plot and save her father's life. Jeffeir gives in to Belvidera's pleas and betrays his friend and his oath, telling Pruli about the plan in exchange for a promise that the conspirators will not be punished. The Senate does not keep its promise to Jeffeir, and Pierre, unshakably loyal to his cause, refuses to negotiate with the corrupt Senate even to save his own life. Jeffeir blames Belvidera and his love for her for his betrayal of Pierre, an accusation which drives Belvidera to madness. Motivated by guilt and love for Pierre, Jeffeir kills his best friend rather than watch Pierre endure the torturous and infamous death the Senate has sentenced him to; Jeffeir then kills himself and falls on top of Pierre's body.

This sacrifice of youth and honor without the realization of any changes in the Senate illustrates the frustrating and dangerous status of England's state. As Robert G. Lawrence describes in the introduction to his edition of the play, the futility portrayed in Venice Preserv'd demonstrates "that both a corrupt aristocracy and any group of men plotting to overturn a government are destructive in nature."<sup>204</sup> The tragedy of this play is not simply that the "heroes" die wastefully, without changing the personal or political corruption around them, but that these "heroes," if we can call them that, were moved to action against the government by their own interests and personal wrongs rather than solely by noble motivations. Too, their ineptitude and betrayal of each other makes them appear less than heroic and ultimately

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<sup>204</sup> See 312.

unsympathetic. Because neither the outcome nor the "heroes" offer the reader hope or nobility, Otway presents a dismal view of the immoral status quo and of the "weak," unfocused, and ineffectual alternative.

Although Otway avoided invoking the term "cabal" to represent the rebel group or the corrupt government, Behn affiliated the word with Otway's play through her poem "The Cabal at Nickey Nackey's." The connection between the action of the play and the connotation of the word is two-fold: first, there is Otway's attack on a historical member of Charles II's "Cabal" and second is the general and common association between the word and disruptive groups. In the first instance, Otway has only to attack Shaftesbury to call attention to the failings of corrupt government and to the danger of self-interested rebels. Shaftesbury was a member of Charles II's "Cabal," or Privy Council. Shaftesbury was also one of the most influential and dangerous opposition leaders and conspirators against the King, especially concerning the matter of succession. Shaftesbury was instrumental in the Duke of Monmouth's attempts to take the crown. At the time Otway wrote this play, Shaftesbury and his influence over crown and people had ended.<sup>205</sup> Popular understanding about the truth of the Popish Plot, the defeat of the Second Exclusion Bill, and Shaftesbury's arrest for high treason in July, 1681 and subsequent, obviously political acquittal by a Whig Parliament removed him from power and increased Tory popularity. Otway's 1682 portrayal of Shaftesbury in Venice Preserv'd was in step with events; Shaftesbury is

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<sup>205</sup> Most scholars argue that it is because of Shaftesbury's death that Otway was able to write such an obvious and harmful portrait of him. For examples of this discussion see Philip Harth's "Political Interpretations of *Venice Preserv'd*: Robert Pasquarelli's 'on the Nicky-Nackey Scene in *Venice Preserv'd*,'" (*Restoration and 18<sup>th</sup> Century Theatre Research* 8.2 (1969): 38-41); and Aline Taylor's Next to Shakespeare: Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* and *The Orphan* and their History on the London Stage (New York: AMS Press, Inc. 1966).

depicted as both Belvidera's attacker, the conspirator Renault, and as the corrupt Senator Antonio, an excellent orator, lecher, and generally ridiculous old man.

The scene from which Behn gets the title of her poem, "The Cabal at Nickey Nackey's," features Antonio at Aquilina's, or as he calls her, his "Nickey Nackey." Although Aquilina repeatedly tries to turn Antonio out of her apartment, he first bullies his way into her rooms and then bribes her with gold to let him stay. Antonio's actions and dialogue reveal what a dupe he is: as sexual foreplay, he acts like a bull, a toad, and finally he crawls on the floor like a dog, barking, biting, and begging Aquilina to kick him. Throughout this short scene the Senator inanely repeats his nickname for Aquilina, "Nickey Nackey." Later in the play, Pierre, who is also Aquilina's lover, chooses her house as the rallying point for the conspiracy, or cabal. "Nickey Nackey's," then, becomes the central physical site for both groups' problematic behaviors: corruption, abuse of power, and foolishness on the part of the Senators and betrayal, selfishness, and violence from the rebels.

In Next to Shakespeare: Otway's *Venice Preserv'd* and *The Orphan* and their History on the London Stage, Aline Taylor recounts various criticisms of and reactions to *Venice Preserv'd*. In her work, Taylor reiterates the nineteenth-century condemnation of the conspirators: "The revenge of a merely private wrong upon a whole commonwealth is scarcely sane enough for the dignity of tragedy."<sup>206</sup> This estimation is quite right. The lack of sanity signaled by the personally motivated destruction of public institutions is exactly the point Otway's play makes. The rebels' questionable justifications for attacking the Senate allow Otway to voice concern that public events were influenced and decided by private agendas. That *Venice Preserv'd*

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<sup>206</sup> Sir Edmund Gosse qtd in Taylor 40.

has no clear hero and lacks honorable behavior on the part of either group is the crisis Otway is signaling. The audience and society are left with no hero because the actions of the play's and of the culture's would-be heroes are spurred on by ideas of personal gain or private retribution. Both the rebels and the Senators are to blame for the unstable and immoral society.

Like Otway, Behn also attacks both sides in her poem, focusing in the first stanza on "the Statesman" and in the second on "no *Polliticians*, / But Rogues" and "*Rude Rable*."<sup>207</sup> Since "Nickey Nackey's" is the site of both the Senator's and rebels' misbehaviors, the identities of "the caballists" indicated by the title were unclear. By creating this overlap, Behn joins Otway in pointing to the dangerousness and shared culpability of seditious mobs and corrupt governor who "Maliciously turn[s] Traytor."<sup>208</sup> Though it is easier to identify the danger of the "rable," both Behn and Otway clearly provide evidence of the Senate's or Statesman's faults. Behn accomplishes this by using the same words to describe the Statesman and the Rable in her poem: "Seditious" (3) and "Sedition" (11); "Impudence" (13) and "Impudent" (10). She also addresses the Statesman a second time and within the stanza concerned with the Rable, mingling the two so that their identities and actions are confused. In much the same way, Otway depicts the rebels plotting to betray and kill the Senators in Venice Preserv'd, but in the end it is the Senate who betrays and murders them. Applying the term "cabal" to each side, Behn reinforces Otway's pessimistic portrayal of society and forces the reader to acknowledge the immorality of both parties.

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<sup>207</sup> "The Cabal at Nickey Nackey's," ed. Janet Todd, The Works of Aphra Behn. Poetry (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1992) 98-99, ll. 1, 9-10, and 11.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid* l. 4.



In Emperor of the Moon (1687) and Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister (1684-87), chaos also begins when the characters' actions and private motivations move beyond the reasonable or natural limits of order and impact the public work. Here too caballing plays the central part. Just as the word "cabala" was devalued from a beneficial practice to mean a perverse and unnatural exploitation of institutions and people, the characters' simply self-interested desires cause their behavior to deteriorate into malicious actions. The play Emperor of the Moon: A Farce and the narrative Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister, demonstrate the personal and social devastation caballing brings. In both works, simple, private plans explode into a labyrinth of complex schemes, creating confusion to the point of madness and destroying individuals, institutions, and society. Cabals are the tools of this dissolution, and the unrestrained and self-interested desires of the cabalists are the force that drive the caballing. In these texts, caballing is Behn's means of revealing society's greater failings.

#### Emperor of the Moon: A Farce

Though it was not performed until 1687, Behn claimed to have written Emperor of the Moon before Charles II's death in 1685. The storyline of a daughter, a niece, and their lovers plotting against and usurping the power of a father/uncle must have resonated with political irony for an audience with recent memories of Monmouth's plots against his father, the King, and his uncle, the Duke of York. But in the play, it is the father's intellectual interests, not his political ones, that provoke the schemes that undermine his authority. Though a comedy, in the end, the play's

humor only faintly disguises the ultimately serious consequences of maligning the established order.

Cabala is the key to the plot against the father, Doctor Baliardo, as well as to the action of the play. Although scientific cabala is the heart of the ploy that ultimately undoes the Doctor, it is the social caballing that creates havoc greater than any of the Doctor's supposed "madness." The Doctor's mystical science, the pretend Caballa, and the comedy it generates at first divert our attention away from the more serious matters raised by the lovers' behavior. Early on, the Doctor's "madness" appears to be the greatest crime, but his behavior seems much less mad by comparison as the lovers' actions become more and more irregular.

At the beginning of the play we are led to believe the Doctor is insane and to sympathize with those hurt by his lunacy, the thwarted lovers. In the opening scene, the Doctor's daughter, Elaria, and his servant, Scaramouch, inform us that the Doctor's "mad" state is a result of his "always travelling to the moon" (I.i.86), a reference to his scholarly obsession with life on the moon.<sup>209</sup> A disbeliever in love himself, the Doctor prevents the union of his daughter and niece with their chosen lovers, Cinthio and Charmante. These gentlemen devise a plot or "Farce," (I.i.101) as they call it, in order to marry the women with the Doctor's consent and thereby retain the girls' dowries.

The farce is the Caballa and it generates the plot. In this "Farce," Charmante approached the Doctor disguised as a Cabalist from "the great Caballa --- of Eutopia," (I.ii.24) a secret group whose members were able to communicate with other worlds,

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<sup>209</sup> All references are taken from Todd's edition of Behn's *Emperor of the Moon: A Farce in The Works of Aphra Behn. The Plays 1678-1682*, vol. 6 and 7, ed. Janet Todd (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992) 155-207. All references are cited parenthetically in the text.

to secure divine knowledge, and to know the future. Posing as a Caballist, Charmante tells the Doctor he has earned this other-worldly visit because his scholarship has interested the "Caballa." The "Cabbalist" also tells the Doctor he is looking for the mortal woman the Emperor of the Moon is in love with, the woman later revealed to be the Doctor's daughter. Charmante also promises the Doctor his children can become immortals through an extraterrestrial union, such as a marriage to an extraterrestrial deity. This promise of immortality is the key to convincing the Doctor to approve of the marriages between his daughter and niece and the disguised lovers, and it is this approval that is required for the couples to marry and the women to keep their fortunes.

The second purpose of this plot is to "cure" the Doctor of his absurd intellectualism. Though this objective is not discussed when the plan is first explained, this motivation is revealed in the final scene. After the couples are married, the Doctor's "Physician, Friend and Counsellor," Keplair, urges him to "call up all [his] Vertue" in the face of this plot to "cure" him. Keplair promises him, "You're only cur'd, Sir, of a Disease" (III.iii.639, 632-633). In the end, the scheme successfully unites the lovers and "cures" the Doctor. But this cure causes the Doctor to burn his entire library and renounce all intellectual pursuits in response to the humiliation he endured from the lovers' plot. Though the lovers' plight appears to be the central feature of the play, it is the tricking of the Doctor and through it his reformation from a "lunatic" to a "sane" man which is really the focus of the action.

As Behn constructs the play, the satire is directed at experimental as well as mystical science and eventually turns on the tricksters as well. Behn introduces the

farce or Caballa in Act I, Scene II, addressing several central tropes of cabala as well as elements of experimental science in this early episode. For instance, the stage directions for the scene call for the Doctor to enter the stage "with all manner of Mathematical Instruments, hanging at this Girdle; SCARAMOUCH bearing a Telescope twenty (or more) Foot long" (165). By linking cabala and the new technology of the telescope to the Doctor's ridiculous behavior, Behn is able to attack mysticism, the new science, and virtuosos in one scene. Behn continues mingling empirical science with occult practices by alluding to or representing mystical features along with those of the new science. As Behn must have been aware, the new science was trying to separate itself from superstitious notions and methods not reliant upon reason. By linking the modern technology with ancient superstitions, Behn undermines its "rational" position and thus the reasonableness of its practitioners.

After this attack on "modern" science, we learn that the Doctor is trying to determine at which "certain moments Critical" he may "snatch" a "sight into the secret Closet" of the Monarch of the Moon World (I.ii.6, 7). Here Behn takes the opportunity to connect the traditional and contemporary associations of cabala by revealing the Doctor's political motivations for this scientific endeavor:

. . . [the spying] were flat Treason if it shou'd be known, but thus  
 unseen, and as wise Politicians shou'd, I take Survey of all: This is the  
 State-man's peeping-hole, thorow which he Steals the secrets of his  
 King, and seems to wink at distance. (I.ii.10-13)

We have no other indication that the Doctor wishes to disturb the Moon kingdom nor

is there any discussion of the Doctor taking part in the Moon government. Certainly this comment is a more general exposure of those who exploit their position near the king to betray him. Also, these ideas of betrayal set the tone for the lovers' plot to begin.

At this moment Charmante enters disguised as the cabalist from Eutopia "drest in a strange Fantastical Habit" (165), hailing Doctor Baliardo. He discourses with the Doctor on fantastical matters, the Daemons, visitations from dead heroes, etc. Charmante excites the Doctor with descriptions of the Caballa's "intelligence" which is "more secret and sublime" for they have "little Daemons of the Air [to] inform us all things, past, present, and to come" (I.ii.30-31, 32). As the Cabalist, Charmante reveals that "An absolute abstinence from carnal thought, devout and pure of Spirit; free from Sin" are the keys to admittance to this Society (I.ii.58-59) and that the "first Principle" (I.ii.63) of the Caballa is to be "very secret" (I.ii.62). Charmante repeatedly emphasizes the importance of secrecy and virtue. The clandestine aspect of caballa titillates the Doctor with prospects of special knowledge and thus power. As his description of peering into the Moon King's closet indicates, the Doctor pursues knowledge, even through scientific means, to increase his power. This point will be reiterated by his frantic desire to marry his niece and daughter to the extraterrestrial royalty later in the play. The irony of Charmante emphasizing the importance of virtue as part of his deception of the Doctor cannot be missed, the hypocrisy is too great.

Because the Doctor is obsessed with science and particularly the life on the moon, he trusts the "cabalist" Charmante and the information he brings; this is the

Doctor's downfall. Though the Doctor's niece, daughter, and their lovers make much of his obsession with the moon, in the midst of these (supposed) moments of divine revelation, the Doctor thinks of his children: "But Sir, I have a Neece and Daughter which I love equally, were it not possible they might be Immortalliz'd?" (I.ii.105)

Though the Cabbalist has suggested that the Doctor alone has been chosen for the rare honor of immortality, the Doctor wants his children to share in it. It is true that the Doctor's standing would increase with his children's association with otherworldly creatures, but, as he has just been promised so much on his own account, his motives for hoping for his girls' advancement cannot be solely selfish.

This moment of concern for his girls is even more moving because it immediately follows one of what will be several ridiculous and humiliating exercises Charmante makes the Doctor execute in the name of the Caballa. Charmante directs the Doctor to "Kneel then" in front of his telescope "and try [his] strength of Vertue" (I.ii.72) by trying to see the figures of the next world while looking through the telescope. When the Doctor reports that he sees only clouds, Charmante instructs him to pray to "*Alikin*, the Spirit of the East" and look again (I.ii.79). While the Doctor prays, Charmante places a glass with the figure of a nymph painted on it in front of the Doctor's telescope. When the Doctor next looks into the glass, he believes he sees visions from the moon. Charmante repeats the trick, switching the glass with the painted nymph on it for one with an image of the "Emperor."

This representation of cabala is one of the most comical scenes in the play, not only for the Doctor's gullibility but for the ridiculousness of Charmante's tricks. Certainly the "visions" the Doctor sees through the telescope are the comic highlight

of this scene; interestingly, this episode has a correlation to Behn's own life.

According to Todd, Behn met Sir Bernard Gascoigne, Florentine merchant and secret agent for Charles II, in 1667 on her return from the Antwerp spy mission. At the time the two met, Gascoigne was coming back from Italy on an intelligence trip for Lord Arlington. While looking through a new Italian telescope, Gascoigne and Behn both saw an "apparition." As Todd recounts:

At first, they assumed the glasses had painted scenes on the end, but then they realized the apparition was really there: a floating floor of marble, supporting fluted and twisted pillars with vines, flowers and streamers entwined and a hundred little fluttering cupids ... the most likely explanation of this is that they were seeing the Fata Morgana, an effect of wind and light in stormy weather in the Channel . . . (114)<sup>210</sup>

Todd continues that "Behn herself did not write of the phenomenon" (115), but certainly the Cabbalist's joke on the Doctor is too close to Behn's experience not to be connected.

Behn's interest in the "new science" went beyond her range of acquaintances and occasional glances through a telescope. As Janet Todd has found, Behn had many friends among Royal Society members, not the least of which was its historian, Thomas Sprat.<sup>211</sup> As a careful observer of her society, Behn did not allow the "scientific revolution" to pass her by.

Like writers before her and her peers, Behn included scientific references and ideas in several of her writings. From her translation of Barnard de Fontenelle's

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<sup>210</sup> For a full account of this episode, see Todd's *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* 114-115.

<sup>211</sup> In addition to Todd's biography, see Anne Bratach's "Following the Intrigue: Aphra Behn, Genre, and Restoration Science," *Journal of Narrative Techniques*, 26.3 (Fall 1996): 209-227.

Entriens sur la pluralite des mondes, A Discovery of New Worlds (1688), in which she argues for Copernican astronomy, we have some idea of the scope of her scientific knowledge. Of course, since she lived by her writing, the current popularity of scientific translations and not scholarly interest alone may have influenced Behn's decision to translate this text. Yet Behn's defense of Copernicanism and the amount of scientific understanding demonstrated by her translation of Fontenelle suggests she had more than a superficial knowledge of current scientific concepts. Behn was also asked to write "a poetic commendation"<sup>212</sup> for the second edition of Thomas Creech's translation of Roman Lucretius's *De Rerum Natura* (1683), a controversial and complicated philosophical work. This invitation as well as the knowledge of atomism and materialism Behn displays in her poem also verify her understanding of current scientific theories.

It seems clear that her interest in and support of science was sincere; why then would she satirize it so thoroughly in Emperor of the Moon? As her political writings indicate as well, Behn was not uncritical of what she supported. Of course Behn recognized the commercial value of laughing at the new science's failings as well as at the irrational proceedings found in mystical methods. But in these cases, Behn writes about the topics when the situation is extreme, a warning to her audience to moderate their interests and behaviors. Though at times in the play one could see Behn's satire of science take a general turn, Behn is focused more on the virtuoso whose interest or pursuit of science is absurd. For, though he may appear sympathetic at times, most of all, Doctor Baliardo represents unbalanced scientific pursuit. As the play's title warns, this is a farce: the Doctor's telescope is twenty feet

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<sup>212</sup> See Todd's The Secret Life of Aphra Behn 291.



long and he follows the political scene of the Moon World. Emperor of the Moon is a reminder not to become unreasonable in the search for knowledge, of course, and more broadly, not to become irrational in the pursuit of any of your desires; a message that will appear again in Love Letters.

Yet, in spite of his absurdity and the repeated accusations that the Doctor is "Mad," he is often astute enough to suspect he is being fooled. He interprets vague clues correctly, such as the ridiculousness of his servants' stories and the voices of the trespassing lovers, and is at first wary of a plot. But ultimately he trusts his children and servants more than his own senses and intellect, and because of this faith, they are able to convince him he is wrong. It is this misplaced trust and not his failing intellect that undoes the Doctor. While the Doctor's overzealous hope in the supernatural makes him susceptible to the "Caballists" very real tricks, ultimately, it is the "Caballists" themselves who are his "Madness." The Doctor's daughter, Elaria, demonstrates this with her own words when, in the thickest part of the deception, she puzzles: "Bless me! My Father, in all the rest of his Discourse, shows so much Sense and Reason, I cannot think him mad, but feigns all this to try us" (III.ii.430-432).

A review of the Doctor's actions in Act II, Scene III proves Elaria's point that the Doctor is not mad, in spite of the continued accusations of madness. When the Doctor discovers the lovers' ball and so the plot against him, it is Scaramouch's ability to mislead him that convinces the Doctor he has misunderstood the situation. Still, the Doctor analyzes and questions the situation; he is not easily deluded. When Scaramouch offers a story of the Emperor of the Moon's visit, the Doctor is inclined to believe him, but he interrogates Scaramouch's story and catches the servant in lies.

The Doctor also examines the tapestry in which the revelers are hiding with a "Perspective," reliable technology of the day. The Doctor wants Scaramouch's tale of visiting moon nobility to be true, of course, but still he logically examines the servant's report rather than simply and blindly accepting it. It is because Elaria and Bellemante provide supporting details to Scaramouch's explanation and to what the Caballist said on his first visit that the Doctor finally accepts the story. Many of the most suspenseful scenes are those in which the characters must prove the farce to the Doctor. Because the Doctor is so knowledgeable and careful in his examination of them, the Caballists must work diligently to validate their stories. It takes the entire cast and elaborate scenery to fool the Doctor, or, in Charmante's words, to "banter, the old Gentleman into a little more Faith" (III.iii.109-110). In fact, there are many moments in the play when the caballists are fooled by each other, by simple disguises and misunderstandings, all arguments in support of the Doctor's mental acuity and against the Caballists' sanity and reasonableness.

Examples of the Caballists' superstitious beliefs and irrational inclinations occur throughout the text. If we fault the Doctor for his absurd belief in life on the moon, we must also accuse Scaramouch, Harlequin, and Bellemonte for their beliefs in devils. By the nearly constant allusions to demons and devils by the "sane" characters in the play, Behn certainly calls into question their mental stability and reliability as judges of rationality. In fact, the characters invoke conjurers, conjuring, and devils so often that the supernatural becomes a normal part of the play and of the society. Though most of Behn's audience would agree that supernatural beings, demons and angels exist, or would even accept the possible power of a conjurer, the

extent of superstitious activity is one of the farcical elements of this play. What makes the Doctor's belief in the supernatural a "madness" is a matter of society and degree. First, the Doctor is *alone* in his obsession with life on the moon, while the other characters *agree* on their belief in devils. Second, he is obsessed with the life of the moon while the other characters are not controlled by their belief in devils. Yet their obsession with their love for each other and ambition to gain the object of that love makes them behave as absurdly as the Doctor. If we are to judge the Doctor insane and so worthy of rebuke for his obsession with the Moon world, it follows that we should also be critical of the lovers' equal obsession with their desire to have each other.

Early in the play, Elaira declares that her Father's madness is a result of "reading foolish Books," attributing his "illness" to study (I.i.92). But according to Robert Burton in Anatomy of Melancholy (1621), the Doctor only somewhat fits the profile of the scholar gone mad. Burton cites past authors on the "peculiar *fury*, which comes by overmuch study," a fury which makes "philosophers sombre and stern; severe, sad, dry, tetrick" (259).<sup>213</sup> Also, "study weakens their bodies, dulls their spirits, abates their strength and courage" and "produceth melancholy" (259, 260). While one could argue the Doctor is "stern" and "severe" in his treatment of his children, it is not clear that this behavior is a result of his study, since many fathers were careful of protecting their daughters' honor. Moreover, the action of the play assures us that the Doctor does not lack "strength or courage." For example, he runs about the house in search of intruders, fights, and rides off into the night with no

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<sup>213</sup> This and all quotations of Burton's work are from Anatomy of Melancholy (1660), *Early English Books, 1641-1700*, 1351:18. Page numbers will be cited parenthetically in the text.

concern for his safety. He is too excited by his research and the visits from the Caballists to be sombre; in fact, Charmante instructs him to contain his joy (II.v). Additionally, the Doctor is so far from "neglecting all worldly affairs . . . to gain knowledge,"<sup>214</sup> another symptom of scholarly melancholy, that he thinks of his children's welfare and family advancement in the middle of the Caballist's first visit.

Burton further describes the mad scholar as "in their outward behavior, absurd, ridiculous to others, and no whit experience in worldly business; they can measure the heavens, range over the world, teach others wisdom, and yet in bargains and contracts they are circumvented by every base tradesman" (262). The first part of this passage does describe the Doctor; he does appear an ass and a fool to others. In Scaramouch's words:

This Madness is a pretty sort of a pleasant Disease, when it tickles but in one Vein – Why here's my Master now, as great a Scholar, as grave and wise a Man, in all Argument and Discourse, as can be met with, yet name but the Moon, and he runs into Ridicule, and grows as mad as the Wind. (ii.iii.246-249)

But the latter portion of Burton's description does not apply to the Doctor, raising the question how much of the Doctor's madness is created by the other characters. This is not to say that the Doctor's obsession with life on the moon is normal, but in light of the Doctor's reasonable behavior in situations not dealing with the Moon world, the degree of his "madness" and the validity of this accusation must be questioned.

Burton also describes the mental depravity of the ambitious: "If an ambitious

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<sup>214</sup> Burton 261.

man become Melancholy, he forthwith thinks he is a King, an Emperor, a Monarch, . . . pleasing himself with a vain hope of some future preferment, . . . and acts a Lord's part, takes upon him to be some Statesman or Magnifico, makes congies, gives entertainment, looks big, &c." (344) This diagnosis makes the lovers' Caballa appear less an exploitation of the Doctor's madness and more an expression of their own. In "Democritus Junior to the Reader" at the beginning of Anatomy of Melancholy, Burton justifies his writing by informing the reader of his desire to "help others" by "spend[ing] my time and knowledge, which are my greatest fortunes, for the common good of all" (17). As Burton sees humanity, "who is not a fool, melancholy, mad? – Who attempts nothing foolish, who is not brainsick? . . . though some are madder than others" (31-32). The individual brainsickness leads to a general depravity in humankind, a world disturbed by factions, of father against son, religious fanaticism, and of personal degradation.<sup>215</sup> In short, Burton depicts the socially and politically unstable world of seventeenth century England, a miniature of which Behn creates and reprimands in Emperor of the Moon. For "We are torn in pieces by our passions, as [by] so many wild horses, one in disposition, another in habit; one is melancholy, another mad; and which of us all seeks for help, doth acknowledge his error, or knows he is sick?"<sup>216</sup>

In Emperor of the Moon, the lovers' madness is expressed as much in the making of the Caballa as the Doctor's is by his belief in it. Yet the Doctor's madness is restricted to himself only and is contained to his obsession with the world of the Moon while the Caballa is a social "Disease," to borrow Scaramouch's word. Once

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<sup>215</sup> Burton's "Democritus Junior to the Reader" is filled with these descriptions 43-44, 47.

<sup>216</sup> See Burton 57.

the Caballing starts, the plots and disguises proliferate and even move beyond the confines of the house.<sup>217</sup> Though the Cabbala began as a means for Cinthio and Charmante to marry Elaria and Bellemante with the Doctor's blessing, Scaramouch and Harlequin use it to fight each other for Mosophil. As the play develops, the Caballa becomes more elaborate, beginning with counterfeit telescope lenses, progressing to pretend philosophers with false moon-maps and ending with elaborate sets in which extraterrestrial nobility arrive in moon-chariots. In the end, even the Doctor's friend and physician takes part in the plot, illustrating a further perversion of society and another example of betrayal. Finally, the comic is increasingly unkind, advancing from ridiculing the Doctor to leading him to believe his most precious hopes have come true only to undeceive him with the disappointing and humiliating truth about the Caballa. "Oh, I am undone and cheated *every way*," the Doctor exclaims (III.iii.631, my emphasis).

In her Prologue to the play, Behn reproves the audience for their hypocrisy, drawing attention to those who have "malicious grown, / Friends Vices to expose and hide their own" (15-16). Behn repeats the hypocrites' pattern of attacking the play and playwright with false moral claims while spreading greater corruptions. The hypocrite begins by making moral declarations about the "damn'd Characters, and Plot obscene" (19), advising that

no Woman without Vizard in the Nation,  
Can see it twice, and keep her Reputation – that's certain  
Forgetting –

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<sup>217</sup> The idea of the Caballa originates with Cinthio and Charmante, and so in fact infiltrates the house. Also, Harlequin's trick on the Town Gate guard in Act II Scene I incites further belief in devils and drives others to think themselves mad, indicating further disruption by the caballists.

That he himself, in every gross Lampoon,

Her lewder Secrets spread about the Town; (20-24)

But society's "feign'd Niceness is but cautious Fear, / Their own Intrigues shou'd be unravel'd here" (25-26). The fear of discovering their true identities, of revealing their plots and secret behaviors, precipitates the hypocrites' use of "Niceness" as a diversion. In order to protect themselves and their ambitions, they ruin others by their accusations.

There is a parallel between the children's and the lovers' duplicitous plotting and the actions Behn attacks. Behn herself draws the audience's attention to the Doctor's failings by emphasizing the Doctor's obsession with the Moon, a fault that leads to his downfall. But she clearly creates the dialogue and organizes the events of the play so as to point to the plotters' "malicious" behavior; it is up to the audience to accurately interpret and discriminate between the honest plots and what are hollow "Puppets Show," "meer Machines," and "rough Sports" that the undiscerning and evasive prefer (*Preface* 41, 47, 53).

Behn provides plenty of evidence of the caballists' true natures. For instance, in the first act, Scaramouch reveals that the lovers have "such Strategems abrewing" (I.i.73). He calls them "Conjurers" (I.i.79) and tells Elaira that they have made a plan in which Charmante disguises himself as "one of the Caballists of the *Rosacrusian* Order" (I.i.109) to fool her father. In addition, Bellemante, the Doctor's niece, is also exposed as an unfaithful lover at the beginning of the play. At her first entrance, she is returning from church where she has been to watch the men, not to pray. When these characters begin to attack the Doctor for his "madness" in order to justify their

exploitation of his eccentricities and abuse of his trust, it is up to the audience to look beyond their claims that he is mad, past the comedy, to see their substantial flaws and to judge the motivations of their actions.

Sir William Davenant says that during the Interregnum "plays were secret Instructions to the People, in things that 'tis impossible to insinuate into them any other Way."<sup>218</sup> Like the Doctor peeping into the Moon King's closet, the audience alone knows the play's secrets. In this way, the audience members also become "caballists," or at least implicated in the Caballa. In Emperor of the Moon, Behn is testing and training the audience to be careful consumers of plots and testimony, a useful skill in such precarious times. At first, Behn distracts the audience from the serious aspects of the play. The elaborateness of the plots, disguises, and the staging involve the audience so that it is easy to be caught up in the performance and neglect the more serious considerations in the play. Like the Doctor, the audience is led to miss the danger of over-involvement until the end. This diversion is quite intentional on Behn's part. She aims the action of the play at the audience rather than casting them as passive observers of the plot. For instance, the stage directions often indicate that the characters should direct their lines to the audience, implicating them in the schemes. One example of this involvement is when Charmante is about to switch the lenses on the telescope. The stage directions read: Charmante "takes a Glass with a Picture of a Nymph on it, and a light behind it; that as he brings it, it shows to the Audience" (I.ii). The same effect is created when only the audience and Harlequin himself know that he is the "spirit" who has written the lines of poetry in Bellemante's book (I.iii.). In the scene in which the lovers becomes jealous of phantom suitors and

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<sup>218</sup> Qtd. in Todd 362.



break off their relationships with the women, the audience alone understands the confusion over who is in the girls' closet and why.

What, then, are Behn's "secret Instructions"? Of course, so much of a play's message depends on the performance: the actor's portrayal of a character, the director's interpretation. Beyond these variable components of production we know that Behn is satirizing the Doctor, his science and mysticism, and by extension virtuosos, scientists, and mystics. Beyond this more obvious message are Behn's repeated revelations about the "sane" characters, and so about general society. These insights alert the audience to question the obvious and the apparent, to laugh at their own superstitions, and to gauge the costs and consequences of recklessly pursuing their desires.

Like the elaborate screens Cinthio uses to create the illusion of the world of the moon in the Doctor's house, the danger of scientific cabala is only a screen for the more serious danger of the play, the social caballing. It is this social caballing – this secret plotting against the father – and not the scientific which causes the greater conflict and anxiety in the play. Despite the cabalists' ridiculous and funny circumstances, the ending illustrates the more critical outcome of the plans. Rather than simply uniting the lovers, the goal of the cabala, this plot devastates the Doctor's faith and passion. In the end, Cinthio confesses to the Doctor that all of the scientific Caballing and illusions were just "Fantoms of mad Brains" (III.iii.653). Note that Brains ends with "s," a detail which could imply that he is referring to the "mad Brains" of the schemers, not the Doctor. When the Doctor realizes the game and his own humiliation, he responds:

Burn all my Books, and let my Study Blaze,  
 Burn all to Ashes, and be sure the Wind  
 Scatter the vile Contagious Monstrous Lies . . .  
 . . . I see there's nothing in Philosophy –  
 (III.iii.661-663, 679)

The extremity of this action demonstrates to us that rather than everything ending happily as it should in a marriage play, something has gone wrong. In fact, what is wrong has been obvious all along: caballing negatively affects everyone.

For, once the Caballa begins, the behavior of the "sane" characters only declines. Most of the characters are fooled into seeing what is not there or misinterpreting what is. The Doctor's niece is convinced a deity wrote lines of poetry on her tablet when it was really only a servant (I.ii). Charmante and Cinthio mistake each other for competing suitors and accuse the women of being unfaithful. The servants Harlequin and Scaramouch repeatedly fool each other through lies and disguises, betraying their friendship while trying to win Mosophil's love. All the characters are given to misunderstandings and ridiculous behaviors because all are involved in intrigues that provoke them to be suspicious of others and to act unscrupulously. Friendship, trust, and honor between lovers are as undependable as respect and care in the relationship between father and child.

The caballists' hypocrisy is further confirmed by the characters' repeated invocation of "vertue." The irony of the caballists using "vertue" as a means to manipulate the Doctor illustrates the social decline of morality. There are two ways in which "vertue" is used in Emperor of the Moon. First, the Caballists use "vertue"

as a tool to convince the Doctor of their lies and as a means to humiliate him. Charmante, disguised as the Caballist, tells the Doctor that "The Fame of [his] great Learning, Sir, and Vertue, is known with Joy to the renown'd Society" (I.ii.26-27). He also instructs the Doctor that extreme virtue is required to see celestial visions and so he must "try [his] strength of Vertue" by looking for visions through the telescope (I.ii.72). The idea that his virtue has earned the Doctor his visit from "the great Caballa -- of *Eutopia*" is a means to ridicule the Doctor and his faith even more. Later in the play, the "Caballist" will use the Doctor's virtue as a way of convincing him that he and his children have been chosen by the Caballa, the Emperor of the Moon, and the Prince of Thunderland for the honor of their visits and the marriage of his children to them.

Because the "Caballist" has convinced the Doctor that virtue is the key to receiving these supernatural benefits, he urges his children to be virtuous. More importantly, because of the caballists' lies about the power of virtue, the Doctor sees virtue in others' deceit, thereby increasing his capacity to be deceived as well as the degree of his humiliation. For instance, when the Doctor catches the caballists at their ball, Scaramouch ascribes the dancing music, tapestry, and people to the Emperor of the Moon's visitation, an experience he claims to comprehend through his dream. The Doctor responds: "This Dream is Inspiration in this Fellow -- He must have wonderous Vertue in him, to be worthy of these Divine Intelligences" (II.iii.232-233). Based on this lie and what the Doctor believes is Scaramouch's virtuousness, the Doctor trusts him more and is more open to his deception. Finally, the "Caballists" deception is thorough, distorting and exploiting the Doctor's learning,

faith, and moral understanding.

When at last the "Farce" is exposed, the complete destruction of his faith, illustrated by his order to burn all his books, signals the devastation of what was to be only a "farce." If "madness" is defined at the beginning of the play by the Doctor's harmless belief in the world of the moon, what does it mean that the "sanity" the cabalists return the Doctor to is the burning of his study? The cabala, the props, the Doctor's response are all excessive. Though the tricking of the Doctor creates wonderful comedy, his gullibility and misplaced faith make him a pitiful character, not just a comic one. The lovers, upon reflection, appear selfish and hateful rather than just amusing or clever.

#### Love Letters Between A Nobleman and His Sister

Lacking the comic purpose of Emperor of the Moon, Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister portrays the process of caballing more grimly. As in Emperor of the Moon, Behn frequently juxtaposes conversations about political and romantic behavior and their common attributes, thereby linking the two. In this text the term "cabal" is only used overtly when referring to political groups such as Caesario's rebellious followers and Octavio's phantom French coalition. However, Behn constructs the private and the public (i.e. the romantic and the political) as parallel universes that mimic each other in their uses of caballing. By creating blatantly similar scenes and even dialogue for both worlds, Behn enlarges the reader's opportunities to examine the complexities of both situations and conceive of their similarities. In this way, the narrative demonstrates the potential public consequences

of private actions and vice-versa. Happily for Behn, the factual overlap as well as the specific circumstances of the Grey-Berkely affair and Monmouth's repeated betrayals of his father and attacks on the state ideally illustrate the similarities between the political and the personal.

Also, by emphasizing the parallelisms between the political and the romantic stories, Behn broadens the scope of what a "cabal" is. By comparing the two, Behn expands the definition of cabal as only secret political plottings to include personal intrigues as well. In the two worlds, the caballists' writings, actions, and motivations best illustrate this public-private connection. The most obvious example of this doubled meaning is Philander's use of the same deceitful and secretive practices in politics as in love. Just as Philander is part of a cabal to overthrow the King, Philander assaults the romantic and social institution of the family by pursuing a sexual relationship with his sister-in-law, Silvia. Silvia, too, writes many of the passages that address both the romantic and political situations when she unwittingly enters into caballing. The readers come to understand that both political and private manipulations are cabals and operate by the same methods for the same ends: small groups using secret letters and secret meetings plan to usurp the established order, either of government or of marriage.

In Love Letters, the horror of the individual's and society's disintegration is more obvious and poignant as the naive Silvia, seduced by "love" and a perfidious brother, devolves into a faithless rake. One way to measure her decline from innocence is to contrast Silvia's use of the term "cabal" to Philander's. As in Emperor of the Moon, individuals and nations are undone when selfish desires and thoughts of

personal gain take precedence over commitments to the institutions that make up society – relationships to family, friends, lovers, king. Like the dissolution of society evidenced in Emperor of the Moon, Love Letters depicts an increasingly immoral community and ends with a cryptic but ominous suggestion that depravity is the *status quo*.

In 1688, one year after the completed Love Letters was published, Behn's Oroonoko: The Royal Slave was published. Like Love Letters, Oroonoko has as its main character a man of noble blood in love with a noble woman he cannot obtain for reasons of family relationships. Also as in Love Letters, the hero faces a series of moral dilemmas challenging his personal honor and raising the question of his right to seize governing power as well as his love. The two stories and their heroes and heroines could not behave more differently though their challenges and positions are in many ways similar. A comparison of the two stories demonstrates Behn's progressively darker view of society. Where Love Letters portrays a few individuals who are corrupting agents attacking society, Oroonoko portrays a more sinister world in which the power to corrupt people and society is held by those in authority who set out to destroy the noble few. While Philander returns to court to continue his treacherous romantic and political behavior as Love Letters concludes, Oroonoko ends with its hero tortured and literally torn apart, physically wiped out of existence. With the destruction of the man Oroonoko, the possibility of a civil society is destroyed because he was the center of action and because he was established as the sole man of nobility. Silvia, bereft of value and honor, continues to prey on men and roam the world unmolested while Imoinda, a model of femininity and honor, lies with

her unborn child, rotting, removed from society. In Oronooko the domination of society by Byam's faction and their torture and murder of Oroonoko demonstrates that the world of Philander and Silvia thrives and reaches beyond England and Europe, spreading to new worlds. The end of Love Letters leaves the reader assured of the perpetuation of the romantic and political caballing Philander began. It is a desperate picture of a future of corruption. Oronooko is a vision of society in which the corruption is not only complete but the existence of nobility and honor is hunted and destroyed only to rid the culture of its influence. While Philander and Silvia destroy lives in order to satisfy their own sexual or romantic pleasure and for money, Byam and his faction are intent on destroying Oroonoko to rid the culture of his example, of his nobility and strength.

Of the three books which make up Love Letters, the book with the most direct attention to the political cabal and which most often repeats the term "cabal," Book I (1684), is especially interesting as conventions and images *require* subtextual readings. On the surface, this is a romance of the highest nature, with an innocent Lady and a gallant Lord tragically separated and desperate in their love. Her knowing sacrifice of social position, family, and wealth for his love (illustrated best in her flight from home without possessions, almost without clothes) and his inability to complete the great act of love (impotence), being overcome with adoration for her (he claims), prove the epic proportions of their devotion.

But within and external to the text are forces which deconstruct this "romance." First, the horror of Philander's and Silvia's relationship as brother- and sister-in-law perverts the narrative no matter how moving Philander's arguments and

Silvia's passions are. The audience's prior knowledge of their crimes prevents the reader from accepting the story's romance even before reading the text. The reader's knowledge might make Love Letters more titillating but not more "romantic."

In addition to the shocking and criminal nature of the affair's events, the story is also tainted by the political cabal. As Silvia accuses and warns Philander:

are you not unkind, does not Silvia ly neglected and unregarded in  
your thoughts? hudled up confusedly with your graver business of  
State, and almost lost in the ambitious crowd? Say, say my lovely  
Charmer, is she not, does not his fatal Interest you espouse, Rival your  
*Silvia*, is she not too often remov'd thence to let in that haughty Tyrant  
Mistress? . . . I have a prophetick fear, that gives a check to my soft  
pursuit, and tells me that thy unhappy ingagement in this League, this  
accursed Association, will one day undo us both . . . (38)

Silvia is right; Philander's romantic suit is undermined by his political ambitions.

While Philander's loving words of devotion to Silvia may at first appear sincere to her and to the reader, his admission that he would betray Caesario for personal gain undoes the sympathy generated by his romantic pledges.<sup>219</sup> The political caballing reveals a truer image of Philander's character than his rehearsed romantic rhetoric. Even if Silvia is blinded by her desire or love, the reader must see Philander's falseness in spite of his "charms." It is the reader's awareness of Philander's open treachery to his King and his friend as well as to his wife from early in the story that should alert him or her to the dangers of caballing.

Philander's cabals produce everything one might fear: a virtuous young

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<sup>219</sup> See Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister 45.



woman is seduced and ruined; noble young men are persuaded to rise up against their king; and a disillusioned son works to overthrow his father. As part of his caballing, Philander converts politically and romantically blameless people into cabalists who enact this ruin upon others. This "fiction" not only relates the true story of a disastrous love affair but also portrays two real anxieties: misplacing trust and the danger of losing personal honor.

The danger and contagion of cabal are best illustrated by examining Silvia's progression from an ingénue to a romantic predator. Just as in Emperor of the Moon, the cabal in Love Letters cannot be contained by its initiators. Behn makes clear from the beginning that Silvia is not an experienced lover, for both Silvia and Philander comment upon her youth in their letters to each other. Silvia's virtue early in the narrative is also evidenced by her doubt about the morality of her affair with Philander. Silvia is the only one who considers quitting the romance at various times; Philander never does.

For example, at first Silvia resists Philander's sexual and romantic advances, urging him to consider his honor and hers. Begging in her early letters:

Call me Sister – Swear I am so, and nothing but your Sister: and  
 forbear, oh forbear my charming Brother to pursue me farther with  
 your soft bewitching Passion, let me alone, let me be ruin'd with  
 Honour if I must be ruin'd . . . (22)

Along with her warnings to Philander against violating his personal honor, Silvia also tries to remind him of his duty to his King:

Consider my Lord you are born Nobel, from Parents of untainted

Loyalty . . . wou'd your Honour, your Conscience, your Christianity or  
 common humanity suffer you to inlarge your Fortunes at the price of  
 anothers ruine? and make the spoils of some honest Noble

Unfortunate Family, the rewards of your Treachery?" (39, 41)

These words foreshadow the devastation Philander will bring upon Silvia (and ultimately Caesario) and that which she will eventually afflict upon Octavio as well as others.

Blind to Philander's unreliability, Silvia fully comprehends the dangers of Caesario's caballing. Silvia understands and still considers, at this point in the narrative, the political and social risks involved in the cabal and the moral imperative to maintain the government for the good of England. Rather than focusing solely on the personal profit she or Philander might gain in a coup, she emphasizes the institutional consequences "to establish a King without Law, without right, without consent, without Title, and indeed without even competent parts" (42). She cautions Philander, "he that can cabal, and contrive to dethrone a father, will find it easie to discard the wicked and hated Instruments that assisted him to mount it" (42-43).

In fact, in spite of her youth and inexperience, Silvia comprehends through intuition and "prophetick fear" (38) or her "Soul bod[ing] some dire effect" (29) the eventuality of Philander's caballing – with Caesario and with herself. However, she rushes forward in the personal cabal, overcome with her own desire to be with him, to love:

But I grow wild and know not what I say: Impatient Love betrays me

to a Thousand folly's, a Thousand rashnesses: I dy with shame, but I  
 must be undone and 'tis no matter how, whether by my own weakness  
*Philander's* Charms, or both; I know not but so 'tis destin'd . . . (38)

It is this rashness which brings Silvia into her cabal with Philander against her premonitions and better judgment. Silvia even proceeds with the affair despite a letter of warning from her sister and Philander's wife, Mertilla, alerting Silvia to the degree of Philander's inconstancy; of the dangers of damaging her reputation;<sup>220</sup> of the grief she will bring to their parents; and, prophetically, of Silvia's social and personal demise.<sup>221</sup>

Silvia's unreasonable pursuit of Philander parallels his participation in the cabal. When Silvia asks Philander to withdraw from the cabal, he claims that he is so involved in the plottings against the King that to quit would mean to "run many hazards" (45). Furthermore, he has greater reasons for staying. Philander reveals:

But in going on, oh *Silvia!* when Three Kingdoms shall ly unpossest,  
 and be expos'd as it were, amongst the raffling Crowd, who knows but  
 the chance may be mine, as well as any others, who has but the same  
 hazard, and throw for't; if the strongest Sword must do't (as that must  
 do't) why not mine still? . . . *Caesario* has no more right to it than  
 Philander (45).

Philander is as ungenerous to Caesario as Silvia is to Mertilla. While Philander's political goal is greater than Silvia's romantic one, he is more mindful in how he goes about achieving his goals. As the narrative progresses, we see that Philander is a

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<sup>220</sup> Behn follows the facts of Mary Berkeley's life in having Mertilla suffer from her affair with Caesario (Monmouth) or the rumors of it.

<sup>221</sup> See [Love Letters](#) 74-76 for the specifics of Mertilla's letter.

more successful cabalist than Silvia.

According to Mertilla, Philander was a romantic cabalist prior to the narrative and the reader is given no indication that any specific event or person corrupted him as Philander does Silvia. Instead, the reader has Mertilla's letter, which proves that Philander's romantic caballing is a pattern of behavior, not a recent development associated with Silvia. As Silvia reminds Philander, he has birth and breeding, too, which should prevent his dishonorable behavior. Silvia's plea for Caesario's "Noble Unfortunate Family" are like Mertilla's pleas to Silvia concerning their own "noble Parents" (75), another honorable family Philander has a hand in destroying. These behavioral patterns indicate that Philander's motivations and actions are sinister, his promises empty rhetoric and deceitful parts of plots which are concerned with his personal gain and pleasure.

But the reader sees Silvia's decline into a cabalist as she removes herself from the influence of her family and surrenders to her passion for Philander. First, Silvia denied Philander, then she only gave into his admission of affection. As Silvia slips in her resolve, giving into Philander's sexual caballing and participating in his secret writings and secret meetings, she recognizes that she is "undone." In rapid succession she loses her honor, her family, her position, her reputation, her country. Silvia's decline is not just sexual or even social but is also a moral one, as the reader can note from the eventual absence of her remarks against Philander's political caballing. Her moral downfall is also demonstrated by her inability to stop the fulfillment of the affair as well as to regret it, a fault she also acknowledges when she revels in love's "mighty secret[s]," sex (89). Silvia proclaims to Philander,

I made no defence against a Brother, but innocently ly expo'd to all his attacks of Love, and never thought it criminal till it kindled a new desire about me. Oh, that I shou'd not dy with shame to own it— ye t see (I say) how from one soft degree to another, I do not only confess the shamefull truth, but act it too; what, with a Brother – Oh Heavens! a crime so monstrous and so new – but by all thy Love, by those surprising joys so lately experienc'd – I never will – no, no, I never can – repent it: Oh, incorrigible passion, oh hardned love! at least I might have some remorse, some sighing after my poor departed houour; but why shou'd I dissemble with the Powers divine, that know the secrets of a Soul doom'd to eternal Love? (88)

Silvia's arrogance grows to nearly match Philander's as their desires push them from relationship to relationship. Silvia's unaffected recognition of her loss of honor will be echoed later in her response to losing everything but her most desired objects, whether Philander, possessions, or the freedom to pursue lovers. Her greed, like Philander's for the throne, makes her oblivious to the repercussions of her pursuit. This desire to cabal minimizes even the worst of insults and circumstances. Don Alanzo, Silvia's last pursuit in the narrative, boldly calls Silvia a "Whore" in her presence while she is masquerading as a young gentleman (393). Silvia is bluntly faced with her social reality. But to her, "This [appellation] call'd all the blood" to her face, but "she recover'd again, when she considered [the words] were not meant as rudenesses to her. She lov'd him, and was easie to pardon" (393). Like the loss of her honor, family, position, this degradation too was easily overlooked because it was an

obstacle between her and her desire.

When Philander ruins and finally abandons Silvia, her only possessions are her devastated reputation and the one skill she knows to make herself financially well-off: romantic cabala. Though Silvia sacrificed herself and her honor for love, a cause with some nobility, once Philander leaves her, what appeared to be romantic was then just scandalous. Silvia's all-consuming desire for Philander mellows with the possibilities of other lovers and the reality of living without money. Her greed for Philander is replaced by the more practical love of money. When Silvia recognizes that Octavio can best provide her with the lifestyle she enjoys, she mimics Philander's original ploys of letters and secret plans to win his devotion. As before, Silvia considers only her own desires of the moment, not the consequences of her actions. Like Philander, Silvia's romantic plots have ramifications beyond personal conflicts; Silvia inadvertently brings about political turmoil in Holland and the ruin of a noble family.

But Silvia's relationship with Octavio, her second phase as a novice cabalist, still retains the hints of romance and affection, though they are secondary to her desire to have financial stability. While Philander found her innocent, with Octavio she "set[s] out for Conquest" (165). Following the advice to her servant, Antonett, who Silvia deems a "good manager in love," Silvia sees that "love and int'rest always do best together," for "Love wou'd have us appear always new, always gay, and magnificent, and money alone can render us so" (186). She becomes a "Gamester," betting on Octavio, since he was the best investment to be had. But Octavio, though the more sincere lover of the two, is not an innocent. In fact, like Philander, Octavio

manipulates Silvia through letters, especially his correspondence with Philander and his mediation of Philander's letters to her. He too sees Silvia as a possession to win or barter for, sacrificing his own sister to Philander's desires in order to have Silvia.<sup>222</sup>

In the second book, the reader also sees that Philander's original caballing has infected his servant Brilljard as well. Because of Philander's seduction of Silvia and their resulting affair, Brilljard is used as a counterfeit, though legal, husband for Silvia. To be married to someone above him in class and person fires Brilljard's ambition. First, he is treated more as a "companion" than a servant because of his standing with Silvia and the favor he has done the lovers (125). Eventually, their situation leads Brilljard "to fancy fine enjoymnt, to fancy Authority which he durst not assume," even to "dy with anger" and run to "madness" seeing Silvia and Philander together (125).

Incited to ambition by Philander's and Silvia's caballing, Brilljard initiates his own plans to have Silvia. By seducing Silvia's maid and stealing Octavio's letters to Silvia, Brilljard is able to counterfeit a letter from Octavio, asking Silvia for sex. Enraged, Silvia counters with her own plan in which she agrees to the affair in order to humiliate "Octavio" by having Antonett pose as her. Silvia is fooled by Brilljard and Brilljard by Silvia; Octavio sees Silvia disguised as Antonett lead Brilljard posing as Octavio to Silvia's room and assumes Silvia is unfaithful. Eventually, Octavio and Silvia discover Brilljard's plan, which provokes them to elope, setting off Brilljard's second plan.

In order to keep Silvia and Octavio apart, Brilljard accuses Octavio of

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<sup>222</sup> See 176-178.

"Caball[ing] . . . with French Rebels" (262), on which count Octavio and Silvia, dressed in men's clothes, are arrested. Brilljard's plan to separate Silvia and Octavio is foiled again since Silvia and Octavio are confined together, the circumstance which brings about the discovery of the true nature of their relationship. To further complicate matters, Octavio's Uncle Sebastian becomes involved in Octavio's legal troubles and tries to warn his nephew about the dangers of women. Though Sebastian, a misogynist, at first urges Octavio to leave Silvia, once he meets the "fine Angel," the old man falls in love himself and abdicates his paternal and moral authority to her. Stealing her away from society and Octavio, Sebastian offers to alleviate her circumstances by marrying her. Silvia accepts the Uncle's gifts and protection though she continues a secret affair with Octavio. As the two lovers plan their escape, Octavio accidentally shoots and kills his Uncle – subverting his Uncle's authority in the most final of ways – and the lovers become fugitives.

In spite of what Octavio suffers from his involvement with Silvia – the losses of reputation, standing in society, and political position; his sister's ruin; his uncle's death – he remains devoted to her. Like Silvia's sacrifices for her love of Philander, Octavio's sequence of losses do not restrain his passion until he is ruined. Ultimately, Octavio's life is wasted on Silvia and he is forced to leave society for the monastery, but he only continues to desire more. Though Octavio recognizes the failings of his life and Silvia's role in them, he continues to love Silvia and to support her financially. Silvia simply proceeds from the devastation she wreaks upon Octavio undaunted and better experienced.

By the third book the caballing is replaced by "gaming," the term repeatedly



used in this book for acquiring lovers. Silvia, an experienced cabalist, no longer pretends to love but pursues men in order to possess them and what they can give her. Silvia's rejection of society and its standards continues and allows her to become involved with men who are not her social peers and with lovers much less "heroic" or "romantic" than Philander and Octavio. The descent is as follows: Silvia has a flirtation with Octavio's elderly uncle, an affair with her servant-husband, Brilliard, and, at last, a relationship with a very young man. The locations of these exploits also decline from estates to, in the end, the upper rooms of a tavern – giving Silvia's conquests a greater mercenary and lower-class context. Though Silvia continues to exist in the private quarters of society's upper echelons, she must remain hidden from its open or public arenas. Even the "court" of Caesario's mistress, Hermoine, is too public and too much of an organized society which observes some propriety for Silvia to be welcomed there. Silvia can tease this "court" by appearing incognito about town, but she can never reveal herself and be accepted.

After her initial loss of love and honor, each subsequent loss costs Silvia less and, in turn, she has less to lose. Because Silvia only measures her authority and value by the success of her cabals, she fails to notice or care about her position in the larger society. At the end of the narrative, her identity is made up of lies, manufactured rumors, and illusions she creates. She is no longer a part of a nation, friendships or families, institutions with limits and expectations but also protection and status. Instead, she exists outside, literally on the fringes of town, hiding her true identity. This isolation is necessary to guarantee she can practice her seductions and

secret affairs.

Philander's casual betrayal of Silvia's love, faith, and sacrifice demonstrates the dangers of mistaking noble appearances for honor; in such turbulent political times, this mistake could be ruinous if not fatal. Silvia's transformation from an innocent and victim into an instigator illustrates how simple and seemingly necessary moral disintegration can be when faced with the dilemma of maintaining honor versus keeping your position in this society. As in Emperor of the Moon, cabala and cabals function as avenues to thwarting systems and order so those greedy for their own way can have it. Though the cabalists in both works are successful to some degree, Behn clearly illustrates the costs of these successes. The burning of the Doctor's study appears to be the destruction of philosophy. In Love Letters, Caesario is executed and members of his cabal imprisoned. When we last see Silvia, she is still roving around: she "ruin'd the Fortune of that young Nobleman, and became the Talk of the Town, insomuch that the Governour not permitting her stay there, she was forced to remove for new Prey" (439). Looking ahead, the reader must know that Silvia's beauty and money will run out. Only the one who lacked honour all along, Philander, resumes his place at court "in as much Splendour as ever, being very well understood by all good Men" (439).

This comment is like the Doctor's explanation of his attempts to spy on the Monarch of the Moon's closet: they "were flat Treason if it shou'd be known" but it is accepted that "the State-man" will "Steal[s] the secrets of his King, and seem[s] to wink at distance" (I.ii.10, 12-13). This is more than a small measure of acceptance of these misdeeds. This society is one that "underst[ands]" and "wink[s] at" treason.

Not only are vows in all relationships – familial, political, romantic – broken, but they also are violated so frequently that serious reflection on the consequences of this violation is eventually no longer necessary. Because cabalas and cabals are both perceived to be questionable and acceptable in the late seventeenth, the audience is simultaneously alerted and pacified when they are used in popular literature.

In the end, however funny or romantic the caballing at first appeared, Behn displays fully how its uncontrollable nature, its destructive consequences, and especially the eventual failure of society to reprove or shun caballing and cabalists enhances their already dangerous capacity. Even more alarming than Behn's fictional illustrations of the dangers of caballing is the recognition that these occurrences are real public and comprehensive dangers played out regularly by political leaders and private citizens and result from what are at first simple, private plans. In the end the most horrifying feature of these texts and Behn's portrayals of society is not the cabals themselves but society's acceptance of them. For, as Behn's later works indicate, the audience, the court, and the public welcome the worst of cabalists into their circles.

### **Cabala and Cabals in the Eighteenth-Century**

After the Restoration, the meanings of “cabala” and “cabal” do not continue to evolve as they had during the period. “Cabala” remains an esoteric, intellectual method with some continuing to ridicule “cabala” and those who employ it while others embrace its traditions and practice its methods. “Cabal” continues to indicate small groups but its close association to only shameful activity or dangerous, subversive groups fades until “cabal” is nearly innocuous.

The transformations of the meanings of “cabala” and “cabal” during the Restoration are responses to the events of the time and thus reflect qualities of the era. These words embody power tinged with uncertainty, a sense of dangerous and potential, knowledge surrounded by anxiety, a feeling of hope and of the unattainable or unattained. These characteristics reveal the potential and failings of the time as well as the emotions of a people on a painful quest to find peace with the issues of religion, monarchy, learning, and power.

Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn seize on the capacities of these words to portray their world as well as the strength of these terms to enhance their creativity and find authority to create their works. Cavendish invokes the philosophical power and history of cabala to create her own fanciful kingdom in peace, reconciling the conflicts of a monarch’s power, of a society’s religious divisions, and of closed scientific societies. In a time when “cabal” was most sinister, she makes a cabal between the Empress and the Duchess a powerful bond of intellect and friendship. Behn uses cabala and cabal to bring to light the weaknesses and eventual failings of her society. In this process, Behn explores the dangers of wrongly challenging and

taking authority. Her audience sees in Behn's works how the characters' struggles to seize power through caballing result in the disintegration of familial, romantic, and political communities. Later authors use "cabala" and "cabal" as *de facto* components of their culture, not as active agents of a society's creation or destruction, and thus the words' power to express the imminent danger and tragedy of these destructive events is weakened.

Though certainly still turbulent, the political and philosophical environments of the eighteenth century were more settled than those of the 1660s and 1680s. The confluence of events during the Restoration – the miraculous circumstances of Charles II's return, the budding new science taking hold in the scientific community and coming to light in the popular consciousness, and the dramatic intrigues and events of Charles' administration – reformed the meanings of "cabala" and "cabal" entirely. "Cabal" became a broadly understood and then commonly useable term since Charles II's privy council, The Cabal, gave physical form to the word as a grouping of people who are complex, mysterious, diabolical, and dangerous. The fictional and "true" representations and reports of The Cabal and similar "cabals" readily brought together the secretive, religious, political, and ultimately dangerous suspicions long associated with "cabala." The fantastic reports and practices of experimental science, including experiments on animals and the introduction of strange instruments like the telescope, further created a popular sense of the incredible. These qualities were associated with "cabala" and "cabal" as they came into popular understanding. Transferring the connections between strange and

dangerous activity and cabals or cabalas to people and groups was a means to focus anxieties.

The Restoration, with its religious and political upheavals as well as a popular and intense interest in science, was uniquely suited to bringing about this metamorphosis of “cabala” and “cabal” and their popularization. “Cabala,” which was once thought of only as a religious, mystical, and intellectually powerful system, becomes commonly understood as both a negative and humorous idea. “Cabal” evolves to connote the most dangerous type of association. It was the Restoration environment of possibility and hope as well as of suspicion and danger that expanded the meanings of “cabala” and “cabal.”

Finding themselves living in this Restoration world of uncertainty and possibility, Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn seized upon the complexities and the capacity of “cabala” and “cabal” to represent their social and political contexts. Cavendish’s private and powerful cabala articulates the sense of possibility Charles’ return and the new scientific endeavors held for the English people, regardless of gender. Nearly twenty years later, Behn’s public, dark illustrations of science and society through cabalas and cabals reflect the waning hope in the Stuart line and in England’s ability to have a stable society. Both women recognized the potential for successful government and for peace. Cavendish’s successful *Blazing World*, made possible through cabalistic means, offers ways to achieve a real and balanced peace. Behn’s works reveal the increasingly destabilized and failing Stuart regime and the deterioration of England’s vital systems.

Cavendish resorts to creating a cabala in order to escape her exiled existence in an unstable kingdom with warring countrymen and religious disputes and to overcome her banishment from any scientific community. Trading on the traditional authority held by cabala, the exiled Margaret Cavendish's Blazing World captures the hope and potential the Stuarts' return to power and Charles' reign brought to a people worn down by civil war and the potential her mind offered to science. In a time when hope in the possibility of government and learning abounded and England was beginning anew, cabala offered Cavendish a means to accomplish a peaceful monarchy, a productive scientific society, and personal power to overcome her limited state. The utopic vision of "Margaret the First" offers a balance in all of life whereby learning and relationships flourish and knowledge grows through the employment and application of traditional cabalistic practices. Cavendish's hopes for a peaceful kingdom, the open pursuit of knowledge, and a unified national religion were not borne out.

Instead, Charles' reign was filled with disappointments, leading ultimately to the removal of James II as his successor and the end of the Stuart dynasty. Knowledge, whether scientific or political, and the process of discovery and learning became conduits and representations of danger. Aphra Behn's cabalas, cabals, and their practitioners reflect this disappointment in their dark nature and destructive power. In Behn's cabals, the personal, familiar, and romantic or public and political, erode the foundations of society, stability, and peace. The reader is a witness to Cavendish's cabala building and Behn's cabala and cabals of destruction.

Whatever role it plays, “cabala” remains a powerful source of creativity. It is the nature of that power that changes from a sense of possibility to imminent danger, a reflection of England’s climate of anxiety and the fatal decline of the Stuart line.

Certainly writers after Cavendish and Behn could not use “cabala” and “cabal” without conjuring up some associations with the events of the Restoration or negative associations with danger, deception, mysticism, and ridiculous behavior. In their use, however, is an understanding that they represent the status of events rather than serve as a warning – or promise – of what can be. “Cabal” continued to be an active part of popular thought, as evidenced in its repeated use in *The Spectator* and *The Tatler* in the early eighteenth century.<sup>223</sup> Though the political and intellectual currency of the word certainly continued in the mind of the public, I have not been able to find an extended use of “cabal,” “caballing,” or “cabala” in popular literature or by writers that engage the traditional aspects of cabala as an intellectual method nor as a political touchstone as did Margaret Cavendish or Aphra Behn with the exceptions of Delarivier Manley and Jonathan Swift, and the extraordinary case of William Blake.

Manley’s and Swift’s employment of “cabala” and “cabal” are quite different from either Behn’s or Cavendish’s. In Manley and Swift, corruption, deception, and decline – in politics, religion, and science – exist as a foregone conclusion and operate in all features and aspects of English society and culture. Power is managed through the means of cabala and cabal. Rather than powerful agents creating the betterment of government, religion, or society, as in Blazing World, or bringing about

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<sup>223</sup> For some examples, see *Spectator* volumes: I, 45; II, 250, 287-90, 333, 358-361, 516-520; III, 289 and 459-460; IV, 292-293, 512-515, 575-577; V, 64-66. Also see *Tatler* Volume I, 22-23, 99, 111-112, 121, 127; volume II, 61, 96, 113, 299; and volume III, 14, 30, 217, 232.



their decline, as in Behn's works, cabala and cabals are standard mechanics of the decaying and destructive systems Manley and Swift portray as typical of British society. Manley puts forward three cabals in her The New Atalantis (1709), one political, one personal, one social and specifically female. Swift expressly identifies cabala and cabalistic practices as debilitating parts and customary *modus operandi* of institutions in both Tale of a Tub (1696) and Gulliver's Travels (1726). They are not, as in Cavendish and Behn, personal quests communicated by one individual at a time.

The New Atalantis, a suppressed text detailing the secret lives of prosperous and powerful Whigs through stories, aimed to expose the "true" character of these prominent Whigs and of Whiggish government. It is a testament to the success of The New Atalantis in portraying these powerful people so completely that Manley was jailed for a time for writing this text and was released because the text and its author were so adept at being covert. The dangerous nature of this work, its (openly) secret nature, and its revelations of secret intelligence associate it closely with the history of cabala as a traditional method of revelation. Its content, however, directly connects it with cabal through its specific employment of the term.

Manley's first cabal is "the cabal of the principal lords of Atalantis" and is part of Lady Intelligence's story.<sup>224</sup> It is in fact a recounting of the English lords' invitation to William of Orange to invade England and assume the throne, overthrowing James II. This account also references Monmouth's last attempt at power, an event that led to his death. The reference is brief and, given that this

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<sup>224</sup> New Atalantis, ed. Rosalind Ballaster (London: Penguin Books, 1991) 24.

“cabal” convened to rescue the country from “oppression and holy fears of slavery,” is secret but not sinister.<sup>225</sup>

The second cabal is initially described as positive, the “agreeable cabal,” but turns hateful.<sup>226</sup> In this relation of Lady Intelligence’s, she repeats the story of King William’s first close advisor, Hans Willem Bentick, “the Duke,” and his charge “Charlot,” Stuarda Werburge Howard, the granddaughter of Charles II by an illegitimate daughter. Like Behn’s Love Letters, this story is a warning to women of the inconstant love of men. The “agreeable cabal” is made up of the Duke, Charlot, and “the Countess” or Martha Jane Temple. Though the Duke pledged his love to Charlot and taught her to love him, he grows tired of her devotion during the time spent together by this “agreeable cabal.” He betrays Charlot by marrying the Countess; Charlot, heartbroken, lives a sad life. Though the use of “agreeable” makes this cabal seem less threatening, the use of “cabal” as a descriptor of the group should serve as a warning that no good can follow from this association.

The most fascinating and intricate of Manley’s cabals is the traveling cabal or, “the new Cabal,” only for women who, while in a coach, share information about managing men, particularly their husbands, in order to get what they want and have the lives they desire.<sup>227</sup> These women are charged with “the vices of old Rome,” though Lady Intelligence proclaims their innocence and blames their antagonists for attacking them.<sup>228</sup> “Mutual secrecy” (155) protects these women and their relationships from the dangers of male society. Female friendship is the most

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid 24.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid 42.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid 153-161.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid 154.

important purpose of the group.

The use of “cabal” in The New Atalantis does operate as a warning but certainly as a weak, seemingly overused slang for the danger it implies. The danger of the cabals on a public scale increasingly lessens from a group who successfully work to that change the monarchy and devolves into a collection of women who strive to support each other and to control their lives by managing their husbands. While this fear of women who strive to control men is certainly a message from Manley about her society that should be further explored, it remains a mostly unarticulated threat with unnamed consequences in the text. Though the danger of this last cabal is unclear, its benefits to its participants are argued strongly, a stark contrast to the rampant destruction of Philander and Silvia in Love Letters.

Jonathan Swift’s use of “cabala” and “cabal” is more expansive than Manley’s and employs traditional cabalistic systems. For instance, in Tale of a Tub Wotton invokes cabala as a frame for reading his work by charging that someone has tampered with the text and made it “more Cabalistic” (268) than it originally was.<sup>229</sup> Within this claim is the author’s admission that he wrote with cabalistic intent as well as his feeling that cabala is something that has been forced upon his writing. Implicit in these accusations is the indictment of Grub Street writers, like Wotton, who employed cabalistic methods, such as numerology, as legitimate creative devices. By

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<sup>229</sup> This and all citations from Tale of the Tub in The Writings of Jonathan Swift: Authoritative Texts, Backgrounds, Criticism, ed. Robert A. Greenberg and William B. Piper (New York: Norton Company, 1973). Pages will be cited parenthetically.

linking Grub Street writers and Wotton to numerology, Swift intends for the reader to take as a denunciation of these writers' tactics.<sup>230</sup>

In addition to the narrator of the Tale, the Father's youngest son Jack also employs cabalistic practices in order to achieve his power. In Section Eight the Aeolists Jack leads propagate false learning and heretical religion, connecting experimental science and religion in an unflattering way. Their philosophy began with the theory of wind and was built upon by "that Renowned Cabbalist, Bumbastus" (341). Ignoring information gathered by their physical senses, the Aeolists are misguided into following fantastic notions in an attempt to throw off traditional religion, which the oldest son Peter has made equally mysterious by misinterpreting the Father's will.

Gulliver's Travels also invokes both "cabal" and "cabala." Gulliver's fate in Lilliput is sealed by the King's caballing cabinet.<sup>231</sup> In Laputa, cabalistic practices like numerology are practiced in the state's Academy, its sanctioned venue for science. The results are fields that are barren and buildings that are not sound, a physical picture of the instability cabalistic practices bring, the reader must assume. Words, too, are mysterious devices of power and of transmitting hidden meanings: people are accused of crimes based on the "mysterious Meanings of Words, Syllables and Letters" among their papers (191), and the presence of acrostics and anagrams supposedly found in their writings is also used to vilify them (192). Gulliver's maps, the references to codes, numerology, and other methods of cabala made use of in the

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<sup>230</sup> As examples, see pages 358-359 for the narrator's treatment of numbers and the power of their mystery, The Writings of Jonathan Swift, ed. Robert A. Greenberg and William B. Piper (New York: Norton Company, 1973).

<sup>231</sup> See Gulliver's Travels, ed. Paul Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) 64.

Academies all call for a closer examination of this work as an expression and exploration of cabala in popular eighteenth-century English society.

Swift uses cabala, its methods, traditions and reputation, as a generative device to further his plot in a manner similar to Cavendish, *and* to more clearly communicate the dangerousness and comedy of the institutions and practices he attacks, as in Behn. Swift's depictions of cabala and cabal, however, differ from both Cavendish and Behn. Swift uses both words in an unquestionably negative way and portrays both words as imbedded in the political, intellectual, and cultural practices of his time, not as exceptions to common practice whether used for good or ill. Jonathan Swift's criticism of the intellectual practices and methods employed around him through using cabala is a denouncement of those who went beyond *reasonable* limits of professing learning into esoteric knowledge, religious mysticism, or rationale systems. Swift commented on the excesses of existing practices as danger to society and its fundamental institutions: government, religion, and learning. His purpose was not to reform scientific methods for the improvement of science but rather to warn more generally against the dangers of the unreasonable pursuit of learning already in practice around him. Swift's worlds are the tragic worlds Cavendish and Behn feared would evolve, and cabala and cabals play a central part in the systematic destruction of good government, balanced religion, and appropriate learning.

Further work considering the implications of Manley's and Swift's uses of "cabala" and "cabal" as accepted characteristics or parts of the culture in their works needs to be done. Do the reigns of William and Mary and Anne, the political environments Manley and Swift respond to, and the accompanying religious

atmosphere shape how “cabala” and “cabal” are used? If so, how are these changes reflected in the uses of the words and what are the results? How do science and the debates on learning and “wit” change the meaning of “cabala,” or do they? These and other questions need to be explored for our understanding of cabala and cabal to be complete.

### William Blake

William Blake writes: “The Bible or <Peculiar> [sic] Word of God, Exclusive of Conscience or the Word of God Universal, is that Abomination which like the Jewish ceremonies is for ever removed & henceforth every man may converse with God & be a King & Priest in his own house.”<sup>232</sup> Like Margaret Cavendish, William Blake saw a way to personal power, religious choice, and autonomous government through traditional cabalistic symbols and systems.

Though Blake’s works are often described as enigmatic and requiring laborious interpretation, we could also call them “fantastical.” However, rather than science fiction or fantasy, as with Cavendish, Blake wrote “prophecies” and “revelations.” Using the systems of traditional cabala, Blake, like Cavendish, provides in his writings a means to correct the problems created by religion, government, and science. Cavendish lived with the memories of a civil war spurred by religious differences and the realities of attempting to establish a new order amid continuing religious disputes and questions raised by the emerging empirical science. More than a century later, Blake lived through another wave of religious disruption emanating from the same dispute over the boundaries of individual rights to worship and the disturbances, especially to religion, that empirical science created. The Church and King riots of 1791 are evidence that the issues of the Civil War –

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<sup>232</sup> From “Annotations to an Apology for the Bible,” The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988) 615.

religious and political – remained a prominent and disruptive part of English life. While Cavendish has the Empress establish peace through allowing her to claim power over herself and the kingdom by regulating the Academies and by creating a balanced religion, Blake takes the reader through a process of first degeneration and then recreation in Jerusalem that ends with a completion more final or whole than even Cavendish's Blazing World provides. He, too, manages this process by way of cabalistic symbolism and systems.

Shelia Spector has discussed William Blake's return to traditional cabala at length in her works "Glorious incomprehensible": The Development of Blake's Kabbalistic Language and "Wonders Divine": The Development of Blake's Kabbalistic Myth.<sup>233</sup> In these books Spector points to significant cabalistic components in Blake's works, such as the numerological significance of Blake's Jerusalem, its pagination and the arrangement and rearrangement of its plates; connections to *Heikhalt*/early Kabbalistic literature; Blake's use of van Helmont and his cabalistic system; and the *sefirot*'s significant role in Blake's myth making. Blake's connections to mysticism and even the occult have been theorized about for years. Applying the systems and iconography of cabala to Blake's writings and art leads the reader to fresh and insightful new understandings of his works. His deep spirituality, complex symbolism, and specifically his considerations of the Creation, God's judgment and mercy, and revelation all speak for a firm connection between Blake's work and cabalistic works.

Spector's studies build on Blake scholarship to explain "how Blake exploits kabbalistic language and myth to achieve (his) apocalyptic vision" and to "achieve the transcendent intentional relationship with the One."<sup>234</sup> Spector argues that Blake

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<sup>233</sup> "Wonders Divine": The Development of Blake's Kabbalistic Myth, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001) and "Glorious Incomprehensible": The Development of Blake's Kabbalistic Language, (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 2001).

<sup>234</sup> See "Wonders Divine" 12.

is a true cabalist, returning to a traditional use of cabala in his art. Though Blake uses cabala to attack England's political system, religious systems, and science, his cabala is not the prop for these attacks, as with Behn, nor is it simply the architecture upon which to build new forms, as in Cavendish. Blake's recreation is the cabalist's wish of reunion with the Creator.

### Beyond Blake

To my knowledge, further examination into literature that specifically invokes "cabala" and "cabal" has considered only the study of traditional cabala as an esoteric system and its impact on writers and their writings, leaving "cabal" and social and political aspects of "cabala" unexamined. Among those writers argued to have some connection to cabala after Blake are British authors Samuel Coleridge, William Butler Yeats, and James Joyce; German writer Franz Kafka; nineteenth-century Polish author Adam Mickiewicz; Australian novelist Patrick White; Argentina's Jorge Luis Borges; French writer Edmond Jabes; Russian author Vladimir Sergeevich Solov'ev; and American John Crowley. Literary critics and theorists Jacques Derrida, Walter Benjamin, and Harold Bloom's connections to and considerations of cabala in their works have also been explored.

While most people are still not familiar with traditional cabala, it is becoming increasingly recognizable in the general public. A number of kabbalah centers exist around the world. Thanks to the internet, their information and their interpretations of Kabbalah and kabalistic philosophies are available to many. One example is the Kabbalah Centre which claims to be the "largest, leading educational organization on



the wisdom of Kabbalah worldwide.”<sup>235</sup> The Centre was established by Rabbi Ashlag in Jerusalem in 1922, according to their website, which offers links and contact information to kabbalah centres near the reader as well as on-line instruction, translations from the Zohar, and a store.

More directly in the public eye, popular entertainer Madonna openly acknowledged her involvement with cabala prior to the release of her album, *Ray of Light* in March 1998. Reviewers heralded Madonna’s new album as more mature and “deep,” a change brought on by her new connection to mysticism. In print, Michael Drosnin’s The Bible Code published in 1998, argues that the Scriptures hold secret, coded messages with details of future events hidden in them.<sup>236</sup> Using current computer technologies to decipher the numerical codes, Drosnin demonstrates how the Scriptures foretell the assassinations of President Kennedy, Robert Kennedy, and Yitzhak Rabin, the Holocaust, humans in space, and World War II and the first Gulf War. Drosnin followed with a second book about the coming of the end of the world after September 11, 2001 called The Bible Code II: The Countdown (2002).<sup>237</sup> This book, its contributors, and detractors are featured in a History Channel documentary, “The Bible Code: Predicting Armageddon,” exploring the possibility of Drosnin’s claims and the history of telling the future through numerical codes.

Most recently, the incredibly popular novel by Dan Brown, The DaVinci Code, has also brought kabbalah and its methods to the public’s attention. While deciphering the clues to solve the murder mystery, the scholar-hero notices that a

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<sup>235</sup> See [www.kabbalah.com/k/index.php/p=about](http://www.kabbalah.com/k/index.php/p=about), the Kabbalah Centre’s page explaining their mission and history.

<sup>236</sup> (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998).

<sup>237</sup> (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002).

scrambled sequence is a clue or secret message. When the heroine needs further explanation, the narrator informs her that

The mystical teachings of the Kabbala drew heavily on anagrams – rearranging the letters of Hebrew words to derive new meanings. French kings throughout the Renaissance were so convinced that anagrams held magic power that they appointed royal anagrammatists to help them make better decisions by analyzing words in important documents. The Romans actually referred to the study of anagrams as *ars magna* – “the great art.” (98)

With this understanding, the two can decode the victim’s message and step closer to solving the mystery. Kabbalah emerges again as a source of secret knowledge and power and plays a role in the struggle over information and authority.

“Cabal” has become an innocuous part of our everyday vocabulary and can commonly be found in literature, the news, and ordinary conversation. Its connections to dangerous, sinister activity and to power or subversive power is not implied – or at least not strongly implied – when used today. The crescendo of anxiety about cabals remains in the Restoration with reverberations of its dangerousness echoing into the eighteenth century but not beyond.

The multitude of instabilities among the fundamental systems of religion, government, and science or how the world was understood during the Restoration created a unique environment for the evolution and expression of “cabala” and “cabal” to represent these cultural, political, and religious anxieties. As women of learning interested in and torn by these conflicts Margaret Cavendish and Aphra Behn demonstrate the power of these words by creating a world without conflict, for

Cavendish, and for Behn, by illustrating the immediate dangers of political and personal caballing and warning of the coming dangers if the King and Restoration society – political and religious factions and people of learning – did not better manage their desires and actions to create peaceful, balanced, and productive systems.

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