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“CLOSET”

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LITERARY EQUIVOCATION: WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS AND THE EARLY  
MODERN “CLOSET”

by

NANCY PAXTON-WILSON

Under the Direction of Tanya Caldwell, PhD

ABSTRACT

In general, “closet dramas,” because they have been falsely considered failed stage plays, have received minimal scholarly attention. This dissertation situates itself as a re-evaluation of female authors’ manuscript and printed plays: Elizabeth Cary’s *Mariam*, Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth (Cavendish) Brackley’s *The Concealed Fancies*, Margaret Cavendish’s *The Convent of Pleasure* and Anne Finches’ *Aristomenes, Or The Royal Shepherd*. These plays use the coded rhetorical tool of literary equivocation to conceal yet reveal subversive political information which would attract the attention of the censor if acted upon the stage.

INDEX WORDS: closet drama, pro-Stuart, printed plays, British literature

LITERARY EQUIVOCATION: WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS AND THE EARLY  
MODERN “CLOSET”

by

NANCY PAXTON-WILSON

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2018

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2018

LITERARY EQUIVOCATION: WOMEN PLAYWRIGHTS AND THE EARLY  
MODERN “CLOSET”

by

NANCY PAXTON-WILSON

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Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

May 2018

## **DEDICATION**

To Callan, Andrew, Elizabeth and Anne Lacey who constantly challenge themselves with new endeavors and whose support has been essential to me on this path.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION: “HE ‘WAS NOT RESOLVD TO HAVE HAD IT ACTED, NOR SHOULD IT HAVE BENE HAD NOT MY NECESSITIES OVERMAISTRED ME’

The term, “closet drama,” is associated with the Sidney Circle practices in playwrighting that began in the late 1590’s. The phrase assigns several hundred plays to a genre that is both problematic and highly debatable. In a general sense, a closet drama is defined as a play that was intended by its author to be read and never performed. The genre has consistently housed insignificant failed plays that deservedly do not warrant critical attention. The term, coined more than 200 years after the plays under consideration here were printed, was used to retroactively categorize them. The *OED* states that the term first occurs in print in an article in *Blackwoods Ed. Mag.* in 1822. Closet drama was thus defined as a play intended to be read rather than performed. Brander Mathews, in his 1908 critique, “The Legitimacy of the Closet Drama,” claims the genre as belonging to the Romantic period and echoes the *OED* definition as “a play that was never intended to be played” (214). He states that it is “a poem in dialogue, -- a piece of literature, pure and simple” (214). He writes that “the closet-drama is specifically intended for the closet itself, for the library and not for the stage” (214).

Crucial to this definition of closet drama is the emphasis on author intent. Mathews examines a list of plays considered closet drama, including Byron’s *Manfred* and Tennyson’s *Becket* and finds that Byron’s *Manfred* fits the definition of closet drama by arguing that Byron, despite serving on a Drury Lane subcommittee from June 1815 until April 1816, “disregarded any playhouse, he violently rejected it in advance” (214). He dismisses Tennyson’s *Becket* as closet drama because he claims that Tennyson did intend it for performance. Alfred Harbage, according to Marta Straznicky, like Mathews, “classifies a play as ‘closet’ if it were not intended for performance” (142). Straznicky claims that approximately 150 plays from the Early Modern

Period came to be defined as closet drama (142). She bases her list on Harbage's 1989 *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700*.

This definition of closet drama, favored by Mathews, Harbage, and Straznicky, is problematic, however, for its sole reliance on authorial intent. Motivations of the early playwrights remain somewhat obscure and complex, however. Some facts about the playwrights under consideration in this dissertation demonstrate this problematic approach. Elizabeth Cary is currently recognized as the first English woman to publish a play. Her closet drama, *Mariam*, was published in 1613 when no previous female-authored play had ever been publicly performed and before the English stage had seen the first female performers. Since Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth (Cavendish) Brackley's *The Concealed Fancies* was written during the Interregnum, it would have been impossible for the sisters to aim for public performance. By the time Margaret Cavendish's plays were published, a public performance with female actors was possible. Although both Harbage and Straznicky consider Margaret Cavendish's plays closet drama, adhering to the definition, I question this identification based on a poetics of drama written by Cavendish, herself. Elisabeth Liebert notes that Cavendish states that the plays in her first volume of work, *Plays*, "*were not performable*" (36). Cavendish complicates the matter, however, by indicating that it is not that she does not want her plays to be performed, but rather that she has been told they cannot be performed. In *The Blazing World*, she bemoans this fact: "The wits of these present times condemned them as being incapable of being represented or acted" (Cavendish 220). Cavendish describes the reasoning for the rejection of her plays for the stage. In *The Blazing World*, The Duchess (Cavendish's self-portrayal) states that the current state of theatre, or "mode" disallows "natural" expression and focuses on the artificial, a "nursery of whining lovers" (220). She critiques the main stage theatre productions for their melodrama.

She aims, then, to create a world “of her own invention which “appeared so curious and full of variety, so well ordered and wisely governed” (188). So, while Cavendish does want her plays staged (in her *Blazing World*), she does not see her plays being produced on the main stage in London where a play is a money-making commodity only. Cavendish reveals that the kinds of plays she writes are not popular, according to “the mode” -- are not what a general audience wants to see. Diana Sullivan states that Anne Finch emphatically did not want her plays staged. However, Sullivan asks that we “interpret those instructions critically instead of taking them as simple directives” (38). As I will later explore, Finch deservedly could have had reservations about seeing her subversive royalist play acted on the public stage.

Sullivan argues that authorial intent is “notoriously difficult to pin down” and that a play not performed publicly “implied the play was too flawed to stage” (38). This critique of the genre has led to an almost complete dismissal of the closet drama as a valid genre. In fact, many critics argued just that. Brander Mathews emphatically states that closet dramas are failed plays whose authors “did not take the trouble to master the necessary technique of the theatre” (215) and are “totally devoid of the broad appeal to the public as a whole which is ever the essential quality of all real drama” (217). Although Mathews’s focus is on Romantic closet drama, his remarks which censor the genre as a whole, form the basis for ignoring closet drama across the board. Even Byron received criticism for his closet plays. Mathews states that *Manfred* adds little value to Byron’s oeuvre. He argues that closet dramas “contributed very little to the reputation of their authors” (218). Alfred Harbage’s chapter on closet drama in his seminal *Cavalier Drama* (1936) echoes Mathews in that he finds proof of the “deplorable” state of closet drama whose existence between 1642 and 1660 “represents the ebb-tide in English drama” (215). In *A Voice from the Attic* (1960), William Robertson Davies registers his negativity to “closet drama” by

calling these plays the “dreariest of literature, most second hand and fusty of experience!” One of the reasons for this condemnation is one of the most distinguishing qualities of the closet drama - its use of extended monologue and concern with speech. Senecan tragedy was known for substitution of speech for action. Although Shakespeare and other playwrights include long monologues in their plays, closet dramas consistently feature this element and it is usually a justification for the play’s failure as a stage play.

Alfred Harbage astonishingly includes Jane Cavendish, Elizabeth (Cavendish) Brackley, and Margaret Cavendish in his study of cavalier drama. However, he then goes on the attack. He writes of William Cavendish (father to Jane and Elizabeth and husband to Margaret) as being “punished for his condescensions to drama when the women of his family caught the fever and began to deluge him with their literary offerings” (228). He refers to them as “the sad sister authoresses” (229). Harbage devotes three pages to Margaret Cavendish, giving her plays a highly mixed review. (I will discuss this further in the chapter devoted to Cavendish). He states that Cavendish’s plays “belong to no literary development, cavalier or otherwise” whose ideas “are not good” (232). Randall notes that Margaret Cavendish wrote in *Orations of Divers Sorts* (1652) “that her plays have been criticized ‘as having no Plots, Designs, Catastrophes and such...’” (328). These published views are representative of much early Cavendish criticism.

Recent scholarship on early print culture reveals, however, that the dissemination of manuscripts and printed plays reveals a complex history that belies a general condemnation of the genre. Critical studies of early print culture now recognize the significant evidence of a mass proliferation and dissemination of manuscript and printed playbooks. Scholars note a substantial proliferation of manuscripts and playbooks before, during and after the Interregnum. Louis B. Wright’s research indicates that print culture – especially the printing of play books – was highly

influential from the English Civil War on. In “The Reading of Plays during the Puritan Revolution” (1934), Wright examines the circulation of playbooks during the “troubled times of the Civil War” (73). He examines the “lively traffic in playbooks” which “was a diversion enjoyed by many an aristocratic and liberal citizen who had no sympathy with Puritan blue laws” (73). He effectively negates Brander Mathews’ claim that play readers consisted of “little group of dilettantes” (223). He finds, instead, that “plays were popular with a reasonably large group of intelligent readers” (86). Wright even ventures to state that drama “found an audience perhaps as large as the acted plays had ever reached” (107). He claims that “The demand for plays was clearly sufficient to make them a source of considerable profit to the booksellers” (78). Marta Straznicky, in *Privacy, Playreading, and Women’s Closet Drama* (2004), claims that play reading has been marginalized. She finds that “printed drama, not to mention manuscript drama, has been almost completely overlooked” (4). She furthers Wright’s claim about the marketed proliferation of the printed play and notes the wide circulation of these texts.

Scholars also state that the division between the private and public in terms of the genre is not as binary as one might suppose. In *The Book of the Play: Playwrights, Stationers, and Readers in Early Modern England*, Marta Straznicky tells us that these plays were not necessarily read alone or out loud in a group but that “the play very well could be performed before a controlled audience in a country home” (719). Alison Findlay in *Playing Spaces in Early Women’s Drama* (2006) supplies an introduction to alternative theatre spaces including homes, gardens, and courts. Lisa Hopkins, in “Play Houses at Bolsover and Welbeck,” discusses the architectural design of the Cavendish’s Bolsover Castle in relation to its capacity for large house productions. It is possible that Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth (Cavendish) Brackley not only envisioned their play being performed at one of these large estates -- it may have occurred.

Knowing that these plays possibly reached a wide contemporary audience, their content might be significant in terms of the cultural historical importance in their contemporary time frames. Alfred Harbage, writing of the Interregnum and early Restoration Period, notes that “Practically all the drama, both that written before the closing of the theatres and that written afterward, presented the cavalier point of view, for with few exceptions the Stuart dramatists were ardent royalists” (86). Marta Straznicky, in “Restoration Women Playwrights and the Limits of Professionalism,” discusses the “selected audience” and “selected readers” of published plays. Karen Raber in *Dramatic Difference: Gender, Class, and Genre in the Early Modern Closet Drama* (2001) notes that the unique genre was perfect for the upper class to explore the anxieties of the time. She interprets the closet drama as both a social and political tool.

Louis B. Wright emphasizes the highly political nature of plays printed during the Civil War and Restoration period and describes the suppression of playbooks as lax since Puritans had to prioritize silencing pamphleteers, instead, who “fanned controversies into flame” (74). He also points to the political nature of many of these plays, noting evidence from printed prologues. Straznicky believes that “the elite form of closet drama” can be used “to engage in political discourse” (Privacy, Playreading 1). She believes that these early works are “evidently used as a form of subversive political discourse” (357). She also argues that “the published play, although it issues from a private moment of composition and is usually read in the solitude of one’s closet, is constructed as surreptitious participation in the prohibited activity of theatergoing, thus doubling as political resistance” (359). Lisa Hopkins, pursuing her distinct line of reasoning, connects the architectural design of these Cavendish castles specifically to political aims. Her research indicates that William Cavendish built playing spaces at his country estates at Bolsover



and Welbeck specifically to entertain Charles I, who was present for at least one commissioned masque. Findlay taps into this idea that venue and setting are “absolutely crucial determinants of meaning” (3). Paula Backscheider, in her seminal work, *Spectacular Politics* (1993), establishes the crucial connection between theatre and politics in the Restoration Period. She argues that during times of crisis, “highly original literature is produced, and new forms and even new genres may be born...unrest and traumatic events as well as the dawning awareness of new possibilities, of the implications of change, will generate innovative and challenging texts” (xvi). She states that early women’s literature “became a hegemonic apparatus” that contributed to “significant changes” (69). By extension, to consider plays written by women as adding to this public conversation allows the literary critic and well as the cultural historian new voices to hear from. Few scholars have recognized that these manuscript and printed plays by women perhaps played a larger role than was previously known.

While the early critics of closet drama are notably disdainful of the works, they do, like Randall, perhaps unintentionally, undermine their positions and offer commentary that supports my thesis. One of these is the assertion that these “closet dramas” are, actually, in need of further close reading and consideration. Harbage concedes that the period is “long neglected by historians of drama” and that there is “always the chance of discoveries” (215). He also does praise Margaret Cavendish’s poetics of dramaturgy which he calls “original and prophetic” (23). He calls Cavendish a “pioneer” (232). Mathews concludes by stating that these playwrights “have disdained to play the game according to the rules” (219). They are “anarchists in art” (220). Lois Potter, in Volume IV of *The Revels History of Drama in English* (1981) notes that the only full-length study of the period of 1642 – 1660 drama is the previously mentioned book by Harbage. She includes a full chapter on closet drama where she notes that there are

“Problems of Definition” (263). In 1981 she calls for a reevaluation of the concept of closet drama which was believed to be “an elitist alternative to the professional stage (263).

Elizabeth Cary and Margaret Cavendish, since the 1990’s, have been the focus of feminist critical research. However, scant attention has been paid to their closet drama and its scrutiny of the political landscape which these playwrights observed in their own cultural milieu. Their female characters promote radical shifts of paradigms through their critique of monarchical absolutism and in their anti-authoritarian interrogation of the maintenance and reproduction of social power. The plays of Jane and Elizabeth Cavendish or the plays of Anne Finch have garnished little or no attention. This dissertation seeks to place Elizabeth Cary’s *The Tragedy of Mariam, The Fair Queen of Jewry*, Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth (Cavendish) Brackley’s *The Concealed Fancies*, Margaret Cavendish’s *The Convent of Pleasure* and Anne Finch’s *Aristomenes, or The Royal Shepherd* within the historical trajectory of subversive closet drama that follows the thread originated by the Sidney Circle.

In general, “closet dramas,” because they have been falsely considered failed stage plays, have received minimal scholarly attention. Elizabeth Cary is known primarily for her play, *Mariam* (1613), which has received a fair amount of attention, including a Broadview edition. Relatively little has been written about Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth (Cavendish) Brackley’s *The Concealed Fancies*. Margaret Cavendish is known for a wide corpus of work across multiple genres. Important but minimal scholarly work has appeared on her two collections of closet dramas, *Playes* (1662) and *Plays Never Before Printed* (1668). A flurry of seminal articles devoted to *The Convent of Pleasure* was published in the 1990’s into the early 2000’s but whose consideration has levelled off with very little current scholarly research in print. Finch is known and studied mostly for her poetry, which William Wordsworth admired and called attention to,

but her closet drama, *Aristomenes, or The Royal Shepherd*, has been ignored. This Dissertation situates itself as an appeal for further recovery work on these significant texts.

I will begin this investigation with a review of the seminal scholarship on closet drama by elucidating the varying circulating definitions and attributes of the genre. I will attempt to re-define the genre through a consideration of both the dramatists *and* the plays since their sense of what they were doing is an inherent part of my argument. It is useful, at this initial point, to define “closet drama” as plays that circulated as manuscript or print *instead* of performance on the London mainstage.

### **1.1 Seminal Scholarship**

There are several works that form an important foundation for the understanding of the discourse involving closet drama. The 1990’s brought renewed interest in early modern women’s plays. *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents* (1996), edited by S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies, prolific contributors to the literature in this field, brought original manuscripts to print form, including a section of primary contemporary documents as well as additional commentaries by scholars who have begun recovery of these early women playwrights. This text includes the full text of *The Tragedy of Mariam* and *The Concealed Fancies*. Another text edited by Cerasano and Wynne-Davies is *Readings in Renaissance Women’s Drama: Criticism, History, and Performance 1594-1998* (1998). This collection includes sections on Elizabeth Carey, Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth (Cavendish) Brackley, and Margaret Cavendish,

One of the few full-length studies of these plays is *Winter Fruit: English Drama 1642-1660* (1995) by Dale B. J. Randall who contributes background information on the theatre scene (or lack of one) during the Interregnum. He examines the subversive reactions to the closing of

the professional theatres. He delves into the continued use of masque elements and explores the continuing presence of the pastoral – whose forms appear in the closet dramas under discussion - - and explains genre mixing. He devotes a chapter to the Cavendish circle (which he describes as a ‘phenomenon’). He describes Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth (Cavendish) Brackley’s contribution as “weak” but “intriguing” (323). Randall echoes other male scholars when he calls Margaret Cavendish’s work “totally without discipline” (330). He does note that Margaret Cavendish is “capable of sounding so startlingly outspoken that she should, indeed, be included in any study of the beginning of radical English feminism” (334).

## **1.2 Performability**

Much of the scholarly attention has been given to whether these plays are performable. Although interesting, I believe this line of questioning obfuscates important polemical significance. Gweno Williams was the first director to produce a portion of Margaret Cavendish’s *The Convent of Pleasure* on a professional stage. In ““Why may not a lady write a good play?: Plays by Early Modern Women Assessed as Performance Texts,” she opens the conversation about the possible real performance of these early modern plays. She argues that the label “failed play” is not true. Sophie Tomlinson, in her 1992 article ““My Brain The Stage’: Margaret Cavendish and the Fantasy of Female Performance” also argues that Cavendish’s dramaturgy reveals that she did envision her plays being performed “outside the theatre of her mind” (277).

Gweno Williams in, “Why May Not A Lady Write A Good Play?” (based on thirty plays from 1550-1668 penned by women), offers a rebuttal to this assertion. She locates this questioning of a play’s performance possibility merely in the fact that the plays are written by

women. Mathews refers to only male playwrights in his study of closet drama. Williams, however, takes both Harbage and Nancy Cotton to task. She asserts that:

indeed, a critical strategy has evolved whereby texts which their authors titled, formally structured and published as plays have until now, almost without exception, been redefined as ‘not-plays’ by mainstream critics and marginalized because of their lack of performance history. A striking example is the influential theatre historian Alfred Harbage’s reclassification of Margaret Cavendish’s first volume of plays as “dialogues” and her second as “dramatic sketches.” (97)

The extent of Harbage’s influence can be seen in the fact that Nancy Cotton follows his lead and calls both volumes “dramatic sketches” in her chronology. Williams critiques this view:

Such dramatic critical attention as these plays have received often continues to be

---

disparaging, labelling them as so-called “closet drama,” an imprecise term which actually taken to mean “not intended for performance” or unsuccessful drama. Indeed, the term deserves special scrutiny. It has been called “a contradiction in terms” and certainly has no equivalent in other performance genres; there is no comparable musical term, for example, for “Who would claim music is best left on the page?” It is not a term frequently deployed by writers themselves, arguably no Early Modern woman ever sat down with the intention of writing a “closet drama,” an often gendered term imposed by later critics. (97)

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Williams notes that an “unprejudiced reading of these texts as performable rather than unperformable reveals considerable exciting evidence in the form of internal stage direction, detailed and precise references to contemporary theatre practices, metatheatrical devices and references, calls for integral stage action, sometimes without supporting dialogue, a frequent

emphasis on physicality and on visual effects and specific references to the presence of an audience, particularly in calls for applause” (99). Williams, then, denies that closet dramas are not performable due to some defect on the part of the playwright or the play. Other women scholars, such as Marta Straznicky, explore the complex attitudes toward theatre that circulated at this time and uses the word “anomalous” to describe Margaret Cavendish’s plays – but finds this an apt phrase to describe many of the printed works of the time. Discussions such as these, however, while necessary, are defenses against scholarly bullying that take our attention away from these play’s full historical significance. Framing plays in this genre as less-desirable or unperformable denigrates their status to, as Karen Raber states “dramatists manqué” (97).

### **1.3 Female Performativity**

Sophie Tomlinson is one of the first scholars to address the concept of “performativity” as it appears in the plays -- “to signal social and sexual inauthenticity” (278). Tomlinson catalogs Margaret Cavendish’s theatre experiences as expressed in her prose writings and connects these to the “changing cultural and discursive status of female performance to enable fantasies of female self-representation” (276). Much feminist scholarship is indebted to Tomlinson.<sup>1</sup>

### **1.4 Neo-Senecan Roots**

Two of the plays in this study, *Mariam* and *Aristomenes*, use the neo-Senecan technique of “displacement” which demonstrates their debt to the Sidney Circle in their earlier closet drama. The Sidney Circle’s use of the play form to spread political news is well-documented. Samuel Daniel was a professional poet and writer of closet drama closely associated with the “Sidney” Circle” which included Mary Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Michael Drayton, Sir John Davies and others.<sup>2</sup> A brief 1605 Blackfriars production of Daniel’s play, *Philotas*, resulted in a

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<sup>1</sup> See Tomlinson’s “My Brain the Stage.”

<sup>2</sup> See page 49 Straznicky

summons to the Privy Council where Daniel was forced to defend the play against the serious charge of providing, “sympathetic allusions to Essex” –aka Robert Devereux (1565-1601), the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Essex, and the leader of the 1601 Essex's Rebellion against Elizabeth I of England (Straznicky 50). Essex was executed for treason. His attempt to co-op court power included as its target the court faction led by Sir Robert Cecil and resulted in a failed attack on the Queen’s life. Daniel, an early friend of Essex, suffered not only a loss of “his privilege as licenser of the Queen’s Revels” but also “fell out of favor with his patron, the Earl of Devonshire” (50). Daniel denied the charges, maintaining that “the play was written ‘before my L. of Essex troubles’ and there ‘is nothing in it disagreeing nor any thing, as I protest there is not, but out of universall notions of ambition and envie, the p’petuall argum’ts of books or tragedies’” (50). The Court’s response to the production, however, demonstrates its perceived threat to the crown. Daniel’s efforts to avoid negative repercussions included avoidance of “any mention of the allegations that had followed the performance, or indeed of the play’s having been staged at all” (51). Marta Straznicky designates Daniel’s follow up plan to print as a “re-packaging” of the play.<sup>3</sup> According to Straznicky, the play’s eventual publication “was a recuperative move, a way of *depoliticizing* a dissident play and inscribing it within the construct of a literary career” (50). This move allowed *Philotas* to take “its quiet place alongside other of Daniel’s ‘small poems’ and ‘small works,’ and in that posture became one of the best-selling printed plays of the early seventeenth century” (51).

Another playwright associate with Mary Sidney’s circle, Fulke Greville, “preferred to restrict the reading of his plays to a select coterie, aiming more to participate in a closed political debate than to advance his ideas in a public forum” (50). Greville, whom Straznicky identifies as

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<sup>3</sup> See page 51-2 Straznicky for a detailed description on the unique qualities of these printed plays.

“the most overtly political writer of the group” wrote that his tragedies constituted “‘no Plais for the Stage,’ but rather historical works about ‘ambitious governors’ of a familiar humanist design: ‘to show in the practice of life that the more audacity, advantage and good success such sovereignties have, the more they hasten to their own desolation and ruin” (50). Greville did not even seek publication of his plays, “anticipating, perhaps that broader circulation of his plays would entail a lessening of their political weight” (50). The “coterie” audience referred to by Greville might be private but, as this dissertation will argue, was potentially larger than the audiences attending shows on the public stage. Notably, “the presentation of a closet drama to the reading public as a text for private, intellectual recreation could be orchestrated to achieve political no less than literary ends” (52). The Senecan tragedy model followed by the Sidney Circle is broadly recognized “as inherently political works, works that participate in pivotal debates” (50). Daniel’s refutation of the aims of *Philotas* seem unconvincing given the tenor of the drama of the Sidney Circle. The Sidney circle took their cue from the French playwright Robert Garnier. Straznicky explains that: Robert Garnier, whose neo-Senecan tragedies were the model for the Sidnean closet dramas, “emphasized in his prefaces the topical relevance of his work and was considered a political writer by his contemporaries...His two civil war tragedies, *Cornelia* and *Marc-Antoine*, were overtly didactic treatments of French politics, the first giving voice to the victims of the civil wars through the figure of Cornelia” (111). Mary Sidney whose play *The Tragedie of Antonie* was printed in 1592 but Sidney’s play is distinct in that it is a translation of the French playwright Robert Garnier’s tragedy *Marc-Antoine*.

One essential quality of Sidney Circle neo-Senecan closet drama is its “distancing” – use of past historical and mythological settings to explore contemporary political exigencies. Closet dramatists like Daniel and Greville used the historical displacement of the neo-Senecan plays to



avoid censorship. In this dissertation, I demonstrate that each of the women playwrights uses some form of “distancing” to “cover” political intent. The neo-Senecan reliance on historical displacement serves as a mediation to cover engagement with contemporary ideological structures.

## **1.5 Catholicism**

Some historical background into catholic history contextualizes how Catholicism comes into play in these closet dramas. I explore the close court ties each of these women had to the Catholic queen consorts Anne of Denmark, Henrietta Maria, and Mary of Modena. Each play belies the royalist attraction to catholic spectacle, symbols and icons. Although it is not in the scope of this Dissertation, both Anne of Denmark and Henrietta Maria were well known for the subversive masques they commissioned which engendered anxiety about Catholicism and its influence at court. I argue that these plays are influenced by these queen consorts and connected to Catholic recusancy and the Catholic doctrine of equivocation which results in my redefinition of the closet drama as “literary equivocation.” I ultimately argue that these plays could not be performed because of their subversive bordering on treason-like political material.

## **1.6 Pro-catholic Printers**

Cary chose Thomas Creede, a well-known printer, to publish her play *Mariam*. Creede is fascinating for two reasons. Straznicky writes, “By 1613 Creede was a practiced and reputable printer and had been employed by William Ponsonby earlier in his career...Ponsonby of course is one of the most prominent of Elizabethan publishers and is especially renowned as the publisher of Sidney and Spenser...It seems that he also had some interest in the publication of Sidnean closet drama” (Profane Stoical 107). Creede had also printed some of William Shakespeare’s work. At the age of twenty- seven, her choice to approach Creede displays a

confidence in her work. Of interest is Creede's choice of emblem that appears on the title page of the work. Ferguson notes that "one can perhaps infer that Creede saw the possibility of profit in texts with French connections bearing news about religious disputes in the recent past. Nothing very firm can be said about Creede's intent in selecting the 'Truth Scourged' device for Cary's *Mariam*, but I do want to suggest that the emblem itself had cultural associations with Catholic dissent" (306). Creede also used this emblem in conjunction with Mary, Queen of Scots and her maid, Bess of Harwick. Ferguson notes that "It was also used adopted...by Mary Queen of Scots, a woman brought up in France who became a famous prisoner in Elizabethan England; with her execution in 1587, she became a martyred heroine in the eyes of many English Catholics" (306). Although scholarly studies have failed to unearth any religious or political associations on the part of Creede in relation to the materials he printed, further research might prove profitable. The Sidney Circle, even if not all members were not Catholic, had close ties to many Catholics, including Essex. Catholic equivocation was used to avoid censure and persecution.

### **1.7 Closet Drama as Cipher**

The Catholic use of "equivocation" is closely connected to the strategies used to structure these plays. I posit that closet dramatists use equivocal strategies, or literary equivocations, as displacements or covers for political messages. I will explore these strategies -- such as the use of historical displacement as well as the manipulation of genre -- such as comedy, masque, myth, and folk tale -- to hide political messages. I argue that the closet drama genre, as seen in the arguments for and against the genre itself, emerge out of closet drama's equivocal nature: Is it a play? Is it a dramatic poem? Is it a good play? Can it be performed? Does the playwright want to *see* it performed? These questions inform the equivocal nature of the genre as a whole and its intent to mask its true intent. These equivocations protect the playwright from censure and

prison. Ultimately, it gives women playwrights a political voice – an opportunity to critique the government. It is the voice of political opposition.

Chapter One, “Elizabeth Cary’s *Mariam*: The Catholic Recusant as Vade Mecum for Political Presence,” directs attention towards Elizabeth Cary’s entire oeuvre to contextualize Cary’s use of literary equivocation in *Mariam*. Cary utilizes genre to mask political themes as well as creates characters who equivocate to survive. I propose that Cary’s commitment to Catholicism underscores her defense of the efficacy of equivocation in the face of tyrannical rule. Cary relied on equivocation in her personal life as well as explored it a rhetorical technique in her other writings. I devote a long section of the chapter to an analysis of Cary’s *The History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II, or The History of the Most Unfortunate Prince, King Edward II*. Cary uses both genre (history) and neo-Senecan distancing to enable her to explore contemporary events: the troubling relationship between Charles I and the controversial George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, and the ensuing complications (absolutism) of his extreme favoritism towards him. This slightly veiled critique of Charles I reveals her discomfort with political machinations that she, herself, was forced to tolerate. She also portrays Isabel as a heroine who is forced to equivocate to not only save her own life, but to overthrow a corrupt monarchy.

I posit that the earlier drama, *Mariam*, establishes her lifelong emphasis of critique of absolutism. Cary creates a printed play, a closet drama, to subvert censorship. She then utilizes the Sydney Circle neo-Senecan technique of displacement by using historical sources and setting the play in 29-4 B.C. -- the rule of Herod the Great, King of Judea. First, I argue that Cary portrays Herod similar to the later Edward II -- an ineffectual monarch who rules by tyranny. Cary provides us with several possibilities for how to react to this un-monarchy-like behavior.

Cary's play masks a critique of James I. She manipulates genre by creating a tragedy that is complicated by her portrayal of Mariam – who seemingly is a heroic stoic – poised against the equivocating Salome.

The main tenet of stoicism is self-control, “self-sufficiency, and immunity to the assaults of any external force is consequently a strategy of empowerment, an attempt to locate the center of power in the self” (Straznicky *Profane* 110). The concept of stoicism was “for those both marginal to and dependent upon the center of power” (Straznicky *Profane* 111). Under siege, a proponent of stoicism gains power. Straznicky writes, “Facing off against the many avatars of a brutal fortune, stoicism's imperial self stands at least a fighting chance” (110). Stoicism is “directed inward toward those things that are strictly within his own control” (Straznicky *Profane* 115). However, I take a close look at the behavior of Salome -- who is usually contrasted negatively to Mariam. Mariam's insistence on honest speech contrasts with Salome's subversive speech which I relate to equivocation. Critics, such as Margaret Ferguson in “The Spectre of Resistance,” note that Cary is critical in her characterization of Salome and her bold speech and posits that Cary admires the more stoic Mariam. I, however, plan to identify a “Salome who is intelligent, articulate, and strong” and operates subversively to maintain her own agency as well as to survive. Tellingly, she is the only character alive by the end of the play (*Renaissance Drama by Women*, 5). Salome embodies the epigraph to *Edward II* which I use as a quotation at the beginning of the chapter. I argue not only that Salome resembles Isabel in *Edward II* but that both of these characters use equivocation for survival.

Chapter Two, “Writing and Dissembling: Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth (Cavendish) Brackley's *Concealed Fancies*,” explores the English Civil War period when the Cavendish estate, Welbeck, was seized by Parliamentary forces, and the sisters were effectively imprisoned

as the estate operated as a garrison for parliamentary troops. The daughters make an attempt to keep the estate intact while their father, William Cavendish, remained in exile in France. This historical fact not only underscores the political milieu concerning the writing of the play but also provides the setting. The play takes place in a Royalist castle under Parliamentary siege. Although the play may have been intended for performance at one of the Cavendish country estates, it remained in manuscript form until the 1930's. The use of the manuscript form kept the play hidden from the parliamentary censors while allowing for a significant distribution amongst Royalists. The Cavendish sisters use the genres of comedy and masque to cover their political intent -- to present news to Royalists at home and in exile by presenting what are seemingly marginal dialogues but function similarly to popular play pamphlets of the day. They provide information about property, finances, morale, sieges, incapable commanders, counter sieges, torture, and personal reactions such as missing exiled friends and family.

The play also presents several female characters who utilize equivocation as a protection against parliamentary soldiers and male patriarchal hegemony. I point out that the play also demonstrates an awareness by the Cavendish playwrights of the power dynamics of the manipulation and control of language. Language-making is identified as the domain of males, yet the sisters undermine that by shaping and forming their own language, which is different from the language of males. Like Salome, the characters act outward obedience but their very knowledge and use of mimicry is for subversive ends. *The Concealed Fancies* ends – as a comedy should – in marriage. However, Luceny and Tattiney control the means of communication during the play with plans to continue going forth.

Chapter Three, “Royalist Material and Cultural Property Under Siege: Margaret Cavendish’s *The Convent of Pleasure*,” explores the influences that may have inspired

Cavendish in the creation of her convent. Cavendish prints her play, once again, like the other women playwrights, keeping it from the censor's eye so she can safely create a pro-Royalist text. She equivocates when she states that the play is a comedy – the play does end in marriage, so Cavendish is not strictly lying – yet the end of the play creates a state of discomfort in the reader who must assess the playwright's aims. I maintain that the play presents a real time siege and pillage of Royalist material and intellectual property. I discuss Cavendish's relationship to Queen Henrietta Maria and her salon practices as well as to the salons run by her husband, William Cavendish, and his brother, Charles Cavendish, during their exile in Paris. Cavendish's convent is indebted to these intellectual spaces. I also note Cavendish's biographical portrayal of her mother and her characterization of the Lucas household before the civil war. I posit that the material convent is the Lucas property imagined during its siege during the war. Cavendish creates the image of the pleasure garden which becomes a metaphor for Royalist intellectual property. The play includes an appeal for a clear garden with free running water which emphasizes royalist's emphasis on pleasure and the creative imagination.

The politicizing of the convent is evident in the first scene of the play which features men conversing outside the convent who threaten to send attackers in to remove Lady Happy and restore her to a marriageable state. They consider her person as part of the property they feel entitled to and rail at the unfairness of her "encloistering." This is echoed by the violent threat issued by the foreign Prince at the end of the play. The prince enacts the parliamentary plan to send in males disguised as females to subvert the convent. Lady Happy and her convent become the property of the Prince after their marriage -- and he decides its future usage. Royalist property is unfairly appropriated

Chapter Four, “*Aristomenes, or The Royal Shepherd*: Anne Finch’s Fable of Pro-Stuart Disenchantment,” echoes the first three plays by portraying continued political turmoil. Finch specifically wanted the play to remain in print. Clearly, the play contains treasonous qualities. Finch wrote the play immediately following the “Bloodless Revolution” of 1688 where Anne Finch and her husband, Heneage, became prominent “nonjurors,” who refused to take oaths to William and Mary. The Finches faced harassment and legal battles and were forced to flee to the country. Heneage was caught and imprisoned on charges of Jacobitism for trying to join James II in France. The Finches were separated for over six months until the case was discharged. Anne Finch’s *Aristomenes, or The Royal Shepherd*, written in 1690, is a tragedy. Like Cary’s *Mariam*, the setting -- war between the Messenians and Lacedemonians -- provides the neo-Senecan distancing utilized in many closet dramas. Finch, like the other women playwrights explored here, relies on manipulation of genre to serve her subversive aims. As noted by Diana Solomon, the play functions as a tragicomedy for the first four acts (44). During these acts, Aristomenes is a war hero who escapes prison. Two couples marry – Herminia and Demagetus followed by Aristor (Aristomenes’ son) and Amalinta. The audience participates fully in the belief that all is right in the relationship between man and the state. However, in act 5 politics turns wrong. Amalinta is the daughter of the king of Lacedemonia and her act of betrayal at enabling the freeing of Aristomenes is treasonous. When Aristor tells Aristomenes that he loves a Lacedemonian, Aristomenes moves to murder her until he realizes she is the person who helped set him free. The Lacedemonians, in retaliation against Amalinta’s treason, kill both her and Aristor. Aristomenes is left to look on at the dead bodies and contemplate the meaninglessness of what he thought was his duty to the state.

I further contend that Finch adapts the myth of Aristomenes and combines it with the use of the popular genre of the fable to mask her political commentary – a dark portrayal of pro-Stuart disenchantment. I first explore the events of The Glorious Revolution and the effect of this event on Finch. I discuss several of her political poems to contextualize the play as a piece of political communication. I then explore Aristomenes as myth. One of the most interesting features of this play -- a small moment I believe to be greatly significant – is when Finch includes, in stage directions, the entrance of a curious mechanical fox into Aristomenes' dungeon. The fox leads Aristomenes out of the dungeon and, hence, seemingly becomes a symbol of rebellion. The mythological Aristomenes, a heroic figure, is traditionally associated with the folk emblemata of the fox. Yet Finch develops this association further by bringing this subversive fox into the play three times and emphasizing Aristomenes' identification with the animal, creating a space where boundaries between human and animal are ambivalent. Aristomenes, in a mimic of the fox, is covered in dirt when he comes out of the underground dungeon/burrow and Finch emphasizes their oneness. I posit that the fox is the folk tale character of the trickster and that the close identification of Aristomenes to the fox signifies himself as trickster who also becomes victim to his own tricking. Aristomenes has tricked himself into believing in the validity of the identifying himself as an honorable hero which he finds meaningless after his son's death.

In the conclusion, I argue for a reconsideration of these plays' deep connection to the contemporary political events that influenced these playwrights. The equivocal genre of closet drama provided the cover these playwrights needed in order to enable them to offer commentary on sensitive historical events. My research indicates that these dramas could not/would not be performed on stage because of their radical investigations into absolutism, English Civil War



cruelties, and the aftermath of the Glorious revolution – as experienced by Royalists. Although Margaret Cavendish states that she would like to see them performed, the more probable outcome for these plays would be censorship, as in the fate of the Samuel Daniel's play, *Philotus*. The bold content of these plays operates through equivocation, or coded political communication to avoid this censorship. Their full significance as theatrical texts deserve incorporation into the history of English drama and warrants further investigation.

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## 2 CHAPTER ONE: ELIZABETH CARY'S *MARIAM*: THE CATHOLIC RECUSANT AS VADE MECUM FOR POLITICAL PRESENCE

*Qui nescit Dissimulare, nequit vivere, perire melius.*<sup>4</sup>

Elizabeth Tanfield Cary is best known as the first English woman to write an original manuscript drama that culminated in print form. In 1609, Cary composed *The Tragedy of Mariam, The Fair Queen of Jewry*, the only existing closet drama by Cary printed by Thomas Creede for the bookseller Richard Hawkins in 1613, the focus of this chapter. Drama, however, was one of only several genres Cary engaged with. She was proficient in Spanish, Italian, Latin, Hebrew, and Transylvanian and, in 1598 at the age of twelve, she had translated *The Mirror of the World* from Abraham Ortelius's *Le Mirroir du Monde*. In 1626-7, Cary wrote an historical account, *The History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II, or The History of the Most Unfortunate King Edward II*, which was printed in 1680. Her 1628 poem "Elegy for Buckingham,"—a response to the untimely death of George Villiers--, was widely circulated. In 1630, she translated *Reply of the Most Illustrious Cardinal of Perron* from Jacques du Perron's *Replique à la réponse du Serenissime Roy de la Grand Bretagne* (a religious tract Cary dedicated to Henrietta Maria, Queen consort of Charles I). Additional useful information about Cary appears in *The Lady Falkland: Her Life, by One of Her Daughters*--, a hagiography composed between 1643 and 1649. She circulated several of these texts in manuscript form before she had them printed. Unsurprisingly, critical scholarship on these texts is neatly divided

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<sup>4</sup> "*Qui nescit Dissimulare, nequit vivere, perire melius*: he who doesn't know how to dissemble, is unable to live, and is better off dead." Opening epigram to *Edward II* (Purkiss, 229).

according to genre. Since the 1990's, her tragedy, *Mariam*, has steadily gained attention for its artistic value.<sup>5</sup>

*Mariam*, explored as a stand-alone dramatic text, has been read as an autobiographical account of the demise of Cary's marriage, a performance of gender, an attack on the patriarchy, an account of stoic martyrdom, and a text influenced by the Sidney Circle and Senecan drama. While it is certainly valuable to discuss the play as drama, Cary's work is so rich intertextually that an examination inclusive of her entire oeuvre is vital in order to provide clear insight into the political ideology she scrutinizes in *Mariam*. The extant works inform cohesive political theory. I begin this chapter with a short account of Cary's intellectual interests and of contextual material respecting Cary's link to Catholicism, the Sidney Circle, and Senecan tragedy. I then examine Cary's own writing, with a focus on *Edward II*. I conclude with an interpretation of Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam, The Fair Queen of Jewry*. I ultimately argue that Cary's closet drama utilizes the strategies of the Catholic recusant to inform a reaction to tyranny and to establish a nascent concept of human rights.

## 2.1 Early Life

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*The Lady Falkland: Her Life, by One of Her Daughters* mostly details Cary's conversion to Catholicism.<sup>6</sup> However, the biography also includes some information from Cary's youth

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<sup>5</sup> For pioneering scholarly work in the 1990's, see Beilen, Cerasano and Wynne-Davies, Purkiss, Straznicky, culminating in the Broadview text edited by Stephanie Hodgson-Wright published in 2000. For scholarly work continuing after 2000, see Ferguson, Findley, Kegl, McLain, Nesler, Roth, Shannon, Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice

<sup>6</sup> All passages from *Lady Falkland: Her Life* taken from *Elizabeth Cary, Lady Falkland: The Tragedy of Mariam The Fair Queen of Jewry With The Lady Falkland: Her Life By One of her Daughters* edited by Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson.

which underscores her later subversive behavior and writings. Her father supplied her, at the age of twelve, with Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. She read it "to please him" but "she made so many objections, and found in him so many contradictions" that her father stated, "'This girl hath a spirit averse to Calvin'" (188). Her daughter writes that she was "but an ill kneel[er] and a worse riser" -- required to kneel when she spoke to her mother who was "never kind to her" (199). *Lady Falkland* familiarizes the reader of Cary with Cary's extensive reading:

She read very exceeding much: poetry of all kinds, ancient and modern, in several languages, all that ever she could meet; history very universally, especially all ancient Greek and Roman historians, and chroniclers whatsoever of her country; and the French histories very thoroughly, of most other countries something, though not so universally; of the ecclesiastical history very much, most especially concerning its chief pastors. Of books treating of moral virtue or wisdom [and natural knowledge as Pliny/ (such as Seneca, Plutarch's *Morals*, and natural knowledge such as Pliny/ and of late ones, such as French Mountaine [Montaigne], and English Bacon). (268)

This passage underlines Cary's learnedness, especially in conjunction with her fluency in languages. The inclusion of these readings in a volume mostly concerned with her Catholicism suggests an intersection between her faith and political views. Most interesting for the purposes of this dissertation is her familiarity with Montaigne, which will be interrogated further in a discussion of *Mariam*.

In her first work, *The Mirror of the World*, Cary demonstrates precocious political awareness.<sup>7</sup> Cary translated when she was twelve *Le Mirroir*, a text describing most of the known countries in 1598. Lesley Peterson, in her introduction to the text, states that the

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<sup>7</sup> See *The Mirror of the Worlde: A Translation by Elizabeth Tanfield Cary* Edited and with an introduction by Lesley Peterson.

translation “conveys concern for the reality of localized oppression combined with a sensitivity to the roles maps play in the process of exporting oppression; here I would further argue that this aspect of her youthful work anticipates her mature work” (92). Peterson notes that Cary’s translation includes negative commentary not found in the original text. This is evident in her description of Ireland (where she later lived and created social programs during her husband’s assignment there under James I). Cary translates, “The people of this ile are poorly appareled in black clothe.” She continues, “They esteeme liberty more than riches” (129). This commentary prefigures Cary’s later political interests.

## **2.2 The Catholic Recusant**

English citizens who had converted to Catholicism were known as “recusants.” Some recusants observed loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church and the pope and, for the most part, did not attend the Church of England. However, the behavior of a recusant is more complex. Of course, this binary “high-stakes ideological war” over “individual identity formation” was complicated by the social realities Janet Halley finds that many Catholics subverted both sides because “they maintained a Catholic devotional life and yet cooperated with state demands by outward show of conformity” (38). Many recusants, to avoid penalties, attended secret masses as well as Church of England services. Halley notes that “Most English Catholics – unless and until they found themselves forced to take a rigid position resisting the state – engaged in a constantly adaptive and even opportunistic strategy of passive resistance” (51). It was simply impossible for the state to know whether some of its citizens were Catholic or had Catholic sympathies.

Catholicism was viewed as a political threat to the state. One reason was “those qualities which distinguished it from other sectarian movements. These were (a) the nature of the

demands Catholicism made upon its adherents, especially insofar as they were members of the political elite; and (b) the status of Catholicism as an international religion.” (Hibbard 15).

Caroline Hibbard writes:

From the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, it was the potential collaboration between Catholics in England and foreign governments-mediated by members of the exile communities -- that posed the real political threat to the English establishment. The government had always been anxious about the exiles, many of them of sufficient social standing to figure in the counsels of European courts. By the early seventeenth century- and especially after Charles I married a French Catholic queen-France was competing with Spain for the clientage of the English Catholics. Nonetheless it remained true that the geographical center of the English Catholic exile lay in the Spanish Netherlands; and the concentration there was, if anything, increased in the period 1598-1640. Efforts to expel the exiles from Flanders and scatter them far from England were frustrated not only by lack of cooperation from the Spanish authorities but also by the persistence of the exiles in providing for their special needs. Proximity to England was vital to the religious communities for it facilitated both the traffic in students, priests, and nuns and the collection of money from home for their support. (30)

According to the state, “refusal to attend church was a blatant challenge to authority,” “a grave dereliction of social duty and a shocking example to sectaries and separatists” and -- “suggested a neglect of the obligations of one's allegiance (17). In certain cases, state fears were not exaggerated.

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the “Recusancy Acts” began -- not to be repealed until 1650. A 1583 treatise by William Cecil, Lord Burghley, entitled *A declaration of the favourable dealing with her Maiesties Commission appointed for the Examination of certaine Traitours, and of tortures unjustly reported to be done upon them for matter of religion* led to the 1584 act where Queen Elizabeth forbade “any Englishman who had taken Roman Catholic orders to remain in England longer than forty days on pain of death” (Huntley 394). Punishments imposed upon people who refused to take part in Anglican religious activities included fines, confiscation of property and possible imprisonment. The seventeenth century additionally ushered in “the growth of the missionary priesthood, of an overseas Catholic education system, and of Catholic literary production” (Hibbard 11). Figures reveal “a steady increase in recusancy from 1570 to 1640....By 1603, the number of actual (if not judicially convicted) recusants had reached 30,000-40,000, and it rose to 60,000 by 1641” (8).

The 1605 Gunpowder Plot escalated attention on the possible treasonous aims of Catholics.<sup>8</sup> Known also as the Gunpowder Treason Plot or the Jesuit Treason, the plot was a failed assassination attempt against King James I of England and VI of Scotland by a group of provincial English Catholics led by Robert Catesby. On November 5, 1605, the date of the state opening of Parliament, an attempt was made to blow up the House of Lords. Thirty-six barrels of gunpowder were found stashed under the building. Subsequently, Parliament introduced new legislation against recusants. Earlier laws against Catholics, established under Elizabeth I, came back into effect.

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<sup>8</sup> This summary of the events of the Gunpowder Plot is described in detail in the following articles: “The Gunpowder Plot: Terror and Toleration in 1605” Simon Adams, *History Today* Nov. 2005 55:11 10-17 and “The Gunpowder Plot” Pauline Craft *History Review* Sept. 2005 52 9-14.

In 1606, Henry Garnet, an English Jesuit priest, was put on trial for treason for his alleged knowledge of the assassination attempt. He had published *A Treatise of Equivocation*, earlier, in 1598. Equivocation, also called mental reservation, utilized a linguistic technique that allowed Catholics under pressure to escape persecution. It implied a duty to God that superseded human allegiance. Janet Halley lists the four possible types of equivocation:

According to the *Treatise of Equivocation*, a Catholic priest in England was entitled, under appropriate circumstances, to resort to any one of four methods of baffling his audience. First, he could use words having more than one common meaning – for example, declaring that a priest ‘lyeth not in my house,’ and meaning that he does not tell lies there. Second, he could give only one of several possible answers to a question – for instance, declaring that he came to a friend’s house to have dinner and omitting to mention a purpose to celebrate mass as well. Third, he might exploit the ambiguity of hidden gestures, unclear pronoun reference, altered pronunciation – any addition to standard usage that would create an ambiguity. This is what St. Francis was about when, asked if he had seen an escaping thief, he protected the fugitive by answering (with his pointing hand hidden in his robe), ‘He came not this way.’” (35)

As Halley points out, equivocation “was a key strategy in preserving identity” (35). She recounts a 1613 court case, where Catholic grand jurors stated that they “‘had a special reservacion or exception in their minds of all such things as should touch their conscience or religion” (48). She states that “Jesuitical equivocation could be said to be subversive in the ways that textuality is subversive” (36). The Jesuits conceived language “as multivalent, unstable, and conventional; and recognized a complex dialogue occurring within the Catholic mind, in which thought itself took on the representational qualities of speech and writing” (36). Civil order, however, depended

on the opposite – “equated with transparent expression, committing the state to policing referentiality” (35). In any case, equivocation allowed persecuted people to refuse to cooperate with questioners they felt were unjust. Halley details the specific traits the manuscript lays out as the “condition of legitimate authority.”<sup>9</sup> Equivocation could occur only when these traits are not present.

To some, equivocation amounted to no more than lying. Sir Edward Coke, Attorney General presiding over Garnett’s trial, presented the opening remarks:

Their dissimulation appeareth out of their doctrine of equivocation. [There Is] the treatise of equivocation, seen and allowed by Garnett, and by Blackwell the arch-priest; wherein, under the pretext of the lawfulness of a mixt proposition to express one part of a man’s mind, and retain another, people are indeed taught, not only simple lying but fearful and damnable blasphemy. (Huntley 390)

Catholics saw equivocation, however, as a valid moral survival technique. The word gained additional meaning from its Latin root “recusare” – to refuse or make an objection.<sup>10</sup> An additional definition for recusant, which relates to the political aims explored here is a person “who refuses to accept or obey established authority.”<sup>11</sup>

*Lady Falkland* chronicles the contact Cary maintained with the Catholic clergy after her conversion in 1626. The biography dates Cary’s interest in Catholicism as early as 1605 which follows soon after Queen Anne’s conversion in 1600. Anne, who hailed from Denmark, was queen consort to James VI during his rule in Scotland and his subsequent rule as James I in England. Cary maintained close ties to the court. Much has been made of Cary’s conversion and the

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<sup>9</sup> Pg. 43 Halley

<sup>10</sup> See Huntley on recusants and equivocation

<sup>11</sup> Merriam Webster Dictionary



subsequent demise of her marriage to Henry Cary, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Falkland, who pitilessly endeavored to render the mother of his eleven children destitute. Early in the reign of Charles I, Lady Denbigh (a good friend of Cary) and her brother Lord Buckingham (George Villiers) revealed to Charles I that Elizabeth Cary had converted. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski writes that “when Lady Denby and Buckingham informed King Charles that she had been received into the Roman Church, he ordered a formal inquiry, which made the affair public and scandalous” (196). As an admitted recusant, Cary was committing a statutory offense by refusing to attend services at the Church of England. Her husband, Henry Cary, immediately disowned her as her daughter explains in *Lady Falkland*. The children who still remained at home (eleven total) were taken from her and she was reduced to a poverty which entailed begging her friends for food to sustain her. She “retired to a little old house that she took in a town ten mile from London” which “had no other household stuff in it, [but] than a flock bed on the bare ground (which was also borrowed of a poor body in town) and an old hamper which served her for a table, and a wooden stool” (*Lady Falkland* 212). She lived there in the company of a recently converted young female servant. Cary remained stubborn. She not only refused to renounce Catholicism, but she also refused the King’s suggestion that she go stay with her mother who was shocked and disappointed in her. Following the announcement of her conversion, Elizabeth:

Refused Henry’s order to go live with her mother, preferring instead to stay in London near her Catholic circle of supporters. Her mother, Lady Tanfield, allegedly refused to take her in. Henry accused Elizabeth of Engineering this split with her mother in order to ‘remayen wheare she is, as shee ism in despight of me, by the Power of hir popishe friends.’ Elizabeth chose to live on Drury Lane, an area known for its high concentration of Catholics, and her friends included the French Ambassador, the Bishop of Chalcedon, Jesuits, and secular

priests, as well as other London Catholics. Elizabeth Cary participated in a very different type of Catholic household and community than the women-led households typically lauded in recusant literature. Elizabeth Cary chose where she would live and with whom she would live and associate, actively resisting pressure to conform to her will to her husband's. (McCain 4)

During this period, she wrote a flurry of petition letters, including many to Charles I, asking that her husband be made to give her an allowance – which he eventually did.

As an expression of an additional unwillingness to behave, Cary wrote her translation of *Du Perron* during this time and dedicated it to the Catholic Queen consort Henrietta Maria. I will discuss this text in greater detail later in the chapter. The manuscript was printed by Martin Bogard in Douay, reflecting Cary's deep ties to a Catholic France. The Lord Canterbury, however, "seized on it coming into England and burnt it, but some copies came to her hands" (Lady Falkland 213). Cary continued her commitment to the Catholic Church. Several of Cary's daughters and sons also became converts and novates of the Catholic Church. Cary's youngest two sons remained in London with their older brother, the Protestant, Lucius.

Cary, herself, practiced Catholic Equivocation not long after her conversion. *Lady Falkland* details an ongoing intrigue with the family tutor, Mr. Chillingworth, who had converted to Catholicism only to renounce it. Cary had fired him. Somehow, Chillingworth once again procured himself a place in Lucius's household as a tutor to the two youngest sons while Elizabeth was in family exile. In an act of both subversion and equivocation, Cary secretly and successfully planned the abduction of these two sons from Lucius's house by dark of night that saw them transported to Paris and into the hands of the Convent of the Benedictine Fathers:

In 1636, the government discovered her plan to spirit away two of her sons, Patrick and Henry, to receive Catholic educations in France. Even though she knew them to be still in London, Elizabeth equivocated, claiming not to know *exactly* where her sons were when she was brought before the King's Bench. The officials of Star Chamber saw through the artifice and recommended she be committed to the Tower of London but to no avail. When examined again, she was evasive" "beeinge againe demanded where her said sons now are, shee saith that shee thinketh they are in France, but in what parte of France she knoweth not' Elizabeth broke the law and obstructed the investigation into her crime with little personal consequence." (McCain 7)

These repeated subversive and equivocal acts by Cary inform my later analysis of *Mariam*.

### 2.3 Sidney Circle

In the Introduction to this Dissertation, I explored the intersection between the Sidney Circle, neo-Senecan drama, the genre closet drama, and its possible ties to Catholic views. I now examine Cary's connection to this literary group which is crucial considering their political acuity, evidenced in the discussion of Samuel Daniel's censored play in the Introduction -- and to Cary's own closet drama, *Mariam*. Although there is little existing information on Cary's relationship to the Circle, Marta Straznicky closely links Cary to the work produced there. Straznicky writes that *Mariam* is "a closet drama closely modeled on the neo-Senecan tragedies of Mary Sidney Herbert, Thomas Kyd, Samuel Daniel, Fulke Greville. William Alexander, and Samuel Brandon" and that Cary "shares a politically charged cultural literacy with the intellectual aristocracy of her day" ("Profane Stoical Paradoxes" 109). As will later be discussed, the play is composed of several traits of neo-Senecan drama used by the Sidney Circle.

Three people known to have an association with the literary coterie wrote dedications to Cary. Straznicky notes that “in 1612 John Davies of Hereford, the celebrated Elizabethan writing master, dedicated his *Muse’s Sacrifice* ‘To the most noble, and no lesse deserved-renowned Ladys, as well Darlings, as Patronesses, of the *Muses*; Lucy, Countesse of Bedford, Mary, Countesse-Dowager of Pembroke; and Elizabeth, Lady Cary, (Wife of Henry Cary;) Glories of Women” (104). Straznicky states that the other two women mentioned in the dedication were firmly established members of the Sidney Circle. Straznicky believes that it “would be very curious were there no relationship between Cary and the poets whose work she is asked ‘To shield from Envies pawe and times abuse’” (108). Other dedications to Cary include the second edition of *England’s Helicon* by Richard More and the sixth book to Philip Sidney’s *Arcadia* by Richard Belling. Straznicky finds an additional connection through a sonnet written to Cary by William Basse who was “personally acquainted with Mary Sidney through his patron Sir Richard Wenman, and his circle of friends included John Davies and Edmund Spenser” (108).

#### **2.4 Du Perron**

In 1630, Cary printed her translation of *Reply of the Most Illustrious Cardinal of Perron*. The original was Jacques du Perron’s *Replique à la réponse du Serenissime Roy de la Grand Bretagne* published posthumously in 1620. As Karen L. Nelson points out, “This 500-page, folio-sized volume was designed to bring the light of Catholic doctrine to an English population living in semidarkness” (147). Cu Perron’s intended reader was James I.

As the title page of Cary’s translation indicates, it was published in Douai in 1630 by Martin Bogart, a prominent University of Douai printer. The rich history of Douai includes its establishment as a textile market in the Middle Ages and its change of hands from a fourth-century Roman fortress through subsequent sieges by Germany, England, France, with damage during the

French Revolution, World War I and World War II. For my purposes, Douai is important due to its status in terms of Catholic studies under the auspices of The University of Douai. It was a center for persecuted English Catholic “exiles.” A large number of English Catholics found sanctuary in Douai during the reign of Elizabeth I and her imposition of anti-Catholic laws. A seminary for English priests was set up to train and then return priests to England. The prestigious university “had a Europe-wide influence as a prominent centre of neo-Latin literature and was the second largest university in France during the late 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries” (147). The university was also known for its master printers. The text, then, was backed by impressive distribution possibilities. Nelson notes the distinguishing features of the volume. She points out the “red-and-black title page graced with a printer’s mark, depicting the seal of the Society of Jesus” (147). These historical facts underline the importance of this text to the contemporary Catholic movement embodied in Douai. Nelson details the illustrious company Cary kept and remarks that “Cary’s translation is among the most extensive” (155). Cary continued to focus on the political work she began in the composing of *Mariam*.

Cary’s translation once again utilizes neo-Senecan tradition of distancing (one closet drama trait that I equate with equivocation) by taking Du Perron’s 1618 text designed to convert English Protestants and transposing the text to inform the religious and political issues in the court of Charles II and Henrietta Maria. Nelson notes that it is “a direct response to the exigencies of the time” (152). Nelson points out that Cary’s new audience differed greatly from Du Perron’s original: “While Cary had not transformed Du Perron’s text, the audience for that text had changed dramatically. Readers in 1630 brought a different understanding of the religio-political situation to these words than when Du Perron left the manuscript at his death in 1618 and when it was first

printed in French in 1620 and Latin in 1621)” (157). This was the last text Cary would create, continuing the technical thread first used by the Sidney Circle.

The paratext suggests political intention. The dedication page reveals that the text aims to be more than a translation of a piece of work. As Nelson notes, “Nonetheless, this publication was framed with paratext, especially in its prefaces, its encomia, and its closing paragraphs, that marked its contents as especially significant for 1630 and for England” (149). Cary dedicates the translation to Henrietta Maria, queen consort of Charles I. (Upon her death, Elizabeth Cary was buried in one of Henrietta Maria’s tombs). As Nelson points out, Cary refers to Henrietta Maria as “Queen Henrietta Maria of Bovrbon, Qveene of Great Brittain” (147). Nelson notes that Cary subsequently lists her as “daughter of France; second as the wife of Charles; third as a woman” but I find that Cary’s reference pointedly buries reference to Charles even further. Cary does not mention him by name – the dedication reads: “a daughter of France,” “Queene of England,” “King James his Sonns wife,” “a woeman,” and “a Catholicke.”<sup>12</sup> Cary masks her aim further by training her eye on James I for whom the text was originally intended. However, the intended audience for the translation is the current King of England, Charles II, a Protestant, and Cary attempts to influence his views. She hopes that Henrietta Maria will share the translation with him.

Henrietta Maria was the focus for Protestant fear of Catholics. Cary “offered an emphatic statement of political and doctrinal propaganda designed to assist efforts to return England to the Roman Catholic fold at a moment when Henrietta Maria, Charles’s Catholic Queen, was gaining power and gathering a circle of Roman Catholic--leaning women and men around her” (Nelson 155). Henrietta Maria promoted Catholicism on her own terms. This resulted in the fact that “many of the apprehensions about Catholics centered upon Henrietta and her court, primarily the result

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<sup>12</sup> See EEBO for Cary’s Du Perron dedication to Henrietta Maria.

of internal politics and policies. She served as a lightning rod for English fears, with her chapel that attracted increasing numbers of English courtiers to attend mass publicly” (149). Although Cary exhorts Henrietta Maria to share the text with her husband, this request is buried toward the end of the dedication. Cary refers to du Perron as an “Ornament of your Countrie” who “sent to the father in French to the Sonne in English” and states that it is only proper that Henrietta Maria “receive it for him, who are such a parte of him, as none can make you two, other then one.” Nelson argues that, “Couched as it was in terms of a translation of an argument not against Charles but against his father, Cary muted the ways in which her treatise attempted to correct the English Church’s errors” (148). Cary does not mention the Catholic nature of the translation until the last few sentences. Here she designates Henrietta Maria as a “Catholicke, and a zealous one, and therefore fittest to receiue the dedication of a Catholicke-worke.” Cary creates an identification between herself and the Queen and works to establish the authority of the text. On the “To The Reader” page, she is self-referential, “I am a Catholique, and a Woman”-- equating her with Henrietta Maria.

Cary’s translation was not merely a quiet voice in seclusion. It joined an organized corpus. Nelson explains, “These arguments, made resoundingly in lengthy treatises such as *Reply*, and in versions directed at a variety of audiences, printed in a range of lengths and genres, created an environment of agitation, of print noise, that contributed to an increased sense of Catholic solidarity” (160). Cary praises herself for translating the text in one month and tells the reader that anyone who does not “think that learning’s not for ladies fit” is “deluded.” She asks, “Why should I not speak truth without offence?” and states that the work might “Equall, if not exceede, the Original,” and compares the translator (herself) to “Michaell Angells.”

Cary's translation exhibits "her willingness to insert herself into the political and doctrinal debates of her time in thus translating an argument for Catholicism aimed specifically at the king" (154). Hibbard states that Cary's effort was part of a far-reaching effort, "The clandestine conditions in which this literature had to be produced and distributed did not prevent a lively trade in books printed secretly in England or smuggled in from the continent. This literature is almost unknown territory both to historians and to theologians" (12). In addition to smuggling her children, Cary contributed to an underground attempt to smuggle subversive texts from France to England.

The value of Cary's translation to an understanding of *Mariam* lies in the fact that it is a continuation of techniques used in the play – neo-Senecan distancing to inform contemporary religious and political issues and laden in literary equivocation. Unfortunately, the volume is often ignored as part of Cary's canon. Nelson notes that "protofeminist elements are excerpted for inclusion in anthologies or cited to assist in constructing Cary's biography" and, unfortunately, "the bulk of the volume goes unread, decidedly neither 'literature' nor historical evidence" (147). She writes, "Perhaps because scholars have tended to read Cary's translation within the context of the recovery of women's writing, its enormity as an achievement has often gone unremarked" (155). Hibbard also addresses the apparent neglect of texts such as Cary's:

But difficulty of access does not wholly account for the neglect of this corpus by the modern Anglo-American academic community. Scholars disposed to a near idolatry of Thomas More have shown almost no interest in influential later figures such as Robert Southwell and Robert Persons...Such attitudes have not yet died out; W. K. Jordan described Catholic literature in the Elizabethan era as "increasingly un- English" and that



of the early Stuart era as "weak, undistinguished, and unsystematic," adding that "during the reign of Charles I English Catholic thought almost disappears. (14)

I highlight how Cary's corpus, even her clearly pro-Catholic text, incorporates a unity of purposeful dramatic technique that underscores her political commentary on monarchs and absolutism.

## 2.5 *Edward II*

In *Edward II*, published in 1626-27, Cary anatomizes the role of the English sovereign.<sup>13</sup> Cary's interrogation into the rhetorical means of power becomes important later in my analysis of *Salome*. Cary defines the proper role of a monarch, catalogues the abuse of power, and argues for a restitution of the proper order. Cary makes practical and effective use of a multi-layered literary equivocation in *Edward II*. Technically, Cary's 1626-27 text is in the genre of history. Yet, she includes dramatic techniques which are essential components of her earlier drama, *Mariam*. In *Edward II*, Cary offers us a text dependent on mixed genre which I argue is the essential nature of closet drama. First, she creates the long monologues inherent to closet drama. The structure of Cary's "history" is unique in that it contains a mixture of prose and monologues. Long monologues spoken by Edward I before his death, Edward II, and Isabel break the narration. In fact, Dianne Purkiss states that "It is not at all clear whether the work was intended as a drama or a long narrative poem" (xxxvi). The result of this odd combination is that "Her authorial shift from commentator to playwright gives her immunity from the certain censure that she would risk in writing a more transparently subversive text" (Starner-Wright and Susan M Fitzmaurice 84). Cary also employs the use of the present tense throughout the narration which lends a feeling of immediacy, as though events are happening now. Starner-Wright and

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<sup>13</sup> The text referred to appears in *Renaissance: The Plays of Elizabeth Cary The Plays of Aemilia Lanyer*, edited by Diane Purkiss.

Fitzmaurice write that “this routine replacement has the effect of destabilizing the text; the gnomic present reassures the reader that the history does not depart from received wisdom while the historic present suggests to the listener that its significance is relevant to the moment in which the story is told” (84). Secondly, she employs the neo-Senecan distancing technique to visualize the present from the lens of the historical past. Cary’s time frame is approximately 1306-1308 which includes the end of the rule of Edward I, his death, his son’s ascendance to the monarchy, and the exploits of Isabella of France. Through this dramatic technique, she hides the fact that she is illustrating contemporary events. Cary “could avoid immediate censure and ensure a reading by carefully choosing her topic and genre” (81). Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice state, “Cary may hide behind ‘history’ to convey her message. If accused of breaking the cultural injunction to silence (by writing) that women were expected to obey, she might plead that she was ‘only’ writing ‘history’, only ‘imperfectly’ and therefore is ‘no tongue-man’” (90). Like Samuel Daniel’s, then, “Her history is thus far from a disinterested account of the life and times of a distant king” (85). Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice call the use of this technique “such dissembling”:

But the duality in Cary’s text – of writing one thing which serves another end rhetorically – was a strategy to which Cary was no stranger. Such manipulation of language or linguistic equivocation was common both to the time and the particular circumstances of catholic recusants who faced questioning by the government. Dorothy Glew remarks, ‘A person who equivocates uses words which, if closely examined, will prove to be capable of being taken in two senses: the sense in which they are true, and the sense in which he hopes his hearers will take them.’ (90)

As I will argue later, Cary makes use of this technique in her dramatic work, *Mariam*. Finally, she rewrites the character of Isabel, known as a “she-wolf,” into a more sympathetic portrayal and highlights Isabel’s use of equivocation to bring about the desired result of the overthrow of tyranny.

Cary begins the play with three lengthy monologues by the dying King Edward I. Cary writes, “The actions of a crown are exemplar, and must be perfect, clean, upright and honest” (145). Edward I imparts this advice to his son, and we do not know if his motivation is mere formality or because he suspects future trouble. He stresses, “My judgement, not my eye, did steer my compass” (88). He places responsibility for his subjects’ behavior in his own lap: “The sovereign’s vice begets the subject’s error, /Who practice good and ill by his example. /Can you in justice punish them for that/Whereof yourself are guilty?” (87). He finally describes the fragile balance between state and subject and the necessity for the king to maintain the highest moral standards:

To be beloved secures a sweet obedience,  
 But fear betrays the heart of true subjection,  
 And makes your people yours but by compulsion.  
 Majestic thoughts, like elemental fire,  
 Should tend upwards; when they sink  
 Lower than their sphere, they win contempt and hatred. (87)

If the king does not or cannot follow these premises, English as a nation becomes vulnerable.

Edward I dies and, immediately, the historian perceives growing turmoil. The poetic, lofty language (“sweet obedience,” “Majestic thoughts”) changes to a grittier, earthy tone that demonstrates a changed relation between men: “The prey thus seized, the Spencers long to taste

it, and like to furious tigers, act their passions” (149). This is an arena prefiguring Hobbes’ *Leviathan* which undermines the order at the beginning of *Edward II*. The historian’s negative bias begins as a generalized fault-finding. Edward II “had within his breast an unnatural civil war which gains the first preeminence in his resolution” (90). There is something off putting about “his secret revolutions...He does not communicate the depth of his resolution, being a secret of too great weight to be divulged” (90). The sovereign does not display transparency.

Cary posits Edward’s fault in his obsession with favorites Gaveston, then Spencer. This second favorite, cementing the “unnatural rule” of the first, furthers an already unstable atmosphere. The historian stresses the jeopardy this kind of emotional favoritism yields for the kingdom:

Neither is it safe for the royal ear to be principally open to one man’s information, or to rest solely on his judgement. Multiplicity of able servants that are indifferently (if not equally) countenanced, are the strength and safety of a crown, which gives it glory and lustre. When one man acts all parts, it begets a world of error, and endangers not only the head, but all the members. (127)

When Edward loses his first favorite, Gaveston, he is inconsolable and borders on inability to rule. At this time, the court sees no option but to provide another favorite to the King. Gaveston’s place is quickly filled by Spencer who very soon yields similar power. Starner-Wright states that Cary “deplores the private conversation between monarch and favourite as a means of governing because, unlike the collective responsibility that stems from the institutions of public utterance or proclamation, its meanings are unverifiable, and thus unstable and unreliable” (87). The outcome is that “It is the new King’s favourite, Spencer, who holds sway over all dealings at court,

including the interpretation of speech” (Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice 87). Cary insinuates that both the King and his favorite are unfit to rule:

Mushrooms in state that are preferred by dotage

Open the gap to hate and civil tumult.

You cannot justly blame the great ones’ murmur,

If they command that are scarce fit to serve them. (Cary 88-89)

Although the historian renders dislike for the favorite and his grab for influence and power, she faults the King for allowing this unbalance relationship to permeate his rule:

The error is not so properly theirs as their masters’, who do countenance and advance such sycophants, leaving the integrity of hearts more honest (that would sacrifice themselves in his service in the true way of honour) wholly condemned and neglected, which hath begotten so many desparate convulsions, that (as we may find in our own stories) deposed diverse glorious kings from their proper dignity and lawful inheritance. There are too many frequent examples what mischief such parasitical minions have wrought to those several states they lived in, and certainly such revolutions succeed by a necessary and inevitable justice, for when the royal ear is so guided there ensues a general subversion of all law and goodness, so you may behold here evidently in this unfortunate king, who willingly entertains this fawning orator. (91)

The favorite soon wields greater power than that of the King: “The command of war, and all military provisions, were committed solely to his care and custody; all treaties foreign and domestic had by his direction success or ruin; nothing is concluded touching the government or royal prerogative, but by his consent and approbation” (101). This destabilization brings the state to the edge of chaos.

Once Queen Isabel becomes a stranger to her husband's bed, Cary writes that there is "a foul disorder" (103). It is a debased kingdom, "Hence flew a world of wild disorder; the sacred rules of justice were subverted, the law's integrity abused, the judge corrupted or enforced, and all types of honour due to virtue, valour, goodness, were like the pedlar's pack, made ware for chapmen" (102). Cary, then, finds justification for equivocation. Essentially, she intervenes in history and uses rhetorical techniques to re-shape it – the work of the dramatist.

Although the diseased court is recognized by its own members, Cary reminds the reader that the citizen must be absolute in his surety that overthrow is warranted. It is best to act with caution: "...and like a good steward locks them up in the closet of his heart, till time called upon him to give them life and action" (115). Yet when she reports that, when England is perceived to be in danger as a nation, its people must act according to their conscience, "This mushroom must be cropped, or arms must right the kingdom. Yet before they will attempt by force, they'll feel their sovereign's pulses..." (103). If the conscience believes that just cause is evident, it is the duty of the citizen to raise arms against the monarchy. Cary calls for putting the kingdom above the King:

He is your sovereign, you must obey him,

Unless the cause be just enforced your moving.

If he himself do swerve or raise combustion

The kingdom's good must give your arms their warrant. (115)

Cary's assertion of the right of the subject to rebel against the monarch is the nexus of her political subversion. The historian, Cary, hopes that a person of conscience will stand forward, "Wishing some one would show undaunted valour" (96). This person is the unlikely woman, Queen Isabel, "Isabel, the French king's daughter" -- the person of conscience (100). Cary makes

an important change to the traditional historical narrative at this point. Purkiss notes that “*Edward* focuses not solely on Gaveston or Edward, but on the figure of Isabel, the queen demonized by Marlowe, Hubert, Holinshead and other writers on Edward II whom Cary had read” (xxvii). Historically known as the “she-wolf” for rebelling against Edward II, Cary rewrites Isabel in a favorable, albeit complex, light.

Isabel, a Catholic, embodies through word and action the recusant’s use of the doctrine of equivocation. Using the dramatic tool of the extended monologue, Cary gives a voice to an Isabel who defends her choice of action. Isabel “thus begins her story” (Cary 172). Closet drama places keen emphasis on these crucial sympathetic speeches. Cary claims political efficacy on Isabel’s behalf as the final section of the text focuses on Isabel and her view of what a monarchy should be. After Isabel begins an affair with Mortimer, she lies on two occasions. She pretends “a journey of devotion to St. Thomas of Canterbury” (167). Instead, she kidnaps her son and flees to France. She implores her brother to offer her sanctuary but, after a series of conversations, decides against staying there. She lies a second time stating that she will return to England: “She still gives out she means to go to England” (183). She knows she has duped both the English and French by noting “the English thus abused, the French deluded, both are secure” and happily thinks that “Thus women’s wit can sometimes cozen statesmen” (184-86). Appearing “pure and clear as crystal,” Isabel seems to agree she will return to England as an obedient wife. However, she instead takes off towards Bologne (67). In this section of the history, Cary marries Catholicism and necessary duplicity in the phrase “the shrine of her pretensions” (168).

Cary makes the claim that Isabel is the clear inheritor of Edward I’s reign, despite the fact that she is a Catholic and from France. In her speech, Isabel emphasizes not herself but the

nation as a whole: “My tears speak those of a distressed kingdom, / Which, long time glorious, now is almost ruined” (173). She continues, “Besides the justice of my cause, the strongest motive, / I bring the hearts of a distressed kingdom” (174). She places nation above sovereign. Isabel’s aim is to, “ease the subject, punish the oppressor;” (175). Exhibiting a likeness to Henrietta Maria, beyond being French and Catholic, Isabel dons warrior garb and leads troops in battle. She meets up with Lancaster, who helps her organize: “Henry of Lancaster, whose brother’s death and proper grievance inflamed his heart with grief, his hand for vengeance, with a strong troop of friends and stout attendants, was the first great one that increased her party” (194). She leads her own army back to England with Lancaster’s gathered men, “Already he had gotten together three hundred well-resolved gallants that vow to live and die in this fair quarrel” (190). She marches to “right the queen, and to restore her heir” (196-7). Miraculously, her coup is successful. Her army captures Edward and places him in a remote location.

Cary establishes what Isabel needs to do “to reform the disorders of the kingdom” (196-97). She establishes an opaque rule, “When this grave assembly was come together [Parliament], the errors and the abuses of the kingdom are laid full open” (204). Included in these abuses are the political favors Cary found so repulsive:

Now is the tyranny of all that grievance which had abused the king, and robbed the kingdom, condemned by his own actors, as a motive in justice fit to be reformed and punished. Lastly, the purchase gained by such corruption as sold promotions, places, justice, honour, yields no assistance, but doth prove a burden, which bruised the hearts and thought of them that bore it. (194)

Edward “had been a continual lover and abetter of unjust actions, and had consented to the oppression of the whole kingdom, and the untimely death of so many noble subjects” (206-7).



Cary writes that “had he not been a traitor to himself, they could not all have wronged him” (228). Once again, the state of the kingdom is directly attributed to Edward.

As for “favourites,” Cary advocates, “Let the favourite taste the king’s bounty, not devour it; let him enjoy his ear, but not engross it; let him participate his love, but not enchant it. In the eye of the commonwealth if he must be a mote, let him not be a monster. And lastly, if he must practice on the subject, let it be with moderation, and not with rapine” (207). Cary underscores the inherent danger in giving a favorite boundless power:

Neither is it proper, that the principal strengths and dignities should be committed to the care and fidelity of one man only; such unworthy and unequal distribution wins a discontent from the more capable in ability and blood, and carries with it a kind of necessary impulsion still to continue his greatness; else having the keys to the kingdom in his hand, he may at all times open the gates to domestic danger, or foreign mischief.  
(207)

The King is essentially committing treason by laying the nation open to foreign takeover.

Cary reiterates the reliance that must be placed on reason, “Where the royal passions are rebellious and masterless, having so unlimited power, his will becomes the law; his hand the executioner of actions unjust and disorderly, which end sometimes in blood, commonly in oppression, and evermore in a confused perturbation of the kingdom” (209.) Cary writes:

Kings in their deliberations should be served with a council of state, And a council of particular interest and honour; the one to survey the Policy, the other the goodness of all matters in question; both composed Out of integrity, not corruption; these delivering truly their opinions And judgements. It is more easy for him to reconcile and elect. (208)

Isabel’s monologue evidences her thorough consideration throughout the political situation.

*Edward II*, written after *Mariam*, demonstrates Cary's continued privileging of political discourse and her hidden examination of contemporary political situations. These historical "dislocations" mask political intent focused on contemporary issues. As a woman and a playwright, she is deeply involved in Caroline politics and creates dramatic material to shape how it is perceived. Cary was close to the court not only during the reign of James I and Anne, when she wrote and published *Mariam*, but also later into the rule of Charles I and Henrietta Maria, when she published *Edward II*. Charles' favorite, Buckingham, had been a favorite of his father, James I, before him. There was rumor of a homosexual alliance between James and Buckingham -- who enjoyed enormous power during both reigns. This dislocation allows Cary to explore her real subjects -- Charles I and Henrietta Maria -- and the King's obsessive relation to his favorite, George Villiers, Lord Buckingham -- without risking condemnation -- similar to Samuel Daniel's *Philosias*. Starner-Wright and Fitzmaurice note that "Cary's historical composition is rooted in her own cultural, historical, and personal moment" (81):

The parallel between the situation the text describes (a weak king neglects the kingdom and his queen for a series of lover-favourites) and the events of the 1620's is very evident. Just as Edward's reign was destabilized by his powerful favourites, Gaveston and Spencer, so in 1627 Charles I was under the thumb of Buckingham. Just as Edward neglected Isabel, so Charles neglected his queen Henrietta Maria....In the late 1620's and 1630's, Cary became very close to Henrietta Maria, dedicating her translation of Du Perron to the queen, and eventually being buried in her private chapel. If we accept the possibility that Cary worked on *Edward* after 1627, her view of Buckingham may gradually have been influenced by her sympathy for Henrietta. Henrietta had of course

been completely sidelined by Buckingham's influence over her husband. (Purkiss xxvi-xxvii)

As mentioned earlier, Cary had personal connections to Buckingham as well as his sister, Lady Denbigh. After their report to Charles I of her conversion to Catholicism and the events that ensued, "The Buckingham family were thus directly responsible for the financial and familial woes which dogged Cary for the rest of the decade" (xxvi). She experienced abuse from the favorite, Villiers, first hand.

## 2.6 *Mariam*

At first reading, *Mariam* seems to be a domestic tragedy.<sup>14</sup> The drama can be read that way. However, a close reading of *Mariam* through the lens of literary equivocation in Cary's other work, provides new insight into Cary's political agenda. Once again, what Cary *seems* to be doing is different from what she is actually doing, which I have argued is an essential characteristic of closet drama. Cary uses literary equivocation on several levels. First, she chooses the genre of printed closet drama to avoid censure. Second, by titling the play *Mariam* with its supposed focus on a character whose stoic response to Herod presents no undue threat, Cary again avoids censure and hides her celebration of a dangerous character like Salome. Cary develops the same rhetorical and dramatic technique in *Mariam* that she uses later -- the same neo-Senecan historical distancing which appears in *Edward II* and *Du Perron*.

The play takes place during the reign of Herod from 35 BC to 7 BC. Writing about Wordsworth's *The Borderers*, Marjean Purinton comments, "The historicism of the play replaces a specific history, and ideological criticism is transported or allegorized in different forms" (27). Her comments work too for Cary's play. The reign of James I is replaced by the reign of Herod

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<sup>14</sup> All quotations from *Mariam* are from the Broadview edition.

which allows her to safely train her eye on James I and his government. She creates the character, Salome, whom the reader associates with the negative Salome of the Bible, but reinvents her as an equivocator who survives Herod's tyrannous reign. The portrayal of the triumvirate of "good" women – the stoic Mariam, the faithful wife Doris, the chaste Graphina – stands poised "Penelope-like" to the equivocating Salome. Although scholars disagree, I argue that the "tragedy" of Mariam lies directly in her stoic response to Herod. Mariam's complex reaction to Herod's reported death and return results in her decision to embrace stoicism and refuse to dissemble, or equivocate, which leads to her early, unwarranted death.

Cary incorporates the intensive closet drama monologues that she later utilizes in *Edward II* and "Elegy for Buckingham." These monologues are signature Cary. They allow the playwright to view characters from multiple perspectives, creating complex psyches. Cary's inclusion of sixteen speakers is not unusual but her emphasis on long monologues which include the voices of five women characters -- Mariam, Salome, Doris, Alexandra, and Graphina – as well as Herod, Constabarus, Pheroras – and the voice of a "Greek-like" chorus is significant heteroglossia. For my analysis of the play, I focus on three main characters – Herod, Mariam, and, particularly, Salome for whom I argue a new interpretation. Cary's source for this play is an account of Herod by the Jewish historian, Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*.<sup>15</sup> Although Cary made several changes to Josephus's account, the most important one for my purpose here is her adaptation of Salome.

In the paratext to the play, Cary creates an abstract entitled "The "Argument." She reveals the entire plot by critically detailing the events leading to the opening of the play when Herod returns from Rome a second time. The reader is asked to consider Herod's fitfulness for

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<sup>15</sup> For an in-depth consideration on Cary's use of this source see the Introduction to *The Tragedy of Mariam, The Fair Queen of Jewry* edited by Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson (17-26). They note that "Among her most significant revisions of the source is her emphasis on different styles of female speech and on the critical reactions of her male characters to Mariam's speech in particular" (17-18).

the throne as well as which model of behavior and action, demonstrated in the persons of Mariam and Salome, is the correct response to tyranny. Herod marries Mariam, the granddaughter of Hircanus “the rightful King and Priest” in order to gain power, while repudiating his wife Doris, and children. He then murders Hircanus (Mariam’s grandfather) and Mariam’s brother, Arisobulus (Cary 49-50). Mariam’s mother, Alexandra, reports these atrocities to Anthony, and Herod is forced to answer charges in Rome. He tells Josephus before he leaves that, in case of his death, Mariam should be put to death “unwilling that that any should enjoy her after him” (49-50). Josephus tells Mariam the plan, “meaning it for the best, to prove Herod loved her” (49-50). Upon returning, Herod, finding out that Josephus revealed his wish, puts Josephus to death. He tries to reconcile with Mariam who, however, “still bare the death of her friends exceedingly hard” (49-50). Herod is called to Rome by Caesar once again upon the overthrow of Antony which “was likely to make an alteration in his fortune” (49-50). While Herod is gone, Sohemus reveals to Mariam the rumor of Herod’s death. Mariam feels guilty that she is overjoyed at the prospect. When Herod returns, she cannot disguise this feeling and berates him for the death of her family members. Salome, Herod’s sister, creates a plot to make it appear that Mariam is attempting to poison Herod. Herod, who is “more moved with jealousy for Sohemus, than with this intent of poison,” has Sohemus put to death and Mariam beheaded (49-50). Herod descends into madness.

Cary grounds Herod’s disordered monarchy as the opening focus in the drama. “The Argument” paints a scene of political chaos:

At the time of the play’s events, Julius Caesar himself has been assassinated, and his political heirs, preeminently Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar, have been squabbling over the territories

dominated by Rome – that is, the emerging Roman Empire. As the Argument indicates, the defeat of Herod’s patron, Mark Antony, casts doubts on Herod’s continued authority and even life. (49-50)

The chaos outside Herod’s court echoes the chaos inside his court when he is presumed dead. Almost every character immediately plans an escape from former unsustainable binds. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski notes that, “in a sense, all of the play’s characters – with the obvious exception of Herod – are in a politically analogous position, and their various responses to Herod’s absence and return figure a variety of strategies for coping with tyranny” (125). I am in concord with Lewalski in that I agree that the disordered court and absent king yields chaos and almost every character uses this short-lived freedom to consider his own fate. Jenny Roth states that this is, “an unruly, resistant populace” (489). I disagree with Lewalski, however, in her estimation that “Herod fails to regain his authority.” Herod is not the “exception” to chaos. I read the “Argument” as a document that interrogates his legitimacy and authority (130).

Herod’s legitimacy, then is in question before the play opens. We learn that Herod’s kingdom is built on four immoral acts – his marriage to Mariam (immoral but not illegal) where he abandons Doris and his children, the killing of Hircanus and Arisobulus (Mariam’s grandfather and brother), and the killing of Josephus. Cary asks her reader to question Herod’s right to the throne not only in the Argument but later through Alexandra (Mariam’s mother) in Act I scene ii when she asks, “What kingdom’s right could cruel Herod claim, / Was he not Esau’s issue, her of hell?” (I.ii.99-100). His status in Rome underscores his slippery footing.

Herod’s impulsive, confused, and cruel nature is underscored several times throughout the play. Alexandra describes him as an “unconstant wavering lord” (I, ii, 127). Herod returns to court in a state of joy: “Hail, happy city, happy in thy store, / And happy that thy buildings such

we see: / More happy in the Temple where w'adore" (IV.i.1-3). He is unable to recognize the complex state of things that awaits his arrival. Moments later, a few words from Pheroras revealing the hiding of the sons of Babas by Constabarus results in Herod saying, "Go, take a present order for his death, / And let those traitors feel the worst of fears" (IV.ii.75-6). Herod sends these subjects to their death but is confused about who he commits these deeds for: it should be Salome, but he says Mariam – a slip of the tongue, "Then haste them to their death. [Exit Pheroras.] I will requite / Thee, gentle Mariam – Salom, I mean" (IV.i.83-4). When Herod is questioned by Mariam, his response is anger: "I will not speak, unless to be believ'd / This forward humour will not do you good: /It hath too much already Herod griev'd" (IV.ii.139-141). He demands, despite his incertitude, that his word is the only true word.

Herod's "love" for Mariam consists mainly of obsessional jealousy. His entire first monologue focuses on Mariam and offers blazon-like compliments, "But when I am with Mariam, time runs on, / Her sight can make months minutes, days of weeks: / An hour is then no sooner come than gone / When in her face mine eye for wonders seeks" (IV.i.17-20). He states that he is willing to commit a sacrilegious act on her behalf when he tells Mariam he will rob David's tomb, "For thou shalt rule, and I will win the land. / I'll rob holy David's sepulcher / To give thee wealth" (IV.ii.104-6). Alexandra describes his "love" for Mariam as *not* love, "I know by fits he show'd some signs of love, / And yet not love, but raging lunacy" (I.ii.123-4). The jealousy Alexandra describes appears immediately after the butler tells Herod that Sohemus informed Mariam of Herod's plan that, in the event of his death, she should be put to death, too - - to prevent her from being with another man. His rage infests itself instantaneously, "Oh Heaven! Sohemus false! Go, let him die" (IV.iv.171). His "love" disintegrates immediately: "Now do I know thy falsehood, painted devil, / Thou white enchantress. Oh, thou art so foul, /

That hyssop cannot cleanse thee, worst of evil. / A beauteous body hides a loathsome soul” (IV.iv.175-178). This change of feeling for Mariam occurs instantly when the name of Sohemus is mentioned, “Even for love of thee / I do profoundly hate thee” (199-200). Herod moves from a suspected affair to an accusation of a plot to get their son to the throne: “Hadst thou complotted Herod’s massacre, / That so thy son a monarch might be styl’d” (IViv.207-8). After Herod has Mariam beheaded, his state of mind disintegrates as he maniacally paces back and forth: “I cannot think she meant to poison me: / But certain ‘tis she liv’d too wantonly” (IV.iv.256-7). He seems to be unsure of the real reason he sentenced her to death. From these lines to the end of the act, the reader witnesses his mental breakdown. In Act V the chorus says, “But now he hath his power so much betray’d” (V.i.285). He is similar to Edward II in that he rules by emotion, not reason. This, along with the fact of his possible illegitimacy and the heinous acts he commits in his quest for power gives his subjects the right to attempt an overthrow of his reign, according to Cary which she establishes again later in *Edward II*, with another depiction of a flawed King.

Scholars insist on Cary’s veneration of Mariam. S.P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies write that “Cary idealizes Mariam” (*Renaissance Drama by Women* 50). Mariam’s supposed honesty is one of the main characteristics scholars point out. When we first meet Mariam, she communicates a sense of feeling imprisoned. She states, “For he, barring me from liberty, / To shun my ranging, taught me first to range / But too chaste a scholar was my heart” (I. i.25-7). Weller and Ferguson note the connection in this passage of “range” to “to roam about like game – or dogs -- on a stretch of hunting grounds” and the following use of “heart” to “a deer who “represents a woman who has become royal property.”<sup>16</sup> Mariam asks, “And must I to my prison turn again?” (III.x.151). She knows she could save herself:

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<sup>16</sup> See footnote 27 in Weller and Ferguson’s *Elizabeth Cary, Lady Falkland*.



I know I could enchain him with a smile:  
 And lead him captive with a gentle word,  
 I scorn my look should ever man beguile,  
 Or other speech than meaning to afford. (III.x.163-166)

Yet, she reacts to Herod's return and her imminent imprisonment by telling the audience of her inability to dissemble: "I cannot frame disguise, nor never taught / My face a look dissenting from my thought" (IV.ii.145-6). She critiques Herod, but she refuses to dissemble or equivocate to uproot him. Mariam ruminates on her inability to keep silent when she is troubled and notes that her thoughts about Herod are not the first ones she has vocalized in relation to a despotic ruler. She says, "How oft have I with public voice run on/ To censure Rome's last hero for deceit" (I.i.2). Mariam questions and doubts the use of her tongue which she cannot control.

She derives power from her sense of stoic righteousness: "Oh, what a shelter is mine innocence" (III.x.171). She repeats, "Mine innocence is hope enough for me" (III.x.180). Later in the play she is firm: "My soul is free from adversary's power" (IV.viii.570). Scholars have commented on Mariam and stoicism, presenting it in a positive light. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski writes, "Stoic ethic counsels indifference to rather than interference in politics" (112). By refusing to give in to the demands of Herod, Mariam lay "claims to personal integrity" (208). As Straznicky notes, "spiritual self-sufficiency as the only effective response to political turmoil" ("Profane Stoical Paradoxes" 109-100). Straznicky finds that Mariam, although she loses her life, overthrows the tyrant: "In the fifth act of the play Cary reverts to a male-like stoic discourse, representing Mariam as effectively subversive and Herod as utterly debilitated" (124). Lewalski agrees:

Mariam's challenge to patriarchal control within the institution of marriage is revolutionary, as the heroine claims a wife's right to her own speech – public and private – as well as to the integrity of her own emotional life and her own self-definition. Cary's *Mariam* intimates that such integrity is the foundation for resistance to tyranny in every sphere. (211)

These passages reveal the positive light in which scholars interpret the character of Mariam.

However, Cary's inclusion of text reminiscent of Montaigne allows her to present Mariam as a more complex character than scholars allow for – someone who cannot be solely defined as a stoic. Cary's daughter, in *Lady Falkland*, notes her mother's reading of Montaigne, “not without making her profit of them” (268). Marta Straznicky and Richard Rowland describe a similarity between the opening of the play and *The Essays of Montaigne Book I Chapter 37*.<sup>17</sup> The title of the chapter Cary references is “That we laugh and cry for the same thing.” Montaigne provides several examples of historical figures who cry upon the death of their enemy, “When we read in history that Antigonus was very much displeased with his son for presenting him the head of King Pyrrus his enemy, but newly slain fighting against him, and that seeing it, he wept.” Montaigne warns us not to label either countenance as false: “that this countenance of his ought not to suffer under any misinterpretation, or to be suspected for either false or counterfeit.” He states that emotions are inconstant: “’Tis said, that the light of the sun is not one continuous thing, but that he darts new rays so thick one upon another that we cannot perceive the intermission.” He compares the sun to the soul, “Just so the soul variously and imperceptibly darts out her passions.” Montaigne writes:

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<sup>17</sup> For quotations from Montaigne Book 37 see:  
<https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/m/montaigne/michel/essays/book1.37.html>

We have resolutely pursued the revenge of an injury received, and been sensible of a singular contentment for victory; but we shall weep notwithstanding. 'Tis not for victory, though, that we shall weep: there is nothing altered in that but the soul looks upon things with another eye and represents them to itself with another kind of face; for everything has many faces and several aspects.

Montaigne's dissection of contrary emotions is invoked by Cary to create a complex Mariam.

Mariam reveals directly to the audience that she is conflicted – and not quite the stoic she also claims to be. Mariam worries over the fact that she cannot cry enough tears that would be appropriate on the death of a monarch, “How canst thou them so faintly now lament / Thy truest lover's death, a death's disgrace” (I. i.65-6). At the same time, she prefers the life of a peasant to being his wife: “Yet I had rather much a milkmaid be, / Than be the monarch of Judea's queen” which directly contests her thoughts about her son's right to the throne (I. i.57-8). She then remembers her earlier love for him “When virgin freedom left me unrestrain'd” (I. i.72). These fleeting opposing emotions underscore her attempt to establish the feelings of her conscience but also demonstrate unsurety.

Cary creates a morally ambiguous Mariam. Mariam reveals in Act III, that she is not completely innocent. She says:

Oh, now I see I was an hypocrite:  
 I did this morning for his death complain,  
 And yet do mourn, because he lives, ere night.  
 When I his death believ'd, compassion wrought,  
 And was the stickler 'twixt my heart and him:  
 But now that curtain's drawn from off my thought,

Hate doth appear again with visage grim:

And paints the face of Herod in my heart,

In horrid colours with detested look. (III.x.153-160)

Salome reveals that Mariam might be as much a plotter as she is: “More plotting yet? Why, now you have the thing / For which so oft you spent your suppliant breath: / And Mariam hopes to have another king, / Her eyes do sparkle joy for Herod’s death” (I, iii, 207-10). In fact, this is the truth that Mariam has been questioning in her opening monologue. Ferguson states, “Although Mariam’s martyr-like death suggests that she figures a morally virtuous failure to equivocate, Salome prevents such a simple reading of the case” (298). In Act IV Salome says, “She speaks a beauteous language, but within / Her heart is false as powder: and her tongue / Doth allure the auditors to sin, / And is the instrument to do you wrong” (IV.vii.429-432). Salome’s reference to Mariam and gunpowder evokes an implicit tie to the contemporaneous gunpowder plot.

Ferguson states that “many of Cary’s contemporary readers – not only those in her own circle who knew of her religious leanings – would have seen in Salome’s statement about a heart ‘as false as powder’ a topical allusion to the Gunpowder Plot and, beyond that, to the Catholic practice of equivocation itself, so closely associated with the plot and its eventual aftermath” (301). Although Mariam is associated with the Gunpowder Plot, however, she rejects rebellion as a solution. More ambivalent commentary is provided by the chorus near the end of Act I, “Still Mariam wish’d she from her lord were free, / For expectation of variety” (I. vi. 517-18).

Although there is no direct evidence of her being involved in a love affair, this commentary attests to the possibility. Ferguson writes, “the audience/reader is asked again and again to evaluate differences between what characters ‘are’ (which may not be fully known even to them) and what they say both in dialogue and in soliloquy” (281). Despite Mariam’s complexity, her

decision to reject a Gunpowder plot-like rebellion against Herod does nothing but guarantee her own death. I believe Cary considers this decision to be the “tragic flaw” or the tragedy of Mariam.

Scholars tend to identify Cary with the character of Mariam. However, Cary demonstrated limited tolerance for stoic qualities. She displayed no interest in martyrdom which is evidenced in the biography written by her daughter as well as other Cary-created texts. On more than one occasion, she openly rebelled. She rejected her father’s offering of Calvin. Banned by her mother-in-law from reading books, Cary began to create her own texts. Clearly, as stated earlier, Cary equivocated on more than one occasion, most notably in the case of the kidnapping of her two sons and their arrival at a Catholic school in France when she refused to admit she knew their whereabouts. Cary, herself, was accused of Salome-like qualities by her husband soon after her admitted conversion to Catholicism. McCain writes, “Following Elizabeth’s conversion, Lord Falkland’s epistolary descriptions of his wife’s character referred to her ‘feminine wily pretenses...assisted by feminine mediation,’ her ‘serpentyne subtlety,’ and her ‘violent contestation with him, against duty and the Lawe Matrimonniall’” (4). She wrote copious correspondence to anyone she thought could help her, including Charles II. Lewalski notes that “she kept up a barrage of forceful, sharply worded and rhetorically effective letters and petitions to King Charles, Coke, Conway, and the Buckingham ladies” (200). This biographical information attests to the fact that Cary’s sympathies lie more deeply with Salome than has been explored.

The reader expects the Salome who is portrayed in the Bible as the person who requests that Herod hand her John the Baptist’s head. Religious artwork displaying Salome holding the head reinforces negative associations. Scholars such as Straznicky claim that Salome is “the

champion of unrestrained personal will” or “functions as the female grotesque” (“Profane Stoical Paradoxes” 127). Weller and Ferguson state that “her forthright rejection of patriarchal authority is depicted as transgressive and extreme” (111). They note that “The associations of ‘Salome’ as name and figure, are...compound and confusing, but her cumulative aura of wickedness presumably contains the representation of her transgressive behavior, marking it beyond the pale of respectable moral possibility” (40). Dowd writes that “What remains frighteningly center stage is her forceful rejection of the gendered politics of divorce” (112). Yet, I argue that Cary creates a positive portrait of equivocation in her re-invention of the character of Salome. I posit that Cary’s approach to Salome is an attempt at re-signifying meaning, like her later creation of Isabel in *Edward II*. Isabel, as mentioned earlier, was historically known as the “she-wolf” who rebelled against Edward but is rewritten by Cary in a much more positive light. Cary *seemingly* includes these negative, even evil characters, but a close reading reveals to the reader that Cary reinterprets them to mask her political aims. I argue that Salome embodies the epigram Cary uses in *Edward II*: *Qui nescit Dissimulare, nequit vivere, perire Melius*. Salome is the only character left alive at the end of the play.

Taken in isolation from the patriarchal rant of her husband, Constabarus, -- which ironically scholars use to evaluate her as evil – Salome can be viewed as politically astute. Salome states that law is, “not by precedent.” Salome protests the unprotected position Doris finds herself in. Unlike Mariam, Salome honestly reveals that she is a plotter: “And for my will I will employ my wits” (I.iv.296). Salome aims to get free of her husband, Constabarus, whom she has come to hate. She questions the unfairness of divorce laws:

If he to me did bear as earnest hate,

As I to him, for him there were an ease;

A separating bill might free his fate  
 From such a yoke that did so much displease  
 Why should such privilege to man be given?  
 Or given to them, why barr'd from women then?  
 Are men than we in greater grace with Heaven?  
 Or cannot women hate as well as men? (I.iv.301-8)

She covets the freedom of men and harbors no indecision, "I'll be the custom-breaker: and begin / To show my sex the way to freedom's door" (I.iv.309-310). Beilin notes that "Salome's seizure of male prerogative, accompanied by so cynical a view of law, shakes the proper order of things" (173). Although Salome's controversial speech is what has earned her a negative reception and elicited a comparison of her as the evil opposite to Mariam, it rings true as a political feminist tract:

I have devis'd the best I can devise:  
 A more imperfect means was never found:  
 But what cares Salome/? It doth suffice  
 If our endeavors with their end be crown'd.  
 In this our land we have an ancient use,  
 Permitted first by our law-giver's head:  
 Who hates his wife, though for no just abuse,  
 May with a bill divorce her from his bed.  
 But in this custom women are not free,  
 Yet I for once will wrest it... (I.v.329-38)

Beilin states, “Like her male counterparts, Salome is subversively witty – a quality most evident in act 4, scene 7, where she both deflates Herod’s hyperbolic blazons of Mariam and indefatigably prompts him to kill Mariam by various means. But her subversions, obviously, are more than verbal, frankly; claiming for women the male prerogative of divorce (1.5.334-339) and asserting the preeminence of will over law and tradition (1.6.454-55), she crosses the millennia of boundaries” (40). Salome does not hide her plan but tells it to Constabarus up front, “That I from thee do mean to free my life / By a divorcing bill before I sleep” (I.vi.418-20). Constabarus’s monologue, following Mariam’s exchange with Silleus, underlines the patriarchal view:

Didst thou but know the worth of honest fame,  
 How much a virtuous woman is esteem’d,  
 Thou wouldest like hell deserved shame,  
 And seek to be both chaste and chastely deem’d.  
 Our wisest prince didsay, and true he said,  
 A virtuous woman crowns her husband’s head. (I.vi.391-396)

He reacts, “Are Hebrew women now transformed to men?” (I.vi.421). “Let the world be topsy-turved quite” (I.vi.424). Salome, after this outburst, merely replies, “Though I be first to this course do bend, / I shall not be the last, full well I know” (I.vi.435-6). Salome explains where she gets her rights from: “I mean not to be led by precedent, / My will shall be to me instead of Law” (I/ vi. 453-4). When Herod returns, Salome’s divorce from Constabarus is presented as a matter of fact, not open to debate. When Salome hears that Herod is alive, she knows that Herod will kill Constabarus but she states her divorce with no need of help. Even she does not seem to view Herod as a legitimate authority – she is her own authority.



Salome asks Pheroras to tell Herod upon his return that Constabarus “hid / The sons of Babas” (III.ii.70-71). This is not a lie but true. Salome Previously defended Constabarus from Herod, saving his life, but now that she wants to divorce him and cannot because she is a woman, she is not willing to provide him cover. She says, “And ‘tis no more than Constabarus did” (III.ii.72). She then turns her focus to Mariam. In Act I, Salome recognizes Mariam’s possible designs on the crown. Mariam berates Salome’s base birth and proclaims her own: “For Mariam’s servants were as good as you” (I.x.224). Earlier, Mariam claims the throne for her sons over Doris’s claim for her eldest born as Herod’s first wife.

He not a whit his first-born son esteem’d,  
 Because as well as his he was not mine:  
 My children only for his own he deem’d  
 These boys that did descend from royal line.  
 These did he style his heirs to David’s throne;  
 My Alexander, if he live, shall sit  
 In the majestic seat of Solomon;  
 To will it so, did Herod think it fit. (I.i.135-142)

Salome seeks to prevent this from happening. She knows her brother’s jealousy quite well. She will try “First, jealousy – if that avail not, fear – (III.ii.84). Salome says, “As Herod’s fear shall turn his love to hate: / I’ll make some swear that she desires to climb, / And seeks to poison him for his estate” (III.ii.90-92). There is no evidence that Mariam plans to poison Herod; however, Salome’s claims are not entirely false. This act of equivocation allows Salome to survive. In Act III, Mariam, after learning Herod lives, echoes Salome “to live with him I so profoundly hate” (IIIx.138). Mariam underestimates the efforts and effects of Salome and her

mother's attempt to sway Herod, "Else Salome in vain might spend her wind, / In vain might Herod's mother whet her tongue: / In vain had they complotted and combin'd, / For I could overthrow them all ere long" (III.x.167-170). Mariam could, if she were willing to dissemble, like Salome.

Mariam and Salome seem to appear as binary figures but interpreting them in this way undermines their complexity. Salome's voicing of the unfairness of the divorce laws is not evil, but rebellious. Her part in convincing Herod to kill Mariam is more sinister but not completely unfounded politically given early conversations in the play between Mariam, Alexandra, and Salome. Beilin states that "Salome expresses Mariam's rebellious tendencies" (174). She notes that "Whether Salome speaks for Cary's rebelliousness or Graphina articulates her ideas on obedience is unclear" (176). She concludes, "Cary may have given Salome better lines because dramatic villains customarily reflected the attractiveness of vice, or it may be that she enjoyed articulating Salome's impudence much more than Graphina's pious orthodoxy" (174). I argue that Salome cannot be so easily categorized as a dramatic villain. Weller and Ferguson note, "Yet her actions succeed where Mariam's fail" (40). Salome, alone, survives this political nightmare.

The Chorus mentions all the casualties of that one fateful day – "This day's events were certainly ordain'd, / To be the warning to posterity: / So many changes are therein contain'd / So admirably strange variety" (V.i.289-92). Sohemus is dead, Constabarus is dead, Mariam is dead, Herod is mad, "Now doth he strangely, lunaticly rave" (V.i.287) – but there is no mention of Salome. Straznicky comments that the chorus at the end of act one berates Mariam for being unable to control herself but not Salome. "Salome goes by unnoticed" (127). Salome, like Isabel, is the one who brings an end to rule by tyrant.

Cary, in her drama *Mariam*, covertly critiques the absolutism of James I. Herod's struggle to keep the crown echoes the similar struggle of James I after the death of Elizabeth I. James' chief strategy to assure him the crown was the negotiation of his marriage to Anne of Denmark. Ferguson writes, "In depicting a prince who aspires to absolutism status but who, in reality, must negotiate and renegotiate his power both at home and abroad, Cary casts a skeptical eye on the institution of absolutism that her own newly installed monarch, James I, was seeking to reinforce" (330). Cary had close ties to the court and may have been influenced by Queen Anne's conversion to Catholicism around 1600 as well as her general sympathy towards the queen consort. Ethel Carleton Williams writes that Anne "believed that King James would prove to be the most perfect of husbands" (14). But marriage negotiations had been broken off once previously to Anne's disappointment. William Asheby, the English ambassador to Denmark, had at that time reported, "'The King is but a cold wooer'" (15). Williams states that "All his life, except perhaps for six months, King James disliked women, regarding them as inferior beings. All his interest was centered on the attractions of personable young men" (15). Of course, Anne had no knowledge until later when the King attached himself obsessively to two favorites, as Edward II does in *Edward II*. The first was Robert Carr and the second was George Villiers.<sup>18</sup>

James lavished gifts upon Villiers and confirmed knighthood on him. Williams writes, "As the months passed Robert Carr's power grew" (134). While James could not be content without him by his side continually, Anne "had to endure the ignominy of seeing her husband embrace Carr in public, fondle him and plant moist kisses on his cheek" (134). She detested Carr. Eventually, it was rumored that Carr wielded more power than the King himself. He gained

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<sup>18</sup> Information in this section taken from Williams, Ethel Carleton. *Anne of Denmark: Wife of James VI of Scotland: James I of England*.

land and titles. Carr was unpopular with the public, however. Williams states that “they believed he was responsible for the forced loans, and for trying to negotiate a Spanish marriage for Prince Henry” (138). He was soon “finding the work quite beyond his grasp” (138). Carr’s reign ended when he fell in love with Frances Howard, Countess of Essex, “that *femme fatale* whose evil influence cost Carr King James’ favor, sent Overbury to his death, and brought about the favourite’s ruin” (138). Thomas Overbury had been a long--time controversial but able server to the King. Soon after Carr’s wedding, the friendship not only began to disintegrate and James found “himself neglected, with long periods of boredom” (168). Williams notes that “the government was getting into such a hopeless state that drastic action was needed” (168). She states, “The dissentient lords decided that the only hope was to provide King James with a new favourite. Their choice fell upon George Villiers, an impecunious young man of twenty-two, but beautiful as a Greek god” (169). This is the same Lord Buckingham who, later, along with his sister, played such a large role in Cary’s condemnation and impoverishment after her conversion to Catholicism. At first, Anne liked Villiers. In 1617, he became Earl of Buckingham. Bevington and Holbrook note that Shakespeare includes a masque in *The Tempest* and that “Prospero bears some resemblance to King James. Both are imperfect rulers, self-indulgent, arrogant and impolitic, too proud in their learning, to ready to cast the administration of the state to others” (13).

Anne, like Salome and Isabel -- women and political leaders, was not a passive queen, “the Queen’s new masques led some observers to wonder whether James was master in his own house” (12). It was Queen Anne, not Ben Jonson, who instigated and enacted the negotiation between court show and court politics” (Cerasano and Wynne-Davies 85). The court masque as subversive text cannot be covered here but Anne established herself as a Queen consort who did

not always play by the rules. Cerasano and Wynne-Davies find that “women’s involvement in these entertainments was essentially political. Court masques, ostensibly created to celebrate court life, had a hidden agenda: “Rather than privileging a hierarchy of neatly aligned pairs, each mirroring the other, we are instead presented with a mass of conflicting asymmetrical lines of power” (99). The Queen used her masques to influence foreign diplomacy by inviting and disincluding various foreign heads of states at masque showings. Cary signals a connection between influential Catholic queens such as Anne and Henrietta Maria and her characters Salome and Isabel who respond with action to absolutist tendencies at court.

## 2.7 Conclusion

I argue that Cary’s closet drama is essentially political and traverses territory far beyond a tale of domestic tyranny. Her depiction of Herod deconstructs the rule of James I. Salome’s rebellion is a psychological version of the Gunpowder Plot. Cary consistently demonstrates this kind of rebellion through her own choices and actions which serve to underscore the rhetorical choices evident in her work. Barbara Kiefer Lewalski recognizes that “All her life Cary seems to have been caught up in conflict between social and ideological pressures to conform and submit and an inner imperative to resist and challenge authority” (195). Cary’s formal conversion “was a gesture of opposition and resistance” (200). Beginning with *Mariam*, Cary continued her politically driven work. Considered sub-par dramatic creations, “playtexts are understood not as inherently corrupt vehicles of authorial intentions but as material objects that record the specific cultural, intellectual, and political conditions that prevailed *at the time of printing*” (Straznicky *The Book of the Play* 7). Her drama is quite similar to the political work of Samuel Daniel and Fulke Greville which “find close parallels in contemporary Senecan dramas and histories written in the Tacitean mode – genres often perceived as dangerous by Elizabethan and Jacobean censors

precisely because they allow for the clash of ideological positions and for the sympathetic representation of resistance and rebellion” (194). Lewalski notes:

but they are not mere academic exercises, as is evident from their authors’ fears and the censors inquiries. Rather, they were a recognized vehicle for the exploration of dangerous political topics – the wickedness of tyranny, the dangers of absolutism, the modes of and justifications for resistance, the folly of princes, the corruption of royal favorites, the responsibilities of counselors... These dramas often make a strong case for aristocrats and magistrates who resist tyranny on the ground of their own rights and responsibilities to the state... The dramas do not overtly sanction or encourage rebellion; their perceived danger resides in the complexity and ambiguity with which issues of tyranny and rebellion are treated. (203)

Salome becomes the vehicle of Cary’s subversion.

Cary’s *Mariam* employs the rhetorical strategies of closet drama – neo-Senecan use of a past historical time and equivocation to frame and highlight contemporary political issues and responses to tyranny. Her use of the Sidney Circle closet drama genre, based on a neo-Senecan tradition combined with her Catholic faith informs a radical approach to politics. For Cary, the truth lies in her Catholic faith. When that faith is undermined by unjust interlocutors, be it the monarch, the Star Chamber, or a tyrannous husband, Cary relied upon her own conscience to create new laws and champion her own human right to freedom. The amount of material available on Cary’s conversion to Catholicism gives us insight into the nature of characters, such as Salome and Isabel, who need to lie to survive or undercut unjust tyranny. Weller and Fitzmaurice state that “Cary herself was forced to duplicity, to exploiting the possibilities of oral and literate expression, in order to subvert the system that threatened to silence her completely”

(91). Cary's long monologues provide insight to both male and female characters who are actors in these tyrannous systems and, like the Catholic recusant, must equivocate.

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**3 CHAPTER TWO: WRITING AND DISSEMBLING: JANE CAVENDISH AND  
ELIZABETH (CAVENDISH) BRACKLEY'S CONCEALED FANCIES**

‘Sweet Jane / I know you are a rare Inditer. -- / And hath the Pen off a moste redye  
writer.’

‘Bess, You must write too, write what you think / Now you’re a girl / Dissemble when  
you link’

W.N.<sup>19</sup>

*The Concealed Fansyes*, in manuscript form, copied by William Cavendish’s scribe, John Rollston, is part of a collected work entitled *Poems Songs a Pastorall and a Play by the Right Honorable the Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley* housed in the Bodleian Library (MS Rawl., Poet. 16). Literary activities such as those of the Cavendish sisters earn the praise of Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own* when she writes of, “those earlier women writers shut up in parks among their folios...solitary great ladies who wrote without audience or criticism, for their own delight alone” (66). The first scholar to introduce a print version in 1931 -- Nathan Comfort Starr – repeats Woolf’s remarks when he states: “The chief interest of the work lies in the artless revelation of the activities of seventeenth century ladies of fashion, living in the country” (44). However, critics who label Elizabeth Cary’s *Mariam* a “domestic tragedy” or scholars, such as Alison Findlay, who call Jane Cavendish’s and Elizabeth (Cavendish) Brackley’s play a “household performance” risk marginalizing the play.<sup>20</sup> The few scholars who

<sup>19</sup> William Cavendish in Manuscript book at University of Nottingham MSS Portland Collection, Pw V 25: 21-22. Beinecke and Bodleian Library, MS Rawl., Poet 16 *Poems Songs a Pastorall and a Play by the Right Honorable the Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley* (copied by John Rollston+).

<sup>20</sup> See Alison Findlay’s “She gave You the Civility of the House: Household Performance in *The Concealed Fancies*.”

have written about the play emphasize the autobiographical elements, which seem apparent, but I believe insulate the play from a critical reading. The remainder of the criticism focuses on the element of performance evidenced by the theatrically-tinged banter between the sisters with its feminist undertones.<sup>21</sup> There is, however, a dearth of scholarly work on this play.

While scholars note the existence of the marginal plots inserted into the play, no one has addressed why the sisters include them or comment on their significance. The pat observation is that they didn't know what they were doing as playwrights – an attack on most of the closet drama of the period –and stress the lack of unity plot-wise. In fact, Starr condemned the play: “the two sisters, in order to pass time which must have hung heavily on their hands, and perhaps to amuse the old Earl of Bridgewater, dashed off a Comedy. As a literary production, *The Concealed Fancies* is practically without value” (44). However, when the play is examined through the lens of civil war culture, particularly the act of the closing of the theatres in tandem with the new lax printing laws, the shape of the play makes more sense and its value becomes more apparent than simply a product of wealthy royalists in retreat. I argue for a new interpretation of the play as a coded royalist text intended for the ears of their father – and possibly other royalists exiled to Antwerp, Paris, and elsewhere – as well as Royalists guarding properties during the Civil War. Communiques like this – which resemble early print culture pamphlet plays -- express a continued effort to undermine the parliamentary government through the spreading of news along with an attempt to display continued support for royalist sympathizers. Like Elizabeth Cary, who uses the closet drama as literary equivocation by employing neo-Senecan historical distancing to hide her commentary on current events, the Cavendish sisters use closet drama and the genres of comedy and the masque to provide a cover

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<sup>21</sup> See Bennet, Clarke, Findley, Hopkins, Milling, and Raber.

for their dissemination of royalist news. Royalists would be looking for this kind of coded information. First, I explore the significant literary activities of the Cavendish family. Second, I provide historical background on the English Civil War directly related to Cavendish and his daughters. Third, I interrogate the marginal plots -- which all deal with life under military siege -- and the debates engendered by them. Finally, I analyze the exchanges and actions of Luceny and Tattiney and position the play as a dialogue between the Cavendish sisters and their royalist father. I argue for the play's importance as significant documentation of life during the English Civil War. I conclude that *The Concealed Fancies* functions as coded information which reinforces my definition of closet drama as literary equivocation.

### 3.1 Cavendish Literary Circle

To contextualize the literary output of Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth (Cavendish) Brackley in *Poems Songs a Pastorall and a Play*, I posit that the literary and theatrical discourse of William Cavendish define a significant motif in the cultural atmosphere of the family. Before the Civil War, Cavendish composed masques for the court. Alison Findlay adds that "Besides patronizing the work of professional dramatists and composing plays for the commercial stage, he staged productions in the family homes" (Findlay House 260). Charles I visited Welbeck on several occasions -- once to see a masque performed that was commissioned in his honor by William Cavendish --and twice more during Jane's and Elizabeth's residence before the siege by the Parliamentarians. The political intent of William Cavendish's commissioned play was evident. Charles I stayed at Welbeck in 1633 on his way to Scotland and was presented with a masque entitled *The Kings Entertainment at Welbeck in Nottinghamshire, A House of the Right Honorable, William Earle of Newcastle, Vicount Mansfield, baron of Botle, and Bolsover, &c. At his going to Scotland*. Lisa Hopkins notes that "Charles, who was often felt to be out of touch with his subjects

and to underrate the importance of his nobility, is here being firmly reminded of both” (26-7). The masque was intended to entertain as well as deliver a political message.

Not only did Cavendish pursue his own artistic career, but he took keen interest in the literary activities of his children as well. Findlay writes that “William Cavendish provided an example of literary and theatrical creativity which he encouraged his children to follow. He recognized that Jane had ‘the pen of a most ready writer’ and urged Elizabeth ‘Bess, you must write too, write but what you think....His comments to Elizabeth suggest that the family home was a privileged haven for uncensored self-expression” (Findlay House 259). The dedications in the *Poems Songs a Pastorall and a Play collection*, reveal a ready, existing, sophisticated audience for the women’s work: “There are, furthermore, fifteen occasional poems on unnamed ‘noble friends’ both male and female, who presumably read the works penned in their praise” (Ezell 285). These possible readers most likely included their father’s friends. Cavendish was highly respected for his literary career. Ezell writes:

Nor were these readers unsophisticated country squires. Newcastle was called ‘our English Maedenas’ by Gerard Langbaine for his patronage of drama and poetry. During the years his daughters were growing up, he numbered Jonson, Hobbes, Shirley, Suckling and Davenant among his literary friends, as well as minor manuscript poets such as William Sampson. Newcastle commissioned Jonson’s masque *Love’s Welcome at Bolsover* for the king and queen in 1634...his contemporaries viewed him as an astute, active participant in the literary world of his day. (Ezell 285)

The Cavendish sisters most likely had one of the family estates in mind as a site for the production of their play. Hopkins states that “Lady Jane Cavendish and Lady Elizabeth Brackley’s *The Concealed Fancies*, plays which were not only written for performance in these

particular houses, but also engage directly both with the particularities of their geography and chorography and with the political implications of their domestic and architectural spaces” (25). Findlay believes that it is possible that *The Concealed Fancies* may have been performed before an audience such as this. She states that “No evidence of a Cavendish performance of *The Concealed Fancies* has yet been discovered, but since household theatre leaves little documentary evidence in comparison to professional or court drama, this cannot be taken as incontrovertible proof that the play was not staged by the authors” (Findlay House 260). Whether the play was performed or not, the sisters appear to have had that intention.

Cavendish’s theatrical activities and his active support of his daughters’ literary efforts runs decidedly counter to any critical oversimplification such as expressed by Alfred Harbage who writes of William Cavendish (father to Jane and Elizabeth and husband to Margaret) as being “punished for his condescension to drama when the women of his family caught the fever and began to deluge him with their literary offerings” (228). Harbage refers to them as “the sad sister authoresses” (229). On the contrary, Newcastle fully supported and encouraged the young women to write – and took their texts seriously. The poems in the volume also provide evidence of the interest Cavendish took in his daughters’ writing through lines that answer his encouragement to write. Margaret Ezell provides a rich analysis of the poems including Jane’s response and promise to “be your Daughter in your Pen” (Ezell 293). Ezell writes that the early correspondence between father and daughters demonstrates that “the daughters had been active participants in their father’s literary activities, as instigators of pieces and transcribers of manuscript volumes” (Ezell 293). William Cavendish demonstrated the same interest and support for Margaret Cavendish’s work. He commented on her writing and wrote poems for

inclusion in her work. She, like his daughters, dedicated many pieces to him. Although not within the parameters of this study, the Cavendish Circle merits further research and study.

### 3.2 English Civil War

Historical details of the English Civil Wars contextualize the Cavendish sisters' experiences during the writing of the play. During the civil wars the meaning of "household" was upended and inverted when Parliamentary troops seized property, turning the formal household into an occupied garrison. This siege and pillage undermines the positioning of the play as a "household drama." Historian Barbara Donagan argues against the notion of the English Civil War as "unusually benign" (1137). She recounts bloody revenge on prisoners:

The English Civil War offered examples of painfully conscientious behaviour by captors and prisoners, but it was also marked by casual cruelty and atrocities: at Hopton Castle, for example, twenty-five prisoners were slaughtered in cold blood, while in Barthomley church in 1643 twelve prisoners to whom quarter had been granted were stripped, stabbed to death, or had their throats cut 'most barbarouslue and contrary to the Lawes of Armes.' (Donagan 28)

Properties taken by Parliament were ransacked and ruined. Further, Donagan writes, "If a besieged town refused to surrender, was stormed, and fell, it was legitimate if not admirable to sack and plunder the town and even kill its civilians, Reprisal offered a particularly useful justification for appalling actions, matching atrocity for atrocity" (Atrocity 1144). She states that "England knew atrocities, as well as marginally permissible cruelties, and not only those committed against the Irish. They also occurred on home ground against the home-grown" (1137). The Battle of Naseby (1645), where one hundred women were murdered, is a compelling illustration. The women were mistaken to be Irish, but were, actually, Welsh. Donagan argues



that “Even in the first year, less bitter than the second, massacres of soldiers who had surrendered or of women after the battle of Naseby, the hanging – with sadistic preliminaries – of civilians in Dorset, the more prolonged sadism and appalling conditions inflicted on prisoners at Oxford, the treatment of Irish men and women, all endanger any conception of a kinder, gentler war” (1146). The present threat to Jane and Elizabeth Cavendish, during the sieges of Cavendish property, should not be dismissed.

Several critics have noted the siege of the Cavendish estates, Bolsover and Welbeck in 1644. William Cavendish fought for the royal cause in the first civil war. Both he and Prince Rupert of the Rhine led at The Battle of Marston Moor. His command ended in his disastrous defeat here against Cromwell’s men, Lord Fairfax and Lord Manchester, where over 4000 troops were killed and 200 taken prisoners. Most of the royalist weaponry was confiscated. Newcastle fled to Hamburg then Paris with two of his sons and his brother, “leaving Jane as the senior family member remaining at a home suddenly located within enemy territory” (Bennet 2). The young women’s mother, Elizabeth Bassett, had died the previous year.

Critics have downplayed the seriousness of the sieges at Welbeck and Bolsover, echoing the Earl of Manchester’s friendly account of the siege. Alison Findlay offers this quote by Manchester: “When the Earl of Manchester captured Welbeck on 2 August 1644, he reported that ‘Newcastle’s daughters and the rest of his children and family are in it, unto who I have engaged myself for their quiet abode there’ (Findley House 263). Cerasano and Wynne-Davies, who re-published the play in 1996, barely recognize the realities of civil war occupation at Welbeck. They write, “A similar protective coterie surrounded Elizabeth Brackley and Jane Cavendish, for despite the difficult circumstances they had to endure during the Parliamentary occupation of their home, their father, brothers, and husbands all encouraged their skills as

writers” (4). Cerasano and Wynne-Davies attest to a quiet siege: “The women needed to be enterprising because Welbeck was captured by the Parliamentary forces on 2 August 1644, notwithstanding letters sent to Lord Fairfax, the Parliamentary general, which reveal that they were treated with respect and consideration” (127). Elizabeth Clarke writes that “Jane Cavendish spent the civil war in a literal state of confinement at Welbeck, which served as a garrison for royalist troops until the Earl of Manchester took Welbeck in August 1644. Thereafter the parliamentary garrison must have turned the house into a kind of prison for Jane and her sisters” (133). Clarke’s appraisal of the house as “a kind of prison” undermines the seriousness of these situations.

Interestingly, however, Welbeck was seized by the Earl of Manchester, who, along with Lord Fairfax, had devastated and humiliated Cavendish at Marston Moor. The Earl of Manchester notoriously disliked Cavendish and moved to secure his properties soon after the battle. Jane Milling counters Manchester’s peaceful account:

On 2 August, 1644, Manchester reported that Welbeck had fallen to his troops and he had assumed control from the Duke’s daughters and all his children. By 12 August, Bolsover Castle, which had also been under siege, fell to the Parliamentary forces. Its 200 defenders were disbanded; its ammunition, most of its plate and resources were confiscated and it was garrisoned with loyal troops under the governorship of Col. Francis Thornhagh. (263)

Like Donagan, Milling describes a castle taken by force and pillaged. Scholars who do not recognize the significance of the occupation do a disservice to the experience of the young woman and their attempts to stave off parliamentarian takeover. Milling explains, “Ten days later, Bolsover Castle also surrendered to the Parliamentary troops. It seems possible that the

sisters remained in Welbeck, writing *The Concealed Fancies* in late 1644 or early 1645, although they did make attempts to recover Bolsover Castle” (263). She finds that “Jane and Elizabeth’s direct engagement with the military realities of the Civil War is explored in the Ballamo plot of *The Concealed Fancies*” (263). An additional struggle occurred when Welbeck was temporarily recovered to Royalist hands in July of 1645. By November it was back in control by Parliament. These ongoing sieges and recovery attest to the seriousness of the Cavendish sister’s position. Jane made attempts to save some of father’s Van Dyke collection – ostensibly acts her parliamentary captors would not appreciate.

The Fairfax letter Cerasano and Wynne-Davies refer to is included in Nathan Starr Comfort’s Introduction to the play. It reads as follows:

For his Excellence the Lord Fairfax, these humbly present.

May it please your Lordship.

Your favors are so continued us, that they are not only to be acknowledged, but repeated as comforts, since your lordship’s care of us we may justly confess is much beyond our merit. Now give us leave to present our humble thanks to your lordship for your noble favors, which oblige us as long as we live to owe your excellence a faithful acknowledgement. Colonel Bright hath been lately at Bolsover, and is to give your lordship some account of that garrison.

We linger our remove from thence till we have some certainty of that business, hoping.

That if he concur with the committee of Derby and some others for disgarrison of that place, to have the favor to be admitted to that house., which we the more desire, by reason that town is assigned to us for maintenance, which will yield very little, I fear, if it

continue still a garrison. However, whatsoever your excellence's pleasure, it shall be most welcome to Your lordship's most humble and obliged servants,

Jane Cavendysshe

Fra. Cavendysshe

April 17<sup>th</sup> 1645

My sister Brackley presents her most humble service to your lordship, and gives your excellence many thanks for the favour of your lordship's protection

Comfort writes, "But Welbeck was not yet lost for King Charles. In July, the former governor of the manor, Colonel Fretchville, and a Frenchman, Major Jammot, recaptured the Abbey in a brisk little engagement. Newcastle's daughters were almost certainly there at the time. And three weeks later the King himself stopped off there during his northern campaigning... However, in November 1645, the Abbey seems again to have been in the hands of the Parliamentarian" (43). Lisa Hopkins notes the extensive damage sustained to the Cavendish properties – "so much of his own property had been violated and despoiled during the Civil War" (Hopkins 37). The time line of these occurrences and communication is significant: Marston Moore 2 July 1644, taking of Welbeck 2 August 1644, taking of Bolsover 12 August 1644, Jane's letter to Fairfax 17 April 1645, the retaking of Welbeck by Royalists and the King's visit June 1645, the retaking of Welbeck by Parliamentarians November 1645 – indicates that we might approach Jane's letter more skeptically than scholars have thus far – this contested space faced multiple turnovers in just a little over one year. Clearly, the letter flatters Fairfax, but assuredly contains elements of dissembling. The young women could not regard the men who humiliated their father in a respectful light.

Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Cavendish Brackley deserve to be added to Margaret Ezell's list: "History abounds with accounts of heroic women such as Lady Halkett, Lady Brilliana Harley, and Lady Fanshawe, actively involved on both sides of the conflict, defending their homes from military attacks, enduring sieges, and spying on the enemy" (287). Cerasano and Wynne-Davies hint of their involvement in these sorts of activities, "the sisters continued at Welbeck, aiding the King's cause as best they could; for example, by sending military information to the King's commanders at Oxford" (127). I argue that *The Concealed Fancies* functions as a source of coded royalist information.

### 3.3 Censorship Through Theatre Closures

Literature and theatre scholars emphasize the closing of the theatres from 1642-1660 as something of a totality when dramatic production ceased and was completely censored.<sup>22</sup> A closer look at the 1642 edict and the historical milieu reveals that dramatic production was infinitely more complex.:

Whereas the distress and Estate of Ireland, steeped in her own Blood, and the distracted Estate of England, threatened with a Cloud of Blood by a Civill War, call for all possible Means to appease and avert the Wrath of God, appearing in these Judgements; among which, Fasting and Prayer have been tried to be very effectual...and are still enjoyed; and whereas Publike Sports do not well agree with Publike Calamities, not Publike Stage-playes with the Seasons of Humiliation, this being an Exercise of sad and pious solemnity, and the other being Spectacles of Pleasure, too commonly expressing lascivious Mirth, and Levitie it is therefore thought fit, and Ordained, by the Lords and Commons in this Parliament Assembled, that while these sad Causes and set times of

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<sup>22</sup> The reason so little scholarship exists on theatre of this period is that traditionally it has been seen as unworthy of attention.

Humiliation doe continue, publike Stage-playes shall cease and be forborne, instead of which are recommended to the People of this land the profitable and seasonable considerations of Repentance, Reconciliation and Peace with God, which probably may produce outward Peace and Prosperity, and bring again the Times of Joy and Gladness to these Nations. (Wiseman 1)

Susan Wiseman unpacks this edict, proposing that critical reaction has offered false assumptions about a dearth of theatre practice during the years 1642-1660. Wiseman writes, “Most critics, therefore, use a single model of censorship with regard to 1642. They assume, first, that those who issued the edict wanted the stage closed permanently, secondly, that they more or less achieved this and, finally, therefore, they assume that censorship operates by stopping meaning” (15). She argues against a simple interpretation of censorship as announced in the edict, “The outbreak of war and the ban on theatre in 1642 were the product of something infinitely more complicated than the seizure of power by a group of fanatics who were the parliamentary embodiment of anti-theatrical polemicists” (Wiseman 16). I believe that Wiseman’s view that censorship in non-binary terms allows for the creation of a new understanding of dramatic agency occurring during the Interregnum. Considering the main stage theatres as the only arena for dramatic writing ignores a plethora of alternative possibilities. She argues:

In the complex cultural history of British theatre this text is taken to mark the end of a period considered to be Renaissance drama. It is usually found serving the purposes of periodicity in theatre history, which characterizes 1642-1660 as a gap between two ‘national’ dramas. Often in studies of Renaissance and Restoration drama and theatre it *replaces* discussion of the period, standing by synecdoche for eighteen years of largely

unacknowledged and uninvestigated but immensely diverse dramatic, and some theatrical activity. (Wiseman 1)

The attempt at censorship, in the case of the closing of the main-stage theatres, drove dramatic expression somewhat underground into other, hybrid theatrical forms – print texts highly dependent upon dramatic discourse. Theatre -- always considered politically subversive – found ways to continue and perhaps become even more radical. Wiseman notes that censorship “does not produce an absence of meaning but changes, even transforms, the discursive field” (Wiseman 16). It is this complex discursive field that the play, *The Concealed Fancies*, belongs to.

### **3.4 Star Chamber Closing and the Growth of Secret Communication**

The abolishment of the Star Chamber, in 1641, one year before the closing of the theatres, allowed for the translation of main stage drama into print culture. Lois Potter writes that the dissolution of the Star Chamber “resulted, indirectly, in the temporary end of licensing and a great increase in the number of works that came off the press” (1). Potter notes:

When Charles I gave his assent to the abolition of the Star Chamber in July 1641, its main effect was to remove the cumbersome ecclesiastical machinery which – among other things – meant that books had to be read and approved before publication by an authorized licenser, usually a churchman. The purpose of licensing had only partly been one of censorship. Its other function was to preserve the closed shop of the Stationer’s Company and its copyrights of specific works. Unlicensed printing was a direct threat to the livelihoods of Company members; it was this they tried to control, not the content of what was printed. (Potter 4)

Of course, this system was not conducive to the previous exclusivity awarded to the Stationers. Potter writes that, in fact, “It did continue, however, because between 1641 and 1649 Parliament had too much other business on its hands to set up an efficient alternative to the old licensing system” (4). The explosion in printing possibilities opened the floodgates to channels of communication. Charles I, effectively then, pre-empted the repercussions of next year’s closing of the theatres by providing royalists freer rein to distribute material. Of course, print culture was utilized by parliamentarians as well. But royalists were far from censored or silenced.

Potter significantly notes that “In fact, from 1642 to 1660 the source of the most deliberately and consciously subversive publications was the royalist party” (3). Despite a cultivation of a web of secrecy, royalists “constantly proclaim their intentions of committing treason at the first opportunity” (Potter 33). Royalists took part in a myriad of subversions: “Cultural rebellion was probably widespread, whether it took the form of celebrating Christmas in private houses, singing ballads, or engaging in amateur theatricals” (Potter 34). A plethora of political communication blossomed.

What resulted was a complex network of secretive, subversive publications. According to Potter, some were “false or nonsensical” including one document “Printed at Cuckoo time in a hollow tree” (2). George Thomason, publisher and bookseller, collected what is now known as the Thomason Tracts, containing over 22,000 pieces of contemporary publications. Potter notes that “Thomason’s collection includes much which had been secretly published, as it would have been defined as treasonable by one government or another” (2). John Wilkins published *Mercury, or the Secret and Swift Messenger* because of the “fear of secrecy” -- his aim was to “make secrecy public” (2). Potter discusses what Wilkins’s audience was interested in: “What attracted them in his book, at a time when the press was producing more than ever before, was



‘how we may conceal’. The paradox can be seen as a microcosm of the period” (2). Wilkins offers fascinating examples of efforts to “conceal” messages, “such as shooting letters in arrows and writing in invisible ink; ways of communicating more quickly (birds, speaking tubes, smoke, trumpets, and bells); separate languages like canting; and visual codes: shorthand, hieroglyphics, emblems, even pictures and musical compositions” (Potter 38). She states that royalists had specific goals: to reinstate “Charles I, and, after his death, Charles II” and that to look particularly at the “secrecy and encoded meaning... is essential to any party whose opponents control access to the media” (xiii). Later, I discuss Henrietta Maria and Charles I and their use of encryption in their correspondence.

### **3.5 Dialogue Pamphlets: Pamphlet Play Debates**

In the chapter on *Mariam*, I explored Catholic conspiracy’s use of equivocation to disguise and deceive, and how this subversive dissembling is given voice to by Cary in the play - also being the main characteristic of closet drama. Like *Mariam*, *The Concealed Fancies* is as significant as a reading text that dissembles. The marginal plots bear a resemblance to a subversive hybrid print genre to appear during 1641-42 -- the play pamphlet. These dialogues appeared as dramatic discourse but are, actually, news reports. S J Wiseman details the growth of “dialogue pamphlets” after the fall of the Star Chamber as publishers became news-oriented. Wiseman argues that “It initiated a hybridization of genres in which, for example, genres from newspaper to dialogue and playscript mimic one another” (25). Potter notes that “royalist news-pamphlets appeared in the form of miniature plays, with prologues claiming that they were offering these as alternatives to the forbidden drama” (34). Play pamphlets address readers as a theatre audience. (Potter 34). There was an “emergence of a sphere of critical commentary and storytelling about politics and war – the news market. These changes, which included the

ordinances against the stage, produced (amongst other things) a highly hybridized and flexible new type of pamphlet, sitting at the borders of print and oral culture, political theory and polemic, plays and news” (Wiseman SJ 69). Lisa Hopkins, in her work on play pamphlets, finds the debating characters “attempting to rethink their place in the political debate” (76). Like the play pamphlets Hopkins examines, Cavendish and Brackley create characters all readers can identify with. These play pamphlets include, “both political theory and fantasized resolution of political troubles by means of the subjective yet representative desires of the ‘ordinary’ subject or citizen and therefore provides positions with which a reader could identify. It can evoke, for the reader or a reader aloud, dramatic production and news simultaneously” (Hopkins 79).

Wiseman provides an example of this type of dialogue, usually in the form of a debate:

*Citizen*           ...did you not heare of the Guild-hall night worke?  
*Countryman*    What was that I pray, do they work in the night?  
*Citizen*           Noe, noe, they playd all night’  
*Countryman*    Why, I thought that Plays and playhouses had beene put downe:  
*Citizen*           Yes, so they were in the Suburbes, but they were set up  
                           In the City, and Guild-hall is made a Play-house. (66)

This debate appears in a playlet entitled *The Last News in London* (October, 1642) and indicates, according to SJ Wiseman, that “‘news’ in the 1640’s included many different genres” (66).

Wiseman notes that “Such texts have been understood as plays manqué, ‘dramatic but not dramas.’ However, they make sense in part in relation to the genres of pre-war theatre, but are also symptoms of the changed relationship between politics, print, and theatre in 1640-42” (68).

The lessening of restrictions on print combined with the censorship of the theatre contributed to form a new mode of dramatic communication.

There is no doubt that these dramatic texts fulfilled a political purpose. These texts, “simultaneously a ‘play’ or playlet and a sub-genre of news, occupying a similar market position to other genres which attempted to influence the political ferment” (SJ Wiseman 69). However, that does not lessen their significance as artistic and cultural documents. Raber contextualizes royalist writing and the subversive reputation it engendered during the Civil Wars:

The civil conflicts of the 1640’s and the closing of the theaters in 1642 made private reading of play texts and musing on their possible political significance a complex form of political resistance. Lois Potter documents the explosion of tracts, broadsheets, and ephemeral publications produced by both royalists and republicans during the 1640’s and 50’s, which she argues is characterized by the paradox of ‘secret publication,’ a phrase that connotes not only the underground production of news-sheets but the variety of strategies used to obscure authorship and source. While the monarch still controlled the press, secret writing shielded parliamentary authors from official retribution. After the king was put on the defensive, writers with royalist sympathies evaded government censorship apparatuses through the same sort of anonymous and ephemeral publications. Although reading subversive texts on either side of the controversy was not necessarily a punishable offense, the *act* of reading was clearly redefined in this climate of conflict and suspicion; it became always at least potentially subversive since it eluded precisely the kind of overt government control that closure of the public theatres represented. (Raber 190)

These writings enabled the royalists to survive, “the royalist community coped with defeat by adopting what might be called a philosophy of secrecy...royalist literature fulfilled the functions most necessary for the culture of a repressed group: enabling communication and consolidating

its sense of itself as an elite” (Potter 113). *The Concealed Fancies* belongs to royalist literature meant to secretly inform and offer royalist support.

As mentioned previously, literary scholars, historically, are puzzled by texts that do not conform to genre and hence condemn them as failed texts. Potter notes that “A great deal of this material, however, poses problems of definition. It is often meaningless – and even so to speak, genre-less – without an understanding of its context” (xi). Historical context, specifically, here, information on the growth of popular print culture and its hybrid forms, such as the pamphlet play, allows us to better understand the aims of these writers, specifically royalist playwrights composing material during the English Civil War.

### 3.6 Marginal Plots

I begin my reading of the subplots Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth (Cavendish) Brackley develop in *The Concealed Fancies* by including this quotation on marginality by Jonathan Culler:

This concentration on the apparently marginal puts the logic of supplementarity to work as an interpretive strategy: what has been relegated to the margins or set aside by the previous interpreters may be important precisely for those reasons that let it be set aside.... Interpretation generally relies on distinctions between the central and the marginal, the essential and the inessential: to interpret is to discover what is central to a text or group of texts. On the one hand, the marginal graft works within these terms to reverse a hierarchy, to show that what had previously been thought marginal is in fact central. But on the other hand, that reversal, attributing importance to the marginal, is usually conducted in such a way that it does not lead simply to the identification of a new

center... but to a subversion of the distinctions between essential and inessential, inside and outside.<sup>23</sup>

Culler argues for the significance of the marginal – in fact, the marginal is the essential. This is a useful lens offering a possible answer to the question of why the Cavendish sisters included these scenes which seem to have little to do with the play.

State of the siege news is dramatized in eight scenes of subplot in *The Concealed Fancies*. The main “comic” plot is riddled with scenes of debate. I also would like to include two additional scenes that feature Luceny and Tattiney as I believe they do not fit in neatly with the main plot of the play. Scholars represent the subplots, in general, as adding color to the main plot involving Luceny and Tattiney and their suitors. Milling writes, “these snippets feed into the central plot and flesh out the sense of life in a great house under siege, occupation and finally, at liberty” (413). However, these plots reveal a more important strategy: to report as news the state of the royalists to William Cavendish and exiled outsiders.

The first of these scenes represents daily life in general. The Cavendish sisters signal to the reader that they are beginning to portray of daily life under siege. This first subplot scene featured in Act I has Gravity, the cook, and Jack, the kitchen boy, discuss taking care of and preparing food for the ladies under siege, including Lady Tranquility, and the cook’s frustration with pleasing them. This scene does not seem to report any information to the reader but sets up an expectation that more news is to follow.

The first news scene in Act III offers commentary on the royalist position as poorly planned and poorly guarded. It also reveals a dangerously low royalist morale. Mr. Proper, Mr.

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<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*.

Friendly, and Mr. Devinity debate the Royalist response to imminent Parliamentary takeover.

Mr. Proper begins the scene with direct mention of the siege:

PROPER

Come, what, a siege?

FRIENDLY

By God, I think so; but where's the relief?

I'm sure our party is now as flat as a flounder.

PROPER

And this garrison flatter than any.

FRIENDLY

Pox on it! I know that. Where's our officers?

PROPER

Why, the old man is at the works.

FRIENDLY

Have we not more? (III.i.1-8).

This covert passage informs the reader of several royalist issues that exiled royalists may not be fully aware of: that a royalist castle has been seized, and that the governor of the castle is at the military barriers. The "gentleman ushers," or those servants left to "fight as well as a gentleman usher shall" prefer being lame and "cashiered" or dismissed. They would prefer to just receive a pension, instead of fighting, which "will buy sack and claret enough." The scene ends with the two men off to drink their cares away. This scene also reports that the main royalist officer is "confounded" -- being French and not able to understand the language. This might be a direct reference to the Frenchman, Major Jammot, mentioned earlier. In addition, Mr. Devinity states

that “the works are not made high enough, for the enemies, if shot will enter into every chamber of the house” (III.i.26-28).<sup>24</sup> The reader of such news would understand the royalist position in England to be quite vulnerable at best.

In fact, the following short scene, which is one of the Luceny and Tattiney scenes that does not fit into the main plot of the play and could be considered part of this set of sub-scenes, reiterates the emotional crisis of royalists left behind. Luceny and Tattiney debate the proper reaction to the war. Luceny maintains that it is better to “go on wisely on a resolute ground” (III.ii.4). Tattiney, however, is resolute to not hide her feelings of sadness:

TATTINEY

Grief, I wonder you should angry be with

Me,

Thou didst not see me till after I was thee,

But patience I have considered with myself, and

Can Tell you, sadness is the best, which I'll be and

Am; Yours is a madness, for quiet you will see,

But I'll grieve to the bone, anathema, will be. (III.ii.8-16)

An angel enters and tells the young women not to be angry but to suffer with friends until a “happy gain” occurs which brings joy. These two passages together communicate a shaky steadfastness under severe conditions which threaten to engulf royalists left behind to defend property.

The next news scene underscores fear of censorship by royalists. In Act III, the characters, Action and Moderate, two royalist prisoners held at the Bellamo estate, debate the

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<sup>24</sup> See the Cerasano and Wynne-Davies edition of the play which will be referred to going forth.

utility of self-censorship. It emphasizes the threat to royalists who do not control their tongues. The playwrights bring attention to the news-like quality of this debate when Action immediately asks the new prisoner, Moderate, “Pray, what news?” (III.vi.3). Moderate responds by saying, “Alas sir, I wish there were no news...” signifying that the news is bad. Action says, “A pox take them all and the devil go with them, for they are a company of knaves” (III.vi.8-10). Moderate warns him to take heed and watch his tongue because “It may do you hurt, and our party no good” (III.vi.13-14). Self-censorship can serve to protect royalists for parliamentary harm.

However, self-censorship is exactly what the Cavendish sisters do not heed. Right under the nose of parliamentarians, they hide scenes of news and information in play form – even as main stage plays are banned. The sisters use language to dissemble – not to be taken by critics of their real intention. In a discussion of Action’s choice of words for parliamentarians, Findlay writes, “Jane and Elizabeth’s scrupulously polite letter to ‘His Excellent the Lord Fairfax’ suggests they followed such council themselves, whatever their true feelings about the ‘company of rascally knaves’” (She Gave You 63). I would argue, however, that the playwrights’ use of the phrase “a company of knaves” and “rogues” in *The Concealed Fancies* echoes their “polite” tone to Fairfax. The use of these words is a cover. These covers, or dissembling, allows the playwrights to reveal darker information when Action next talks about the conditions he has been under.

The scene continues to reveal news about treatment of prisoners captured by parliamentary forces. Moderate states that “imprisonment has made you mad” (III.vi.19). The authors more than hint that Action has been tortured when he states, “I was put into such a room for talking, as I had no bigger window to take breath at than the bigness of my little finger, and no more to piss” (III.vi.16-18). Moderate warns Action that words such as these should be



spoken “not in this garrison. And thus much known will hang you” (III.vi.23-24). Action, who refuses to remove his hat for parliamentary soldiers says to Moderate, “Let’s now handsomely send to our party, to come to take their horses, and if possible, to take this house” (III.vi. 33-35). Moderate refuses and states, “I will not be of this high-flown no-design. Go sir, and sleep, for this can prove nothing” (III.36-38). The scene, which includes a plot to retake the seized property, is later echoed by the Stellow brothers. It is significant because it lets royalists know the real danger they face by parliamentarians seeking information. Action has been physically tortured and through this news the Cavendish sisters reveal real parliamentary actions.

A debate in the next act signals to the royalists that not all hope is lost, however, and that small pockets of resistance still exist against the odds recounted earlier. This scene reverses the former scenes of low morale and confusion. The Cavendish sisters stage a scene between Elder Stellow and Younger Stellow who debate a counter-siege. Elder Stellow is incensed: “My lady and mistress captive, a prisoner! Can Stellow suffer that? I’ll her relieve!” His call to rally is countered by his brother who believes that by dying, “my corpse can have no possibility of enjoying her” (IV.ii.12-13). His older brother sees it differently. Elder Stellow exclaims that, “Why it doth profit me if she could see me blown in a thousand pieces to show I die her martyr” (IV. ii. 14-16). In fact, the Stellows do free the imprisoned women when the younger brother agrees to the older Stellow’s plan. This passage calls for royalist sympathy and support despite the “impossible” events the brothers discuss.

A state of financial anxiety felt by the royalists who remained on their properties in England appears in much Cavendish family literature.<sup>25</sup> The next scene is notable for containing

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<sup>25</sup> See Margaret Cavendish’s *The Blazing World* for an example, pps.130-133.

news of the Royalist estates and the plunder committed by royalist servants as well as parliamentarians. The debate between Mr. Caution and Mr. Discretion in Act IV reveals a money-related plot which reports to royalists a concern over financial security. A plot is suspected by SH that Mr. Caution denies. SH, who has little interest in the account books given the state of things, refuses to look them over. SH believes that Mr. Caution is secretly trying to gauge whether she finds him honest or not. Mr. Discretion states that he “had a design to vex them” when he had one of the grooms tell SH that a coach-horse had been plundered. SH quickly recognized it as a lie. Mr. Caution states that the sisters “trouble business, and I love not interruptions” (IV.vi.24-25). Plots and counter plots abound, revolving around royalist assets.

The next news scene describes three cousins held prisoner at Ballamo Castle and signals at royalist dissembling to parliamentary soldiers and confidence in a royalist win. SH’s only postures as an imprisoned Cleopatra “in her captivity.” She only acts weak as a political strategy. SH reveals that she is even willing to continue to act when she adorns “their triumphs” -- Cerasano and Wynne-Davies state that this is a reference to the “ceremonial entries of victorious generals into Rome; Cleopatra was intended to adorn Octavius Caesar’s triumph” (211). There is a double dissembling here: SH will continue to “act” as Cleopatra, but the Cavendish sisters’ use of military language refers to a victorious return of Charles I to the throne.

Following this exchange, the characters debate on their mood. The morale of the imprisoned royalists remains grounded in the foreground of the news reports. The playwrights want royalists to know that they suffer greatly, maybe even greater than their exiled friends. SH wishes she could not think “that I might not remember, I had once been happy” (III.iv.20). Cicilley disagrees with her: “I am not in your opinion, for then I should remember nothing but misery” (III.iv.21-22). Cicilley says she is “dulled with grief” while SH is “stupefied with a

continuation of misery” (III.iv.28-29). They long to be reunited with their exiled family and friends.

In what I believe to be code, the playwrights communicate in the next “cousin” scene that William Cavendish’s personal cabinet is under threat for plunder by parliamentary soldiers. Although the cousins attempt to plunder the cabinet, I believe it could be a warning to William that his cabinet has already been compromised by soldiers. When the cousins open the cordial box, Cicilley finds a receipt and a letter that she identifies as having “one of his mistress’ seals” (III.iv.50). However, SH states “You’re mistaken, you judge wrong, ‘tis a cordial letter” (III.iv.51-52). The scene ends with SH promising to pick the lock on Monsieur Calsindow’s magazine, or cabinet, the following day. She calls the cabinet Calsindow’s “magazine of love” where “you will see locks of all manner of coloured hairs, and favouring ribbons in as many colours as the rainbow” (III.iv.82-85). The cousins are interrupted in their scheme to get into the cabinet in Act IV. Despite the fact that it is Calsindow’s own daughters who threaten to reveal the contents of the cabinet, I would like to suggest that the contents of the cabinet be considered at a more general risk.

Jane and Elizabeth Cavendish would have known of the capture of Charles I’s letters after the battle of Naseby and their subsequent publication as *The Kings Cabinet Open’d*, in 1646. Britland writes, “another Parliamentary weapon would be the publication of intercepted and sometimes deciphered letters, culminating in 1645 with those of the king himself” (2). The possibility of intercepted letters led Henrietta Maria and Charles I to compose a series of encrypted letters. In fact, “The first step in any correspondence between royalists was an exchange of ciphers” (Britland 72). Britland states that “the interception and opening of private correspondence was the most obvious example of secrecy becoming public” (Britland 9). In an

effort to stop intercept and stop communication between royalists, Parliament outlawed the use of cipher: “In April 1643 Parliament ordered that anyone who wrote in cipher or any other unknown character should be punished as a spy” (Britland 39). *The Concealed Fancies* not only hints that private content of cabinets and letters might be made public, but functions as a form of cipher, itself, with its coded scenes if civil war.

Milling discusses, intriguingly, that, in 1645, the contents of another captured letter-packet had been published under the title: ‘A New Discovery of Hidden Secrets In several letters, propositions, articles and other writings concerning the Earl of Newcastle, Capt. John Hotham, and many other malignant gentry All lately found in Pomfret Castle; the original wherof remains now in York, where they may be seen of any who desire it’” (423). This plot line in the play foreshadows the real events that occurred in relation to their father and his letters.<sup>26</sup> Milling writes:

The cousins contemplate their father’s magazine of love, with its artillery of ribbons within the context of a play written as the authors defend their family seat from plunder by the enemy. Under the matrix of war, the language of romance in the pastoral and play is translated into a resistance to the extra- textual political plunder experienced by the authors. The imagery of the play literally forms part of the armoury of these two young female writers. (Milling 423-24)

The playwrights’ suggestion that Calsindow’s cabinet is about to be broken into by a locksmith - - playful in the context of the cousins reading his love letters – heralds a more sinister reality for William Cavendish.

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<sup>26</sup> See these letters in *The Life of William Cavendish* Appendix IV (pps. 188-191).

SH's next short speech condemns the parliamentarians as well as acts as a battle cry for royalists. This speech reads like a political pamphlet. This final scene in which the cousins appear is immediately after they have been freed by the Stellow brothers. SH says, "Oh friend, I have been in hell" (V.i.10). SH, a prominent spokesperson for the royalists, tells what this hell was like:

I will,

And tell you how they good souls kill:

They have their harrier devils to betray

Each honest soul, that loves the true right way. (V.i.15-18)

Although the parliamentarians "good souls kill," this news reports that royalists should remain hopeful. The last line by SH signals that royalists continue united in their dedication to the "true right way" -- which means their aim to reinstate Charles I or, later, his son as rightful ruler.

Act V presents an offering of Catholic solace and sends a message of support to the French Catholic Queen Henrietta Maria. The sisters appear a third time as nuns near the end of the play and this solidifies their connection to catholic sympathies – during this time the playwrights' father and future step mother remained in exile in Paris – William Cavendish as a loyal courtier and Margaret (Lucas) Cavendish as one of Henrietta Maria's ladies in waiting. The two young women enter the scene as Catholic nuns who identify the sufferings of the populace under parliamentary rule. They hand out cordials and ribbons to the sufferers. The First Poor Woman refers to royalist exiles: "My friends, who I held more dear than my life, are in a far country" (IV.i.12-13). The Second Poor Woman specifically identifies the Civil War and parliamentary plunder as her sorrow. She says, "And I have almost lost my wits by plunder" (IV.i.19). Luceny hands her laurel, "as a promising hope of conquest" (IV.i.20-21). Cerasano and Wynne-Davies state that the laurel is a

“symbol of military victory; a laurel wreath was worn by victorious Romans” (212). In a longer speech, Luceny sings to Presumption and once again predicts the military victory royalists hope for:

Your stealing language further shall not creep  
 Into my sacred church, where I shall weep;  
 Praying that all may truly, honest keep,  
 For my ambitious store in votes ascends  
 For my loved, dear and absent friends,  
 That each upon their temples truly may  
 Wear several laurels, of each sweeter bay,  
 At their return then happy I shall be  
 In that blessed day, I once them more do  
 see. (IV.i.48-57)

Through Luceny’s handing out of “a bow of hope,” or a ribbon, Milling notes “their use of Catholic iconography” through “symbolic alms-giving” (421-22). These catholic references connect the dissembling by the sisters throughout the play to Catholic equivocation.

### **3.7 Luceny and Tattiney**

Jane and Elizabeth Cavendish, in the over-arching main plot, create what mimics comedy with the wooing of the sisters, Tattiney and Luceny, by Courtly and Presumption, culminating in a masque-like scene directly before their marriages. However, the sister playwrights complicate the use of these genres, which, in turn, serves to reinforce the subversive news stories. Their portrait of Luceny and Tattiney directly answers William Cavendish’s call to “dissemble when you link.” Luceny’s and Tattiney’s deconstruction of courtship and marriage and their plan for

how they will behave after marriage is full of dissembling and mocking. The style and substance of Luceny's and Tattiney's dialogue is similar to that of the catholic equivocation I note in Chapter One. Although William Cavendish's phrase refers specifically to marriage, I argue that when the sisters dissembling is connected to the marginal plots Jane and Elizabeth wrote into the play, dissembling takes on a considerably more significant meaning. William Cavendish and other royalists know, upon reading this play, that they can rely upon his daughters and other remaining royalists to continue to support the royal cause by supplying political information as well as protect financial holdings.

The young women characters communicate to their father and the reader that they are aware of exactly what this dissembling entails. Luceny recognizes that the marriage state entails the taking on of a new behavior. She says, "My destruction is that when I marry Courtley I shall be condemned to look upon my nose whenever I walk; and when I sit at meat, confined by his grave wink, to look upon the salt; and if it be but the pairing of his nails, to admire him" (II.iii.47-52). In the epilogue Luceny tells Tattiney that Courtley advised her to pay attention to and model herself after another young woman, "she might be your example" (Epilogue.41). Luceny replies, "she was a very good lady, and I accounted him happy that was her husband, that he would content himself with such a mechanical wife" (Epilogue.38-40). This slight is followed with an even stronger rebuke when Luceny states that this her behavior is no more than selling herself into slavery, "I know that, said I, and do the more admire why she will contract her family, nobleness and birth, to the servitude of her husband, as if he had bought her his slave" (Epilogue.43-46). She offers an alternative model where she retains her individuality by referring to herself by her first name, "My happiness, when I am in the condition of his wife to imagine him Courtley and I Mistress Luceny"

(II.iii.53-54). This linguistic act directly opposes the loss of identity that occurs when a woman takes the husband's last name.

Jane and Elizabeth Cavendish emphasize the importance of linguistic acts in *The Concealed Fancies*. Both Luceny and Tattiney question the words contained in wedding vows. Luceny negates their efficacy: "Why do you think 'I take thee' shall alter me? (I.iv.43). Tattiney asks, "For do you think, sister, the words saying in the church shall make me mind him more than I do now?" (II.iii.110-112). Tattiney comments that for Courtley and Presumption, "there are no miracles in their language" (II.iii.141). On the contrary, however, Luceny participates in the production of her own language: "Why that's because we have been brought up in the creation of good languages, which will make us ourselves" (II.iii.142-144). She refers to "Luceny's language" (II.iii.136). Under siege by soldiers and suitors, this reference suggests the creation of a language code. One of the languages Luceny and Tattiney discourse in is the use of military language to describe courtship. Upon Courtley's entrance she states, "I'll them defeat!" (I.iv.44). Susan Wiseman writes that "in this play the aristocratic lady's war is metamorphosed into witty linguistic combat" (95). Language becomes their armor as they subversively question patriarchal culture. However, this fighting back is also an allegory of royalist political response to civil wars and parliamentary attacks.

Control of the tool of language became crucial during the English Civil Wars. Halley emphasizes the significance of the means of control of language as "a bid for control of language and the social production of meaning" (Halley 41). In fact, she states that Edward Coke, mentioned in Chapter 1, "repeatedly expressed the state's relationship to English Catholics in terms of a struggle to control discourse" (Halley 39). The risk of losing control of language was high: "Coke implies in these passages that the state is a text, and that the great question is



whether Catholic traitors will be allowed to erase it or the forces of justice will be able to continue composing it” (Halley 39). The act of dissembling, or equivocation, undid parliamentary authority. Halley writes:

Coke’s repeated prosecutorial encounters with the Jesuits thus appear to be an historical instance of dominant ‘ideology’ insisting on closure and punitive constraint of meanings. Opposed by a subversive ‘textuality,’ a force of linguistic mischief that constantly undoes the neat lexical controls of its oppressors. (Halley 39)

The Cavendish sisters’ participation in this debate on language in the form of Luceny and Tattiney echoes the states’ aim to silence popish royalists and control an uneasy populace. Luceny states that “we have been brought up in the creation of good languages, which will make us ever ourselves” (II.iii.142-44). This underscores the validity of their royalist position. Courtley comments on the sisters’ pedigree: “Your mistress and mine, though they have great portions, are not to be tutored like a rich citizen’s daughter, or a great heir. They are of other breedings” (III.iii.81-84). This reference to the fact that they cannot be tutored or controlled by others is a communique by Elizabeth and Jane to William Cavendish indicating that they will not cave in to suitors or soldiers:

Tattiney

Aye, but I know who governs us both.

Luceny

Who prithe? Let me hear.

Tattiney

Monsieur Calsindow.

Luceny

Ho! My father, indeed. And that gentleman is the alpha and omega of government

Tattiney

What, shall Mr, Courtly be your governor when you're married?

Luceny

How often, sister, have you read your bible over, and have forgotten man and wife should draw equally in a yoke? (II.iii.29-38)

Luceny's and Tattiney's attitude toward Lord Calsindow indicates the importance they bestow upon being Cavendish and royalist.

Throughout the play, characters display a keen awareness of roles as acted. Luceny says, "Prithee, tell me how you acted your scene? (I.iv.2-3). In fact, an awareness of acting out conventional behaviors is noted by Presumption, Tattiney's suitor, when he suggests to Courtley, "Come let's go to them to see how they will act their scenes" (I.i.52-3). Courtley remarks on the sisters' "posture of coyness" (I.i.55). Courtney is aware of Luceny's discernment, "What a misfortune this to me, / T court a wench that doth so truly see" (I.iv.110-11). Luceny's acting covers her intent to behave in an opposite manner. At times Luceny pretends she is taking Courtley seriously, "I looked soberly, as if I would strictly observe him, yet dressed myself contrary to his instruction" (Epilogue.14-16). When Tattiney asks her what she will do when faced with the ultimate authority – her mother-in-law, Luceny is not intimidated and reiterates that she will behave as she likes while pretending to be obedient:

Luceny

Yes, faith, will I; but though I look obedient and civil to her, I will let her discretion understand in silence, that I know myself, and that I deserve thanks for coming into her

family. Therefore I will not lessen my conversation for her piece of sobriety” (II.iii.124-129)

More importantly, the young women display an awareness that conventional behavior can be mimicked. Luceny talks of “of making who I please believe I am an obedient fool” (II.iii.137):

LUCENY

Why then, a wife in show appear,

Though monkey (mimic)I should dare;

And so upon the marriage day

I'll look as if obey. (V.vi.3-6)

Luceny and Tattiney have not self-internalized patriarchalism, which undercuts the power the system has over them. Their behavior demonstrates that they will not necessarily go along with things as they are – including being docile royalists under siege. Martin Butler, in *Theatre and Crisis 1632-1642*, discusses Terry Eagleton’s comments: “According to him, the dominant ideology ‘incorporates within itself (not without ceaseless struggle) the codes and forms whereby subordinate classes ‘practice’ their relations to the social formation as a whole” (5). Luceny and Tattiney, in their acting, renegotiate the status quo.

### 3.8 Genre as code

The Cavendish sisters utilize genre to cover political aims. The masque that occurs towards the end of the play signals subversive intent. Jerzy Limon highlights the coding that occurs. Discussing plays such as *Neptune’s Triumph*, Limon states, “To obtain a license without Sir Henry’s intervention, political allusion had to be disguised, which is why the plays are equipped with a ‘mask’ of non-referentiality: they refute their link to the present by setting their plots in the indefinite mythological past...in the historical past...or in the timeless allegory”

(132). *The Concealed Fancies* does utilize this mask of genre, but Presumption and Courtley descend from the heavens “disguised as gods and singing” (V.ii.27-28). This unmasking, where the reader is notified by stage directions that a god is not really a god, is a parody of a masque -- the men are recognized to be merely mortal. Additionally, the play mimics a comedy with an ending marriage scene. However, no sense of stability is offered by the marriages. In fact, the play ends with four epilogues, one spoken by both Tattiney, and Luceny, one by Tattiney, one by Luceny, and one dedicated to William Cavendish. The first epilogue by the sisters reiterates the relatively unsettled marriage state which begins in Act I when Courtley says of Luceny, ‘I know not what to make of her; for when she smiles I know not whether ‘tis a scorn or grace’ (I.i.23-5). In the Epilogue Tattiney says of Presumption, “when I am in company with him he becomes a compound of he-knows-not-what” (Epilogue.68-9). They laugh at the thought of people who think “husbands are the rod of authority!” (Epilogue.88). The use of the genres of masque and comedy obscures the subversive agenda engendered in the pamphlet play scenes.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The decision by these Royalists to write a play after the 1642 edict banning public performance while imprisoned at Welbeck (which at one point was taken back from parliamentarians and thereby unstable territory) is a significant risk. Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth (Cavendish) Brackley committed an unlawful act right under the nose of their captors – and they included eight scenes of direct portrayal of the siege. They composed what came to be known as a closet drama; however, scholars believe they intended the play for performance and it may have been performed at Welbeck or Bolsover. It is my intention to suggest that the play was not written to entertain themselves while confined to their estate for that year, but to suggest that the manuscript served a greater purpose. The addresses to William Cavendish at the open

and closing of the play indicate that the sisters were attempting to communicate with their father (and perhaps other royalists). The unique situation created by both the closing of the theatres and the Star Chamber and a burgeoning print culture which saw the creation of a new genre – news and play pamphlets -- offered Jane and Elizabeth the perfect medium to continue the family tradition of artistic expression (fancies/imagination) combined with news communiques (concealed). Limon states, “To facilitate the kind of communication, texts had to be equipped with a number of signals which would draw the attention of the audience to the similarity of event and character appearing in the created world to their extra-textual and contemporary equivalents” (132). Specific details in the play would signal William Cavendish, such as the cabinet and the ribbons contained therein. According to Milling, these are part the Cavendish family choice of imagery, “The language of gifts and ribbons takes us to the heart of *The Concealed Fancies*, to the father’s closet which is said to conceal ‘favouring ribbons in as many colours as the rainbow’. Here again the reader is part of familial intertextuality (Milling 422). Milling notes that “In using characters, plots and language from their father’s work in their own construction of the father figure, the play works in form and content as tribute to and joke with the exiled William” (418). She describes the fair copy held in the Bodleian:

the manuscript book is in a clean, scribal hand and is clearly a presentation copy prepared for Jane and Elizabeth’s exiled father, Sir William Cavendish. The book contains a collection of eighty-five poems addressed to family members, friends and acquaintances, as well as meditations on romantic or religious themes. The poetry is steeped in the relaxed language of family banter, full of in-jokes and looser, more conventional verses. Elegies on their mother and dead siblings nestle beside jokey stanzas ribbing their exiled brothers, Charles and Henry. (411-412)

The collection's emphasis is on shared familial conversation. William Cavendish's direct challenge to his daughter to dissemble in certain circumstances was accepted by his daughters during the English Civil War. Not only do Luceny and Tattiney dissemble with their suitors but one of the cousins, SH, dissembles when she acts the part of Cleopatra to the soldiers. Although not catholic, this royalist family had deep ties to Charles I and Henrietta Maria, a catholic. William Cavendish advises his daughters to adhere to the Catholic technique of equivocation which serves to not properly inform people who might be your enemies of intent or truth.

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**4 CHAPTER THREE: ROYALIST MATERIAL AND CULTURAL PROPERTY  
UNDER SIEGE: MARGARET CAVENDISH'S THE CONVENT OF PLEASURE**

‘And all the Groves, Wildernesses, Bowers and Arbours pruned, and kept free from dead Boughs Branches or Leaves; and all the Ponds, Rivulets, Fountains, and Springs kept clear, pure and fresh’

Margaret Cavendish, like Elizabeth Cary, was prolific, publishing work in multiple genres which included poetry, science, philosophy, biography, along with two volumes of plays: *Playes* (1662) and *Plays Never Before Printed* (1668). *The Convent of Pleasure* appears in the second volume. Cary and Cavendish chose their printers carefully: Cary's play, *Mariam*, was printed by the esteemed printer, Thomas Creede, while Margaret Cavendish differentiated her work from her husband's (William Cavendish) by choosing her own printers, including a rare from the crowd in other ways as well. Known as “Mad Madge” because of her assertive behavior -- which included bearing copious amounts of breast in public and cross-dressing -- Cavendish astounded Restoration audiences with texts eagerly awaited by readers but labelled as crazy.<sup>27</sup> Scholars note that Cavendish texts still challenge readers today. Virginia Woolf described Cavendish as a “vision of loneliness and rot...as if some giant cucumber had spread all over the roses and carnations and choked them to death” (59-60). *The Convent of Pleasure*, like other Cavendish pieces, complicates genre by inserting an anti-masque, a pastoral, and a masque within one play. It is easy to see why Woolf finds Cavendish excessive. However, details about Margaret Cavendish's interests before the English Civil War and as an exile during the Interregnum provide clues to her inclusion of a plethora of Royalist elements in a single work.

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<sup>27</sup> See Firth note 1 (175) in *The Life of William Cavendish* where Pepys describes her as “naked-necked.”



*The Convent of Pleasure*, considered a closet drama like the previous two plays discussed in this dissertation, like *Mariam* and *The Concealed Fancies*, can be read as a piece of literary equivocation that seeks to mask political intent. Where *Mariam* seeks to expose political absolutism and support equivocation as the correct response, and *The Concealed Fancies* functions as a secret Royalist news communique, Margaret Cavendish's comedy disguises, or equivocates, her real purpose, which is to reveal the ruination of Royalist material and cultural property. First, I consider Margaret Cavendish's identification to the court and royalists through her use of Royalist symbols and icons throughout the play. She incorporates Queen Henrietta Maria's genre of choice, the court masque, her salon milieu, and royalist celebrations -- all linked to the French Queen's Catholicism. I then turn my attention to two other significant influences -- the separate Paris salons of William Cavendish and Sir Charles Cavendish, his brother. Third, I connect Margaret Cavendish's convent more closely to the Lucas family as I posit Cavendish's mother, Elizabeth, as a possible model for Lady Happy and their home, St. John's Abbey as an additional model for Cavendish's convent. Fourth, I explore the significance of Cavendish's inclusion of a Hortus conclusus, or enclosed garden, in the play and argue for its symbolic representation of the Royalist brain and imagination. Fifth, I note the historical significance surrounding Margaret Cavendish's family, the Lucases, during the civil war and the losses incurred by them. Ultimately, I argue that the action in the play is immediate, not a wistful rewriting, and serves as an allegory for royalist consternation for material as well as cultural property directly threatened and under siege by parliamentarians.

I would like to first argue for a possible reconsideration of the date of composition which I believe has led scholars to label the play "a fantasized restoration" (Crawford 190). Several scholars comment on the play's nostalgia. Julie Crawford finds the play to be a "nostalgic

utopian portrayal of pre-war royalism.<sup>28</sup> She writes that Cavendish's convent "restores royalist losses of property and privilege to their former glory" (179). Hero Chalmers states that the play draws "on this climate of royalist nostalgia for the ethos and activities of Henrietta Maria's court life" (87). In addition, the play is noted for its theme of royalist retreat. Rebecca D'Monte states that *The Convent of Pleasure* represents "an ideal of retreating" (93). Crawford finds the play to be about royalist "withdrawal" (184). Chalmers even suggests that "*The Convent of Pleasure* may be taken to be Cavendish's "belated adherence to the model of pastoral retirement literature" (87). Crawford specifically states that the play is property "on display, not under siege" (179). Based on a revision of the date the play was composed, I would argue the opposite: that the author presents fresh Civil War wounds not yet recast as nostalgia -- and suggest that the space Cavendish creates is not a passive retreat, as previously suggested, but highly active.

Scholars have debated the date of composition and note what is seen to be a delayed printing. The play was printed in 1668, but there is evidence that could place it even earlier than the 1650's that scholars such as Chalmers posit as its composition date. Scholars have offered various reasons for the delay. Shaver notes:

there was a hiatus until the first volume of plays in 1662, in part because the manuscript of plays intended for an earlier printing was lost at sea and had to be re-edited from original copies. Also, her husband's lavishly illustrated oversized folio on the training of horses was produced in Antwerp in 1657-58 at the cost of more than £1,300, a fortune by the standards of the time; it is possible that this outlay as well as the expense and effort of the permanent move back to England stopped Margaret Cavendish's printing. (Shaver 3)

Cavendish remarks on these 'lost sea texts' in letter 143 of *Sociable Letters*:

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<sup>28</sup> See Crawford, Nelson and Alkers, and D'Monte and Pohl.

“Madam,

I heard that the Ship was Down’d, wherein the man was that had the Charge and Care of my Playes, to carry them into E. to be Printed, I being then in A. which when I heard, I was extremely Troubled, and if I had not had the Original of them by me, truly I should have been much Afflicted, and accounted the loss of Twenty Playes, as the loss of Twenty lives... (203)

Shaver writes, “Beginning in 1662, Margaret Cavendish brought out a torrent of publications, many on science or natural philosophy at the rate of one or more volumes each year except 1665, culminating in 1668 with seven new or reissued folios” (3). The sheer immensity of publication in such a short time period supports the view that Cavendish wrote many of these plays during the Interregnum. Cavendish later published sixteen plays in two volumes, indicating the possibility that these plays may have all been culled from the twenty lost at sea.

One scholar, Anna Battigelli, predates the composition of the plays to possibly soon after Margaret Lucas wed William Cavendish:

There are reasons to believe that Cavendish composed her plays earlier than their publication date suggests... We know that they were not written before her marriage because she tells us that she began writing them only after reading her husband’s plays... Their attention to court life suggests that they may even have been written during the early years of her marriage. (25)

It is useful, then, to create a timeline that contextualizes the possible composition date: Margaret Lucas joined the court as a lady-in waiting in 1643, following Henrietta Maria into exile in Paris in 1644. She married William Cavendish in December of 1645. The siege and pillage of the Lucas property, St. Johns, occurred in 1647. Margaret Cavendish’s brother, Charles Lucas, was

defeated at Colchester and executed – not until 1648. Cavendish could have begun her playwriting as early as the beginning of 1646, once she had completed her reading of William’s plays. I suggest that *The Convent of Pleasure* may have been composed while wounds from the civil war are still quite fresh and when Lucas property and Margaret Cavendish’s relatives were in danger --while royalists were still doing battle with parliamentarians – not from a later perspective.

#### **4.1 Henrietta Maria: Masque, Salon, Catholicism**

The theatrical art form, the masque, served as one of the main forms of entertainment in the court of James I and Anna of Denmark, the queen consort. It is an artistic genre closely aligned with the monarchy, especially in its use of spectacular effects. Not only did these spectacular scenes appear at Whitehall, but masque-like scenarios were part and parcel of the performances royalty gave in public. The first appearance Henrietta Maria made in England contained masque-like qualities. Crawford notes that “The sea nymph theme invokes the masque that greeted Henrietta Maria when she arrived in England to marry Charles I: “it featured fifty young girls dressed up to represent the demigoddesses of the sea who had come to hail Henrietta Maria as ‘Thetis, queen of the waves’” (187). Cavendish notes, in *The True Relation of My Birth Breeding and Life*, that her sisters (and ostensibly, herself) went to plays in London which most likely included masques at Whitehall. Cavendish became a lady in waiting in the court of Henrietta Maria in 1643, following her into exile to Paris in 1644. Cavendish cements herself to the support of Charles I and Henrietta Maria with her inclusion of a masque in *The Convent of Pleasure*, and it is not the only piece where a masque appears. Her prose piece, *The Blazing World*, concludes with an extravagant masque scene with the Empress in battle. *Bel in Campo* includes scenery that is, embroidered with classical figures and allegorical representations common to the masque; statues

of Mercury, Pallas, Mars, Hymen, the four Cardinal Virtues, and the four Graces decorate the tomb” (Nelson and Alker 23). Once settled at court, “After Charles inherited the throne, much theatrical activity at court was promoted by the new Queen, Henrietta Maria” (Butler 3). Martin Butler states, “Stuart masques were always elaborate spectacles, and typically involved sumptuous scenic display and glittering costumes, as well as music provided by consorts of lutes, viols, and wind instruments, and actors and singers to perform the written text (3). Dances were at the center of the court masque. Spectacular effects included in the masques at Whitehall – most were produced by the famous team of Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones – were complex: “The House of Fame in *Queens* was embossed with luminous emeralds, rubies, and sapphires, and the *Theobalds Entertainment* (1607) presented a throne stuck about with sparkling gems” (Butler 7).

Recent studies have complicated the traditional interpretation of the court masque as a celebration of the monarchy. Erika Veevers argues that masques are politically driven depending upon the date of performance: “Masques were by their very nature occasional pieces: they were meant to ‘mean’, and the relevance of the occasion has been recognized increasingly” (9). Marion Wynne Davies echoes this sentiment: “The interpretation of the masque form which has come to be accepted over the last twenty years suggests that it reinforces the dominant hierarchy of the power it encodes: monarch over subject, King over Queen, parent over child, man over woman, and the conservation of order over the usurping forces of chaos” (99). She argues against this analysis, however, by commenting on the instability presented in the court masque: “Rather than privileging a hierarchy of neatly alignable pairs, each mirroring the other, we are instead presented with a mass of conflicting asymmetrical lines of power. These forces may intersect, but they can hardly be said to determine each other’s existence through a mutually closeting refraction” (99). In fact, Wynne-Davies remarks, “the Queens’ masque not only

challenged the gendered preserves of authorship but questioned the legitimacy of absolute male powers as symbolized by the Stuart King” (80). Martin Butler provides further evidence of a politically driven masque in noting the emphasis dignitaries placed on masque attendance:

The competition amongst the masque audience for access to the performances and, once inside, for good places to sit, testifies to their usefulness for binding the monarch, and his political elites into affinity. But masquing was also part of the international iconography of kingship, the visual language by which Britain asserted itself as a force to be reckoned with in Europe. By imitating ceremonial forms that were current across the Continent, these festivals recruited art to the service of power, advertising the court’s cultural capital and the dignity and civility of the British state. With their classical themes demonstrating the absorption of the past into the present, and their technological accomplishments asserting the prince’s authority over nature, they made London an equal to Madrid, Florence, and Paris, and the Stuarts a dynasty to rival Habsburg, Medici, and Bourbon. As is shown by the interminable squabbling over invitations between the foreign diplomats resident in London, Stuart festival became an arena where international politics went on by other means, and where the niceties of precedence were obsessively scrutinized for coded signals about the honour or disregard done to other nations. Masques allowed the Stuarts to be seen as confident, modernizing, and ambitious monarchs, whose cultural and intellectual accomplishments bespoke their wisdom, aspiration, and command. (4)

I will return to a discussion of this representation of instability in my analysis of *The Convent of Pleasure* and the resulting marriage between the Prince and Lady Happy.

Margaret Cavendish begins by including an anti-masque of “uncontained” women in Act 3. This section forms ten short scenes, all performed by women complaining about their horrific lots brought about by marriage and men. Butler states that in the traditional anti-masque, “The music for these dances was often vulgar. Several masque texts refer to ‘wild’ or ‘rude’ music, which typically meant drums and winds, and sometimes uncouth instruments were used such as rattles (*Queens*), cymbals (*Pleasure Reconciled*), and bagpipes (*The Irish Masque*) (10). Yet, the women’s voices in these scenes do the work of these uncouth instruments. These scenes are followed by a dance.

Finally, towards the end of the act, a sweeping masque-like spectacle is presented. The stage directions read: “*The scene is opened, and there is presented a Rock as in the Sea; whereupon sits the Princess and the Lady Happy; the PRINCESS as the Sea-God NEPTUNE, the Lady Happy as a Sea-Goddess: the rest of the ladies sit somewhere lower, drest like Water-Nymphs*” (240).<sup>29</sup> Cavendish emphasis on movement and light is similar to imagery presented in the masques written by Ben Jonson for Henrietta Maria. Lady Happy as Sea-Goddess utilizes water imagery: “On Silver-Waves I sit and sing, / And then the Fish lie listening.” She choreographs movement: “clear, pure, and fresh flowing water.” The Sea-Goddess says, “My cabinets are Oyster-shells, / In which I keep my Orient-Pearls, / To open them I use the Tide” (241). Julie Sanders writes that Jonson’s masque, *The New Inn*, “conjures up all the precious associations of light and movement that Henrietta Maria was so fond of including in her masques at court” (457). Veevers agrees: “In the Queen’s masques, with their emphasis on movement and light, Jones seems to create a contrasting set of images that depend on the effects of contemporary painting and suggest the ‘spiritual’ qualities of beauty and Light embodied by the

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<sup>29</sup> See the Anne Shaver edition of the Cavendish play. All references are to this edition.

Queen” (10). Later, I suggest that Cavendish puts forward these facets as qualities of her mother, Elizabeth Lucas.

Queen Henrietta Maria’s influence on English culture as well as her direct influence on Margaret Cavendish allows us to better understand elements utilized by Cavendish in the creation of her convent. The French queen, married to Charles when she was only fifteen, brought to England a cultural awareness instilled in her by her mother, Maria de Medici. This cultural awareness grew out of an established French salon life, one of the best known being the salon of Mme de Rambouillet at the Hôtel de Rambouillet. The salon emphasized *préciosité* and platonic love. Erika Veevers writes that, “The term *préciosité*, in its simplest sense, refers to the set of manners and literary tastes that had developed in France during the opening years of the seventeenth century (14-15). Veevers explains:

The fashion grew up in Parisian *salons*, which formed a world outside the court though with connections to it, and it influenced French culture throughout the century. The salons came into being partly in reaction to the coarse manners and morals of Henri IV’s court...The salons, or large rooms of private houses, became the meeting places for informal assemblies of people who shared similar interests. The assemblies were generally led by outstanding women, of whom Mme de Rambouillet became the best known, and were dominated by feminine tastes; the groups were usually small, and exclusive not solely on the grounds of social rank, but on personal qualities of manner, wit, or learning as well. The emphasis in these assemblies was on elegant yet easy manners which avoided the formality and showy luxury of the court, as well as whatever was thought to be common or coarse in behavior or expression. (14-15)



The Hôtel de Rambouillet seems to have been established as a retreat for weary Parisians where they could amuse themselves: “At the Hôtel de Rambouillet these people found a peaceful refuge where they could occupy themselves in conversation, writing, painting, and play-acting, and amuse each other with poetry, protracted wooing, and even with practical jokes” (Veevers 15). Henrietta Maria’s adapted some of the French salon’s ethos which she brought to London, but her version was not a carbon copy. Veevers notes the fluidity of behavior which occurred in these salons:

Henrietta’s version of préciosité is generally taken to be a more or less exact copy of that in vogue in France in the early seventeenth century and practiced by the *salons*. Certainly she helped introduce this type of préciosité to the English court in the 1620’s, and it continued to exert its influence throughout the 1630’s and beyond. Préciosité, however, was not a static set of ideas. Like most fashions it tended to move fairly rapidly through different phases, and to change its character according to its surroundings and the people by whom it was practiced. Henrietta’s version was not acquired directly from the Hôtel de Rambouillet, but from circles at the French court dominated by her mother, Marie de Medici. (2)

A central element of salon culture was the belief in Platonic love engendered by a focus on Honore D’Urfe’s novel, *L’Astrée* (1607), which was dedicated to Marie de Medici. Battigelli notes that “D’Urfe’s pastoral romance served as the source book of the Platonic system, providing a code of manners for polite society in France and England” (16). Veevers writes that “Probably the most important feature of *L’Astrée* was D’Urfé’s doctrine of Platonic love” (16). The book was one of Henrietta Maria’s personal favorites and served as a bible of sorts for salon culture.

Saint Francis de Sales (1567 – 1622), a Bishop Geneva and a Catholic saint, defined the doctrine of platonic love:

How good is it to love upon earth, as they love in heaven to learne to cherish one another in this world, as we shall doe eternallie in the next. I speak not here of the simple love of charitie, fo that must be borne unto all men, but of spirituall frindshippe, by which two, or three, or manie soules, do communicate their devotion, their spirituall affections, & make themselves to be but one spirit in diverse bodies. (15)

Veevers further explains that the doctrine of platonic love leads “the true lover from the experience (through the senses) of beauty and love in particular forms, to experience (through the understanding) of the universal Forms of Beauty and Love, and eventually to the direct perception (shared with the angels) of the heavenly vision of Beauty and Love, which is God” (16). The doctrine of platonic love was associated with all-female enclaves and pastoralism.

Crawford states that “The pastoralism invokes Henrietta Maria’s court entertainments, such as Walter Montagu’s *The Shepherd’s Paradise* (1633), in which women, including Henrietta Maria, took the male parts” (185). Of course, these activities were not acceptable to Puritans in London.

Battigelli notes, “Largely at issue was Henrietta’s use of Platonic love doctrines, which, as another critic explains, antagonized Henrietta’s subjects: ‘French in origin, artificial in manners, casuistic in ethics, [they] naturally aroused Puritan ire, which flamed even hotter as the Queen and her party displayed increasing allegiance to Rome’” (15). In addition to platonic love, Henrietta Maria’s milieu emphasized the concept of honnêteté which spoke to the behavior of women. Honnêteté “invested women with the Neoplatonic qualities – Beauty, Virtue, and Love – but instead of the extreme ‘woman worship’ of *L’Astrée* it recommended a conservative

feminism, in which women exercised their beauty and virtue in such a way to make for cordial relations between the sexes and for a general social harmony governed by religion” (Veevers 3).

After the Queen’s exile to France, she set up her own convent. In 1651, “Henrietta Maria, with whom Margaret Cavendish had gone into exile in France from 1643 to 1645, established her own convent at Chaillot” (Crawford 179). It was named the Convent of Visitandines. Crawford notes that this was “a former pleasure home of Catherine de Medici in Chaillot which had ‘fallen on evil days, lewd persons and shameless revelry’ and turned it into a convent” (202). There is a connection in Henrietta Maria’s convent between “piety to pleasure” (Veevers 21). In fact, these groups believed they set “a high standard of moral conduct” (Veevers 15).

Margaret Cavendish’s convent includes elements of Henrietta Maria’s salon. Foremost is its emphasis on female relations. Chalmers notes that “For an alert audience, the all-female groupings which both plays depict, with their focus on women’s eloquence and learning and their demotion of sexual relations, would echo the feminocentric culture of *préciosité* and Platonic love promulgated by Charles I’s queen, Henrietta Maria” (83). Crawford also connects Cavendish’s convent to Henrietta Maria: “Much of the plot of *The Convent of Pleasure* is comprised of a series of all-female dramatic performances, many of which invoke, even pay homage to, specific aspects of Queen Henrietta Maria’s female court culture, including the cult of platonic love, and the practice of dramatic cross-dressing (184). The virgins in the convent “accouter themselves in Masculine-habits, and act Lovers-parts” (229). Also included in the play is a pastoral performance where, “*The scene is changed into a Green or Plain, where sheep are feeding, and a MAY-POLE in the middle. L. Happy as a Shepherdess, and the Princess as a Shepherd are sitting there. Enter another Shepherd, and Wooes the Lady Happy*” (234-35). The language between Lady Happy and the Princess echo the language of Platonic love. The Princess

says to Lady Happy, “may I live in your favour, and be possest with your Love and Person, is the height of my ambition” to which she replies, “I can neither deny you my Love or Person” (237). The Princess soon remarks, “We shall agree, for we Love inherit / Join as one Body and Soul, or Heav’nly Spirit” (238). Battigelli notes that Cavendish’s love letters to William Cavendish echo Platonic rhetoric: “she appropriated the language of the Platonic love doctrine that Henrietta had imported into court culture...Lucas’s letters to William during their courtship in 1645 reveal a profound interest in the language of Platonic love, used in ways that parallel directly the language employed in the masques of Henrietta’s court” (12).

Cavendish’s emphasis on pleasure also finds its source in the court of Charles I. Lady Happy emphasizes pleasure as an essential element in being, as Madam Mediator calls her, “a Votress to Nature” (220). She intends to “incloister my self from the World, to enjoy pleasure” (220). Specifically emphasizing female pleasure, Cavendish includes a short poem in this section of the play:

*For every Sense shall pleasure take,  
 And all our Lives shall merry make:  
 Our minds in full delight shall joy,  
 Not wex’d with every idle Toy:  
 Each Season shall our Caterers be,  
 To search the Land, and Fish the sea;  
 To gather Fruit and reap the Corn,  
 That’s brought to us in Plenty’s Horn;  
 Cavendish ends the poem with:  
 This will in Pleasure’s Convent I*

*Live with delight, and with it die.* (220)

Lady Happy will not only incloister herself but will, “take so many Noble Persons of my own Sex, as my Estate will plentifully maintain, such whose Births are greater then their Fortunes, and are resolv’d to live a single life, and vow Virginitie: with these I mean to live incloister’d with all the delights and pleasures that are allowable and lawful; My Cloister shall not be a Cloister of restraint, but a place for freedom, not to vex the senses but to please them” (220).

One example of a royalist symbol and pastime is the tradition of the maypole: “The maypole and its dances were among the rural pastimes Charles I defended in his 1633 reissue of *The Book of Sports*. William Cavendish also defended them, regretting that under the new powers ‘May Games, Moris Dances, the Lord of the May, & Lady of the May...nowe Are forbidden, as prophane, ungodly thinges (185). In her pastoral scene, Cavendish the royalist symbol of the maypole. The stage directions announce: “*Here come the Rural Sports, as Country Dances about the May-Pole; that Pair which Dances best is crowned King and Queen of the Shepherds that year*” (238). Lines included in this scene, written by William Cavendish celebrate these royalist celebrations:

You’ve won the prize and justly; so we all  
 Acknowledge it with joy, and offer here  
 Our Hatchments up, our Sheep-hooks as your due,  
 And Scrips of Corduant, and Oaken Pipe,  
 So all our Pastoral Ornaments we lay  
 Here at your Feet, with Homage to obey  
 All your Commands, and all these things we bring  
 In honour of our dancing Queen and King;

For Dancing heretofore has got more Riches  
 Then we can find in all our Shepherd's Breeches;  
 Witness rich Holmby: long then may you live,  
 And for your Dancing what we have to give. (238)

Besides the inclusion of the pastoral elements, this short poem is significant for "hatchments," or "heraldic emblems, as on a family crest" and the emphasis on the importance of dance. (238).

The next stage direction reads, "A Wassel is carried about and Syllibubs" (239). The note to the text tells us that "wassail was spiced wine used for toasting, especially at Christmas; syllabub, a holiday punch made of milk and wine" (239). As Crawford suggests, "Maypoles and games were explicitly associated with triumph over the republic and with the return of the monarchy" (186-87). Royalist cultural identity included celebrations no longer allowed under parliamentary rule. Crawford writes, "popular festivities such as dances and drinking songs were thus also signs of royalism; celebration of these festivities flew in the face of parliamentary suppression" (186). The above royalist celebratory event, pictured by Cavendish, is directly in opposition to Puritan ideology.

It is hardly possible to separate the spectacle of the masque, as well as the ceremonial celebrations, from the Queen's Catholicism.<sup>30</sup> Veevers describes Henrietta Maria's version of Catholicism as French Devout Humanism, "in fact recognized by contemporaries as a moderate form of Catholicism" (6). She notes, however, that "the issue of religion was indeed linked with the Royalist shows" with "visual similarities between catholic ceremony and court spectacle" (12). Although Margaret Cavendish did not convert to Catholicism, she experienced a plethora of Catholic influence during her years on the continent:

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<sup>30</sup> See Erika Veevers.

What Cavendish absorbed during her stay in the Spanish Netherlands was the archetypal Catholic continental experience. As was the case with radical Protestantism in Interregnum London, the influence of Catholic sensibilities on the continent was not limited to theology and religious ritual. In Antwerp as I other cities of the Spanish Netherlands, Catholicism coloured every area of life, including social and community and gender relations, artistic and cultural styles and preferences, and even the theory and practice of science and mathematics. (Mendelson 6-7)

At the beginning of Act V, Cavendish has Lady Happy and the Princess exchange ribbons, catholic symbols used in *The Concealed Fancies*. Mendelson finds that Cavendish, rather, “responded to the medium rather than the message, the sensual and aesthetic appeal of Baroque Catholicism” (10). In essence, this became embodied in royalist culture. Mendelson states, “As Emma Rees has shown, performance, ceremony, and spectacle came to be; constructed and perceived as inherently royalist activities’ that exiles like Cavendish took with them to the continent” (4). Mendelson cites the particulars of Protestant repression: “exiled Royalists associated Interregnum leaders with the philistine persecution of conspicuous consumption in general and of the arts in particular. Radical Protestants were assumed (with good reason) to be anti-theatre, including ‘legitimate’ theatre, street theatre, carnival, masques, and all forms of cross-dressing” (4). The very nature of Cavendish’s convent is based upon the above royalist activities.

#### **4.2 Cavendish Salons in Paris**

Although Cavendish was greatly influenced by Queen Henrietta Maria, her convent was, I argue, based on salons run by her husband, William, and her brother-in-law, Charles, in Paris during exile. Margaret Cavendish dedicated several works to her brother in law and he was the

one to accompany her to England to attempt to recover her husband's estates in 1659. It was during this time that she began publishing her work. Cavendish acknowledges her debt to these men in her creation of the convent in *The Convent of Pleasure*. These men and their salons had a strong effect on Margaret Cavendish's education. She writes: "that had she been denied the company of her husband's salon, had she been 'inclosed from the world, in some obscure place, and had been an anchoret from my infancy, having not the liberty to see the World, nor conversation to hear of it, I should never have writ so many things'" (Battigelli 46). Cavendish was also tutored by her husband as well as his brother. Different from the French salon, these salons were based on scientific thought. Here she was introduced to atomism. In 1645 in the Cavendish salon:

she found herself at the center of a scientific salon in which some of the leading thinkers of her day, including the great expositors of mechanism Rene Descartes and Pierre Gassendi, circulated, reviewed, and discussed their ideas. The salon itself became 'an unofficial university of the mechanical philosophy.' (Battigelli 45)

The Newcastle Parisian salon also included Thomas Hobbes as a guest. Battigelli quotes the political economist William Petty who recalled its exhilarating environment: "'For about that time in Paris, Mersennus, Gassendy, Mr. Hobs, Monsieur DesCartes, Monsieur Roberval, Monsieur Mydorge and other famous men, all frequenting and caressed by your Grace and your memorable brother Sir Charles Cavendish, did countenance and influence my studies as well as by their conversation and their Public Lectures and Writings'" (45). Battigelli notes that Sir Charles Cavendish, like his brother, "hosted a scientific salon of sorts, although his was an epistolary salon through which he acquired, reviewed, and circulated new ideas, including those of Hobbes and Gassendi" (47).



The Cavendish convent, which includes the French court emphasis on female platonic love and the arts, is also a model of the male salons she observed first hand. It is home to women taking on traditional male roles such as those Cavendish observed: “Women-Physicians, Surgeons, and Apothecaries... Women for every Office and Employment” (223). It is a place of intellectual freedom for women. Cavendish’s hybrid salon, mixing qualities of the all-female and all-male salon, gestures towards a call for the creation of an androgynous space – and foreshadows concerns in Woolf’s *Orlando*.

### 4.3 Elizabeth Lucas and St. John’s Abbey

In *The True Relation of My Birth Breeding and Life*, Margaret Cavendish offers a portrait of her earlier family life in her childhood home, St. John’s Abbey, which bears some similarities to the French salon with its emphasis on intellectual and artistic pursuits. It is easy to see why Lucas and other women found Henrietta Maria’s example so attractive. Cavendish writes, “As for tutors, although we had for all sorts of virtues, as singing, dancing, playing on music, reading, writing, working, and the like, yet we were not kept strictly thereto” (157). In addition to seeing plays, and partaking in “harmless recreations,” Cavendish notes that her older sisters kept to themselves, like the insulated coterie of the salon:

Their customs were in the winter time to go sometimes to plays, or to ride in their coaches about the streets to see the concourse and recourse of people; and in the spring time to visit the Spring Garden, Hyde Park, and the like places; and sometimes they would have music, and sup in barges upon the water. These harmless recreations they would pass their time away with; for I observed they did seldom make visits, nor never went abroad with strangers in their company, but only themselves in a flock together, agreeing so well that there seemed but one mind amongst them. (160)

They also would also engage in one of the most important salon activities -- conversation: "As for the pastime of my sisters when they were in the country, it was to read, work, walk, and discourse with each other" (159). Cavendish describes her mother's mode of living:

She made her house her cloister, inclosing herself, as it were, therein, for she seldom went abroad, unless to church...She was of a grave behavior, and had such majestic grandeur, as it were continually hung about her, that it would strike a kind of an awe to the beholders, and command respect from the rudest (I mean the rudest of civilized people, I mean not such barbarous people as plundered her, and used her cruelly, for they would have pulled God out of heaven, had they had power, as they did royalty out of his throne.) (163)

Lady Happy, who "encloisters" herself, is similar to Cavendish's mother in that she creates a more permanent private life than Henrietta Maria would lead in her participation in her convent. Like Lady Happy, Elizabeth Lucas inspires the admiration of those around her. Veevers comments that "The heroines of these plays are as ready to recognize beauty and support virtue in another woman" (67). Cavendish comments that her mother inspired the "rudest" people. Veevers writes, "Since beauty in a woman was a sign of her moral virtue as well as her connection to Heaven, a beautiful woman might have any number of 'servants' whose allegiance to her could result only in the acquisition by them of self-discipline, self-knowledge, and social grace" (17).

Pleasure was also a royalist pursuit given prominence in the Lucas household. In *The True Relation of My Birth Breeding and Life*, Cavendish relates that "Likewise we were bred virtuously, modestly, civilly, honourably, and on honest principles. As for plenty, we had not

only for necessity, conveniency, and decency, but for delight add pleasure to a superfluity; it is true we did not riot, but we lived orderly” (156).

Part of living orderly includes basing life activities on the four seasons. Lady Happy tells Madame Mediator that they will live by the seasons in the food they eat. They will clothe themselves in silk and “Linnen fine as white as milk.” They will look at artwork, breathe perfumed air, and listen to “sweet melodious Sound” (221). In addition to natural food and clothing, seasonal natural décor dependent on the seasons will include “the Floor strew’d with sweet Flowers” in the Spring, and “strew’d with green Rushes or Leaves” in the fall (224).<sup>31</sup> Reminiscent of St. John’s Abbey is the inclusion of “a Cupboard of Purseline, and of Plate....*Turkie* carpets, and a Cup-board of Gilt Plate” (224). She says they will be “accoutered properly” (225). This long description most certainly is a testament to royalist material culture.

Lady Happy recites a poem that suggests that not only will the women harvest the produce they grow but they will also search the land, or forage for food, as well as capture meat naturally by fishing:

Each season shall our Caterers be,  
 To search the land, and Fish the Sea;  
 To gather Fruit and reap Corn,  
 That’s brought to us in Plenty’s Horn; (221)

This poem not only sets up the vastness of the estate but reveals that life in the convent will be very active.

Cavendish qualifies her statement by stating that “superfluity” does not lead to happiness. She writes:

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<sup>31</sup> See page 224 of the play for a detailed description of the interior of the convent.

but we lived orderly; for riot, even in kings' courts and princes' palaces. Brings ruin without content or pleasure, when order in less fortunes shall live more plentifully and deliciously than princes that lives in a hurly-burly, as I may term it, in which they are seldom well served. For disorder obstructs; besides it doth disgust life, distract the appetites, and yield no true relish to the senses; for pleasure, delight, peace, and felicity live in method and temperance" (156).

This passage can be read as a critique of Charles I's court. Battigelli tells us that "Lucas would have willingly left court soon after she arrived. By her account, she was simply unequipped for the contradictions inherent in the court's social life" (21). I argue, then, that the convent created by Cavendish, while indebted to the example provided by Henrietta Maria, reflects a uniquely personal interpretation influenced by Elizabeth Lucas.

#### 4.4 Pleasure Garden

Lady Happy's first appearance in the convent features her engagement in a debate with Madam Mediator about who mankind should follow – the gods or Nature. She states that since following the gods does not result in pleasure, "I will serve Nature" (220). As part of nature, I would like to call attention to a feature of Margaret Cavendish's convent – the Hortus conclusus, or the enclosed garden. One of the most representative symbols of England is the garden. I do not argue that Puritan's disavowed the garden. However, they were suspicious of the kind of garden that appears in *The Convent of Pleasure* – the "pleasure garden" – and the sensual pleasure engendered by it. The Hortus conclusus is symbolically associated by Catholicism to the virgin Mary and images abound in religious artwork. Although Julie Crawford offers a convincing account that explores *The Convent of Pleasure* as an elegy of loss for Cavendish property and a wish to see it returned to its former material glory, she excludes a significant

aspect of the Puritan threat – to royalist cultural and intellectual property. I would like to consider the garden within the convent as much more than a physical entity or piece of property. I argue that the garden in *The Convent of Pleasure* is symbolic of the royalist imagination -- directly under threat of being destroyed. I analyze this garden in tandem with her poem, “Similizing the Braine to a Garden.”

Cavendish’s personal history with gardens broadened when she joined Henrietta Maria and other royals in exile in Paris and had the opportunity to reside at the Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye, a little over eight miles outside of Paris. This castle has a rich history of political intrigue including burnings and reconstruction. It was built by Louis VI in around 1122 and expanded by Louis IX of France in the 1230’s. Henry II built a separate chateau and, under the direction of Étienne Dupérac, a French architect, painter, engraver, and garden designer, known for his topographical studies of Rome and its ruins in the late 16th century, the slope from the castle to the Seine was shaped into a series of descending terraces.

Another person of note who visited these same gardens was English writer, gardener, diarist, and mapmaker, John Evelyn. His treatise, *Sylva, or A Discourse of Forest-Trees* (1664) was one of several nature studies he composed and published. *Sylva* encouraged landowners to plant trees to replenish the significant amount of timber cut down to provide the English navy with material to build war ships during the civil war and after. Sylvia Bowerbank writes, “As Evelyn clearly sees, new arguments, incentives, and attitudes had to be created to motivate the English people, collectively and individually, to value the forest – along with its wild inhabitants and their habitat” (16). Evelyn’s interest in the natural world, and gardens in particular, led to his designs for several pleasure gardens during the Restoration period, such as his family’s ancestral home in Wotton, Euston Hall, a country house located in Suffolk, Albury Park in Surrey where

he redesigned the Italianate garden of Henry Howard, Groombridge Place in Kent, as well as Sayes Court, his own grounds where he “demonstrated the benefits of tree planting as prescribed” in *Sylva*. He also experimented with techniques “such as growing in hotbeds and in greenhouses.”

Cavendish expresses her own deep concern for the depletion of English forests in her prose piece *The Blazing World* when the Duchess and the Empress pass through Sherwood Forest on their way to the Cavendish estate soon after the end of the civil war. The Empress “took great pleasure and delight therein, and told the Duchess she never had observed more wood in so little compass” (193). The Empress wonders, however, why there seem to be “more wood on the seas, she meaning the ships, than on the land” (193). The Duchess replies the reason being a “long civil war in that kingdom, in which most of the best timber-trees...were ruined” (193). Cavendish’s connection to John Evelyn, and their joint concern for England’s land (and gardens), speaks to the deep connection felt by royalists for English soil. According to James Fitzmaurice, Cavendish and Evelyn had more in common than visiting Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye and an interest in the reforestation of England. Fitzmaurice makes the claim that in April and May of 1667, John Evelyn visited Margaret Cavendish at the Cavendish estate in the village of Clerkenwell, just north of London, a newly purchased property. Fitzmaurice suggests that, “Margaret and John both had an interest in garden architecture” and “shared overlapping experience with noted gardens of the time, more specifically, Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye. Fitzmaurice notes that, previously, in Cavendish’s *The Unnatural Tragedy*, the character Madam Maleteste speaks of the importance of gardens and details the appearance of the terraces which, “look like a series of shelves of grassy lawn on which people can stroll or

sit. Part of the impression will be of ‘geometry,’ or lines and spaces.” Fitzmaurice notes both Cavendish’s and Evelyn’s interest in the “practical and geometric application” to garden design.

It is no surprise, then, that Cavendish includes a garden, or Hortus conclusis, in her play *The Convent of Pleasure*. Madam Mediator provides details about the spatial mapping of the property. She tells the men outside the convent that Lady Happy’s property “has so much compass of ground within her walls, as there is not only room and place enough for Gardens, Orchards, Walks, Groves, Bowers, Arbours, Ponds, Fountains, Springs and the like...” (223). The type of garden Cavendish refers to in her play is a vast, massive, seemingly endless succession of a garden such as Château de Saint-Germain-en-Laye --NOT a small backyard kitchen garden. She gestures towards a garden that is both closed yet vast. James Fitzmaurice, mentioning both *Convent of Pleasure* as well as Cavendish’s *Nature’s Pictures* notes that the garden which appears in these two pieces, is probably a ‘wilderness’ like the one at Ham House – the several hundred acres estate owned by Elizabeth, Duchess of Lauderdale, constructed a few years after this play was published.

Lady Happy then describes the garden that will be “kept curiously,” or carefully: upon Pedestals, Flower-pots, with various Flowers; and in the Winter Orange-Trees...in every Season all sorts of Flowers, sweet herbs and Fruits” (225). Here, it is noted that the convent includes what is known as a “winter garden.” Liz Bellamy in her article, “The Uses of Fruit: Literary Symbolism and technological Change in the Long Eighteenth Century,” states that “With technological progress, the construction of a ‘Winter-house’ was increasingly brought within the means or at least aspirations of the gentleman gardener” (6).

Cavendish’s poem, “Similizing the *Braine* to a *Garden*” develops the conceit that the brain and the garden function similarly. Christine Coch explores Justus Lipsius’s *Two Books of*

*Constancie* (1594) and the connection between poetry and gardens. She includes a line stated by the wise character, Langius: “the mind is prepared & made ready *not being fit before to receive the sacred seed*” which she interprets as “the mind itself becomes a garden here, infertile until it is cultivated by pleasure” (115). Cavendish’s comparison, while not original, may have been influenced by earlier garden writers.<sup>32</sup> The Cavendish poem reads:

THE *Braine* a *Garden* seemes, full of *Delight*,  
 Whereon the *Sun* of *Knowledge* shineth bright,  
 Where *Fancy* flowes, and runs in *Bubbling Streames*,  
 Where *Flowers* growes upon the *Banks* of *Dreames*.  
 Whereon the *Dew* of sleepy *Eyes* doth fall,  
 Bathing each *Leafe*, and every *Flower* small.  
 There various *Thoughts* as severall *Flowers* grow,  
 Some *Milk-white Innocence*, as *Lillies*, shew.  
*Fancies*, as painted *Tulips* colours sixt,  
 By *Natures Pencils* they are iatermixt.  
 Some as sweet *Roses*, which are newly blowne,  
 Others as tender *Buds*, not full out growne.  
 Some, as small *Violets*, yet much sweetnesse bring:  
 Thus many *Fancies* from the *Braine* still spring.  
 Their *Wit*, as *Butter-flies*, hot love do make,  
 On every *Flower* fine their pleasure take.  
 Dancing about each *Leafe* in pleasant sort,

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<sup>32</sup> See Coch for a list of popular garden books that appeared near the turn of the sixteenth century.



Passing their time away in *Amorous* sport.  
 Like *Cupids young*, their painted *Wings* display,  
 And with *Apolloe's golden Beames* they play.  
*Industry*, as *Bees* suck out the sweet,  
*Wax of Invention* gather with their *Feet*.  
 Then on their *Wings of Fame* flye to their *Hive*,  
 From *Winter* of sad *Death* keeps them alive.  
 There *Birds of Poetry* sweet *Notes* still sing,  
 Which through the *World*, as through the *Aire* ring.  
 Where on the *Branches of Delight* do sit,  
 Pruning their *Wings*, which are with *Study* wet.  
 Then to the *Cedars of High Honour* flye,  
 Yet rest not there, but mount up to the *Skie*. (Cavendish, online)

Cavendish opens the poem with the analogy: “The *Braine* a Garden seemes.” Lady Happy’s emphasis on “pleasure,” “delight,” “melodious sound” and “Variety,” is replicated in the poem. The braine and the garden, one, are “full of Delight.” The fancies are “various” and “many;” they “dance” in “Amorous sport” and, as birds, “sit on *Branches of Delight*.” Cavendish relies upon the water imagery she established in *The Convent of Pleasure* throughout the poem. Fancy “flows, and runs in *Bubbling Streames*.” Dew falls upon the flowers that grow in this garden. Fancies, or birds, prune “wet” wings. The brain grows a proliferation of fancies, or flowers, that Cavendish identifies as lilies, tulips, roses, violets, and their attendant buds. Some of these fancies are, like roses, “newly blowne” while others are “tender *Buds*, “not full out growne.” Fancies are “*Birds of Poetry*” and bees, garden related creatures who “painted *Wings* display”

and “suck out the sweet, / *Wax of Invention.*” True to the poetic trope, these fancies, these garden creatures, “mount up to the *Skie* as poetic invention. The brain, like the garden, is an active organism that requires pleasure in order to engender the imagination. In the poem, the unblocked artist is free to create.

In *The Convent of Pleasure*, Cavendish also develops the metaphor as garden as brain. Lady Happy describes the larger property, “And kept so as not to have a Weed in it, and all the Groves, Wildernesses, Bowers and Arbours pruned, and kept free from dead Boughs Branches or Leaves; and all the Ponds, Rivulets, Fountains. And Springs kept clear, pure and fresh” (225). It is easy to take this section of the play as a description of utopian perfection where life within the garden wall borders on the pastoral. I argue, however, that Lady Happy is referring to a radical rebellion freeing the mind and imaginations of the young women in the convent. She gestures back to the speech about marriage where marriage equals slavery, “marriage to those that are virtuous is a greater restraint then a Monastery” (218). She states that “when women retire not” it is “only for the sake of Men” and “retiredness bars the life from nothing else but Men” (218). Through a secluded natural life in the Convent, women are free to clear away the dead boughs, branches and leaves-- dismantle the commonwealth and clear the mind of debris -- and experience the flowing waters, the rivulet, the fountain, and the spring that are “clear, pure and fresh” – a place of “freedom” (220). Three of these four watery sources constantly flow. These water sources, I posit, are connected to creativity and imagination evidenced in the poem “Similizing the *Braine* to a Garden.” The seizure of the garden become the seizure and plunder of the royalist mind and imagination.

#### 4.5 Lucas Family and the Civil War

The Lucas family suffered substantial losses during the English Civil War, including the death of Margaret Cavendish's mother, a sister, a niece, and the execution of her brother, Charles Lucas, for treason. In 1647, prior to the deaths of her mother and brother, St. Jon's Abbey, the Lucas family property was seized by parliamentarians, ransacked and pillaged, along with the tomb that held dead Lucas ancestors. Raber notes that "Margaret Cavendish also experienced the extremes of loss and disruption: she accompanied Henrietta Maria's court to Paris, where she soon learned that her family home had been devastated by Parliamentary attack, during which her family tomb was desecrated" (415).

John Lucas, another brother, gives an account of this devastating attack in *Mercurious Rusticus*, No.1 which Margaret Cavendish repeats in *Nature's Pictures*. I repeat it again here and note the extreme brutality of the attack which echoes material in the previous chapter about the civil wars. Sir John Lucas's gives an account of the plunder:

On his attempt to start the town was raised, the volunteers and train-band assembled, and a crowd of 2000 people broke into the house to search for arms and the suppressed garrison of cavaliers, The people lay hands on Sir John Lucas, his lady, and sister, and carry them, attended with swords, guns, and halberts to the common gaol. Last of all they bring forth his mother with the like or greater insolency, who, being faint and breathless, hardly obtained leave to rest herself in a shp by the way; yet this leave was no sooner obtained, but the rest of the rude rabble threatened to pull down the house, unless they thrust her out; being by this means forced to depart from thence, a countryman (whom the alarm had summoned to this work) espies her, and pressing with his horse through the crowd, struck at her hed with his sword so heartily, that if an halbert had not crossed the blow, both her sorrows and her journey had there found an end. After this the house was

thoroughly plundered, deeds and papers destroyed, garden defaced, deer killed, and cattle driven away. This was largely caused by a rumour that 200 armed men were discovered in the vault of Sir John Lucas's, had killed nine men already, and were issuing forth to destroy the town. And to show that their rage will know no bounds and that nothing is sacred and venerable which they dare not to violate, they break into St. Giles Church, open the vault where his (Sir Johns) ancestors were buried, and with pistols, swords, and halberts transfix the coffins of the dead. (163-64)<sup>33</sup>

Crawford refers to this attack as a “whirlwind” (24). She comments on the active reaction of Margaret Cavendish's mother to the plunder, after the attack: “It was Margaret's mother, Elizabeth Lucas, who picked up the pieces of St. John's Abbey (she wrote to the House of Lords to protest the outrage of the attacks and petition that she and her servants should be given the right to search those houses where she knew or suspected her pillaged or sold goods were hidden)” (190). Cavendish writes of her mother:

But these unhappy wars forced her out, by reason she and her children were loyal to the King; for which they plundered her and my brothers of all their goods, plate, jewels, money, corn, cattle and the like, cut down their woods, pulled down their houses, and sequestered them from their lands and livings; but in such misfortunes my mother was of an heroic spirit, in suffering patiently where there was no remedy, or to be industrious where she thought she could help. (*Nature's Pictures* 163)

Crawford tells us that conditions in the town were severe: “By the beginning of August, famine had reduced the inhabitants to eating dogs and horses; soon even those became scarce” (42).

Crawford details the destruction to the Lucas family: “parliamentarian troops plundered the Lucas

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<sup>33</sup> See *The Life of William Cavendish* for an account of Sir John Lucas, pps. 210-215.

family ‘of all their Goods, Plate, Jewells, Money...cut down the woods, pull’d down their Houses and sequestered from them their Lands and Livings’” (191). I noted this concern for the land in the previous section on the garden.

Margaret Cavendish’s reaction to the events of the civil war cannot be overestimated. She writes:

For it is frequently seen and known, by woful experience, that rebellious and factious parties do more suddenly and numerously flock together to act a mischievous design, than loyal and honest men to assist or maintain a just cause; and certainly ‘tis much to be lamented, that evil men should be more industrious and prosperous than good, and that the wicked should have a more desperate courage, than the virtuous an active valour.

*(Nature’s Pictures 142)*

She stresses that “...the worse feature of these outrages was the amount of wanton destruction” (*Nature’s Pictures 164*). The destruction did not end for returned from exile royalists after the restoration of Charles II. Cavendish states, “But not only the family I am linked to is ruined, but the family from which I was sprung, by these unhappy wars” (*Nature’s Pictures 163*). She returned to England during the years of exile to petition for a return of some of her husband’s estates. She failed, at this time, in her plea: “But when I came there I found their hearts as hard as my fortunes, and their natures as cruel as my miseries, for they sold all my Lord’s estates, which was a very great one, and gave me not any part thereof, or any allowance thereout, which few or no other was so hardly dealt withal (166-67). She compares her own feelings to those of her mother when she writes, her mother “whilst I live in the view of the public world, yet I could most willingly exclude myself, so as never to see the face of any creature but my Lord as long as

I live, inclosing myself like an anchorite, wearing a friez gown, tied with a chord about my waist” (178).

#### 4.6 The Convent of Pleasure

Cavendish, throughout the play, establishes the space as one that, through elements associated to Charles I, Henrietta Maria, William and Charles Cavendish, Elizabeth Lucas, and the Pleasure Garden, is strictly royalist in its representation. It describes a material as well as cultural property valued by royalists. The Puritan rhetoric which sets the tone at the beginning of the play sets the stage for parliamentary siege. The play begins with a group of men standing outside the convent discussing the funeral of Lady Happy’s father and wondering in disbelief if it is true that she plans to remove herself from men’s society to live in a convent. Once they learn of the serious nature of this “incloistering,” Monsieur Facil says, “Let us fee the Clergy to perswade her out, for the good of the Commonwealth” (222). Monsieur Adviser repeats a religious reaction when he says, “Her heretical opinions ought not to be suffered...she ought to be examined by a male synod and punish’d with a severe husband, or tortured with a deboist Husband” (223). Crawford finds that “the men’s responses to Lady Happy’s withdrawal invoke parliamentary treatment or royalists and other ‘delinquents’” (188). Crawford finds Cavendish’s portrayal of the response of these men to be a mocking of parliamentary edicts. I agree, but this scene of comedy, as literary equivocation, hides more serious intent on the part of Cavendish. The rhetoric becomes increasingly more violent when Monsieur Courtly asks:

Monsieur Courtly. Is there no hopes to get those Ladies out of their *Convent*?

Adviser. No faith, unless we could set the *Convent* on fire.

Takepl. For *Jupiter*’s sake, let us do it, let’s everyone carry a Fire-brand to

Fire it.<sup>34</sup>

Court. Yes, and smoak them out, as they do a swarm of bees. (220)

Crawford connects this scene, as I do as “a direct reference to the parliamentary siege of Margaret’s family home in Colchester, St. John’s Abbey, in 1648. As the pamphlet *A great and bloody Fight at Colchester* vividly illustrates, the Abbey was destroyed by fire, and the women inside were certainly forced out. Afterward, as Margaret reports in her autobiography, the abbey was pillaged of all its goods” (188). This is not the last scene where violence is invoked – it is later invoked by the Prince.

Immediately after this proposal for action, Take-Pleasure (an apt name for a possible Puritan and anti-royalist) suggests, “Faith, let us resolve to put ourselves in Women’s apparel, and so by that means get into the *Convent*” (227). This is exactly what the Prince does, connecting him to the parliamentarians and the siege. The Prince enacts what the men outside verbally demand. His entrance to the convent corrupts the convent -- the masque is a corrupted masque-- due to the false entry. The Prince’s reaction to the anti-masque reveals that he disagrees with Lady Happy about the anti-marriage theme, “I cannot in conscience approve of it; for though some few may be unhappy in Marriage, yet there are many more that are so happy as they would not change their condition” (233). Since it his aim to marry Lady Happy and remove her from the convent, his words are apt. Lady Happy replies, “O Servant, I fear you will become an Apostate” (233). She refers to the vow upon entering the convent: “Thus will in Pleasure’s Convent I / Live with delight, and with it die” (221). The Prince has broken this vow. Elisabeth Liebert notes that this is “the infiltration of the demesne of pleasure by a representative of pain” (46).

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<sup>34</sup> The text footnote tells us that “Jupiter was the Roman king of the gods and a famous rapist” (226).

The Princess seduces Lady Happy, using the language of the salon, *préciosité* and platonic love to deceive her. He says, “can any Love be more vertuous, innocent and harmless then ours?” (234). When Lady Happy relies, “How can harmless Lovers please themselves?” he rejoins, “Why very well, as, to discourse, imbrace and kiss, so mingle souls together” (234). It does not matter what the Prince says because he is ingratiating himself. Nelsen and Alkers offer this analysis of the end of the play:

In a vampiric manner, the Princess suggests that she feeds off the women who once controlled the convent. The convent women, who previously performed the cruel role of men in women’s lives, now play the sea nymphs who pay the sea king homage by subjecting themselves to his magnificence: “All his Sea-people to his wish/ ... / With Acclamations do attend him’... Whereas earlier in the play Madam Mediator argues that in the convent, “every Lady there enjoyeth as much Pleasure as an absolute Monarch can do’... here the women abdicate their royal power for positions of subjection. (432)

I suggest that the vampires are the Puritans taking over Royalist properties and cultural collateral.

At the end of the play, the prince’s ambassadors arrive to deliver an ultimatum: “Embass. May it please your Highness, the Lords of the Council sent me to inform your Highness, that your subjects are so discontented at your Absence, that if Your Highness do not return into your Kingdom soon, they’l enter this Kingdom by reason they hear you are here; and some report as if your Highness were restrained as a prisoner” (243). The Prince’s response is quick and to the point: “Princ. But since I am discover’d, go from me to the Counsellorss of this State, and inform them of my being here, as also the reason, and that I ask their leave if I marry this Lady; otherwise, tell them I will have her by force of Arms” (243-44). One scene earlier the takeover is foreshadowed



by Lady Happy does not want to dance – which signifies Puritan takeover. Prince describes the convent as “my bounty” (246). He gives the convent to the fool – which emphasizes complete loss which I compare to estates pillaged and destroyed during the Interregnum. Crawford states that “The fact that the Convent of Pleasure is dissolved when the Princess gives the property to a clown called Mimick is a possible reference to the wrongful dissemination of privilege in post-Restoration” (204). I find it representative of complete and total plunder, as in the case of the Lucas property. The negative ending invokes the parliamentary state as an imposition of tyranny. The silencing of Lady Happy at the conclusion to the represents the silencing of royalists and their culture as convent disappears.

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

Margaret Cavendish’s *The Convent of Pleasure*, pictures a space that is in direct opposition to Puritan edicts. The play “registers royalist opposition to parliamentary control over English culture” (Crawford 180). It is no coincidence that the closed convent, besides so many other royalist symbols, also housed a theatre where masques are performed. She labelled the play a comedy, but it is a tragedy. Lady Happy and her estate symbolize royalist material and cultural property under siege and pillage by parliamentarians. The Prince, associated to the parliamentarians outside of the convent because of his adoption of their technique of false infiltration, marries Lady Happy and dissolves royalist appreciation and commitment to pleasure. The loss of the convent is complete and final. The loss of the Hortus conclusivus is particularly devastating because of its association to the imagination and poetry. Cavendish wrote about her feelings of melancholy, or depression, that clouded her life. The frontispiece image to “Studious She is an all Alone” which appears in *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (1655), designed by Abraham van Diepenbeck, connects Cavendish to melancholia, just beginning to be associated to

male poets. In *The Blazing World*, the section where the Empress and the Duchess visit Cavendish property after the war illustrates the very serious effect civil war had on Margaret Cavendish. Writing was the action she undertook to ward off depression. In *The Blazing World*, she writes that she wanted to be Empress of a world but now she will be empress of a fictional world where she still yields some power. I believe this refers to the petition she attempted for her husband's estates that fell on deaf ears. The convent is that world she is in the midst of losing as she writes, under direct threat and takeover by the Prince who uses the royalist language of Platonic love to steal the convent. There is no doubt, however, that if he had not been able to seduce it away, he would have taken the convent by force. This is what was occurring on the Lucas property. The loss and desecration of the Lucas family tomb was the final atrocity. Margaret Cavendish left for exile and within years multiple family members were dead and the estate destroyed. The destruction of the convent, more particularly the convent of "pleasure" – so associated to royalists – is also Cavendish's call to action as a critique on parliamentarians whose "devotion is forced then voluntary" (Cavendish, *The True Relation*, 219).

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## 5 CHAPTER FOUR: ARISTOMENES, OR THE ROYAL SHEPHERD:

### ANNE FINCH'S FABLE OF PRO-STUART DISENCHANTMENT

‘Aesop’s fable shown today’<sup>35</sup>  
‘the feather in the Cap was fatal to the Head’<sup>36</sup>

Anne Finches’ standing as a woman of letters grows as her poetry appears in anthologies and continues to gain scholarly attention. William Wordsworth was an early admirer of Finch’s nature poetry which he included in a manuscript volume he presented to Lady Mary Lowther. In his “Sonnet to Lady Mary Lowther,” Wordsworth compliments Finch, writing that he “culled this store of lucid crystals from a Parnassian Cave seldom trod” (Reynolds lxxvii). But poetry is not the only significant genre on which to base a study of Anne Finch. Included in the 1903 publication of *The Poems of Anne Countess of Winchilsea*, edited by Myra Reynolds (which underwent a second edition in 1992), are “plays, play translations, prologues, epilogues, songs, and possibly a libretto” (Solomon 37). In addition, I would like to draw attention to the fables Finch translated and composed. Two dramas, *The Triumphs of Love and Innocence* and *Aristomenes, Or The Royal Shepherd*, appear in Reynold’s collection of Finch’s work – and only here. Scholars have paid surprisingly little attention to these plays – or any of the other pieces not poetry in Finch’s oeuvre. Diana Solomon observes that Finch pointedly “instructed the reader not to perform the plays” (38). In her prologue, Finch writes:

Having seen (out of the love of novelty) many Plays brought upon the stage, wh(ch) have been as indifferent as these two of mine, and not being able, longer then my own life, to

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<sup>35</sup> John Dryden “Epilogue” to *Albion and Albanus*.

<sup>36</sup> Final line to Finch’s fable “The Battle between the Rats and Weazels.” See Myra Reynold’s edition.

protect either of them, from the same fate, of being expos'd, censur'd, and condemn'd, I prefix these few lines, which will accompany them as long as they are to have a being, to assure all that shall peruse them, that a more terrible injury cannot be offer'd me, then to occasion, or permit them ever to be represented.<sup>37</sup> (Prologue)<sup>38</sup>

The few scholars, such as Solomon, who have written about this play, take the line “being expos'd, censur'd, and condemn'd” as a reference to a fear of a hostile audience. I would like to argue that it is possible it is a general Drury Lane audience Finch alludes to, but perhaps, also, to the Whig parliamentary government -- even the crown then held by William III of Orange.

Finch writes:

When first upon the Stage a Play appears,  
 'Tis not the multitude a poet fears,  
 Who from example, praise, or dam by roate,  
 And give their censure, as some Members vote. (Prologue)

I posit that it is possible that Finch is directly referring to members of Parliament in the final line and is aware of possible political retaliation, similar to what occurred with Samuel Daniels when his play *The Tragedy of Philotas* was performed in 1604 (mentioned in the Introduction to this Dissertation). Solomon even notes that, “At times Finch imagines her audience as members of the Parliament – a particularly hostile reference for her as a Tory” (Solomon 47). For the

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<sup>37</sup> Print History: The Folger Manuscript (contains two plays, a prologue and epilogue to *Aristomenes*, a partial translation of a play by Tasso, the prologue to Thomas Otway's *Don Carlos* (1676), and twenty one songs. Myra Reynolds in 1903 volume relied on this manuscript.<sup>37</sup> The Wellesley Manuscript. Relied upon for the Barbara McGovern/Charles Hinnant edited version. 1998.

<sup>38</sup> *Poems of Anne, Countess of Winchilsea*, ed. Myra Reynolds (Chicago, 1903). Future references to Finch's work appear in this edition.

purposes of this chapter, then, I argue that the play takes the form of political rhetoric against the crown.

One scholar, Claudia Kairoff, in “Anne Finch as Playwright: The Purposes of Manuscript and Print in Her Pro-Stuart Plays” recognizes the play’s political intent and offers an interpretation of the play that includes the suggestion that the characters may stand for William III and Mary – who was James II’s daughter. I argue for a different interpretation. In Act II scene I, Finch includes the stage direction: “A Machine, like a Fox, runs about the Dungeon smelling” (II.i.95). This fox appears in two more separate stage directions. While interesting in its own right as a possible mechanical set piece that could be used on the eighteenth-century stage, the insertion of a fox seems laden with interpretive possibilities given Finch’s interest in fables and the fact that close to thirty percent of the volume of her poems is dedicated to the translation and creation of fables. I argue that Finch’s exploration of Aristomenes as myth results in the creation of a fable that may replicate some of the political occurrences Kairoff mentions but, in fact, expresses a deep sense of disenchantment with court politics resulting in war – both a treasonous refusal to support the crown of William III (Finch and her husband remained non-jurors) and a wariness of where the Finch’s Pro-Stuart support got them. To complicate this design, I posit that Finch’s creation of Aristomenes’s close identification to the fox – which goes beyond their relationship in the source material -- signifies shape-changing. The trickster who offers help to Aristomenes *becomes* Aristomenes who, as trickster, is complicit in the tricking of himself. I argue that the play cannot be read simply as a Pro-Stuart play and that Finch, through the writing of a play that is a fable, presents a dark epistemological account of the journey of an ardent court supporter who finds himself complicit in his own undoing. Finch, like the other closet dramatists, equivocates by hiding her message in code, through the use of myth and fable. First, I explore the

Glorious Revolution as a political event and its effect on Anne Finch. Second, I look at some of Finch's political poems and examine Kairoff's commentary that indicates that Myra Reynolds changed the order of poems -- Finch originally placed the plays in close proximity to these political poems. Third, I discuss the figure of Aristomenes in mythology. Fourth, I investigate the growth of the popularity of the fable in England after the Glorious Revolution and the influence of La Fontaine and L'Estrange, two well-known fabulists, on Finch. Fifth, I note Finch's contribution to the fable genre which has gone almost completely ignored. Finally, I offer an interpretation of *Aristomenes, Or The Royal Shepherd* as an exemplar of Finch's definition of what it means to be a royal shepherd and the resulting bitter disillusionment.

### **5.1 The Glorious Revolution**

The Glorious Revolution, also known as the bloodless revolution, saw the Dutch ruler, William of Orange, and his wife Mary, James II's protestant daughter, depose James, ending with James's exile in France. Barbara McGovern illustrates the revolutionary events of 1688:

Since coming to the throne in 1685, James II had repeatedly tried to promote the Roman Catholic church in England. In 1687 he issued a Declaration of Indulgence that suspended the Test Act (which aimed to restrict both Catholics and Dissenters), insisting that he had the right to set aside laws and over-rule Parliament. With the birth of his son in the summer of 1668 and the threat of a continued royal line of Roman Catholics, the country reached a state of crisis. A coalition of Tory and Whig parliamentary leaders began secret negotiations with William of Orange, the Dutch husband of James's Protestant daughter, Mary, and a widely recognized champion of Protestantism, to invite him to England.

(McGovern 54)

James's wife, Mary, like Henrietta Maria, was feared: "Her Roman Catholic faith, and James's subsequent conversion to Catholicism, led to a heightened fear of popery among an already nervous English people, culminating in such crises as the Popish Plot" (McGovern 21). James decided it was in his best interest to attempt a temporary exile in disguise, but he was captured on December 12<sup>th</sup> in Faversham, England by a group of angry fishermen and taken prisoner. He was put into protective custody to await the arrival of several lords when he could return safely to Whitehall after he had contacted Lord Winchilsea, who was Anne Finch's father-in-law (McGovern 55). There was great disappointment on the part of many supporters of James who saw his failed attempt to escape as desertion. In fact, later, Lord Winchilsea and others later lent their support to William of Orange. James did take refuge at Whitehall but, once William directed his men to the palace, James II was forced to depart to France, this time without incident – on December 14, 1688. The events of the Glorious Revolution quickly upended the lives of Stuart supporters who were now required to pledge their support to the new crown.

## **5.2 Anne Finch at the Stuart Court**

Before her marriage to Heneage Finch, Anne Finch was in the position of Maid of Honour to Mary of Modena, James II's second wife – and a Catholic – who resided at St. James Palace. Like the other women playwrights in this study, their close proximity to Catholicism resulted in a Continental influence. Carol Barash describes the activities of Finch during this time:

Anne Finch wrote her earliest poetry in response to the female community and mythic female authority engendered by James II's second and Catholic wife, Mary of Modena. Until Finch's marriage in 1684, she was a Maid of Honour to Mary of Modena, living at court with the queen and her English and Italian waiting women. The Maids of Honour



performed in court masques; they read, sang, and painted. Most important in terms of producing women writers, they were schooled both in French and Italian translations of classical texts and in the heroic tradition of Tasso and Ariosto, and they were urged to make their own English translations of these works. (330)

After her marriage, Anne could no longer provide the services of a Maid of Honour, but she and Heneage, due to his ongoing service to the crown, resided at Westminster Abbey. Following the accession of James to the throne, Heneage “was a colonel in the army; groom of the bedchamber to the King; he was three years deputy lieutenant for the county of Kent, and he sat one year as a member of parliament for Hythe” (Reynolds xxvii). Their involvement at court remained paramount in their lives.

The Glorious Revolution, however, abruptly ended their service to the court. Tory women were “skeptical about the beginnings of democratization and the true motives behind the Glorious or ‘Bloodless’ Revolution of 1688, which they feared to be greed and petty opportunism” (McGovern 5). Their new status was hazardous when both Anne and Heneage refused to give their oath to William and Mary. Heneage Finch, as “a non-juror, could have no part in public affairs” (Reynolds xxix). Barash notes that “As non-jurors, Finch and her husband were in a precarious political and economic situation from the time of their banishment from court in 1688 to his inheritance of the Winchilsea title and lands in 1712” (Barash 337). The Glorious Revolution, Reynolds states, resulted in “the wreck of their fortunes in 1688” (xxxv). They spent the days following the revolution at the house of good friends in Northamptonshire. The revolution was “a momentous and lamentable event as a result of which the course of their lives was suddenly and violently changed. So closely, indeed had they identified with the Stuart interests that Mr. Finch found it impossible to take the vow of allegiance to the new monarch”

(Reynolds xxviii). In fact, Heneage Finch was charged with treason and was removed to London for a year during which time he prepared his defense. He and Anne had to live separately for over a year. Reynolds notes the nomad experience of the Finches. She states that “The first two or three years after the revolution, accordingly, were trying ones. During these years we find Anne in various places of temporary refuge” (Reynolds xxviii). William Wordsworth also noted “that she suffered by the Revolution” (Reynolds lxxvii). In 1689-1690, while Finch was in Godmersham in Kent -- while Heneage was in London -- she composed *Aristomenes, Or the Royal Shepherd*.

### 5.3 Finch’s Political Poems

Despite the fact that Finch is known as an early nature poet prefiguring Romanticism (mostly due to the appreciative evaluation of William Wordsworth), many of Finch’s poems are political evaluations of court life. Barash finds that these poems “suggest the tensions and ambiguities which arise when Finch strains against her deep sense of religious and political loyalty to the ousted Stuarts” (328). While it is not the purpose of this Dissertation to explore Finch’s poems, these political poems offer a context for the examination of Finch’s play *Aristomenes*. Two poems that illustrate Finch’s interrogation of contemporary politics include “A Fragment” and “An Elegy on the Death of King James. An excerpt from “A Fragment” reads:

From “A Fragment”

And basking in the warmth of early Time,

To Vain Amusements dedicate her Prime.

Ambition next allur’d her tow’ring Eye;

For Paradise she heard was plac’d on high,

Then thought, the Court with all its glorious Show

Was sure above the rest, and Paradise below. (13)

Finch recalls an infatuation with court life and the ambition generated through “its glorious show.” The fact that she places the phrase “Then thought” indicates to the reader that the narrator of the poem no longer remains beguiled by the spectacle of the court and infers that “Ambition” – portrayed as a seducer through the use of the word “allur’d” – has burnt out. In “An Elegy on the Death of King James,” Finch indicates a sense of betrayal on the part of a king who did not follow through with a loyalty his followers showed him: “Who never shall the Woes, the Wants repair, / Which for thy sake, have been thy Followers share (86). McGovern notes that the Finch poem, “On the Lord Dundee” indicates her Jacobite support (57). She states that the poem, “Caesar and Brutus,” is “constructed around the theme of betrayal” (57). McGovern also mentions the poem, “The Change,” which “anachronistically portrays an idyllic Arcadia that has been spoiled by contemporary political events” (57). These political poems are grouped together in the middle of the volume. What is significant about Finch’s political poems in terms of *Aristomenes*, is that the play not only was composed when Finch’s husband, Heneage, was under the charge of treason and staying in London, but that, in the original manuscript, Finch places her plays in the middle of the volume next to these poems.

Myra Reynolds drastically altered the placement of the Finch plays in her 1903 edition of the Finch poems. Although we owe much to Reynolds for publishing this collection, Kairoff notes that Reynolds moved the plays from the middle of the volume to the very end. Kairoff’s examination of the manuscript finds that the altered placement of both plays, *The Triumphs of Love and Innocence* and *Aristomenes* results in a different reading experience: “thereby obscuring their contexts” (Kairoff 5). Kairoff notes that, in the manuscript edition, *Aristomenes* is followed by a paraphrase of Psalm 137, “verses lamenting the Jews’ Babylonian exile” (Kairoff 6). Kairoff

writes that “the psalm might provide a coda for readers lamenting the loss of their own king...her folio’s arrangement suggests that the contents, while miscellaneous in genre, are carefully orchestrated to support certain interpretations” (6). In effect, according to Kairoff, Finch was both hiding the political plays as well as calling attention to them. Reynold’s placement of the plays at the end of the volume of poetry further marginalizes them and serves to de-politicize their content. An awareness of the original placement of the political poems and the plays allows for an interpretation of these pieces as Finch’s dialogic questioning of her own political epistemological growth.

#### **5.4 The English Fable**

In the early 1700’s, fable-reading and writing grew as a popular pastime in England.

Reynolds writes that it is due:

to La Fontaine that this striking revival of interest is chiefly due. The first six books of his *Fables* were published in France in 1668, other parts appearing in 1671, 1678, 1679, and the twelve books in 1694. Their popularity in England is shown by a remark of Addison, who, writing in 1711 in praise of fables, says that La Fontaine ‘by this way of writing is come into vogue more than any other Author of our times.’ In 1692 appeared the first edition of Sir Roger L’Estrange’s collection, in which he added to the fables of Aesop most of the new sets of fables that had been published abroad. In spite of the size of this extensive compilation it quickly passed through seven editions. (Reynolds cviii)

Both the popularity of fables and the list of English authors writing fables is significant:

Amid the Literary forms used by writers in eighteenth-century England, the rather humble form of the fable (or apologue, as it is sometimes called) held for a brief period a position of some stature and was well regarded by a sizable number of authors. In a 1732

letter to John Gay, for example, Jonathan Swift commented that, while nothing was so difficult to succeed in as fable writing, he esteemed no writing more than he did fables. Gay and Swift – along with other writers such as Sir Roger L’Estrange, John Locke, Bernard Mandeville, Samuel Croxall. Christopher Smart, Samuel Richardson, and William Somerville – all used the form in varying degrees for didactic, literary, or satiric purposes. (Daniel 86)

Reynolds posits that “it was not till the appearance of Gay’s *Fables* in 1728 that there was any notable attempt to follow in English the versified fable of La Fontaine, and Gay has always been counted the progenitor of the race of verse fable-writers in England” (cviii). Hinnant mentions Jonathan Swift in addition to John Gay as an early writer of fables. Anne Finch, however, was writing her collection of fables earlier -- during the time frame of 1700-1713. Although a chapter on Anne Finch is included in Jayne Lewis’s *The English Fable*, published in 1996 – almost no mention of Anne Finch as the author of fables appears anywhere.

Fables have characteristics unique to themselves. The main characters in English fables were not solely animals. Hinnant states that “In the practice of La Fontaine and his English followers, the term fable came also to refer, more loosely, to allegories and moralizing tales that drew upon classical mythology or legend. From the essentially Christian perspective of these poets, classical gods and goddesses were subject to a witty, irreverent handling” (168). Fables would teach a lesson – and, like children’s fairy tales, the topics could be dark. In fact, many were aimed at an adult audience. Daniels writes that “According to Croxall, L’Estrange’s Jacobite philosophy was instead directed toward an adult readership, as was indicated by the excessive length and cost of L’Estrange’s folio volume” (93). Lewis writes:

Aesopian conversations themselves are seldom amicable. They usually end up with one party's murder or discomfiture by the other: indeed, a fable is the only literary form in which the principal characters regularly devour one another. Aesopian debates thus visibly ground language not only in the material world to which its elements correspond one-to-one, but also in the realm of frequently brutal power relations. And thereby fables weld together the material, the political, and the symbolic. (Lewis 8)

Many fables “demonstrate the artifice and interestedness of even the most modest symbolic structure” (Lewis 7). Fables often communicated political meaning. Daniels notes that “Grub Street writers found that the fable form provided some of the distance and ambiguity necessary to protect themselves from official retaliation for their criticism of the government or its members” (Daniels 91). Many early seventeenth century writers “found the fable useful tool for social commentary” (Daniel 95).

Joseph Addison became one of the primary experts on fables. In his chapter entitled “The Epistemology of Fable Use,” Daniel discusses Addison's appreciation of the fable. He notes that “Addison considers fables first and foremost as works of persuasion” with a “dialogic character” (Daniel 106 - 108). Daniels writes: “Instead of suggesting that we study the fable as a finished project, Addison invites his readers to consider the fabling process as a process by which the reader is made to believe that he advises himself” (106). He also notes that the English use of the fable is highly political: “nowhere other than England do we find such a concerted effort to bring the art of fabling into such close proximity with topics of immediate social import” (110). The genre of the fable, then, was the perfect medium for Anne Finch as disappointed pro-Stuart loyalist.

Finch, however, as a non-jurist, had to be careful of what she wrote, especially during the threat to Heneage while he stood accused of treason. Lewis asks, “What did Augustans consider a good fable?” (5). Her answer is: one that could ‘carry a double meaning’ (Lewis 5). She writes, “In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the term ‘fable’ was polyvalent. It could signify a lie, any ‘feigned or devis’d discourse,’ a plot, a hieroglyph, a parable, a myth” (Lewis 10). Finch was drawing from a long English and Continental tradition of politically motivated fables. Finch’s play is similar to the other plays considered in this Dissertation in that it functions as a piece of literary equivocation – presenting material – disguised though it may be – that could be considered politically seditious. In this way, it models itself partly on the Senecan drama features used by the Sidney Circle.

### **5.5 Aristomenes in Mythology**

Aristomenes, the mythological figure, appears in Book 4 of Pausania’s *Periegesis* as a semi legendary hero of the second Messenia war. Solomon writes that “based on an historical event made topical by a recent source: Pausanius’s story of the Messenian leader Aristomenes is referenced in many seventeenth-century sources and retold in Greek and Latin by Cornelius Nepos in 1675” (44). The story is “based on Aristomenes’s capture by the Spartans in the seventh century” (Solomon 44). Barbara McCauley summarizes Pausania’s account:

A descendant of the former kings of Messenia, Aristomenes won several victories over the Spartans in the Second Messenian War before being defeated in the so-called Battle of the Great Trench, not by the superior forces of the enemy, but because he was betrayed by his ally, Aristocrates, king of the Arcadians, who had been bribed by the Spartans to desert at a key moment. With a small band of followers, Aristomenes withdrew to a fortress on Mount Eira in northern Messenia near the Arcadian border, which for the next eleven years

he withstood a Spartan siege and even managed occasional raids into Laconia. During this period, Aristomenes was the scourge of the Spartans, defeating them in encounter after encounter...After many extraordinary exploits, including three daring escapes from Spartan captivity, Aristomenes was finally forced to abandon Eira, but, forewarned by an oracle, he buried certain secret things on Mount Ithome which, if kept out of enemy hands, would guarantee that the subjection of Messenia would not last forever. (McCauley 1)

### **5.6 Anne Finch as Fabulist**

Anne Finch's contribution to English literature as a fabulist has gone almost completely unnoticed. While Gay, Swift, Dryden and other major male poets in the Restoration and eighteenth century are recognized for their contribution to this genre, Finch's work remains overlooked. Her work in this genre, however, has been noted by both Reynolds and Hinnant who observe that "before Gay, Lady Winchilsea holds a solitary pre-eminence as an English fable-writer in the manner of La Fontaine...They were probably all written between 1700 and 1713. She formed herself almost entirely on La Fontaine, who had broken distinctly with the literary tradition of his predecessors" (Reynolds cix). Many of her fables are in poetic form.

Both Reynolds and Hinnant evaluate Finch's fables as daringly original even when Finch tells the reader they are "Translated from Monsieur de la Fontaine" or "imitated from Sir Roger L'Estrange" (155, 164). Reynolds notes that in a Finch fable, "Two lines are expanded into as many pages; there are large omissions and frequent condensations; details are replaced by others giving English local color; fables are broken into two; morals are added or altered; titles are changed" (cix-cx). Hinnant posits that "Finch's fables, like those of Swift or Gay, are not translations – or even imitations, in the sense popularized by Oldham and Pope. Thus, they do not conform to what Dryden called paraphrase – a mode 'where the author is kept in view by the



translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not strictly followed” (168-69). One significant feature of her fables is her inclusion of human beings as characters. Hinnant writes:

The most appropriate form in which to embody the admonitions implied by this perspective was not the beast fable proper, in which the protagonist is often pitted against the wiles or superior strength of a predatory antagonist, but a tale embodying human characters, in which the vulnerability of the protagonist to chance or to a capricious deity is emphasized. (180)

Like most English fables, including those translated by Dryden, Finch’s fables contribute to the political debates of her day, early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Hinnant writes that “Finch’s version totally transforms this source text by giving it a new, ironic, application in a contemporary context” (169). Like closet drama and literary equivocation, “the choice of fable has a specific purpose – namely to avoid referring openly to current events and issues but to devise narratives that are immune to topical application because of their obvious fictionality” (Hinnant 170). Hinnant notes that “the more closely one reads her tales and fables the more one comes across similar evidence of a covert political or ideological strain” (175). Like the other plays examined in this Dissertation, Finch’s fables present the same concern as Elizabeth Cary, Jane Cavendish, Elizabeth Cavendish Brackley and Margaret Cavendish -- “her experiments in the fable demonstrate a continuing protest against tyrannical structures” (Hinnant 196). In fact, Finch’s fables “ridicule of the presumptive truth of political rationalizations” (Hinnant 178). As I will later argue, Finch’s play, *Aristomenes*, also displays a keen interest in the construction of tyranny.

Characteristically, fables and their counterparts, the folk tale, explore dark outcomes. However, Hinnant and Lewis suggest that Finch's fables are particularly violent and pessimistic. Hinnant notes that Finch's fables, "adopt a moral posture that is rigorous and unrelenting in its assault upon illusion, pretension, flattery, and unwarranted assumptions about the world" (Hinnant 168). An example of this kind of fable, noted by Lewis is "The Goute and the Spider." A spider builds a beautiful web: "the hanging Fret work makes her active Loom" (Lewis 128). An "unpitying Maid" takes her broom and uses it as a weapon ("the battering engine went") to knock the web down. Lewis states that the moral of this fable is that "Each [should] his proper Station learn to know" (128). In fables like this, Hinnant states that there "a discontinuity between the comic surface and an underlying sense of pessimism" (179). Lewis also notes the comic and pessimistic dichotomy of a Finch fable: "Instead her fable animates an ultimately collaborative tension between the imperial arrangement of the table and the Jester's longings" (144). In the fable "The Battle Between the Rats and the Weazles," Finch finds the rats unable to escape their foes the weazels because the plumes on their military hats are so large they cannot make it through the "slender Crannies" (207). Hinnant notes that "a vein of seriocomic humour is combined with aspects of a conservative politics of disillusionment and nostalgia" (179). In general, both Hinnant and Lewis recognize that Finch "remains preoccupied with the realities of power and violence" (Hinnant 196). In fact, Lewis notes, "her imitations of La Fontaine emphasize their original' violence" (138). Lewis states that "In the French fables that Finch turned into English, assault and battery mark material bodies' confrontations with established symbolic designs" (138). Finch even takes side against her characters in her fables, according to Lewis: "Finch worked traces of her own agency into her translations, fiercely taking sides against the characters in her fables Her morals are harsh, even retributive. They often force La

Fontaine's poems into a sterner, far more repressive framework" (Lewis 138). As I will later demonstrate, this characteristic reveals itself to be part of the make-up of her work, *Aristomenes*, as well.

Finch's fable writing is inextricably linked to the politics of the day. Hinnant's estimation of Finch's fables are particularly apt:

In practical terms, this means that her eagles and lions should not be seen as representations of William III – or that her cats and owls are symbols of specific courtiers and politicians. Yet these characters, like the other personages in her fables, are placed within a context in which they embody Finch's ideological assumptions. From her perspective, the well-being of English society depended upon the preservation of its divinely ordained hierarchies, and was thus threatened by the political and financial revolutions of the 1680's and 1690's. The fable was a particularly appropriate vehicle for her response to these revolutions. Steven N. Zwicker has linked 'the rise of the fable' in the last decade of the seventeenth century to the 'uncertainty; that attended the Glorious Revolution, while Annabella Paterson has aptly characterized 'the conditions that promote Aesopic writing' as 'political repression, combined with the existence of an educated elite with a stake in the political structure but no direct access to it.' Both conditions were certainly present in Finch's case. (175-76)

Existing critical consensus on Finch's fables also helps us to contextualize the play, *Aristomenes*.

In light of the arguments about the intent and modus operandi of Finch's fables, I would posit that the play is a fable in play form.

## 5.7 The Fox Figure

The figure of the fox is arguably one of the most complex characters in folk tale and fable. Known as a “trickster,” the fox not only tricks others, but also, at times, falls victim to trickery by other animals and himself. The history of the fox figure in fable and folk tale is menacing:

From Classical Antiquity onward the fox has been associated with cunning and guile in literature, folk superstition and religious iconography. This association is born from a variety of vulpine characteristics. The fox’s red coat identifies it with evil and deception, and the typical characterisation of the fox as cunning and sly meant that in Biblical exegesis and the *Physiologus* tradition it represented the devil or the heretic. (Williams 85)

Between 1174 and 1250, “the twenty eight versions (or ‘branches’) of the *Romance of Reynard the Fox* were written in France” (Salisbury 122). In this version, Reynard displays his complex make up:

In his attempts to execute his tricks Renart makes various alliances. It can be established immediately that Renart is always a trickster, never a prankster, for his actions all have the same aim of bringing him some form of personal advantage, whether this is material benefit, such as a choice chicken, or an intellectual victory over a sworn enemy...He is not always a successful trickster, however, and it is his very fallibility which creates the pattern of trick and countertrick, deception and revenge which structures the *Roman de Renart*.

Williams 90

The odd thing about Reynard is his deep connection to the community he subverts. He cannot survive except as a member of society: “On each occasion Renart tries to mask his true motives by appealing to the bonds of loyalty and kinship which characterize feudal society” (Williams 90). He then “turns the loyalty and allegiance which his intended victims properly practice into the instruments of their own deception. Although he has no desire to embrace such virtues himself, he

tries to use the social and moral integrity of the other animals to trick them” (Williams 91). Williams observes, “the wrongdoer is perversely sheltered by the loyalties which he subverts, it is clear that Renard is ultimately dependent on these rules and structures. It may already then be established that the fox as trickster does not stand outside the community, but actually relies on its social bonds” (Williams 91). Reynard’s relationship to society is presented as a strangely symbiotic.

His role as trickster is precarious. Despite his menacing nature, the fox can fall victim to his own trickery. In Alison Williams’s analysis of Branch II of the Reynard story, she finds that “Renart’s encounters with the smaller animals at the beginning of Branch II thus cast him in the role of the would-be trickster who is tricked” (Williams 92). She states that Reynard is not the only trickster in this section, but that all of the animals are in trying to avoid becoming Reynard’s next meal. In this instance, “all of Reynart’s victims in Branch II are well-justified in using trickery” and “show themselves capable of employing duplicitous words and actions” (92). I argue that Aristomenes as fox figure, tricks himself but, according to Daniel’s argument that the fable is dialogic, Finch situates this within a site of disenchanting epistemological growth.

### **5.8 Analysis of *ARISTOMENES, OR THE ROYAL SHEPHERD A TRAGEDY***

In the Epilogue, Finch tells her audience that “a tedious Play / Is like the last long mile in dusty way / That tryes your patience, and that wearies more, / Then all the irksome road you past before (Epilogue). I believe that by tedious, Finch means depressing. She explains:

the Author thought itt fit

To let the Audience know when this was writ,

‘Twas not for praise, or with pretense to witt:

But lonely Godmersham th’ attempt excuses,

Not to be endur'd, without the Muses;  
 The if what was compos'd within that shade...  
 Can gain your Pardon – cancel but the past,  
 And of this kind, this fault shall be the last. (Epilogue)

Finch stayed at Godmersham while her husband, Heneage, faced treason charges in London – due to his service to James II. Finch is pleading for a “cancel” of the events leading to Godmersham and indicates that if the past – “the irksome road you past before” -- could be cancelled, there would be no need for her to write a dark play like *Aristomenes*. Kairoff offers a general synopsis of the play:

*Aristomenes* concerns a legendary ruler of Messenia who successfully warred against Sparta...we see Aristomenes after his capture by Sparta. He later escapes from the Spartan dungeon with the aid of the Spartan king's daughter Amalinta, who, unknown to both rulers, loves Aristomenes' son Aristor. Meanwhile, Aristomenes daughter Herminia has escaped to the countryside, where she meets the shepherd Climander, really the disguised prince of Rhodes. Aristomenes' return and climactic battle with Sparta facilitate the unions of both pairs of lovers, but Amalinta and Aristor die after a skirmish, while Herminia and her shepherd-prince will marry and accompany the victorious Aristomenes to Rhodes. There he will help Climander, now known by his real name Demagetus, secure his throne.

Kairoff 28

A closer look, however, yields intriguing insights.

At the opening of the play, Finch Climander (Demagetus, son to the Prince of Rhodes) is disguised as a shepherd. A definition of honour is set up in the first scene: it depends on warrior skill in battle. Early in the play, Aristomenes is lauded for his heroism and honour. Climander's

respect for Aristomenes is total: “But trust me, when we have subdued these Countries / When Lacedemon’s Kings shall sue for Peace, / And make great Aristomenes Returns / Agreeing to his Merits, and their Wrongs” (I.i.80-83). In his state as a shepherd, he believes that “The Gods have giv’n him Fame, whilst We are Wretched” (I.i.130). Aristomenes capture and possible death means the death of honour: “Whilst the bright Spirit, Honour is gone by” (I.i.159). Demagatus recognizes this:

Why wou’d’st thou thus contrive against my Fame,  
 And rob my fiery Youth of this first War,  
 (For which it languish’d with a Lover’s Fondness)  
 By saying still ‘twould last, ‘till Time had freed me?  
 But I will yet pursue it thro’ Despair,  
 And share their Ruin, tho’ deny’d their Glory. (I.i.161-66)

Right after this speech, he witnesses many soldiers flee to the woods dropping their arms: “*2d Sold.* What, is the Army all dispres’d, and broken! [*To them. 3d Sold.* No, but the Wisest of them do as we do. /Away, away –” (I.i.191-93). Climander berates them for abandoning the hero Aristomenes:

Can ye so soon forget your Noble General,  
 Your *Aristomenes*, whose Courage fed ye,  
 And by whose Conduct, ye have slept securely  
 In reach of Foes, that trebled ye in Number! (I.i.203-206)

Aristomenes’s heroism and honor is established and emphasized during the first two thirds of the play.

Although Climander demands emphatically (several times) that he would be armed so he could serve with Aristomenes and Aristor in battle, as the play progresses, he never fights in battle but, rather, partakes in lovemaking – pastoral courting that leads to marriage. He is, ostensibly, the royal shepherd of the play. The drama opens with a conversation between Climander and Arcasius debating his role in the battle against Lacedaemons where Aristomenes is leading the attack. He is disguised as Climander because of a prophecy established by the all-knowing Oracle:

*The Isle of Rhodes shall be of peace bereft,  
Unless it by the Heir thereof be left,  
And that He wed, ere he returns agen,  
The Beauteous Daughter of the Best of Men;  
Whose Father's presence there shall save the State,  
And smooth the threatning Brow of angry Fate. (I.i.32-37)*

Climander states that he *must* participate in the battle and requests Arcasius to supply him with arms. He says; “That Aristomenes, the Spartan Terrour, / Were leading me, this moment, bravely on” (I.i.14-15). Climander protests against the oracle: “No more of Oracles” (I.i.25), and Arcasius states “O wretched *Rhodes!* Thy Ruin is pronounc'd” (I.i.20). Arcasius continues in his plea for Climander to remain away from the battle by invoking Climander's father's wishes to obey the oracle and suggests he focus on the Oracle's demand that he find a fitting spouse: “You might espouse One of these Rural Maids, /Whose Parents harmless Presence in our Land / Might bring the Blessings of the Gods upon us” (I.i.49-51). Climander continues to lament his imposed passivity:

But here have spent the long and lazy Hours



Carelessly stretch'd beneath some *Sylvan* Shade,  
 And only sent my Wishes to their tents:  
 But ere the Battle (which is soon intended)  
 Shall meet in glorious Tryal of their Right,  
 I will be there, and side with the *Messenians*. (I.i.58-63)

He protests yet again against his father, "I did not promise him to be a Coward, / To let the sound of War thus strike my Sense, (I.i.115-16). Climander agrees to wait for two hours while Arcasius states he will consult with Rhodes about Climander's wish to gain arms and fight. During this time frame, we learn that Aristomenes has been caught by the Lacedaemonians. Soon after this, Climander meets Herminia, Aristomenes daughter, also disguised as a shepherdess. There follows a long scene where they begin to fall in love. Soon after, Climander meets Arcasius who tells him about another soldier's desertion from the cause following Aristomenes capture and possible death. Even though Arcasius tells him that the time has expired, and he is free to fight, Climander directs him to get jewels so he can pay soldiers to remain at battle, "fetch me the Wealth I mention'd. / About these Woods they quick Return shall find me. After Arcasia leaves, another love scene between Climander and Herminia occurs. In Act IV, Climander, now dressed in military uniform as Demagetus, appears in the General's Pavilion. He laments to Arcasia that his shepherdess is nowhere to be found: "Now in the midst of Clouds and loud Applauses, / That greet me for restoring them *Aristor*, / Must wretched *Demagetus* sigh for Love" (IV.i.58-59). Although the audience might be sympathetic to the young lover, a pro-Stuart audience would also recognize Demagetus's passivity. Curiously, however, this passivity, however, goes unrecognized by Aristomenes. When Aristomenes has won the final battle to regain Sparta, he makes no comment

to others or even aside to himself about Demagetus as one might suspect he would. One cause for this might be that his need to be the penultimate soldier.

When Aristomenes, Aristor, Aleander and other attendants enter with a flourish, Aristomenes says to Demagetus, “Thou are the restorer of my lov’d *Aristor*...I declare thee equal in command” (IV.i.68-70). Demagatus merely sighs. Aristomenes says, “A Soldier sigh, when courting Fame attends him!” (IV.i.73). But he seems to understand Demagatus’s passion and brings Herminia, his daughter, to the prince and they are married. The scene that follows between Aristomenes and his son, Aristor, demonstrates his deep love for his son. He states, “Still to my Heart *Aristor* wou’d be nearest, / Still, with a Merit not to be withstood” (IV.i.201-2). These two short scenes call attention to Finch’s emphasis on love and family.

A series of fantastic events leads up to the restoration of Aristomenes as the hero of the Messenians. Before the successful battle, Aristomenes is imprisoned in an underground dungeon, where he despairs of ever seeing light again. While he languishes in the dungeon, horrified by “my dark ruin,” he hears two voices that present opposite tidings of despair and hope. The first is the voice of an “evil genius” who encourages Aristomenes to commit suicide, “Fallen Wretch! Make haste and Dye!” (I.ii.31). Aristomenes begins to follow the sound “I come, I come --” (I.ii.54). However, a second voice intrudes who counsels the opposite: “Stay, oh! Stay; ‘tis all Delusion, / And wou’d breed thee more Confusion. / I thy better genius, move thee, / I, that guard, and I, that love thee” (I.ii.55-58).

The voices argue over which one has more power over Aristomenes:

*1<sup>st</sup> Voice.* I thy evil Genius am,

To *Phoerea* with thee came;

Hung o’er thee in the murd’ring Croud,

And clapp'd my dusky Wings aloud;  
 Now endeavor'd to deceive thee,  
 And will never, never leave thee.  
*2d Voice.* I'll protect him from thy Pow'r.  
*2d Voice.* Laurels He again shall wear,  
 War and Honour's Trumpet hear. (I.i.73-82)

Aristomenes reiterates the second voice's proclamation when he states, "The Field of Honour is his Bed of Ease; / He toils for't all the Day of his hard Life" (II.ii.89-90). This engenders the departure of the first voice and both voices cease here. This scene, with voices asking Aristomenes to follow opposite paths prefigures the entrance of the traditional folk figure of the double-talking fox.

The scene of the competing voices is complicated by the entrance of a curious figure. Finch tells us in the stage directions that "*A machine, like a Fox, runs about the Dungeon smelling, and rushes against Aristomenes, who taking it for his evil Genius, catches at it, and speaks*" (362). Finch did not originate the connection between Aristomenes and the fox. Drawing from D. Ogden's study *Aristomenes of Messene: Legends of Sparta's Nemesis*, McCauley writes that Ogden:

traces various strands of Aristomenes' character. It concludes that in addition to receiving cultic honors as a hero, he combines the figure of a martial hero such as Achilles with those of a cunning thinker such as Odysseus and a fox-like trickster such as Aesop, all of which is suitable to his character as a resistance hero. (McGovern 2)

Richard Evans states that the stories surrounding Aristomenes were “stock-in-trade material commonly found in folklore” (696). In the myth, Aristomenes escapes a dungeon by grasping the tail of fox which leads him to the hole through which it had entered. Finch takes the existing tale of the relationship between Aristomenes and the fox and develops it into a significant complex alliance.

The stage directions state that Aristomenes takes the fox as an incarnation of his evil genius only. This seems naive. Considering that he had previously rejected the first voice in order to follow the second, the turn-about that follows seems surprising. Aristomenes addresses the fox whom he thinks is his evil genius:

What! Hast thou Substance too, and dar'st

Assault me!

Nay then, thou shall not 'scape; I'll seize and grapple with

Thee,

And by my conqu'ring Arm o'ercome thy Influence.

Fool that I was! To think. It could be banquisht.

This is some rav'ning Beast; the Fur betrays it;

A *Fox*, I think, teach me to be as subtle,

*Extremity*, thou Mother of Invention! [He catches it.

I have it now; and where it leads will follow.

My better Genius do's this Hour preside:

Be strong that influence, and now my Guide.

[Exit, led out by the Fox (Stage directions, 95-103)

Aristomenes's seems to think that his "better Genius" still presides and will guide him despite the fact that he is receiving help from the fox. It is the fox that leads the way. His estimation that he can conquer the fox is unfounded because now he is beholden to the creature.

Aristomenes's identification with the fox continues to grow. Once again, Finch includes stage directions detailing the growth of this strange relationship: "*From the other Door, the Fox runs over the stage, follow'd soon after by Aristomenes, his Hands foul with Earth* (366). He has taken on the fox's characteristic of digging through the earth. He finds himself in a myrtle grove on the grounds of Alexander's palace. He says to the fox: "Farewell my wild Companion, and my Leader!" (III.i.25). Aristomenes then dedicates his loyalty to the fox:

*[Pointing to the Fox.*

Henceforth thy figure, in my Ensigns borne,

Shall tell the World (if e'er I 'scape these Walls)

That 'twas thy Conduct drew me from my Bondage. (III.i.26-28)

Aristomenes's fully identifies with the fox by his grasp of its tail and his hands "foul with Earth." He dedicates his loyalty to the beast whose image he will display on his flag. He believes that the fox is the heroic leader who freed him from bondage. However, we know that the fox that appears in the fable is not heroic. He is a trickster, double-faced, and a liar. Aristomenes has attributed features of himself to the fox. The honorable Aristomenes, identified as a leader in battle and as an emblem on the flag, is replaced with the fox. In fact, I believe that both voices that sing songs to Aristomenes may very well be the double-talking fox. Aristomenes has attributed features of

himself to the fox. The honourable Aristomenes, identified as a leader in battle and as an emblem on the flag, is replaced with the fox.

Foxes in folk tale and fable notoriously love to manipulate language. A line that foreshadows Aristomenes's appreciation of and manipulation of language first occurs when he is before the Spartan council. When given the choice to pay tribute or go to his death, Aristomenes asks for them to "Propose the gentlest Bargain you can make" (I.ii.46). Their response is that "'Tis not for Us to wave, or change our Terms" (I.ii.49). One of the kings of Lacedemon, Anaxander, asks Aristomenes, "Have you enough considered of its Horror / To bend your stubborn Will to our Demands?" (I.i.104-5). Aristomenes replies with a stirring speech:

That active Faculty, which we call *Phancy*,  
 Soon as you spoke, dragg'd me thus bound by Slaves  
 Thro' the throng'd Streets, exciting several Passions;  
 The Barb'rous Croud shouted their clamorous Joy,  
 Because unpunish'd they might sport with Blood;  
 Old Men and Matrons, destin'd long for Deat,  
 With envious Pleasure saw me forced before them  
 To tread that Path, in spite of vigorous Nature,  
 Whilst tender Virgins turned aside their Heads'  
 And dropt, in Silence, the soft Tears of Pity:  
 But, Oh! The Soldiers; from the Soldier's hands  
 Methoughts I saw their Swords neglected thrown,  
 When Fortune shew'd they cou'd not save the Bravest  
 (If once she frown'd) from such a Fate as mine. (I.ii.107-20)

The Spartan council becomes aware of the effect he is having the crowd. Clarinthus says, “He’ll move the Crowd; urge him to speak directly” (i.ii.121). Anaxander warns Aristomenes: “All this is from the purpose; plainly tell / Whether you’ll meet our Mercy, or the Dungeon” (I.ii.122-23). But Aristomenes continues his Byronic-like speech making, fashioning himself as a tragic hero:

My Train of Thoughts to that dark cave had  
 Led me;  
 I stood reclined upon the horrid Brim,  
 And gaz’d into it, ‘till my baffl’d Sight  
 Piercing beyond the many jetting Rocks  
 That help to break by turns the falling Body,  
 Was lost in Shades, where it must rest for-ever:  
 And ready now to be pushed rudely off,  
 This was my last, and best Reflection on it,  
 That there dwelt Peace, which is not to be found  
 In his dark Bosom, that has sold his Country. (I.ii.124-33)

Aristomenes’s valorization of himself, evident in these lines, is the kind of flattering talk spoken by the fox to his next victim. Finch’s emphasis on the heroic nature of Aristomenes seems commendable here. The audience would agree in this estimation of the character.

The prediction of the second voice occurs twice. The second voice vows that “Laurels He again shall wear, / War and Honour’s Trumpet hear.” (II.ii.80-81). At the opening of Act V, there is “A noise of drums and Tumpets.” Aristomenes says: The trumpet calls, with the impatient Drum; / And he that loves Honour, let him come” (V.i.36-7). At this victory celebration, Aristomenes

takes his son, Aristor, in his arms, “Now let me fold thee thus, my Life’s best treasure!” (V.i.16), but he feels an odd sense of emptiness. Even though the predictions of the second voice have come to be, Aristomenes vows faith in his evil genius, “Yet my evil Genius but be true, / And a fam’d end is all it can portend me” (V.i.28-29). This indicates that there is no clear dividing line between the good and evil genius and that the fox represents both of the voices because he seems to be dependent on them both. Aristomenes’s identification with the fox demonstrates that he serves both voices of the fox, which are now internalized.

The identity of the second voice arises when Alcander discovers the bodies of Alistor and Amalintha and cries, “O sudden Horror! Where’s our Conquest now. / Our lofty Boasts, and brave expected Triumphs?” (V.i.290-91). The second voice then predicts: “A Flourish of *Drums and Trumpets, with Shouts of Joy.* (406). Aristomenes arrives with a wreath of victory on his head. Although the play’s hero sought after and won victory – and fulfilled the desired prophecy of the second voice – he, the fox, tricked himself into believing that this was the desired outcome. Now that Aristor is dead, these laurels mean nothing. The wreath immediately becomes “the slightest Toy” (V.i.375). Aristomenes weeps:

So look’d the World to *Pyrra*, and her mate;

So gloomy waste, so destitute of Comfort,

When all Mankind besides lay drown’d in Ruin.

Oh! Thou wert well inform’d, my evil genius;

And the complaining Rocks mourn’d not in vain:

For here my Blood, my dearest Blood I pay

For this poor Wreath, and Fame that withers it

*[Tears the Wreath, and throws himself upon his Son.* (V.i.368-374)



When Demegatus asks Aristomenes if he can bring him comfort by succeeding Aristor in active duty, Aristomenes replies:

Comfort on Earth! Oh! 'tis not to be found.  
 My *Demagetus*, thou hast far to travel;  
 The Bloom of Youth sits graceful on thy brow,  
 And bids thee look for days of mighty Pleasures,  
 For prosp'rous Wars, and the soft Smiles of Beauty,  
 For generous Sons, that may reflect thy Form,  
 And give thee Hopes, as I had, of their succor. (V.i.405-411)

Aristomenes's final speech reveals his deep disenchantment as he realizes what a fool he was to believe in the concept of honour he lived his life by:

Then let me draw this flatt'ring Veil aside,  
 And bid thee here, her in this face behold,  
 How biting Cares have done the work of Age,  
 And in my best of Strength mark'd me a Dotard.  
 Defeated Armies, slaughter'd Friends are here;  
 Disgraceful Bnds, and Cities laid in Ashes:  
 And if thou find'st, that Life will yet endure it.  
 Since what I here have lost –  
 So bow'd, so waning shalt thou see this carcass,  
 That scarce thou wilt recall what once it was.  
 Then be instructed Thou, and All that hear me,  
 Not to expect the compass of soft Wishes,

Or constant Joys, which fly the fond Possessor.  
*Since Man, by swift returns of Good and Ill,*  
*In all the Course of Life's uncertain still;*  
*By Fortune favoured now, and now opprest,*  
*And not, 'till Death, secure of Fame, or Rest. (V.i.413-29)*

Aristomenes had pledged himself to honor -- to defend the state and, once again, war – the tyrant he adheres to.

The title of this play can be interpreted in more than one way. Demagetus is listed in the *Dramatis Personae* as “Damagetus, Or the Royal Shepherd.” He is a shepherd by disguise (only) and royal by birth. I think it is possible to read the title of this play another way. Aristomenes is a different kind of royal shepherd. It is evident in the play after the soldiers drop their guns and desert that only Aristomenes can bring them back into the fold. When he is freed from the dungeon, he does just that and wages the final battle that secures Sparta. He is a Royal Shepherd who keeps the most valuable stock – the King’s soldiers – together and secure from foreign attack. However, Aristomenes suffers from the ultimate unchangeable tyranny when his son is killed in war and he must cope with that death for the rest of his life. The war “even at its termination” clearly continues to enslave soldiers who accept it and endorse it as a system” (Purinton 80). Aristomenes’s earlier definition of himself as “honourable” becomes meaningless. Through the introduction of the trickster, the fox, Finch works through the process of the epistemology of Aristomenes who, at the end of the play, questions and rejects the very basic tenets of the life he has lived and is now destined to suffer through. Like the rat in the Finch fable, “The Weazels and the Rats,” the feather in Aristomenes’s cap leads to his (son’s) death.

## **5.9 Conclusion**

The political concerns of the text can be read as the personal reaction of Anne Finch to the events of the Glorious Revolution and its effect on her and her husband as well as in a more general pro-Stuart disenchantment. Finch dedicates the play to her husband: “*To my Lord Winchilsea, upon the first reading the Play to him, at Eastwell in Kent*” (Prologue). Although the Finches lost no child during the revolution, the effect of the revolution on every aspect of their lives brought about the same distress and melancholy experienced by Aristomenes after the death of his son. The Finches lost everything. The inability of James II to help them recover any of the losses they suffered because of their loyalty to him was a devastating pill to swallow. As Kairoff notes, Finch recognized the rich possibilities presented by the tale of the captive King, his son, and son’s fiancé. James II, like the Stuarts before him, could be construed as a ‘captive,’ due either to his exile or his country’s rule by William, the warrior and Dutch stadtholder (29). I disagree with Kairoff, however, when she states that:

James was driven into exile because he not only alienated many in the ruling class; he ‘lost support of a large proportion of his subjects.’ Aristor and Amalintha might resemble the English people, led by their passion to betray their father(s) and indulge their forbidden love. The fates of Aristor and Amalintha might reflect, when Finch wrote the play, the kind of self-destruction she foresaw resulting from the people’s desertion of their King. (29)

I believe that Aristor represents the hopes of Stuart supporters – hopes that dwindled due to the inaction of their king – obliquely portrayed in Finch’s characterization of Demagatus.

Finch is the only playwright in this study who outright states that she did not want the play to be performed, as I mentioned in the prologue. I interpret her remarks, however, not as a fear of public reaction in the public theatre, but a political fear of Parliamentary backlash. Kairoff writes, “Finch had a good reason to be wary; at least one of her plays was likely written while her husband

was under investigation for treason and both were copied while the pair lived in internal exile” (25). Like Elizabeth Cary, like the Cavendish sisters, and like Margaret Cavendish, the play functions as a secret communiqué to fellow Royalist supporters: “By then, she had every reason to avoid widespread knowledge of plays that could be considered seditious. Through her placement of the plays in the middle of her folio, she both buried them within her poetry and made them its central feature, somewhat in the manner of the Civil War era’s Stuart supporters who sent messages in code” (Kairoff 28). However, Finch’s coded communiqué has one fundamental difference from the others: her play portrays royalist hopes completely dashed with no hope for repair.

Kairoff notes that Finch revised the manuscript when the play was readied for publication in 1713. The revised last verse reads:

Yes, I will live, ye Sov’reign Pow’rs, I will:  
 You’ve put my Virtue to the utmost Proof;  
 Yet thus chastis’d, I own superior Natures,  
 And all your first Decrees this Sword shall further,  
 ‘Till Rhodes is resc’d, and my Task completed.  
 Who knows, but that the way to your Elysium  
 Is fortitude in Ills, and brave submission;  
 Since Heroes whom your Oracles distinguish,  
 Are often here amidst their Greatness, wretched? (V, 393-401)

Kairoff notes that “In the aftermath of James’s flight to France, which both he and his followers believed would be a temporary exile, Aristomenes’s defiance could have been read as a rallying cry for both the King and his supporters” (Kairoff 33).

For her audiences in 1713, Finch may have meant this speech to recall James II's piety at the end of his life, as well as his endurance of prolonged exile, which left uncompleted his task of regaining the throne despite all his efforts...it would have suggested that his surviving followers, and all who admitted the Stuart claim to their throne, should now unite and fulfill James II's destiny. The speech backs away from any threat of desperate aggression but it assures readers of the Stuarts' willingness to fight for their restoration as well as their patient endurance of exile to date. (Kairoff 33)

This revision, I believe, however, undermines Finch's Epilogue and creates a very different portrait of Aristomenes.

The initial version of Aristomenes's final speech reads:

Yes, I will live, ye cruel fates I will,  
 Ye've done your worst, and now I'll live to brave ye.  
 Carlesse of your decrees, to push on war,  
 Till Sparta's State, and all the foes to Rhodes,  
 Though ye had sett 'em down to Triumphant great,  
 Shou'd sink beneath the weight of my despair (V, 377-382)

I find this version to better integrate with the play as a whole. The "lofty plumage" worn by the rats is replaced by the laurel wreath celebrating victory by Aristomenes. I do not see any possibility for continued Stuart hopes evidenced in Aristomenes's futility in the face of irreparable death. Perhaps, Finch, fearing Whig retribution, felt she had to modify the utter devastation experienced by Aristomenes in the final act.

Finches' 1713 audience – fifteen years after the writing of the manuscript – would read a play where the intensity of the final despair was somewhat modified. Her political poems,

political fables, and political play are surrounded by poems about marriage and nature which also seems to downplay the political aspect of the material. Yet the positioning of the play in proximity to the political poems would be a signal to the Royalist reader that a political missive was the intent of the piece. Royalists would be looking for a clue such as this. The fact that the play was printed and not performed would be an indication, in itself, of the political nature of the text.

I would posit that the play goes further than the lament for an exiled king to express the feelings of deep melancholy, or depression, felt by pro-Stuart supporters as the after-effect of the Glorious Revolution. I agree with Hinnant who writes, “The mind can construct a privileged and ideal state of existence, but it must then suffer the deflation of this ideal from the vantage point of reality” (Hinnant 196). The valorization that defines Aristomenes until Act V is revealed to be erroneous. The fact that the Finches and, in general, their pro-Stuart friends found themselves tricked and complicit in their own personal downfalls is a bitter truth to attend to. As Lewis writes, “Their protagonists are enterprising bodies whose activities mimic the fables’ own signifying strategies, but who are betrayed by the polyvalent scenes of their own devising” (151). It is exactly this that makes the play so dark. Hinnant writes, “Finch’s own ideology takes its rise from the premise that a well-ordered society depends upon the constraints imposed by a divinely established social hierarchy. Since the Revolution has led to the erosion of such constraints, there is no longer any defense against overweening pride or ambition” (180). With the death of this idea, how does Aristomenes, Heneage and Anne Finch, or the pro-Stuart follower go forth? The play represents the epistemology of an existential crisis. Finch needed to bury this bitter experience in a closet drama that was also a fable. Finch’s audience was steeped in the tradition of the fable, which offered moral instruction through tales of sometimes dark experience. They would understand that

*Aristomenes* -- a printed play in a volume featuring more than thirty fables, including the odd stage directions featuring a fox -- would go well beyond the tragic story of a mythological hero. Finch's methods situate the play within a new definition of closet drama as literary equivocation.

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## 6 CONCLUSION

Although we are indebted to the scholars who have called attention to the playwrights under discussion here, arguing for a play's performability undermines focus on the significance of these texts as cultural and theatrical artifacts. I, instead, pose this question: how did these playwrights use the literary traditions and conventions available to them? In each play, the author manipulates genre to hide subversive forms of communication. These genres include the incorporation of historical sources such as Cary's adaptation of the Herod/Mariam story and Finch's use of the Aristomenes/Sparta myth. These plays include a tragedy where one equivocating character mysteriously escapes death, two comedy-like plays that end in marriages that do not resemble traditional marriages – with one resembling a death. Two plays include masque scenes, both of which are corrupt. The Cavendish sisters utilize the equivocation of the hybrid news-playlet genre, just becoming popular in the growing print culture. Finch, an early unrecognized writer of fables, uses this genre to express discomfit with The Glorious Revolution. These authors adapt genres in order to stage their political sensibilities. The closet drama genre as a whole is subversive: as I mention earlier, the genre is plagued by questions such as is it a play? Is it a dialogue? Is it a poetic drama? etc. This renders the closet drama the perfect genre to communicate sensitive material and destabilize the Master of the Revels.

By investigating the historical circumstances surrounding each playwright, I highlight the complex milieu these plays were borne out of. As I show, plays written during the Early Modern period through the Restoration period cannot be divorced from their historical imperatives. Each of these plays is written by a woman who maintained close ties to a catholic queen. The Royalist penchant for catholic symbols and icons appears in these plays, including an attraction to spectacle. For women writers experiencing a situation of material or emotional siege, the

Catholic doctrine of equivocation is a practical survival skill. For Cary, a converted Catholic, equivocation kept her children safe. Three of the plays were written during or immediately after war or revolution. These unstable times called for careful control of the tongue – specifically addressed in both *Mariam* and *The Concealed Fancies*. Like the Catholic equivocator, these playwrights take literary conventions (or truths) and bend them in order to protest against contemporary absolutism, communicate about current events, or express bitter disillusionment.

My research indicates that these dramas could or would not be performed on stage because of their bold content. These playwrights expose ineffectual ideological structures. Each playwright generates provocative discourse that both highlights tyrannical structure and serves to subversively undermine it -- a resistance to psychological colonization. Although Margaret Cavendish states that her plays are “not of the mode” and would like to see them performed, the more probable outcome for these plays would be censorship. These plays operate through coded political communication to avoid that censorship. Marjorie Purinton’s comments regarding Romantic closet drama, apropos to the time frame explored here, states, “these theatres were politically charged with control and censorship...The legitimate romantic theatre, therefore, was not permitted to produce plays of blatant political, religious, or social content” (Purinton, 17). Each of the politically dissident texts acts seditiously, provocatively, inflammatory, and promotes discontent or rebellion amongst their readers -- the language inciting rebellious attitudes against the lawful hegemonic government. Raber concludes that “...the genre constructs a bridge across which women negotiate their transgression of the boundaries that theoretically exclude them” (255). These playwrights use the closet drama as that bridge.

I suggest, following Purinton, that these plays require close reading – but that their coded views were probably more easily recognized by their contemporaries. Purinton writes: “readers

must actively search beyond the physical features of the dramatic structure, must discern more than the visible disguises of the costumed characters, must perceive more than surface level linguistic constructs, must consider additional dimensions to historical allusions, and finally, must read past simplistic linear conflicts to appreciate the rich ideological complexities and meanings layered throughout the play” (21). When read in the context of the playwright’s historical backdrop and other writings, the scholar intuits intricacies not immediately apparent.

The use of this historical lens allows for a bleak interpretation of the outcome of these closet dramas. As Horacio Sierra writes Lady Happy’s “body is appropriated as an ‘advantage’” to a foreign state” (667). The same could be said to be true for her predecessor, Miriam. The sisters marry in *The Concealed Fancies*, but the civil war is not over, and the sisters’ continued banter predicts future discord. Aristomenes’s bitter disillusionment is unfixable. Disruption of the system portends a distressing future. Michael Evenden, finds, however, that closet playwrights, “look for alternative alignments of the body and identity in alternative performances and plays” (245). There is a refusal of mediated experience. It can be noted that, in the attempt to speak and/or control their bodies, Miriam, Tattiney, Luceny, and Lady Happy are successful. Katherine R. Kellet commends “their ability to resignify their bodies and disrupt the coherence of any system that attempts to regulate them” (422). These women are defiant, disobedient, insubordinate, unruly, mutinous -- more than merely “wayward.” They form a rebellious republic. Their actions are insurrectionary. They are not easily handled or kept in place. Yet, each of these plays acts seditiously, provocatively, inflammatory, and promotes discontent or rebellion amongst their readers -- the conduct or language inciting rebellious attitudes against the lawful hegemonic government. Karen Raber notes that these plays are “...a powerful abstraction of renaissance concepts of selfhood, identity, and a reflection on how such concepts produce

forms of power” (16). These plays challenged the status-quo with a call for rejection of state values. Raber concludes that “...the genre constructs a bridge across which women negotiate their transgression of the boundaries that theoretically exclude them” (255). I would posit that the closet offers these women playwrights a space and audience for subversive, even radical, political exploration of concepts of human rights.

One of the traits of the trickster, embodied in the figure of the fox, is his love of language – specifically, the manipulation of language. These plays abound with characters who manipulate language: Salome, Luceny, Tattiney, the Prince and Aristomenes. The one character who displays no interest in the use of language is Lady Happy – who falls victim to this manipulation. Although, certainly not in the case of the prince, the playwrights’ fascination with characters who dissemble, or equivocate – and survive -- by the use of rhetorical skills underscores the skill of these women playwrights who employ the same strategies as their characters in order to escape censorship and disseminate their views through their constructed texts. The closet drama becomes a means for political duplicity.

Their full significance of these theatrical texts and their incorporation into the history of English drama warrants further investigation. Scholars of the Renaissance, Interregnum, and Restoration Periods must examine these playwrights and their work to develop a richer understanding of the cultural imperatives of these time periods. Lois Potter finds “many different works written in dramatic form” that the scholar “of mid-century drama cannot legitimately ignore” (264). While *Mariam* and *The Convent of Pleasure* have received a modicum of attention from scholars, who propound the feminism inherent in the texts, *The Concealed Fancies* and *Aristomenes, Or the Royal Shepherd* remain practically unheard of. This is compounded by the fact that no stand-alone scholarly edition of these two plays or *The Convent*

*of Pleasure* exists. In addition, as Solomon notes, Finch made changes to her play upon its publication. Both the manuscript and the printed play need further study in tandem with the 1903 edition of the play by Reynolds who moved it to the end of her volume, separating it from poems which might offer a vantage point for a reconsideration of the play. Beyond the scope of this dissertation is a call for a reevaluation of all plays labeled “closet drama” – those written by males as well as females – these plays remain unexplored in virtual dustbins. As true scholars of literature we cannot afford to ignore what Harbage called, “the chance of discoveries.”

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