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Swansea University
Prifysgol Abertawe

‘Enough in my Heart to know all my Thoughts’:
The Letter Writing of Unmarried Women 1575-1802

Chloë Rowan Guy

Submitted to the University of Wales in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2012



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Summary

The rise in popularity of women's history and the history of letter writing has ensured much debate on these subjects in recent years. However, little research has been conducted on the letter writing of unmarried women and networks shown in their letter writing. From courtship to widowhood, the relationships created and sustained through the medium of letter writing are manifested, and the detail of their lives makes for compelling reading.

Through largely case based studies, I have sought to show the types of support systems women had in place, not only from men, but from friends and relatives. Their lives are documented through analysis of both manner and content, examining style, rhetoric and expression. I have sought to include not only examples of women who have already been examined, such as Dorothy Osborne, and Anne Newdigate, but lesser known sources, such as Isabella Strutt and the correspondents of Jane Stringer. This adds a new depth to the work already conducted on the lives of early modern women.

Single women were able to create agenda and autonomy through their letter writing, employing a variety of rhetorical devices and personas subject to their stage in the life cycle. Through their letters, they were able to maintain bonds with men and women, cutting across gender and class barrier, broadening their experiences and enriching their lives.

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Acknowledgements

The time which I have spent researching and writing my PhD has been an exciting, challenging, busy (and at times frantic!), yet ultimately rewarding period. I would like to take this opportunity to thank some of the people who have been there to support me during the journey.

Firstly my utmost and devoted thanks must go to my supervisor, Professor John Spurr. His humour, advice, and endless patience have helped me enormously, not only at postgraduate level, but as an undergraduate too. His unfailing support has been much appreciated, and his guidance has been of paramount importance to my work. This will be much missed, but not forgotten, as I continue forwards on my career path.

I would also like to thank Swansea University for granting me a bursary which enabled me to continue with my studies and conduct my research. I hope that the end product will do the university, and the History Department in particular, justice.

Swansea University Ladies Hockey Club has been a huge part of my life in the years I have been at this university, and I would like to thank the members for all their support, competition and company. Their jovial spirit and never ending jokes about my apparent vocation as a student have provided me with some wonderful memories.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents and family for all the support and guidance they have given me throughout my academic life.

Abbreviations

BL	British Library
BL Eg.	British Library Egerton Manuscripts
BCA	Birmingham City Archives
DRO	Derbyshire Record Office
HCA	Hull City Archives
HRO	Hampshire Record Office
LRO	Lancashire Record Office
WCRO	Warwickshire Record Office

O'Day

Rosemary O'Day, *Cassandra Brydges (1670-1735) First Duchess of Chandos; Life and Letters* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007).

Parker

Kenneth Parker ed., *Dorothy Osborne: Letters to William Temple, 1652-54; Observations on Love, Literature, Politics and Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

Searle

Arthur Searle ed., *Barrington Family Letters 1628-1632*, Camden Fourth Series Vol. 28 (London: Royal Historical Society, 1983).

Steen

Sara Jayne Steen, ed., *The Letters of Lady Arbella Stuart; Women Writers in English 1350-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Taylor

Nancy Taylor, *Cousins In Love; The Letters of Lydia DuGard, 1665-1673* (Arizona; Arizona State University, 2003).

Wall

Alison D. Wall ed., *Two Elizabethan Women: Correspondence of Joan and Maria Thynne 1575-1611* (Devizes: Wiltshire Record Society, 1983)

Note on Quotations

Quotations are given as they appear in the manuscripts and printed primary sources. If a word is unclear, then the most probable word or letter is placed in square brackets.

Note on Referencing

For continuity purposes, all footnotes referring to primary manuscript sources take this format; sender, recipient, date, location, archive office, manuscript reference. If one of these elements is missing it is because the information is unavailable. When the month is available but no year, 'year unknown' will appear in the footnote for clarity.

Printed editions of letters take this format; editor's name, date, location, letter number in the collection, page reference. If one of these elements is missing it is because it is not available.

When there is no ambiguity over who is receiving the letter, only the sender's name will appear in the footnote.

Isabella Strutt and Cassandra Brydges are always referred to by their married names.

Dorothy Osborne's letters are sent from Chicksands, unless otherwise specified.

All referenced letter writing manuals were printed in London.

Introduction

The decision to look primarily at the letter writing of unmarried women was born of a desire to give more recognition to women whose lives were, at least for some part, not lived in conjunction with men. There is a void of research concentrated on correspondence by and between single women. Being single is a link that all women have at some point in their lives.¹ Yet this experience could vary. While some women chose to be single and were happy to remain so, for others it was not so much by choice but by default, as suitable beaux were not forthcoming, or their dowries were not tempting enough. Some women found themselves single once again after becoming widows. Other women were constrained by issues which were outside their control, such as socio-economic factors.

Single women are in danger of being considered by historians as one dimensional creatures with a sole aim in life; to get married. The alternative was assumed to be a life of misery and loneliness. For women in the upper-classes, spinsterhood has been described as ‘a functionless role played out at the margins of other people’s lives... For a woman the single life was hardly an alternative life-style to marriage, but rather a despised condition which both the woman and her family sought to avoid.’² This may have been true for some single women, but to make it a sweeping generalisation for all unmarried women would be unconvincing.

Susan Whyman, in her extensive work on the Verney family, has shown that single women could make their own agendas and do not have to be viewed as ‘females with a function’ just because they were poor relations.³ Through analysis of letters to and from four spinster cousins in the family, Pen and Cary Stewkeley, Peg Adams and Mary Lloyd, Whyman has shown that dependent women were still able ‘to obtain self-expression, psychological support and assistance from kin.’⁴

¹ Single women therefore could be spinsters who remained single throughout their lives, women who were courting but not married yet and widows.

² Miriam Slater, ‘The Weightiest Business: Marriage in an Upper-Gentry Family in Seventeenth Century England’, *Past and Present*, No. 72 (August 1976), p. 46.

³ Susan Whyman, ‘Gentle Companions: Single Women and their Letters in Late Stuart England’, in James Daybell ed., *Early Modern Women’s Letter Writing 1450-1700* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 177; See also Susan E. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England; The Cultural World of the Verneys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 191. Cary (b.1655) and Pen Stewkeley (b.1657) were the first and second daughters of five born to Sir Ralph Verney’s poverty stricken sister Cary and her second husband John Stewkeley. None of the five sisters had portions and none were married by the 1680s. They were therefore reliant

Furthermore letter writing, which may have been the only vehicle for interaction for some women, challenged notions of gender, class and patriarchal conventions. In their letters, women were able to increase their power and enhance their autonomy, even if they resided in a particularly dominant patriarchal family. Through their quest for patronage (as this was often the only route to survival) they developed their letter writing into an art form, encompassing various strategies and techniques in style and rhetoric. They also sought to cement their usefulness by sending valuable social and political information.⁵

Considering Whyman's work on the Verney cousins has important consequences for the historian. Women who may have been otherwise repressed found that they could have a voice through their letter writing. They were able to create and maintain bonds with the recipient of their letters, and found an outlet for their thoughts and feelings. It also leads us to ask questions of the methods women employed when doing this. How were they able to express themselves and what devices did they use to do so? Did their writing change through their life experiences and encounters, and if so, in what way? Persuasive methods may have been used, and letters written with set goals in mind. Single women in particular may have found a cathartic release when socially or geographically isolated. What they chose to write about as well as how they chose to write is also important. I use the word 'chose' because the empowerment of these women is a key point here, as they sought to set their own agendas through their correspondence.

Historians such as Amy M. Froide and Bridget Hill have looked at the history of single women in their own right, while others such as Patricia Crawford and Sara Mendelson discuss them incidentally in books about early modern women in general.⁶ One of the few historians to combine work solely on women and letters is James Daybell, yet although his work encompasses a wide range of women, it still

on their uncle's generosity. Peg Adams (b.1665) was born to Elizabeth Adams, the youngest of Sir Ralph's six sisters. As she could not afford to house her two daughters, they were sent to wait on various members of Verney kin. Mary Lloyd (b.1666) was the daughter of Sir Ralph's sister Mary, who had disgraced the family by becoming pregnant and marrying the steward. Between 1692 and 1717, the unfortunate younger Mary had had eight changes of employment; Whyman, 'Gentle Companions' in Daybell ed., *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing*, pp. 180-9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 178-9.

⁶ Amy M. Froide, *Never Married; Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Bridget Hill, *Women Alone; Spinsters in England 1660-1850* (London: Yale University Press, 2001); Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

tends to be focused mainly on women who are married (be it to a spouse or to God!). Daybell asserts that in his own findings unmarried women constitute only 10 per cent of the letter writers and offers the theory that correspondence from single women may have been considered less important than that of wives or married daughters by their families, and therefore they were less likely to survive.⁷

However, this may be due to the evidence that is available. Whilst the thought of concentrating solely on such a group may be attractive, it is difficult to know where to draw the boundaries. Froide's research shows that anywhere between 13 and 27 per cent of people born between 1575 and 1700 remained single throughout their lives, and as demographers agree that the figure is probably around 20 per cent, around one fifth of early modern men and women never married.⁸ Furthermore a sample of 100 urban and rural communities produced results showing that single women accounted for an average of 30.2 per cent of the female population, and in the late seventeenth century 54.5 per cent of the women in London were single.⁹ What is telling here is her careful use of phrasing; the first statistic deals with both men and women, whilst the second deals only with single women, but in what sense were they single? Were they spinsters, or were widows also included in this figure? If one then starts to think about the literacy level of these women, then it can be quickly determined that perhaps the reason that women who were married, or who moved in the upper echelons of society, have been the most frequently commented upon is because there is more evidence from this group to work with. It is very difficult to be rigid and argue that only lifelong spinsters, for example, will be looked at, as it is far too tempting to include other social groups.

There is some elasticity in the term 'single women'. It could be taken to mean women who never married, women who had not yet been married and those who had married but were no longer so. For the purposes of this thesis I define single women as women who were not married at the time of writing their letters. This would have allowed for the inclusion of young girls and adolescents, courting women, widows, spinsters and nuns. To this end I have researched and written chapters focussed on girls, women prior to marriage and women during widowhood,

⁷ Daybell, *Women Letter Writers*, p. 39.

⁸ Froide, *Never Married*, p. 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

but not concentrated on spinsters or nuns. Throughout my research, I have found it difficult to obtain collections of letters from women who remained spinsters throughout their lives. One clear exception to this is some of the members of the Verney family, whom Whyman has commented upon. Peg Lloyd is used in this thesis as an example of a woman who was able to create her own agenda through the illness of her uncle Sir Ralph Verney. Furthermore, evidence surviving from never married women is mainly diary based. I decided not to include nuns for a number of reasons. My first consideration was on the basis of definition. My research focuses on women who were unmarried, whereas nuns are technically married to God. On a pragmatic level, if I had allowed them as subjects under my definition, this would limit the space to conduct a thorough examination of their letter writing. Claire Walker rightly acknowledges that ‘research to date has focused almost entirely upon the secular writings of aristocratic gentlewomen. It all but ignores the epistles of nuns’.¹⁰ Therefore in my belief this group of writers are worthy of a thesis entirely devoted to themselves. Furthermore, nuns are very different to the groups of women I was interested in researching; they lived abroad, led solitary lives, were of the Catholic faith and mainly (though not always) wrote about spiritual subjects. I wanted to analyse women who had different sets of priorities over their life cycle, depending on where they were in their life experiences.

Criteria of Selection

By using the collections of both yet-to-be married women, and widows, I have sought to provide a wider cross section of a portion of women who have been largely overlooked. Sources such as diaries are the main ones to have been used so far in the investigation of women’s lives over the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries, and the growing fascination into letter writing, as well as the rising popularity of women’s history since the 1970s, meant that this was an exciting niche of history which required further scrutiny.¹¹ As John W. Velz comments; ‘everywhere one

¹⁰ Claire Walker ‘Doe not suppose me a well mortified Nun dead to the world’: Letter Writing in Early Modern English Convents’, in Daybell ed., *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing*, p. 159

¹¹ See for example James Daybell, *Women Letter Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); James Daybell ed., *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing 1450-1700* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); James Daybell, *Women and Politics in Early Modern England 1450-1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Jacqueline Eales, *Women in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (London: UCL Press, 1996); Rebecca Earle, *Epistolary Selves; Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999); Laura Gowing and Patricia Crawford, *Women's Worlds in England, 1580-1720; A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 1999); Anne Laurence, *Women in England, 1500-*

turns there are editors and transcribers eager to bring women's voice out of the past to the interested ears of modern listeners.'¹²

There has been more work in the last few decades on the conventions of letter writing. Both Daybell and Gary Schneider analyse the various machinations that accompany the process of penning and sending a letter, and this aids understanding of the whole practise, from the type of paper used, to the handwriting, to the methods used to deploy letters.¹³ Whilst analysing the customs and quirks used in epistolary practise, I was not interested in merely regurgitating the research of other historians, but looked to see what fresh evidence I could bring to support their findings through my own investigations. This was particularly striking when looking again at women's handwriting and the role of messengers in the postal service. Even letters by the same author can throw up issues of continuity and clarity, but there may well be reasons behind this which are revealed by examining manner and content.

When deliberating which letters to use in my thesis, I came to the swift conclusion that collections of letters would prove more valuable to my research than single examples. Daybell for example has done extensive work in the research of women's letters between 1540 and 1603, encompassing around 2,500 letters by about 650 women.¹⁴ However, he concentrates more on the questions of authorship and creation of these letters, whereas I wanted to explore smaller sets of letters written or received by the same person, in order to cultivate some theories on the relationships these women had in their lives. Therefore I decided on a qualitative approach.

1760; A Social History (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1994); Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation; The Conditions of Writing and Reading in Early Modern England* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984); Christine Peters, *Women in Early Modern Britain, 1450-1640* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004); Bruce Redford, *The Converse of the Pen* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Sheila Rowbotham, *Hidden From History; 300 Years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against it* (London: Pluto Press, 1973); Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005); Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

¹² John W. Velz, 'Giving Voices to the Silent: Editing the Private Writings of Women', in W. Speed Hill ed., *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts; Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985-1991* (New York: Renaissance English Text Society Special Publication, 1993), p. 264.

¹³ Daybell, *Women Letter Writers*; Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity*; Alan Stewart and Heather Wolfe, *Letter Writing in Renaissance England* (Washington DC and London: University of Washington Press, 2004).

¹⁴ James Daybell, 'Women's letter and letter writing in England, 1540-1603; An introduction to the issues of authorship and construction', *Shakespeare Studies*, Vol. 27 (1999), p. 161.

The accessibility and availability of letters was also a consideration. Collections of single women's letters appeared to have survived in fewer numbers than individual ones, and therefore some of the collections I have used are already well known, such as those of Dorothy Osborne and Anne Newdigate.¹⁵ Yet others such as those of Elizabeth, Martha and Isabella Strutt¹⁶, Esther Pease¹⁷, Anne Graham¹⁸ and the correspondents of Jane Stringer have been less analysed and therefore can be used to bring fresh perspectives to arguments. Even when original manuscripts could be obtained, many letters were missing, or occasionally appeared to be out of sequence. This meant that sometimes an incomplete picture was formed and some educated estimations had to be made of what had happened in the gap in correspondence.

Due to the material available, it was also prudent to be flexible and consider not only letters that women wrote themselves, but letters that had been received by a sole recipient. The most notable example here was that of Jane Stringer; not one of the letters in her set were sent by her, but the letters she received from her various female acquaintances shed light on how important their link to her was.¹⁹ In research

¹⁵ Dorothy Osborne (1627- 95) was the youngest of ten children born to Sir Peter Osborne, a staunch Royalist, and his wife Dorothy Danvers. Her collection of courtship letters to William Temple (1928-99) between 1652-4 is notable not only for its survival, but for her style, her expression and her ease with epistolary writing. Her letters are all the more power due to the clandestine relationship she entered into with William, who was rejected by her family as a serious suitor due to personal and financial reasons; namely his family connection with Parliament and the necessity for Dorothy to marry somebody who would increase her family's declining wealth. Parker, pp. 3-12.

¹⁶ Elizabeth (1758-1836) and Martha (1760-93) Strutt were the daughters of eighteenth-century inventor and cotton manufacturer Jedediah Strutt (1726-97), who, along with his business partner Richard Arkwright, became a prominent business man in Derbyshire through his building of cotton factories. The Strutt girls were encouraged to write fluently and their education was of great importance to their father, who wished to promote the family into a higher social sphere. Little is formally known about his daughter-in-law Isabella Strutt (1769-1802), nee Douglas, who was the daughter of Archibald Douglas of Swaybrook. Her courtship and subsequent marriage to Joseph (1765-1844), Jedediah's youngest son, was documented through the many surviving letters that passed between them at the end of the eighteenth-century, and provide an insight into how courtship letter writing had developed; Susan E. Whyman, *The Pen and the People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 92-104; J. J. Mason, 'Strutt, Jedediah (1726-1797)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26683>.

¹⁷ Esther Pease (1720-97) was the daughter of Joseph Pease (1688-1778), successful merchant and banker of Hull. Joseph, like Jedediah Strutt, sought to ensure the steady education of his daughter, through demands for a high standard of epistolarity; Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, pp. 33-4.

¹⁸ Little is known about Anne Graham. Her legacy is the seven letters which survive from her to the Hon. George Shirley, which display the anguish of her unrequited love for him. See Chapter 3 for more details.

¹⁹ Research has uncovered little evidence of Katherine Ftiz-Walter and Margaret Lawrence, other than that Margaret Lawrence was the widowed sister of Jane Stringer. Margaret Shaftesbury was the third wife and consequently widow, of Anthony Ashley Cooper (1621-83), first earl of Shaftesbury, who,

conducted so far there has been a tendency to concentrate more on the writing of particular women and their families such as Vivienne Larminie's work on Anne Newdigate, and that of Alison D. Wall on the Thynne women.²⁰ In addition to this there has also been the production of various volumes solely concerned with individual women, such as the volumes written on Dorothy Osborne's letters to William Temple.²¹ Yet collections like Jane's, where the person who binds letters together does not leave evidence from their own hand, gives a different perspective – suddenly we are more aware of the role of the recipient as well as the role of the writer.

The period of research in question is the early modern period. The time scale of the letters ranges from the beginning of the Thynne correspondence in 1575, to the last letter from Isabella Strutt before her death in 1802. The coverage here is greater than I first set out to analyse; however the quality and richness of the relationship between Isabella and Joseph Strutt was of such importance that I was loath to exclude them because their relationship took place at the end of the eighteenth century. I would argue, however that the thesis is not defined by the years of the first and last letter I have looked at, but rather of the experiences and relationships of the women in the study and how they communicated them.

Central Themes and Arguments

The rest of this introduction will consider some of the key concepts I hope to have addressed in the study. When considering my research I found myself asking three main questions; What subjects did women write about, how did they write (including the rhetorical devices they employed) and how were relationships between correspondents manifested on paper?

like the other women, sought comfort and friendship from Jane Stringer after the end of her childless marriage.

²⁰ Vivienne Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture: The Seventeenth-Century Newdigates of Arbury and Their World* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995); Alison D. Wall, *Two Elizabethan Women: Correspondence of Joan and Maria Thynne 1575-1611* (Devizes: Wiltshire Record Society, 1983). See Chapter 6 for details on Anne Newdigate and Joan Thynne.

²¹ Kenneth Parker ed., *Dorothy Osborne: Letters to William Temple, 1652-54; Observations on Love, Literature, Politics and Religion* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002); Edward Abbott Parry, *The Love Letters of Dorothy Osborne to Sir William Temple 1652-54* (1888); David Cecil, *Two Quiet Lives* (London: Constable, 1948); Robbie Glen, 'Lines of Affection: Dorothy Osborne and Women's Letter Writing in the Seventeenth Century', PhD Thesis (University of Pennsylvania, 2007).

The chapters in this thesis vary between those which are more associated with particular parts of a women's life cycle, and more general topics such as friendship and health which particularly dominated their correspondence. When deciding what to include, it seemed salient that the rites of passage endured during life should be incorporated such as courtship and widowhood, as the issue of relationships between men and women were just as important as those solely between women. However, following Daybell's lead and using letters as the sources, I was keen to keep an open mind and also look at what the letters revealed. From this sprung forth, amongst others, details on education, illness, anxieties and matchmaking, as well as ideas on the types of language they used.²² Carolyn Steedman comments that a woman and her letter 'are matters for historical enquiry because of the force and pressure of theories, structures of explanation, and mythologies that have emerged across a number of academic fields.'²³ By managing these sources in a more flexible manner, the thoughts of these women were more fully expressed. It was also therefore possible to handle them more naturally, and allow these women to dictate perhaps what I should be looking for in their work, rather than trying to force them to write words and deal with issues that were not present.

Gender History; The Question of Spheres

The interest in women's history has been on the ascent since the 1970s. There are of course works conducted on women in history from before that decade, but it was the emergence of the first women's studies courses in the USA and Europe in the 1970s which meant that feminist scholars were able to do more than merely report on or add new material to the historical record. They had committed to changing analytical structures and breaking new boundaries within historical practise.²⁴ By the middle of the 1980s however, it appeared that women's history on its own had failed to have as great a potential impact on the shape of historical discipline and was being researched and taught alongside the standard narratives of 'real' history, instead of influencing them. Therefore there was avocation of the use of the concept of gender

²² For works on each of these topics please see the relevant chapters.

²³ Carolyn Steedman, 'A Woman Writing A Letter', in Rebecca Earle, *Epistolary Selves; Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), p. 119

²⁴ Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History* (London: Hodder Arnold, p. 2004), p. 2-3. See also Robert B. Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850; The Emergence of Separate Spheres?* (London and New York: Longman, 1998), pp. 1-5.

history in order to allow feminist scholarship to have a stronger affect on the field.²⁵ As a product of the move towards postmodernist theories, the concept of gender history was one which concerned certain historians, who were worried that women's history would thus be discarded, and the inclusion of gender would harm the voice of women in history. Joan Hoff's well known concern was the isolation of women's history, and she was resistant against the merits of gender history, claiming 'all such claims to objectivity and neutrality in the past have been masks for asserting male power. They [women's and gender historians] disagree over whether there can be a gender-neutral historical discourse that does not, like traditional history, make women invisible and politically inviable'.²⁶ Other colleagues who had been frustrated by the marginalisation of their work 'sought increasingly to separate themselves from what they condescendingly labelled as 'herstories' and to show the centrality of their concerns through 'gender analysis'.²⁷ Not only were their efforts at writing women's history under threat from marginalization, but the separate treatment of women they sought to give a voice to meant that there was a danger that men would become established in wider history as 'dominant and universal'.²⁸

Further to this there has been a shift in the usage of the term 'gender history' to encompass women's history, and therefore a blurring of the boundaries between terms has occurred. In recent years many titles have substituted the word 'gender' in a book or article title where the subject was women's history. Joan W. Scott explains the reasoning behind this; 'In some cases, this usage, though vaguely referring to certain analytic concepts, is actually about the political acceptability of the field.... the use of 'gender' is meant to denote the scholarly seriousness of a work, for 'gender' has a more neutral and objective sound than does 'women''.²⁹

In her essay, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', Scott has argued that a separate notion of women's history cannot survive.³⁰ As men and

²⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

²⁶ Joan Hoff, 'Gender as a postmodern category of paralysis', *Women's History Review*, Vol. 3 No. 2 (1994), p.159.

²⁷ Ruth Harris and Lyndal Roper eds, *The Art of Survival; Gender and History in Europe 1450-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 5.

²⁸ Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p. 3.

²⁹ Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91 No. 5 (Dec. 1986), p. 1056.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 1053-75. See also Mary Spongberg, *Writing Women's History Since the Renaissance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 3-5 for a detailed summary of Scott's main arguments.

women are usually defined in terms of what one another is and is not, it can be argued that it is impossible to study one without some knowledge of the other.³¹ There have been questions, therefore, as to what gender history should encompass. If women are viewed though an identity separate from men, should there also be a 'history of men'? The answer to this was yes, and there has been an emergence in literature on men and masculinity in recent years.³² By examining the history of both sexes, many sub-sections of history as a whole can be enriched. This conclusion has been pressed by Natalie Zemon Davis, who comments 'it seems to me that we should be interested in the history of both women and men... the study of the sexes should help promote a rethinking of some of the central issues face by historians - power, social structure, property, symbols and periodization.'³³

This is true of this thesis. Although it is about unmarried women's letter writing, it is impossible that men could not be involved in my analysis. In the most basic form they are present due to them often being the recipients of the letters; this is especially true in girls' letters, courtship letters and those of widows. In certain chapters I have even examined the letters men have written, in order to enhance inspection of their relationships with the women involved. Therefore the letters of Joseph Strutt and Thomas Greene in particular are used in order to give a more detailed picture of their epistolary relationships with Isabella Strutt and Jane Robinson. By analysing the behaviour of the men in their letters, we may better understand how and why these women wrote or acted in the way they did.

The relationships created by men and women in their letter writing is useful when considering gender history as there have been questions asked as to whether women existed in different spheres to men. Women have a tendency to be examined in spheres of domesticity, where education took second place to learning how to become a wife and mother. Aileen S. Kraditor writes that 'strictly speaking, men

³¹ Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society*, p. 1.

³² See for example, Kenneth Clatterbaugh, *Contemporary Perspectives on Masculinity* (Oxford: West View Press, 1997); Elizabeth A. Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England; Honour Sex and Marriage* (London and New York: Longman, 1999); Larry May, Robert Strikwerda and Partrick D. Hopkins, *Rethinking Masculinity; Philosophical Explorations in Light of Feminism* (London: Roman and Littlefield Publishers Inc, 1996); Victor J. Seidler, *Rediscovering Masculinity; Reason, Language and Sexuality* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989); Victor J. Seidler, *Unreasonable Men; Masculinity and Social Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

³³ Natalie Zemon Davis, "'Women's History' in Transition: The European Case', *Feminist Studies*, Vol.3, No. 3/4 (Spring-Summer 1976), p. 90.

have never had a “proper sphere” since their sphere has been the world and all its activities.’³⁴ There is the argument as to how deeply these spheres existed, and to what extent the acknowledgement of men and women inhabiting different spheres has actually been more for the purpose of trying to explain certain contemporary and historical questions. Linda K. Kerner comments that in the future, the notion of separate spheres will be understood as a trope used by people in the past who could not otherwise determine the differences in power between the sexes, and by historians in the present times to impose order on, and better comprehend, the evidence we have been left.³⁵ The idea that women occupied private realms, whilst the men were more dominant in a public setting appears now to be a natural and justified assertion; what we should ask is why this was so, and what, if anything, can be done to challenge it? To move in ‘separate spheres’ appears to leave little room for interaction or companionship, yet from the courtship letters studied in this thesis there is a sense of cohesion between partners. Dorothy Osborne and William Temple enjoyed a relationship where even in their courtship both appeared to be of equal status. In the case of the Strutts, whilst Joseph was the more dominant partner, it is clear that he had respect for Isabella, and they are able to mould each other through their mutual regard. There are frequent references to male friends and family members in these letters which show that, even though in the outside world men and women had different realms, when in their familiar communities these spheres were blurred.

However, we may also use the theory of separate spheres to our advantage, arguing that, when in existence, they heightened and intensified relationships between women. In recent years historians have used private documents from non-famous women to analyse the woman’s sphere as a source of strength and identity.³⁶ When investigating the relationships between women in nineteenth-century America Caroll Smith Rosenberg remarked that ‘their letters and diaries indicate that women's

³⁴ Aileen S. Kraditor ed., *Up From The Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), p. 14, in Linda H. Kerber, ‘Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History’, *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (June 1988), p. 12.

³⁵ Linda K. Kerner, ‘Separate Spheres’, p. 39; for more on the debate and historiography of the notion of separate spheres see Amanda Vickery, ‘Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women’s History’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 36 No. 2 (June 1993) pp. 383-414.

³⁶ Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 197.

sphere had an essential integrity and dignity that grew out of women's shared experiences and mutual affection'.³⁷ This thesis aims to add to the debate on women's spheres by examining the deep bonds women were able to create through their letters, and how friendships through epistolary means proved for some women to be the difference between contentment and isolation.

Female Agency

The question of female agency, and to what extent these women had a voice in their letters, is also prevalent. Velz has suggested that in order to find out about the lives of women of the Renaissance for example, we should look to the familiar letters of the men of this period, which are bound to mention mothers, sisters, wives and daughters, and the letters of ordinary women are not likely to be found in any great number.³⁸ Whilst the period which encompasses that of the letters analysed in this thesis is after that of the Renaissance, I would argue with the point he makes about the ordinary woman in general, even though, as I have discussed, there is a place in my work for men's letters. There is much information to be gleaned about women's lives from their letters, and although the numbers may not be vast, the quality of the letter writing enables the historian to make various educated guesses as to the state of their everyday lives. From this we can gauge how much freedom of action they had, if they were limited in anyway, and what the positives were. In their letter writing, particularly to female friends, they were able to set their own agendas, yet still follow social etiquette rules.³⁹

Joan Kelly has pointed out that 'there was no renaissance for women – at least not during the Renaissance.'⁴⁰ By looking at criteria including female sexuality, political, economic and cultural roles and the ideology surrounding noble women in Italy in the Renaissance, she concluded that they were still seen as dependent on their husbands, even though they wielded more power than peasant women. While there were artistic and cultural shifts in the Renaissance, the period marked a decline

³⁷ Carroll Smith Rosenberg, 'The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth Century America', *Signs*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Autumn 1975), p. 9.

³⁸ Velz, 'Giving Voices to the Silent', p. 268.

³⁹ For example, giving their regards to the recipient's family.

⁴⁰ Joan Kelly, 'Did Women have a Renaissance', in Joan Kelly, *Women, History and Theory; The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

in the public power of women, which was manifested in the new restraints on their personal and social lives. Therefore women became more dependent on men and, due to Renaissance ideas and literature on love and manners, compliant in their homes. Through their subordination they became mere objects of aesthetic pleasure, 'decorous, chaste and doubly dependent,' struggling to regain their former power in society.⁴¹

It would appear, however, that in the early modern period, power through social climbing became an option for some English women (and men) whether it was through marriage, greater opportunities for literacy and education, or religious bearings such as Puritanism, which gave men and women a more equal status at least in the home. Jedediah Strutt and Joseph Pease expected high literacy skills and effort in letter writing from their daughters, as they sought to establish themselves and their families in higher social circles through their business acumen. We can also see from the letters of Dorothy Osborne writing in 1652-54 how she considered herself to be equal to her fiancé (and could easily debate on a variety of topics with those around her), and the notion of sexual equality slowly became more prominent in Europe over the course of the seventeenth century.⁴²

This theme is also important as it suggests the consideration of how letter writing to female friends and relatives gave women a voice that may otherwise have gone unheard. In the example of Meryvell Littleton and some of the correspondents of Jane Stringer, these women were able to use their letters as an outlet for grief, anxiety and release. A person who may have appeared to be outwardly stoical could use their correspondence as a means of cathartic experience, highlighting the importance of epistolary communities and networks. This solidity echoes what has been said above on the topic of women's spheres, but in the context of network cohesion, it was vital that these women had a basis on which to interact. This gave them a sense of direction and identity, decreasing their feelings of loneliness and promoting their inclusion within some type of social context. The community was

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 47

⁴² See Siep Stuurman, 'The Deconstruction of Gender: Seventeenth-Century Feminism and Modern Equality', in Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor eds, *Women, Gender and Enlightenment* (Basingstoke: Palgrave: MacMillan, 2005), pp. 371-88.

not just a phenomenon which existed on a physical plane, but also on an abstract dimension.⁴³

Female Subjectivity and Identity

In the following chapters I will argue that letter writing was a tool which allowed women to develop their own expressions and methods of interaction. Letter writing could be a cathartic experience, or one which allowed a woman to use stream of consciousness to fulfil her self-expression. However, it must be considered that the consciousness of one's perceived state could have a bearing on the way a woman portrayed herself through her letter writing. Kenneth J. Gergen in his work of the concepts of the self has noted that 'social interaction does much to furnish the basic repertoire on concepts used by the person to understand himself and to guide his conduct.'⁴⁴ Single women in particular appear to have been influenced in the way they wrote by the point they were at in their life cycle. Therefore, women writing courting letters wrote differently to those writing letters when they were widows. This may seem like an obvious point, but the differences are reflected not only in content and expression, but also style and rhetoric. Richard Sorabji comments that 'much of our ethics and agency depends on the same person being the owner of different activities and experiences, and on our recognising this.'⁴⁵ Therefore the recognition of women's various rhetorical shifts throughout life is a useful tool to have.

I will argue that I do not think single women were particularly influenced by letter writing manuals, although there are examples of use of literary devices associated with certain genres in their writing. They were, however, influenced by the perceptions they had of themselves, and therefore some of the letter writing performed by single women was guided by their idea of the self. 'The self' according to Anthony Elliott, is 'constituted and refashioned through reference to a person's

⁴³ For more on the discussion of different types of communities see Alexandra Shepard and Phil Withington eds, *Communities in Early Modern England; Networks, Places, Rhetoric* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

⁴⁴ Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Concept of Self* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc: New York, 1971), p. 40.

⁴⁵ Richard Sorabji, *Self; Ancient and Modern Insights about Individuality, Life and Death* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 2006), p. 245.

own understandings, opinions, stocks of knowledge, cognition and emotion.’⁴⁶ Through their development of those criteria, women were able to shape the way they wrote and adapt to various situations. Furthermore, women who were classed in the same type of singleness altered their rhetoric depending on who they were writing to. Widows in particular showed different shifts in their language and style. Anne Newdigate wrote deferentially to Lord William Knollys, even though in person she was on good terms with him, because she needed his assistance in gaining the wardship of her eldest son Jack after the death of her husband. Katherine, duchess of Suffolk and Elizabeth Russell both conversed with William Cecil, yet Katherine did so as a friend, whereas Elizabeth’s manner altered with the changing relationship she had with him, from nervous sister-in-law to comfortable acquaintance.

The only collection I have used which contains letters from a courting and widow’s perspective is that of Joan Thynne. Her two surviving letters to her husband-to-be John Thynne are markedly different to those she wrote as a widow to her son Thomas and daughter-in-law Maria. As a young bride-to-be she tentatively offered her affections to her future husband in short letters. As a widow who sought to maintain her authority over her son and fight for her unmarried daughters’ dowries, her approach was far more domineering and argumentative. Her self-awareness and the role she needed to play was evident in the change in her letter writing.

⁴⁶ Anthony Elliott, *Concepts of the Self* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2001), p. 5.

Chapter 1

Letter Writing in the Early Modern Period

Gary Schneider has described letters as '*the material medium of early modern sociocultural exchange... involved in almost every sphere of early modern life,*' and letter writing as 'an exceedingly common social behaviour.'¹ David Barton and Nigel Hall explain that letter writing is 'one of the most pervasive literate activities in human society' and that 'letter writing crosses informal and formal contexts.'² Letters cross boundaries that other texts do not and cannot. There is a letter for every occasion, be it happy, sorrowful or business related, and further to this there are conventions and styles that are usually followed. Studying these sources is important because of the consequences that letters have; they 'evoke discussion and negotiation of their meanings, and they often result in responses.'³ It is important when viewing and analysing letters that we look not only at the letters as objects, but at what they tell us about human interaction, its diversity, the social implications, cultural evolvments and literary practises. Barton and Hall add strength to the need for analysing letters as a form of studying history and English by arguing that letter writing has been a process which has moved with the times and that even from basic structures people have learnt to develop powerful ways of expressing themselves textually.⁴ Therefore it is a question of changing societies and cultures, and how people adapted their literary techniques not just to move with the progressing years, but to evolve within themselves and their need to express themselves differently. Coupled with this is the need not just to study single author collections as individual texts, but to compare them; looking for their similarities and where their differences may be, analysing how certain techniques may have been used in specific genres of letters and even searching for newsworthy events of the time and how they affected people's lives. Studying women's letter writing in particular has contributed to the growing interest and research in gender history, and would further complement

¹ Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), p. 13.

² David Barton and Nigel Hall eds, *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1999), p. 1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

studies in correspondence. To further this it could also be considered prudent to break future research down even more, comparing women's writing over class and age boundaries, marital status, period in which they wrote it, even considering geographical variations.

From the mid twentieth-century, historians and literary academics have become more interested in the subject of letter writing. Those such as Jean Robertson and Katherine G. Hornbeak have looked at the manuals which were so popular in instructing others how to write, while others such as Richard Cust have examined how letters evolved into other guises like those of printed and published newsletters. Contemporary historians such as Barton and Hall are starting to move away from looking at the actual contents of the letters and instead studying the activity of letter writing as a separate entity. Their book *Letter Writing as a Social Practice* contains essays on such topics as letter writing instruction in nineteenth-century schools and pen pals on death row. There is even a chapter on 'computer-mediated communication', which in many ways is shadowing conventional letter writing. They stress that letters are not just written, they can be 'touched, held, smelled; they are stored away, hidden and destroyed.'⁵ In addition to this, letter writing and receiving was seen as a pleasurable experience; there was a sense of enjoyment in knowing that although one could not be physically close to someone, they could still be attached in other ways.

In 2006, James Daybell documented the recent studies that had been completed on seventeenth-century letters.⁶ By exploring this, one can see what areas have been concentrated upon, and even to what extent. As well as general 'all encompassing' works, there have been studies on female literacy and letter writing, publication of letters, the love letter and other particular genres, as well as numerous books and articles on the letter collections of individual authors, such as Dorothy Osborne and John Evelyn. This is also useful for assessing which areas still need to be researched and those which have seemingly only been touched upon. For instance, there is a section on females writing as females but there is nothing about

⁵ Barton and Hall eds., *Letter Writing*, p. 8.

⁶ James Daybell, 'Recent Studies in Renaissance Letters: The Seventeenth Century', *English Literary Renaissance* (2006), pp. 135-70.

masculine writing, or how being a man may have affect tone, style or literary technique.

Schneider argues that more research needs to be done in epistolarity before the ‘golden age’ of the eighteenth century, and he has led by example with *The Culture of Epistolarity*. It could almost be two separate volumes, as the first four chapters deal with how and why people wrote letters, conventions and literary techniques, while chapters five and six look at the print culture that evolved through letter writing. Schneider bases his research on mainly royal circles, concentrating on issues such as the trials of transportation, politics through correspondence, and the network system of letters, but also explains that his study is extensive, but not exhaustive.⁷ Daybell has also written a book published in 2012 entitled *The Material Letter in Early Modern England* which examines such subjects as tools, techniques and conventions of letter writing.⁸

The eighteenth-century world of letters has been comprehensively covered by historians Claire Brant in *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* and Eve Tavor Bannet in *Empire of Letters*. Brant believes that ‘we need to know about the norms and nuances of letter-writing in the period. Only such an analysis can show what is representative of eighteenth-century culture... the ideas, beliefs and representations that preoccupied them.’⁹ In order to do this Brant undertakes an examination of the general aspects of letter writing in the eighteenth-century, before analysing various genres of letter writing, and the guises authors took. Writing as a lover, a parent, a traveller and even a criminal are some of the themes covered. Tavor Bannet chiefly inspects the existence and use of letter writing manuals over the long eighteenth century, literature which she describes as ‘masterpieces of Enlightenment taxonomy.’¹⁰ She covers not only British letter manuals, but also American volumes, and the impact they had on transatlantic correspondence. The work of these two historians has enhanced awareness and knowledge on the world of eighteenth-century letter writing, noting its development, accessibility and machinations.

⁷ Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity*, p. 20.

⁸ James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England; Manuscript Letters and the Cultures and Practises of Letter-Writing 1512-1635* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

⁹ Claire Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, 2006), p. 1.

¹⁰ Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters; Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1680-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Letters are now being studied not just as material objects, but as a view to the lives of the people who wrote them, in the sense that they contain emotions, travel between destinations, impart information and can even have distinct personalities. This is enhanced if one considers that the 'life' of a letter can be likened to the life of a human, in the sense that each encompasses similar milestones. The conception of a letter starts with the purchase of the materials needed to make it, the paper and ink, and continues with the desire to find in a place in which to progress with the creation, namely, and most likely, a desk in a quiet corner. From this the letter materializes and its birth creates satisfaction and perhaps joy. The letter matures and ages with its journey to the recipient, becoming aged and weathered over time. The letter can invoke happiness, laughter, anger, sadness and provoke reactions including violence, reproach, passion, and most frequently the need to reply. As humans age, letters follow a similar trend; they colour, fray tear and generally wither. Even the end of a letter's 'life' can meet a fate akin to that of a person. They can be preserved and survive for years after they are last glanced at, like the mummification of ancient Egyptians or even modern day cryogenics. They can be placed in caskets or boxes, or burnt in a grate. If one views letters in this way and understands how they could be synchronized with human life, then the importance of letters and value to both sender and recipient takes on a new meaning.

Although letters are an excellent source, there are also problems associated with using them. Historians need to think about what they hope to achieve from analysing the letters and not trying to manipulate them in order to gain information relevant to their studies. Although this is true for any source, with letters one has to be particularly careful because of the conventions surrounding them. One has to deal with the issues of style and substance, as well as what the author is trying to say. It can be difficult to gauge the tone of the letter and different readers may have differing views on what the writer is trying to say and how. It is also important that the historian knows the context in which the author is writing and how this may affect the text. For example, two couples may be courting and writing to each other, but if one has a happy relationship and one has opposition to their union, this may manifest itself in their rhetoric and manner of writing. There were also mannerisms and phrases that were popular in society and they were used in letters. It is important to be able to recognise these, as they may place a different emphasis on the reading.

For instance, a lady listing types of men she would never consider marrying may be parodying stereotypical characters in literature and on the stage.¹¹ If the historian did not know this he may think that the author was very particular about the company she kept! To be aware of these types of literary techniques is to be aware of the culture of people in the early modern period.

Another pitfall of epistolary sources is that the historian may only have one side of the exchange. If only one side of the correspondence is retrieved it can always be useful, but there will be limitations. The author may refer to occasions, or events, of which we have no knowledge, and then it can be hard to understand the conversation. It can also be frustrating when the author alludes to something which has been written by the other correspondent, but without much specification. This may lead the historian to feel they are researching dead ends.

Private and Public Spheres

Letters are where the private and public spheres intersect or overlap. While some letters were designed exclusively for publication and others were at first private and then allowed to be printed, some letters were strictly for a specific reader's eyes only. In Philip Ariès's opinion there were three factors notable in the rise of the private sphere – state centralisation, religious inwardness and an increase in literacy.¹² Schneider builds on this point by stating that the terms 'privacy' and 'private' had three senses which were sometimes interrelated; firstly the privacy of special orientation in writing or reading a letter, secondly the private nature of epistolary content; and lastly the private circles of epistolary circulation.¹³ Roger Chartier believes that a rise in the need for privacy and private spaces in the years 1500-1800 mirrored the increasing physical distance from body to body in a time of growing 'social and demographic densities.'¹⁴ Intimacy thus manifested itself in material objects such as letters and, as mentioned above, caused pleasure to give and to receive. As Schneider notes, 'the imaginative, almost magical correspondence

¹¹ Parker, 15th/16th October 1653, Letter 45, p. 148.

¹² Philip Ariès quoted in Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity*, p. 68.

¹³ Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity*, p. 68.

¹⁴ Roger Chartier quoted in Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity*, p. 133.

between the letter and its writer clearly accounts for the fetishization of the letter.’¹⁵ Privacy and the letter therefore became very important to people as it was a way of having something very personal only for them without having to share it with anyone.

There was etiquette designed to protect both the writer and the reader. Many letter writers had a room or at least a desk in which they could retire to and peacefully write uninterrupted. Even if they had to leave their letter awhile they could come back to it after running an errand or receiving visitors. When it came to reading a letter, a special distance should also have been observed by others nearby. Erasmus, in his *De Civilitate*, advised that ‘It is impolite to glance sideways at a letter which has not been offered for your perusal. If perchance someone opens his correspondence in your presence, move away.’¹⁶ However, it was in the reader’s power to make the letter public and share it with others if he or she so wished. Thus the private could be turned into the public, albeit in a small, controlled way. Erasmus again offered the advice that a letter may be read or shared, if it has been ‘offered for your perusal.’¹⁷

Anxieties about the private and the public were magnified by the transmission of letters. The transformation of a letter from private to public could be very fluid if an untrustworthy letter bearer, or even secretary, was used. Using a secretary to write a letter could be a complex process. The secretary had to have access to what was perhaps sensitive information, which could be leaked or betrayed to others. Yet the secretary had to be trusted in order to get some very important letters written. As Schneider points out it was often a ‘very intimate relationship.’¹⁸ Letter carriers or bearers also put pressure on the private turning into the public, even though they too were meant to be trusted. Charles Bazerman states that in earlier periods in Greece and the Near East, letters were delivered by personal messengers who read the written message aloud, and sometimes also gave a second verbal message which could not be written down, this adding to the social drama.¹⁹ There were concerns about the bearer opening letters and revealing the contents to

¹⁵ Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity*, p. 133.

¹⁶ Erasmus quoted in Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity*, p. 68.

¹⁷ Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity*, p. 69.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 17-18.

outsiders, and there was also a threat of lost or intercepted letters. It is no wonder then that these factors contributed to what Schneider calls ‘epistolary anxiety.’²⁰

To what extent then can we assume letter-writing was truly private, especially for women? Claire Brant has suggested that the difficulties in terminology can be decreased through the assumption of a third realm – that of the ‘personal’, which, as it is not a term of seclusion, breaks down the dual spheres of the private versus the public; terms which need to be considered in a more fluid light.²¹ The physical act of letter writing was even a subject for Dutch genre painters such as Gerard ter Borch, Johannes Vermeer, Frans van Nieris and Casper Netscher. As examined in Robbie Glen’s absorbing PhD on Dorothy Osborne’s letters, ‘Dutch painters established the visual forms that letterwriting took for the next three centuries throughout European art.’²² Her detailed analysis in particular of ter Borch’s three paintings of women writing letters highlights what Glen names ‘the insatiable interest in women as letterwriters.’²³ Here, in what is meant to be one of the most confidential of spaces, the observer is invited to share the experience of the woman’s task, even though they are not permitted to read the letter. Even in art, an act usually performed in solitude is given an audience, and the private becomes a shared space. To this end, the historian may then agree with Brant’s conclusion, as ‘personal’ may be a more flexible and meaningful term than ‘private’ when considering women’s letter writing.

Epistolary Anxiety

When it comes to the issue of style and literary technique, there were certain rules to be followed. As Schneider discusses there were conventions that were particularly suited to epistolary correspondence. The writer or recipient could make their feelings clear by sometimes not even having to write a word. The feelings and even anxiety this could provoke was powerful and could provide the initiator with an intense power. Much like an overlooked phone call or text message in the present day, an

²⁰ Ibid., p. 75.

²¹ Brant, *Eighteenth Century Letters*, p. 5.

²² Robbie Glen, ‘Lines of Affection: Dorothy Osborne and Women’s Letter Writing in the Seventeenth Century’, PhD Thesis (University of Pennsylvania, 2007), p. 1.

²³ Ibid., p. 21.

ignored letter, or one sent after a long period of time, could invoke confusion or feelings of rejection. Epistolary delays and silences, as Schneider points out, 'often registered the general dynamics of a relationship.'²⁴ Any delays or silences could shatter the view that letter writing was a steady, reliable source of communication. Correspondents would have to be assured that any delays were not due to anger or annoyance, but because of illness or the loss of a letter on route. Silences could indicate a loss of favour or patronage, and although Schneider primarily uses examples of royalty, court members and gentry to illustrate his point, the principles can be applied to any sector of society.

There are many examples of epistolary anxiety in women's letter writing in the early modern period, many to do with the length of time between the receivership of letters, or the acknowledgement of distress caused by a delay in obtaining a letter.²⁵ A key factor in an ongoing epistolary relationship is the equality of letters sent; some women even kept a rough tally of letters passed between correspondents as Dorothy Osborne showed us in 1653; 'You must not forget that you are some letters in my debt besaydes the Answer to this... and yet you cannot wonder at it, the constant desire I have to hear from you and the satisfaction your letters give mee'.²⁶ This could also raise the suggestion that people kept sending letters in the hope of provoking a reply, if one had not already been gained. Moreover, there is a sense that the physical act of writing and sending a letter was more important than the actual content. In the research I have conducted, epistolary anxiety seems to fall into two main categories; uneasiness and worry that a writer had offended a friend due to her silence, and the restlessness when waiting to hear from a loved one. These tensions could be heightened due to circumstances already present in a correspondent's life: if her salvation came in the form of a letter from a respected friend, then the wait for such an item could be long and arduous.

This kind of apprehension was still visible in letters written 130 years later in the late eighteenth century. Isabella Strutt displayed examples of this kind of anxiety

²⁴ Ibid., p. 88.

²⁵ It appears that epistolary anxiety was something that was naturally experienced by many single female letter writers in the early modern period. The examples in this section were taken from Dorothy Osborne, Katherine Fitz-Walter and Margaret Shaftesbury in the seventeenth-century and Anne Graham and Isabella Strutt in the eighteenth-century. Whilst these women many have lived at different times, we can see they are remarkably similar in their doubts.

²⁶ Parker, 13th/14th August 1653, Letter 35, p. 126.

in her letters to Joseph Strutt. During their engagement they often had to endure long periods spent apart, and this was exacerbated by his intensely busy schedule. She acknowledged this in an early letter, when she asked ‘is it possible that business still occupies so great a share of your time, that you cannot afford an hour to one who feels truly interested in your happiness?’²⁷ This feeling is echoed in future letters, and it is clear that she felt closer to him when in possession of a fresh letter.²⁸ Anxiety also had its place in the letters of Anne Graham. Here it is shown that epistolary anxiety could work both ways in a relationship; not only did she admonish Hon. George Shirley for his delay in sending letters, but referred to his unhappiness in not hearing from her with the line ‘I didn’t deserve the reproach he sent me for my silence.’²⁹

Fretfulness was not only constrained to male and female romantic relationships. There are some very telling lines written in the correspondence to Jane Stringer from her various acquaintances. Jane appeared to be a linchpin for her circle of friends, and for a few of them her friendship and familiarity meant a great deal. Silence from her was difficult to tolerate; uneasy feelings were created, and there was palpable trepidation. Her lonely sister Margaret Lawrence begged her that she ‘doe wish you would let me hear a little oftener from you’ as she had few correspondents and needed support whilst dealing with troubles of her own.³⁰ Similarly Jane was scolded by Margaret Shaftesbury, who changed direction in her letter to pause for a moment to ‘discourse conservedly of not hearing one word from you or any of your family.’³¹ It is an interesting quirk of human nature that Jane appeared to have held all the power in this situation; even though she was not an avid pen pal, her friends still made it clear they wanted to hear from her, and her silence even made them doubt their own behaviour in their relationship, leaving them to wonder if they had done something to offend her. Katherine Fitz-Walter alluded to the length of time since she had heard from Jane in one letter where she sadly scribed ‘amongst my misfortunes I cannot but esteem it a very great one to lose a Friendship so much prized as yours and Mr Stringers... the last time I heare from Ivery Church

²⁷ Isabella Strutt, May 1788, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/2.

²⁸ See for example, Isabella Strutt, October 1789, Sandy Brooke, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/4.

²⁹ Anne Graham, 27th August (Year Unknown), Holbrook Hall, WCRO, CR2131/16/53.

³⁰ Margaret Lawrence to Jane Stringer, 9th November 1704, HRO, 9M73/672/21.

³¹ Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 29th June 1685, HRO, 9M73/672/27.

was about a yeare since'.³² Considering how much she had exalted the pleasures of having the Stringers' friendship in previous letters, this must have been a blow, and indeed her letter was sorrowful and to the point.³³ We can assume that Jane did indeed reassure her of her continued affection as there was further contact between them, but their example highlights the occasionally tenuous nature of relationships which were conducted solely or mainly by epistolary mode.

Even after receiving a letter, a correspondent could still display signs of anxiety over the length of it. The amount of words written on a page appeared to signify the regard that the person was held in - the longer the letter, the more effort was deemed to have been put in. Women in this period acknowledged this, particularly when letters were sent by friends or lovers. Isabella Strutt referred to the varying length of her letters when writing to her husband Joseph, in which she asserted 'I wrote you a long letter on Wednesday and a hurried one last night, which I thought would prove more acceptable than none', and Dorothy Osborne apologised for one of hers with the words 'Will you forgive mee if I make this a short letter'.³⁴ Perhaps this became even more poignant when the letter was from a secret beau; Anne Graham, when writing a letter to Hon. George Shirley made the request for 'a long, long Epistle', after scolding him for sending her 'such a little dab of ten lines' since she was unable to physically meet with him.³⁵ Contrastingly, she showed signs of worry when she wrote him a particularly long missive apologising for 'teasing you with such a long and stupid Epistle', though perhaps her she is more apprehensive at the thought that what she had to say would be dismissed out of hand, and the time she had taken to do it as she self-deprecatingly analysed that 'I have writ great nonsense'.³⁶

Yet even in more serious relationships, letter length became a symbol for the depth of one's affection. Dorothy Osborne, in one such letter to William Temple asked him not to 'beleieve that your Letters can bee so long as to make them

³² Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 24th January 1673, HRO, 9M73/672/15.

³³ For examples of her happiness at their friendship see Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer. HRO 9M73/672/12-14.

³⁴ Isabella Strutt, 30th October, 1794, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/15; Parker, 2nd/3rd April 1653, Letter 16, p. 87.

³⁵ Anne Graham, 27th August (year Unknown), Holbrook Hall, WCRO, CR2131/16/53.

³⁶ Anne Graham, WCRO, CR2131/16/55.

unpleasing to me, are mine soe to you, yours, never will bee soe to mee.'³⁷ Again here we see a desire for lengthy letters coupled with a concern that her verbosity will prove an irritation. Her unease was unfounded, and later she even expressed regret at having to send a shorter epistle.³⁸ Dorothy was somebody who evidently valued the significance in the measurement of her letters. Whilst her father was gravely ill, she took solace by throwing herself into writing to William, and told him of how she was in the position to 'undertake a longe letter to you whilst I watch by him.'³⁹ Since it was only eleven or twelve days since she had last written to him, we can assume that the length of her letter was in part due to a need to connect herself to William during her period of discomfort, and that her correspondence turned into an interlude of pleasure, as she paused from writing and watching over her father, and share in a bottle of ale.

Letter length became something of a bargaining tool between some writers, even foraging occasionally into the realms of emotional blackmail. Not only was there the threat of the addressee's unhappiness to consider, but there was also the proposal that one would only receive as much as they were prepared to give. Dorothy emphasised this when she said to William 'I am growne so provident that I will not lay out more than I receive'.⁴⁰ Comically however in a letter sent two months later in March 1653, and possibly with her earlier protestations in mind, she implored 'for god sake though this bee a short letter let yours not bee soe.'⁴¹ The references to letter length took place in the first few months of their relationship and set a benchmark for their fondness for one another, at times becoming a currency for their affections. The frequency of her words on this subject also gives credence to the assumption that it was an important point of an epistolary relationship. A bartering mechanism began to take place, in which length became the important factor – if one sent a letter of three pages for example this would set a precedent; a shorter letter would indicate languidness and indolence, one of equal or increased length would be pronounced a success. Retribution could take the form of forewarning the fellow writer of their shortcomings, with the promise that similar action may be revisited upon them. Anne Graham, when feeling upset about the ten

³⁷ Parker, 19th/20th March 1653, Letter 13, p. 82.

³⁸ Parker, 2nd/3rd April 1653, Letter 16, p. 87.

³⁹ Parker, 14th April 1653, Letter 17, p. 88.

⁴⁰ Parker, 15th/16th January 1653, Letter 4, p. 64.

⁴¹ Parker, 17th/18th March, 1653, Letter 12, p. 80.

lines mentioned above, half jokingly warned that ‘Could I take the pleasure in revenge I wont send you an epistle of three sheets every post’.⁴² Furthermore passionate feeling could be provoked with emotive rhetoric, in order to make sure such behaviour was refrained. Dorothy Osborne ardently declared ‘O if you do not send mee long letters then you are the Cruellest person that can bee. If you love mee you will and if you doe not I shall never love my self.’⁴³ Letter length therefore could be an aggravation in relationships that were primarily conducted on paper. A length letter signified that the writer had taken out sufficient time from their duties of the day to spend time solely on the recipient, perhaps even having to put aside business or depart from company. In the absence of physical and visual signs of love which could be felt and seen in person, correspondents looked for other manifestations of love, and wordy epistles was one of these.

Letter Writing Manuals

In order to be able to write an appropriate letter of high standards, many people bought letter writing manuals. They emphasised letter writing as a skill one acquired by learning, not just by trial and error. They became so popular that they have been described by Linda C. Mitchell as being regarded as the kind of book which should be in every library in every home, due to their ethical instruction.⁴⁴ Mitchell’s article makes some informative points on the manuals. From her perspective they were extremely useful for studying the culture of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries.⁴⁵ The seventeenth-century manuals emphasised the elaborateness of rhetoric, borrowing ideas from ancient Romans who marked special favours by creating a letter in one’s own hand.⁴⁶ French influence was also evident in the manuals, which played on English cultural sensitivities and the craving for French refinement.⁴⁷ However, the eighteenth-century material in manuals was more preoccupied with the familiar letter, the details of life and self revelation as

⁴² Anne Graham, 27th August (Year Unknown), Holbrook Hall, WCRO, CR2131/16/53.

⁴³ Parker, Letter 17, p. 89.

⁴⁴ Linda C. Mitchell, ‘Entertainment and Instruction: Women’s Roles in the English Epistolary Tradition’, *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 3/4, Studies in the Cultural History of Letter Writing (2003), p. 334.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

⁴⁶ Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, p. 42.

⁴⁷ Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, p. 29.

advocated by Madame De Sévigné.⁴⁸ The art of letter writing had progressed from the tight grasp of the elite classes to being an act which all but the lowest rank could accomplish, and to this end eighteenth-century manual writers ‘developed a semiology of style and correctness that made the ability to write one’s own letters with propriety, elegance and ease a mark of personal distinction.’⁴⁹ Furthermore, with the increasing understanding to the needs of a family, including in its widest sense servants, apprentices and kin, manuals incorporated models of familiar letters.⁵⁰

The advice given in the manuals was usually aimed specifically at men or women and they reiterated the ideals of how women in particular should behave in public.⁵¹ The manuals are also useful for analysing the society in which young men and women lived in. There were warnings to young females to protect their reputations, especially if they were single and in London. Men were also warned to keep good company and to keep away from temptations in the city.⁵² The success of manuals meant that they were highly in demand, even though many of them did not differ in the majority of their content. Mitchell estimates in fact that about 80 per cent of the manuals she lists in the appendix of her article share roughly about 75 per cent of the same material.⁵³ It must be remembered also that while the manuals provided genuine instruction, their authors also sought to entertain their readers, and that some of the examples could be satirical.

Barton and Hall make the point that, ‘books on how to write letters abound and are (and have been for centuries) available for children and for adults within formal education as well as in business and in everyday life.’⁵⁴ While this is true, it is important to realise that these instructions evolved both naturally and forcefully over the centuries. The manuals in the early modern period changed over the decades due to various influences and cultural evolvments.⁵⁵ According to Robertson, the

⁴⁸ See for example Angel Day, *The English Secreterie* (1592), STC (2nd ed.) 6402, consulted on JISC Historic Books; M.R. *A President for Young Pen-men* (1615), STC (2nd ed.) 20584, consulted on JISC Historic Books; John Hill Gent., *The Young Secretary’s Guide* (1687), Wing (2nd ed.) H1991B, consulted on JISC Historic Books; Dorothea Du Bois, *The Complete Letter Writer* (1775).

⁴⁹ Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, p. 42-3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁵¹ Mitchell, ‘Entertainment and Instruction’, p. 334.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 345.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 332.

⁵⁴ Barton and Hall eds., *Letter Writing*, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Mitchell, ‘Entertainment and Instruction’, pp.335, 338.

first formulation of rules for letter writing was in the middle ages.⁵⁶ After this it was the *Ar Dictaminus*, or Latin formularies, that were used in schools as an introduction. In 1602 there was a turning point with the publication of Nicolas Breton's *A Poste with a Packet of Madde Letters*.⁵⁷ Many imitations of this work were to follow, the first of which being *The Prompter's Packet* in 1612, which became particularly useful to men with little education.⁵⁸ Breton saw the niche for a book on letter writing, and was successful by instigating four different types of letter; the begging letter, the misogynist letter dissuading a friend from marriage, the railing letter and the letter of the rustic wooer (who seems to make an appearance as a stereotypical lover in a number of manuals).⁵⁹ His work was enormously popular and aided by his achievement in making the letters seem real, when really they were created for the pleasure of his audience, and not to be taken seriously.

Letter writing manuals were created for different audiences and in the years after *Poste* this became evident in the contents and styles of the various volumes. 'W.P.', another influenced by Breton, wrote *The Wit's Academy* (1677) and *A Flying Post* (1678).⁶⁰ The former was written in the French tradition, included material suited to love and merriment, and was meant to entertain, whereas the latter was meant more for instruction.⁶¹ Other handbooks offering advice on certain types of correspondence such as love letters also used different slants; *The Academy of Pleasure* (1665) was full of letters exclusively designed for lovers, whereas *The Card of Courtship* included not only letters but dialogues, songs and verse epistles.⁶²

⁵⁶ Jean Robertson, *The Art of Letter Writing: An Essay on the Handbooks Published in England during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: University of Liverpool Press, 1942) p. 9.

⁵⁷ Nicholas Breton, *A Poste with a Madde Packet of Letters* (1602), STC (2nd ed.) 3648, consulted on JISC Historic Books.

⁵⁸ Anon, *The Prompters Packet of Letters Both Private and Familiar* (1612), STC (2nd ed.) 20432, consulted on JISC Historic Books.

⁵⁹ Robertson, *The Art of Letter Writing*, p. 26.

⁶⁰ W.P. *The Wit's Academy* (1677), Wing P139, consulted on JISC Historic Books; W.P. *A Flying Post* (1678), Wing (2nd ed.) P129A, consulted on JISC Historic Books. Similar to many other manuals of its kind, *A Flying Post* contains many examples of letters sent in the first instance, with their acceptable replies given afterwards. Examples include 'A Letter to Perswade a Friend to Marry', 'A Cunning Letter sent to a Crafty Friend to borrow Money', 'A Letter to his Angry Sweet-heart' which is coupled with 'Her Short But Loving Answer'.

⁶¹ Robertson, *The Art of Letter Writing*, p. 36.

⁶² Robertson, *The Art of Letter Writing*, p. 49, 52; Anon, *The Academy of Pleasure* (1665), Wing A160, consulted on JISC Historic Books. A typical letter in this instance was 'A wanton Letter to a witty Gentlewoman desiring her company such a day at such a place', pp. 6-7, and 'To a Rival; A Complemental, yet Threatening Letter', p21; Musophilus, *The Card of Courtship* (1653), Wing (2nd ed., 1994) C489., Thomason E.1308[2]. This promisingly titled tome begins with a dedication to 'the longing Virgins, amorous Batchelors, blithe Widows, kinde Wives, and flexible husbands', and

By *The Young Secretary's Guide* in 1687, advice was given on written letter of any subject, including business and legal documents.⁶³ More serious themes were included in this book, turning away from the mocking and entertaining letters of other volumes.

What was noticeable in most manuals was the same material being regurgitated. The demand for such material in each successive generation meant that new editions and re-prints were frequent as their popularity grew.⁶⁴ Throughout the long eighteenth century, even the least well regarded manuals managed three or four London editions, with the most popular being reprinted twenty or thirty times.⁶⁵ It was also an easy way for an author to get published by using much of the same examples as other handbooks, displaying a few new letters, and finishing by changing the title. It is little wonder then that authors began to attack each other, commenting on style, examples, or just general indifference to each others work. W.P commented upon writing *The Wit's Academy*, 'The Title of this Book I must confess is little different from that piece of weather- beaten Antiquity, vulgarly known by that once famous name of the Academy of Complements.'⁶⁶ Charles Gildon also stated; 'I rather think... that he has patch'd together a Rhapsody of Bombast robb'd from some *Old Academy of Complements*, on purpose to compound a Mishmash or Extravagancies.'⁶⁷ What is interesting is that although there was so much criticism, authors still continued to share their work, and books such as *The Academy of Complements* were still imitated and copied. It raises questions about whether there was a truly correct way to write, or if there were techniques which would suit everybody for any subject. Robertson identifies that the history of letter

contains many dialogues between courting couples, including for example the apparently endearingly titled 'A rich, but simple Gentleman. Thus woos and wins a counterfest Lady, who not unwillingly, yields to his fruit.'

⁶³ Robertson, *The Art of Letter Writing*, p. 63; Hill, Gent, *The Young Secretary's Guide*.

⁶⁴As an example we may look at J.G., *The Academy of Complements* (1639), Wing G1407, consulted on JISC Historic Books. A search on *Early English Books Online* reveals that there this book was in particular demand with re-prints or revised editions occurring in 1640, 1641, 1650, 1663, 1684 and 1685. There were also editions under the name of Philomusus, and a new edition by Charles Sackville, Earl of Dorset in 1671; his was also re-printed a further four times.

⁶⁵ Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, p. 22.

⁶⁶ Robertson, *The Art of Letter Writing*, p. 48.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

writing is ‘the story of the gradual development of a native product out of foreign materials, or a popular art from a study confined to scholars.’⁶⁸

However it would seem that their popularity began to decrease in the eighteenth century and they had come to be seen as works which were for the lower classes and for the ‘partly literate.’ Robertson sums up her otherwise positive book with the concluding sentence ‘a very little education enables the humblest to dispense with what is now one of the lowliest and most despised forms of ephemeral literature.’⁶⁹ This can be related to the idea of being able to become a gentleman; they had to be distinguished from the poor, even if this was the background they were more familiar with. By acquiring an education, and learning the manners and literacy of a gentleman, men were able to elevate their status and create social mobility. It is acknowledged in the dedication of *The Gentleman’s Companion* that ‘tis virtue, a large and Noble Soul, hating all baseness and pusillanimous Actions that makes a Gentleman, and truly Enobles him more than his Birth’.⁷⁰ By following the advice of these manuals, men who were not of gentle birth were at least able to simulate some of the ideal behaviour judged to be polite and gentlemanly.

During the increasing popularity of letter manuals, it comes as little surprise that some authors developed instructions specifically for women. These came in various guises; some handbooks such as *The Female Secretary* claimed to be for women, but the material within was more suited to a male persuasion; others like the *Gentlewoman’s Companion* by Hannah Wooley offered not only advice on epistolary matters, but was also a lifestyle guide treating issues such as women’s education and equality to men.⁷¹ *The Ladies Complete Letter Writer* is a volume concerned with teaching women the correct way to address and write letter for every occasion, and in every guise, whether it is a daughter writing to her parents, or a

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 65.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 66.

⁷⁰ William Ramesey, *The Gentleman’s Companion* (1672), Wing R206, Arber’s Term cat. I 104, consulted on JISC Historic Books; see also Anon, *The Polite Gentleman* (1700), Wing P2760A, consulted on JISC Historic Books and David Fordyce, *The New and Complete British Letter Writer or, Young Secretary’s Instructor in Polite Modern Letter-Writing* (1790), T013268, consulted on JISC Historic Books.

⁷¹ Henry Care, *The Female Secretary* (1671), Wing C519, Arber’s Term cat. I 88, consulted on JISC Historic Books; Hannah Woolley, *The Gentlewoman’s Companion* (1673), (no bib. number), consulted on JISC Historic Books.

mother to a gentleman who wished to propose to her daughter.⁷² It is useful for noting the kinds of social experiences and occurrences that people had to deal with. The editor has carefully chosen a number of example letters to follow and divided them into sections; one on letters of advice, one relating to love courtship and marriage, and a third on various subjects of importance. Eight pages are devoted to rules for addressing different people, and provide enlightenment on every person who young ladies may possibly need to write to. For instance, it gives guidelines on how to address members of the military, government, and even the King and other dignitaries. While it is unlikely that members of society should have a imperative reason to write to the Queen in the present day, there must have been occasions where it was necessary or appropriate in the early modern period. It also gives an indication as to who would be reading this type of manual; it is unlikely that women of the lower classes would need to write to members of the royal family (unless it was a petition). Also included is an introduction which advises on such rules and techniques of letter writing, such as how to write to inferiors, when not to add postscripts and how to conclude ones correspondence. The introduction is meant to be complimentary to young ladies, as the women are referred to as ‘the fair and most amiable sex’ and as the ‘fair reader.’ The editor wished to be helpful and realised that some ladies may find letter writing to be a daunting task and thus did his best to allay their fears. There was also a nod to the French influence that was noted by so many authors and which was prominent in many handbooks during this period, although here the editor was quite clearly moving away as he stated, ‘I have not borrowed from *French Letter Writers; the Manners of their Females* as such as would fit but ill upon the *English Ladies*, and there is a flimsy Kind of Gaiety in their Epistolary Correspondence, that would be displeasing to the more grave and sensible Turn of Mind of the *British Fair*.’⁷³ Thus although the popularity of the French was evident in many handbooks, as the eighteenth century progressed there was a desire to promote an English style. It would be interesting to analyse the English view of French women and see if it had any bearing on how French writing was viewed – it French women were seen as distasteful for example, it is unlikely that English women would have been pressed to follow their example in any way.

⁷² Anon., *The Ladies Complete Letter Writer* (London: 1763).

⁷³ Anon., *The Ladies Complete Letter Writer*, p. ii.

Women's letter manuals were evidently widely available and appear to have been popular due to their avid reprints. However the extent to which they had an impact on women's actual letter writing is debateable. Tavor Bannet has claimed that manuals produced 'a single standard language, method and culture of polite communication.'⁷⁴ Yet I must agree with Whyman's opinion that this assumption conflicts with the diversity that was to be found in real letters.⁷⁵ While it cannot be denied that letter writing manuals may have given women ideas on how to write, and guidance on contemporary epistolary etiquette, they do not allow for the writer's own personality to have an influence on the finished article. The emotions, education, and inspirations of the woman all contribute to her sense of self. Her identity as a woman in a particular situation, during a particular point in her life altered her subjectivity; although there were, for example, models letters on courtship, they do not appear to have been copied regularly by women in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Brant comments that single women were not impressed if they thought their suitors had taken their phrases from a complimentary book or manual. This was perhaps because the manuals presented courtship letter writing in a stilted and sternly patriarchal light, as according to some manuals 'courtship is practical, earnest and absolutely no fun' or because their sentiments were artificial and seemingly insincere.⁷⁶ Nor did most manuals take into account the nature of a long lasting, mutual correspondence, as they much preferred single letters to runs of exchanges.⁷⁷ This left authors unable to develop their epistolary identity, which was an important component of the letter writing process as it signified how they imagined themselves and how they thought others saw them.⁷⁸ Manuals, whilst useful for reference, were therefore not the most helpful tools for women's expression, as they 'narrowed recognition of letters as an outlet for women's feelings and desire.'⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, p. x.

⁷⁵ Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, p. 28.

⁷⁶ Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, p. 168.

⁷⁷ Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, p. 40.

⁷⁸ Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, p. 115.

⁷⁹ Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters*, p. 41.

Expression and Self-Revelation

As discussed above, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries letter writing progressed, but not without the occasional resistance. There was a transition from very poised, formal writing into a more informal expressive style. Indeed some seventeenth-century letter writers such as Dorothy Osborne believed that there never should have been a rigid style of correspondence in personal letters, as she argued, 'letters mee thinks should bee free and Easy as ones discourse, not studded as an Oration, not made up of hard words like a Charme... like a gentleman I knew, whoe would never say the weather grew cold, but that Winter began to salute us.'⁸⁰ Glen points out that 'the more formal Osborne's rhetoric, the less intimate the relationship' and thus her letters to William were different to the other letters she wrote.⁸¹ Lydia DuGard, writing just over a decade after Dorothy wrote in the 1650s, admitted to a relaxed style of writing, but was adamant that this was due to Samuel noticing that 'while I spoke to you I did but think aloud... and have ever since both spoken and writ more freely and inconcern'dly than otherwise I would have done.'⁸² Lydia's perceived lack of attention consequently gave her more freedom of expression as it released her from the bonds of epistolary etiquette.⁸³

We can track changes here with the changes in handwriting during the seventeenth century. One may argue that as styles of handwriting became more informal, so did the content and expression of letters as the italic moved to the round hand. As letter writing became more accessible due to the advancement in hand writing, women may have felt more confident in expressing themselves on paper, as they did not have to take such great pains to physically accomplish the task. Furthermore, the physical ability of women to express themselves could have had an impact on their psychological ability, encouraging them to become more open and communicative.

⁸⁰ Parker, 24th/25th September 1653, Letter 41, p. 139.

⁸¹ Glen, 'Lines of Affection', p. 56.

⁸² Taylor, Barford, 13th February 1672, Letter 28, p. 106.

⁸³ Lydia DuGard (1650-75) was the daughter of William and Lydia DuGard. William was a professional teacher and printer and at one point was headmaster of the Merchant Taylors' School and a member of the Stationers' Company. Both Lydia's parents had died by the time she was twelve and her father's friend Edward Waterhouse became her guardian. From the age of fifteen she conducted a secret relationship with her cousin Samuel DuGard (1643- 97), which was conducted solely through the medium of letter writing. For more on Lydia's relationship, see Chapter 3.

However other persons, particularly women of the middle classes wished to stick to the formularies which to them signified their culture and which were easy to copy and put into practise. These values progressed into the eighteenth-century as certain authors such as Lady Mary Wortley Montagu criticised the influences which led to these changes. Robert Halsband notes that even in her letters to her future husband, she ‘rarely relaxes from her pose of sensible reasonableness – it is, in the main, a correspondence of plain thinking, plain dealing and plain writing. Only towards the end of the courtship does she betray emotion.’⁸⁴ His use of the word ‘betray’ signifies how guarded she was in her writing, at least at this point in her life. It is perhaps not surprising that she disagreed with writers such as Madame De Sévigné who were having an impact on letter writing styles. The informal tone was growing popular and led to the breaking down of rigid and inflexible conventions, even by the upper classes. Coupled with this were the ideas of self revelation in one’s letters and the use of expression and confession.⁸⁵ The main grievance of Lady Mary was probably due to Madame De Sévigné’s rival status as a fellow female author, but she genuinely seemed to have deplored the new types of phrases and terms that were now being used;

Well-turned periods or smooth lines are not the perfection either of prose or good verse; they may serve to adorn, but can never stand in the way of good sense... How many readers and admirers has Madame De Sévigné, who only gives us, in a lively manner and fashionable phrases, mean sentiments, vulgar prejudices and sudden repetitions?⁸⁶

Lady Mary was no admirer of the method of writing which allowed the author to develop their sense of freedom. However it must be noted that when she was involved in a relationship with a young Italian twenty five years after her marriage, she found it hard to suppress her passions, and had to find a method in which to do this, namely writing in French.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Robert Halsband, *The Life of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 53.

⁸⁵ For more on the emerging notions of individuality and self-expression, and whether they were due to the Renaissance or had been present previously, see John Jeffries Martin, ‘The Myth of Renaissance Individualism’, in Guido Ruggiero, *A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance* (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006) pp. 208-24 and John Jeffries Martin, *Myths of Renaissance Individualism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 2006.

⁸⁶ Halsband, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, p. 53.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

The Process of Letter Writing

Tools

The composition of a letter begins with the necessity to write something. It may be to impart information or news, or to deliver some basic cordial felicitations. An invitation may be included or the author may be seeking answers to some important questions. Once the desire to make contact has been established, the tools required must be accessed. According to Jehan de Beau-Chesne and John Baildon, 'Inke always good store on right hand to stand,/ Browne paper for great haste,or else boxe with sand:/ Dip pen and shake pen, and touch pen for haire:/ Waxe, quills and pen knife see alwayes ye beare.'⁸⁸ As well as purchasing ink, there were recipes available for making, among others, different coloured, quick drying and long lasting inks. The next ingredient was paper and most household expenses indicated that people could buy it in a 'quire', 'ream' or 'bale.' Sir William More's inventory in 1556 indicates the kind of materials one needed if they were to keep in the habit of letter writing;

little desk to wryte on...a standyshe of pewter... a dust boxe of bone... a haere of bone to be made a sele... a penne of bone to wryte with... a Sele of many Seles... a penknyf... a pene of yron... several books of paper, one of them bound 'in past'... a wrytyng boke of parchment... a boke to lerne to wryte by... a slate to wryte in ... and scissors.⁸⁹

Handwriting

Once one had possession of all the materials, an appropriate style of handwriting had to be adopted. As Stewart and Wolfe explain; 'Each different hand came with its own history, its own set of expected uses and social signals.'⁹⁰ The 'secretary' hand was the most common for business and was a form of 'specialised hand' which was

⁸⁸ Alan Stewart and Heather Wolfe, *Letter Writing in Renaissance England* (Washington DC: London: University of Washington Press, 2004) p. 13. For more on the tools of letter writing see Alan Stewart, *Shakespeare's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 40-50.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

most commonly used by scribes, lawyers and diplomats.⁹¹ The sixteenth century saw the emergence of the 'italic' hand, which was then associated with and seen more frequently in women's handwriting due to its fashionable and simple style. Italic, in turn, developed into the round hand, 'a clear, all-purpose cursive whose slope encouraged speed in one flowing movement.'⁹² Yet although women may have attempted a certain style of handwriting, their scripts differed. The collection of letters written to Jane Stringer in the 1680s and 90s are a testimony of this. She had a few frequent women correspondents, and all had quite different modes of writing, even those one may suppose they were all followers of the italic example. Lady Sarah Cowper's penmanship is quite small and fairly neat, whereas the letters of Katherine Fitz-Walter display larger, untidy handwriting, which make her letters quite hard to read in parts.⁹³

However, even in the same author, handwriting was not always uniform. This could be because, as mentioned above, the writer penned some letters in their own hand, and others using an amanuensis. Yet even when this was not the case, and the hand was the same, script still varied. Draft versions of letters could contain writing of a more untidy style, and even held the occasional practising of symbols or spellings. Anne Graham's letters to Hon. George Shirley hold examples of variations of handwriting. Out of the seven letters she sent to him, the first two and the fifth have wilder, larger handwriting than the other four. As these letters were meant to be secret, it is unlikely she would have used an amanuensis, and the timing of her first letter at 11pm looks to support the assumption that she wrote in her own hand. Perhaps then there was a reason for the rushed style; a desire to catch the morning post, or to finish the letter, which due to its clandestine nature, had to be kept in even more private circumstances than usual. Apart from this Anne's handwriting is fairly readable, with only the odd word difficult to read, usually when a pronoun is used.

The need for quickly sent or secretive letters was not the not the only reason for a change in handwriting from letter to letter. Isabella Strutt's handwriting was very neat, easily deciphered and uniform. She wrote in a medium sized hand with a very slight slant, and her spelling is consistent and in the main correct by today's

⁹¹ Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, p. 26.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹³ Lady Sarah Cowper to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/4-5; Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/8-17.

standards. She wrote her surviving letters between 1787 and 1802, and there is a marked difference between her earlier and later letters. During the time she was married to Joseph Strutt, one may wonder whether the relaxation of the relationship from courtship into marriage also had an effect on her script; possibly as a mother and wife she was less fastidious in her presentation. However a more pertinent explanation is that Isabella's health became quite poor in the last years of her life, and she suffered frequent illness. This is manifested in not only her writing, but her arrangement of the letter on the page; her letters contained scrawled script and spaced out writing.⁹⁴ This is in stark contrast to her earlier precise immaculateness, and is a useful example of its kind.

Furthermore, some women displayed different handwriting depending on their mood. Sara Jayne Steen describes how Arbella Stuart's handwriting suggested 'shifts in emotion, as an elegant, upright presentation script becomes a plain, slanted informal hand, or a careful informal hand becomes a seemingly hurried, heavily blotted scrawl.'⁹⁵ This was particularly noticeable when Arbella wrote in a free-writing style to those in a position of patronage; 'a letter to the queen or her counsellors may begin in Stuart's formal upright presentation handwriting, shift into her informal hand as though she was thinking and writing too quickly to maintain the delicate loops and flourishes of her presentation style, and then shift back.'⁹⁶ Here Arbella's handwriting was as important a part of her self-expression as the content of her letters.

⁹⁴ See for example her last surviving letter; Isabella Strutt, 26th August 1802, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/25.

⁹⁵ Steen, p. 38.

⁹⁶ Sara Jayne Steen, 'Manuscript Matters: Reading the Letters of Lady Arbella Stuart', *South Central Review*, Vol. 1, No. 11 (Summer 1994), p. 28. Lady Arbella Stuart (1575-1615) was a claimant to the English throne, who often found herself in conflict with Elizabeth I and James I. The granddaughter of Elizabeth Talbot (or Bess of Hardwick), she was a fascinating letter writer, who used her rhetorical skills to create a fictional lover, to express her emotions and to manipulate others. She is now believed to have suffered from the medical condition porphyria. See Chapter 5 for examples of her possible mental illness in her letter writing.

Orthography

In addition to the topic of handwriting, the spelling and characters used in these letters also provoke thoughts and occasionally entertainment. When trying to read and analyse these epistles, and after finally getting to grips with the language and handwriting used, the reader can still lose the thread of where a sentence is going because the spelling is unusual. The spelling, coupled with untidy handwriting of Mervell Littleton, writing at the start of the seventeenth century, is a useful example of this. Mervyell, whilst writing generally mournful letters to her aunt, Lady Muriel Knyvett, gave information of various family circumstances which could prove helpful in terms of understanding property, social links and legal settings, but due to her erratic spelling, some words are illegible, or incomprehensible. In one letter she described ‘A most sumtious Hows my Unkell hath left behind Him with great Riches both in land and in Howss fornature but yt wh may most joy his frends in ye god name and reporse [?] of jush [?] deslinge [?] in yr Coores of his life’.⁹⁷ By reading these words in context and applying a trial and error approach of changing various letters (and even occasionally speaking these words aloud in a different accent) it is understood that the most logical meaning of the phrase is ‘reports of just dealings in the course of his life’. However, this approach is not always as straightforward and research undertaken on Muriel’s letters is characterised by the amount of question marks which appear on the page after copying down a word which proves hard to decipher.

However, Daybell asserts that over the early modern period, spelling in women’s letters generally improved, and women who wrote later in this period ‘demonstrate a greater mastery of the pen in terms of fluidity and competency of pen-strokes than women were capable of a generation or so earlier.’⁹⁸ By comparing some examples we can certainly see that was the case. There is a great contrast between the orthography of Meryvell Littleton writing in 1602, and Isabella Strutt writing in the 1790s. Yet time is not the only factor signalling differences in women’s spelling. Location is another consideration, as women spelt out words phonetically. Furthermore, it is noticeable that women writing in the same sphere

⁹⁷ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 22nd July 1608, BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 96.

⁹⁸ James Daybell, *Women Letter Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 96.

and at the same time had markedly diverse ways of spelling. This is visible when comparing the letters received by Jane Stringer. Letters from Lady Sarah Cowper, Margaret Shaftesbury and Lady Dorothy Ashley present little concerns, because even when they spell words by diverse means, it is only occasional, and rarely causes problems when deciphering the text. However Katherine Fitz-Walter's irregular orthography makes for difficult reading, especially coupled with her at times untidy handwriting.⁹⁹ Katherine's haphazard spelling also highlights another foible; the variable spelling of Proper Nouns. Place names and people's names were often given dissimilarly, sometimes even in the same letter.¹⁰⁰ Anne Graham's surviving letters from the mid eighteenth century contain fairly standard spelling throughout and it is mainly the pronouns which cause any difficulty, for example when differentiating between 'he' and 'she'. A further hindrance is the fact that her capital R's and B's were quite similar. This does not cause problems with places such as 'Bury Fair' but does hamper acknowledgement of more precise names like B/Renalhagh B/Room; even in the context of her sentence, it cannot be made certain if this is a person or place.¹⁰¹ Shortcomings such as this may prove challenging for the investigating historian, but from this at least it may be concluded that people writing in this style in the early modern period would have been fairly confident of their letters being understood, at least to the degree where if there was a chance of misinterpretation, it would not be to a level where the message of the letter would be significantly altered.

Salutations and Conclusions

The salutations given at the beginning of a letter indicated the relationship between the correspondents. Brant suggests that 'identity was understood less in terms of psychological depth and more through typologies of class, sex, nation, age, occupation, region, religion and the like.'¹⁰² Therefore there were certain superscriptions that were meant to be used to open the letter. Superscriptions such as 'Sir' or 'My Lord' were used to indicate the hierarchical relationship between

⁹⁹ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/4, 8-17, 27-34.

¹⁰⁰ See for example Katherine Fitz-Walter's spelling of a gentleman's name – first spelt Mr Boloks then Mr Boloch; Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 12th August 1670[?], HRO, 9M73/672/8.

¹⁰¹ Anne Graham, 2nd June 1742, Bury, WCRO, CR2131/16/55.

¹⁰² Brant, *Eighteenth Century Letters*, p. 24.

correspondents and exhibited their level of familiarity.¹⁰³ However, depending on whether letters were between friends, lovers, family members or those of a different status, various openings were used, and conventional superscription practises were not always adhered to.

Occasionally, the author began the letter without greeting, and this too may suggest a familiarity with the reader or a wish to progress straight into the letter. Often in these cases they wove their salutation into the first sentence of their letter. Isabella Strutt in her courting letters to Joseph often included the words ‘my dear friend’ in her first line, while Meryvell Littleton used variations of ‘My deare good Aunte’.¹⁰⁴ Anne Graham’s letters are notable because that they contain no formal greeting; instead she commences the letter as if she was speaking directly to George Shirley. Interestingly all her epistles start by affirming the connection they have with one another; she either referenced his behaviour to her, or the fragility of their association, in both the physical and epistolary sense.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps because their relationship was clandestine, she felt the need to establish a direct bond early in her letter, or perhaps her love for him was so deep that it spilled forth from her onto the page. When commencing letters to someone of a higher status however, it was necessary to start with the correct level of appropriateness. When writing to Lord Salisbury for assistance in a legal matter for example, Anne Newdigate commenced with the respectful opening, ‘Rightly honorable and all worthy of that title’.¹⁰⁶ This is in contrast to the letters she sent to her servant and family friend William Henshawe, which began with the more familiar ‘Good Willi’.¹⁰⁷ Salutations also changed as the nature of the relationship altered. When Isabella married Joseph Strutt, she began her letters with ‘My ever dearest Love’.¹⁰⁸ Dorothy Osborne also changed from the formal use of ‘Sir’ to the more loving ‘My Dearest Heart’.¹⁰⁹ The adjustment in greeting shows the boundary which had existed before had now been removed; women could now be more prolific in their profession of love, whereas previously their modesty and sense of etiquette may have prevented them from doing

¹⁰³ Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁴ See for example Isabella Strutt, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/2-7 and Meryvell Littleton, BL., Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 300.

¹⁰⁵ Anne Graham, WCRO, CR2131/16/50-56.

¹⁰⁶ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, WCRO, CR 136, B308.

¹⁰⁷ Anne Newdigate to William Henshawe, WCRO, CR 136, B314 -317.

¹⁰⁸ Isabella Strutt, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/12-13.

¹⁰⁹ Parker, Appendix A, Letters A-I, pp. 301-306.

so. Interestingly, men were perhaps not as constrained in their openings. Joseph Strutt, in his first few missives to Isabella commenced with the rather formal 'My Dear Miss Douglas', but this quickly changed to 'My ever charming friend', 'My Lovely Friend', and then in one instance 'My dearest love!'.¹¹⁰

In addition to the salutations, there appeared to be certain protocol followed when closing a letter. Tavor Bannet comments that 'subscriptions registered hierarchies and acknowledged relations of power' whilst Stewart compares an example of a subscription to a letter in one of Shakespeare's plays to a 'bowing servant'.¹¹¹ Letters were generally either finished with a solid note of finality such as 'Yours Sincerely' or the sender's name ran from a last torrent of prose. Even between friends the end of a letter could sound fairly formal, with a declaration of friendship or loyalty. Adjectives such as 'faithful' 'affectionate' and 'obliged' were all popular ways of expressing cordial farewells, written in the manner of 'your faithfull affectionate Servant' or 'your most obliged faithfull friend and servant'.¹¹² More natural were the endings which sprung from the sentence last written, although these too appear to have been carefully orchestrated, however fluidly the words rolled forth from the page. The letters of Isabella Strutt are an example. In the first years of her acquaintance with Joseph Strutt she ended her letters fairly formally, in a style which could not be mistaken for being too familiar or flirtatious. Later on however during their marriage she became more expressive and emotive, albeit in a modest, demure way. She bid him farewell with sweet affirmations of her love for him and with the tenderness of somebody who wishes the last lines of communication to carry the most heartfelt sentiments in the whole letter, as if these were the words she hoped he would carry with him after reading it. In the first surviving letter of their marriage, the alteration is clear as she concluded; 'good night my dearest best beloved, may heaven protect and guard thee, prays fervently thy tenderly attached, and ever affect. Isabella Strutt.'¹¹³ Another ending reads; 'Accept the warmest wishes and most grateful affections of my heart and believe me to be my beloved Husband your ever faithful Isabella Strutt.'¹¹⁴ Writing her closing lines in this manner made the letter feel more personal and was appropriate for their

¹¹⁰ Joseph Strutt, BCA, MS3101/C/E/4/8/3-4, 5, 7-8, 12.

¹¹¹ Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters*, p. 65; Stewart, *Shakespeare's Letters*, p. 53.

¹¹² See for example the numerous letters to Jane Stringer, HRO 9M73/672

¹¹³ Isabella Strutt, 25th October 1794, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/12.

¹¹⁴ Isabella Strutt, 30th October 1794, Derby, BCA MS3101/C/E/5/16/15.

relationship. It also added another dimension to the conventions of letter writing; Isabella could now break free from the constraints of finishing a letter in a more structured, rigid way.

Postscripts were another way of personalising the end of a letter, although here there appeared to be in place some principles too. While we may think of a postscript as a way of adding on information forgotten in the main body of a letter, early modern writers seem to have used them not only for this purpose, but also to highlight and emphasise certain points of etiquette. In some instances, a postscript was used to give regards and good wishes to the recipient's family.¹¹⁵ On another occasion they may have been used to share recipes or advice; at the end of a letter to Jane Stringer, Lady Sarah Cowper imparted culinary wisdom with her instructions beginning 'Take an egg white and all mix it with fine flower as thick as batter...'¹¹⁶ They were also used as a useful way for noting additional information the writer wished to document, perhaps as a way of still including news that would have disrupted the flow of the main body of the letter, or to document something the writer remembered and wanted to add at a later stage before they sent it. Katherine Fitz-Walter often added a postscript to her letters to Jane and on one occurrence announced that she 'will add no more' yet proceeded with a postscript that was almost as long as the main letter itself!¹¹⁷

Apart from the handwriting, spelling and other customs of a letter there were other features which gave it its identity. Seals were a common part of letters, and even where they no longer remain, their presence is detectable by a rip or discolouration in the paper. Seals were used primarily to fasten a letter, and their importance is highlighted by Dorothy Osborne in one epistle when she asks of William Temple 'pray hereafter seale your letters soe as the difficulty of opening them may dishearten anybody from attempting it.'¹¹⁸ Yet seals also had other functions and often symbolic meaning; in an attempt to reconcile with her mother-in-law Joan Thynne, Maria Thynne placed a lock of her dark red hair under her Audley

¹¹⁵ See for example Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 3rd July 1684, HRO, 9M73/672/10; Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 3^{1st} December 1687, HRO, 9M73/672/28; Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 16th June 1603, BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 300.

¹¹⁶ Lady Sarah Cowper to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/4.

¹¹⁷ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 5th November 1687, HRO, 9M73/672/13.

¹¹⁸ Parker, 28th/29th May 1653, Letter 23, p. 101.

family seal.¹¹⁹ Individuals had special seals whether their writing was for business or less formal reasons, and furthermore could also contain the initials or family crest of a writer.¹²⁰ The Bacon family sought to play a little joke at their own expense by using a seal which bore the representation of a boar.¹²¹ Joseph Strutt, in his letters to his future wife Isabella, regularly used a seal of what appears to be a Roman soldier boy, complete with little shield, though on occasion also used other ones, including a man in Grecian clothing with a big plumed bird, a centurion, and a personalised one of a young girl with his initials displayed on it.¹²² Red wax seals were particularly common; Anne Graham used them on her letters to Hon. George Shirley, as did Isabella Strutt.¹²³ In actual fact it is noticeable that Isabella actually used a particular seal for most of her letters where one survives. This is in the style of a woman's head in profile.¹²⁴ Towards the end of her surviving letters, Isabella switched from using red to black wax. A black seal could represent mourning, and one wonders if Isabella's ill health towards the end of her life was reflected in her choice of colour for her seal.

Seals also achieved fashionable notoriety in some circles. Dorothy Osborne detailed in a few of her letters to William Temple how seals had become collectable, and asked him for his help in the matter: 'She [Lady Diana Rich] says that seals are much in fashion, and... has sett mee a longing for some too.... I do remember you once sealed a letter to mee, with as fine as one as I have seen, it was a Neptune I think rideing a upon a dolphin.'¹²⁵ She also gave an indication as to how far one would go to secure seals, as she announced that she had sent to Italy for some although she confessed 'by the time they come over they may be out of fashion againe,' giving the impression that trends such as this one could come and go fairly quickly.¹²⁶ Nevertheless Temple was quick to help out, and Dorothy usefully provided some details of what she had gained; 'There is a little head cut in Onixe, that I take to bee a very good one, and the Dolphin is... one that my Brother sent my

¹¹⁹ Wall, p. xxvii.

¹²⁰ Stewart and Wolfe, *Letter Writing in Renaissance England*, p. 19.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹²² Joseph Strutt, 23rd November 1787, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/4/8.

¹²³ Anne Graham, WRCO, CR2131/16/50-56; Isabella Strutt, 1st November 1794, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16.

¹²⁴ There are some letters where the seal has survived particularly well; see for example Isabella Strutt BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/18-20.

¹²⁵ Parker, 22nd January 1653, Letter 5, p. 66.

¹²⁶ Parker, 29th/30th January 1653, Letter 6, p. 69.

Lady Diana last week... 'twas brought out of India's and cut there for an Idoll's head... I never saw soe ugly a thing'.¹²⁷ As the seals were not mentioned again we may assume that either Dorothy was satisfied with her lot, or indeed the fad passed on without much further consideration.

Sending Letters

Once a letter was written and sealed, thoughts turned to sending it. In present day society, addresses assume a fairly uniform style. In the early modern period however, there were inconsistent methods of superscription used. This could range from a letter simply displaying the name of the recipient, to the more regular name, house and town, to the incredibly labelled, which often boasted precise details of where the letter needed to be left. Occasionally there was no address, or even name, leading us to presume that a carrier was given exact instructions and would place the letter directly into the hands of the receiver. In addition to this were instructions to leave letters at post houses, or at a location where it could be conveniently picked up. Stewart describes the importance of the superscription as 'not simply an 'address' in the modern sense, it also needed to encode from the outset the relative social status of the sender and recipient.'¹²⁸

There are numerous examples of addresses given in the way described above; furthermore writing repeatedly to the same person did not mean that they necessarily addressed it in the same manner every time. When writing to Joseph Strutt, Isabella Strutt found it essential to her instructions depending on where he was based. This did not only take the form of changing a town or a road name. In some instances she only found it necessary to address her letter to 'Mr J.Strutt', indicating that she had perhaps used a carrier or messenger who was familiar to them – and indeed although she dates the outside of the paper there is no official postmark.¹²⁹ Similarly on occasion she wrote 'Mr J Strutt, Derby.'¹³⁰ In these instances postmarks and town stamps were provided, implying that they had gone through the postal system.

¹²⁷ Parker, 5th/6th January 1653, Letter 7, p. 70.

¹²⁸ Bennet, *Shakespeare's Letters*, p. 56.

¹²⁹ See for example Isabella Strutt, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/9; Isabella Strutt, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/11.

¹³⁰ See for example Isabella Strutt, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/2; Isabella Strutt, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/8; Isabella Strutt, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/10.

Interestingly though no house name or road is given, perhaps suggesting that the Strutts were a family with a notable enough estate not to render any further address. In contrast to this, it is evident that when Joseph was away from home, Isabella was careful to provide careful instruction for the certainty of her letter arriving correctly. On one epistle, she wrote the address 'Love Lane Wood Street London', before crossing it out and inserting the correction 'al. Mrs Martin's No3 Sleire [?] Brighthelmstone'.¹³¹ Joseph stayed at the Love Lane address when in London, so perhaps Isabella had word that his accommodation had altered and adjusted her letter accordingly.

Detailed addresses can also be found in the letters to Jane Stringer. Although it appears that her primary address was Ivy Church in Wiltshire, we can glean from what is written in various letters that she travelled fairly often to diverse locations. Therefore perhaps due to this fact her acquaintances felt it wise to describe her whereabouts as accurately as possible, although this may possibly be a co-incidence, and they were merely fastidious in their approach. Her regular address was fairly standard, given as 'Ivy Church near Salisbury'.¹³² However, as seen from a letter from Katherine Fitz-Walter even this could be fantastically extended. Her first surviving epistle bore the instruction 'For Mrs Stringer at her hows at Ivy Church To be left as Mr Gosse shows IronMonger upon the ditch in Salsbury.'¹³³ Interestingly in her next letter she also commanded that it should be left at Mr Gosses, however the location of Jane had altered and was given as 'To Mrs Stringer at St Gilles in Dorsetshire.'¹³⁴ This suggests that Mr Goss was used as a dropping point for letters, or perhaps was a convenient stopping point for carriers around the Wiltshire area. This is the most frequent address that Katherine used, although she did provide another attractive one in the form of 'This to Mrs Stringer at Mr Stevens [?] Hows a Surgen in Warfold Street London.'¹³⁵ Lady Sarah Cowper left no room for doubt in one beautifully detailed address, even describing the facade of the building lest there should be any uncertainty; 'For Madam Stringer as Mrs Collun's House the white

¹³¹ Isabella Strutt, 29th July 1791, Sandy Brooke, MS3101/C/E/5/16/7.

¹³² Lady Sarah Cowper to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/4; Margaret Shaftesbury also uses this method of address consistently.

¹³³ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 12th August 1670 [?], HRO, 9M73/672/8.

¹³⁴ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 27th January 1682, HRO, 9M73/672/9.

¹³⁵ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 8th December 1686, HRO, 9M73/672/12.

twisted posts in Red Lyon Street in Holborn London.’¹³⁶ There are also references to leaving letters at a post house in Salisbury in a few of the letters, signifying that this also was a method used in distributing letters; we can also ascertain that a carrier or message was used to take the letter to the post house, as it is instructed to be left there.¹³⁷

How did these women know where to send their letters, especially when the addressee appeared to move about fairly frequently? Did they go by the address the last letter had been sent from, or were they under instruction from the writer as to where to send their letter? It may be assumed that it was a combination of both factors, though evidently some letters did go astray. Anne Graham mentioned how sorry she was ‘to find my letter miscarried, for I directed one to your house in Hanover Square as you desire’d’.¹³⁸ Perhaps the very fact that some of the addresses given above are so detailed suggests that the miscarrying of letters was fairly frequent, and that writers became meticulous in their directions to prevent this from happening. Perhaps this was also a contributing factor to the epistolary anxieties above, and some relationships were put under pressure due to mislaid, misdirected or simply lost letters.

In addition to the address borne, postmarks became a trait later in the period. Established in 1661 as a way to increase efficiency though accountability, they consisted of a circle divided into two semi-circles, one containing an abbreviation of the month, and the other the day. Further to this Henry Bishop, the Postmaster General, developed the ‘postage due’ stamp – a rectangular box divided into two squares, showing payment in either shillings or pence.¹³⁹ In many of the letters sent to Jane Stringer, there are clear models of this. On the front of Lady Sarah Cowper’s letter to Jane there is a circular stamp with ‘DE 17’ inside, whilst her second letter bore ‘IY 30’ and a large number ‘2’.¹⁴⁰ Another example can be taken from a letter Katherine Fitz-Walter, which showed a stamp with ‘OC 17’ and ‘2’.¹⁴¹ August was

¹³⁶ Lady Sarah Cowper to Jane Stringer, 29th July, HRO, 9M73/672/5.

¹³⁷ See for example Jane Stringer, HRO 9M73/672/11; Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 26th July 1688, 14th October 1688, HRO, 9M73/672/30.

¹³⁸ Anne Graham, 12th August (Year Unknown), Holbrook Hall, WCRO CR2131/16/52.

¹³⁹ Stewart and Wolfe, *Letter Writing in Renaissance England*, p. 123.

¹⁴⁰ Lady Sarah Cowper to Jane Stringer, HRO 9M73/672/4-5.

¹⁴¹ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 14th October 1688, HRO 9M73/672/11.

characterised by 'AV', January by 'IA' and July by 'IY'.¹⁴² Intermittently, a circular stamp appears with only one number in it, indicating the date on which it was sent.¹⁴³ Some excellent surviving examples of this are also on the letters between Joseph and Isabella Strutt, showing the changes that had taken place between the ends of the seventeenth- and eighteenth centuries. There are very clear illustrations of postmarks on the outside of their correspondence, coupled with some other marks which had become part of postal convention during the eighteenth century. On the letters Joseph sent, the circular stamp has been replaced by an address square, which contains the date the month and the year of sending. Further to this stamps are present from where the letter was posted. There are again larger numbers which may indicate the postage fee. For example, an early letter from Joseph has an address square containing 'Octr 87' (indicating the year) and '28', 'Derby' and a large '2'.¹⁴⁴ Isabella's letters before marriage tended to bear an 'Ashbourn' stamp, but those displayed after her marriage shows that she was the one who sometimes travelled and he was the partner who stayed at home. This is informative also in the sense that different counties appeared to have different methods of postal mark; a letter sent from Mayfield carries a large 'M' on the front, and a big '5' instead of '2'. When in Scarborough, a large '8' appears.¹⁴⁵

How a letter got to its destination varied. There was no national postal service during the Tudor and very early Stuart period (only Royal mail was officially carried), so in order to send letters friends, carriers, merchants, travellers and official and unofficial letter carriers had to be relied upon.¹⁴⁶ This meant that occasionally letters were left waiting for a while until a suitable person could be employed, or alternatively, it had to be finished quickly; Isabella Strutt finished one letter with 'Adieu - the servant awaits [to take the letter] - excuse very great haste'.¹⁴⁷ There were however stirrings of an unofficial postal service in certain areas. In 1620 a Post

¹⁴² Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 12th August 1670 [?], HRO, 9M73/672/8; Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 27th January 1682, HRO, 9M73/672/9; Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 30th July 1694, HRO, 9M73/672/16.

¹⁴³ See for example a letter sent by Katherine Fitz-Walter, which was written on the 8th December and carries a circular stamp with the single number '9' in it; Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 8th December 1686, HRO, 9M73/672/12.

¹⁴⁴ Joseph Strutt, October 1787, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/4/8/7.

¹⁴⁵ Isabella Strutt, 28th October 1799, Mayfield, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/18; Isabella Strutt, 6/10th July 1800, Scarborough, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/21.

¹⁴⁶ Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity*, p. 51.

¹⁴⁷ Isabella Strutt, 24th July 1789, Sandy Brooke, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/3.

to Plymouth was initiated in order to thwart a private system which was being run by a man named Jude, and due to the pressure of the official and unofficial systems running parallel to each other, in 1629 the King's Post undertook a letter run once a week along the Plymouth route, and furthermore delivered them within twenty miles of the road at no extra charge.¹⁴⁸ From the early seventeenth century, therefore, a national postal service began to be organised. Finally in 1635 a royal proclamation was issued, giving set rates of the carrying of letters (for example 2d per single letters for a journey of under 80 miles, and letters to or from Scotland were 8d), and establishing a series of bye-posts, connecting post offices on the main routes with outer posts. Barnstable had already set up such a service with Exeter (a distance of 40 miles), which timed the appearance of their foot post with the arrival of their weekly delivery from London. Over the next two centuries, more progress was made; local sorting offices were created, bye roads were set up to link all the towns to the major postal routes, and the system became more organised and systematic.¹⁴⁹ By 1685, the post office had become a 'single integrated, government-run service in England.'¹⁵⁰ There may have been shortcomings, but as Tavor Bannet points out 'there had never before been a postal service as comprehensive, and service was expanded and improved throughout the eighteenth century.'¹⁵¹

Even though the royal post began officially receiving private letters in 1635, it suffered from the same problems of unreliability that using carriers or messengers did.¹⁵² Isabella Strutt confessed her surprise even in 1791 that a parcel from Joseph Strutt did not reach her until a week after his letter, even though the two appeared to have been sent at the same time.¹⁵³ As described through the indications borne on surviving letters above, it appeared that people in the later half of the seventeenth century and beyond did indeed use official methods of post more frequently, even though intermittent changes in leadership and the running of the official post made for unsteady and often frustrating lapses in professionalism. But what of those who did not or could not use the official post? Their reliance on messengers and carriers

¹⁴⁸ F. George Kay, *Royal Mail* (London: Rockliff, 1951), p. 22.

¹⁴⁹ Philip Beale, *A History of the Post in England from the Romans to the Stuarts* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 227, 231. See also J. Crofts, *Packhorse, Wagon and Post; Land Carriage and Communications under the Tudors and Stuarts*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967).

¹⁵⁰ Tavor Bannet, p. 9.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Stewart and Wolfe, *Letter Writing in Renaissance England*, pp. 121-122.

¹⁵³ Isabella Strutt, 19th December 1791, Sandy Brooke, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/9.

was such that they often wrote a line or two in the body of their letter describing their dealings with their use. Often throwaway comments are revealing to the historian; Anne Graham mentioned that an unexpected letter gave her pleasure as her correspondent knew ‘the post comes no nearer than Sudbury which is three miles from this house so I often ride for my letters’, therefore indicating that she had to make frequent journeys to collect her post from a post house.¹⁵⁴ Isabella’s letter written one Friday in July 1789 suggests that she expected Joseph to receive it fairly soon as she sent him the particulars of an excursion, to be commenced on the following Monday and concluding on the Thursday: As she hoped he would be able to accompany her party for part of it, she must have had faith that her letter would have been received in time. Furthermore as her letter bears an ‘Ashbourn’ stamp, this gives credence to the assumption that she was using the official postal service.¹⁵⁵

In some circumstances there was a fundamental reason why using a trusted carrier was more suitable than taking a chance on the postal service. In the case of Dorothy Osborne and William Temple, their clandestine relationship made it imperative that letters were sent and received in secret, and that the messengers they relied on used their utmost discretion. In one epistle Dorothy makes reference to the anxiousness of their delivery, when she wrote ‘your Last cam safe, and I shall follow your direction for the addresse of this’.¹⁵⁶ This even hints at the possibility of them addressing the letter to another person; this would have been difficult for William to do as he would not have had the opportunity for it that Dorothy had; as he was infrequently at home, she had more options open to her for the addressing of letters to him, and the possibility of using a mediator, whereas his reliance was more on using a messenger they could trust to give the letter solely and discreetly to Dorothy. Their boundaries of epistolary privacy were firm, and Dorothy was dismayed to find that the seal of his letter had been broken by the time she had received it. Her concern is replicated in the tone of her reply to William as she described as she scolded the carrier, so sure was she that it had been tampered with; ‘the Poore fellow was ready to Cry and Swore to mee that it had never bin Touched since hee had it, and hee was soe carefull of it and that how it cam amongst his mony, which perhaps

¹⁵⁴ Anne Graham, 12th August (Year Unknown), Holbrook Hall, WCRO, CR2131/16/52.

¹⁵⁵ Isabella Strutt, 24th July 1789, Sandy Brook, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/6/3.

¹⁵⁶ Parker, 30th/31st July 1653, Letter 32, p. 119.

might break the seale'.¹⁵⁷ Although it may seem a powerful and over-impassioned response, the interference of Dorothy's brother Henry in their relationship meant that threat of interception was very real. When one letter failed to arrive in Dorothy's hand, William patently thought it may have been seized by Henry, causing Dorothy to try to reassure him, 'I am extreemly sorry that your letter miscaryed but I am confident my B: has it not. As cunning as hee is, hee could not hide it soe from mee, but that I should discover it some way or other.'¹⁵⁸ From this example we can see that carriers took on new importance; they were not merely transmitters of post, but could become an integral and trusted part of their clients' lives. This is perhaps epitomised by the example of the carrier above, who was so distraught at the thought that Dorothy would now distrust him, that he sought counsel from Dorothy's neighbour, begging her to communicate to Dorothy (and through her to William) that he was innocent in the matter, and was so aggrieved that he had not eaten or slept due to his upset.¹⁵⁹

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Letter writing was a fundamental part of the early modern period. It was the main written way to communicate, and within its contents lay a vast range of subjects and themes. Maintaining an epistolary relationship invoked a sense of purpose and worth, and provided enjoyment and even excitement. The different reasons for writing letters are evident; some were written for patronage and business purposes; others read almost like a transcript of a modern phone call, containing gossip, emotions and news. To aid them in their correspondence quest, letter manuals were used, providing examples which could (according to the manuals) help them to write any letter for any occasion. These books provided, on the whole, as much entertainment as serious examples and were intensely popular for most of the seventeenth-century. Yet letters were more than just words on a piece of paper. They could be the difference between friendships and foes, patronage and desertion, and even life and death in terms of those which carried state secrets. They could be teased and manipulated, providing only drops of information, with the power to exert anxiety and discomfort. They could contain words of love and endearment, hope and

¹⁵⁷ Parker, 28th/29th May 1653, Letter 23, p. 101.

¹⁵⁸ Parker, 17th/18th December 1653, Letter 50, p.159.

¹⁵⁹ Parker, 28th/29th May 1653, Letter 23, p. 101.

contentment. With the growing interest in not only letters as inanimate objects, but as material which can metaphorically come alive due to their contents, letter writing can truly bring something new and refreshing to the world of history and of English.

Chapter 2

Girlhood;

Father-Daughter Relationships and Education

The history of childhood has proved to be a part of historical analysis which has generated much debate since the 1960s. From the publication of Philippe Ariès's *Centuries of Childhood* in 1962, to Lloyd de Mause, Edward Shorter and Lawrence Stone in the 1970s, and Linda Pollock in the 1980s, the increasing interest in this field has led to many hypotheses, but less agreement on conclusions.¹ In the first works on childhood, it was generally agreed that the experience of childhood was one of transition, with an improvement in the treatment of the child, and the nature of childhood in general. In the 1980s however, this theory had been disputed, and there was recognition that the vast majority of children in the past had been brought up in loving nuclear families; therefore an emphasis of continuity replaced that of change.²

Philippe Ariès argued that attitudes to children progressed in history, from the medieval period to the seventeenth century. From about the age of seven, children merged into adult society with no real concept of what childhood entailed. Over time with economic and social changes, childhood became a recognised phase of the life cycle. Crucial to this in Ariès's mind was the realisation of the importance of education over the centuries.³ For a decade, Ariès's book was the only available text which managed the history of childhood. In the 1970s this changed with the publication of three books which are seen as 'marking a peculiarly 1970s approach to the history of children and of childhood.' The trio of works have become notable not only for their content, but due to the disagreements amongst the authors. De Mause in *The History of Childhood* concentrated on parent-child relationships and

¹ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962); Lloyd de Mause ed., *The History of Childhood* (New York, Psychohistory Press, 1974); Edward Shorter, *The Making of the Modern Family* (New York: Basic Books, 1975); Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1977); Linda A. Pollock, *Forgotten Children; Parent-Child Relations from 1500 to 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

² Hugh Cunningham, *Children and Childhood in Western Society Since 1500* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), p. 4.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

outlined three ways in which adults responded to children; the projective reaction, the reversal reaction and the emphatic reaction. It was necessary for the parent to emphasise with and understand the child, and since each subsequent generation had improved at this, in essence parent and child relationships had become better. Edward Shorter's *The Making of the Modern Family* returned to the work of Ariès, but put much more emphasis on the sexual behaviour of young people and adults. While he agreed that there was a transition in the dynamics of family life, he believed that it took place later than the seventeenth-century turning point that Ariès advocated. This was also associated with a 'surge of sentiment', in which mothers viewed the development and happiness of their child with more interest, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Lawrence Stone however, in *The Family Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, kept his focus on earlier centuries and identified three types of family, the 'open lineage family' of 1450-1630, the 'restricted patriarchal nuclear family' of 1550-1700 and the 'closed domesticated nuclear family' of 1640-1800. His work concluded that there was little evidence to promote the existence of loving parent-child relationships until 1660, when there was a remarkable change and a growing concern for children.

In the 1980s, the 'sentiments approach' of the 1970s received criticism from historians who pointed out the problems with evidence used and the establishment of fact over speculation.⁴ Michael Anderson in 1980 was possibly the first historian to point out these issues.⁵ In 1983, Linda Pollock produced *Forgotten Children*, which combined an overview and analysis of published works on childhood with primary sources such as diaries and autobiographies from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Her motivation for doing so was her concern for the way the history of childhood had been handled. She believed that it was 'an area so full of errors, distortion and misinterpretation that I thought it vital, if progress were to be made, to supply a clear review of the information on childhood contained in such sources as diaries and autobiographies.'⁶ As her book was a thorough critique of the histories of childhood which had come before it, Pollock can be credited with shifting the older thought processes and setting a new precedent; one where continuity was shown to be present, and that many conclusions drawn before had been the exception rather

⁴ Ibid., p. 11.

⁵ Michael Anderson, *Approaches to the History of the Western Family* (London: MacMillan, 1980).

⁶ Pollock, *Forgotten Children*, p. viii.

than the norm. Other historians of the 1980s such as Keith Wrightson, Ralph Houlbrooke and Alan MacFarlane have also refuted the work of the 1970s, through their work on the family in the early modern period.⁷

The history of children and of their relationship towards their parents has also often proved difficult for historians to contend with. This may in part be to do with the questions that have been asked, and the evidence that had been sought. Cunningham believes this is due to the inability of the historian to ever truly know much about the intimacies of relationships between parents and children. He remarks that this is because it is assumed ‘that we would recognise love if we saw it, and record its absence if it were not there, as though it were a material object... it may have expressed itself in very different ways in different societies.’⁸ He highlights a potential problem here; since the debates of the 1960s, 70s and 80s and the conflicting ideas over whether parent and child relationships in the early modern period were cold, unaffectionate affairs, or whether they had the means to develop into interactions which included deeper emotional attachments, the intricacies of parent-child relationships has been one issue which historians have been keen to comprehend. Will Coster, for example, has commented that since it is now impossible to argue that parent-child relationships were unloving and unfeeling, the importance now lies in understanding the nature of these relationships.⁹ Yet, if this task is as complicated as Cunningham believes, then what *is* possible for the historian to achieve?

Reading letters of young girls to their parents is one way of appreciating their interaction, and the bonds between them. According to Cunningham, we are hard-pressed to find evidence of how older children in their teenage years were considered, and that it is only with the availabilities of oral and working class histories of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that we can begin to imagine the emotional life of the family.¹⁰ While this statement has merit, in this chapter I aim to challenge his belief that ‘individual children and their families rarely come alive for us’ by examining epistles between two fathers and their daughters who wrote in the

⁷ Keith Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (London: Routledge 1993); Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London; New York: Longman, 1984); Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England; Modes of Reproduction 1300-1830* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).

⁸ Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 2.

⁹ Will Coster, *Family and Kinship in England 1450-1800* (London: Pearson, 2001), p.68.

¹⁰ Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, pp. 104-5.

mid to late eighteenth century; Joseph and Esther Pease, and Jedediah and Elizabeth and Martha Strutt.¹¹ The tie between these two families concerns the fathers' demand of epistolary excellence from their daughters, coupled with a good overall education. Ralph Houlbrooke has stated that 'of all relationships within the family this [between fathers and daughters] was the one whose harmony depended most heavily on the child's compliance.'¹² The compliance in these cases was the will of the child to please her father by penning fluent and elegant letters. Esther, Elizabeth and Martha were between the ages of eleven and seventeen when they produced the letters used in this chapter, and adolescence was often the period of time in which the child produced their own enduring identity, especially if they were away from their parents. This was due to the necessity of correspondence, and the autonomy of the child who was learning to accomplish tasks on his or her own. However, conversely the parent still sought to maintain authority over their children, often creating conflict.¹³ The fathers in this chapter, whilst wanting their daughters to mature and flourish, retained control of them through their demands for excellence. The complexities this stance initiated ranged from tension and anxiety about their epistolary effort, to manifestations of gratitude. Yet relationships were not unchanging, and as shown below, after the death of their mother the Strutt girls' appreciation of their father's unwavering insistence for their best endeavours increased. By analysing the correspondence of members of these two families I hope to test Cunningham's assertion that 'there simply do not exist sources which enable us with any confidence to write about the emotional life of families in the mass of the population.'¹⁴

Historians have tended to rely on the evidence from upper or elite society when drawing conclusions on single women's letter writing in the early modern period, due to the survival and availability of the material. While I do not want to enter into a debate on class and the social strata of the eighteenth century, it is worth noting the changes that were taking place. According to J.A. Sharpe, 'one of the most deeply entrenched concepts... in the early modern period is that of a rising middle class... possessing a crucial role as an agent of historical change in the

¹¹ Ibid., p. 104.

¹² Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 186.

¹³ Ibid., p. 188.

¹⁴ Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 82.

sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁵ Whilst Sharpe acknowledges that there was change in the England in this period, it is the term ‘middle-class’ he takes umbrage with, as the elasticity of it, in J.H. Hexter’s words, ‘attains all the rigour of a rubber band.’¹⁶ Sharpe adds that the problem of definition has been compounded with the use of phrases such as ‘the middling sort’ by social historians.¹⁷ One historian who uses similar terminology is Keith Wrightson, who devotes a sub-chapter to ‘the middle sort of people’ in his book *Earthly Necessities; Economic Lives in Early Britain*. He argues that ‘the notion of a ‘middle sort of people’ placed between the landed gentry and the labouring classes had a general validity... if it was a distinctly elastic category, those encompassed by it had certain broad characteristics in common.’¹⁸ These characteristics could include working independently, a generation of significant income and being an employer rather than an employee.

This is relevant to our study of the Peases and Strutts as they were examples of this sector of society. Furthermore it has been suggested that one way of analysing parent-children relationships is to look at families within similar social and economic groups.¹⁹ By using these two families as case studies I aim to show how the relationship between father and daughter was displayed in their letters, and how the education of the girls was an issue which was of great importance in their childhood. Even though it difficult to define ‘childhood’ in this period because of the blurred boundaries of the time a child became an adult, the three girls studied here are in their early to mid teens, and as they are still being schooled, for my purposes here they are not considered to be adults.

Joseph Pease was from a family who had left Holland for England in the seventeenth century, and by the eighteenth had become established as merchants, manufacturers and bankers. After a spell in Holland, Joseph settled in Hull in 1709 and launched a successful linseed and oil-processing business. By 1754 he had also

¹⁵ J.A. Sharpe, *Early Modern England; A Social History 1550-1760* (London: Hodder Education, 1997), p. 181.

¹⁶ J.H. Hexter, *Reappraisals in History* (Aberdeen: Northwestern University Press, 1961), p. 74 in Sharpe, *Early Modern England*, p. 182.

¹⁷ Sharpe, *Early Modern England*, p. 182.

¹⁸ Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities; Economic Lives in Early Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 290.

¹⁹ Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 13.

founded a private country bank.²⁰ Jedediah Strutt was apprenticed to a wheelwright at the age of 14, and became the inventor of the ‘Derby Patent Rib’ (an attachment for a stocking frame) in 1756. After forming a partnership with Richard Arkwright in 1771, he became an accomplished businessman in his own right, building his own cotton mills near Derby in 1778 and 1789. His cotton spinning firm was to become the largest in England, and one which would be passed on through his family.²¹ More pertinently, they are examples of men who each lived in a period of the eighteenth century when their respective occupations were becoming particularly successful. Before 1760, it was merchants rather than industrialists who had been particularly prominent, and who were ‘the dominant element in the money-making sectors of the middle classes’, whilst industrialists had only ‘limited significance.’²² Yet towards the end of the eighteenth century, the rise of the factories and the development of machinery ensured the growth of industrial business. My point here is that as these men became more successful, they sought to enhance their daughters’ prospects through good education and careful nurture of their epistolary skills. By doing this they may also have felt able to strengthen their own social position as well as that of their offspring. It may also have been seen as a way to support their family; as Wrightson points out failure to support one’s kin ‘entailed a powerful sense of personal inadequacy, and was also likely to be regarded by others as evidence of moral and prudential shortcomings’.²³ Moving into the middle rank required some consideration of one’s domestic situation, and the education of one’s children came under the potential accomplishments of a successful segue into a different social sphere.

Father and Daughter Relationships

Esther Pease was the daughter of Joseph Pease, a merchant in Hull. Letters she wrote to her father from the ages of eleven to thirteen whilst at school in York show,

²⁰ Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 33.

²¹ Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, pp. 96-101. See also R.S. Fitton and A.P. Wadsworth, *The Strutts and the Arkwrights 1758-1830* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958) and Alfred P. Wadsworth and Julia De Lacy Mann, *The Cotton Trade and Industrial Manchester 1600-1780* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931) for more information on the career of Jedediah Strutt.

²² Sharpe, *Early Modern England*, pp. 183-4.

²³ Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities*, p. 296.

according to Susan Whyman, her ‘tense relationship’, with her father.²⁴ In contrast to the letters sent by Elizabeth and Martha Strutt to their father, Esther’s epistles were written more out of obligation, with more formality and less of what can be perceived as general news. This is understandable considering her father demanded a letter every Friday, but any opportunity she may have had to forge a closer relationship with her father through her letter writing was not taken. This is signified not only in what she wrote, but in the length of her letters; only one of her eleven surviving letters runs to more than one side of A5 paper, and her writing is neatly spaced and of a medium sized font in order to cover as much of the paper as possible. Esther did not seem particularly inclined to converse about anything important or relevant to the sphere in which she inhabited, and the arduousness of her task is apparent in two of her earlier letters as she concluded ‘My Duty and Service is due, concludes this from your Dutiful Daughter’.²⁵

The anxiety she felt when penning her correspondence is also shown by the frequent apologies she made for not writing sooner, or worse, for forgetting to write. Whilst it was epistolary convention to apologise (occasionally routinely) for postponement of letters, the embarrassment Esther felt in having repeatedly to explain and ask forgiveness for the delay in her writing is clear. In eight of her letters she made a plea for her lack of epistolary presence, and implored her father to excuse her; on one occasion she started her letter ‘I must confess that my delay of writing, has the appearance of great neglect; but ‘tis only appearance... I have not had an opportunity for writing’, whilst another commenced with the apologetic ‘‘Tis with shame I reflect on my long ungrateful silence, since I receiv’d the Cambrick Apron... I have often designed to write’.²⁶ Yet however difficult Esther found committing her thoughts to paper on a regular basis, she was quite aware not only of her duty to her father, but also to other members of the family. Under the eye of a Mrs Hotham, Esther promised ‘I design to write soon, to my good Grandmother, whose life, I rejoice, is still preserved’, placating her father who had probably reminded her of her remiss actions in not writing sooner.²⁷ Esther found it difficult to maintain a steady

²⁴ Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, p. 34.

²⁵ Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 8th Feb 1731, HCA, DFP/111; See Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 18th July 1732, HCA, DFP/113 for a similar conclusion.

²⁶ Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 18th July 1732, HCA, DFP/113; Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 25th Aug 1732, HCA, DFP/115.

²⁷ Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 12th Jan 1733[?], HCA, DFP/117.

flow of correspondence with her father, which in turn had an effect on the nature of their connection. Although she could not bring herself to write more frequently, Esther still hoped for consistent letters from her father, and when they were not forthcoming she was conscious that the reason for his epistolary silence may be due to her lack of attention to him. ‘Tis so long since I writ, that I begin to fear your anger; and so long since I was favour’d with one from you, that I am uneasy... Dear Good Papa, pardon my Omissions, and let me have a letter’ was the appeal given in one letter.²⁸ She was keen to remain in Joseph Pease’s favour, and reminded him gently that ‘my Dear Papa us’d to write a great deal’, perhaps in order to trigger a response from him.²⁹ Joseph could not be described as entirely absent to his daughter; he sent regular gifts to her, leading her to thank him ‘for your kind remembrance of me in shrimps and your sending the buttons and cloggs’.³⁰ Nor did Esther have any hesitation in requesting necessary items from her father, asking on one occasion, ‘Mrs Hotham saith I want a Muslim Apron, or a coarse Cambrick one’.³¹ Yet for all her father’s bequests, it is the comfort of a letter she wished for most dearly, in order to satisfy her anxious state. When she had not heard from him for a while, Esther took to signing her letters ‘your affectionate Dutifull daughter’.³² A letter meant that all was well, that she was still in her father’s thoughts, and that she had not displeased him in any way. His letter was a reward to her for her efforts and a sign of his approval. Although Esther’s letters are polite and at times stunted by their formality, there is enough warmth discernible in her letters to conclude that this child perhaps wanted a closer relationship with her father, but had neither the time nor the words to express herself fully.

In contrast to the letters of Esther Pease, Elizabeth and Martha Strutt enjoyed a closer epistolary relationship with their parents and the letters of the Strutt family are useful for analysing how dynamics worked in an eighteenth-century family, in the first instance in a more traditional way and, after the Elizabeth Strutt senior died, in a one parent family. In letters surviving from the month before Elizabeth Sr. succumbed to a fever, the interaction between Elizabeth and Martha and their parents

²⁸ Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 8th Feb 1731, HCA, DFP/111.

²⁹ Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 8th Dec 1732, HCA, DFP/117.

³⁰ Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 18th July 1732, HCA, DFP/113.

³¹ Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 27th July 1732, HCA, DFP/114.

³² See for example Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 3rd July 1733, HCA, DFP/119; Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 7th Sept 1733, HCA, DFP/121.

can be viewed. In March 1774, Elizabeth Sr. had left the children to join Jedediah in London, while he sorted out affairs of business. She wrote regular letters to the children in the two months before she died although she admitted she had ‘no inclination for writing’ and she sought to keep the family close together by detailing the activities of herself and Jedediah.³³ In her letters, there were clear indications of how she and Jedediah expected the children to behave, which was a reflection not only on themselves, but on their parents too. Elizabeth Sr. was glad to hear there had been no cause for concern during their absence, and while Jedediah was to press upon them the importance of their academic skills, it fell to Elizabeth to gently remind them to be mindful of one another; ‘be loving, kind and obliging to each other, let there be no contention amongst you, but which shall behave best’.³⁴ In her following letter, she wrote of how pleased she would be with accounts of their good characters, and ‘the confidence we have, of your not only behaving well to each other... with a gentle frugality, a long with that principle of morality, which I have often observed with pleasure in all your conduct.’³⁵

As the Strutts were to be away for an indefinite period of time, they also sent gifts to their children; amongst them were buckles for shoes, hats and ribbons, and a glass play-toy sent for the children to examine and report back on to their father.³⁶ There was a promise of more presents if they continued to receive good reports of the children, and the children were aware of doing ‘more and more to merit them by our conduct.’³⁷ The Strutt girls, for their part, were eager to send thanks for their parents’ gifts, and in return sent gingerbread and butter.³⁸ They also ensured that their mother knew what was occurring in the home, and mentioned some of the homely business they had to take care of. In one letter Elizabeth mentioned bottling the wine, hoping she had done a good job of it, and assured her mother she had

³³ Elizabeth Strutt Sr. to the Strutt children, 4th April 1774, London, DRO, D5303/12/7; Elizabeth Strutt Sr. to the Strutt children, April 1774, London, DRO, D5303/12/9.

³⁴ Elizabeth Strutt Sr. to the Strutt children, 20th April 1774, London, DRO D5303/12/10.

³⁵ Elizabeth Strutt Sr. to the Strutt children, 27th April 1774, London, DRO D5303/12/11.

³⁶ Ibid. Lawrence Stone mentions that educational games were becoming more popular in the eighteenth-century, in an attempt to combine instruction with fun. See Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 258-9; Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, p. 67.

³⁷ Elizabeth Strutt to Elizabeth Strutt Sr., 2nd May 1774, DRO, D5303/12/12.

³⁸ Elizabeth Strutt Sr. to the Strutt children, 4th April 1774, London, DRO, D5303/12/7; Elizabeth Strutt Sr. to the Strutt children, April 1774, DRO, D5303/12/9; Elizabeth Strutt to Elizabeth Strutt Sr., 2nd May 1774, DRO, D5303/12/12; Elizabeth Strutt to Elizabeth Strutt Sr., 5th May 1774, DRO, D5303/12/14.

visited a Mr Lowe about George and Joseph's clothes.³⁹ Her good sense of home skills also encompassed payment of goods, although she confessed to her mother 'The butcher sent the hams but... I did not think it right to send the money by the man who brought them'.⁴⁰ The experience Elizabeth gained in running household affairs was to become even more significant after her mother's death.

It is noticeable that between them the Strutt girls sent five letters during the period between 2nd May and 8th May 1774; probably due to their knowledge that their mother was ill. They mentioned their anxiety frequently, and their wish for her swift recovery was acknowledged particularly poignantly by Martha who hoped 'by this time you are much better than when my sister wrote I wish I was with you and then I would not be so uneasy.'⁴¹ Her sister Elizabeth had written only the day before, which revealed the strain these young ladies were under; instead of waiting a few days to write Martha felt it was imperative to send another letter in a short space of time lest there be any change in their mother's condition. Unfortunately there was a decline in Elizabeth Sr.'s health, forcing Jedediah to write what must have been a very difficult letter. On 7th May 1774, four days before her death, Jedediah informed the children of the grave situation; 'It is with the utmost concern I am oblig'd to tell you that your Mamma is very ill of a fever this is the 10th day... I have been under the most painful apprehension that you would never see her more.'⁴² Although Jedediah tried to protect his children from the painful realisation of the situation by stating that he felt she may have been a little better that day, he was forced to admit 'you will guess what I feel by what your selves will feel on this occasion'.⁴³ It was likely that he had read the letters from his daughters to his wife and realised that they implicitly knew of how ill she was; therefore he wrote not only of feelings in an emotional sense, but warned them to prepare themselves for a distressing outcome.

Elizabeth Strutt Sr. died on 11th May 1774 and the relationship between the Strutt girls and their father appears to have changed after her death. Whilst she was alive, it was she who they preserved the more loving sentiments for, perhaps moved to do so by their love for her and the sweet nature of her letters. Two surviving

³⁹ Elizabeth Strutt to Elizabeth Strutt Sr., 5th May 1774, DRO, D5303/12/14.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Strutt to Elizabeth Strutt Sr., 2nd May 1774, DRO D5303/12/12

⁴¹ Martha Strutt to Elizabeth Strutt Sr., 3rd May 1774, DRO D5303/12/13

⁴² Jedediah Strutt to the Strutt Children, 7th May 1774, DRO D5303/12/1

⁴³ Ibid.

letters from February 1774 (when their father was in London, but their mother still at home) show shorter letters with an air of polite obligation; Elizabeth's was a checklist and is formulaic with little originality – she acknowledged his goodness, told him of her studies and ended with her best wishes for his endeavours; Martha appeared to write chiefly because Elizabeth had, and she did not want to seem ungrateful. Her letter however was less stilted than her sister's, with news of their relatives in Derby and her girlish hopes for a horse.⁴⁴

However, when Jedediah was widowed, there was a subtle, yet distinct, alteration in how the young women addressed him. Their polite concern for their father turned to more tender sentiments, as they frequently worried for his health and professed anxiety that he had not returned home to them. Their letters give an insight into the relationship between father and daughter in a different way to Joseph and Esther Pease; while Esther was younger and had only a concern for pleasing her father, the Strutt girls' bond with Jedediah had adjusted with the death of their mother. Jedediah remained in London for many months after his wife's death, but was keen not to forgo a relationship with his children. He therefore asked them 'to tell me how you do and how you go on and how you manage affairs and all the little things you can think of they will all please me.'⁴⁵ Taking him at his word, he received regular letters from his daughters, who were able to use letter writing to tell him of their grief, and thus use their letters for catharsis.⁴⁶ This may have been the only outlet open to them, as Joseph wished them to deal with their loss 'in a becoming manner'.⁴⁷ To the Strutt girls, the letters to their father became a representation of themselves, and they felt their correspondence could provide companionship to him. They were determined to indeed tell him of all they could think of, in order to amuse and comfort him, and deter him from his isolation. They told him of the company they kept and news of their acquaintances. They shared stories that they may have been more inclined to tell their mother, but since that was no longer possible, and due to the fact that their father had asked to hear of everything, they sought to indulge him. From this they were able to build a

⁴⁴ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, Feb 1774, DRO, D5303/12/2; Martha Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, Feb 1774, DRO, D5303/12/3.

⁴⁵ Jedediah Strutt to the Strutt children, May 1774, DRO, D5303/13/2.

⁴⁶ See for example Martha Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, June 1774, DRO, D5303/13/5; Martha Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/8; Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 9th July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/9; Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 27th July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/10.

⁴⁷ Jedediah Strutt to the Strutt children, May 1774, DRO, D5303/13/2.

foundation for a closer relationship with their father. They were still highly respectful of him, but there was more tenderness in their writing, and whilst writing to him may still have been a painstaking chore at times, they wrote with a better spirit. I would argue that the Strutt girls were motivated by their duty to him, instead of feeling constrained by it.

By May 1774 when both parents were in London, the fondness for them and the loneliness of the Strutt children manifested itself in a line from Martha who wistfully asked her father ‘don’t you wish to retire from busy bustling London to your own arm Chair and lovely fireside, where after the business of the day you can nod a bit undisturbed?’⁴⁸ Now that they had to deal with the loss of one parent, it became imperative that the other one should remain in good health and return home as safely and swiftly as possible. Joseph appears to have suffered from depression at this point, which caused Elizabeth to fret and beg with him to come home; ‘I never wished so much to see you as I do now; you have been gone at least 5 months.’⁴⁹ A month later she had cause to readdress her concerned and wrote, ‘I am very much concerned to hear of your indifferent state of health; you have my best wishes and my constant prayers for the restoration of it.’⁵⁰ In contrast to Esther Pease’s letters, which contained polite enquiries and wishes for her father’s good health, the Strutt girls were adamant that their father should keep well, and their concern for him was evident.

Education

Historians have used two approaches in ascertaining the level of education of women in the early modern period; firstly by sourcing evidence of reading and writing skills and secondly analysing the availability of schooling.⁵¹ Yet the evidence available pertains mainly to the upper-class, with fewer sources available for the middle and lower-classes. Assessing the educational opportunities of young women in the early

⁴⁸ Martha Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 8th May 1774, DRO, D5303/12/17.

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 9th July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/9; The Strutt children were very aware of the increasing length of time their father was away for – see also William Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 14th Sept 1774, DRO, D5303/13/14.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 10th August 1774, DRO, D5303/13/11.

⁵¹ Caroline Bowden, ‘Women in Educational Spaces’ in Laura Lunger Knoppers ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Early Modern Women’s Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 86.

modern period could be viewed as a difficult task. According to John Burton in 1793, the question was ‘whether a woman who is ignorant and uninformed will be more pleasing in her manners, be better qualified to instruct her children, and manage the affairs of a family than one who is sensible and intelligent.’⁵² Perhaps the answer lay in their expectations of adulthood; as Rosemary O’Day points out ‘all girls... might learn what they needed for their future life at their mother’s knee - sewing, cooking, medicine, all manner of housewifery, accounting and, in the case of the lower classes, certain agricultural skills.’⁵³ For moralists and educationalists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the difficulty of the questions of a girl’s education lay not in *whether* girls should be taught, but rather *what* they needed to learn. Michèle Cohen emphasises this by claiming that ‘accomplishments came to be valued or criticized depending not on what they were, but on whether they could be, or were meant to be, “displayed.”’⁵⁴ Differing opinions on the education of young ladies was manifested in every household, through a combination of parental beliefs, was what fashionable, and what the leading scholars of the day advised.

Yet, during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, expansion in women’s education as a whole was seen, with more prospects available for certain small groups. O’Day has suggested that one reason for this was the breakdown of the manorial system and the spread of enclosure, which then made changed the working life and value of women.⁵⁵ Furthermore as women were now marrying later (in their mid-twenties) it meant there was more time for them to acquire education, and the skills they needed to run a household.⁵⁶ The degree to which a young girl was educated was at first dictated by her parents, leading to a wide variation between standards in each household.⁵⁷ Anthony Cooke, father of Elizabeth Cooke, who was to become Lady Elizabeth Russell, saw that his five daughters were provided with the same classical education that their four brothers received; while most of their middle-class friends received instruction in how to become robust, religious

⁵² John Burton, *Lectures on Female Education and Manners, Vol. I* (London, 1793), p. 109, in Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 64.

⁵³ Rosemary O’Day, *Education and Society 1500-1800* (Essex: Longman, 1982), p.183.

⁵⁴ Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, p. 65. A discussion of this statement with regards to the learning of languages can be found later in this chapter.

⁵⁵ O’Day, *Education and Society*, p. 180.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁵⁷ Bowden, ‘Women in Educational Spaces’, p. 90.

housewives, in addition to this the Cooke girls also gained fluency in Latin, Greek and several modern languages.⁵⁸ There is also evidence of clergymen's daughters being sent off to school with daughters of the gentry in certain instances.⁵⁹ Even when we cannot know for certain the educational history of a particular young lady, we can look for evidence in the standard of her writing. Lydia DuGard's letters at the age of fifteen demonstrate the ability of an articulate young woman, and although no formal evidence of her education exists, to become such a natural conversationalist she must have been instructed in the art of writing at some point in her adolescence. This is emphasised by Nancy Taylor's work on the DuGard family which concludes that in this family in the 1660s, 'all the women regarded letter writing as a normal, expected skill.'⁶⁰

Elementary schools provided some education for girls in urban areas, and references to schools in various autobiographical works are enough to estimate that by the mid seventeenth century every town had a girls' academy.⁶¹ The rise of the boarding school in the seventeenth century saw girls being sent away to learn English, French and more decorative subjects such as dancing, singing and painting.⁶² Although establishments such as these were more concerned with the vision of young ladies as accomplished damsels who became complimentary wives to the successful husbands, it meant that it was easier eventually for more academically minded schools to appear. Bathusa Makin insisted that girls who entered her Tottenham school in 1673 were already able to read and write at the age of eight or nine and claimed to introduce her pupils to classical and modern languages, science and mathematics; this led her school to be considered the nearest representation to a grammar school for girls.⁶³ Home schooling was also an option, with girls often sharing a tutor with their brothers. Yet opinions over what girls should be taught varied, and in order to write successfully women were often compelled to take ownership of their skills, practising in their own time, and maintaining their education.

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Farber, 'The Letters of Lady Elizabeth Russell (1540-1609)' PhD Thesis (Columbia University, 1977), p. 5.

⁵⁹ See Taylor, pp. 21-2, .60.

⁶⁰ Taylor, p. 22.

⁶¹ O'Day, *Education and Society*, p.187.

⁶² Helen M. Jewell, *Education in Early Modern England* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1998), p. 106.

⁶³ *Ibid.*; O'Day, *Education and Society*, p. 188.

There was still a popular view that a woman's traditional role was in the home, and instead of her education being used as an inspiration to tackle new ventures, it was seen as a tool to complement her husband. As O'Day concludes, 'The case for more academic education for girls rested on the grounds that well-educated women would mean well-brought up children and contented husbands.'⁶⁴ According to Linda Pollock, 'daughters were provided with different goals to strive for'.⁶⁵ To illustrate her point, Pollock puts forward a range of autobiographical sources from women and men in the early modern period. Lucy Hutchinson described how her mother was averse to her learning Latin even though she was more advanced in it than her brothers because she had 'so wholly addicted myself to that as to neglect my other qualities.'⁶⁶ This is interesting because according to Lucy, her father was happy for her to pursue Latin, yet it was her mother who feared she would not become accomplished in her 'other qualities' namely music and dancing. As with Sir Anthony Cooke above, it would appear that there were fathers who encouraged their daughters to have a more rounded education. Unton Dering, in a letter to Henry Oxinden on the suitability of a school for Henry's two young daughters, recommended a master who advocated 'the qualities of music... and writing and... that their behaviour be modest.'⁶⁷

By the end of the eighteenth century, despite Burton's remarks, there is evidence that the approach of a more multidisciplinary education was becoming more popular. Charlotte Papendiek recalled how important her children's education was, and how schools were now catering for all classes, from the nobility to the lower ranks. She believed that for her daughters, household duties were essential, yet she ensured they remained as day scholars with a Miss Roach, who was a woman of strict principles. By observing her daughters' education, Charlotte was certain she was doing her utmost 'to bring them up as useful and right-minded members of

⁶⁴ O'Day, *Education and Society*, p. 189.

⁶⁵ Linda Pollock, *A Lasting Relationship: Parents and Children Over Three Centuries* (London: Fourth Estate, 1987), p. 204.

⁶⁶ Lucy Hutchinson, 1624. Rev. Julius Hutchinson ed., *Lucy Hutchinson, Memoirs of the Life of Colonel (John) Hutchinson* (London: Longmans, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1810), pp. 25-6, in Pollock, *A Lasting Relationship*, p. 222.

⁶⁷ Dorothy Gardiner ed., *The Oxinden Letters 1607-1642. Being the Correspondence of Henry Oxinden of Barham and his Circle* (London: Constable and Co., 1937), Unton Dering to Henry Oxinden, 1647 p. 128.

society'.⁶⁸ Her use of the word society may be innocuous, but it could also point to the developing notion that women could play a greater part outside of their household, something which Joseph Pease and Jedediah Strutt appeared to be aware of.

However strained their relationship may have been it is evident that the education of his children was important to Joseph Pease. This may have been the chief reason for his demands of weekly letters from them. Esther's letters may not have shared news of her visits to acquaintances, or what her daily routine was like, but they did reveal how her writing was progressing. The letters were not only sent as a duty to her father, but also as a proof of her education. At first glance Esther's letters are neatly presented; her handwriting is of medium size and a flowing italic script. All letters bar one are fully dated, and her lines are spaced out in an orderly fashion. Her second surviving letter in particular is quite eloquent and her manner overall is mature, although this may be a given in the sense that she was living away from home and even at the age of eleven was being educated not only in ways of literacy but also in household management.⁶⁹ In a letter sent in November 1732, she described how 'Mrs Hotham sends her humble service to you, and bids me tell you, that she and I are to be great Housewives.'⁷⁰ This was the sole direct mention of women's traditional roles in the house, but there are also more subtle references to the skills Esther may have been learning through Mrs Hotham. Esther asked for some Muslim or Cambrick material, in order to make an apron, and Mrs Hotham in a postscript to Joseph mentioned that Esther was 'mending' one of them, but was in need of new ones.⁷¹ In the same letter Mrs Hotham also referred to Esther's attendance at school, stating that Esther was there to be taught 'the nice part of learning'.⁷² 'The nice part of learning' in Mrs Hotham's view was the academic side of Esther's education, and it is possible that Esther was being taught such subjects as arithmetic and French.

⁶⁸ Charlotte Papendiek, 1791. Vernon Broughton ed., *Court and Private Life in the Time of Queen Charlotte: being the journals of Mrs Papendiek, Assistant Keeper of the Wardrobe and Reader to her Majesty* (London: Richard Bentley, 1887), pp. 279-82, referenced in Pollock, *A Lasting Relationship*, pp. 236-7.

⁶⁹ Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 23rd June 1732, HCA, DFP/112; this is Esther's second letter.

⁷⁰ Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 27th July 1732, HCA, DFP/116.

⁷¹ Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 7th Nov 1732, HCA, DFP/114.

⁷² *Ibid.*

However, although Esther appeared proficient at writing in her correspondence with her father, Joseph was aware that his daughter used a copy book, and was more confident when reproducing her letter characters and words from it. This in part may have been the reason he asked for a letter written exclusively by Esther, with no help from her copy book crutch. The last extant letter from Esther, was as promised by her, one in which she wrote ‘at your comand... without a cobby and thearfore I hope you will soon excuse my mistakes.’⁷³ As shown from this short quotation, from the first sentence of her letter Esther was erroneous in her spelling, although her handwriting remained neat and uniform throughout. She was forced to correct herself on a few occasions, re-writing over certain letters and crossing out others. There are other factors which also betray that Esther was not comfortable writing without an aid; the date was written for the first time underneath the body of her letter, instead of in the top right hand corner, perhaps showing in her agitation that she forgot to date her letter in the first instance; also the letter was short, even by Esther’s standards, with the words spaced out more than usual. She managed five full lines of prose, and another three lines split in half side by side for her farewell. Her nerves were also apparent in her content; she wished she was ‘as loveing a daughter as you are a loveing Father, but that I cannot be.’⁷⁴ Esther perhaps felt that to show her capability in writing a proficient letter to her father was to show her love for him, for nothing would please him better than to see her with adept literacy skills. Joseph Pease was keen to see his daughter improve, and as her reply was written ‘at his command’, Esther tried her utmost to please her father, and the curtailing of letter length maybe have been one way in which she was able to demonstrate control, by allowing as few mistakes as possible so as not to offend him. Yet Joseph’s request may not have been wholly unkind; he may have been aware of his daughter’s need to practise unaided in order to avoid losing the skills she had already learnt, and to feel comfortable in her private epistolary space.⁷⁵

Similarly to Joseph Pease, Jedediah Strutt had the education of his children at the forefront of his mind, and demanded a high level of accuracy in their letters to him. Whyman has described him as ‘mercilessly’ demanding constant letters with

⁷³ Esther Pease to Joseph Pease, 7th Sept 1733, HCA, DFP/121

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ For more on the research of this idea in twenty first century communities, see Bowden, ‘Women in Educational Spaces’, p. 87.

‘correct spelling and grammar’ and as having an ‘obsession’ with their letter writing.⁷⁶ Jedediah’s desire for his children to perfect their writing skills stemmed from his own lack of epistolary skill and confidence. He was determined that the inadequacy he felt would not be recognised by his children. Therefore he was often quite forceful in his manner, to both his sons and his daughters. Whilst he struggled with his ‘transition from a rural wheelwright to an urban businessman in a world of social inequality’, he knew his children had a better chance of elevating themselves to a higher status from an early age.⁷⁷ As he could not necessarily teach his children all they needed to know by his own hand, he resorted to other methods of direction, in one instance sending his son William a copy of Lord Chesterfield’s ‘Letters’. He pointed out to William that he may become ‘a Trademan of some eminence’, and therefore it was imperative that he obtained ‘the Manners, the Air, the genteel address, and polite behaviour of a gentleman.’⁷⁸ Yet as I shall discuss below, his daughters often asked for guidance on their letter writing, and their father’s advice was eagerly received, although this may also have been a way of admitting one’s faults before they were pointed out by a zealous father. Jedediah’s lack of self worth can be heeded in a poignant letter to his elder daughter Elizabeth written in 1786; as she was then an adult of 28 perhaps he felt he could be more candid in his feelings. He had married a yeoman’s widow, causing tension with his children, and the strain reached its zenith after a letter was received from Elizabeth discussing a sum of money for clothes he felt she would look ridiculous in. The desire for his children to be respected and not ridiculed was still prominent, and to this end he described his awkwardness and lack of self esteem. He asked her to ‘consider and see how slender once my former fortunes were, and how narrow and constricted my education and the habits of the former part of my life had been’.⁷⁹ It is clear that Jedediah viewed his existence in two parts; before and after his financial and social elevation, and was still uneasy about where exactly he fitted in society. In an emotive passage he confessed;

I am but little known and but little regarded. Few people imagine that the house at Derby belongs to me, that I have my concern in the business there, or that you are my children. When I am there, strangers view me as

⁷⁶ Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, p. 102.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁷⁸ Jedediah Strutt to William Strutt, 17th Aug 1774, DRO, D5303/10.

⁷⁹ Jedediah Strutt to Elizabeth Strutt, 23rd March 1786, DRO, D5303/21.

a stranger also, and acquaintances seem not to be acquainted, nay... I think their eyes wished they did not see me.⁸⁰

The knowledge that he had little standing in his own community had led Jedediah to try and increase his children's opportunities and in turn lead them to greater social acceptance. Although he was uncomfortable writing letters, he did not want his foibles to be handed down to his offspring and although at times, as we shall see below, they found writing to be an arduous task, they were able to master the skills of letter writing. Although he did not give direct praise to his children in his surviving letters, he was nevertheless proud of their achievements as their mother told her children '[Martha's] second letter was quite a master pies, your Father said it was a very pretty letter'.⁸¹ Whyman has described the adult letters of his children as having become 'chillingly standardized' by the end of the century, but I argue that whilst they remained teenagers, his daughters letters showed affection and respect for their father, and although were indeed perhaps missing idiosyncrasies and quirks which may have been expected in letters from a northern family, were not formulaic or rigid in their contents.

Through the letters of Elizabeth and Martha Strutt we can ascertain the kind of education girls of their status had, although the fact that their father wished for them the confidence he never had when moving in society may have meant they had opportunities other young ladies of their background did not. There is no direct mention in their letters of them going to school, unlike their brothers, yet there are many references to their learning. Jedediah had pressed the importance of education upon his son William to such an extent that the boy was moved to write; 'I am now perfectly convinced of the Utility of Learning and practising Polite, easy, graceful Manner and Behaviour... giving me in some degree... behaviour which makes a Man at first sight... so much admired and esteemed.'⁸² Elizabeth too, in her efforts to grow in areas she felt were worthy, promised her father, 'I cannot say that I will be wise, but I will endeavour to improve, and learn and know all I can.'⁸³ The letters the Strutt girls sent to their father were in the main articulately written, with only a few faults in spelling and grammar apparent. Written in a neat italic hand, the girls

⁸⁰ Jedediah Strutt to Elizabeth Strutt, 23rd March 1786, DRO, D5303/21.

⁸¹ Elizabeth Strutt Sr. to the Strutt children, 4th April 1774, DRO, D5303/12/7.

⁸² William Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 14th Sept 1774, DRO, D5303/13/14.

⁸³ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 30th Aug 1775, DRO, D5303/15/7.

appeared to have been at great pains to please their father with their prose, and it is clear that their tidy script was composed with great care. Only occasionally do we note impatience or haste creeping in, bringing with them blots of ink and scribbled out words.⁸⁴

Elizabeth and Martha were anxious to please their father, and often asked for his advice on how they should write in a better manner. As someone who had received little instruction in these matters himself, it was ironic that his daughters now held his guidance in high esteem. To them their father was the person who would instruct them on how to excel in life, and the regard they had for him can be seen in a line from Martha; ‘train us like yourself to all that’s good and amiable in the eyes of God and Man’.⁸⁵ Jedediah was however forthcoming in his instruction, even if it was not always from his own mind.⁸⁶ As their father demanded excellence from them, the Strutt girls were mindful that they should deliver it, and therefore not only accepted any mistakes that were pointed out to them, but also sometimes pre-empted them, whilst assuring their father that they were eager to learn to do better. On realising that perhaps she had used the wrong phrasing when she said she had liked some books ‘vastly’, Elizabeth enquired ‘will it be better if I say that, I am much pleased with them.’⁸⁷ Whilst Elizabeth was not yet fully confident in her abilities, she at least had more self-belief than Martha, who may have found it more of a strain to write letters than her elder sister. Elizabeth described Martha as ‘not in the humour’ for writing in one instance, and Martha opened one letter with the remark ‘I know take up my pen with an intention to write you a long letter’.⁸⁸ Her expression hints that letter writing was something which required much motivation and that to some extent she felt some intimidation. She confessed to her father ‘for one of yours [letters] there should be three or four of mine to make up for the inelegancies of them but I hope I shall improve thought I flatter myself poor as they

⁸⁴ See for example Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 5th Sept 1774, DRO, D5303/13/13; Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 24th July 1775, DRO, D5303/15/3; Usually if there were any spelling mistakes, the girls crossed them out neatly.

⁸⁵ Martha Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 8th May 1774, DRO, D5303/12/17.

⁸⁶ See for instance the example given above of his gift of Lord Chesterfield’s ‘Letters’ to his son William.

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 9th July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/9; for the letter in which she make her original mistake see Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, June/July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/6

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, June/July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/6; Martha Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/8.

are that they give you some pleasure.’⁸⁹ For Martha, the task of weeding out every inelegant or mis-used word was an overwhelming task; therefore she hoped her father would take enjoyment from her letter, and overlook however many mistakes it contained. For Elizabeth, perfecting her writing was an important issue, and she strived to please her father in this respect.

Obligation to her father for pointing out her faults was a recurring theme in Elizabeth’s letters, but she did not become embittered by the occasional criticism; rather it spurred her on to self improvement. ‘[I am] oblig’d to you or any one else that will tell me of my faults, they are innumerable. And will never be expell’d without great attention’.⁹⁰ Ironically the very sentence in which Elizabeth thanked her father for aiding her improvement contains an error and in her next letter she found herself expressing gratitude for the attention drawn to it; ‘I see that the word expell’d was very improperly used in my last letter, and I am oblig’d to you for taking notice of it; remedied would have been much better’.⁹¹ If Elizabeth ever became impatient with her father’s recommendations, then she worked very well to hide it. It was apparent to her that her father wished the best for his children, and therefore she was determined to rise to his high standards. She was perhaps made more aware of this after the death of her mother, when she was worried that her father had become depressed. Whilst Elizabeth tried to raise his spirits in the usual manner of declaring her anxiety at his declining health, she also employed tactics whereby she stressed the importance of what he had taught her so far, and how much she still had to learn;

I esteem it as a favour that you will take the trouble to tell me of any thing you think inelegant in my letters... you telling me of my faults is a proof that you love me, and I will do all that I can to improve, but I am much afraid you will be tired before you have taught me to speak and write elegantly.⁹²

It was not only in matters of spelling and grammar than his daughters sought his assistance. They also asked for help on matters of epistolary etiquette. In one instance Elizabeth, stumped on the matter of how to address Miss Dolly, asked for

⁸⁹ Martha Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 17th August 1774, DRO, D5303/13/12.

⁹⁰ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 10th August 1774, DRO, D5303/13/11.

⁹¹ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 5th Sept 1774, DRO, D5303/13/13.

⁹² Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 9th July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/9.

his advice. Worried that she would not answer in the correct fashion since Miss Dolly was an old friend who had since married, she appealed to her father to let her know the suitable path to take. The situation was hindered by the fact that Elizabeth had not renewed the friendship before the lady in question had been married; ‘I suppose it would be very improper to renew the correspondence now, having deferr’d wishing her happiness so long – if you think it would not, and can tell me how to address her in her elevated station it would be very agreeable to me’.⁹³ Elizabeth clearly trusted her father’s judgement to resolve her issue, and to her the question of his social standing does not occur. She was convinced he would know what to do, especially considering the ‘elevated station’ of her now married friend. On another occasion however Elizabeth had not waited for her father’s advice, and fretted over the possible mistake she had made; ‘I have said just the reverse of what you tell me to say and I have taken so much pains in the writing... I think I will send it [to you]... if you think it a very improper one and not fit to send... I will write another’.⁹⁴

Elizabeth was not alone in asking a close relative to look over her letters to analyse whether they were fit to send. Lydia DuGard also employed the same method of self improvement in her letter writing. When writing epistles to her cousin and future husband Samuel DuGard, she often asked him to take the time to read a letter to a third party, which she enclosed with his epistle. After composing a letter to Samuel’s friend and colleague Thomas Jerkyl, she asked Samuel to ‘peruse it, and I refer it to you whether to deliver it or not. If I have not your approbation withhold it and excuse me to Mr Jerkyl for not writing.’⁹⁵ This was a fairly common practice for Lydia and Samuel, who also occasionally asked Lydia to look over something he wanted to send. Lydia regularly left open letters in Samuel’s packet, and apologised when she did not do so, stating ‘ I would not have seal’d this letter if there had bin anything in it worth your reading’.⁹⁶ Lydia had faith in Samuel not only to give her genuine constructive advice when necessary, but she also trusted him not to divulge the contents of her letters to others. The fact that their relationship was clandestine meant that trust was implicit in the bond between them and could therefore transcend

⁹³ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 5th Sept 1774, DRO, D5303/13/13.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 14th Sept 1774, DRO, D5303/13/15.

⁹⁵ Taylor, Barford, 28th March 1668, Letter 13, p. 58.

⁹⁶ Taylor, Barford, 30th June 1669, Letter 18, p. 74.

the restraints of epistolary privacy. Furthermore if Samuel had given direction on any changes, one feels Lydia would have respected them, as they would have added to her education and development of her literacy skills.

It would appear that throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it became increasingly desirable for young women to be able to express themselves in their own voice, adding to their sense of identity and autonomy. Joseph Pease wished Esther to write him a letter without using a copy book to assess the level of her literacy, but perhaps also because he wanted to hear her own thoughts. Similarly, Jedediah Strutt in asking his daughters to tell him of everything they did, was subconsciously enticing them to create their own epistolary personalities. Numerous handbooks had been written in the late seventeenth century instructing women how to create and model letters, but as Taylor has opined, many women such as Lydia DuGard were able to communicate effectively without having to use the restrictive and repetitive nature of such volumes.⁹⁷ Lydia's unrestrained yet dignified style was highlighted when she admitted 'I am grow'n soe well acquainted with you, that I have us'd my self to write as familiarly and freely as I talk', although she was afraid of the inability to convey her thoughts in the manner of which she thought her cousin Samuel deserved; 'though a mean capacity or want of art denighs me the privildg of expresing my most advantagious thoughts of you, yet you... I hope are confident my affection is as great as if it were better exprest.'⁹⁸

Dorothy Osborne also had a naturally expressive way of writing which was enhanced by her confident manner and aided by her love of literature. Kenneth Parker points out that she wrote to William Temple 'not simply as an equal, but especially with a range of observations that require (and deserve) recognition.'⁹⁹ He consequently focuses mainly on her opinions and arguments of certain stances, but even in the lines of her letters where she professed a general description or attitude, her aptitude for clever observation shone through. She began one letter, 'This world is composed of nothing but contrariety's and sudden accidents, only the proportions are not at all Equall for to a great measure of trouble it allow's soe small a quantitye

⁹⁷ See for example Henry Care, *The Female Secretary* (1671), Wing C519, Arber's Term cat. I 88, consulted on JISC Historic Books; Hannah Woolley, *The Gentlewoman's Companion* (1673), (no bib. number), consulted on JISC Historic Books; Taylor, p. 22.

⁹⁸ Taylor, Barford, 13th February 1672, Letter 28, p.106; Taylor, Worcester, 16th January 1671, Letter 22, p.84.

⁹⁹ Parker, p. 13.

of Joy that one may see tis merely intended to keep us alive withall;'¹⁰⁰ Dorothy confessed that this sentiment was borne of a depression she had felt the previous evening, but it is more how she expressed herself, rather than what she said that can interest a modern reader. She wrote with a moral stance, knowing that William would let her indulge herself in it, even though she then swiftly moved in a different direction. Her sense of equality left her unembarrassed to share her thoughts, even though she acknowledged that they had no bearing on the rest of her letter. Instead Dorothy's musings enhanced her letters, adding intensity to them. Even shorter sentences reveal a sharp turn of phrase. She commented in March 1653 that 'Your last letter came like a pardon to one upon the block', which perfectly conveyed her relief and joy at receiving his epistle, even if it may sound a little extreme.¹⁰¹ Her commentary was not just reserved for her own person. She referred to a Goldsmith as having 'a head fit for nothing but horns' and held the opinion that Lady Isabella Thynne 'had better have married a begger, then that beast with all his Estate.'¹⁰² Her demonic symbolism proved apt when describing people in a demoralising fashion; instead of just calling them the 'devil', she created vivid imagery, allowing the reader to engage fully with her descriptions.

The Strutt girls took ownership of their education while their father was away by borrowing and reading books which would enhance their knowledge. This was done not only for enjoyment, but also for their self improvement as Elizabeth pointed out; 'I always thought there was something disagreeable in my reading but did not know till now what it was; now I do know I shall certainly endeavour to rectify it.'¹⁰³ To 'rectify it', she read books that her father had sent her and had found 'many passages that had entertain'd me' and some which 'have renewed my grief'.¹⁰⁴ She also enjoyed broadening her mind with various different subjects, and took pleasure from borrowing books from a Mrs White, who 'lent me the life of Queen Caroline, and will lend me any other book that they have.'¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth was also able to turn what she had read to her advantage. In regular fear for her father's health, she often pressed upon him her desire for his safe return home, where he may be looked after

¹⁰⁰ Parker, 25th May 1654, London, Letter 64, p. 195.

¹⁰¹ Parker, 5th/6th March 1653, Letter 10, p. 75.

¹⁰² Parker, 16th/17th July 1653, Letter 30, p. 116; Parker, 8th/9th October 1653, Letter 44, p. 144.

¹⁰³ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 10th Aug 1774, DRO, D5303/13/11.

¹⁰⁴ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 9th July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/9.

¹⁰⁵ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, June/July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/6.

by the family. Worried that her pleas were not having a strong enough impact, she found a stanza that she hoped would convey the importance of good health; ‘See the Wretch that long has lost/On the thorny Bed of pain/At length repairs his vigour lost/And breathe and walk again.’¹⁰⁶ Comforted by this verse, whilst Elizabeth was not confident enough to try and express her feelings in her own words, she was at least confident in quoting the words of others to make her point.

Whether young ladies should have had the ability to converse in a language other than English was a topic which divided opinion. The acquirement of French, for example, was one subject Cohen refers to when she mentions if certain accomplishments were to be displayed; ‘Some considered it an indispensable accomplishment, arguing that it was an intellectual acquirement which graced a polite education. To others French was merely an ‘ornamental accomplishment’, but one that it was highly proper to possess. Other still condemned it as a ‘Foreign’ and useless accomplishment.’¹⁰⁷ It would appear that there was a conflict whether French was an attribute or a hindrance, and further to this, even if a young woman had knowledge of French, it was not always desirable to her to speak it. To converse in French could be regarded as insincere. Indeed, according to some commentators in the eighteenth century, the cultivation and definition of a French accent was ‘showy’ and enhanced the flaws in the female progression of education.¹⁰⁸ According to Hannah More, a woman’s best advantage in conversation was her silence as it allowed her the concurrent appearances of ‘rational curiosity and becoming diffidence.’¹⁰⁹ One can only assume that conversation in a French accent would have been even more distasteful to Madam More.

It was not only French that came under scrutiny in the early modern period. The use of Latin in a young lady’s education was also commented, and sometimes frowned, upon. Seen as a more masculine subject, to stretch and challenge the mind, Latin was seen to be the subject which boys should learn, not girls.¹¹⁰ Sir Ralph Verney advised a Dr Denton against letting his daughter Nancy, Ralph’s god

¹⁰⁶ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 30th Aug 1775, DRO, D5303/15/7.

¹⁰⁷ Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁰⁹ Hannah More, *Scriptures on The Modern System of Female Education, with a View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent among Women of Rank* (1799) in Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, p. 70.

¹¹⁰ For more on this see Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, pp. 82, 99.

daughter, learn Latin, promoting a life of obedience, and direction under her eventual husband. Even when Nancy wrote in determination to her uncle, in order to gain his approval, he could not be dissuaded;

Good sweetheart be not so covetous, believe me a Bible... and a good plain catechism in your mother tongue being well read and practised, is well worth all the rest and much more suitable to your sex; I know your father thinks this false doctrine, but be confident your husband will be of my opinion.¹¹¹

Was Sir Ralph being patronising here, or is he simply sharing a belief that many of his contemporaries shared; that young women did not need to be bi or poly lingual, when English served their interests so well, especially in the domestic sphere? It is insinuated from what Sir Ralph wrote that Dr Denton was agreeable to Nancy's study of Latin, but was swayed by the influence of a powerful patron.

Like Nancy Denton, other young women wished to be fluent in a language other than English, and enjoyed their endeavours. According to Jacqueline Eales, Lady Brilliana Harley preferred anything in the French tongue to any work in English and Isabella Strutt mentioned a Miss Brown 'who was very obliging in hearing me read and instructing me in the Italian pronunciation.'¹¹² Dorothy Osborne was fluent in French, inserting occasional French phrases across her prose, and even sent a whole note written in French to William Temple when she was staying in London.¹¹³ The Strutt children also learnt to write and converse in French, and were mainly enthusiastic in their efforts. William assured his father that he would 'certainly continue to endeavour to Improve all I can in the French language both by reading and speaking it'.¹¹⁴

Thus option to become multi-lingual was not only confined to the young gentlemen. French was moving 'from contributing to the fashioning of males in the eighteenth century to being central to the construction of femininity in the nineteenth.'¹¹⁵ The shifting of French in this way over the two centuries, coupled

¹¹¹ Ralph Verney to Nancy Denton 1651. Margaret Maria, Lady Verney ed., *Verney Letters of the Eighteenth Century from the MSS at Claydon House* (London: Ernest Benn, 1930), pp. 501-2, in Pollock, *A Lasting Relationship*, p. 226.

¹¹² Jacqueline Eales, *Women in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (London: UCL Press, 1996), p42; Isabella Strutt, 10th February 1791, Sandy Brooke, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/6.

¹¹³ Parker, 22nd/23rd October 1653, Letter 46, Note C, p. 152-3.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity*, p. 83.

with the probable awareness that young ladies in the upper-classes were taught French, meant that Jedediah also desired his daughters to become adept in the language. His daughters were serious in their attempt to become fluent and Martha kept him informed on their progress; ‘we still learn French and we will get forward as fast as we can; Betsy Samuel... has begun to learn French and we are to write to one another. You say you would have us acquainted only with those which we can learn something from.’¹¹⁶ Her words indicate a hope from Jedediah not only about what his children might learn, but also from whom they learnt it. To elevate themselves in society, the Strutt children would have needed to keep company with those of a higher status, and the advantage of having knowledgeable acquaintances, who may give them cause to advance themselves further, had been pressed upon them. However it was not always easy to progress as quickly as they may have hoped as Elizabeth reminded him; ‘I apply very closely to my French... with care, attention and practise I shall be able to translate any French book; but as to converse in that language, the pronunciation is so very difficult, that I am afraid I shall never do it with elegance and fluency.’¹¹⁷ By starting her sentence with the positive parts of her studying, she hoped to placate her father by stressing what she was able to do well, but then notified him of her struggles, in the attempt to warn him that she felt she would never be able to speak the language as well. Here Elizabeth had a sense of ownership over her education; Jedediah may have enticed his children to study hard, but ultimately their ability to learn was their own, and they could not be forced to take in difficult or new ideas quickly, or perfect them immediately.

The Strutt girls’ letters also show the kind of duties a young woman had to undertake after the death of a parent. After the death of their mother, Elizabeth and Martha began to show a tender maternal affection towards their brothers, in particular towards the younger two, George and Joseph, who would have only been thirteen and nine respectively when their mother died. The two girls were sixteen and fourteen, and although they had to ‘render life tolerable without that best of women’, they were determined to keep things running smoothly at home.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Martha Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/8.

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 5th Sept 1774, DRO, D5303/13/13.

¹¹⁸ Martha Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 18th May 1774, DRO, D5303/13/4.

As surrogate mothers to their younger brothers, it was the Strutt girls' obligation to furnish their father with the details of how they fared. They had already started to take charge of the two youngest Strutts whilst their mother was in London before her death, leading Elizabeth Sr. to remark in an open letter to her children, 'Thay [George and Joe] must be good to their sisters and do every thing thay bid them.'¹¹⁹ It would appear that the youngest Strutts were not regular correspondents with their father at this age, or if they were, then they left 'mundane' writings about such things as their clothes to their elder sisters. Martha warned her father that her grandfather had been with a suit of clothes each for George and Joseph but she did not think they would serve them for Sundays as well as every other day they were to wear them.¹²⁰ Elizabeth also expressed her concerns in her next letter, stating that 'We have got Joes cloathes dyed but Georges are already too little and they will run up with dying... they had better be laid by for Joe till he is big enough and let George have another suit of black.'¹²¹ Their tasks also ran to 'makeing and mending all the boys shirts', which kept them busy.¹²² They also took it upon themselves to report on how the boys were behaving, which led Martha to write on one occasion, 'I have the pleasure to tell you that George and Joe have never been beat but once since Whitsuntide they are very good'.¹²³ It is not clear who handled the discipline of their brothers, but Martha knew that it would please their father to hear of the boys' good behaviour. The pride he felt in their achievements can be noted from one particular letter, where Elizabeth wrote of George's performance at school; 'he writes very prettily, and she [Mrs Tate] says they all think him an attentive, diligent, good boy, and indeed we hear frequent and good accounts of him from other people.'¹²⁴

As the eldest daughter, Elizabeth was keen to do justice to her mother's memory, and to this end her letters contain valuable information about the kinds of tasks she undertook in order to keep the household organised. This was not only a necessity, but a cathartic experience, and one she felt kept her close to the memory of her mother. She confided in her father, 'I know not how it is but there is

¹¹⁹ Elizabeth Strutt Sr. to the Strutt children, 4th April 1774, London, DRO, D5303/12/7.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, June/July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/6. The date has been added on by modern hand but is unclear.

¹²² Martha Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/8.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 20th August 1775, DRO, D5303/15/6; Mrs Tate is a lady from Derby who had seen George at school there.

something so pleasing in my grief that I love to indulge it – as to the management of the house we do every thing we can recollect she used to do.’¹²⁵ This was a philosophy Elizabeth firmly adhered to as she remarked a year later ‘I have not forgot all my Mamma’s rules’.¹²⁶ Despite the support that Elizabeth had in managing the house, it was still a daunting task. Her sister Martha was able to shoulder some of the burden, writing to her father when Elizabeth did not have the time to do so. As Jedediah was absent from their home for a long period after his wife had died, when his daughters asked for his advice on certain household decisions through epistolary means they were often forced to use their initiative and intuition. When selecting a new servant, Martha assured her father that they would be careful not to make any definitive choices until Jedediah had seen the girl for himself, but was adamant that their new servant must be well trained; ‘we must have one that knows how to do most things as we are not clever enough ourselves at present to teach one, but must learn what we can of them’.¹²⁷ It was not a case of the girls’ unintelligence, but rather their inexperience which made them unable to favour anyone with less knowledge than themselves. Her words also show that expertise in running the house was a progressive matter – one wonders what else they may have learnt from their mother if she had not fallen ill. Furthermore there is an understanding that one does not only instruct a housemaid, but rather learns from them at the same time.

The Strutts were not only maintaining their own house, but were becoming familiar with what their capabilities should be when they married and had a household of their own. In the end, the servant proved not to be a good match as Elizabeth pointed out; ‘since my sister mentioned a servant to you... who we thought would do, I have enquired her character of Mrs Butler [?] and we all think she will by no means suit us.’¹²⁸ Elizabeth’s judgement was necessary in this case, and she appeared to have been coping fairly well with her situation. However she was aware of the trials ahead of her, and not surprisingly was at times overwhelmed by her everyday tasks. Professing gratefulness that a servant had at last been found, in a letter written to her father in September 1774 (less than four months after her mother

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 9th July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/9.

¹²⁶ Martha Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 24th July 1775, DRO, D5303/15/17.

¹²⁷ Martha Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 27th July 1774, DRO, D5303/13/10.

¹²⁸ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 10th Aug 1774, DRO, D5303/13/11.

had died), in a rare moment of uncertainty, Elizabeth betrayed some anxiety that her efforts were not of a high enough standard, and she begged her father to excuse her;

For so young a housekeeper this is a very difficult affair and I am sorry it happens so soon for it makes me appear to a great disadvantage having never been used to cooking or any thing of the kind I am not capable of instructing a servant, and those that do understand their business are very hard to be found... If when you come home, you should not find such good Economy nor have things so nicely cook'd as they have been, I hope you will be so kind as to excuse it at present, and when I have had more practise... I don't fear but I shall be capable of managing the house to your satisfaction.¹²⁹

Elizabeth was clearly worried that her father would not have allowed for a decline in household standards, and from what is known about the high expectations he had of his children's writing skills, she may have had a just cause for concern. Elizabeth was confident she could learn household management skills ably, and she reassured Jedediah that 'Mrs Willott and Misses have given me their advice and assistance in a very friendly way.'¹³⁰ Being able to cook to a good level was something she aspired to, and we have already seen from the examples above that she was a competent seamstress. The importance of running the family home was important to the Strutts not just in the everyday necessity of continuing to provide a service for other family members, but in also keeping their mother's memory alive. As Elizabeth Strutt Sr. was a domestic servant, it was likely that she was able to teach her daughters some skills during her lifetime, but her death meant they had to undertake part of their education themselves, and the absence of their father meant an increase in pressure. Through their letters Elizabeth, and Martha to a lesser extent, showed the identities they were carving out for themselves in their new roles. Although they had advice from others, much of their education on household matters had to be learnt and practiced ad hoc, and sometimes even improvised. Yet these young women matured into their roles and were able to manifest a stable home environment for the rest of their kin. Whilst Martha was happy to visit London and spend time away from home, for Elizabeth her household was where the comfort lay. The significance of this is

¹²⁹ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 5th Sept 1774, DRO, D5303/13/13.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

perhaps best summed up, when she admitted ‘I could wish that home was more agreeable to her [Martha], and every one of the family than any other place.’¹³¹

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In this chapter, a snapshot of girls’ adolescence has been examined using two families from the eighteenth century. Both families, through the advancement of their businesses were becoming mobile in their social spheres. As the success of the Pease and Strutt patriarchs increased, they sought to filter this through to their children. Susan Whyman comments that letters of both northern workers and that of the middling sort were used to ‘reveal the personal pride that accompanied using one’s voice to chronicle a private life’.¹³² By encouraging their daughters to increase their literacy and epistolary skills, Joseph Pease and Jedediah Strutt sought to complete the crossing of class boundaries, and ensure the next generation of their family was firmly ensconced in the middle class.

Cunningham has commented on Pollock’s assertion that ‘historians who spend their time reading advice books, or sermons, or general treatises on childhood will... learn little of use about the actualities of child-rearing or of child life.’¹³³ I hope to have shown that precisely by using primary sources written by girls in their impressionable years, the historian can gain valuable insights into how fathers and daughters interacted with each other, and how fathers sought to have an impact on their daughters’ education, and thus futures.

¹³¹ Elizabeth Strutt to Jedediah Strutt, 20th Aug 1775, DRO, D5303/15/6.

¹³² Whyman, *The Pen and the People*, p. 112.

¹³³ Cunningham, *Children and Childhood*, pp. 12-2.

Chapter 3

Servant, Friend, Best Beloved; Representations of Courtship Letters

Part I: Loving Companionship

Courtship, and the arrangement of it, was an important part of a woman's life. As a prelude to marriage, the matching of partners and the negotiations that arose from successful pairing was a process that included not only the proposed couple, but also their families, and occasionally the wider community. Diana O'Hara describes the courtship procedure as 'a period of public and private negotiation, and of exploration fraught with anxiety, as hitherto ordinary relationships became transformed and vested with heightened significance.'¹ Indeed some seventeenth-century literature advocated the refusal of courtship, asking its female readers why they would want the restrictions of marriage; 'Whilst you are single there's none to curb you:/ Go to bed quietly and take your ease,/ Early or late there's none to disturb you,/Walk abroad where you [will], and when you please.'² For the majority of women though, marriage represented the path to adulthood, and courtship was a necessary path to tread.

Although the focus of this chapter will be on courtship conducted primarily through letter writing, much courtship was done in person. Experience of courtship differed throughout society. Upper- or middle-class families often sought to make matches for their children, with the offer of financial assistance where possible. However for the majority of people, they personally had to engineer the basis for their own marriages. This may have given them more freedom in some respects - in the lower classes young people had much more opportunity to socialise with members of the opposite sex, with drinking and dancing forming many of the rural festivities.³ Alan MacFarlane comments that when young people lived away from their families, there was a more relaxed attitude towards the mingling of the different

¹ Diana O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint; Re-Thinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 1.

² J.P. *A Fairing for Maids*, (London, 1639) in Joy Wiltenburg, *Disorderly Women and Female Power in the Street Literature of Early Modern England and Germany* (Charlottesville; London: University Press of Virginia, 1992), p. 65.

³ Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London and New York: Longman, 1984), pp. 72-3.

sexes without a chaperone, and therefore geographical mobility had an effect on courtship, as it promoted the ability to be companionable.⁴ Through this way of courting, women were able to have a greater scope for female agency, as their role was more active; far from being submissive, they were able to engage in a more equal participation. Although women were not meant to take the initiative in the first stages of courtship, as their courtship progressed and became more akin to a 'lengthy series of private negotiations', women became more assertive in their participation and control of their preferences.⁵

For those who moved in the middle or upper-classes, there was not as great an opportunity for this freedom. Not only were families more instrumental in the machinations of courtship, but there was likely to be greater physical distance between partners. This is not to say that there were no love affairs created in this level of society. The letters discussed in this chapter are primarily between two couples, Dorothy Osborne and William Temple, and Isabella and Joseph Strutt, who went on to have successful and long lasting marriages, only ended by death. The letters written between these engaged pairs during their courtship give an insight as to how they could express themselves, and what they felt was the best way to show their devotion for each other. The collections of letters are notable because although they are alike in the sense that they produced strong relationships, the tone and content contrast in the two sets. In the letters the Strutts sent to one another, it is evident that Joseph was the more dominant partner, and sought to nurture and mould Isabella into what he saw as a prime example of womanhood. The letters between Dorothy and William displayed a more equal relationship, possibly due to the fact that Dorothy did not view herself as weaker or subservient, and they were united against a common enemy in their families' disapproval. What is similar is the eloquence and openness of both women, who were able to express themselves in an

⁴ Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England; Modes of Reproduction 1300-1830* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 296-7. See also Richard Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy, and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), Chapter 5 and Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories; Popular fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), Chapter 7.

⁵ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 116. Bundling was also a common practise for the lower classes; although it is not discussed here, for more on the subject see Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p.118; Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1977), pp. 384-5; Yochi Fischer-Yinon, 'The Original Bundlers: Boaz and Ruth and Seventeenth-Century English Practices', *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 35 (2002), pp.683-705.

intelligent manner. As well as the style of these women, it is also useful to analyse what they wrote. Dorothy in particular was vocal about her view on relationships and marriage; not only about what she expected from her own, but on what she saw as acceptable behaviour in the relationships of others. Here it has also been valuable to ascertain the content of men's courtship letters. While we do not have the letters William Temple wrote, we can gauge the tone and to some extent the content of his responses from how Dorothy replies. Therefore the primary male perspective in this chapter will be provided by the letters of Joseph Strutt and Thomas Greene in order to see how they corresponded with the women they purported to love. O'Hara feels that 'the extent to which letters might represent a more formal dialogue of love and marriage is unclear,' and she is right in the sense that our appreciation of the dynamics of courtship letters has not been fully realised.⁶ She also points out that letters could have replaced the need for ritual gift exchanges, and become the symbols or gifts of love, especially when worn close to the heart.⁷ If this was indeed the case then there is a suitable case for arguing how important it is to look at what these types of letters contained. The first part of this chapter will therefore look at the kind of language that was used in courtship letters, and whether this had any impact on the writer or the recipient.

Matchmaking

Ralph A. Houlbrooke asserts that there were four main criteria in the choice of marriage partners; advancement of the individual or family, the ideal of parity, the character of the partner and personal affection or love, while Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford believe that, especially for the upper classes, the financial considerations of a match outweighed any personal attachments.⁸ The discussion of Dorothy Osborne's circumstances later in this chapter give credence to this, but from the hand of the lady herself we also gain clues as to what was important when making a match. Describing Lady Anne Wentworth's proposed marriage she asserted that

⁶ O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, p. 71.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 73; Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 108. See also O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, Chapter 3 for more on this subject.

She is without dispute the finest Lady I knew . . .not that she is at all handsome but infinitely Vertuous and discreet, or a sober and very different humour from most of the Young People of these times, but has as much witt and is as good company as any body that Ever I saw.⁹

Here the character of Lady Anne was indeed an advantage of making a good match, for who could not want a woman of such impeccable qualities? Financial implications were also important; Katherine Fitz –Walter mentioned the proposed marriage of the daughter of Sir Mark Giant – a man who had ‘80000’, which was a positive factor for any intended spouse. However, securing a compatibly adequate match could prove to be difficult, and the process of matchmaking could prove challenging. Perhaps this was what Meryvell Littleton had at the front of her mind when she confessed ‘I wear so happie as to tell you of any good mach for my Cosin Edmund truly I thinke now [the] Contry more barren of good maches then this I live in’.¹⁰

Single women were not only involved in the courtship process as matchmakees, but also at times as matchmakers. Whilst, as shown in Chapter 6, strong matriarchal figures of widowhood were often involved in the cultivation of matches between their kin and eligible young men or women, there are also examples of spinsters acting as intermediaries. Cassandra Brydges, when married, offered young women ‘a package of matchmaking’, whereby young women would reside with Cassandra and her husband, Lord Chandos, meet distinguished and appropriate young men, and have their portions managed.¹¹ Yet even before her marriage at the relatively late age of forty three, she took an active, albeit often reluctant, role in matchmaking. In 1694 at the age of twenty three, she wrote a private comment on a copy of a letter she sent to a relation of hers, who had enquired as to whether she could propose him as a husband to a lady of her acquaintance. The gentleman in question obviously felt it wise to have somebody to act as an agent, perhaps due to the fact that he felt there may be an objection to his offer. His bid was indeed rejected, and Cassandra wrote to him to proffer her regret; ‘I am sorry my endeavours have not been more successfull, & that amongst my acquaintance I know not another which I would name to (so scarce are good women) but at my return into

⁹ Parker, 25th March, 1653, Letter 14, p. 84.

¹⁰ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 29th June 1610, BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 114.

¹¹ O’Day, p. 27.

Nottingham I resolve on a fresh attempt, though I doubt it will be to no purpose.’¹² Here it must be noted that Cassandra, although absolutely certain that a second attempt would be to no avail, was prepared to act again on her relation’s behalf. It would appear from other sources mentioned above that the first refusal of an offer did not deter the hopeful suitor from making at least one more. What has not been considered is the effect it had on the matchmaker, particularly when they had also failed to make a match thus far. Cassandra, at this point in her life at least, was uneasy about the task being asked of her, and this may point towards her own anxieties at not being wed. In the letter to her male relation, she had a more playful delivery of the unwanted news of her friend’s refusal, though there was a tough undertone; ‘in truth ‘tis your own discretion which you must doubly blame, first for employing me’.¹³

Twelve years later however, and in her mid thirties, there was a creeping tone of resentment and annoyance at what appears to be a definitive role she had then undertaken – that of the eternal matchmaker with little hope of an attractive proposition for herself. She commented to her sister-in-law Lady Child that ‘your bidding me rejoice at my safety here, in such a matrimonial season... has made me have very dull fits ever since, for fear lest I should live to that age, & then believe my self young enough for any boy.’¹⁴ While this could be taken as a referral specifically to her age becoming a hindrance in remaining a marriageable prospect, in a letter sent slightly earlier to her sister, it was clear matchmaking had become tiresome, and there was a hint that not all of her attempts had borne fruit; ‘since I must be censured, I had rather it be for match breaking, than making, being confident that does less mischief than the other’.¹⁵ As we are aware, Cassandra appeared to settle more comfortably in the role of matchmaker once married, and while it is possible that she felt the way in which she and her husband arranged meetings and aided young women was more appropriate, it is also possible that the role now sat more agreeably on her shoulders, as she too had now made a successful match. It is a shame that so few of Cassandra’s letters from before her marriage survive, as it is

¹² O’Day, Cassandra Brydges to unknown recipient, 1st Jan 1694, p. 332.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ O’Day, Cassandra Brydges to Lady Child, Wollaton, May 1706, p. 339.

¹⁵ O’Day, Cassandra Brydges to Lady Child, Wollaton, 6th May 1706, p. 338.

possible they would have contained further references to her matchmaking ability and how her experiences impacted on her role as a married matchmaker.

While intricacies of matchmaking have been documented by historians, there has been less discussion on how matchmaking was reported in the letters between friends and partners. There is the view that for the main part matches were made between people who at least had some regard for one another, and a show of courtship arranged.¹⁶ Matchmaking was frequently, if albeit sometimes briefly, referred to. Sometimes it was given as news in passing such as when Katherine Fitz-Walter claimed ‘I hear L[or]d Manchester and Mrs Cuttler [?] thar [there] will be a match.’¹⁷ Previously she had referred to other acquaintances initiating a match through the father’s negotiations; ‘Sir Joe Child is making a match between his daughter and Sir Marke Giants son a very young man and has had Cambridg breeding.’¹⁸ Again we are made aware of the importance of good class and education. It was also discernible in these letters that help was often provided by various family members and it was not always the patriarch who enabled or engaged meetings with potential marriage partners. Dorothy Osborne related how, since the loss of her mother, her aunt had taken over the role and commanded her to stay awhile in London. It appeared that her aunt had an eye on the marriage potential of her niece, and had been making enquiries as to who would be suitable for her. She remembered;

When I cam she told mee how much I was in her care . . .and drew out longe, sett, speech which Ended in a good motion (as she called it) and truly I saw noe harm int, for by what I has heard of the Gentleman I guessed hee expected a better fortune than myne . . . yet he protested hee liked mee soe well.¹⁹

On the other hand sometimes it was necessary to ask for assistance in these matters. When Meryvell Littleton heard of a marriage that was no longer taking place, she

¹⁶ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 70.

¹⁷ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 5th November 1687, HRO, 9M73/672/13.

¹⁸ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 12th August 1670[?], HRO, 9M73/672/8; Sir Josiah Child (1631-1699) was an economic writer and merchant. He was a founder member of the Royal African Company, but is better known for his involvement with the East India Company, and as an MP. It is not clear which daughter is referred to here, but it is certain is that for all Katherine’s talk of the match, his daughters married others; Elizabeth to John Howland of Streetham, Surrey, and Rebecca to Charles Somerset, Lord Herbert. His stepdaughter Cassandra married James Brydges. Richard Grassby, ‘Child, Sir Josiah, first baronet (*bap.* 1631, *d.* 1699)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn., Jan 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5290>.

¹⁹ Parker, 8th/9th January 1653, Letter 3, p. 60-1.

took the opportunity to request support for one of her relatives; 'if yor good frind woould make a mach thear for one of my cosins and part wt sumatt of his and bring it about as he promised in the otheare place'.²⁰

The discussion of eligible suitors made up a fair portion of Dorothy Osborne's letters. As examined later in this chapter, Dorothy's family had reason to want her to make a financially fortunate match. In consideration of this, they tried to tempt her with various eligible bachelors and widowers. Dorothy had no qualms about revealing each of these beaux to William Temple, and described both their personal qualities and her dealings with them in her own blunt style. Her aunt had probed the possibility of an alliance with a gentleman who was not put off by Dorothy's lack of capital. While he was very keen on the possibility of Dorothy as a bride, she did not share the same enthusiasm, as she explained with her usual wit and intellect; 'hee protested hee liked mee soe well, that he was very angry my Father would not bee perswaded to give up £1000 more with mee, and I him soe ill, that I vowed, if I had £1000 less I should have thought it too much for him'.²¹ On another occasion she joked about a potentially interested party who was expected imminently. As she was ill, she prayed he did not come before she had rallied to 'give mee a little time to recover my good look's, for I protest if hee saw mee now, hee would never desyr to see mee againe.'²² Although one may find it odd that Dorothy shared her views of her suitors so freely with the man whom she truly loved, it was not done to provoke a jealous or passionate response. She felt the need for honesty; as there was no true regard for any of these men on her part, she saw no need for concealment. She even teased William about his intended brides, even though occasionally she exposed in her writing that the thought of him betrothed to another caused her sorrow.²³

However, in addition to the random suitors that came and went, Dorothy also had one who made a more lasting effort in his pursuit of her. Sir Justinian Isham was a frequent figure in Dorothy's early letters to William, and unfortunately for him, he was a figure of derision and scorn. Sir Justinian was a widower with four daughters,

²⁰ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 101.

²¹ Parker, 8th/9th January 1653, Letter 3, p. 61.

²² Parker, 7th/8th May 1653, Letter 20, p. 94.

²³ See for example Parker, 15th/16th January 1653, Letter 4 where she teases him about the potential of being his stepmother, and 12th/13th March 1653, Letter 11 when she writes of his father trying to find him a match.

who was about forty two years of age to Dorothy's twenty five. Dorothy related the tale of how he ventured to see her when she was in town about six months previously, and she, having heard of him, at first thought he may an appealing match.²⁴ Although it was true that 'hee had a great Estate, was as fine as a Gentleman as ever England bred, and the very Pattern of Wisdom', it was the thought that he may be a match for her vivacity that enticed her to meet with him.²⁵ However she was not impressed with his character, announcing him to be the 'vainest, Impertinent, self conceated, Learned Coxcombe, that ever yet I saw, to say more were to spoyle his marriage, which I hear hee is towards with a daughter of My Lord of Coleraines'.²⁶ This proposed marriage did not take place, and Sir Justinian became a figure of ridicule as Dorothy reported his attempts to court and to find a wife. Perhaps she was becoming more proficient in the 'art of scorning'; jeering at the attentions of her suitor.²⁷ It appeared that her intense dislike of him, as well as her desire to share the joke with William led her to descend into blatant disrespect. After he came to renew his courtship for Dorothy she sarcastically wrote, 'Would you think it, that I have an Ambassador from the Emperour Justinian, that com's to renew the Treaty in Earnest'.²⁸ The use of the word 'Emperour' as a derogatory name is repeated further in a later letter when she stated, 'It was not mine it seem's to have an Emperour the spitefull man, merely to vexee mee has gon and Married my Country Woman my Lord Lee's daughter'.²⁹ Sir Justinian Isham was not the only suitor to experience the vicious side of Dorothy's character; she also had choice words for James Beverley's attempt to seduce her with his token of a love letter, which she answered by throwing it into the fire in front of him!³⁰ Her behaviour towards these men suggests that she was not prepared to give up the ideal of what she was attracted to. It does however also suggest the lengths men were prepared to go to in order to secure a lady's regard. Courtship for a gentle-woman could be a lengthy process, spread out over many years, and could include many instalments before a lady either found a partner or failed to secure one at all.³¹ This apparently

²⁴ Dorothy and William were not corresponding at this point.

²⁵ Parker, 8th/9th January 1653, Letter 3, p. 61.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 117.

²⁸ Parker, 11th/12th June 1653, Letter 25, p. 106.

²⁹ Parker, 17th/18th September 1653, Letter 40, p. 137.

³⁰ Parker, 18th/19th February 1653, Letter 59, p. 182-3.

³¹ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 116.

was also true for men – we can see just from Dorothy’s correspondence that Sir Justinian, whatever else he may have been guilty of, was at least thorough and ardent in his attempts to win a bride. His quest was finally successful and he married Vere, daughter of Lord Leigh of Stoneleigh.

Lydia DuGard was another young woman who saw no purpose in hiding the affection of other suitors from her beau. By relating to him the efforts of others to pair her with suitable young men, she was able to maintain her closeness with Samuel by showing she had nothing to hide. Her guardian Mr Waterhouse tried to match Lydia with ‘a pious, rich genteel young man’ from London and ‘doubted not but it would be a very convenient and comfortable mache’.³² Lydia however was disinterested and instead declared ‘I needed no deswsion from that or any other mache, for were the man every way accomplished and had a vast estate I could never be moved from my resolution.’³³ Although Lydia does not make the reason for her resolution public, thus keeping her relationship with Samuel a secret, by acquainting him with the plans of her guardian she is able to maintain his trust and assure him that no other man has a place in her heart except for him.

So confident were they of their devotion to one another, Lydia and Samuel were able to tease and joke about the matches that people put before them. In January 1671, almost 6 years after their courtship had started, Lydia offered her sympathy towards another failed match for Samuel with the playful words ‘it’s a sad thing you should loose your Mistrises one after another thus: but I must confess I don’t pity you much and need not ask whether you are sorry... for I am confident... my Cousin loves his honest Lydia so much.’³⁴ For Lydia to make this kind of joke, when she was usually so polite in other aspects of her letter writing, she had to take her lead from Samuel, who evidently had little time or inclination for the women offered to him. The comments he made about them are referred to by Lydia who teasingly scolded him for his offending remarks; ‘if some of them did but know what you say of them, I believe they would be reveng’d on you... but for my part I like

³² Taylor, Barford, 19th October 1667, Letter 9, p. 48. Taylor mentions the ongoing battle between Mr Waterhouse, Lydia’s guardian and Thomas DuGard her uncle, who wanted the guardianship to be transferred to him. Apparently although Mr Waterhouse wanted to be free of the guardianship, instead of surrendering it, he proceeded with his matchmaking plan. Taylor, p. 49.

³³ Taylor, Barford, 19th October 1667, Letter 9, p. 48.

³⁴ Taylor, Worcester, 16th January 1671, Letter 22, p. 84.

you the better: can laugh at them as much as you do'.³⁵ Teasing a partner about their intended suitors may have been an acceptable form of courtly rhetoric, and as shown above, was a device used by women in the early modern period.

The Rhetoric of Courtship; True to the Self?

In the two sections following this one, the language single women used in their courtship writing will be discussed, with reference to their style and expressions. However, it must be noted that there has been an increasing debate as to whether the self was ever truly expressed in letter writing, even when writing to those closest to the author. Fay Bound theorises that the rhetoric seen in courtship letters was entangled with the language advocated in letter writing manuals and romantic fiction, and concludes, 'the material properties and literary conventions of the love letter helped to construct the experience being articulated... This recognition raises doubts about the ability of love letters to express *any* subjective emotional experience, and indeed the extent to which emotional experience can ever be recaptured.' Naturally there would be some considerations from cultural influences, literary sources and popular expressions, but to say that this overwhelms any natural individuality is debatable. If the letters that Bound uses to illustrate her point are read in isolation with no consideration for other existing courtship correspondence however, then it is possible to acknowledge this premise. Ursula Watson's epistles to Thomas Mascall appear to be devoid of any personal feeling, instead playing upon certain rhetorical devices she may have read in a letter writing manual or a romantic novel; 'In the case of love letters, the models were largely formulaic, dealing with protestations of love, the despair of the lover, the lover's betrayal and the belief that love will conquer all.'³⁶ Ursula's letters contain frequent examples of this kind, ending with a crescendo of desolation;

Oh Dearest, I dare not call you my Dearest, for I'm afraid I have lost you. . . O Good God what did I not suffer at the reading [of] your letter . . . I call my God to witness for me that I have not a secret wish but in your love to throw myself at your feet to testify it by all the marks of a sincere, affectionate, and tender wife . . . my heart has been long accustomed to love you, and my tongue to tell you so. If ever you loved

³⁵ Taylor, Worcester, January 1671, Letter 23, p.90.

³⁶ Fay Bound, "'Writing the Self': Love and the Letter in England, c.1660 - c.1760", *Literature and History*, No. 11 (2002), p. 6.

me, for God sake don't abandon me now, for life without you will ever be haitful...³⁷

Yet was this the real Ursula? Bound appears to think not, and this is understandable. Ursula's letters seem almost sterile, given more to deliberate manipulation of emotions, rather than genuine anguish or torment. Her letters are devoid of any sentiment which would have sought to personalise the letter. It is true that the letters bound her and Thomas together and acted as proof of their relationship, but they do not contain any of the generalities of other courtship letters that I have looked at. Instead their purpose was to heighten tensions and provoke a similarly emotional reaction, and it therefore indeed questionable as to what extent these epistles produced a true representation of her emotionality.

However, it cannot be ignored that there are some similarities between the rhetoric of Ursula Watson and Dorothy Osborne, which give credibility to the notion that the reading of romances and the influence of literary techniques was at the very least underlying in some part of their conscious writing. Dorothy was an admirer of the French romances, and techniques derived from this genre were often invoked in her letters. As Ursula appeared to use powerful sentiments derived from these materials then it is possible to draw the same conclusions from some of Dorothy's vocabulary. In her fifth letter to Thomas, Ursula protested, 'I am betwixt faint hope and reall despair, for I have never had one easy moment sins, when I reflect on your pain and my self the cause.'³⁸ This echoes the words of Dorothy who wrote ninety years earlier, 'Why are you soe sullen, and why am I the cause.'³⁹ This has roots in what Bound dubs 'the psychological and physiological consequences of emotional betrayal.'⁴⁰ Furthermore, the letters sent at the nadir of the relationship between Dorothy and William resonate the words Ursula wrote to Thomas; both women betrayed their emotions, though the extent to which they are authentic is contentious. Yet I would argue that Dorothy was more sincere in her outpourings than Ursula, who used her letters primarily as a source of emotional manipulation. This is perhaps also highlighted by the fact that Ursula did not marry Thomas, and her rejection of him in favour of another man was so objectionable that Thomas appeared before the

³⁷ Ibid., p. 15.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Parker, 15th/16th October 1653, Letter 45, p. 147.

⁴⁰ Bound, "'Writing the Self'", p. 6.

Consistory Court of Durham, and the appeal Court of York, in order to sue her for breach of promise. Did Ursula therefore invoke these sentiments of adoring love and angst without thought for the consequence, and only in order to placate Thomas, who had accused her of infidelity? The danger here is that if we take the case of Ursula Watson, and use her as a solitary study, it may be easy, though not accurate, to justify the claims for lack of sincerity in all women's courtship letters.

What is perhaps more arguable is that women implemented certain tropes in order to embellish their writing, and even on certain occasions used them to create the persona they wished to put on display. This does not however mean that these practises were employed fluidly or continuously. They could perhaps be sustained only for as long as they proved useful to the writer. James Fitzmaurice and Martine Rey have ascertained that 'The language of the letter as written by women in England helped Osborne express her practical concerns with marriage. The language of the French romance kept the practical from becoming too mundane.'⁴¹ Dorothy was able to express herself in a style which she believed would enhance her courtship and capture the exact identity she wished to portray. However, she blended this with the more 'mundane' – observations about health, her visits to acquaintances and news of her kin. Furthermore, the changes in circumstances in their relationship between her and William Temple were mirrored by the differing characteristics of her penmanship. Robbie Glen points out that 'the linguistic tension... between the pragmatic English girl and the romantic French reader is always apparent, for despite Osborne's craving romances for their escapist benefits, she was quick to criticize what she saw as their extravagances, in particular with regard to courtship.'⁴² During the more fraught periods in their relationship Dorothy operated in the manner of the French tradition, but in the later part of the courtship, with their union becoming increasingly likely, she employed a more English and 'unadorned' style.⁴³

Perhaps this was because she felt she could become less constrained in the persona she had adopted, now that her future with William had become more

⁴¹ James Fitzmaurice and Martine Rey, 'Letters by Women in England, the French Romance, and Dorothy Osborne', in Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Coudert and Maryanne C. Horowitz, eds, *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe (Sixteenth Century Essay & Studies)* (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989), p. 152.

⁴² Robbie Glen, 'Lines of Affection: Dorothy Osborne and Women's Letter Writing in the Seventeenth Century', PhD Thesis (University of Pennsylvania, 2007), p. 36.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

assured, or because as the relationship progressed and matured, she became more relaxed in her writing style. She even alluded to this notion in a letter where after pondering the growth of their courtship, and how she was almost swept away by the speed and surprise of his gaining her heart, she admitted 'by this confession you will see I am past all disguise with you'. By speaking frankly about her regard for him, we see a shift in how she wished to portray herself on paper and on this one occasion at this point in their correspondence at least, she was ready to put aside any romantic impressions and uncloak her emotions.

This is also seen in the letters of Lydia DuGard during her courtship with her cousin Samuel. Her letters were ultimately less styled and contained less literary allusions and references than Dorothy's.⁴⁴ Yet she did acknowledge that over the course of their relationship, her writing became more at ease as their intimacy increased; 'I am grow'n soe well acquainted with you, that I have us' my self to write as familiarly and freely as I talk and of late (though at the best my writeing is very mean) have taken soe little paines with my letters'.⁴⁵ There is a hint here that she had taken much care over her earlier letters in order to present herself in a favourable light. There is no reason to suppose, however, that the feelings she expressed were disingenuous. The lack of fanciful, flowery language, coupled with the plain and gentle affirmations of her feelings make for refreshing reading, and her simpler style entices the reader to believe in the devotion written on the page. Honest words obviously held great weight with Lydia, and the secrecy which was necessary to guard her relationship with Samuel meant that as physical displays of affection were disallowed, contact through literary means was important, 'you say that you are sometimes melancholy that, though you love me much, yet you can shew it only in words; that you may see I am not soe, I must tell you. . . that as long as those words are real and hearty; I shall rest very well satisfied and contented.'⁴⁶ Lydia was not worried about intricate protestations of love, and in turn views her own writing as heartfelt and simple, at least in times of assuring Samuel of her devotion.

⁴⁴ The exception to this is that Lydia uses Biblical references to illustrate her point at times. See for example Taylor, Barford, September 1666, Letter 1, p. 32; Taylor, Barford, 28 May 1667, Letter 6, p. 42.

⁴⁵ Taylor, Barford, 13th February 1672, Letter 28, p. 106.

⁴⁶ Taylor, Worcester, 16th January 1671, Letter 22, p. 86.

Expression and Opinions

Robbie Glen claims that ‘seventeenth-century women letterwriters broke new ground - stylistically, linguistically, socially - to claim as their own the genre of letters.’⁴⁷ By analysing Joan Hayward’s two courtship letters, written to her intended husband John Thynne in 1575, Glen’s view can be supported to a certain extent. Joan’s letters were far simpler and shorter than the examples I use below from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and her style was perhaps not as sophisticated as Dorothy Osborne’s, or even Lydia DuGard’s who would have been around the same age at the time of writing. Although we know little of Joan’s education, the fact that she was the daughter of a rich and prominent merchant, alderman and Lord Mayor of London suggests that she was sufficiently educated to be able to write her own love letters.⁴⁸ Joan’s letters were fairly succinct, concerned mainly with the length of time the settlement of her marriage was taking, and of good wishes of John’s health. However, although she was not overdramatic with her proclamations of love, she added a fond line at the end of each letter; in the surviving examples we have, both are concerned with their separation and the heart is mentioned. In her first letter she finished with ‘by your pensive friend in heart and mind’.⁴⁹ Her second letter contained the emotive ‘but as fire can not be separated from heat nor heat from fire, so is the heart of faithful friends which share in one desire.’⁵⁰ In this sense her writing was similar to that of other courting women a century later; with eagerness to show her affection, but mindful of the preservation of modesty. Of course, it cannot be claimed that Joan’s letters are representative of all courtship letters written in the sixteenth century, but it is useful to be able to make brief comparisons here. What I hope to show in the rest of this and the following section is how women later in the early modern period were able to express themselves in a more personal and colourful way, and, as noted above, claim the genre of letters as their own.

Single women in particular did not lend themselves to effervescent outpourings of love when writing letters, as if to preserve their chastity and to avoid

⁴⁷ Glen, ‘Lines of Affection’, p. 40.

⁴⁸ For more on Joan’s background see Wall, p. xvii.

⁴⁹ Wall, Joan Hayward to John Thynne, soon after 10th October 1575, Letter 1, p. 1.

⁵⁰ Wall, Joan Hayward to John Thynne, after 10th October 1575, Letter 2, p. 1.

lending themselves to accusations of flirtatious or immodest behaviour.⁵¹ This is noticeable even by the salutations they used, which were different before and after marriage; Isabella Strutt changed from ‘My beloved friend’ to ‘My dearest best beloved’⁵² while Dorothy Osborne changed from the formal ‘Sir’, ‘Servant’ and ‘Friend’ to the warmer ‘My Dearest Heart’.⁵³ Anne Graham used no formal opening address, but referred to George Shirley as either Mr. Freeman or Mr. Shirley.⁵⁴ Men appeared to be more able to express their devotion; Joseph Strutt used the terms ‘My Dear Miss Douglas’ and ‘My Lovely Friend’ to open two of his letters⁵⁵ and Thomas Greene opened one letter to a woman who was actively ignoring him with ‘My Love’!⁵⁶ However, women’s letters were far from dull. Sometimes their thoughts were simple and direct; for instance ‘whatever my situation may be while I retain the powers of recollection you my best friend will possess my strongest affection’⁵⁷ was a line from Isabella to Joseph, while Dorothy on occasion could also forego her usual loquaciousness and wrote once with unadorned charm ‘you are Enough in my heart to know all my thoughts’.⁵⁸ Yet was the fact that they had to curtail their feelings and act politely a form of flirtation in itself? Was the knowledge that you could not fully declare your ardent lust or love actually an aphrodisiac? Did these women then use their words as influential tools to woo their men?

Dorothy engaged in banter with William from the earliest of their letters, perhaps in order to show her vivacity and wit, or simply in order to enjoy their new friendship. In order to make a joke of the threat of Sir Justinian Isham, she offered to make William a gift of one of her apparently soon-to-be stepdaughters; ‘Lett me tell

⁵¹ Early modern courtship books contained suggestions of how to address one’s beau, with examples such as ‘Sir, I am proud to be your Servant, and desire no more but to enjoy that name’ and ‘Sir, ‘tis you alone, next Heaven, on whom I must relye; your favours are so many, that my heart has scarcely room to contain them’; Anon., *The Art of courtship; or, The School of delight* (1688), Wing (2nd ed.) A3789B, consulted on JISC Historic Books, p 11. The single women in the examples I have come across appear to have preferred to use more muted methods.

⁵² See for example Isabella Strutt BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/10; Isabella Strutt BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/12.

⁵³ See for example Parker, 24th December 1652, Letter 1, p. 1 where she uses all three terms in one letter and Parker, Letter A, p. 301.

⁵⁴ Anne Graham, 24th May (Year Unknown), WCRO, CR2131/16/50, 12th August (Year Unknown) Holbrook Hall, WCRO, CR2131/16/52. There does not seem to be a particular reason why Anne used the name Mr. Freeman; it may be a play on the words ‘free man’, ironically indicating this was exactly what he was not, or a pet name which had special reference only to the two of them.

⁵⁵ Joseph Strutt, BCA, MS3101/C/E/4/8/3; Joseph Strutt, BCA, MS3101/C/E/4/8/5.

⁵⁶ Thomas Greene, 7th January 1658, Manchester, LRO, DDHK 9/8/4/3.

⁵⁷ Isabella Strutt, October 1792, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/11.

⁵⁸ Parker, 2nd-4th June 1653, Letter 24, p. 104.

you I had not forgot you in your absence, I always meant you one of my daughters... and trust mee, they say some of them are handsome.’⁵⁹ On another occasion when she was ill she teased him, ‘I sent to your lodging to tell you that visetting the sick was part of the worke of the day, but you were gon.’⁶⁰ We can draw parallels here with the witty banter of the ‘gay couple’ in Restoration comedy of the time. John Harrington Smith comments that

The great comic theme of the first decade of Charles’s (II) reign was the love game, in which a gay hero and heroine, both of whom, in accordance with the inflexible code of the time, make a point of seeming not to be serious about anything, carry on a witty courtship action, which always ends – sometimes to their surprise. . . in an agreement to marry.⁶¹

Although Dorothy and William’s courtship preceded the period in which Smith writes about, the air of lightness in her banter was necessary in a relationship which, as we now know, was about to undergo trauma, and it is quite clear that a talent for making one’s beloved laugh was appreciated.

The beauty of what these women wrote is in how they expressed themselves, their views on love and marriage, and how they translated these thoughts into elegant and powerful prose. Dorothy conveyed her opinions regularly in her letters, and it was expected that, even if he did not agree with them, William would at least read and listen to them, acknowledge them and even give them serious consideration as intelligent and worthy remarks. Dorothy often peppered her letters with her attitudes on marriage and her opinions were not just confined to her own intended marriage. She had very strong views on the betrothal of others, particularly if they had acted in a manner with which she disagreed. She was prepared to show the depth of her feelings on issues such as compatibility and love in a marriage, and the union of Lady Sunderland and Mr Smith prompted her to say ‘I shall never forgive her one thing she sayed of him, which was that she marryed him out of Pitty. It was the pittyfull’st sayeing that I ever heard, and made him soe contemptible that I should

⁵⁹ Parker, 15th/16th January 1653, Letter 4, p. 63.

⁶⁰ Parker, 5th/6th February 1653, Letter 7, p. 71.

⁶¹ John Harrington Smith, ‘Shadwell, the Ladies, and the Change in Comedy’, *Modern Philology*, Vol.46, No. 1 (August 1948), p. 24. For more on the witty banter between couples see also John Harrington Smith, *The Gay Couple in Restoration Comedy* (London: Octagon Books, 1971); Robert D. Hume, ‘Diversity and Development in Restoration Comedy, 1660-1679’, *Eighteenth Century Studies*, Vol. 5 No.3 (Spring 1972), pp. 365-97; P.F. Vernon, ‘Marriage of Convenience and the Moral Code of Restoration Comedy’, *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. XII, Issue 4 (1962), pp. 370-87.

not have married him for that very reason.’⁶² Dorothy may well have been referring to the assumption that Lady Sunderland had married Mr Smith because he had been spurned by Lady Banbury, and considered this distasteful as she felt Mr Smith was a gentlemen who was deserving of his new wife, and should not have been thought of as a creature who should be patronised because he has been unsuccessful in his pursuit of women up until then.⁶³ She also had words for Lady Udall, when she took a blind man for her husband;

since you tell mee hee has bin in love with her seventeen year, it apear’s stranger to mee a great deal, for if she did not love him what could perswade her to marry him, and if she did, in my opinion she made him but an ill requital for seventeen years’ service, to marry him when she spent all her youth & beauty with another.⁶⁴

Although Dorothy does not appear to be motivated by money in her choice of husband (if she was, she could have just married Sir Justinian Isham), she does have the nous to recognise that money was an asset which made life much easier. This is seen when she mentioned the marriage of Elizabeth and Richard Franklin; ‘I doe not think it possible she could have any thing left to wish that she had not already in such a husband with such a fortune. . . if she been not [happy] I doe not see how any body else can hope for it.’⁶⁵ Does this signify that if Elizabeth had a kind and loving husband, but less of a fortune, there would always be something lacking in her marriage? It is probable Dorothy was indicating that Elizabeth was lucky to have the complete package; love, money and respect for a spouse, and that so many marriages are deficient in at least one of these factors.

Dorothy also had some very clear values on the kind of relationship she would enter into. It is unlikely that she felt it necessary to explain these to William in order to mould his behaviour, but rather that she felt comfortable that there was enough respect and honesty between them for her to be frank about her ideals. Considering how passionate and forthright her own character was, it comes as no surprise that she could not support the consideration of a marriage where there was only dullness and boredom. She even stated that she would prefer a husband who loathed her rather than one who treated her with indifference, for at least it then

⁶² Parker, 29th/30th January 1653, Letter 6, p. 69.

⁶³ Parker, n.8, p. 228.

⁶⁴ Parker, 27th/28th August 1653, Letter 37, p. 129.

⁶⁵ Parker, 16th/17th July 1653, Letter 30, pp. 117-8.

meant she was of enough consequence to be noticed; 'I should sooner hope to gaine upon one that Hated mee then upon one that did not consider mee enough either to Love or hate mee.'⁶⁶ This thought however did not extend to her feelings towards a husband. She was certain that to marry she would have to feel love, or at the very least the possibility of growing to love a future spouse. Any alternative would be unthinkable, and she sought to preserve not only her own happiness, but the welfare of any potentially unlovable husband; 'Sure the whole worlde could never perswade mee (unless a Parent comanded it) to marry one that I had noe Esteem for . . . for I should never bee brought to doe them the injury as to give them a wife whose affections they could never hope for.'⁶⁷ However she was cautious not to disregard the notion completely in case one day she found herself having to tread that path, and thus referred to parental pressure, letting William know that it would not be of her choice and therefore her feeling was not false. It appeared that although her heart belonged to William, she was still realistic about their situation, and the threat of a forced marriage to someone else was omnipresent.

It is plausible that Dorothy knew couples in relationships like the one she described, and was keen to avoid making the same mistake. Matrimonial disharmony was rife due to matches made when the couple were young, or to those who chose lust over common sense and made rash choices.⁶⁸ Many couples therefore had to make separation arrangements, as divorce was almost impossible to secure, and certainly remarriage was not permitted if the end of the previous marriage had come about by such measures.⁶⁹ Although one may expect that after the Reformation legal divorce would become more accessible, as marriage was no longer a sacrament, in fact divorce with the right to remarry became more difficult.⁷⁰ There became only three narrow routes for exiting a marriage; firstly a judicial separation, with no right to remarry; secondly from later in the seventeenth-century divorce by Act of Parliament, which proved hugely expensive; and thirdly the practise of 'wife

⁶⁶ Parker, 15th/16th October 1653, Letter 45, p. 148.

⁶⁷ Parker, 2nd/3rd July 1653, Letter 28, p. 119.

⁶⁸ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 114.

⁶⁹ Lawrence Stone points out that when marriages failed usually because of an adulterous spouse, 'there was only separation of bed and board, accompanied by a financial settlement. This was currently called 'divorce' but it did not allow either party to remarry'. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England*, p. 33.

⁷⁰ In fact by 1603, pre-Reformation procedure was realised, and divorce within remarriage became impossible; this time however it was even difficult to gain an annulment as many of the accepted reasons for this practise were dismissed; MacFarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, p. 225.



selling'.⁷¹ A parliamentary divorce was the only legitimate way of ending a marriage until the mid nineteenth-century, and clandestine, or 'common law' marriage became more popular. This could have posed a threat to the idea of stable family life, something Roderick Phillips describes as 'one of the great moral, social and political issues that preoccupied theologians, social critics and other intellectuals of the time.'⁷² With marriage seen as a lasting commitment, it is understandable that Dorothy should have had some strong views on the subject. With no appropriate alternatives available to an unhappily married woman but to stay in some remnant of a marriage, her resoluteness in marrying a suitable man was unshakeable.⁷³

In addition to this Dorothy showed some progressive thinking on the interaction between couples before and after marriage. She was aware of the turmoil in marriages, finding it astonishing that she lived in an age where 'tis a Miracle if in ten Couple that are marryed two of them live soe as not to publish it to the world that they cannot agree'.⁷⁴ She appeared to have a solution for this, one which would possibly have caused some scandal amongst those of her class;

For my part I think it were very convenient that all such as intend to marrye should live together in the same house some year's of probation and if in all that time they never disagreed they should then bee permitted to marry if they pleasd, but how few would doe it then.⁷⁵

Conscious of the fact that few couples would be able to withstand living together without arguing, but not wanting to take away from the importance of marriage, she made a concession;

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 225; Separation by private deed was also an option, but again there was no real dissolution of the marriage.

⁷² Roderick Phillips, *Putting Asunder; A History of Divorce in Western Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 96.

⁷³ This holds even more weight if we take Stone's view into consideration; 'Full divorce and remarriage were possible by law for the very rich and by folk custom for the very poor, but impossible for the majority in the middle who could not afford the cost of one of the social stigma and remote risks of prosecution of the other.' Stone, *Family Sex and Marriage in England*, p. 36. For more on divorce in the early modern period see Lawrence Stone, *Broken Lives: Separation and Divorce in England 1660-1857* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); O.R. Mcgregor, *Divorce in England; A Centenary Study* (London: Heinemann, 1957); Lawrence Stone, *Road to Divorce; England 1530-1987* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). Stone's *Broken Lives* is particularly useful as it contains case studies of those who managed to make a case for lawful separation including 'Blood v. Blood; Separation for Cruelty 1686-1704' and 'Dineley v. Dineley; Cruelty, Adultery and Murder 1717-1741.'

⁷⁴ Parker, 8th/9th October 1653, Letter 44, p. 145

⁷⁵ Ibid.

I am cleerly of opinion (and shall dye int) that as the more one sees, and know's, a person that one likes, one has still the more kindness for them, soe on the other side one is but the more weary of and the more adverse to an unpleasant humor for haveing it perpetually by one.⁷⁶

We may wonder when and where Dorothy first cultivated these opinions, but it does signify her skill as a watcher and reader of people's behaviour. One ponders as to whether she would have put her opinions forward in a more public setting, or if the secrecy of her correspondence allowed her to have more freedom in her expressions.

Viewing the courtship of others provided the impetus for thought on how other should conduct their courtship and subsequent marriages. Gossip around acquaintances' courtship may have been popular, but the following examples of discussion of the affairs of others were not just mere snippets of tittle-tattle, but were hints as to how people saw the correct etiquette of courtship. Whilst this varied from person to person according to their tastes, nonetheless there are some factors which are constant. Again Dorothy was fairly vocal on the subject, and in her letters gave an insight into her views of what was appropriate. The act of public passion was a deed which she felt pushed the boundaries of propriety and she was appalled even when it happened away from her presence, as she made known when talking of a mutually known gentleman;

I never saw him, in my life, but hee is famous for a kinde husband... only was found fault with, that hee could not forbear kissing his wife before company, a foolish trick that young married men it seem's are apt to... seriously tis as ill a sight as one would wish to see, and appear's very rude mee thinks to the Company.⁷⁷

Although Dorothy saw herself as equal to a man in essence, it by no means extended to the sentiment that she should preside over her husband. When telling William of a visit she made with her brother Henry to a married couple, she confessed herself worn out by the sight of a too-devoted husband who danced attendance on his wife. When Henry teased her and declared he felt she would want a husband of the same calibre, she denied this vigorously, stating that although it did him no harm to be

⁷⁶ Parker, 15th/16th January 1653, Letter 4, p. 64.

⁷⁷ Parker, 16th/17th July 1653, Letter 30, p. 116.

governed over, it was of detrimental effect to the woman. She did however concede that it was ‘a great Example of friendship and much for the credit of our sex.’⁷⁸

Once Dorothy and William’s relationship had become more stable, and they were finally engaged, her tone became softer in parts of her letters, and she allowed herself to be more romantically expressive. Her sentiments were concerned with sealing William’s (and her own) confidence in their union, and reiterating her loyalty to him. By this point in their courtship, emotions had run high on several occasions, and there was probably a desire to put all past mistrust and accusation behind them. She assured him

How then I declare that you still have the same power in my heart that I gave you at our last parteing; that I will never marry any Other . . . From this hower wee’l live quietly, noe more fear’s noe more Jelousy’s[,] the wealth of the whole world by the grace of God shall not Tempt mee to break my worde with you.⁷⁹

In addition to this she added frequent clear indications of how strongly she felt. When Henry Osborne provoked an argument with William, Dorothy was quick to ease the tension, reassuring him, ‘remember his sister Loves you passionatly & nobly that if hee Valew’s nothing but fortune shee dispises it and could Love you as much as a begger as she could doe a Prince, and shall without question Love you Eternally’.⁸⁰ Sometimes however, she believed the most effective way of showing her love was also the simplest, with the succinct statement ‘‘Noe [Know] in Earnest, I think, (nay I am sure) I love you more than Ever’.⁸¹

Affectionate Discourse and the Proffering of Love

Isabella Strutt’s affections for her husband-to-be Joseph were also articulate and eloquent, though often not as forceful as Dorothy’s. Their letters to one another began in 1786 when she was eighteen and he was twenty two, and they were married in 1793. She was the daughter of Archibald Douglas of Swaybrook, Derbyshire, and

⁷⁸ Parker, 6th/7th August 1653, Letter 33, p. 122.

⁷⁹ Parker, 21st/22nd January 1654, Letter 55, p. 170.

⁸⁰ Parker, 25th May 1654, London, Letter 64, p. 195.

⁸¹ Parker, 11th/12th February 1654, Letter 58, p. 179.

he was the son of the inventor and cotton manufacturer Jedediah Strutt.⁸² Joseph too became a cotton manufacturer and philanthropist. From the evidence of their letters, they enjoyed a loving and affectionate marriage, which produced two sons and three daughters, and it appears that after her death in 1802, he remained a widower until his death in 1844.⁸³

It is true that during their courtship the Strutts did not face the same necessity for concealment as Dorothy and William, and therefore this may have had a bearing on how passionately they voiced their opinions. However, while Isabella may have expressed herself in a more demure fashion, one can still perceive the depth of her feeling in her letters. Sometimes her happiness was expressed with regard to others especially in terms of her fortunate alliance when comparing Joseph with other men they knew; ‘when I look around and see how far few of the young men of the present age are governed by that reason, and prudence which are so conducive to happiness, I rejoice more and more in the privilege of your friendship’.⁸⁴ Whilst clearly fond of each other and appearing to have no desire for anyone else, there were still fraught moments in their relationship, even to the point where Isabella would scratch out lines Joseph had penned because she was displeased with what he had written.⁸⁵ However for the most part, Isabella handled his instructions on how she should behave with good grace, and was keen to express her gratitude for his attention of her. After an illness she had suffered, she wrote to him expressing her appreciation for his concern,

it is not always in our power to follow our inclinations, nor can we at all times do as reason and gratitude prompt us – this my friend I have painfully experienced, in being so long prevented from expressing the various sensations of gratitude, and admiration with which my heart is fill’d for your tender sympathy.⁸⁶

She rewarded his consideration by giving him acknowledgement of how much his letters pleased her, and how glad she was to receive them, stating ‘you are so good as

⁸² Joseph was the youngest brother of Elizabeth and Martha Strutt, and was referred to in their letters in Chapter 2.

⁸³For information on Joseph Strutt see J. J. Mason, ‘Strutt, Jedediah (1726–1797)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn., Jan 2011, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26683>.

⁸⁴ Isabella Strutt, 30th August 1791, Sandy Brooke, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/8.

⁸⁵ Joseph Strutt, 5th May 1788, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/4/8/11; Isabella has scribbled over six and a half lines in this letter; it appears Joseph was about to instruct her on what he found displeasing in her manners and conduct.

⁸⁶ Isabella Strutt, 29th July 1791, Sandy Brooke, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/7.

to say that you will favor me with another letter... I cannot refrain from expressing how much real pleasure it will afford me'.⁸⁷ It would seem then that she was able to put up with his vigorous instructions and may even have welcomed them on occasion. As Joseph so adamantly stressed, everything he sought to educate her in was for her own good and because he had so great a love for her, and Isabella, when she was not angered by it, understood this; 'every time I address you my beloved friend I have new proof of your affection to acknowledge... every thing I have to offer in return for your liberality and kindness to me is the poor tribute of a grateful heart'.⁸⁸ While her style of writing was different to that of Dorothy Osborne, it was no less heartfelt, and they shared some similarities; both were guarded against revealing too much about their loving feelings until they were secure in their relationship (engaged in Dorothy's case or married in Isabella's) and they both appreciated certain qualities that were found in their courtships. Furthermore they were aware of their compatibility with their partners, and sought to express gratitude for the friendships they had gained.

It is also possible to make some comparisons with Lydia DuGard's letters even though they, like Dorothy's, were written over one hundred years before Isabella's.⁸⁹ Like Isabella, Lydia was not as forceful in her writing as Dorothy, yet considering her letters to Samuel began when she was only fifteen, she shows a remarkable maturity in her style of writing. Nancy Taylor describes her as 'a dutiful young woman of strong feelings, writing ardent intimate letters to the one she loves'.⁹⁰ Like Isabella to Joseph, Lydia sought to please Samuel with how she wrote and her self-awareness is manifested in the language she uses in many of her letters. This however did not mean that she was unable to express her feelings towards him. A letter written in April 1667 appeared to have no other purpose than to assure Samuel of her love and devotion of him, as does one written in early 1668. She displayed strong sense of how she wanted to be portrayed in her letters; modest yet not unfeeling, loving yet not cold. She tried to keep her writing humble and if at any time feared her sentiments were becoming pronounced to the point of appearing disingenuous, begged him to warn her; 'am I indiscrete in my love, 'tis certain that

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Isabella Strutt, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/10.

⁸⁹ The surviving letters we have for Lydia were written 1665-72.

⁹⁰ Taylor, p. 8.

that cannot be too large, but the expression of it may... if you thinke I have bin too free and shew'd too great a fondness... I can if you would have it so, keep [my] most passionate thoughts within my heart'.⁹¹ This, however, was a promise soon to be broken, as she explained only a month or so later; 'my late resolve of being less free in the expression of my affection is soon forgotten and broke... you see I can't keep my heart lockt and it will not be hid from him that has it.'⁹² A year later in February 1669, it appeared that Lydia was still struggling with how candidly she could communicate, as she referred once again to reigning herself in;

I cant alter or grow weary of Loving one whose deserts call for the greatest respect and whose affection I should be ungrateful too did I not answer with the like, but I begin to check my self for writing so freely and taking such a liberty as will cost me a blush when I think you are reading it.⁹³

Lydia may have been using this strategy to enable her to display her regard for Samuel whilst making an effort at self censorship. By writing in this way, she was able to preserve her modest persona, whilst allowing her emotions to be shown. She was also able to use this balancing act in other areas; on one occasion she stopped short of giving Samuel her own advice on a matter which was troubling him, but instead offered the advice of some of their relatives.⁹⁴ It is clear from what she wrote that Lydia agreed with the suggestions of the third parties, but felt coming from her it would not have the desired effect.

The language of love was used not just to clarify somebody's opinions on the subject, or to describe how they felt, but were used even to explain what the writer thought love actually was. When Thomas Greene was trying to woo Jane Robinson, he spent a portion of his epistles detailing in elaborate language what he felt love and its virtues to be. In order to dissuade her of any reservations she may have had, he extolled the desirable qualities of love, if only she would be drawn to them;

What is it that love cannot effect, if you suspect I will be too expensive, then love will soon point out away to frugality, if there is a mistrust of incontinencie, love will settle desire, if there a misprisson of folly, Love

⁹¹ Taylor, Barford, 1668, Letter 12, p. 56.

⁹² Taylor, Barford, 21st March 1668, Letter 13, p. 58.

⁹³ Taylor, Barford, 6th February 1669, Letter 17, p. 68.

⁹⁴ Taylor, Worcester, 24th October 1670, Letter 20, p. 80.

canseth discretion in short love contriveth all impossibilities and overcomes all intricacies... and facilitates any difficultie.⁹⁵

One is put in mind here of St Paul's letter to the Corinthians, where we are told what love is and what it is not.⁹⁶ Thomas cultivated his argument and it appeared that he had given it great thought, picking out themes he believed would trouble young ladies, and seeking to smooth balm on any raw areas. He also used lyrical language to illustrate his point; he made references to Cupid in one letter and compounded this allusion with a metaphor of his letters as a quiver full of arrows used as tools to secure her love.⁹⁷

There was an abundance of literature on the subject of courtship available to the wooing man in this period, much of which offered advice on how to successfully court a lady. Much of this was distributed via a single sheet, such as the *Good Counsell for Young Wooers*, a ballad which offered guidance such as 'Comply with her humour in everything right,/ For that's the chiefe course that will give her delight'; however the author pressed the argument for a more forceful courtship if necessary, suggesting via the chorus, 'You must kisse her, and coll her until she doth yield:/ A faint hearted solider will never win field'.⁹⁸ The popularity of chapbooks, which along with ballads, almanacs and broad sheets made up street literature, also ensured the circulation of ideas on courtship. Consisting of a single sheet of paper folded in eight, making a book of sixteen pages, they circulated easily.⁹⁹ Courtship was a popular subject, known to sell well, and in fact seven per cent of the chapbook collection and a fifth of the 'popular culture' section devoted itself to this topic.¹⁰⁰ As well as advice they also promoted instruction; one chapbook included in Samuel Pepys's collection written in 1685 was entitled *Cupid's Master-piece*, and gave direction on how to seduce women with words; 'You must not accost them with a shrug... but with your Lady, Sweet Lady... neither must you let your words come

⁹⁵ Thomas Greene, 30th December 1657, Manchester, LRO, DDHK 9/8/4/1.

⁹⁶ *The Bible*, 1 Corinthians 13:4.

⁹⁷ Thomas Greene LRO, DHK 9/8/4/2; Thomas Greene LRO, DHK 9/8/4/4; Thomas Greene LRO, DHK 9/8/4/5.

⁹⁸ Martin Parker, *Good Counsell for Young Wooers* (1635) STC (2nd ed.) 19236, consulted on JISC Historic Books; See also an example of this kind, Anon, *The Master-Piece of Love Song*, a tale of love over adversity.

⁹⁹ John Ashton, *Chapbooks of the Eighteenth Century*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1882), p. vii. The form of chapbook changed after the first quarter of the eighteenth century to a sheet folded into twelve, making twenty four pages. They declined rapidly after 1800.

¹⁰⁰ Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories*, p. 157.

rambling forth... as I love you: but you must speak the overcoming Language of Love. I do not mean those strange Pedantick Phrases, used by some gallants... But you must in fine gentle words, deliver you true Affection; Praise your Mistrisses Eyes, her Lip... her Neck... her every thing.¹⁰¹

Perhaps Thomas, who was writing in 1657, had been inspired by this type of literature as another tactic he used was to write verses for his beloved. There is evidence of this elsewhere; Joseph Strutt's collection of letters began with a long poem written to Isabella although it started as a love poem but soon descended into an observational piece on her character.¹⁰² Thomas's rhymes were altogether more gushing as can be witnessed from what we can now assume was his first letter to Jane; 'Though absent yet my heart is in your brest/ but wanting voice to speake it syes [sighs] at rest/ your beauty gave theis winges to my desire/ Inflamed my soule, and set my heart on fire/ soe madam with compassion pittie give/ without the which your servant cannot live.'¹⁰³ Even more impressive was his effort in the third missive he sent to her, where he had, for the moment, given up on using prose as his main influence and instead relied on simple verse to make his point. A typical stanza read; 'A toaken of my love I wott,/ Endless it is like to this knott,/ Cupid it is, that hath mee shot,/ that does not miss, butt victory got,/ For I my love, am tormented,/ that makes mee say, My hart is dead'.¹⁰⁴ Deficiency in eloquence and style was made up by its heartfelt tenderness, and the lack of substance was substituted by a desire to please. His last sentence to her was a touching avowal of his attachment, and even displayed a measure of self respect; 'oblige me to assure yow that though yow should forget me name, I will never chang the resolution which I have taken to bee yor faithful friend'.¹⁰⁵ There was no pleading, no angst filled lines, but more an affirmation of what love was, and the necessity of her knowing how he felt about her one final time.

¹⁰¹ Roger Thompson ed., *Samuel Pepys' Penny Merriments* (London: Constable, 1976), p. 106. See also Robert Collinson, *The Story of Street Literature* (London: J.M.Dent & Sons, 1973).

¹⁰² Joseph Strutt, *Poem or Ode to Isabella*, BCA, MS3101/C/E/4/8/1.

¹⁰³ Thomas Greene, LRO, DDHK 9/8/4/4.

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Greene, LRO, DDHK 9/8/4/2.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Greene, LRO, DDHK 9/8/4/6.

Courtship Conduct

When analysing courtship letters, there were markers which indicated thoughts on the ideal partner and relationship. Through the language they used we have seen that women could adapt their roles; from the self-deprecating modest girl, to the forthright stronger woman who professed her opinions persuasively. However, the way in which men and women acted was also a notable factor in relationships, and in their letters we can find indications as to the behaviour that was found acceptable. It was agreed by Dorothy Osborne that love was the ideal emotion to feel for one's spouse and that there must be fondness before marriage; 'though I easily believe that to marry one for whome wee have already some affection, will infinitely Encrease that kindnesse yet I shall never bee perswaded that Marriage has a Charme to raise love out of nothing, much less out of dislike'.¹⁰⁶ However, affectionate sentiments should not have been over emphasised and as Dorothy explained in a later letter 'I know 'tis a fault in any one to bee mastered by a passion, and of all passions love is perhaps the lest pardonable in a woman; but when tis mingles with Gratitude, 'tis sure the lessees to bee blamed.'¹⁰⁷ Where there was gratitude, and a humble nature, it was more acceptable for a woman to be forthcoming with her ardour. Furthermore as Houlbrooke comments, passionate love was denounced for being 'irrational and disruptive,' so one had to tread a very careful line.¹⁰⁸

Apart from the view of how vocal a woman could be about her love, there were opinions on how she should conduct herself; not only in the relationship, but in

¹⁰⁶ Parker, 15th/16th January 1653, Letter 4, p. 64.

¹⁰⁷ Parker, 2nd/3rd July 1653, Letter 28, p. 111.

¹⁰⁸ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 77. Belief in women's inferior control of their emotions stems from the theory of Galen's four humours; blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. Each person was made up of these, though there was always a dominant humour which led to an individual's character. Women were generally believed to be colder and moister, therefore they were more prone to irrational and emotionally inappropriate behaviour. Gail Kern Paster comments that the argument using temperature as the cause for women's inferiority was more durable than any on anatomy has it was harder to disprove; Gail Kern Paster, 'The Unbearable Coldness of Female Being: Women's Imperfection and the Humoral Economy', *English Literary Renaissance* Vol. 28, No. 3 (1995), p. 418. Combined with age, a women's humoral inferiority meant they were at risk from more specific deficiencies in character as Thomas Wright warned; Old women were more prone to avarice due to their feeble bodies and weakness of sex, whilst women in general were similar to young men in that they acted rashly; Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Mind in Generall* (London), pp. 38-41. For more on this subject see also Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam; Madness, Anxiety and Healing Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Melinda Spencer Kingsbury, 'Kate's Froward Humour; Historicizing Effect in "The Taming of the Shrew"', *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 69, No. 1 (Winter, 2004), pp. 61-84 (this contains a comprehensive overview of the four humours in the first part of the essay) and Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed; Drama, Discipline and Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca; New York: Cornell University Press, 1993).

day-to-day circumstances. The letters of Joseph Strutt to Isabella before they were married are a rich source of instruction and information as to how he believed she could improve herself. He made quite a task of this, and there were few letters he sent to her which did not give her directions in some way, whether this was advice on what to read, how to present herself, or how to act in everyday situations. We can make some estimation as to how Isabella reacted. As mentioned previously there were a few occasions where his interference was met with annoyance, but for the most part in the surviving letters of Isabella she received his advice cordially. However there are more letters surviving of Joseph's than there are of Isabella's, and it is frustrating that we lack the responses to some of his more pressing letters. Even for the modern reader, his guidance can prove tiring and demanding, and therefore one can wonder at how a young girl in the eighteenth century would have felt when bombarded with criticism, the act of which was being done through 'love'. However Joseph seemed reluctant to offend Isabella, and was more of the opinion that he was doing her a service. He was however highly aware of the judgement of their acquaintances, and therefore what others may have thought of him by his association with her.¹⁰⁹

From the beginning of his set of letters, we can see that Joseph did treat Isabella with a measure of respect simply by his style of writing. Joseph often wrote using stream of consciousness and was careful to thoroughly detail every point he wished to make. He did not dilute his opinions or use language more suitable for an inferior person, and was sure that she had the sagacity to realise that when he gave her instructions, it was well meant; 'You I am sure will readily allow the pernicious tendency that Flattery must have, + your good sense will as easily distinguish between the unmeaning compliments of Men of the World, + those which are

¹⁰⁹ We can also draw parallels with Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* of the education of Isabella. Joseph's efforts to educate her can be seen as a form of taming, and although he was much more serious in his endeavours than the comedic and psychological efforts of Petruchio, William Hazlitt's words on Petruchio can also be applied to Joseph; 'It is difficult to say which to admire most, the unaccountableness of his actions, or the unalterableness of his resolutions.'; William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (London: C.H.Reynell, 1817), pp. 312-3. See also Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson eds, William Shakespeare, *The Taming of The Shrew*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928); Juliet Dusinbuerre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 108, where she comments that Kate's submissiveness actually gave her power. See also Velvet D. Pearson, 'In Search of a Liberated Kate in "The Taming of The Shrew"', *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, Vol. 44, No. 4 (1990), pp. 229-62 and Coppélia Kahn, "'The Taming of the Shrew' : Shakespeare's Mirror of Marriage, *Modern Language Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Spring, 1975), pp. 88-202

sincere.’¹¹⁰ His ‘compliments’ included pointing out any faults she may have had, which at times proved for uncomfortable reading, despite his insistence that the happiness of both of them was at the forefront of his mind; ‘I think it incumbent upon me my lovely Friend, to tell you what I think wrong in your manners or your conduct – and though it is difficult or perhaps impossible for me to do it without awaking your resentment – yet if you take it as it is meant you will not be offended.’¹¹¹ And he was careful not to disgruntle her more than he felt necessary by interspersing his tutoring with regular reassurances that he loved her and was conducting himself in a manner for her benefit. He was able to declare his adoration in a far more candid manner than she was able to, announcing in one letter ‘My dearest girl I love you truly + affectionately; I love you with reason – for (let me speak proudly) I think you are deserving of my love.’¹¹²

The assets that he held in high principle can be found scattered amongst his letters. In one he mentioned that ‘Truth in her nature charms I can cherish and admire’,¹¹³ whilst in another he more meticulously explained that ‘If I have enforced Virtue strongly, I have not enforced it too much – the word has a comprehensive meaning, but I did not use it in the sense you allude to, nor have I the most distant Idea that it will ever be so applied – but listen to its precepts [?], and you will be sure to meet the reward it will be slow – Innocence, Modesty, Truth and Happiness.’¹¹⁴ The best confirmation we have of which qualities he found most to her advantage are to be found in the verse he wrote to her at the beginning of their courtship, ‘Ode to Isabella’. He spent the first eight lines praising her beauty and sweetness, before changing abruptly; asking that when her attractiveness faded, where was the depth of character to be found? Due to her youth, she was lucky – she had time to be educated and to be taught how to have a good disposition, and to arm herself with features of high merit. However, just in case she was unsure of what these might be, he thoughtfully listed them in the rest of the verse;

My love you’re young – study with nicest care,/ To make yourself as
Wise as you are Fair;/ Good sense you have, let Virtue be your Guide/
Walk hand in hand, with Prudence by your side,/ Let every word, +

¹¹⁰ Joseph Strutt, 7th October 1787, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/4/8/7.

¹¹¹ Joseph Strutt, BCA, MS3101/C/E/4/8/12.

¹¹² Joseph Strutt, 5th May 1788, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/4/8/11.

¹¹³ Joseph Strutt, 7th October 1787, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/4/8/7.

¹¹⁴ Joseph Strutt, 12th October 1788, BCA, MS3101/C/E/4/8/13.

every action shew,/ What steps you follow + what paths pursue;/ Beware of Flattery; it's a baneful Art,/ Coined by Deceit, and nurtured in the Heart,/ Resist its first attacks, shut your chaste Ears/ To every sound that the bright Fancy rears/ Oppos'd to Virtue, + you soon will find,/ Such Goodness with such Modesty combin'd,/ Will give you power e'er Five short years are gone,/ To fix those Passions that your beauty won./ "Hard is the task to walk in Reasons fence/ And keep the fair Sobriety of Sense"/ But if the task is hard, greater's the Joy,/ When you arrive at full maturity,/ Reflecting on the past, thus you may say,/ Not one imprudent step had mark'd my way.

Considering this ode was sent to her at the start of their courtship, Isabella could have had no doubt as to what Joseph desired in a partner. The expression of his ideals was a continuing theme in his letters, and he reiterated the principles with some force.¹¹⁵ While we may compare him to Dorothy Osborne in the sense that Dorothy also often put across her views of the idealistic qualities of a relationship, she did not seek to enforce her opinions on William Temple, nor instruct him how to act in this manner. While Joseph maintained he acted out of love and kindness, the style in which he wrote sometimes caused offence. However, some compromise was found and he and Isabella were able to enjoy years of happiness before her death. The more relaxed and chatty style of the letters she wrote when married were testament to how she matured into the roles of wife and mother, and Joseph treated her with respect, not only in terms of her status as his wife, but also as a friend and confidante.¹¹⁶

Part Two: The Hardships of Courtship

The course of true love never did run smoothly. Even in relationships which ended in happy marriage, there were moments of anger, heartache, regret and accusation. Maintaining relationships where the main source of communication was letters proved to be difficult for even the most committed of partners, and tension was occasionally evident in their correspondence. In modern society, it is difficult enough waiting for a text message or a phone call when you dearly want to hear from someone; the impatience of waiting days or even weeks for a letter in the early

¹¹⁵ See for example Joseph Strutt, 18th June 1787, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/4/8/4.

¹¹⁶ See for example, Isabella Strutt, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/18-22. Her tone and expression were more mature than in previous letters and she wrote of family news, including lines on how their children were, visits by friends and various ailments suffered by them all.

modern period could sometimes prove unbearable. Even though people of that time may have expected to wait a while for a reply, this did not lessen their impatience. Furthermore pressures from family members, who may have disapproved, increased the anxiety levels. The first part of this chapter looked at the language of love used in courtship letters, and the idealisms of the perfect partner or relationship. The epistolary collections used there also act as examples here to highlight the zeniths and nadirs of their relationships, and are used to show a more rounded view of their relationships. For example, when analysing the correspondence between Dorothy Osborne and William Temple, while it is true that they were well matched and had loving feelings for each other, to assume therefore that they were without turbulence would be false. The emotions felt, the language used, and the personal journeys endeavoured will be analysed in this chapter, to understand the pain of courtship.

Postal Anxiety

Postal anxiety was the case of much tension in courtship and love letters. Pleas for letters and admonishments for the late sending of them were frequent in the collections of letters studied here. O'Hara believes it is questionable as to whether letters themselves should be regarded as love tokens, but it can be argued that for some women letters were exactly that – tokens of esteem and love.¹¹⁷ In the example of Anne Graham, writing to a lover whom she knows cannot be hers, meant that every letter sent from him was a thrill, a reminder that he still thought of her. Her desire for his letter was so great that she even put a timescale on when she should receive a reply from him; 'I shall be in pain till I hear you have got this Epistle which I expect to do in a fortnight, don't disappoint me pray, for there is no greater pain than an impatient expectation.'¹¹⁸ There are two subtle threats given that she would not be taken for a fool; one is that she will know when he will receive the letter, so he cannot pretend he has not had it; the second is the warning that he will cause her acute distress if he does not reply speedily. We may assume from her surviving letters that this had no impact on George Shirley, for his replies continued to be erratic. When the threat of her unhappiness produced an inadequate response, her

¹¹⁷ O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, p. 71.

¹¹⁸ Anne Graham, 12th August (Year Unknown), Holbrook Hall, WCRO, CR2131/16/52.

next ploy was to appeal to his apparently kind nature; ‘Pray write to me as soon as you receive this letter, if you have the least goodness tell me how you do.’¹¹⁹ She asked him to confirm whether this was the first letter he had had from her whilst she had been in Holbrook Hall, tentatively giving him a reason why he may not have responded to an earlier letter. Her anxiety is palpable, and one cannot help but feel sorry for her as she offered him an excuse for his behaviour. She did this again in a later letter, when she wrote resignedly ‘I suppose you will say you never had mine or you wou’d certainly have been at B[ur]y Fair; shou’d you say so, nay shou’d you swear it with all your might I shou’dnt believe you perhaps.’¹²⁰

Although Anne was in what appeared to be a very one-sided relationship, even more committed relationships suffered from postal anxiety. In these cases it was the strength of the devotion that was measured by how regularly the letters were received. Dorothy Osborne recorded the fretfulness she felt when waiting for William Temple’s letter and described in great detail her wait for the courier and how terror struck her at the thought she would be left empty handed.¹²¹ At another time she told him of the happiness a short note had given her, for ‘without it I should have had strange apprehensions, all my sad dreams and the severall frights I have waked in would have run soe in my head that I should have concluded somthing of very ill from your silence.’¹²² Even when couples were married, letters became an important source of comfort for them when they were apart. Isabella Strutt confirmed the importance of giving and receiving letters especially when there were health concerns; ‘[I] shold have conjured up a thousand fears respecting your dear health and safety, and notwithstanding your daily assurances to the contrary I am tormented with many apprehensions’.¹²³ Nor were the concerns confined to letters penned by women; Joseph Strutt also showed signs of worry as Isabella realised; ‘I am concerned to find you expected a lr [letter] for me... I was not worse than usual... I will however not omit writing in future by every post and I am sad I occasioned you a moments anxiety by not writing’.¹²⁴ It would appear that when no letters were forthcoming the worst was feared, and it was easy to let one’s

¹¹⁹ Anne Graham, 27th August (Year Unknown), Holbrook Hall WCRO, CR2131/16/53.

¹²⁰ Anne Graham, WRCO, CR2131/16/56.

¹²¹ Parker, 19th/20th March 1653, Letter 13, p. 81.

¹²² Parker, 8th-10th December 1653, Letter 48, pp. 156-7.

¹²³ Isabella Strutt, 30th October 1794, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/16.

¹²⁴ Isabella Strutt, 1st November 1794, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/15.

imagination run wild thinking that their beloved was in ill health, or worse, that their affections had dwindled and they no longer wished to write. Letters represented security, and particularly when the physical distance was great they symbolised the confidence two people had in a relationship.

Unrequited Love

The heartache of postal anxiety and the fear of unrequited love was not monopolised by women. There is evidence of men proclaiming their regard for their intended choice of partner, only to find themselves spurned; James Daybell notes the existence of one letter in the hand of a Michael Hickes which contains the refusal of an unnamed woman to a letter of courtship which she received from a Mr Hocknell.¹²⁵ In the worst instance however, one could be ignored entirely, and the romantic sentiments written with hope and earnestness could be dismissed with apparent scant regard for the feelings of the writer. As Catherine Bates observes ‘a courtier could never guarantee the hoped-for response, of course, and however circumspect, judicious, rhetorically aware, he could be cruelly spurned, his suit rejected or ignored.’¹²⁶ A surviving example of this comes from the pen of Thomas Greene, who found his declarations of love to Jane Robinson unwelcome. In six letters we grasp not only his desire for Jane, but what he felt was a winning course of action for her affections, not only in the content, but in his expression.

There is some ambiguity surrounding the order of Thomas’ letters. Not all of them are dated, and when read in the sequence they are presented by the archivist, it could be argued that letter four is out of place. The signature is different, as is the handwriting – this could of course be explained by the use of an amanuensis, but why suddenly use one when the point of the previous letters had been to show devotion, as well as using the epistles as a cathartic experience? In addition to this, and perhaps a more convincing argument, the tone of the letter had altered; it is far more charming and self assured than the previous three and the subsequent two. He

¹²⁵ James Daybell, *Women Letter Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 226. Although it is not specified why the letter should be in the hand of Michael Hickes we could perhaps guess that he was acting as an intermediary, or that the lady in question for some reason did not wish to address Mr Hocknell personally.

¹²⁶ Catherine Bates, *The Rhetoric Of Courtship in Elizabethan Language and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 3.

also wrote ‘it is my cheefest Study [to] discover some deserving object worthy of my love in pursuance thereby I presume to trepase upon your Ladyshippe with this trouble.’¹²⁷ By ‘presuming’ to do so, he sounded as if he was taking the first tentative step to secure her affections. Furthermore, he closed with the lines ‘This being the ffirst tender of my service compels me to cease further simplicity and humbly crave you acceptance herof with the return of an answer to him’, implying that this was the first time he had written to her.¹²⁸

If we then take this to be his first letter, full of desire that she will consent to be his sweetheart, it is clear from the other letters that his hopes had been dashed, and not only did she not return his feelings, but she provided him with no response whatsoever. In the first letter of the sequence (so now, as we believe, his second written letter) he began, ‘It is admiration unto mee that my last lettere produced not one word in answer, which makes me doubtful that my service is not acceptable’¹²⁹. We cannot know how long he waited, as his first letter is not dated, but the length between this letter and letter number three is only eight days (the dates being 30th December 1657 and 7th January 1658), so we may possibly assume that impatience took hold of him and he was eager to receive a response. Optimistic that he could cajole her into replying, he appealed to her generous nature and tried to both flatter and coax her into admitting him into her circle of correspondence; ‘I intreat yow to continue now longer cruell, but admit mee into the number of those that dayly honour yow, and bee pleased to grant mee the favour of yor sweet correspondence[;] one lyne would more elevate my thoughts proceeding from soe excellent a creature, as yor self.’¹³⁰

It becomes quite clear in his following letters that his endeavour was in vain and one can only estimate the reasons as to why Jane declined to reply. Perhaps if she had, even if it was only to dash his hopes and declare herself unavailable, it would have saved him the necessity of unburdening his thoughts any further. Indeed, as the one-sided communication continued and Thomas realised his efforts were not to be rewarded, he focussed on his pain instead. In his fourth letter he was obviously hurt and angry, although we cannot know if it was simply because of her silence or

¹²⁷ Thomas Greene, LRO, DDHK 9/8/4/4.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Thomas Greene, 30th December 1657, Manchester, LRO, DDHK 9/8/4/1.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

whether they had met once more in a social setting and she had ignored him. At this point he put pen to paper as a more cathartic experience and asserted ‘it is not to yow, but to this paper that I tell my thoughts, soe to disburthen myself of them, as that I may never more have them in mind.’¹³¹ Interestingly, sides two and three of the letter have been stuck together as if they should remain out of sight – yet a tear in sides three and four displays the words ‘Deare Love’ which is also how he started the letter proper. Perhaps Thomas did write this letter solely to himself, and this first draft was sealed away in the middle of the pages, before deciding to send it to Jane – possibly convincing himself that the hurt so evident in his words would persuade her to converse with him. His emotions were raw yet he still sent her the epistle, even though ‘I had once resolved not to write any more unto yow, calling to mind how much I have been sleighted’.¹³² The vocabulary he used towards the end of the letter also revealed the strength of his disquiet as he declared ‘yow are too rigorous, and except yow change this severe humour where with yow Tyrannize over mee, yow will run the hazard to loose.’¹³³ The language he chose, and in particular words such as ‘severe’, ‘tyrannize’ and ‘hazard’ which have harsh syllables, display his irritation at the situation and hint at the resentment he felt towards her.

The last letter Thomas sent to her (and again there could be some debate as to their order, especially as ‘Letter Six’ is actually an early draft of ‘Letter One’) reverts back to the gentler and more romantic phrasing of his earlier letters. If this letter was truly the last he had sent to her, then maybe he had understood he was not to hear from her. However, it is clear he is still tentatively optimistic, especially as he so confidently believed he could have done nothing to offend her. He broached the subject again with a light hearted romantic quip, though there is an edge of impatience in his tone; ‘I send this as a third Arrow find out the other two and to know the reason why they found not acceptance, therefore if this finds not better success then shall goe noe more out of my Quiver.’¹³⁴ By this time it was also evident that Thomas felt some confusion on the subject as he seemed unsure whether to continue or end his pursuit. Whatever course he chose, it seemed his upset would not be abated; ‘if yow forget mee, I have cause to complaine, and more if yow

¹³¹ Thomas Greene, 7th January 1658, Manchester, LRO, DDHK 9/8/4/3.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Thomas Greene, LRO, DDHK 9/8/4/5. The fact that he describes this as the ‘third arrow’ also casts doubt on the order of the letters as it is given in sequence as his fifth letter.

remember mee, tis a paradox to mee, what should bee the occasion of soe strange and unexpected allteration.’¹³⁵ If Jane suddenly decided to return his affections, then what had stopped her before? As this is the last letter we can assume that Jane stayed silent he remained true to his word and sent no more letters. There is an interesting footnote to this story – since these letters survive, and one of them appears to be the draft of another, then who kept them? Did Jane keep them, even if she did not reciprocate the attentions of the sender? Or were they given to a third party, or even sent back to Thomas?

Tepid responses could prove to be as painful as unrequited love. What if one’s courtship was limited to the odd dalliance and infrequent letter? Would the limited access to the one you love have been too frustrating, or would you persevere in your endeavours? The aforementioned Anne Graham wrote seven surviving letters to Hon. George Shirley in the mid eighteenth century. Not much is known about Anne Graham; her letters are kept in Warwickshire County Record Office, which could point to her being from the county, yet as they are in the Shirley papers it is uncertain. The Hon. George Shirley (1705-1787) however was from a Warwickshire family. The son of Robert Shirley, 1st Earl Ferrers, and Selina Finch, he lived in Ettington, Warwickshire.¹³⁶ Frustratingly only one of the letters Anne sent to him is dated with the year (1742) and although the letters appear to fit together there is an odd moment mentioned in the sixth letter when she refers to a petticoat he promised her seven years ago whilst she was at Grosvenor Street.¹³⁷ Letter Five is an invitation to visit at Grosvenor Street, so it is plausible there is a large gap between these two letters, or the fifth letter has been placed there erroneously going on the submission that it is written from Grosvenor Street. If the fifth letter was actually written later it would make more sense, as letter six fits more neatly on from letter four,¹³⁸ and the petticoat referral could actually have been dated from before the surviving letters. It is possible that there were more letters, but, as she noted, they appeared to practise the common task in secret relationships of burning each others letters; ‘Where is the

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Charles Mosley ed., *Burke's Peerage, Baronetage & Knightage, 107th edition, 3 volumes* (Wilmington, Delaware, U.S.A: Burke's Peerage (Genealogical Books) Ltd, 2003), Vol. 1, p. 1417.

¹³⁷ Anne Graham, 2nd June 1742, Bury, WCRO, CR3121/16/55.

¹³⁸ Anne Graham, 27th August (Year Unknown), Holbrook Hall, WCRO, CR3121/16/53; Anne Graham, 2nd June 1742, Bury, WCRO, CR3121/16/55; see for example the reference to Mr. William’s illness and his visit to Bath, which is then alluded to in the later letter.

letter you had once from Witham? I hope you re so good as to burn mine as you have em.’¹³⁹

The letters Anne wrote are extremely interesting as they are a significant source of evidence of how a young woman grappled with her emotions. She admitted ‘I am so proficient in the art of dissimulation and never yet know how to disguise my sentiments.’¹⁴⁰ Torn between snubbing her lover, and revealing the extent of her devotion, the wrestling of her feelings is played out on the page, to the extent that her handwriting changes when she becomes angry. There are two examples in the fourth letter where her composure slipped and she had to stop before continuing her prose in a tidier hand. The first instance was when she fumed over the difference between men and women’s roles in relationships. She wrote; ‘I had often been told that an affection easily obtain’d is never value’d and that men only aim at inspiring us with a passion they never intend to feel themselves, and if they succeed, they despise us for it.’¹⁴¹ The last two words are joined together and as an afterthought a line has been struck through them. The word ‘it’ is also bigger and written in more scrawled handwriting, as if she was becoming more aggravated by what she was writing. The implication here is that she was indeed a victim of the sentiments she described – she has been overcome with her regard for him only to find herself disappointed, and fears he scorns her for it. Later in the letter she attempted to rectify this, possibly fearful that she had exposed herself too much. She sought to impose damage control, but again her hand betrayed her when she wrote ‘I wish a great deal for you when I am walking; but I don’t desire to see you here, for we are very formal and frighted at the sight of a man. It sutes my disposition because I love solitude and rural scenes, and having my will.’¹⁴² The part she underlined is again more wildly written in a larger script, perhaps to emphasise that whatever she may have confessed to earlier in the letter, she enjoyed independence and would not want to be at the mercy of any man.

Although these are the sentiments that Anne would have him believe to be true, it is evident from her letters that hope reigned supreme, and she could not let

¹³⁹ Anne Graham, 27th August (Year Unknown), Holbrook Hall, WCRO, CR3131/16/54. Dorothy Osborne also burnt almost all of the letters William Temple sent to her.

¹⁴⁰ Anne Graham, 12th August (Year Unknown), WCRO CR2131/16/52.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

the link between them die, even when it caused such misery. There are glimpses of realism, where she comprehended the situation she was in. She knew that she could never truly be in a genuine relationship, but as long as he kept in touch she could bear her disappointment. She was obviously in turmoil, and trying to make the best of sad circumstances. One of the ways in which she coped was to try a form of bargaining for his attention, usually taking the form of a promise that if he would only write to her, that would satisfy her and she would ask for no more. In one instance she swore, 'I do assure you I never expected a conjugal affection from you; and if you will promise never to forget me and let me know you perform that promise, I shall be so happy as I never hoped to be.'¹⁴³ The effect of his letters had a clear impact on her; when she received them her spirits rose, and so overjoyed was she that she could forgive him for his lack of consideration. She even attributed her recuperation from an illness to his correspondence; 'I believe your letter contributed more to my recovery than any thing my doc gave me, therefore be good and write once more to Nancy'.¹⁴⁴

Perhaps the starkest contradiction in her manner, and therefore the one which is the most revealing, is the difference in the two parts of the last letter. Although they are placed together, it is not certain whether they were sent together, as the contrast in tone is so great, it is questionable whether a letter of reproach would be sent when a second reply of a sweeter nature has been penned. Furthermore she referred to a billet she needed changing in the first letter, and thanked him for changing a bill in the second, so it would appear that his reply slotted in between the two. In the first part, her frustration at his silence is proclaimed. She opened with the reprimand; 'I wish I could think as little of Mr Shirley as he does of me', before continuing 'I'm unwilling to pronounce you ungrateful because I look upon it as the worst quality one can have... I must tell you that if you wish'd my health and happiness as much as you pretend to do you wou'd write oftener to your obedient ser[vant]'.¹⁴⁵ Here it almost feels like she has finally got the measure of him and is no longer afraid to take him to task. Yet she still ached to hear from him, and still wished to have that contact and consolation that only he could provide. She ended her epistle with the sorrowful 'Pray give me a little comfort you know nobody else

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Anne Graham, Holbrook Hall, WCRO, CR3121/16/51.

¹⁴⁵ Anne Graham, WCRO, CR3121/16/56.

can', proving that however strong she tried to be, her desire for his epistolary connection overpowered her.¹⁴⁶

The second shorter letter displayed a difference in her handwriting; it was larger and more spread out across the page, as if she could not contain her excitement, and although she commenced in a more contented manner, it soon became clear how emotional she was. She began by thanking him for changing her bill, but it is the 'little dab of paper he sent with the money' that gave her infinitely more happiness.¹⁴⁷ It is insinuated that he may have asked her to meet with him as she wrote that she would have been in the park if possible 'though my heart was very heavy and my eyes too full to have distinguished even you.' Was there an event which caused her this great pain, or was it the realisation that meeting him would not abate her anguish? George Shirley was married to Mary Sturt on 28th December 1749, and they had a son Evelyn in 1756; as this is the last surviving letter, it is possible that after this that contact ceased between them.¹⁴⁸ The letters of Anne Graham make for emotive reading. Although she appeared to understand the conditions of their association, her hopes for a real connection fade over the course of the correspondence; while she tried to assert her independence and behave in a dignified way, in reality her very dependence on George Shirley is what shaped her letters. Although she wrote of various happenings in her social life and the news of others in order to maintain a sense of normality and lightness, her longing is coupled with the loneliness she felt from coveting a man who was not to be hers.

Family Interference

Such is the nature of human interaction, it is apparent in many collections of lovers' letters that rarely was the relationship solely conducted between just two people. There was frequent interference from people on the outside gossip and scandal threatened connections between partners. However, there were also instances where associates in general (and relatives in particular) actively meddled in the bond between couples. O'Hara asserts this was allowed due to the structure of courtship and the various phases that were a part of that process. She argues 'these stages required the participation of outsiders at many different points, each with their own

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Mosley, *Burke's Peerage and Baronetage*, p. 1417.

agendas and points of view about the suitability or otherwise of the intended match.¹⁴⁹ Dorothy Osborne's male relatives sought to persuade her of the pitfalls of her alliance with William Temple, and there are frequent references in her letters to him of the ways in which this was manifested. They were looking for a marriage for her which would solve their financial problems, and Dorothy was aware that this was an important point in her marriage negotiations as she warned William; 'You are spoken of with the Reverence due to a person what I seem to like... but your fortune and mine, can never agree... we forfeit our discretions and run wilfully upon our owne ruin's, if there bee such a thought.'¹⁵⁰ However, as Parker highlights, their reservations were also personal; 'Quite without foundation, some members of the Osborne family saw in W.T. an unprincipled adventurer, without either honour or glory, someone who would be willing to render service to any party for the sake of personal advancement'.¹⁵¹ Equally, William's family had reluctant views on their match too, which Dorothy was all too aware of ('I shall hate myself as Longe as I live if I cause any disorder between your father and you') but from Dorothy's surviving letters it was the intrusion of her brother Henry which caused the most pain to the couple.¹⁵²

From the beginning of her courtship with William, Dorothy had cause to resent her family's interference – she was focus of lectures her brothers imparted, detailing why she should be careful in her choice of suitor. These lectures took the form of lengthy diatribes, and on one occasion she sought to make lighter of another reprimand she had been given for turning down more advantageous suitors;

all the People I have ever in my Life refused were brought againe upon the Stage, like Richard the 3rd Ghosts... Well twas a pretty Lecture... wee came soe neer an absolute falling out... that we have hardly spoken a word together since.¹⁵³

Others were simply draining, and caused her to complain 'would you had heard how I have bin Chatechised for you, and seen how soberly I sitt and answer to

¹⁴⁹ O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, p. 31.

¹⁵⁰ Parker, 12th/13th March 1653, Letter 11, p. 78.

¹⁵¹ Parker, p. 7.

¹⁵² Parker, 17th/18th March 1653, Letter 12, p. 80. Again we can draw parallels here with Restoration Comedy. P.F. Vernon asserts that 'the most popular type of action concerns the attempts of a young pair of romantic lovers to get married despite the active opposition of mercenary relatives'; Vernon, 'Marriage of Convenience', *Essays in Criticism*, p. 375.

¹⁵³ Parker, 18th/19th June 1653, Letter 26, p. 107.

interrogatory's'.¹⁵⁴ Her use of the word 'interrogatory's' puts one in mind of a legal setting; one has an image of Dorothy sitting bolt upright in a chair facing her accusers who attacked her with questions about her intentions. It must have been exhausting, and her belief in her relationship with William must have been very strong at this point in order to withstand such bombardment. Furthermore she was living with the knowledge that she could not disobey her father – a feeling that probably caused her some anxiety. She wrote to him

I can never think of disposing myself without my father's consente, and though hee had left it more in my Power than almost any body leav's a daughter, yet certainly I were the worst natured person in the world if his kindnesse were not a greater lye upon me then any advantage he could have reserved.¹⁵⁵

Her regard for her father was so great that she knew she could not marry against his wishes, while acknowledging that she had more choice than others in the same situation. The fact that her father had shown her respect cleverly meant that she was even more in awe of him, and she had less desire to rebel than if she had been constrained. However, this is not to say that Dorothy, and others like her who found themselves in the same situation, were helpless. Will Coster remarks that it is clear from other examples in history that 'children could get their own way if they were prepared to override their parents' objections'.¹⁵⁶ Houlbrooke also gives the example of Ralph Josselin, who was essentially prepared to respect the wishes of one of his daughters, whom he tried to nudge in the direction of a man she was not attracted to.¹⁵⁷ We should remember though that while these views are in essence correct, it was not easy for children to go against their relatives, particularly if they were aware of how much pain could be caused.¹⁵⁸

Was it then the actions of Henry Osborne which strengthened her resolve, and led her to hope that if she remained true to William, one day her brother would

¹⁵⁴ Parker, 12th/13th March 1653, Letter 11, p. 78.

¹⁵⁵ Parker, 29th March 1653, Letter 15, p. 85.

¹⁵⁶ Will Coster, *Family and Kinship in England 1450-1800* (New York: Longman, 2001), p. 57.

¹⁵⁷ Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700*, p. 72.

¹⁵⁸ Amy M. Froide makes reference to a 14 year old girl, Christian Hodge, who was hidden away in 1567 by her father William Coles, to prevent her marrying William Hodges. The interesting point here is that her uncle, John Hodges, had been seen to usurp the parental role by promoting the courtship, allowing the couple to meet in his house. Christian Holes claimed that she was against the match and had only carried on the courtship after being verbally and physically threatened by her uncle. Amy M. Froide, *Never Married; Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 65-6.

yield? It is evident from her correspondence that although Henry had misgivings about her marrying William, he was nonetheless eager for her to wed someone more appropriate, doubtless with the view to attaining financial security. She commented 'You would laugh sure if I could tell you how many Servant's hee has offered mee since hee came downe'¹⁵⁹, and was candid in her recognition of her brother's self interest, even though Henry knew she would never leave their father while he was in poor health;

You are Altogether in the right that my B will never bee at quiet till hee see mee disposed of, but he do's not mean to loose mee by it.. hee is resolved to follow mee if hee can, which hee thinks hee might better doe to a house where I had some power.¹⁶⁰

The echo of the word 'dispose' in her letters gives reason to the sentiment that she was a possession, an asset to be bargained over. She knew she held a certain balance of power, and although Henry may have felt he was acting from a strong position, it appears he was not above using emotional blackmail and effective rhetoric to try and convince Dorothy to marry; 'There has bin complaints on mee already by my Eldest Brother... what offers I refuse and what a strange humor has possest mee of being deafe to the advice of all my friends. I finde I am to be bayted by them all by turn's.'¹⁶¹ The mention of the advice of her friends hinted that it was not only from familial quarters she had been feeling pressure and indeed she acknowledged that they laughed at her protests that she will not marry, or at least not yet. It is evident that this caused Dorothy some annoyance and displeasure as she confessed, 'Somtimes we are in Earnest and somtimes in Jest, but alway's sayeing something, since my Brother Harry found his Tongue againe.'¹⁶² It would seem that 'Brother Harry' was behind the machinations to persuade her to marry from her companions. However at this point in her relationship with William at least, she was resolute in her convictions, but it must have been incredibly tiring to have to listen to the same arguments so often, thus leading her to exclaim 'Patience is my Penance.'¹⁶³

Henry's interventions were not confined to verbal intrusions. He actively sought to disrupt the correspondence between his sister and William. Dorothy had

¹⁵⁹ Parker, 11th/12th June 1653, Letter 25, p. 105.

¹⁶⁰ Parker, 21st/22nd May 1653, Letter 22, p. 99.

¹⁶¹ Parker, 9th/10th July 1653, Letter 29, p. 114.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

cause on more than one instance to suspect her brother of trying to intercept their letters, leading Dorothy to warn William that he would have to send his epistles in a different manner as Henry had been inquiring as to what the carrier bore;

My B.... cald to him, & asked what letters hee had of mine, the fellow sayd none... But my B. not sattisfied with this rides after him, and in some anger threatned the Poore fellow, whoe would not bee frighted out his letter... I was hugely pleased to heare, how hee [Henry] had been defeated.¹⁶⁴

It seemed that Henry was to some degree fixated upon their relationship, and even searched the house for correspondence that had passed between them, believing that he was not completely in the picture as to the extent of their attachment; 'Hee is not fully satisfiyed to what degrees our friendship is growne and thinks hee may best informe himself from them... [he] is soe pleased with the hopes of making some discovery... and yet hee has noe more the heart to aske mee directly what he would soe faine know'.¹⁶⁵ However she was convinced that Henry cannot have seen any of their correspondence; 'I am confident my B. has it not. As cunning as hee is, he could not hide it soe from mee'.¹⁶⁶

Perhaps Henry was over protective, perhaps he only sought to sustain his family's finances, but it is evident that he felt he shared a close link with his sister. This bond was the result of a deep and complex sibling relationship. She tried her best to convey this to William, who appeared unable or unwilling to gauge the nature of it;

When hee raunt's and renounces mee I can dispise him, but when he askes my pardon with tear's pleades to mee the long and constant friendship between us and call's heaven to wittnesse that nothing upon Earth is dear to him in comparison of mee, then, I confesse I feel a strange unquietnesse within mee, and I would doe any thing to avoyde his importunity.¹⁶⁷

This is compounded with tales of his gift giving when they made up after another quarrel.¹⁶⁸ By the time their marriage plans were underway, she also insisted that Henry was to have a prominent role in the negotiations; 'his Carriage towards mee

¹⁶⁴ Parker, 23rd/24th July 1653, Letter 31, p. 117.

¹⁶⁵ Parker, 30th/31st July 1653, Letter 32, p. 119.

¹⁶⁶ Parker, 17th/18th December 1653, Letter 50, p. 159. See also Chapter 1, p. 50-1 of this thesis for further explanation.

¹⁶⁷ Parker, 28th/29th January 1653, Letter 56, p. 172.

¹⁶⁸ Parker, 4th/5th March 1654, Letter 60, p. 185.

gave mee such an occasion as I could justifie the keeping that distance with him, but now it would Look Extremely unhandsome in mee'.¹⁶⁹ Their relationship had thawed and she was determined to show her brother compassion by including him, as well as it being a sensible option since her father was by then dead.

Tension Through Secrecy

The clandestine nature of their relationship is one of the most fascinating things about the correspondence between Dorothy and William, and the tension this inevitably caused is evident in their letters. Although they conversed amiably and shared witticisms and jokes, there are sections of their mail which are characterised by frustration and pain. As to be expected, their separation led to feelings of longing, and a wish to spend more time with each other. 'How often have I wisht myself with you though but for a day for an hower, I would have given all the time I am to spend heer for it with all my heart' wrote Dorothy, signifying how tedious her days were at home without his company.¹⁷⁰ These kinds of sentiments were tenderly written; however, the tone of their discourse could change rapidly, and tension could be manifested through her writing. This was displayed in their visiting arrangements; as well as their need for discretion, their physical distance meant that any meetings they did manage to have had to be carefully planned – and if there was any change in plans made, this gave rise to accusations of unkindness and disaffection. One postponed visit led Dorothy to ask, 'why are you soe sullen, and why am I the cause. Can you believe that I doe willingly deffer my Journy, I know you doe not. When they should my Absense now bee lesse supportable to you then heretofore.'¹⁷¹ In an earlier letter, she had sniped, 'For god's sake doe not complaine soe that you doe not see mee, I beleeve I doe not suffer lesse in't then you, but tis not to be helpt.'¹⁷² It would appear that the strain between them manifested itself in allegations of uncaring behaviour; William had convinced himself that she could not love him and yearn for him as he did for her, therefore the easiest way to purge himself of these uncomfortable feelings was to take an accusatory stance. In a bitter way he could not

¹⁶⁹ Parker, 16th September 1654, Knowlton, Kent, Letter 75, p. 214.

¹⁷⁰ Parker, 22nd/23rd October 1653, Letter 46, p. 150.

¹⁷¹ Parker, 15th/16th October 1653, Letter 45, p. 147.

¹⁷² Parker, 25th/26th June 1653, Letter 27, p. 109.

lose; either she would prove him correct and she would show herself to be less committed than he, in which case he could bask in sour accuracy, or she would act as she did in passionate irritation and assure him he was not the only sufferer, thus promising him her devotion.

It is also a part of human nature that when a person feels anger or aggravation they end up showing anger to those close to them. Indeed in the letters between Dorothy and William words became ammunition as the exasperation at their situation simmered and on occasion boiled over, creating words from both parties which were designed for maximum impact. Knowing how principled Dorothy felt herself to be may have been one of the reasons why William chose to call her 'a falce and inconstant person'¹⁷³, which provoked the response 'I am the most unfortunate woman breathing but I was never falce.'¹⁷⁴ This slur on her character, and the accusation that she was disloyal and frivolous with her affections resonated deeply and may have been at the forefront of her mind when she penned the cutting words 'soe let mee tell you that if I could help it I would not love you, and that as long as I live I shall strive against it.'¹⁷⁵ However Dorothy was not above using words to provoke feelings of pain for William. She rarely used her phrases to make a direct attack upon his character; her tactic was to cause him discomfort by making him realise the effect the situation was having on her, whether it was to do with his melancholic moods, his choice of words to her, or simply the frustration of the situation. She described to him how 'I was much more at my Ease whilest I was angry, Scorne and dispite would have cured mee in some reasonable time which I dispaire of now'.¹⁷⁶ Evidently when the anger faded then the pain was felt more prominently, and she found angry emotions easier to deal with than sorrowful ones. And sometimes she felt it necessary to pour out a torrent of words, and vent the confusion and frustration she felt;

All this considered what I have to say for my self when People shall aske what tis I Expect, can there bee any thing Vainer then such a [hope?] upon such grownds. Ou must needs see the ffolly on't your self and therefore Examine your owne heart what tis fit for mee to doe, and what you can doe for a Person you Love, and that deserv's your compassion if

¹⁷³ Parker, 10th/11th December 1653, Letter 49, p. 158.

¹⁷⁴ Parker, 5th January 1653, Letter 52, p. 164.

¹⁷⁵ Parker, 24th December 1653, Letter 51, p. 162.

¹⁷⁶ Parker, 7th/8th January 1654, Letter 53, p. 165.

Nothing Else, A Person that will alway's have an inviole friendship for you, a friendship that shall take up all the roome my Passion held in my heart and govern there as Master till Death come to take possession and turn it out. Why should you make an impossibility when there is none. A thousand accidents might have taken mee from you, and you must have borne it, why should not your owne resolution work as much upon you, as necessary and time do's infallibly upon all People.¹⁷⁷

Despite all their aggravation and attacks on one another, it is clear that underpinning their relationship was the sweet memory of one another's company, and the gentle hope that they could bear their discontent stoically and eventually be united. While epistles remained to be the most consistent and realistic connection, it was no substitute for the warmth and affection that corporeal contact would bring; 'how much more satisfied should I bee if there were now need of these [letters] and wee might talke all that wee write and more, shall wee Ever bee soe happy.'¹⁷⁸ It was also clear that they were prominent in each other's thoughts, and Dorothy, far from acting coy, was secure enough in her emotions to admit;

How often do I sitt in company a whole day and when they are gon am not able to give an account of sixe words that was sayd, and many times could bee soe much better pleased with the Entertainment my own thoughts give me, that tis all I can doe to bee soe civill as not to let them see they trouble mee, this may bee your disease.¹⁷⁹

Although there is an echo of melancholy in her expression (her preference for solitude and immersion in her own thoughts for example) it is also discernible that she took some comfort from thinking of him. Her thoughts could not be disturbed, nor her aspirations sullied with negative connotations; therefore she was able to reach points of salvation.¹⁸⁰ Although unable to stop herself facing realism and the supposed consequences of their union, ('You undoe mee by but dreaming how happy wee might have bin, when I consider how farr wee are from it in reality. Alasse, how can you talk of deffeyeing fortune, noe body lives without it and therefore why should you imagin you could.') she nevertheless allowed herself to believe that in the end their faith would prevail and they would be married; 'I would not live though, if

¹⁷⁷ Parker, 17th/18th December 1653, Letter 50, p. 161.

¹⁷⁸ Parker, 23rd/24th July 1653, Letter 31, p. 118.

¹⁷⁹ Parker, 22nd/23rd October 1653, Letter 46, p. 150.

¹⁸⁰ See Chapter 5 for more on the subject of melancholy.

I had not some hope left that a little time may breed great Alterations, and that tis possible wee may see an End of our misfortunes.’¹⁸¹

A decade later, Lydia and Samuel DuGard also faced difficulties in keeping their relationship a secret. As first cousins, they feared that their romance would be frowned upon by their family. As Lydia was an orphan, their worries arose chiefly from the anticipation of how Samuel’s father, Thomas DuGard, would react. As Nancy Taylor points out, as first cousins or ‘cousins german’ there was no legal impediment to their marriage, as such marriages had been legal since 1536; however there was still sensitivity over the issue, as even in the 1670s people recorded concerns over such unions.¹⁸² Samuel DuGard felt so strongly about the potential reaction of his kin that he was moved to write *The Marriages of Cousin Germans, Vindicated from the Censures of Unlawfulnesses, and Inexpediency*, which was published in 1793, the year after he married Lydia.¹⁸³ It is clear from his work that the opinion of his father was of utmost importance to him, as well as the consideration of his friends and neighbours. It was in this context that Lydia and Samuel conducted their courtship, which began when she was fifteen, and he twenty two.

Lydia joined Samuel’s family home sometime between 1662 and 1665. As an orphan she had spent time in the houses of various relatives from the age of 11. From 1661, Samuel was in Trinity College Oxford, thus he and Lydia did not live in the same house. Since their only sustainable contact was through their correspondence, they developed their feelings through their writing. Lydia was anxious that his family would guess of the relationship that was blossoming through their letters. ‘I find I can’t have the same privacy I had there [in Coventry], and besids here are those that do as good as tel me they suspect the truth’, she wrote in November 1667.¹⁸⁴ A few months later in January 1668, she confided to Samuel that his stepmother Mary knew of their love, but had warned her that Thomas would not

¹⁸¹ Parker, 25th/26th June 1653, Letter 27, p109; Parker, 26th November 1653, Letter 47, p154.

¹⁸² Taylor, p.14. She gives the example of Sir John Bramston who expressed nervousness when his daughter married her first cousin; see Lord Braybrooke ed., *The Autobiography of Sir John Bramston*, Camden Society, o.s. 32 (London: John Bowyer Nichols and Sons, 1845), pp.105, 348.

¹⁸³ Samuel DuGard, *The Marriages of Cousin Germans, Vindicated from the Censures of Unlawfulnesses, and Inexpediency*, (Oxford: Hen Hall, 1673). An edition of this work can be found in Taylor’s edition of Lydia’s letters.

¹⁸⁴ Taylor, Barford, 17th November 1666, Letter 4, p. 38.

be pleased.¹⁸⁵ To their minds this strengthened the necessity of their secrecy, even though it was difficult. Although Lydia never wrote with overt frustration, the sadness they occasionally felt was referred to. ‘You say you are sometimes melancholy that, though you love me much, yet you can shew it only in words’ was as frank and resigned a statement as Lydia deigned to make.¹⁸⁶ They appeared to have a complete faith that they would be married at some point, and were aware that it was a combination of their respective circumstances which kept their married life at bay.¹⁸⁷

The courtships of Lydia and Samuel DuGard, and Dorothy Osborne and William Temple may both have been conducted in near total secrecy, with only a few trusted souls in their confidence, but the way in which each couple handled the anxiety was different. We can see from the quotations above that both Dorothy and Lydia were able to converse about their various suitors with their true loves, and to some extent even make light of the notion of marriage to another. However, whilst Lydia and Samuel seem to be comfortable in their jesting, there was occasionally a notable tension in Dorothy’s writing. Whereas Lydia and Samuel were able to maintain their optimistic outlook throughout their courtship, Dorothy’s relationship with William came under regular threat. The cause for this may have been due to the differing reasons why each courtship was clandestine. Lydia and Samuel’s fear of how Thomas DuGard would react was mainly in the hypothetical realm; they feared his disapproval, but could not be certain of how he would respond. Taylor makes reference to the lack of open confrontation reported in their letters, and how they were keen not to draw attention to themselves. Dorothy and William, by contrast, were in no doubt of how their families would see their union, and Dorothy was under the added pressure of the obligation to make a good financial match. Although they did not actively court hostility from their kin, it was frequently mentioned in Dorothy’s letters, especially with regards to her brother Henry. In addition to this, what Robbie Glen describes as ‘the specter of discovery and any resulting publicity’ weighed heavily upon the pair.¹⁸⁸ The resulting repercussions of their affair becoming public knowledge would have had far bigger consequences than the

¹⁸⁵ Taylor, Barford, 28th January 1668, Letter 11, p. 54.

¹⁸⁶ Taylor, Worcester, 16th January 1671, Letter 22, p.86.

¹⁸⁷ See for example Taylor, Barford, February/March 1672, Letter 29, p. 100 when Lydia referred to the problems surrounding her guardianship and inheritance.

¹⁸⁸ Glen, ‘Lines of Affection’, p. 59.

unclinking of Lydia and Samuel's relationship, which again could be a factor in the increased arguments and anxiety in Dorothy's letters.

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This chapter has analysed various aspects of courtship apparent in letter writing. Rituals of courtship have been examined, from the very foundations of matchmaking, to the epistles sent at various stages of the relationship. Through these letters we can see the developments of the courting process; what was expected of each other, the first tentative expressions of love, and the more passionate displays later on. So much of what has been looked at in the history of courtship focuses on the legal aspects, or the financial negotiations of marriage. By using letters as source material, we are able to flesh out these relationships and look at the voices created by the two people involved. Dorothy Osborne has been quoted on her knowledge of literature and her forbidden relationship, but more infrequently on her powerful illustrations of love and marriage. Isabella Strutt has much to offer also in her courtship letters, particularly as we also have the letters of her partner Joseph. By using these letters, and those of Thomas Greene, we find that the language of love was very much alive in this period and that it was not all on one level. There were various points of intensity and concentration, with different tones and pitches. In whatever way people chose to express themselves, however, the common unification in the letters studied in this chapter is that they were heartfelt, and sincerely written. The chapter has also discussed the lows of courtship, from family interference to unrequited love. For some couples, the pain of courtship provided them with a chance to prove how strong their relationship was, but the turbulence of their emotions is evident in their words. The tenacity of Anne Graham and Thomas Greene is evident in their letters, even when, with the benefit of hindsight, it is apparent they would not be successfully united with their loves. Even when love was found to be unreturned, the optimism of the human spirit was to be found.

Chapter 4

The Hand of Friendship

‘A friend is an eye, a heart, a tongue, a hand at all distances. True friends are all the world to one another.’¹ So wrote Catherine Hutton in the late eighteenth century. As an avid letter writer and someone who thrived from creating and maintaining strong friendships, it may be assumed that her view was a salient one. Letter writing, especially for those women who lived in isolation, whether geographically or physically, provided an outlet for their need for human contact, a lifeline for those whose voices would otherwise not be heard. This is not to argue that all letters written were by melancholic old spinsters - and we know this is certainly not the case - but rather that letter writing was an act able draw women together, even when circumstances and events meant they could not maintain friendships in the flesh. A poignant letter from Lady Dorothy Ashley to Jane Stringer contained words which summarised perceptibly how her relationships had changed since she had become a mother. She stated; ‘being I find frinds are not to be had; though which doe all things to purchass them in the world; and can not make one; haveing left many; that I shall never see againe, for now I have so many children.’² The implication here is that since she was committed to doing the very best for her children, she was unable to socialise or travel as she once used to. Whilst she did admit that she felt some constraints in only being able to converse by pen and paper (‘I am sure if ever I should have the happiness to see your Dear Ladyship; and to discourse, freely with you, that that happieness would take away all anxietie;’) Dorothy obviously took some comfort from being able to divulge her emotions through the medium of writing to somebody she trusted would understand; perhaps undergoing a cathartic experience?³

Amy M. Froide has analysed the concept of what she has termed ‘Surrogate Kinship’.⁴ She identifies this idea as single women with no female kin reaching out

¹ Catherine Hutton, *Catherine Hutton and Friends*, p. 4, in Bridget Hill, *Women Alone, Spinsters in England 1660 -1800* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 74.

² Lady Dorothy Ashley to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/34.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Amy M. Froide, *Never Married; Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 71.

to each other and even living together if necessary. By fostering these relationships they were able to build the foundations of a potential family sphere and therefore create surrogate kin.⁵ Froide concentrates her views on women living together and the contents of their wills in order to assess the rapport of her subjects, but David Cressy points out the importance of letter writing in disclosing how strong the ties of kinship were. He affirms that ‘family letters in particular reveal the operation of a kinship system much more dense, demanding, potent and wide ranging than anything glimpsed in Ralph Josselin’s diary or among the probate records of Terling.’⁶ Froide and Cressy both comment upon kinship, or the lack of it, in the context of those who were related to one another but, as Cressy advises, could we not extend its meaning to include those bonds between women who may not have necessarily been connected by birth or marriage, but in some cases were the nearest thing to a family each other had? Alan Bray supports this notion by stating that kinship should not be constrained to those who were bound by blood, but also by promise and as the consequence of human agency.⁷ Keith Thomas notes that marriage could provoke a shift in gestures of friendship, as men and women cancelled bonds of platonic friendship in favour of the bonds of marriage.⁸ Could it be that women out of wedlock, whether they are spinsters, courting or widowed, sought to maintain bonds with other women in order to replace the natural bond they initiated through marriage? Occasionally, the marriage of a friend could re-instigate a lapsed friendship due to the shift in relationship status; Cassandra Brydges wrote to an anonymous correspondent seeking to renew their friendship, since she had heard news ‘from a distant hand of the confirmation of your wedding, which if true justly challenges my best wishes for your happiness’.⁹ She confessed that she had been ‘often endeavouring to renew a corispondance you once offered me with, but my fears of being too troublesome still prevented me’.¹⁰ It would appear that her friend’s marriage had spurred Cassandra on into re-establishing her communication, perhaps

⁵For more on the topic of never married women’s relationships with their kin and acquaintances see Amy M. Froide, *Never Married; Singlewomen in Early Modern England*, Chapter 3.

⁶ David Cressy, ‘Kinship and Kin interaction in Early Modern England’, *Past and Present*, No. 113 (Nov. 1986), p. 43-4.

⁷ Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 214.

⁸ Keith Thomas, *The Ends of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 212.

⁹O’Day, Letter A6, p.334 .

¹⁰ Ibid.

reminding her of her own unmarried status, therefore enticing her to strengthen bonds with her acquaintances, married or not.

The question of friendship, what it is, whether it has different values for different-sex and same-sex associations, and how we define a 'friend' has produced some thought provoking and probing studies in the last decade. Alan Bray's *The Friend* has provided ground breaking analysis into the world of same-sex relationships, through his thorough and admirable knowledge of funeral monuments dedicated to celebrating friendships. His work, which encompasses the period from the middle ages to the Victorian era, seeks to dispel the view held by historians such as Peter Laslett, Alan Macfarlane and Lawrence Stone that kinship, and thus friendship, only resides in the nuclear family. Bray was successful in his mission and was highly aware that his findings would receive a 'stormy welcome'.¹¹ Although sodomy and male physical intimacy are covered, his arguments for the case of kinship, sworn brotherhood and the body in regards to friendship are realised without *unnecessary* homoeroticism, allowing platonic male friendship to be at the forefront of his argument. What is lacking overall in his work is an analysis of the complexities of women's friendships throughout the centuries. Women make only sporadic appearances in his book, until we embark upon Chapter Six, where they are covered in more depth. This, Bray asserts, is down to the more forthcoming presence of women in the historical record, and he therefore includes their stories as he finds them. It could be argued that if Bray looked to letters for evidence of the friendships between women (as he did to some extent for men) then he may have found a more bountiful source from which to work from.¹²

The angle from which Bray examines female friendships is similar to that of how he tackles the male; through the uniting of women by promises and deep intimacy, thus hinting that for close female friendships there lay an undercurrent of homoerotic love. The work of historians such as Valerie Traub is crucial here to understanding the boundaries between what constitutes the move from friendship

¹¹ Bray, *The Friend*, p. 307.

¹² It should be explained, however, that Bray uses letters more as objects of intimacy between men, and the physical existence of them (and in particular whether they were self-written) is the signifier of their friendships, not especially what is written within them. See Bray, *The Friend*, p. 159-64.

into lesbianism.¹³ She asserts that one of her aims in her work has been to ‘chart changes that occurred in the representation of female bodies and bonds over the course of the seventeenth century.’¹⁴ Whilst I do not seek to add to the debate on lesbianism, or the movement from innocent friendship into the problematic definitions of female intimacy, I, like Traub, hope to track the changes of female friendship, though in my case it will be through rhetorical shifts in the way women conversed through letter writing in the early modern period. These shifts can be attributed to the alteration of how friendship was viewed from the middle ages into the early modern period. The movement from faithful, loyal yet formal friendship, into that which also served to display affection and the act of confiding was reflected in women’s letter writing. Historians such as Lorna Hutson and James Daybell have accredited the rise of humanism as a concept which affected the meaning of friendship as a concept.¹⁵ Julie Crawford has concluded in her work on women’s secretaries that in some instances, female same-sex relationships were the most enduring and reliable form of friendship, with the emphasis on secret keeping and counselling.¹⁶ Her work on women’s secretaries has argued for recognition of the intimate, constant and faithful structure that same-sex secretarial services offered. Women had a gendered sculpted role to offer, and were thus understood in these terms.¹⁷ Yet even where there was no sculpted, professional alliance between women, friendships still progressed forward. The uniqueness of the early modern friendship model has been commented upon by Keith Thomas who maintains that there ‘was an emergence into public view of a type of relationship which differed from these older kinds of alliance in purporting to be based wholly on mutual sympathy, and cherished for its own sake rather than for its practical advantages.’¹⁸

¹³ For more on same sex relationships and the blossoming of female relationships through letter writing and other forms of literature, see Harriette Andreadism, ‘Re-Configuring Early Modern Friendship: Katherine Philips and Homoerotic Desire’, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Summer 2006), p. 523-43 and ‘Transgendered Perspectives on Premodern Sexualities’, *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Summer 2006), p585-96; Valerie Traub, ‘The (in)significance of ‘lesbian’ desire in Early Modern England’, in Susan Zimmerman, *Erotic Politics; Desire on the Renaissance Stage* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 150-69.

¹⁴ Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) p. 150-169.

¹⁵ Lorna Hutson, *The Usurer’s Daughter* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) p. 2-3; James Daybell, *Women Letter Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) p. 259.

¹⁶ Julie Crawford, ‘Women’s Secretaries’, in Vin Nardizzi, Stephen Guy-Bray and Will Stockton eds *Queer Renaissance Historiography; Backward Gaze* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) p. 114.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 112-4, 126.

¹⁸ Thomas, *Ends of Life*, p. 193.

The transition from friendships that were based in the nuclear family to those who included wider kin and associates impacted not only upon the construction, but also the content of the letter. A letter from Anne Newdigate to Lady Gray is characterised by the use of deferential language and a self awareness that ensures she uses conventions which would have been expected of her; this however projects a stilted air.¹⁹ When compared to the letters Katherine Fitz-Walter sent Jane Stringer in the 1680s, we can see how the style has changed. While polite conventions were still adhered to, the letter became less constrained and designed to contain all that the reader wished to say. This may have been because as Daybell acknowledges, women originally considered letters to be unsuitable for the catering of all their requirements, preferring to send some of the message at least by oral communication in order to increase intimacy.²⁰ I would argue that over the course of seventeenth century, women were increasingly able to find this intimacy through their letters to one another. Their ability to feel more at ease with their compositions enabled them to write with more honesty (though naturally there was some influence from popular literature of that period) and articulate their emotions in a way which was acceptable to both writer and reader. Rigid rules and conventions were cast aside, and plainly written language was adopted.²¹ Perhaps the adjustment to an easier style of handwriting also contributed to the confidence of women in their writing; Susan Whyman has noted that the italic hand developed into the round hand, enabling women to gain epistolary literacy.²² Perhaps this had a psychological effect on the women who began to use a clearer script; if women were able to physically improve the appearance of their letters, perhaps the content was enhanced on an emotional level, and a more informal hand led to more informal prose.

One aim of this chapter is to ascertain whether it is possible to break down friendship into its basic essence, which is two people reaching out to each other for comfort and enjoyment. Interesting and invigorating as it is to learn of the political, kin, patronage and same sex relationships that social and literary historians have commented upon, it is no less academic to show that the simplest friendships could

¹⁹ Anne Newdigate to Lady Gray, WCRO, CR 136 B306. See for example her use of terms such as 'Your worthiest selfe' and 'wth the presentation of my service to yor dearest selfe do humbly take my leave', and the effect they have on the overall tone of the letter.

²⁰ Daybell, *Women Letter Writers*, p. 37.

²¹ Susan E. Whyman, *The Pen and the People; English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 17.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 27.

also be the deepest, the most endearing, and sometimes the most devastating. I do not seek to emphasise same-sex erotic love and physical intimacy, but rather am conscious of the platonic friendships that appear in women's letter writing. When analysing the bonds of friendship between women (and in one case a man and woman) in this chapter it is clear that there are some conventions and rhetorical mechanisms at use, and as Daybell points out these skills are capable of 'engendering friendships, not merely mobilizing existing networks...Women's conducting of correspondence was central to oiling the wheels of kinship and patronage networks, and in cultivating useful contacts that could be called upon for future assistance.'²³ Daybell supports his view with reference to a chapter of his book that deals with letters of petition. In these types of letters there would have been an agenda of significant purpose. Yet in more cordial everyday epistles women sent to each other also lay agendas; whether it was the maintenance of a friendship, an apology for wrongdoing, a way to alleviate loneliness, or to deepen the bonds between acquaintances. The simple action of putting pen to paper and writing a note to a friend could resuscitate an ailing friendship, or enhance a healthy one. As Thomas acknowledges, in the early modern period, 'an individual would flounder without a network of supporters; a faithful friend was a strong defence.'²⁴

Representations of Friendship

Connections across Boundaries; Male and Female Correspondence

Servants, whilst perhaps not sharing a status equal to that of their master or mistress, could by virtue of their close connection become a friend or confidante. There is some ambiguity as to what extent the relationship between those of an unequal status in the household could share a true friendship in the early modern period, to the extent that even contemporary writers such as Angel Day appeared to have trouble accommodating a clear definition. In his 1592 edition of *The English Secretorie*, he was adamant that 'the limits of Friendship... are streight, and there can bee no

²³Daybell, *Women Letter Writers*), p. 259.

²⁴ Thomas, *Ends of Life*, p. 192.

Friendshippe where an inequality remaineth.²⁵ However in his 1599 edition, he attempted to rectify his earlier observations, perhaps in acknowledgement of the problems of the rigidity and unyielding nature of his comments. He admitted the difficulty that arises from trying to place boundaries on the association of master and secretary, and asked ‘[M]aie not our Secretorie as well as any other, merit nevertheless in the place of service at the hands of his Lord or master, the name of a Friend?’²⁶ Day was theorising a convenient arrangement whereby, as Alan Stewart suggests, Day was able to claim ‘that the usual system of friendship can be ignored and social unequals bound in a service relationship can be friends, because the patron would not let anyone in such a position of proximity unless he *were* a friend.’²⁷

Whilst the logic of Day’s argument does not sit easily with Stewart in the realm of secretary/ master dynamics, I would argue that possibly his reasoning could be applied to the relationship between servants and mistresses. I do not seek to presume that the association between them equates naturally to one normal friendship, but that in certain instances there can be enough of a rapport to establish a closer connection. Thomas has alluded to the recognition of ‘lopsided friendship’ whereby a perfect friendship in true definition cannot be attained because of the inequality of the people involved.²⁸ The assumption that the bond has to be horizontal, not vertical, and that the most necessary qualification for perfect friendship was social equality, meant that even affectionate relations between a servant and a mistress could be described as friendship in its truest form.²⁹ In fact the inference that a servant and mistress could have a deep bond is doubly problematic if we consider the proposal that as the sexes were not equal, again there was reason to doubt sincerity.³⁰ Stewart has also highlighted the complexities of the male/female contact, especially where the woman occupied the higher status. He refers to the Renaissance literature, taking Shakespeare as one source, which contained many

²⁵ Angel Day, *The English Secretorie* (1592), STC (2nd ed.) 6402, consulted on JISC Historic Books, p.118.

²⁶ Angel Day, *The English Secretorie* (1599), STC (2nd ed.) 6404, consulted on JISC Historic Books, p. 112.

²⁷ Alan Stewart, *Close Readers; Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 175-6

²⁸ Thomas, *Ends of Life*, p. 190, 196. See also Julian A. Pitt -Rivers, *The People of the Sierra* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 140.

²⁹ Thomas, *Ends of Life*, p. 196.

³⁰ There are however instances of incredibly deep, spiritual friendships between men and women, for example John Evelyn and Margaret Godolphin; see Frances Harris *Transformations of Love; The Friendship of John Evelyn and Margaret Godolphin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

women who had male servants or secretaries, and the suspicion which their dealings aroused, corroborating his assertions with the example of Elinor and her male secretary in George Gascoine's *A Hundredth sundrie Flowres bounde up in one small Poesie*.³¹ The implied intimate, sexual relationship between Elinor and her secretary may serve to fuel any assumptions that female mistresses and male servants were unable to engage in a platonic or professional manner, but as I shall argue below, this cannot be seen as an all encompassing paradigm.

Anne Newdigate fostered a familiar relationship with her male deputy steward William Henshawe. He had been connected to the Newdigate family for many years, being the nephew of William Whitehall, the Newdigate's steward. Whitehall was held in high regard and was involved in many of the family's legal and financial decisions. After Anne's husband John died, Whitehall became instrumental in aiding Anne's successful management of her estate and family, and was named as chief executor of her will.³² His nephew Henshawe was well placed to be of use to Anne after John died and the four letters surviving from her addressed to him display an affiliation which was much deeper than a mere servant/mistress relationship.³³

Vivienne Larminie, through her extensive work on the Newdigate dynasty, has noted that in the correspondence between Anne and William Henshawe, 'there emerges most strikingly that subtle combination of piety, humanity, determination and habit of command, together with a clear grasp of the way the world worked.'³⁴ The tone Anne used when writing to William was markedly different to that of the letters she wrote to other men when she needed assistance in securing her family's future.³⁵ Her style of writing in the letters to William had a more informal air, was

³¹ Alan Stewart, 'Gelding Gascoine', in Constance C. Relihan and Goran V. Stanivukovic eds. *Prose Fiction and Early Modern Sexualities in England 1570- 1640* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

³² Vivienne Larminie, 'Newdigate, Anne, Lady Newdigate (1574-1618)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn. 2007, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/52768>. For more on William Whitehall's duty to the Newdigates see Vivienne Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture: The Seventeenth-Century Newdigates of Arbury and Their World* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995) pp. 10-1, 14, 16, 34-6, 38- 40, 42-3, 48, 50, 55, 68, 74, 115, 133-6, 182.

³³ Although Anne Newdigate is used as an example here, her family background is discussed in more depth in Chapter 6.

³⁴ Vivienne Larminie, 'Fighting for Family in a Patronage Society: the Epistolary Armoury of Anne Newdigate (1574-1618)', in James Daybell, *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 105.

³⁵ See Chapter 6 of this thesis.

freer of conventional restraint and had a more fluid style. In these letters she did not sound as if she was following a pattern or a model; instead her prose is far more natural and had a more relaxed quality to it. Her salutation was 'Good Willi', displaying her affection for him, and she would end her missives with the pleasant 'Yor Mistress and friend.'³⁶ Larminie has noted that Anne showed a sense of intimacy towards William, and that her manner was generous, without needing to flatter him.³⁷ There certainly does not appear to be any form of insincerity among her words, and she appeared happy to take William into her confidence about various matters.

One of these issues was her failing health. Anne died in early 1618, but had been suffering from an illness which was discernible from a swelling in her leg. During October-November 1617, the period which her letters to William encompass, she made numerous references to her painful leg, and confessed in the first letter 'I am much trobled with a swelled leg and so fearefull least it should breake that it makes me the worse'.³⁸ The following month it appeared her health had deteriorated and the misery she felt due to her weakened leg had a detrimental effect on her general health; 'I was so ill upon thursday, that I could not write to you and am not much better at this time; my legg much troubling me although little pain'. She continued that there was scant point in asking for medical assistance or advice, and 'it is to no purposse to troble Mr Mathias about it; unless he sawe the manner of it; for I dare applye nothings unless I had his presence.'³⁹ Perhaps the most chilling indication of the state of her wellbeing was when she had few words to describe it; 'my legg I knowe not what to saye of it or do to it.'⁴⁰ Whether she wrote of her ailment to seek reassurance, or just to keep William informed of her general health, the fact that she did so revealed that she was comfortable about speaking to him about her personal matters. One may argue that there is no great surprise in this, since he was privy to other information of a private sort, but it is likely that Anne would not have wanted to conceal anything from William which may have affected their relationship, both on a professional and a more friendly level.

³⁶ Anne Newdigate to William Henshawe, 22nd November 1617, Arbury, WCRO, CR 136 B316

³⁷ Larminie, *Epistolary Armour*, p. 105.

³⁸ Anne Newdigate to William Henshawe, 25th October 1617, WCRO, CR 136 B314.

³⁹ Anne Newdigate to William Henshawe, 26nd November 1617, Arbury, WCRO, CR 136 B316.

⁴⁰ Anne Newdigate to William Henshawe, 29th November 1617, Arbury, WCRO, CR 136 B317.

Anne also entrusted William with various messages to be delivered, and tasks to be carried out. This may be an obvious thing to deduce since he was her deputy steward, but in her writing she did not simply bark instructions at him, or purely list jobs he had to undertake. She had confidence he would relay any messages faithfully, and this we glimpse the social networking that she was still so patently good at. She asked ‘I pray you tell Mr Reede and commend my love to him’ and when asking him to pass on her regards to Mr Rich, confided in him some detailed information on Rich’s legal matters; ‘he purposed to have searched for Mr Dorringtons will but now let him knowe that he neede not troble himself for Sr Hen Slyngishly hath already searched the office of testamenst for that purposes and finds he hath made his wife his Executirx [and] appoints his Brother to assist hir’.⁴¹ Yet perhaps it was in the sentiments she expressed about those closer to William that we can best judge the closeness between the two. She asked him to ‘comend me to your sister’, and appeared to be on cordial terms with her as she discussed the sending of some lace for a ruffle.⁴² She also sent her respects to William Whitehall, since ‘yor pore uncle hath bin held with long fit, in great extreamety of pain’.⁴³ Her esteem for William himself was most poignantly highlighted in a sentence which showed affection not only from herself, but also from her offspring; ‘I hope you will not now be long from home; God send us a comfortable meeting al my deare children are well I humbly thank God and commend their loves to you.’⁴⁴ Her words are all the more touching when we consider that Anne was only a few months from death. While their friendship is not unique in the sense that it is between a servant and their employer, it is perhaps a little less usual to see a steward and mistress enjoy such a platonic but nevertheless cherished camaraderie. It is clear that a sense of hierarchy had been established between them, yet the lines were not solid and their working relationship probably benefitted from the warm alliance connecting them.

This type of connection was not atypical to Anne. She fostered other alliances in the opposite social spectrum by conversing with some of the leading men at court. The chief contact for Anne, and indeed all the Newdigates, at court was Sir William Knollys. In 1596 Queen Elizabeth had appointed him comptroller of the

⁴¹ Anne Newdigate to William Henshawe, 22nd November 1617, Arbury, WCRO, CR 136 B316.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Anne Newdigate to William Henshawe, 25th October 1617, WCRO, CR 136 B314.

⁴⁴ Anne Newdigate to William Henshawe, 26th November 1617, Arbury, WCRO, CR 136 B316.

household and a privy councillor, and furthermore named him Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire and Berkshire.⁴⁵ The connection with Anne's family had flourished over the years -William had been a long term friend of Anne's father Sir Edward Fitton, addressing him in one letter as 'my verye lovyne frend Sr Edward Fytton' and reassuring him that 'whensoever eny occasion shall be offered wher-in I may stand you in stead I will never ffayle to use my uttermost power.'⁴⁶ This deep promise of solidarity and friendship was to spill into the next generation in a most poignant way. William clearly had a high regard for Anne, starting many of his letters with the affectionate 'Fayre gossepp'.⁴⁷ In one early letter he left her in no doubt as to how he saw their friendship; 'to you and yours I desire neyther to be head nor ffote but that in equal proportion where frendshipp ys like to contynew surest and longest, and what ys deere to you ys deerest to me.'⁴⁸ To Mary Fitton he professed his profound devotion. Trapped in a marriage to an older woman, he has been described as having 'chafed at the chain that prevented his marriage to a younger and fairer spouse.'⁴⁹ It has been documented that the younger and fairer spouse of his choice would have been Anne's sister.⁵⁰ He therefore used Anne as a confidante, documenting his hopes that he will one day be wed to Mary and be able to call Anne his 'Honorable Syster...

⁴⁵ Victor Stater, 'Knollys, William, first earl of Banbury (c.1545–1632)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn., Oct 2007 <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15760>.

⁴⁶ Lady Newdegate-Newdigate ed., *Gossip from a Muniment Room; being passages in the lives of Anne and Mary Fitton, 1574 to 1618* (London: D. Nutt, 1898), p. 8-9.

⁴⁷ For more information on gossip through the last four centuries, see Roger Wilkes, *Scandal: A Scurrilous History of Gossip* (London: Atlantic, 2002). For discussions of the term 'gossip' and its place in society, see Christina Scott, 'Gossip', *Agenda*, No. 17 (1993); James Daybell, 'The News and Intelligence Networks of Elizabeth Talbot', *Women and Politics in Early Modern England* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), which also gives an account of male gossips in the early modern period and Henry Lanz, 'Metaphysics of Gossip', *International Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 46 No.4 (July 1936). For an analysis of the purposes behind gossip mongering see Robert Paine 'What is Gossip About? An Alternative Hypothesis' *Man*, New Series, Vol. 2, No. 2 (June 1967).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10. Their friendship also raises the issue of kinship in this period, and what it meant to families, neighbours and communities. Historians have in the main moved on from the view of Lawrence Stone that kinship ties were eroding during the early modern period (Lawrence Stone *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London: Penguin, 1977)), and have conducted research on the kinship system; see for example David Cressy, 'Kinship and Interaction in Early Modern England', *Past & Present*, No. 113 (Nov. 1986), pp.38-69; Anne Mitson, 'The Significance of Kinship Networks in the Seventeenth Century: South West Nottinghamshire', in Charles Phythian-Adams ed., *Societies, Cultures and Kinship, 1580-1850; Cultural Provinces and English Local History*, (London and New York: Leicester University Press, 1996) for a commentary of what kinship meant in parishes, incorporating dynastic families and economic links; Naomi Tadmor, *Family and Friends in Eighteenth Century England; Household, Kinship and Patronage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), particularly Chapter 4 on 'The Language of Kinship', and Will Coster, *Family and Kinship in England 1400-1850* (New York: Longman, 2001).

⁴⁹ Lady Newdegate-Newdigate ed., *Gossip from a Muniment Room*, p. 7.

⁵⁰ Vivienne Larmine, 'Fitton, Mary (bap. 1578, d. 1641)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn., Jan 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9523>.

because I desire nothing more that to have yt so.'⁵¹ He confessed that he feared that this would not happen for many years to come, as he explained; 'Hyr greatest feare ys that while the grass groeth the horse may starve and she thinketh a byrd in the bushe is worth 2 in the hand. But bothe she and I must have patience and that will bring peace at the last'⁵² William was to be ultimately rejected. His letters point to a perceived equality with Anne as he did not belittle or patronise her, and in fact used her as a sounding board for his woes. This shows a particular intimacy more commonly seen in letters between husbands and wives. By treating her as a trustworthy acquaintance and confidante, William paid Anne a great compliment. As it was so delicate a relationship she repaid the gesture carefully by not abusing his goodness when writing to him for his assistance.

Sir Richard Leveston was a different kind of correspondent, affectionate in his own way, addressing Anne as his 'deare sweet wyff,' and also looking to create better opportunities for Anne. In 1604-5, he was among those whose sought to guarantee the role of royal wet nurse for Anne. According to Lady Newdigate-Newdegate, it was a matter of some delicacy as 'a nurse would be required of rank, with other essential qualifications; the K. Phisitions were to examine and geve their opinions of ther aptness for that Charge as by tasting of ther Mylke etc.'⁵³ He hinted to her that he was not alone in feeling that she would be suited in this important position, as he cajoled her; 'alredy I can assure you that you have had very good offices don for you which shallbe continued with my best helpe.'⁵⁴ Although Anne was to be unsuccessful in securing the role, Richard had served to highlight the esteem in which she was held.

Curiously another link between Richard and Anne was that he too had a weakness where Mary was concerned. Although it is now acknowledged that they were lovers and he fathered a daughter with her, in previous years the truth surrounding the duo has provoked some debate. While Larminie asserts the affair as factual, Lady Newdigate-Newdegate, editing the letters to and from Anne shows a touching hopefulness that this 'blot upon Sir Richard's memory' cannot be the truth,

⁵¹ Lady Newdegate-Newdigate ed., *Gossip from a Muniment Room*, p. 14.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 63-4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

as it 'rests only on the MSS of Sir Peter Leycester'.⁵⁵ Furthermore she declared 'Whatever Mary Fytton may have been capable of this particular scandal seems to be quite unsubstantiated, and it is to be hoped, is untrue!'⁵⁶ What is interesting here in terms of gender stereotypes is that due to other evidence Lady Newdigate-Newdegate was quite willing to believe Mary guilty of creating turmoil and turbulence, but appeared to be unwilling to consider that 'so frank and genuine a man' could be involved in any demeaning way which could cause a slur upon his character. While she is not so ungenerous as to be blatant about it, it would appear that the popular Madonna-Whore dichotomy is in place here, and there is inclination to portray Mary as the delinquent sister and Anne as the virtuous example. In fairness to her Ladyship, it would appear she has grounds on which to base her conclusions, but the lack of blame apportioned to the men involved with Mary is striking; William Knollys was merely lovesick, while Richard Leveson was unfairly charged.

What I hope to have highlighted here is that Anne was quite comfortable conversing with men. This was something that evidently ran in the family, as Larminie points out, 'articulate women in the Newdigate circle could move skilfully in a world apparently dominated by men.'⁵⁷ This is a useful judgement to consider on different levels. Firstly we are directed towards to idea that the women in the Newdigate family were not only educated, but intelligent and able to express themselves eloquently and articulately. Secondly, to be able to move skilfully suggests that they performed artfully, and in a manner suited to their purpose. They were equipped with the necessary tools to use as and when they saw fit; to dispense advice, gently cajole, to partake in friendly gossip or harsh rebuke. Lastly the concept of the world 'allegedly dominated' by men suggests that while men were seen as the more powerful sex, women could be influential and obtain their own victories. While not looking to subvert the norm, these bright women were more than capable of holding their own, and when hard times arose (as they did for Anne) proved they could play the rhetoric game and be formidable adversaries.

⁵⁵ This may be due to her feelings of family loyalty, and the aversion to bringing scandal on her family.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁵⁷ Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture*, p. 8-9.

The Quest for Comfort

Meryvell Littleton sought consolation from a relative, rather than a close friend, after her husband had died. There are six surviving letters from her to her aunt Lady Muriel Knyvett spanning the years 1602-11, which are now housed in the British Library among the Egerton Manuscripts. The collection reveals how Meryvell took comfort in writing to Muriel and trusted her enough to share with her the trials of her widowhood. While it is possible that Meryvell took other people into her confidence, present in these letters was a tender relationship where the younger less experienced 'poore neece' sought advice from her older wiser 'good Auntt'. Meryvell gained great strength from her aunt's letters, and even though they were infrequent, they were of enough substance and sustenance to provide some relief from her burdens.

The affection Meryvell felt for Muriel was quite apparent. She liberally scattered terms of endearment such as 'dear good Auntt' throughout her epistles, and even began one of them with the more emphatic 'My evar honoured and most worthylic beloved dear Auntt.'⁵⁸ The repetition throughout the letters of her 'good' or 'dear' aunt emphasised the love and respect she held for Muriel, and in her first missive she used these expressions (or similar) six times. Although the letters were of consolation to Meryvell she was earnest in her desire to have more personal contact with her aunt. In a letter written in 1610, she began with the gratifying words, 'My onely good and loving Auntt how much rather I doth have waited upon you in person then to present my love by these lines paper cannot demonstrate.'⁵⁹ Her pronouncement of Muriel as her 'onely' good and loving aunt signalled that there were few whom she held in such high esteem, and also signified the loneliness she needed to deal with. Her feelings of isolation were hinted at elsewhere in her letters. Sometimes it was the physical company and presence of her aunt she craved as she explained, 'how much it wold have joyed me to have mett with your self, beleve it my deare Aunt, I want power to express.'⁶⁰ At one stage, she even likened it to being in confinement and claimed, 'my self was prisnoe [prisoner] here nothing

⁵⁸ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 12th February 1611, BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 129.

⁵⁹ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 29th June 1610. BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 114.

⁶⁰ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 3rd May 1602, Westminster, BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 194.

could have happened happier unto me than to have enjoyed your company.’⁶¹ Even a few lines would sometimes suffice. Meryvell displayed a sense of social anxiety when she did not hear from Muriel for some time, though she was quick and careful to dismiss it as her own unmitigating discomfort in order not to offend her aunt; ‘tho I should have bin glad to have recovered... letters from my good Auntt much sooner yet could I not misdoubt your forgetting of me. But presumed howsoever on occasions you forbore to wright. Yet you continued to love which I finde approved by your letters.’⁶² Due to the assumption that they were unable to meet, it became more imperative for Meryvell to maintain a connection with Muriel, as she added at the end of one letter; ‘I troust once in a year to hear how yow and all ye doo I have not hope of such a hapiness as meetinge with so dear friends.’⁶³

The need for Muriel as her confidante enhanced the vitality of communication, as she confessed ‘I cannot be silent unto my good Aunte of my owne Troubles’.⁶⁴ Meryvell was involved in legal matters concerning the estate of her dead husband, and it can be supposed that Muriel had been helpful in this matter, or at least had provided some direction as Meryvell told her Aunt ‘muchadoe I have had with your old frend in Attorney and his hard mesure offered me as ever was to any in my Unfortunate estate.’⁶⁵ This turbulence was due to Meryvell’s bond not only to her husband’s debts, but also ‘his fathers which he did stand bound for’.⁶⁶ She used the contact with her aunt to purge herself of doubts and anxieties. She mentioned ‘A Cais in Channcery between a bad Unkell in law of mine and me’ in June 1610, and the following year wrote in more length of the pressure she was under; ‘I am drawn by a shwt [suit] in Charncery brought by the Unkell of my deare diseased husband his wife and children who demand great matters of me.’⁶⁷ The strain took its toll on Meryvell as she worried about the cost of the suit, and it also had an impact on her health. The link with her aunt provided some balm to her

⁶¹ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 20th September (Year Unknown), London, BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 101.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 16th June 1603, Westminster, BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 300.

⁶⁴ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 3rd May 1602, Westminster, BL Br. Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 194.

⁶⁵ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 16th June 1603, Westminster, BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 300.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 12th February 1611, BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 129.

situation and lessened her sense of solitude, as she felt there was somebody to provide support and guidance for the duration of her troubles.

Furthermore the religious devotion shared by Meryvell and Muriel was another component in the strong bond between them, and the frequent allusions to the 'Allmighty' showed the magnitude of their collective faith. The combination of her Aunt's love and God's favour was of extreme comfort to Meryvell, and she admitted in her first letter 'this performed [the undertaking of a legal settlement] your poore neece will hope bie the favour of the Allmighty God to repare his... estate and [my] poore childrens'.⁶⁸ Taking her aunt and God as points of salvation, Meryvell was able to cope with what lay ahead. The references to God in her letters were a way for Meryvell to thank her aunt for listening and responding to her. Not only did she pray to God for herself but also asked him to take Muriel into his consideration. She ended one letter with the hopeful and devout words; 'I leve yow unto his mercifull protection who send unto you and all your Happiness in this world and in the end Joyes evar lasting once again.'⁶⁹ When they had no hope of meeting she sought solace in her faith, and looked to extend this to her aunt. So ardent was she in her devotion that it is easy to be touched by her words; 'yet I will live in hope of that comfort as once again to meet in this world God grant it to me for his Holy Mercy Sake. And to us and all our Grace. Truly to searve and Honor His Holy Name Amen Amen.'⁷⁰ The simple act of reaching out to her aunt through letter writing provided an outlet for Meryvell's fears, and she was able to create her own significant trinity of herself, her aunt and God in order to expel her difficulties without having a breakdown. In this sense the connection between herself and Muriel was straightforward, but still of ultimate essentiality.

Meryvell Littleton was one of a number of women in this period showing religious devotion in their writing. As discussed in Chapter 6, Joan Barrington's deep religious beliefs and pivotal spiritual role in her family and wider community are evident in her letters. Elizabeth Isham's (1608-1654) spiritual autobiography *My Book of Remembrance* revealed the choice she made to devote her life to God after

⁶⁸ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 3rd May 1602, Westminster, BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 194.

⁶⁹ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 16th June 1603, Westminster, BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 300.

⁷⁰ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 29th June 1610, BL, Eg. MS, 2714, fol. 114.

a failed match with John Dryden, an event which played a prominent part in her writing. Agnes Beaumont (1652-1720) was another religious autobiographer, perhaps notable for the fact that she was brought up in a family of non-conformists, and then joined a congregation of John Bunyan, with whom she was accused of having an illicit affair. Her autobiography, *The Narrative of the Persecution of Agnes Beaumont*, contained her account of the events surrounding this slur, as she sought to defend her honour.⁷¹

Friendships Discussed in Letters

It is possible to analyse relationships between women not only through the letters they wrote to each other, but also through the discussions of third parties. Dorothy Osborne's letters to William Temple, in which she regularly mentioned her close friends and acquaintances, are an excellent example. In particular, the relationship between Dorothy and Lady Diana Rich is the most useful for analysis. Diana was the daughter of Henry Rich, Lord Holland, and one of Dorothy's dearest friends. She had four sisters, who also cropped up in Dorothy's letters, and remained unmarried throughout her life. The intimate friendship she enjoyed with Dorothy was evident in the letters to William, not only in what she said but in the mere fact that William had also become acquainted with Diana. She mentioned in a letter to him, 'twere very well that you took some care to make my Lady R. your freind, and oblige her by your Civiltys to believe that you were sencible of the favour was offer'd you', and the obvious care and regard she had for her companion shone through her correspondence.⁷²

⁷¹ For more on Elizabeth Isham, see Isaac Stephens, 'The Courtship and Singlehood of Elizabeth Isham, 1630-1634', *The Historical Journal* Vol. 51, No. 1 (2008) pp. 1-25; Isaac Stephens 'Confessional Identity in Early Stuart England; The "Prayer Book Puritanism" of Elizabeth Isham', *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (January 2011), pp. 24-47; Anne Cotterill 'Fit words at the "pitt's brinke" The Achievement of Elizabeth Isham', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, Vol. 73, No. 2 (June 2010), pp. 225-48. For more on Agnes Beaumont, see Kathleen Lynch, "'Her Name Agnes": The Verification of Agnes Beaumont's Narrative Ventures', *ELH*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (Spring 2000), pp. 71-98, for discussion on what Agnes took to be the truth of her experience, and how the projection of oneself constructs their autobiographical work.

⁷² Parker, 19th/20th March 1653, Letter 13, p. 82.

Her devotion to Diana was apparent from the first mention of her. She confessed to William that she could not make certain her plans for the next few weeks as

I am ingaged to my Lady Diana Rich... whoe lyes at a Gentlewomans hard by mee for Sore Eyes that I will not leave the country till she does, she is soe much a stranger heer, and finds soe little Company, that she is glad of mine, till her Eyes will give her leave to looke out better.⁷³

She felt unable to leave Diana and had decided to take her under her wing, but instead of feeling resentment or that she had been burdened, there was an air of kindness in her writing, and it is clear that Dorothy took no trouble in her actions. She prized Diana highly as a friend and took pleasure in giving her many compliments, particularly about her beauty. Diana's beauty had been a source of conversation between Dorothy and William, for when she referred to Diana in one letter she alluded to her as the one 'who makes as you say soe many sore Eyes with looking at her.'⁷⁴ There was a reference here to the 'sore Eyes' Diana had in Dorothy's previous letter, though now the suggestion was that Diana was so attractive that she hurt the eyes of those who glanced upon her.⁷⁵ It was not only her good looks which Dorothy held in such high esteem, as she pointed out 'if I know her at all, or have any Judgment, her beauty is the least of her Exelency's.'⁷⁶ Her finest compliment was paid to her friend in her seventh letter, and shows the depth of her affection towards her;

her eyes have not the flames they have had, nor is she like (I am affrayde) to recover them heer, but were they irrecoverably lost, the beauty of her minde were Enough to make her outshine Every body Else and she would still bee courted by all that knew how to vallew her, like La belle avenugle, that was Phillip the 2^d of France his Mistresse.⁷⁷

In addition to her prettiness, Diana also may have added elegance and intelligence to her attributes, and Dorothy was keen to point these out. By using the allusion of Philip II of France and his mistress Dorothy pointed out the prestige of her friend, labelling her not only good enough for general men of their acquaintance, but indeed fit for a King's approval. Furthermore having such a charming friend could only

⁷³ Parker, 15th/16th January 1653, Letter 4, p. 64.

⁷⁴ Parker, 22nd January 1653, Letter 5, p. 66.

⁷⁵ Parker, p. 226-7 n. 10.

⁷⁶ Parker, 22nd January 1653, Letter 5, p. 66.

⁷⁷ Parker, 5th/6th February 1653, Letter 7, p. 70.

reflect well upon Dorothy, and her ability to make suitable choices in her circle of associates.

Tokens of Friendship; Reciprocal Gestures

The discussion over Diana's beauty leads us to consider the gifts given as tokens of friendship.⁷⁸ Marshall Sahlins has developed a spectrum of reciprocities and the relationship between Dorothy and Diana appears to be characterised by an amalgamation of two of the groups; 'generalized reciprocity' and 'balanced reciprocity'.⁷⁹ Sahlins characterises generalized reciprocity as 'transactions that are purely altruistic... [with an indication of] a sustained one way flow. Failure to reciprocate does not cause the giver of stuff to stop giving'.⁸⁰ 'Balanced reciprocity' refers to 'returns of commensurate worth or utility within a finite or narrow period'.⁸¹ Dorothy mentioned twice that Diana was having her portrait painted, and was planning to present one to her. She described how Diana 'intends very shortly to sitt at Lilly's for her picture for mee,' and encouraged William to share the enjoyment of visiting it as she continued, 'I give you notice on't that you may have the pleasure of seeing it sometimes whilst tis there.'⁸² The artist she mentions, Sir

⁷⁸ Paramount to the argument of the mutual giving and receiving of gifts is Marcel Mauss's theory that there is no such thing as a free gift; 'In theory they are voluntary, in reality they are given and reciprocated obligatorily'; Marcel Mauss, *The Gift; The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 3. A good starting point to understanding his views is Claude Lévi Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987). Mauss's arguments have become a main point for debates on the subject of gift giving, by those who support him, those who seek to bring other perspectives to his work, and those who wish to supplement their own theories. Examples of this include (but are not exhausted by) Jane Fair Bestor, 'Marriage Transactions in Renaissance Italy and Mauss's Essay on the Gift', *Past and Present*, No. 164 (Aug. 1999), pp. 6-46; Amy Shuman, 'Food Gifts: Ritual Exchange and the Production of Excess Meaning', *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 113, No. 450, (Autumn 2000), pp. 495-508; Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Lewis Hyde, *The Gift; Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (London: Vintage, 1999); James G. Carrier, *Gifts and Commodities: Exchange and Western Capitalism since 1700* (London: Routledge, 1995); Annette B. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley; Oxford: University of California Press, 1992). The arguments on the giving and receiving of gifts are salient here as they reinforce the image of the close relationship between Dorothy and Diana, sealing their solidarity and emphasising the connection between them; they are not merely kind gestures between friends, but part of an ongoing bond.

⁷⁹ Marshall Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics* (London: Routledge, 1974), pp 193-6; see also Chapter 4 'The Spirit of the Gift' for discussion on Mauss's work. The third basis is 'negative reciprocity', where there is an attempt to get something for nothing - for my purposes this part of the spectrum is not under discussion here, although it is likely there is evidence of it in women's letter writing.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁸² Parker, 28th/29th May 1653, Letter 23, p. 102.

Peter Lely, would paint portraits of both Dorothy and William during their lives, and was held in great esteem for his work on prominent figures. Lely finished the portrait of Diana at her brother-in-law Lord Paget's house five months later in October 1653, and again Dorothy took pride in mentioning how a picture would be drawn also for her. The significance of this gesture was highlighted by Diana's own words, as passed on by Dorothy; 'she giv's it mee she say's as the greatest testimony of her friendship to mee, for by her own rule she is past the time of haveing Pictur's taken of her.'⁸³ This was one of a number of reciprocal gestures between the pair; another striking one they had is shown at the beginning of the collection of letters - a fondness of seals to affix to letters. Diana led the way in this trend, but Dorothy was keen to take an interest too; 'She says that seal's are much in fashion, and by showeing me some that she has, has sett mee a longing for some too.'⁸⁴ So eager was she to immerse herself in this new hobby, she solicited William's help in obtaining various seals. She thanked him in one letter stating 'You have made mee soe Rich, as I am able to helpe my Neighbours,' before going onto describe her newest treasures as 'a little head cut in an Onixe... and the Dolphin... the odnesse of the figure makes the beauty of these things.' Evidently sharing this common interest would have added to discussions between Dorothy and her friends; in particular Diana, who had acquainted her with the phenomenon in the first place. Although Sahlins is quite rigid in his definitions of reciprocity, I would argue that the friendship between these two women has the essentials of both of the qualifications mentioned above. They show signs of 'balanced reciprocity' in that their exchanges were frequent and of equal measure, yet hints of 'generalized reciprocity' are also evident, as this was practised amongst close friends, with less obligation to commit to returning the gift immediately. Natalie Zemon Davis sums this up in her conclusion that for the instigators of 'generalized reciprocity', '[The return] may come soon, it may never come, but the relation between giver and receiver continues nonetheless.'⁸⁵ The relationship between Dorothy and Diana appeared to be one where, although there was an assumption that any gifts would be returned, the time scale was more fluid, and their bond between them so strong that there would be little anxiety created in the duration of reciprocity.

⁸³ Parker, 15th/16th October, 1653, Letter 45, p. 149.

⁸⁴ Parker, 22nd January 1653, Letter 5, p. 66.

⁸⁵ Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 6.

Dorothy and Diana's friendship seemed to be based very much on an equal footing. As the examples above show, both women were keen to please one another, help each other when necessary, and partake in each other's delights.⁸⁶ One other noticeable feature was Dorothy's recognition of Diana's advice and opinions which she acknowledged carefully. An example of this is shown when Diana had her portrait painted. Diana believed that once a lady was past a certain age, it became very hard to have an agreeable portrait painted of her, and as Dorothy explained 'after Eighteen shee say's there is noe face but decay's aparently, I would faine have had her Excepted such as had never bin beauty's, for my comfort, but she would not.'⁸⁷ Therefore even if this rule were true Dorothy would gladly have considered Diana to be the exemption, but Diana stuck fast to her reasoning. Her ability to do this had a profound effect on Dorothy as she mentioned it again in her following letter after sending William her picture. She implored William to 'put it in some corner where noe Ey's may finde it out but yours to whome it is only intended'.⁸⁸ While this may have been a nod to the fact that their relationship was somewhat clandestine, and therefore her picture could not have been on prominent display, there was a slight touch of vanity about her reasoning. Diana's views on the decay of beauty had made a deep imprint as Dorothy confessed, 'tis noe very good one but the best I shall ever have drawn of mee for as my Lady say's my time for Pictur's is past, and therefor I have always's refused to part with this because I was sure the next would bee a worse.'⁸⁹ In order to back up Diana's words, she remarked on her late mother's view on the subject, as 'there was never any body (that were not deformed) but were handsom to some reasonable degree, once between fowerteen and twenty.'⁹⁰ That she had given William what she felt she would never improve upon showed the strength of her regard for him, but there was also a delicate wryness to her words. While she took Diana's opinion seriously, there was playfulness in her warning to William that from now on she would appear worse to him.

Dorothy's regard for Diana even extended to the proper carrying out of smaller actions. Dorothy did not want to do anything to provoke Diana's displeasure

⁸⁶ Perhaps the apparently equal reciprocity between the two women helped them in this, echoing Mauss's argument of the obligation to not only give presents, but to reciprocate them – otherwise one risked rejecting 'the bond of alliance and commonality'. Mauss, *The Gift*, p. 13.

⁸⁷ Parker, 15th/16th October 1653, Letter 45, p. 149.

⁸⁸ Parker, 22nd/23rd October 1653, Letter 46, p. 151.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

and this was evident in the correspondence she had with William about the sending of letters and books. Although we cannot be certain how well William and Diana knew each other at this point, relations seemed amicable between them. Dorothy felt comfortable enough to lend him some books belonging to Diana, but she was careful to stress ‘they are my deare Lady Diana’s and therefore I am much concern’d that they should bee safe.’⁹¹ The borrowing of books between acquaintances highlights the fluidity of movement of gifts and articles, but for our purposes here it is the safe return of the books to Diana, along with the accompanying letter, which is of most importance.⁹² Even though they are not her own possessions, and perhaps especially because they are not, Dorothy took great pains to repeatedly remind William of the importance of the protection and careful delivery of them. After already giving him directions on where to send them, she reminded him forcefully to complete his task; ‘In sober Earnest, I know you will not think it a trouble, to let your Boy deliver those books and this inclosed letter, where it is directed for my Lady’.⁹³ It is possible that Dorothy was exerting authority through her gifts as she pressed William to pass on these possessions, even though they were not her own. By doing this she could control the circulation of the gifts, even though she played little part in the physical disposal of them.⁹⁴ She appeared quite worried that Diana would be inconvenienced by the slow recovery of the books, and also that she would not have received her letter and communications would have been halted. In this view she was unfortunately right as we learn in a letter written in the following month of April 1653;

⁹¹ Parker, 12th/13th March 1653, Letter 11, p. 77-8.

⁹² See for example Zemon Davis, *The Gift* and Natalie Zemon Davis, ‘Beyond the Market: Books as gifts in Sixteenth- Century France: The Prothero Lecture’, *Transactions of the Royal History Society*, Vol. 33 (1983), pp. 69-88; the article in particular gives an insight into how important books became as gifts in France. As well as the dedication of books and the bequeathing of books in wills, she also analyses how the personal gift of a book could create intimacy and flexibility; a book could bring pleasure as long as either the recipient or someone in their household could read. This fluidity is highlighted in the distribution of books around Dorothy’s circle of acquaintances.

⁹³ Parker, 25th March 1653, Letter 14, p. 83.

⁹⁴ This echoes Annette B. Weiner’s theory that the exchange of gifts ‘involves a power struggle in which agents seek through giving to gain control over the unique, identity-bearing possessions of others, while striving to keep their own out of circulation . . . hence the ground of their authority’. Annette B. Weiner in Jane Fair Bestor, ‘Marriage Transaction in Renaissance Italy’, pp. 18-9. Although it would be unfair to suppose that Dorothy was deliberately keeping her possessions out of circulation, and that as William was already in possession of these books it made more sense for him to pass them forward, Dorothy’s hand in the gift-giving process ensured her identity was present in these objects.

Let mee aske you if you did not send my letter... I received one from her to day full of the kindest reproaches that shee has not heard from mee this three week's. I have writ constantly to her, but I doe not soe much wonder that the rest are lost as that she seem's not to have received that which I sent to you nor the book's.⁹⁵

Although Dorothy was careful to point out that Diana used the 'kindest reproaches', it is clear that she felt some embarrassment and indignation about the situation as she was not at fault for the lack of contact between them. The tender bonds of friendship between them were not to be threatened by the inability of other people to carry out tasks on her behalf.

Dorothy patently felt loyalty towards Diana, and was not afraid to deliberate with William over some of the comments he made about her. We do not have his letters to know exactly what was said on his behalf, but there appeared to have been much debate surrounding her suitors and the possibility of her making an appropriate match. Although she was not oblivious to some of Diana's foibles (she is unable to share Diana's flawless opinion of her sister Isabella's character and quotes 'why cannot I say that she is as free from fault's as her Sister beleev's her'), she did believe that she was one of the dearest and most precious people she knew.⁹⁶ Although she was keen to see Diana wed, she considered that it would have to be to someone worthy of her and sensible of her many qualities. She professed pleasure that William had become familiar with Diana and described her as 'a woman... that one would not loose.'⁹⁷ Yet he had also made some remarks upon which she took umbrage and felt an obligation to correct him. It appeared that William had sent Dorothy a tale about Diana and one of her suitors, and though we cannot know the particulars it stirred enough zeal in Dorothy for her to have commented, 'Is it possible that she can bee indifferent to anybody, take heed of telling me such Story's. If all those Exelency's she is rich in cannot keep warme a passion without the sunshine of her Eye's, what are poor People to expect'.⁹⁸ The debate continued to the next letter she sent, as William had obviously found her observations worthy of a thoughtful reply. A need to protect himself had ignited, as Dorothy had also reflected on his character, as well as that of Diana's suitor. Dorothy, however, was keen and

⁹⁵ Parker, 14th April 1653, Letter 17, p. 88.

⁹⁶ Parker, 22nd/23rd October 1653, Letter 44, p. 144.

⁹⁷ Parker, 19th/20th March 1653, Letter 13, p. 82.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

able to eloquently defend her opinions and argued, 'I spake it very innocently and out of a great Sense how much she deserv's more then any body else. I shall take heed though, hereafter, what I write, since you are so good at raising doubts to persecute your self withal.'⁹⁹ The matter was therefore acknowledged and left at that point. Dorothy had made an earnest and successful attempt at supporting her friend, and the faithful attitude she portrayed showed the extent to which she would go to in order to defend the beliefs of both Diana and herself.

The Magnetic Force; Letters to Jane Stringer

An intriguing collection of letters which show both the simplicities and complexities of friendship through correspondence are those addressed to Jane Stringer, wife of Thomas Stringer, from c. 1670. The couple resided in Hampshire during the later decades of the seventeenth century. Thomas died in 1701, and the letters to Jane from various acquaintances continued until 1705-6. They are an eclectic mixture of epistles, some from male acquaintances and even one from her husband, but the majority are from female associates. The circles in which these ladies moved appear to have been middle to upper class, as many of their husbands have titled names. There are a few letters from Lady Sarah Cowper which serve as an interesting insight into what women of this status discussed in their letters, but the most prolific of her female pen friends were Katherine Fitz-Walter and Margaret Shaftesbury; in their letters we see how highly they regarded the bonds of friendship, and what a comfort it provided to them.¹⁰⁰ This is even more fascinating if we consider the opinion highlighted in many of the letters that Jane could be a poor correspondent, who failed to keep in regular contact, and instead seemed to keep in touch when it suited her. On more than one occasion one of her fellow writers felt it necessary to remind her of the fact they had not heard from her for a considerable length of time, and Margaret felt the need in one instance to hint at the length of time between receiving her letters; 'tho it be longe since I received yours to omit giving you thanks, yet according to the old proverb better late than never and I know not how long tis,

⁹⁹ Parker, 25th March 1653, Letter 14, p. 83.

¹⁰⁰ Margaret, Lady Shaftesbury (1627-1693), was the third wife and widow of Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury; for ease, in this thesis she is referred to as Margaret Shaftesbury.

because you date not your letter.'¹⁰¹ However, it is possible that Jane did not delay writing necessarily out of disregard for her companions, but because she led a busy lifestyle, making frequent trips with her husband, and visiting contacts. What is noticeable about the various letters in this collection is the varying relationships Jane had with each of the women, and this was dependent on how the women viewed and portrayed themselves within their epistles.

Two letters from Lady Sarah Cowper can be considered in this context for the easy fluid writing style she used, and the sense of simple and straight forward friendship they display. She wrote in a fluid torrent, letting her sentences flow and run into each other. Unlike some of Jane's other correspondents she did not exhibit any signs of self-doubt, and appeared to have a happy countenance. Her correspondence was filled with news from her town, and she wrote of various affairs of mutual acquaintances. The connection between Sarah and Jane seems to be stronger than that of Jane and some of her other pen friends, as Sarah appeared to have heard more often from Jane. She wrote, 'I am glad to hear good Mr String keeps so well this winter,' and then again 'I am glad to hear of your recovery from an illness by which your description has been much like mine.'¹⁰² Although we know from the beginning of her first letter that she has seen Jane's son and therefore may have got this information from him, the implication is that she and Jane were in fairly regular contact. Unfortunately due to the survival of only two of her letters we cannot be sure as to the extent of this. We are able to ascertain that they were in each other's physical company more often, as Sarah noted that she hoped Thomas would keep his health 'till it be seasonable for the Bath and that I may once more see him on his legs again.'¹⁰³ Her deep friendship and compassion was also shown in the closing lines of her second letter when she affirmed, 'And now I congratulate with you for the good news which comes from your Dear son, assuring you it mov'd Tears of Joy in my eies when I read what you there say of him.'¹⁰⁴ Such warm sentiments of camaraderie and the delight in sharing in her friend's pleasure signalled a close attachment between the two women.

¹⁰¹ Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 23rd February 1688, HRO, 9M73/672/31.

¹⁰² Lady Sarah Cowper to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/4; Lady Sarah Cowper to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/5.

¹⁰³ Lady Sarah Cowper to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73 672/4.

¹⁰⁴ Lady Sarah Cowper to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/5.

The letters to Jane from Katherine Fitz-Walter displayed a keen desire to maintain and enhance their friendship. There are eleven surviving letters from Katherine and they are by far the longest letters from Jane's female correspondents. They were unable to meet often due to the distance between them, though Katherine was ever hopeful that they would have been able to meet at more regular intervals. Her pleasure was palpable when she received an epistle and she was eager to share her satisfaction. This was best displayed in a letter she sent whilst Jane was in London, when she flatteringly wrote; 'I was much rejoiced to heare from you when were in my thoughts and my desires presently answered so frequent testimony of friendship being a most extrordenary obligation.'¹⁰⁵ Katherine frequently commented upon the joy of friendship and the distance between them was clearly in her mind every time she wrote, and her letters are remarkable for the expressions of gratitude she used when pressing the importance of combining letters and friendship. She commented upon the friendship between herself and the Stringers in every letter bar one, such is the esteem in which she held it. On one such occasion she concluded her letter; 'tis great satisfaction being we cannot mete to heare from you for distance of place will never alter the friendship'.¹⁰⁶ She also extended her salutations to Jane's husband Thomas, and regularly corresponded with him; 'I read Mr Stringer's letter be pleased to give my servis to him and let him know I will return an answer to his letter as soone as I can doe it efectually'.¹⁰⁷ There was a popular letter writing convention in place here, as Katherine offered her friendship towards her friend's husband, and one wonders if there could have been another one manifested here, where the recipient of a letter not only expressed their thanks for it (as was common) but also felt it necessary to flatter their companion and assure them of their appreciation and devotion. If we had the replies from Jane we would be able to see whether these sentiments were reciprocated or one sided.

Although Katherine was emphatic about her joy of their friendship, and wrote happily of news of their acquaintances, there was also a detectable anxiety in her words. It would appear that Katherine felt an underlying tension due to the fact that she could not meet often with Jane, and that even though she was sincere in her delight at the friendship, there is a feeling that she wavered in her belief that Jane

¹⁰⁵ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 3rd August 1688, HRO, 9M73/672/14.

¹⁰⁶ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 27th January 1682, HRO, 9M73/672/9.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

would pay her the same compliments. Again it is frustrating that we do not have Jane's letters to be sure of how often she responded, but it is evident in Katherine's letters that the replies were not as frequent as she could have hoped. In more than one letter she wondered whether Jane had received her last letter, as if seeking reassurance, either that the letter had gone astray and that was the reason for no reply, or if Jane had had the letter that this declaration of worry would nudge her into answering it. In three of her early letters the first line contained words such as 'I hope Dear Madam my letter came to you right,' showing her concern.¹⁰⁸

It would be understandable to regard this uneasiness as more to do with worry for the postal system, and the fear that letters had been misdirected. However, by reading all Katherine's letters closely we see that her slight anxiousness runs through many of her letters, and by putting together the threads we get a different side of the relationship. This is particularly noticeable in their later correspondence. Even though Jane did not appear to write to her frequently, when Katherine was unable to correspond because business and personal dealings kept her busy, she felt such guilt that she tried to absolve herself by way of an explanation; 'I have many times desired to right [write]...but continually vexations... have prevented me if you knew how often my thoughts has bin with you you would not think me wanting that Frindshipp I so often professe.'¹⁰⁹ It was as if Katherine was desperate to confess herself as a poor friend for not even thinking about Jane as often as she felt she should, and therefore was keen to purge herself of this failing. Her capitalisation of 'Frindshipp' also serves to emphasise the depth of her feelings. Yet it was in one of Katherine's shortest letters that the intensity of her turmoil was shown.¹¹⁰ From the terse 'Madam' with which she opened the letter, to the 'Faithfull obliged Servant' she concluded with, her tone had an acerbity to it. She began on a dejected note, claiming, 'amongst my misfortuns I canot but esteem it a very great one to lose a Frindship so much prized as yours and Mr Stringers and which I thought would not have had an End'.¹¹¹ She regaled some misfortunes that had befallen her son, before ending with 'many troubles attends me if I should not so long have delayed to know

¹⁰⁸ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 3rd July 1684, HRO, 9M73/672/10. For other examples see Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/8; Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/11.

¹⁰⁹ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 14th October 1688, HRO, 9M73/672/11.

¹¹⁰ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 24th January 1673, HRO, 9M73/672/15.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

my particular unhapyness that being of the the worst conditions to be in dout how ever I may apeare shall ever be to Mr Stringer and yourself... Your Faithfull obliged Servant.’¹¹² Yet for all her misgivings, Katherine was eager to have Jane as a friend, and it seems would put up with her unreliable letter writing in order to sustain their relationship.

If the letters of Katherine Fitz-Walter express gratitude and a sense of appreciation for the Stringer’s friendship, the letters of Margaret, third wife of the 1st Earl of Shaftesbury, display a sense of heart wrenching loneliness and seclusion. She married Anthony Ashley Cooper in 1655, and although the couple were not to have any children together, the marriage appeared to be a happy one.¹¹³ However, his death came in 1683 and through her letters to Jane we are privy to the forlorn thoughts of a widow who was obviously very secluded and unhappy. In a bittersweet acknowledgement of her desperate state she appeared aware of burdening others with her problems, as she concluded one letter, ‘I think I have bin very liberall of my pains, as you must be of your patience to reade all this scribble.’¹¹⁴ To compound the misery she felt, she frequently signed her letters with adjectives such as ‘sorroful’ and ‘afflicted’, though the term ‘faithfull’ also appeared habitually, as if to reassure her correspondent that however she may be have been feeling, her friendship would hold steady.

Her lonely feelings are evident in her letters to Jane. Bridget Hill points out that ‘single women without husbands or children stood in particular need of friends and contacts with the outside world they so seldom ventured into.’¹¹⁵ Margaret embodied this notion, as she confided to Jane; ‘I can send you noe newes, because I goe but to few places, and very rarely anybody comes to me.’¹¹⁶ The letters she wrote and received were therefore as close to the formation and sustenance of human relationships as she could get. Her anxiety at not hearing from Jane was shown in a gentle reproach as she stated, ‘I will suspend that a little [writing of her health] (before I speak of retiring into some unknown corner, upon these occasions) and

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Tim Harris, ‘Cooper, Anthony Ashley, first earl of Shaftesbury (1621–1683)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn., Jan 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6208>.

¹¹⁴ Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 21st June 1688, HRO, 9M73/672/29.

¹¹⁵ Hill, *Women Alone*, p. 161.

¹¹⁶ Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 16th June 1689, HRO, 9M73/672/32.

discourse concernedly of not hearing one word from you or any of your family.’¹¹⁷ There was a slight irony here as it would appear that Margaret herself was not a reliable correspondent, as she asked Jane to send her regards to Thomas Stringer, as ‘I being very unfit for, and loving worse, this exercise.’¹¹⁸ It is unclear whether she meant she was physically unable to write another letter (as shown in other letters she suffered from various ailments including kidney stones!) or whether she found letter writing tedious, but it is evident that she was grateful for any interaction in order to save her from her morose temperament. Her salvation from complete isolation is attributed to the communications she received through the post; her friendships upheld by the maintenance of this interaction. Margaret was well aware of this and felt it important to stress to Jane how much she prized their companionship; ‘I owe you many thanks sweet Mrs Stringer for your letters, and kindness in many respects... my disconsolate self can imagine noe plesur in this world but the kindness of frends.’¹¹⁹

The vocabulary and phrases Margaret used in her letters also revealed her dispirited state of mind. Negative adjectives such as ‘disconsolate’, ‘uneasie’ and ‘poore’ are scattered through her sentences and there is an overriding sense of bleakness in her musings. While she was able to converse in some more positive discussion, such as the marriage arrangements of some of her acquaintances and her description of Lord Ashley (‘a hopefull deserving young person’), more frequently her miserable countenance hung like a heavy shroud over her prose, letting little light and optimism through.¹²⁰ This was emphasised by her use of graphic triplicate phrasing to describe something, whether it was a personal feeling or something more generic. The spring season was deemed to be a ‘very sickly uncomfortable cold’ one, and whilst sharing her ailments deemed herself ‘poore sorrofull miserable me’.¹²¹ On one occasion Margaret surpassed herself with her illustration of her poor fortune as she explained she had ‘bin ill of divers complaints incident to an old malincolly solitary worne out carcass.’¹²² What creative and expressive imagery! However one

¹¹⁷ Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 29th June 1685, HRO, 9M73/672/27.

¹¹⁸ Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 31st December 1687, HRO, 9M73/672/28.

¹¹⁹ Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73 672/32; Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73 672/33.

¹²⁰ Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 16th January 1689, HRO, 9M73 672/32.

¹²¹ Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/29; Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/27.

¹²² Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 29th June 1685, HRO, 9M73/672/27.

may detect a sliver of black humour here as she had surely exhausted any better attempt she could have made to describe her pitiable state, and the use of the word 'carcass' made it sound as if she believed she was ready to depart this world. Again this touch of dark wit may be seen in further correspondence as she imparted her own brand of wisdom in stating 'we must sometimes good Mrs Stringer, whyle we remain in this vaile of misery, importune one another in this scribbling way.'¹²³ Although we may revert back to taking her words at face value, and believe her to be wrapped completely in a melancholic cloak, it is also feasible that, just momentarily, she was able to make a small, almost imperceptible, witticism.

Margaret, however, was not the only person who sought solace and relief from her isolation by letter writing. There is one other letter in Jane's collection which is perhaps the most distressing of all, devoid of all humour and hope, and sent with the express wish that the longed for reply will be of comfort to her. The letter is from Margaret Lawrence, Jane's sister, and contains words of pure loneliness. The letter is oddly placed in middle of the collection, as if we are to go by the date given of 9th November 1704, it was one of the last letters Jane received. Jane by this time was a widow, and it would appear that Margaret too was without a husband. It is only a short letter, but this serves to make it all the more moving, as Margaret barely mentioned anything that might count as 'news' and instead fills the page with pleas for communication and advice on her troubles. As Katherine and Margaret Shaftesbury did before her, Margaret began her letter with a request for more contact, and pleaded '[I] doe wish you would let me hear a little offener from you and whether I may hope to see you hear [here] or now and methinks I long to hear how my nephew does.'¹²⁴ Margaret's sense of segregation is further enhanced by the suggestion that not only was there a lack of correspondence from Jane, but that she received little interaction from any of her kin; 'I heare but mighty selldome from my poor Girl nor my brother.'¹²⁵ However she did have a plan which would have alleviated her loneliness, and used language which heightened her sense of vulnerability in order to persuade Jane to succumb to her desire; 'I hartily wish we could... conveniently... spend the remaining part of our days together for I lead but a

¹²³ Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 23rd February 1688, HRO, 9M73/672/31.

¹²⁴ Margaret Lawrence to Jane Stringer, 9th November 1704, HRO, 9M73 672/21.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

melancholy sort of a life now.'¹²⁶ Margaret also mentioned 'the vexation of a chancery suit', highlighting another reason why she felt the need of support from her sister at that time, and indeed she mentioned at the close of her letter that she had 'but little prospect of comfort' except from her daughter, whom she was worried about.¹²⁷ It is plain from her letter that widowed sisters (or other kin, or single women) needed support and comfort at harrowing times in their lives and gives an indication that the network of letter writing was an important and often vital link in displaying that support. The emotive language that Margaret used intensified our sense of her displacement. Her repetition of the word 'wish' and the way in which she enhanced her condition with vocabulary such as 'hartily', 'long' and 'mighty selldome' would have possibly provoked Jane into providing the reassurance her sister desperately needed. The connection was so necessary for Margaret that she penned the letter rapidly; she had no time to add anything of great substance as she explained 'the man is just goeing by whome I send this.'¹²⁸ The action of sending a letter, and the hope of receiving one was in this case more important than the content.

It is clear that the bonds Jane Stringer held between herself and her friends were very different. It would appear that in many of them she held the balance of power and it is only the letters from Lady Sarah Cowper that we get a sense of an equal balance of friendship. One may wonder how draining this could have been on Jane. It is evident from their correspondence that Katherine Fitz-Walter and both Margarets Shaftesbury and Lawrence sought reassurance from Jane as to the status of their relationships. Although we may feel some discomfort that on occasion (and more frequently for some than others) it is obvious she had not responded to their attempts for connection, should we feel some sympathy for Jane? It must have been quite draining at times to absorb the desperation and discontent that protruded from these letters. To read a missive that was not full of happy news, expressions of joy or even random musings must have been at the least disconcerting, and at its worst utterly depressing. Is it any wonder then that she held back, or was not as frequent a correspondent as she might otherwise have been? It can be perceived from Sarah's letters that some sort of communication was fairly common between her and Jane,

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

whether it was written or physical. Jane therefore could have been more inclined to correspond with her more positive comrades. However, Jane played more of a part in her friendships with the other women than she was possibly aware. Katherine Fitz-Walter and Margaret Shaftesbury wrote to Jane on numerous occasions, even when they had not had a response from her for some time. The mere action of them writing to her shows the connection they felt they had, and the need for her reassurance and comfort outweighed any vexation they may have felt at her lack of response.

This assertion is of course made on the basis that all letters in the correspondence have survived, are available to the historian, and indicate that Jane did not respond frequently. In fact this is very difficult to ascertain, and it is possible that some letters are missing, although it is clear from the words of Katherine Fitz-Walter and Margaret Shaftesbury that, even if Jane's letters to them have been destroyed since their creation, they were the more faithful penmen in their relationships with Jane. What are evident are the references both women made to the desire of Jane's friendship and the joy it has brought them. The act of letter writing would have brought them closer to her and thus re-establish time and time again a connection which may have otherwise been irretrievably been lost.

Shifts in Rhetoric

After studying the examples of women's friendship in this chapter, it becomes apparent that the manner in which women conversed with, and about, friends changed over the course of the long seventeenth century. Comparing letters chronologically starting with Anne Newdigate and ending with those written to Jane Stringer enables the historian to chart the trends in epistolary conversation. Anne Newdigate was formal when writing to her friend Lady Gray, as was Meryvell Littleton when writing to her aunt in the early seventeenth century. Dorothy Osborne however, wrote with a less restrained air fifty years later. Her letters often followed a pattern, especially when referring to points that William had made in a previous letter, but she still managed to write with a flowing easy style. By the time of the letters written to Jane Stringer at the end of the seventeenth century, it is apparent that women of this period had become more at ease with expressing themselves in a less restricted fashion. They were prepared to state their feelings in a manner which

was on occasion bald and stark, and invited their correspondent into their intimate space. Alan Bray observes that, moving towards the eighteenth century, men became less intimate physically, replacing their traditional embrace and kiss to each other with a more formal handshake.¹²⁹ Contrastingly women appear to become more relaxed in their writing, possibly finding a pathway to emotional fulfilment which had been denied to them before. Female friendships attracted less suspicion, as lesbianism was not a criminal offence, unlike sodomy. Furthermore, trends in literature influenced the way these women wrote.¹³⁰ It became more acceptable to write in a natural, flowing style, in which women found an ability to express themselves. Dorothy Osborne was certainly influenced by some of the novels she read, taking direct instruction from some of the works she mentioned in her letters; 'A person goes from one subject to another without any constraint: and these kinds of letters are, properly speaking, a conversation between absent people... It is necessary therefore, that the style be easy, natural, and noble altogether.'¹³¹ This is also seen in the letters to Jane Stringer, where her correspondents move from one subject to another with relative ease. Matchmaking, illness, visiting acquaintances and discussion of books meld together in a more relaxed fashion. It would appear that women were starting to discard the conventions which shackled them, in order to find a style in which they were more comfortable with, thus enabling the letter to become a vehicle for genuine self expression.

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Daybell describes the language of friendship as 'ultimately one of reciprocity'.¹³² When one friend wrote a letter to another they clearly expected to have a reply and if this was not forthcoming it could create a sense of apprehension and angst. Correspondents could be left wondering whether they had done something wrong, and therefore display a sense of anxiety which they tried to quell through their repeated efforts to make contact with their acquaintance. Scenarios like this could

¹²⁹ Bray, *The Friend*, p. 212.

¹³⁰ For more on this subject see Chapter 1.

¹³¹ Madeleine de Scudéry, *Artamene, ou le Grand Cyrus* (1656) in James Fitzmaurice and Martine Rey, 'Letters by Women in England, the French Romance, and Dorothy Osborne,' in Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Coudert and Maryanne C. Horowitz, eds, *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe (Sixteenth Century Essay & Studies)* (Kirksville, Missouri: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989), p. 155.

¹³² Daybell, *Women Letter Writers*, p. 260.

prove to be painful. Yet, for some writers there was a compulsion to write and maintain a link with another person. Some of Jane Stringer's correspondents were prepared to accept a silence from her for several months in anticipation of a reward they believed would eventually come. Therefore the simple act of writing to another human could diminish the sense of loneliness they felt. For other women, writing to a close friend or relative provided comfort in desperate times. Writing of their troubles could prove to be a cathartic experience, and afterwards they felt more at ease. In addition to the correspondence between two writers, it is possible to analyse a friendship through the letters to a third party. The friendship between Dorothy Osborne and Diana Rich was of such magnitude that the frequent appearances Diana made in Dorothy's letters to William Temple, and the warmth that projected from her words, leaves the reader in no doubt as to the strength of their bond. From the examples analysed in this chapter, it is clear that letter writing was an essential part of cultivating and maintaining friendships.

Chapter 5

‘Stamped on every page like a water mark’

Reporting Health in Women’s Letter Writing

The desire for, and acknowledgement of, good health is frequent in letters. Correspondents often asked after one another’s health, and wished each other speedy recoveries when they were stuck down by various ailments. Lady Sarah Cowper’s remark in a letter to Jane Stringer is a fine example of this; ‘I am glad to hear of your recovery from an illness which by your description has been much like mine, and by this time I hope you can say with mee I am well in Health.’¹ Similarly, Margaret Shaftesbury was also delighted to hear of Jane’s recuperation from sickness; ‘The newes of your recovering the disease of a sore throat, sweet Mis Stringer was very gratefull to me, who since I came hither, have heard many dangerous complaints of that kinde’.² This kind of compassion and consideration, although expected, nonetheless pointed to a sense of sisterly solidarity against the foe of ill-health.

Roy Porter, from whom the quotation in this chapter’s title is taken, has alerted the historical community to need for research in the analysis and assessment of the experience of illness in past centuries.³ Porter has argued that the focus has been too reliant on doctors’ encounters, with little emphasis on what the patients lived through. Since Porter made his assertion in 1985, historians have devoted more attention to the sufferers’ confrontations with sickness. Lucinda McCray Beier’s publication in 1988, ‘Sufferers and Healers’, acknowledged the patients’ knowledge and approaches to illness, but as the title suggest, this is examined in conjunction with physicians’ tales.⁴ Letters therefore can play an important role in plugging some of the gaps in medical experience, and give us some clue as to what was common and what was rare. However, we should not expect letters to reveal all the secrets of

¹ Lady Sarah Cowper to Jane Stringer, HRO, 9M73/672/4.

² Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 31st December 1687, HRO, 9M73/672/28.

³ Roy Porter, ‘The Patient’s View: Doing Medical History from below’, *Theory and Society*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (March 1985), pp. 175-98.

⁴ Lucinda McCray Beier, *Sufferers and Healers; The Experience of Illness in Seventeenth Century England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988).

medical history, but rather use them as a guide. Porter made the salient point that while we know plenty of information about diseases, we know little about the diseased; or as he put it, 'we have admirable histories of epilepsy and hysteria, but significantly none of epileptics or hysterics'.⁵ Is there a case then for personalising illness, and seeking accounts of not only particular details of a sickness, but how it affected a person mentally? By using letters to gauge the conventions of writing about illness, we may hope to add something to this debate.

Why did illness play such a regular and often poignant role in letter writing? Did it have anything to do with another of Porter's observations, namely 'because medical events have frequently been complex social rituals involving family and community as well as sufferers and physicians. Moreover, a great deal of healing in the past... has been primarily a tale of medical self-help, or community care.'⁶ It would thus appear that the ill-health was not only a matter for the sufferer, but for friends, family and even the wider community. By imparting the tales of their ailments, women were inviting the correspondents to share it with them, to endure it and to formulate a way of surviving it.

Furthermore we may extend the questioning to ascertain whether writing about health had any significance for single women. What agendas were they able to create for themselves, either in the reporting of illness, or in the treatment of it? Is it even possible to argue that for certain single women, writing about health led them to express themselves in a way which was otherwise closed to them? Were courting women or widows influenced in any measure by their marital status when writing to their partners or friends about health matters? This chapter will seek to address some of these issues and reach some conclusions towards the question of significance of health in single women's letter writing.

⁵ Porter, 'The Patient's View', p. 182.

⁶ Ibid., p. 175.

Conveying the Discomfort

Descriptions of various illnesses were predictably diverse. They differed from the brief ‘I heare Charls is troubled with a cold’, and ‘my sister has a violent feaver’, to the slightly more colourful expressions of Margaret Shaftesbury, who declared she had been ‘alarmed with such revelutions, as stuned me and rendred me unable to perfitt that performance [the writing of a letter].’⁷ In some instances, renditions were more illustrative. Again Margaret serves us well with her account of her kidney stones. She left Jane Stringer in little doubt of her discomfort; ‘my health is very crasy, but reason of these fits of the gravell which had hunge lingrinly upon me, these 6 weekes and I have now voided severall little stons, not free at this time from a good deale of pain in my back and sides.’⁸ Here we have not only a vivid description of Margaret’s ailment, but also the duration, and her opinion of it. It is also apparent that although Margaret deemed them ‘fitts of the gravell’ she gave us enough of a description to apply our knowledge of modern day medicine in order to recognise them as kidney stones, or renal colic. We should also remember Margaret’s description of a sore throat as a ‘disease’, highlighting the very real problems that an ailment we take for granted in today’s world could cause in the seventeenth century. Peg Adams, when describing her uncle Sir Ralph Verney’s final illness, wrote of the ‘looseness’ he suffered from, and highlighted the frequency of his lavatory needs; ‘he has gone to stoole I believe at heart 10 or 12 times today and they say only clear water.’⁹ His almost constant diarrhoea was a factor in his declining health and although her frankness made for unpleasant reading, Peg felt it was important for Ralph’s son John to have vivid details of his father’s condition.

Occasionally, encounters with illness were more poignant. In an emotionally charged excerpt of one epistle, Isabella Strutt confessed the fear she held for her uncle’s mental capacity;

I sat half an hour this afternoon with our poor uncle and I thought him much altered and so rambling and odd that I felt afraid of being alone with him he was being very unmanageable last night for some time... he has... been in the same way all day, poor man I should think he cannot

⁷ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 27th January 1682, HRO, 9M73/672/9; Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 30th July 1694, Marsham, HRO, 9M73/672/16; Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 5th November 1687, HRO, 9M73/672/13.

⁸ Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 26th July 1688, HRO, 9M73/672/30.

⁹ Peg Adams to John Verney, 9th August 1696, Claydon, BL, M636/49.

continue so much longer and indeed his release is now much to be wished.¹⁰

Her tender lines suggested a senility and frailty on the part of her uncle; the victim of an illness akin to vascular dementia or Alzheimer's, for her words seemed to suggest an illness more destructive than a mere descent into old age.

Writing of health matters was a cathartic experience, one sometimes undertaken in order to purge oneself of any disquietude or grief. Even when Isabella related her uncle's illness, she tried to protect him, even though it is clear she feared not only for his health but for her safety. She did not blame him for his worsening state, but in the assertion that death would be the kindest thing for him, she was surely thinking in would be best for his relatives too.¹¹ However, in order not to portray herself as unkind, she had to establish the background for her reasoning, which was, in this instance, his frightening behaviour. Isabella obviously felt she was able to unburden her heart to Joseph Strutt, and trusted that he would not think ill of her for speaking in this manner.

Pregnancy

Pregnancy was a universal topic in letter writing, commented upon by both married and single women. While not an illness in itself, pregnancy and the subsequent childbirth could endanger the mother's life. Much debate has been generated on this subject as to how dangerous childbirth was, the rates of infant and maternal mortality, and how women felt about their labour. According to Lawrence Stone, 'mid-wives were ignorant and ill-trained, and often horribly botched the job, while

¹⁰ Isabella Strutt, 23rd February 1800, Derby, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/19. The above quoted sentence includes crossed out words and the occasional word which is hard to decipher. This would usually be nothing odd in itself, but Isabella had very clear handwriting, until the last few of her letters, indicating some upset.

¹¹ Christian faith played a huge part in death in the early modern period. The religious beliefs that only God could decide when to take a life were prominent, though the upheavals in the Christian faith via the Protestant Reformation made some followers aware of different perspectives. Isabella may have been professing the thought that whilst death would be the kindest act for her uncle, ultimately only God had the power to choose when this event would occur. As Ralph A. Houlbrooke points out, 'The deaths of individuals were designed by God as mercies, trials or punishments'. Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 18. See also David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death; Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) for a broad overview of death and religion in this period.

the lack of hygienic precautions meant that puerperal fever was a frequent sequel.¹² However, while Will Coster concedes that many midwives in this period were untrained, the chances of a miscarriage or stillbirth were lessened by their presence; he even offers the opinion that little interference was necessary, particularly in the labours of the poor, who gave birth more easily than the rich.¹³ While pregnancy and childbirth could be dangerous, care should be taken so that the risk to life is not over emphasised. The often quoted statistic given by Roger Schofield stating woman who gave birth before 1750 ran a 6-7% risk of dying in childbirth led him to ask whether maternal mortality was high enough to make childbearing a frightening occasion.¹⁴ The baton is taken up by Sharon Howard, who has argued that we should not place modern assumptions about the perils of labour into a false context; ‘Undoubtedly, early modern women *sometimes* feared childbirth... but that is not the same as suggesting that fear was the over-riding characteristic, the norm, or early modern women’s experiences of pregnancy - as they helplessly waited for modern medicine to deliver them from their perils.’¹⁵

Isabella Strutt interestingly called birth a ‘critical and interesting event’ when her sister produced a baby girl and she continued ‘I have the pleasure to say she is almost perfectly recovered.’¹⁶ This terminology shows us that far from being an occasion of pleasure and celebration, it was also a time of anxiety and apprehension. Thomas Bentley in *The fift lampe of virginittie* recognised the necessity for prayers for not only the child, but the mother and the midwife.¹⁷ His rhetoric is quite graphic

¹² Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1550-1800* (London: Penguin, 1977), p. 64.

¹³ Will Coster, *Family and Kinship in England 1450-1800* (London: Longman, 2001), pp. 70-1.

¹⁴ Roger Schofield, ‘Did the mother really die?’ Three centuries of maternal mortality in “the world we have lost”, in Lloyd Bonfield, Richard M. Smith and Keith Wrightson eds, *The World We Have Gained: Histories of Population and Social Structure* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 259.

¹⁵ Sharon Howard, ‘Imagining the Pain and Peril of Seventeenth-century Childbirth; Travail and Deliverance in the Making of an Early Modern World’, *Social History of Medicine*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (2003) p. 369.

¹⁶ Isabella Strutt, 29th July 1791, Sandy Brooke, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/7; Alice Thornton provided an emotional account of the birth of her fifth child in her memoirs; Charles Jackson ed., *The Autobiography of Mrs. Alice Thornton of East Newton, Co. York; Volume 62 of Publications for the Surtees Society* (Durham; Andrews and Co., 1875), p. 95. The report is interesting not only because it makes for emotive reading, but also because it produces a vivid image of a breech birth. Patricia Crawford, *Blood, Bodies and Families in Early Modern England* (Harlow: Pearson:Longman, 2004) contains various accounts of the pregnancy and childbirth experiences of the women in this period; perhaps the most notable is that of Ann Houlton who saw both her sister-in-law and closest friend die in childbirth before she herself died in childbirth at the age of 29.

¹⁷ Thomas Bentley, *The Monument of Matrones* (London, 1582); Colin B. Atkinson and William P. Stoneman, “These Gripping Greefes and Pinching Pangs”: Attitudes to Childbirth in Thomas Bentley’s

in parts as he sought to convey the agony of giving birth, and the need for spiritual comfort – and possibly divine intervention; ‘How long Lord shall my bowels thus sound like an harpe, my bones and sinewes be racked asunder, and mine inward parts be thus greeuouslie tormented for my sins’ was one particular anguished plea.¹⁸

Courting women remarked upon the pregnancies of their friends and relatives, with the realisation that their own chance of motherhood may not be too far away. This was particularly poignant when young friends died in childbirth, heightening the sense of mortality for young women. Lydia DuGard wrote in regard of her friend Abigail Cross’s pregnancy and subsequent death a few months after childbirth.¹⁹ At seven months pregnant Abigail seemed to be progressing well, as Lydia asked for an old shirt from Samuel DuGard, probably in order to make a garment for the baby.²⁰ Yet she had a traumatic labour and Lydia was concerned enough to seek reassurance on Abigail’s condition, expressing her happiness that there was hope for Abigail’s recovery and praying to God that she be restored to full health.²¹ Lydia’s hopes were in vain and in February 1671 she was devastated to hear of Abigail’s death and declared that she would ‘now have less of a mind to live at Barford then I should if she had lived.’²² Commenting on the pregnancies of friends was a natural product of the connection between two women, but for courting women it also reminded of the realities they might have to face. Although in early modern Europe the mortality rate in childbirth may have been lower than originally believed at one per cent, the reality was that many more women faced long term ill-

The Monument of Matrones (1582)’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 1990), pp. 193-203. Atkinson and Stoneman have comprehensively grouped the various prayers together for the ease of the modern reader; ‘1. Ten prayers by the woman in labor (Nos. 42-51; pp. 95-119) 2. Four prayers of thanksgiving after childbirth (Nos. 52-55; pp. 119-25) 3. Seven prayers for a woman in labor (Nos. 56-62; pp. 125-33) 4. Four prayers for midwives (Nos. 63-66; pp. 134-41) 5. Nine prayers for difficult birth or death (Nos. 67-75; pp. 141-52) 6. Two prayers for the baby (nos. 76-77; p. 151) 7. Two prayers of thanksgiving (Nos. 78-80; pp. 153-56).’ Alice Thornton’s reverence was shown in her description of the death of her daughter Elizabeth who died as an infant; ‘when Mr. Thornton and I came to pray for her, she held up those sweete eyes and hands to her deare Father in heaven, looked up, and cryed in her language, ‘Dad, dad, dad’ with such vemeny as if inspired by her holy Father in heaven to deliver her sweet soule into her heavenly Father’s hands, and at which time we also did with great zeale deliverup my deare infant’s soule into the hand of my heavenly Father, and then she swetly fell asleepe and went out of this miserable world like a lamb.’ Jackson ed., *The Autobiography of Mrs. Alice Thorton*, p. 94-5.

¹⁸ Thomas Bentley in Atkinson and Stoneman, “These Griping Greefes and Pinching Pangs”, p. 197

¹⁹ Her child, a girl, lived for only 12 days. Taylor, Worcester, December 1670, Letter 21, pp. 82-3.

²⁰ Taylor, Worcester, 5th September 1670, Letter 19, pp. 78-9.

²¹ Taylor, Worcester, December 1670, Letter 21, pp. 82-3; Taylor, Worcester, January 1671, Letter 23, pp. 92-3.

²² Taylor, Worcester, February 1671, Letter 24, pp. 94-5.

health and even disability after labour, not to mention the psychological distress caused by a traumatic birth.²³

Widows also wrote of the trials of pregnancy and how outside stresses could hinder this tentative period. They may have been through similar experiences or, especially if older, witnessed numerous pregnancies of kin. When writing of her niece's pregnancy, Katherine Fitz-Walter detailed the troubles she was encountering; 'my Neic Fowler was sent for hir husband is taken ill and she is about 12 weeks gon with child... has bin at New hall some weeks but sees no company is drinking waters... tis said maks hir faint and weake'.²⁴ Katherine's words also alert us to the premise that in some instances, an underlying illness was mistaken for pregnancy. She noted the sale tale of her 'cosen Paschall' who had died. She had 'bin ill since July but thought she had bin with child which mistakes it then upon contrary methods'.²⁵ While it is unclear why her real infirmity had been misdiagnosed, we may hazard a guess that her symptoms may have been frequent sickness, or a swollen abdomen, which could also have been taken as signs of pregnancy.

Mental Anguish seen in Courting Women

Occasionally in letters, there are emotions which are far more concentrated in strength than just the generic 'happy' or 'sad' feelings that are more often portrayed. The melancholy or depressed state occurs not infrequently, and particularly when the writer or recipient was progressing through a traumatic or turbulent period.²⁶

²³ Keir Waddington, *An Introduction to the Social History of Medicine; Europe Since 1500* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 70. Lydia DuGard herself died in childbirth in 1675. Her daughter Lydia survived.

²⁴ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 12th August 1670, HRO, 9M73/672/8.

²⁵ Katherine Fitz-Walter to Jane Stringer, 5th November 1687, HRO, 9M73/672/13.

²⁶ For more on the melancholy state see Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1887); Ruth A. Fox, *The Tangled Chain: The Structure of Disorder in the Anatomy of Melancholy* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1976); Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam: Madness, Anxiety and Healing in Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Mary Ann Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine and Religion in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Angus Gowland, 'The Problem of Early Modern Melancholy', *Past and Present*, 161, May 2006, pp. 77-120; Jeremy Schmidt, *Melancholy and the Car of the Soul* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Bridget Gellert Lyons, *Voices of Melancholy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971); Lyn Cowan, *Portrait of the Blue Lady; The Character of Melancholy* (New Orleans: Spring Journal Books, 2004). Most works on melancholy take Burton's work either as a focus point, or as the basis for literary discussion.

Melancholy could be alluded to when using adjectives to describe oneself as in the case of the widow Margaret Shaftesbury and her ‘old malincolly solitary worne out carcass’, or to encompass more intense psychological states.²⁷ Melancholy was a phenomenon that particularly seemed to affect the higher classes. Here was a condition which according to Michael MacDonald ‘was *à la mode* in Jacobean England, and the rage for this fashionable affliction popularized medical ideas about emotional distress.’²⁸ In fact, so likely was melancholy to importune the upper ranks of society over others it was deemed ‘the crest of courtier’s arms.’²⁹ Richard Napier, the seventeenth century astrological physician, was able to ascertain from his case notes that in instances of recorded mental disturbances of this nature, 65% of aristocrats complained of melancholy, while 18% were troubled in mind and 6% were mopish.³⁰ Furthermore the stigma of ‘mere’ depression could be abated; by considering oneself in this fashion, people were able to give more credence and standing to their troubled state of mind than if they were judged to be simply upset or immersed in sheer sadness. There was also evidence to support the hypothesis that individuals were frequently diagnosing themselves, suggesting that a diagnosis with a more in vogue status would be more desirable.³¹

However it must be remembered that while melancholy may have been the preferred situation, the condition of mopishness was ‘a pale kind of melancholy’; due to it being seen as its ‘social antithesis’, it was less attractive a prospect.³² As MacDonald pointed out the symptoms of melancholy and mopish behaviour were not mutually exclusive.³³ Idleness, sullen behaviour and gloom were shared over the boundaries, but mopishness did not include lunacy and madness, hence its status as a more diluted form. It would appear that William Temple’s moods came under this banner and this induced a strain on his relationship with Dorothy. The differentiation between what the diagnosis of melancholy was and what people actually took it to mean is key to our understanding of William’s moods. Hallucinations, mentally disturbed phases and even suicidal episodes can be frequent in the melancholy state, but Dorothy’s descriptions of William’s tempests were more akin to the narratives of

²⁷ Margaret Shaftesbury to Jane Stringer, 29th June 1685, HRO, 9M73 672/27.

²⁸ Michael MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, p. 150.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 161.

³³ *Ibid.*

mopishness. She asked him why he was so ‘sullen’ and her worries were concerned chiefly with his ill humour (both in the Galenic and the temperamental senses). The pinnacle of his stormy countenance was revealed in a letter to Dorothy which frightened her to the extent that she felt compelled to appeal to his reason and declared, ‘If you have Ever Loved mee doe not refuse the Last request I shall Ever make you, tis to preserve your self form the Violences of your passion.’³⁴ Her worry is emphasised by the use of capital letters on certain key words in her sentences; ‘Ever Loved... Last... Violences.’ While the random and sporadic use of capital letters in epistles is notable, here it does not seem to be a coincidence that she highlights the most emotive words in order to make him see sense. Whether we take the fear of his violent passions at a physical and literal level, as David Cecil did, and believe William to be on the verge of harming himself (or worse), or consider him to be at more of a risk of an emotional breakdown, it is clear that he was suffering from a tormented mind.³⁵

Perhaps it should come as no surprise to us that the constant struggle to keep their relationship afloat, and the need to prevent others from learning of how deep and complex it was, manifested itself in the use of worrying words. As MacDonald explains, the trials and stresses of courtship were often given as reasons for melancholic and mopish thoughts. Drawing again from Napier’s records, he asserts that almost 40% of men and women who visited Napier related anxieties about their courtships or married lives.³⁶ MacDonald hints at more profound catalysts for this, suggesting that cultural values may have played a role in heightening their feelings of angst; ‘Melancholy and gentility became boon companions. Noblemen delighted to have themselves painted in the guise of melancholy lovers; and courtly poets scribbled verses that could have been used to caption them.’³⁷ We know that Dorothy was becoming a fan of the genre of Romance – could this have in any way coloured her view of their correspondence?³⁸

³⁴ Parker, 15th/16th October 1653, Letter 45, p. 147.

³⁵ David Cecil, *Two Quiet Lives* (London: Constable, 1948), p. 53-4.

³⁶ MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, p. 88.

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 151.

³⁸ Dorothy often offered and asked for opinions on the volumes she had read, and in one particular letter stressed, ‘I have noe Patience neither for these Translatours of Romances. I mett with Polexandre and L’Illustre Bassa, both soe disguised that I who am their old acquaintance hardly knew them... If Poore Prazimere bee in the same dresse I would not see her for the worlde she has sufferd enough’; Parker, 24th/25th September 1653, Letter 41, p. 139; Gomberville, *The History of*

The passion and the heartache described in Dorothy's epistles particularly in the most strained months of November 1653 to January 1654 after her visit to London again appears symptomatic of the melancholic and mopish sentiments generated by their attachment. In Napier's statistics on courtship stresses he found that 'lover's quarrels, unrequited love and double dealing accounted for the emotional turmoil of 141 persons, about two-thirds of whom were young women,' and that subsequently 'these young people suffered the unmistakable pangs of romantic love.'³⁹ Cecil's biography of Dorothy appears to agree with this diagnosis, and helpfully compliments Dorothy's own words on the natural qualities of both her and William's personality. Dorothy expressed some surprise when presented with William's moods that they could be allowed to envelope him to such an extent. She declared, 'I have knowne you when all of the things in the world you would have not bin taken for a discontent, you were as I thought perfectly pleased with your condition, what has made it so much worse since.'⁴⁰ Indeed Dorothy believed herself to be more akin to this type of behaviour, stating 'it may be Naturall, as I think it is to me.'⁴¹ Sara Jayne Steen in her research on the illness of Lady Arbella Stuart has made the judgement that 'women were prone to melancholy because they were perceived as emotional, but melancholy increasingly became associated with men and the heroic suffering that led to art, while hysteria suggested women and triviality.'⁴² This seems to confirm what Dorothy was alluding to; that she herself may be suffering, but it was William who caused the more concern. It would appear that on occasion Dorothy was indeed in great despair, and this can be attributed to the deep rooted insecurity arising from turbulent events in her teenage years. The break up of her family home, her father's seclusion and belittlement due to his royalist loyalties and her brother's death in the Civil War left deep impressions on

Polexander, Madeleine de Scudéry, *Ibrahim, ou l'illustre Bassa* (1641), H.Grogan trans. *Ibrahim, or the Illustrious Bassa* (1652); Le Maire, *La Prazimème* and *La Suite de Prazimème*, trans. Roger Boyle (1643). Carrie Anne Hintz has also commented upon Dorothy's interest in this genre, stating 'it is important not to underestimate Osborne's purposeful use of the romances...Osborne craves them for what they can tell her about herself and the world. The stimulation of the imagination...is precisely the source of their appeal to Osborne'; Carrie Anne Hintz, 'Desire and Renunciation: The Letters of Dorothy Osborne', unpublished doctoral dissertation, (University of Toronto, 1998) in Parker, p. 38.

³⁹MacDonald, *Mystical Bedlam*, p. 89

⁴⁰ Parker, 15th/16th October 1653, Letter 45, p. 147.

⁴¹ Parker, 8th/9th October 1653, Letter 44, p. 146.

⁴² Sara Jayne Steen, "'How Subject to Interpretation": Lady Arbella Stuart and the Reading of Illness,' in James Daybell ed., *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing 1450-1700* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 112. See this article for a helpful analysis of how women could suffer from melancholic moods and how if one complained of an illness they were not always believed.

her already serious countenance and sad eyes. As Cecil points out ‘so sensitive a nature as Dorothy’s was especially susceptible to the shock of the contemporary catastrophe, and it attacked her at her most impressionable age.’⁴³ William’s behavioural traits, whilst not so instinctively cheerless, also seemed to display complex and intrinsic emotions. Whilst he was attractive and intelligent, ‘even with those he loved he could be extremely difficult; sometimes sunk in a black gloom in which he would scarcely speak, at other moments protesting violently that they did not respond to him with the ardour that such an affection as his deserved.’⁴⁴

These observations are well founded. It is clear from some of Dorothy’s responses to William that he felt she was not displaying enough warmth or want for him. The quote ‘Why are you soe sullen and why am I the cause,’ points us to the animosity William displayed towards her, and this was confirmed when she defensively tried to protect herself.⁴⁵ She was stung by his insinuation that she was a ‘falce and inconstant’ person, and was bitterly sorry ‘it should bee only in my Power to make a friend miserable, and that where I have soe great kindnesse I should doe soe great injurie, but tis my fortune and I must bear it.’⁴⁶ Her melancholy mood reached its zenith in a letter sent in December 1653. The intensely negative vocabulary she opened with explicitly detailed how weary she was of the sparring between them which had mutated from friendly banter to derogatory rhetoric, and the tone of her writing convinces the reader that was about to snap with the pressure; ‘I am convinced of the Vilenesse of the worlde and all that’s in’t and that I deceived my self Extremely when I expected any thing of comfort from it.’⁴⁷ The use of words such as ‘vilenesse’ and ‘deceived’ coupled with the juxtaposition of ‘expected comfort’ creates a concept of disenchantment, and a vision of a woman consumed in a whirlpool of emotional turbulence. She reserved her anger and indignation to be spewed in William’s direction but to everybody else displayed apathetic behaviour. Much as those suffering from depression find themselves listless and unable to interact accordingly with those around them, Dorothy had little time or inclination for the company of others. While it has been recognised that she naturally had some phases where she preferred solitude, and relished visitors ending their sojourn, this

⁴³ Cecil, *Two Quiet Lives*, p. 12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁴⁵ Parker, 15th/16th October 1653, Letter 45, p. 147.

⁴⁶ Parker, 10th/11th December 1653, Letter 49, p. 158.

⁴⁷ Parker, 24th December 1653, Letter 51, p. 162.

lack of concern was on a different level. She admitted; 'I am possessed with that strange insensibility that my nearest relations have no tie upon mee, and I finde my selfe no more concerned in those that I have hertofore had great tendernes of affection for them in my kindred that dyed long before I was borne.'⁴⁸ Her detachment was so severe she feared she had total disinterest in those related to her, to the extent that they barely subsisted in her sphere of existence.

To Show Regard for the Feelings of Others; Power Struggles within Illness

It is normal, and of course natural, to enquire after somebody's health and if they are unwell to wish them a quick recovery. Yet in some instances the quest of reassurance of good health and general well-being became more of an emotionally charged affirmation of acknowledgement from the questioner. This can be seen particularly in the letters of courting women who enquired after the health of their beaux. Nancy Taylor points out that 'women and men in the seventeenth century did this with an almost formulaic frequency', so perhaps the questioning of health should be attributed to nothing more than politeness and good grace.⁴⁹ However courting women are notable for demanding promises of good health, and bore strength of feeling because they were not yet married. This may be due to a sense of insecurity over their official capacity; not yet a wife with legal rights, but more than a caring acquaintance. This seemed to be a particular issue when the relationship was being conducted in secrecy. For these women, a wedding band did not signal the start of their worry. Close identification was enough, and the health of a partner was felt to be just as much responsibility of a single woman as it was when she was married.⁵⁰

Lydia DuGard's concern for her beloved cousin Samuel was an extension of her expression of love for him. Believing their futures to be intertwined, she saw the state of their health as being intermingled too. She summed up the emotional link between health and courting couples when she wrote 'you need not ask how I doe you may know by your self sinc I am as you are. If you are sick I cant be well if you

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Taylor, p. 24

⁵⁰ See Taylor, pp. 24-5 on Lydia and Samuel DuGard in this respect.

are in health I am so too.’⁵¹ She also displayed unselfishness, declaring how if she ‘have health at any time I could willingly [forsake] it if it would contribute to yours.’⁵² The fact that she was apart from Samuel, and that their relationship was fraught with uneasiness over how others would consider their courtship, also enhanced her anxiety over his health. Any small blight of health was magnified and she admitted ‘how apt I am to fear the worst when to others thinking there is so little ground of fears... but sure you won’t be one of those, won’t blame me for that which your self is the cause of.’⁵³

Isabella Strutt was another courting woman who made it plain to her partner Joseph Strutt that his letters were to quell any trepidation she felt over his well being. She gently yet firmly demonstrated this in a short epistle which had the sole motive of reflecting on his indisposition;

My fears for your health are now much greater than they were before he [the messenger] came, had you been better you would have written, had it been only one lone to say you were so – I have now on my mind all the horrors of a relapse, therefore need not say how necessary your writing is to my happiness.⁵⁴

This was not a singular occurrence either, suggesting that Joseph had not learnt his lesson straight away. In a later letter, Isabella chided him again stating, ‘I have anxiously expected you to fulfil your promise, and entreat you not to defer informing me of your health and happiness.’⁵⁵ It is apparent that the withholding of evidence of one’s good or bad health was a cause of epistolary anxiety, and a partner, spouse or friend could be spared superfluous concern on their behalf. It must have been an uneasy time, where fretfulness was potent and keenly felt. When the only way of reassuring oneself that a loved one was truly well was a letter from their own hand, and this confirmation was not verified, it was inevitable that nervousness would mutate into resentment.

There is a more explicit, enduring example available to us of this quality in a relationship. Dorothy Osborne had various reports of the state of William Temple’s health, but one issue she took very seriously was the perceived lack of care he took

⁵¹ Taylor, Barford, 26th November 1667, Letter 10, p. 52.

⁵² Taylor, Barford, 21st March 1668, p. 58.

⁵³ Taylor, Barford, 6th February 1669, p. 68.

⁵⁴ Isabella Strutt, March 1787, Sandy Brooke, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/1.

⁵⁵ Isabella Strutt, 10th February 1791, Sandy Brooke, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/6.

over himself. On numerous occasions Dorothy felt an imperative need to cajole (or simply plead with) William to be more concerned with his health. It appeared that William was quite unable to hide any illnesses or disquiet moods that he suffered from. While he was fairly candid about the way he was feeling, even if he did try to conceal anything, their mutual friend Jane Wright was on hand to disclose the facts to Dorothy. For Jane's part in this affair, it did not appear that she was acting out of spite or malice, but a desire to prevent William from obscuring his true situation. It is possible however that Jane too was able to glean some sort of power from her involvement; while not directly involved in the machinations of their courtship, by providing Dorothy with companionship, coupled with the added bonus of relaying information about William, she was able to wield a subtle influence. This was due to the fact that it was on Jane's knowledge and confidence that Dorothy often acted when she chided William, particularly for his melancholic attitude. Interestingly it seemed no surprise to William that Jane would relate her findings to Dorothy, and furthermore that Jane would know how Dorothy would react. As Dorothy pointed out in March 1653, 'Jane was certainly in the right when she told you I would have chid if I had seen you so in danger a health that I am soe much concern'd in.'⁵⁶ At times Dorothy was actually reliant on Jane's updates on the truth of William's condition.

In the months before the most turbulent part of their courtship, Jane appeared to have insisted that Dorothy should visit William in London. Although Dorothy was at pains to explain why she was unable to leave Chicksands, her prayers for understanding were met with derision and equally penetrating pleas; 'Then I urge (as tis true) that there is a necessity of my stay heer, she grows furious, cry's you will dye with melancholy and confounds me soe with story's of your ill humor that I'le swere I think I should goe merely to bee at quiet.'⁵⁷ Evidently Jane used emotional blackmail to persuade Dorothy to placate William, but even though Dorothy claimed to be rattled by this, in conveying this information to her lover she was employing her own brand of manipulation. William must have been alerted to the troubled minds of these women and by relating this tale Dorothy may have sought to alter his behaviour.

⁵⁶ Parker, 29th March 1653, Letter 15, p. 85.

⁵⁷ Parker, 8th/9th October 1653, Letter 44, p. 146.

Whether this method of persuasion was effective cannot be wholly uncovered, but it is simple to ascertain that this was a device she was to use at frequent intervals. Her scolding over the state of his health developed into more than loving duty or genuine worry; his awaited reaction became a symbol of his regard for her and a sign of the strength of his devotion. This was most clearly displayed when she reprimanded him for catching colds so often.⁵⁸ Her rebukes ranged from the fairly mild ‘You must promise her [Jane] to be merry and not to take Colde when you are at the Tennis Court’ to far more emotive chastisements. During one bout of ill-health Dorothy demanded that William should have more regard for himself, as this would also reflect the height of his esteem for her; ‘Why did you get such a colde [?] good God how carlesse you are of a life that I have told you makes all the happinesse of mine, tis unkindly don... how can you persawde mee to a care of my self when you refuse to give mee the Example.’⁵⁹ Therefore Dorothy was not only clear in her desire for William to keep well, but was resolute in her implication that he needed to provide an ideal example for her to follow. By inferring that it would be his fault if she was to neglect her own well being, she laid all choices at his feet. For her happiness, her health and her comfort to be complete, he had to prove his devotion by maintaining his good health, if not then she would understand these to be the actions of a man not only with little care for himself, but for the woman he purported to love too.

Female Conditions

Some illnesses were more likely to affect women rather than men. Melancholy was a man’s affliction, while women were more likely to suffer from hysteria. Hysteria was the disease in which vapours and energies from the womb were considered to permeate and infiltrate the body, leading to fits and irregularities of mood and mind. Emotional imbalances were also considered to be a woman’s prerogative; Isabella Strutt confided in Joseph Strutt that ‘I am more free from mental disquiet from heart grieving sickness than I have been for many years and that my spirits in general are

⁵⁸ Dorothy shares this bugbear with Pepys who, as Roy Porter points out, mentioned catching cold 102 times in his diary; Porter, ‘The Patient’s View’, p. 178.

⁵⁹ Parker, 20th/21st August 1653, Letter 36, p. 127.

very poor.’⁶⁰ This very sentence appears to contradict itself from one end to the other giving an indication of her emotional see saw.

It would appear that being under emotional stress could bring on other issues that related more primarily to women. McCray Beier in her research on illness in the seventeenth century describes the spleen as an illness which was most common amongst women and children, and Dorothy’s letters provide evidence of this. McCray Beier concludes that the spleen could be caused either by physical pain, or psychosomatic strain; she describes how Lady Anne Clifford showed symptoms of a pain in her side, while she believes that Dorothy’s attacks of the spleen seem to have been mainly emotional and temperamental.⁶¹ Dorothy herself affirmed the link between females and this condition. When writing to William about an ailment he had been suffering from she concluded that it sound very like the spleen-like symptoms she had undergone, but did not wish to offend him by accusing him of enduring a womanly disease. She explained ‘perhaps I would not be willing to owne a disease, that the severe part of the worlde holde to bee merely imaginary and affected, and therefore proper only to women.’⁶² Here she showed acute awareness of the differences between the medical problems of men and women, and it begs the question of whether men did indeed suffer from certain health issues but refused to reveal them because of the stigma attached. It also raises the matter of how much women were taken seriously when they were unwell, and how much emphasis was placed on their gender when assessing the severity of their illness. Again here we should consider the work of Steen on the letters of Arbella Stuart. While Steen proffers the diagnosis of acute intermittent porphyria as a modern day solution to her invalidity, she makes it clear that Arbella’s contemporaries were undecided as to whether she was genuinely ill, or had ‘manufactured her illness as a political ploy,’ and ‘doubted her veracity and condemned her obstinacy.’⁶³ Although Arbella’s state of health was indeed complex, with intermittent periods of pain and fitness which kept the doctors guessing, it does hint at the difficulties women faced in the acknowledgement of their distress.

⁶⁰ Isabella Strutt, October 1792, BCA, MS3101/C/E/5/16/11

⁶¹ McCray Beier, *Sufferers and Healers*, p. 152.

⁶² Parker, 6th/7th August 1653, Letter 33, p. 121.

⁶³ Steen, p. 109.

Dorothy's spleen attacks also lead us to consider the matter of recurring illness. In these letters we are sometimes able to discern a particular ailment which repeatedly returns to trouble the patient. Dorothy's mentions of her 'scurvy spleen' and 'strong spleenatick fancy' were relatively frequent in her letters in the sense that whenever she wrote of her own ill-health it is the ailment most mentioned or implicitly referred to.⁶⁴ The concept of the spleen appears very frightening to Dorothy - she didn't give as much detail of the symptoms and duration of her illness as and when she suffered from it as she did to other vexations such as her ague and fits, but the omnipresent threat of it was tangible. She admitted to William that

they doe so fright mee with strange story's of what the Spleen will bring to mee in time, that I am kept in awe of them like a Childe. They tell mee 'twill not leave mee common sence, that I shall hardly be fit company for my own dog's, and that it will ende, either in a stupidnesse that will have mee incapable of any thing, or fill my head with some whim's as will make mee, ridiculous.⁶⁵

The possibility of being rendered incapable of any sort of sensible conduct was frightening to Dorothy, and the acknowledgement that she had already been reduced to a child like status by the mere tales of what the illness may have done to her shows that the threat of becoming ill could be as intimidating to a person as actually experiencing it. It is understandable then that she would put herself through the unpleasantness of taking the infusion of steel; as Dorothy stated 'To prevent this, who would not take steel or any thing.'⁶⁶

There is another possible cause for the pain Dorothy was experiencing, the symptoms of which would have been exclusively reserved not only for females, but those who were single. Green sickness was an illness described as a disease of virgins; in modern day medicine it is understood to be hypochromic anaemia (formerly known as chlorosis), which gives the skin a greenish tinge. In the early modern period however, it was seen as a disease of young women and was linked to their menstruation. Marriage was thought to be the ultimate cure, with the procreation that followed as treatment. Unsurprisingly perhaps, I have been unable to find any outright mention of green sickness in the letters I have analysed. There are various reasons we may consider for this. Firstly, it may have been due to the

⁶⁴ Parker, 8th/9th January, 1653, Letter 3, p. 61; Parker, 29th/30th January 1653, Letter 6, p. 69.

⁶⁵ Parker, 5th/6th March 1653, Letter 11, p. 77.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

ignorance of the woman who bore the symptoms. Helen King, in her definitive work on green sickness, compares the diverse attitudes of physicians on the subject, many of whom appeared to be working with various degrees of idealism of what the presenting symptoms were. As she explains,

In addition to the question of whether the different labels favoured in different periods cover ‘the same’ condition, we would consider whether different individual physicians working in the same country in the same period would have used a single label in an identical way... The range of symptoms also made the ‘disease of virgins’ or chlorosis into umbrella terms under which other diseases could hide.⁶⁷

How then were women able to classify their conditions? Were they even aware of what exactly they were experiencing?

Alternatively, it is also plausible to consider that whilst women were becoming more open in their discussion of health in their letter writing, social etiquette (and probably personal embarrassment) still bound them from conversing on certain illnesses and related issues. How open and honest were women prepared to be in their letter writing? From the letters in this chapter we can see that single women became more at ease at revealing medical information as the years progressed, but this was primarily in terms of their emotional health and general well being. There was less focus on more intimate or invasive afflictions, and conditions affecting the womb tended to be absent (apart from pregnancy). This may simply be down to the fact that conversation about certain illnesses was taboo, but consideration of the private and public spaces of women’s letter writing is also important. If a woman was to bare her most intimate secrets, then she would have needed complete faith that her admissions would have stayed between herself and her correspondent. The fear that her post may be tampered with would be a barrier to her confidence. Furthermore, after the reception of her letter, it would have been imperative that her confidante kept the letter away from prying eyes. This may have been even more important to a single woman, who may have felt that an admission of a certain disease would have adverse effects on her prospects for marriage and bearing children. Perhaps the risks of being truly expressive in regards to one’s

⁶⁷ Helen King, *The Disease of Virgins; Green sickness, chlorosis and the problems of puberty* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 14-5.

health outweighed the cathartic effects documenting one's illness may otherwise have had.

From a practical perspective, perhaps we have less reference to single women's illness because these women were still living at home, or with a relative whom they could confide in; this argument could be particularly pertinent in the realms of younger women. If young girls still living at home suffered from what were considered to be virginal diseases, then one could assume they would have been more inclined to speak directly to a mother or a sister about their concerns. Alternatively they may have preferred to wait for a visit from an aunt, cousin or friend. They may have had little need to write a letter detailing their sickness, because they had means of doing it face to face.

Specific obvious references to green sickness and other illnesses relevant to young women may have been missing from letter collections, but is it possible to read some letters and propose a new view on what was written? What if Dorothy Osborne's pains were not an attack of generic sickness, but the symptoms of an illness she may not have wanted to make explicit reference to? King points out that there is evidence that occasionally a young girl with typical symptoms of a disease of virgins could also be thought to 'suffer from obstruction of the spleen', especially if the patient menstruated.⁶⁸ As mentioned above, in one of her letters, Dorothy alluded to an illness William Temple suffered from which was 'very like the spleen'; however she admitted he may be loathe to agree with her diagnosis as her disease was one which 'the severe part of the world holde to be merely imaginary and affected, and therefore proper only to women.'⁶⁹ It is possible that she may have been referring to a disease characterised by its dominance of female victims. Furthermore, the infusion of steel which she was so loathe to take could have been a remedy popular with women who were affected by these kinds of disorders. King states that iron therapy was used well before iron was discovered in the blood, and that there are surviving recipes from books and manuscripts which recommended taking steel in both pill and liquid form (mixed with cordial water or in wine for instance), to aid with menstrual disorders.⁷⁰ Therefore it is plausible that Dorothy,

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 2, 22.

⁶⁹ Parker, 6th/7th August 1653, Letter 33, p. 121.

⁷⁰ King, *The Disease of Virgins*, p. 127-8.

whilst informing William of her illness, wished to keep its true nature secret from him. Even if this is an over-eager interpretation of her letters, it can still lead the historian to ask questions of the masked illnesses women suffered from, and how much single women in particular were prepared to share in their documentation of illness.

The health of Arbella Stuart has been well documented by historians such as Sara Jayne Steen and David N. Durant.⁷¹ It is popularly believed now that Arbella suffered from porphyria, which was an unrecognised illness in the early seventeenth century. Genetic in nature, Arbella inherited the disease through the Stuart line, and would have suffered from symptoms such as ‘abdominal pain, difficulty in swallowing, muscle weakness, stomach and liver distensions, mental shifts ranging from depression and excitement to delusions, convulsions, emaciation... and death’⁷² It is the mental health aspect of Arbella’s illness that can most interest us in this chapter, as it can point towards further analysis of the choices in rhetoric she made during some of her letter writing as a young woman.

Assuming that Arbella did indeed suffer from porphyria, as Steen and others have argued, her mental state during various periods of her life can be explained as symptomatic behaviour. Although she has commonly been classed as insane in the later stage of her life, episodes of unstable health could have contributed to any delusions she suffered from. As Steen points out ‘attacks of porphyria could explain a belief that Seymour was coming to live in the Tower’.⁷³ I would argue that if Arbella was suffering from this condition, it could also provide an explanation for the letters written in connection with her fictional lover in 1602. The fragile state of her mind due to excessive loneliness and possible chemical imbalances may have led her to create an escape route, one which she could use to definite mental, and possible physical, effect. Steen’s assertion that Arbella used three modes of writing, dependent on the stage of her life and who she is writing to, point to the extensive use of persona creation, especially during the years when she was contained in Hardwick Hall, when at times she appeared ‘evasive, arrogant, submissive and

⁷¹ Sara Jayne Steen ed., *The Letters of Lady Arbella Stuart; Women Writers in English 1350-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); David N. Durant, *Arbella Stuart; A Rival to the Queen* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978).

⁷² Steen, p. 98.

⁷³ Steen, p. 99. The episode Steen refers to here is explained on p. 93, when she describes how Arbella conjured a plot to smuggle her husband William Seymour into the Tower of London to live with her.

flamboyant'.⁷⁴ By creating her fictional lover, she was able to inhabit a world in which she could be rescued by a gentleman who would have her 'enter into some great action to winne my selfe reputation... and make strangers to me effect my desires without being beholden to them'.⁷⁵ Her fantasy saved her from her subservient, restricted reality and engaged her in a world which became turbulent with the many lies she conjured.

The pressure on Arbella was exacerbated by the questionings of others, who sought to extract information from her. Durant describes her behaviour at this time as 'certainly eccentric' and her possible realisation of the difficulties she had created for herself led her to become embedded more deeply in her lies.⁷⁶ Her verbosity in her letter writing had been apparent from the first letter of her lover, when in 'six long pages of rambling obscurity... the message got all but lost'.⁷⁷ Yet Arbella kept writing. It was her only outlet, her way of rebelling against the restrictions that had been placed upon her. Knowing that she would receive further attention from court led her to pour out her words at an extraordinary pace in a cathartic release. Her intense loneliness was a factor here as she 'passed the time by letting her mind travel and writing where it went'.⁷⁸ As I have mentioned in other chapters, lonely women often wrote in a torrent, a stream of consciousness which Steen alludes to when analysing Arbella's shift in rhetoric, depending on her mood.⁷⁹ Her letter to Sir Henry Brounker on 9th March 1602/03 portrayed a woman who was in turn dutiful angry, and traumatised enough to write the lines

I have conquered my affection. I have cast away my hopes, I have forsaken all comfort, I have submitted my body to more subjection then could be commanded, I have disposed of my liberty, I have cutt off all means of your attaining what you seek till you seeke it of me by such meanes as I tell you. What harme can the world do me now.⁸⁰

Yet perhaps this had been exactly what Arbella had intended. Her powerful, concentrated emotions had kept her alive, and had forced her to feel everything but

⁷⁴ Steen, p. 8.

⁷⁵ Steen, Arbella Stuart to Elizabeth Talbot, c.29 January-2 February 1602/3, Letter 7, pp. 130-1.

⁷⁶ Durant, *Arbella Stuart*, p. 107.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105-6.

⁷⁸ Steen, p. 37. It is interesting, as Steen notes, that as soon as Arbella was allowed to leave Hardwick Hall, her 'hysterical' writing stopped, possibly showing Arbella's awareness of how her state of mind was affecting her writing.

⁷⁹ Steen, p. 38.

⁸⁰ Steen, Arbella Stuart to Sir Henry Brounker, Wednesday 9th March 1602/3, Letter 16, p.165.

the numbness her incarceration had endangered her to. We may debate whether her mental state was altered by porphyria, or whether her writing was the result of a clever, incredibly self aware ruse to manipulate outside people into noticing her. In truth it could be a mixture of the two. To repeat, porphyria caused ‘mental shifts ranging from depression and excitement to delusions’, and these characteristics are common Arbella’s in writing during her unhappy period at Hardwick Hall.

The Role of Single Women in Caring for Others

It would be difficult to make the argument at present as to whether marital status had any bearing on how women were able to increase their access to medical knowledge. There has been much work done on women’s early modern recipe books by writers such as Sara Pennell, Elaine Leong, Catherine Field and Linda A. Pollock, which shows how married women in particular were able to carry the responsibility of household medicine.⁸¹ It is clear from their work that the sharing of recipes, as well as the circulation of the recipe books, forged relationships between women. Recipes were passed around communities as a way of gifting friends and mothers left recipe books to daughters in their wills.⁸² The creation and maintenance of recipe books gave women authorship and ownership over their work; many remedies were handed down through generations and often adjusted by the author to suit their needs. Furthermore, we can see the shift in medicinal values throughout the era. Whereas Galenic teachings were popularly held in the beginning of the early modern period, there was a move towards the values of Paracelsus, which according to Field

⁸¹ For work on women’s recipe books, see for example; Sara Pennell, ‘Perfecting Practice? Women, Manuscript Recipes and Knowledge in Early Modern England’, in V. Burke and J. Gibson eds, *Early Modern Women’s Manuscript Writing. Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium* (Aldershot, 2004), pp. 237-58; Linda A. Pollock, *With Faith and Physick: The Life of a Tudor Gentlewoman, Lady Grace Mildmay 1552-1620* (London: Browns and Collins, 1993); Catherine Field, ‘“Many Hands”: Early Modern Women’s Receipt Books and the Politics of Writing Food for the Nation’, Ph.D. Dissertation (University of Maryland, 2006); Catherine Field, ‘Many Hands; Writing the Self in Early Modern Women’s Recipe Books’ in *Genre and Women’s Life Writing in Early Modern England* (Vermont: Ashgate, 2007) pp. 237-58; Elaine Leong, ‘Mrs Elizabeth Freke: Her Booke. The Recipe Collection and Remembrances of a Seventeenth-Century Gentlewoman’, M.Sc. Dissertation (University of Oxford, 2001); Elaine Leong, ‘Medical Recipe Collections in Seventeenth-Century England: Knowledge, Text and Gender’, D.Phil. Thesis (University of Oxford, 2006); Jennifer Stine, ‘Opening Closets: The Discovery of Household Medicine in Early Modern England’, Ph.D. Dissertation (Stanford University, 1996); Rebecca Laroche, *Medical Authority and Englishwomen’s Herbal Texts, 1550-1650* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

⁸² Pennell, ‘Perfecting Practice?’, pp. 240-2, 251

changed the distinction between food and medicinal recipes.⁸³ Lady Grace Mildmay was a woman noted for her medicinal skills and many recipes of remedies that she kept meticulously. Pollock notes how her skills were far beyond that of the basic ones women were expected to know, and that her recipe books were a ‘sophisticated analysis of the causes and treatment of various diseases, accompanied by instructions for the large-scale manufacture of medicines, many of them based on minerals and chemicals’.⁸⁴ Her learning was Galenic in origin, but as we can see from the above statement, she also leaned towards Paracelsian teaching, as she used chemicals in her remedies.⁸⁵

Whether a woman was single or not may have had little relation to the circulation and handing down of recipe books, and often married women were more naturally placed to administer remedies and dispense advice. There is also the question of financial reasoning as women sought to manage and direct the contents of their recipe books. Pollock makes the argument that only educated, affluent women could produce the kind of care given by Lady Grace Mildmay.⁸⁶ However, there were occasions when single women, by virtue of their un-attachment, fit more naturally into the role of care-giver. This was particularly pertinent when the woman had a connection to the invalid, or when they needed to travel and remain at their bedside for a considerable amount of time. Having no ties to a husband or children, single women could feel a duty to undertake the burden of nursing. However their experiences differed due to their familial and economic situations and sometimes single women felt compelled to take on the role of primary care giver. This could often be a stressful situation and one which could have repercussions on the woman’s future.

Dorothy Osborne wrote to William Temple about her father’s poor state of health, and in doing this not only related to him the misery she felt but sought comfort from his replies. Her comments on this topic appeared less frequently than her remarks on her own health or that of William’s recurrent colds or moods, but this may be attributed to the fairly constant state of her father’s condition. It is evident

⁸³ Field, ‘Many Hands; Writing the Self’, pp. 53, 57-8

⁸⁴ Linda A. Pollock, ‘Mildmay, Grace, Lady Mildmay (c.1552–1620)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (online edition, May 2010), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/45817>.

⁸⁵ For more on this, see Pollock, *Lady Grace Mildmay*, pp. 94-6.

⁸⁶ Pollock, *Lady Grace Mildmay*, p. 108.

that despite her strength she needed to vent her feelings and therefore undergo a cathartic and liberating experience. It is also apparent that although the savageness of his infirmity abated on occasion, he never regained his former strength and vigour. His position was a strain on Dorothy and the sorrow she felt was baldly conveyed in the first weeks of Sir Peter Osborne's sickness by her plea for release from her distress; 'You ought in Charity to write as much as you can for in Earnest my life heer since my Fathers sickness, is soe sad, that to another humour then mine it would bee unsupportable, but I have been soe used to misfortun's that I cannot bee much surprised with them'.⁸⁷ William's letters provided a respite from caring for her father and she looked forward to welcoming them as objects which would lift the gloom from her day. While it would be untrue that all Dorothy did was care for her father, as he was restricted in his movements, to a certain extent so was she. Although the family still received visitors, there was a feeling of solitude in her surroundings. She disclosed how 'my fathers ill health, which though it bee not in that Extreamity it has bin, yet keeps him still a Prisoner to his Chamber and for the most part to his bed,' and although this statement is with reference to her father, one wonders how much this also reflected her state of mind.⁸⁸ Could it have been that in some respects she too felt isolated and alone in her thoughts? Dorothy admitted at the beginning of her father's invalidity that she was glad of a letter to pull her out of her despair even 'when I thought it almost impossible that I should bee sensible of any thing but my father's sickness... Indeed he was then soe dangerously ill that wee could not reasonably hope hee should outlive this day.'⁸⁹ As we are aware her father survived for almost another year, yet even though the danger to his health was not immediate, Dorothy proved herself to be devoted to his wellbeing, and continued her correspondence from the side of Sir Peter's sickbed. Her dedication extended to her brother's well being, apologising for writing an epistle in haste when he was ill, 'I am not willing to leave him longe alone.'⁹⁰ When her father finally died, her grief was palpable;

I lost the best Father in the worlde, and though as to himself it was an infinite Mercy in God Almighty to take him out of a worlde that ... was made more uneasy to him by many infirmity's that were upon him; Yet

⁸⁷ Parker, 23rd/24th April 1653, Letter 18, p. 91.

⁸⁸ Parker, 14th/15th May 1653, Letter 21, p. 96.

⁸⁹ Parker, 14th April 1653, Letter 17, p. 88.

⁹⁰ Parker, 19th/20th March 1653, Letter 13, p. 82.

to mee it is an affliction much greater than People Judge it; Besides all that is due to Nature, and the memory of many (more than ordinary) Kindnesses received from him.⁹¹

Apart from the pain of losing her father, there in her mind was also the certain knowledge that she was now dependant on others.

Dependence was strong reason for playing a part in the health of other people, and single woman could find themselves in a situation where they could enhance their reputation by providing a service. At the age of thirty one, Peg Adams found herself in the pivotal position of being chief correspondent of her uncle Sir Ralph Verney's ill-health and subsequent demise. She wrote eight letters to Ralph's son John during the last six weeks of his life, providing a graphic account of symptoms such as 'great blisters as bigg as nutmegs.... looseness... with a violent fit of coughing'.⁹² Through her letters John was able to share the events that led to his father's death, thus still enabling him to prepare for his inevitable loss. It is unclear as to whether Peg actually physically nursed Ralph, as she makes no reference to herself as having done so, but it is obvious by her detailed letters that she was a close witness to the manifestation of his illness and the decline of his health. She was able to describe how he was at various points of the day, his eating habits, what made him feel better or worse and if the doctor had been to visit. She did not use medical terms in her letters, but neither did she balk at revealing the more grim aspects of disease.⁹³ Peg also appeared to have been there in Ralph's last hours, as she wearily wrote of the conclusion to his life, 'Your Dear Ffather changed about too [sic] o clock in the afternoon and we thought then been departing, but he revived a little and continued till within a quarter of 12 this night at which time he left this miserable world for endless joy.'⁹⁴

Peg Adam's letters play a key role in the historian's understanding of how single women were able to use ill-health as a means to create their own agendas. It would need a truly cynical person to suggest that Peg's motives were not in any way altruistic, and it clear that she displayed concern for her uncle's deteriorating health. Yet due to her letters she was able enhance her sense of worth, not only to herself but

⁹¹ Parker, 18th March 1653, Letter 62, p. 191.

⁹² Peg Adams to John Verney, 9th August 1696, Claydon, BL, M636/49.

⁹³ See the eight letters from Peg Adams to John Verney, Claydon, 9th August – 25th Sept 1696, BL, M636/49.

⁹⁴ Peg Adams to John Verney, 25th September 1696, BL, M636/49.

also to her cousin. She was important at that point in the senior Verneys' lives because she held the information John required; as Susan Whyman comments 'the responsibility for recording Sir Ralph's days fell upon... Peg'⁹⁵ John Verney trusted Peg to relay news to him, and in turn she was sensitive as to what and how often she should have written. She was aware that Mr Hodges was also writing to John, yet she saw this as no reason to relinquish her part in the events. Her determination to be involved was clear.

If one takes Peg's lifestyle into consideration, this was not only unsurprising, but also key to her everyday survival. As a spinster who relied on her uncle's patronage, she would surely have been aware that the potential for change in her circumstances was high, either in a positive or a negative way. Therefore by making herself indispensable in the communication of her uncle's illness, she was protecting her interests. As the eldest surviving son, John would have been responsible (if he so wished) for providing for his spinster cousins, and therefore it was imperative for Peg to maintain good relations with him. Whyman comments that Peg (as well as her cousin Pen Stewkeley) used letters to retain the support of the family head, and this was crucial in the wake of little other means of financial support.⁹⁶ Therefore it was essential that she start to transfer her allegiance, especially as it seemed she was resigned to remaining a spinster.⁹⁷

While it may have been expected that single women in particular ought to have been on hand to look after relatives they also found themselves becoming companions and nursemaids to people outside their familiar circle. Lydia DuGard wrote to Samuel DuGard about the ailing wife of a vicar in the village of Lighthorn, six miles from where she lived in Barford. Lydia's notes on this subject are refreshing because they hint not only at the tedious nature of her attendance at the bedside of the dying Mrs Dodds, but also at the duty of care she had to a woman who was not related to her. Lydia started her observations in relatively good spirits, and with a confidence about her role; 'Mrs Dod sends you her service and begs your prayers. She is grown very weak, is still in miserable pains, and in all probabilitys

⁹⁵ Susan Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural World of the Verneys 1660-1720* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 23.

⁹⁶ Susan Whyman, 'Gentle Companions: Single Women and their Letters in Late Stuart England', in Daybell ed., *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing*, p. 187.

⁹⁷ See Whyman, *Cultural World of the Verneys*, p. 128.

cannot continue many weeks. I know not certainly when I shall goe home, I am loath to leave the poor woman before she has a better nurse: and that I hope will be some time next week.'⁹⁸ However, ten days later her impatience at the situation she had been in was clear;

I came home a Wednesday; not sorry to leave Lighthorn, you may well imagin, since you know Mrs Dods distemper and worss temper; she is likely enough to die but, if fretting, and chiding will prolong her life she may outlive me or a stronger body. My Uncle sais she is a bad example to young women but I hope you will not find me allterd for the worss since my being with her. Her way is not so commendable or soe taking that I should strive to be like her and peevishness looks so ugly in her that instead of imitating, I think I shall be the more out of love with it as long as I live.⁹⁹

Lydia appears to have been there for the month of March caring for Mrs Dodds, and was determined that the draining encounter she had suffered would not change her personality. From this therefore we can we can determine that Lydia must have been at close quarters with her for much of the month, and she was able to do this without fear of neglecting other family members. For her, like other single women, the care of a friend or relative was expected and there was an onus upon them to deliver that care unreservedly. However it could not always be done freely or without

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As death paradoxically is the only thing certain in life, it is not surprising that illness, which often directly precedes death, was such a prevalent topic. At face value, health and illness seem to be discussed partly as a social convention, and partly as an aid to conversation. Conversationalists would ask after their acquaintance's health and often expected to receive the same courtesy in return. However when we examine underneath the surface, it is evident that writing about health was connected to a deeper network of emotions and relationships. Writing about health appeared to come naturally to many single women in the early modern period, suggesting a growing ease with correspondence of an intimate nature. Courting women who may have been restrained in other areas of their correspondence were able to express their concerns in a more vocal manner.

⁹⁸ Taylor, Lighthorn, 15th March 1672, Letter 30, p. 116.

⁹⁹ Taylor, Barford, 25th March 1672, Letter 31, p. 120.

While McCray Beier may argue that sources such as letters and diaries are too concentrated on other issues to be of much use when gathering medical evidence, I would argue that it would depend on what conclusions one would want to draw.¹⁰⁰ She uses Dorothy Osborne's letters as a source in her book, and should have found much to reference on the topic of health, but does not promote this. In reality, letters are rich founts of information on the subject of sickness, and the relationships of those involved with them. Perhaps it is indeed this angle that we should look to approach it from, and not of a purely scientific or medical view. The sharing of illness in words made a lasting impression on both the writers and recipients; it left an indelible mark and worries which may have been forgotten months later were left on the page as an emotive reminder. Telling another person of their illness, or the illness of a loved one, was not merely trotted out by rote – it was often done to seek comfort and used as a way of purging oneself of one's fears. By doing this, bonds of love and friendship were strengthened; as we have seen, the people who were addressed were often treated as confidantes. When Dorothy Osborne wrote to William Temple about her father's illness, she was not just relating a tale of woe, but undertaking a need to alleviate herself from any personally painful feelings. Similarly, ties were also intensified by the power one could gain or bestow from writing about their health. We have seen how health worries could be used as a manipulative tool, with the delay in news of a loved one's state becoming a source of anxiety for their opposite number. The fact that someone was able to write a letter in their own hand was a sign that they were well, and any change in this, or a lengthy epistolary silence was perceived as a bad omen. Furthermore, the lack of care of one's health was seen as not only a negligence of themselves but also as a slight on those who cared for them. There was an implicit indignation and anger distinguishable and emotional blackmail was sometimes used in order to coax someone into having more regard for themselves.

There are also allusions to health in single women's letter writing which had specific reference to them precisely as single women. There were certain conditions which only women, and in the case of green sickness single women, suffered from, and their openness about these illnesses varied. It appeared that these women were at ease discussing the health of other people, but often refrained from giving graphic

¹⁰⁰ McCray Beier, *Sufferers and Healers*, p. 150-1.

details about their own illnesses, especially if they were related to the womb. There were often occasions when single women by virtue of their un-attached status found themselves looking after those suffering ill health. They could, as Lydia DuGard did, take issue and complain, or as Peg Adams chose to do, look to create their own agendas and hopefully profit from it.

Chapter 6

The Matriarch Alone;

Experiences of Widowhood

According to William Page, author of the 1620 play *The Widdow Indeede*, there were three types of widow; ‘the detestable or evil widow, the miserable or worldly widow and the good widow – the ‘widow indeed’¹ To fit every widow in England into one of these three categories would be an difficult task, and it could be argued that some women would not have recognised themselves in any category. To be a good widow required a woman to be not only chaste, but also to acquire ‘inward virtues and heavenly endowments of the mind.’² The miserable widow projects a dejected and despondent figure, while the evil widow was seen as a lusty debauched predator of men. These stereotypes worked into the conscious of contemporary society, and have been debated by historians working in this field. Yet there is a problem with trying to fit these women into various moulds. Despite the presence of stereotypes, life experiences proved to be more complex than the literary perimeters would allow and therefore it is more useful to analyse the experiences of widows who left records of how they lived in the aftermath of their husband’s death. This knowledge is not always easy to come by as according to Barbara Todd, ‘even the most prolific of female memorialists and letter writers were remarkably reticent on the subject of bereavement. Only a handful of women’s memoirs and journals span the time of a husband’s death or recall the immediate period afterward.’³ Therefore we must glean what we can sometimes from a hint in a sentence, or from reading between the lines of correspondence.⁴

¹ Barbara Todd, ‘The Virtuous Widow in Protestant England’, in Sandra Cavallo and Lyndon Warner eds, *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (New York: Longman, 1999), p. 72. Todd also comments that Page’s work, written for the use of his mother ‘provides the best insight we have into the frameworks within which the Protestant widows of the seventeenth century England interpreted their lives’, *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁴ For a broad overview of the familiar, social and economic lives of widows from various backgrounds in the early modern and modern period see Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), in particular Chapter 1; Bridget Hill, *Women Alone: Spinsters in England 1660-1850* (New York and London: Yale University Press, 2001), David R. Green and Alastair Owens, ‘Gentlewomanly Capitalism?’

There is evidence of widowed women's influence giving advice on various subjects, not only of household and family management, but also on legal issues. Elizabeth Freke, author of *The Remembrances of Elizabeth Freke 1671-1714*, gave an account of the financial and legal trials of her life in a despondent tone, heightened by her sense of isolation and the bereavements she suffered during her life. Her husband Percy Freke (c.1643-1704) regularly demanded money from her, and after his death, the greater wealth she then acquired ironically led to further financial and legal concerns fuelled by the management of her large estate. These worries were compounded by the treacherous behaviour of her cousin John Freke and her troubled relationship with her son. Nevertheless she proved herself to be a formidable landlord and she provides us with an example of the early modern strong matriarchal figure. Anne Clifford was another woman who asserted her authority though legal battles over what she believed to be rightfully hers. Having had her family's estate entailed away from her, firstly her mother and then Anne herself conducted legal proceedings to gain both the baronial titles and the estates.⁵

The Issue of Remarriage

This chapter will focus on the experiences of widows from the early modern period who did not re-marry. Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux has claimed that whilst academics have paid attention to widows who re-married, there has been less concentration on

Spinsters, Widows, and Wealth Holding in England and Wales, c. 1800-1860', *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Aug, 2003), pp. 510-36; Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Sandra Cavallo and Lyndan Warner eds, *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Harlow; New York: Longman, 1999).

⁵ For more on Elizabeth Freke, see Barbara J. Todd, 'Freke, Elizabeth (1642-1714)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn., Jan 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/48931>; Raymond A. Anselment ed. *The Remembrances of Elizabeth Freke 1671-1714*, Camden Fifth Series, Vol. 18 (London: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Raymond A. Anselment, 'Elizabeth Freke's Remembrances; Reconstructing a Self', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, Vol.16, No. 1 (Spring 1997), pp. 57-75. For more on Anne Clifford's history and her diaries see Richard T. Spence, 'Clifford, Anne, countess of Pembroke, Dorset, and Montgomery (1590-1676)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn., Jan 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5641>; Dr. George C. Williamson, *Lady Anne Clifford Countess of Dorset, Pembroke & Montgomery, 1590-1676; Her Life, Letters and Work* (Yorkshire: S.R. Publishers Ltd, 1967); Richard T. Spence, *Lady Anne Clifford* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1997); D.J.H. Clifford ed. *The Diaries of Lady Anne Clifford* (Stroud: The History Press, 2003), and Katharine Hodgkin, 'The Diary of Lady Anne Clifford; A Study of Class and Gender in the Seventeenth-Century', *History Workshop*, No.19 (Spring, 1985), pp. 148-61.

women who remained widows.⁶ Yet the question of remarriage must be addressed as it was a topic which would have crossed the majority of widows' minds, even if the notion was immediately dispelled. The statistical evidence of widows, and to some extent widowers, remarrying has intrigued historians and social commentators for the past few decades. Olwen Hufton has suggested that widowers in Europe had little difficulty in negotiating a second marriage, especially if they were still young.⁷ The reality for widows was more complex. One may think that caught between a choice of independence or control by another man, a widow (who after all had more legal capabilities now her husband was dead) would aim to be self sufficient, and only tempted back into marriage by a love match the second, or even third time round. However, social and economic considerations meant that some widows chose to gain a new spouse. Others may have had little choice in the matter, and it is likely they were forced into it by their circumstances.

Society in the early modern period held conflicting views on the status of remarrying widows, which has created debate amongst historians in their analysis of remarriage. According to Barbara J. Todd, English widows could not easily be put under the control of another male and therefore 'remarriage of widows was strongly discouraged.'⁸ There was a school of thought that because of their newly gained freedom, widows would find it difficult to become accustomed to being ruled over once more by a male. With their power came responsibility, something they may be hard pressed to give up. Indeed, writers like Page were adamant their liberty shouldn't be given up, declaring in *The Widdow Indeede* 'a woman that is a widow may be able to deale in the greatest manners of the com[m]onwealth, if she can order a battle and rule whole kingdomes, so much more may she be able of her self to rule

⁶ Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, 'Marriage, Widowhood and Divorce', in David I. Kertzer and Marzio Barbabli eds, *Family Life in Early Modern Times 1500-1789* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 241.

⁷ Olwen Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her: A History of Women in Western Europe* (London: HarperCollins, 1995) p. 217. Merry E. Wiesner also makes a move in supporting this view, stating that widowers with many children were more likely to remarry, and more quickly, than widows, and also gives the French statistic from the seventeenth-century that 50 per cent of widowers remarried, while only 20 per cent of widows did the same; Merry E. Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 91. Perhaps this was because the status of a man did not change because he was a widower, and he sought for another mother figure for his children, whereas women were less keen to give up the new found independence widowhood brought. See also Vivien Brodsky Elliott, 'Single Women in the London Marriage Market: Age, Status and Mobility, 1598-1619', in R. B. Outhwaite ed., *Marriage and Society; Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London: Europa, 1981), pp. 81-100.

⁸ Todd, 'Virtuous Widow', p. 66-7.

a family a little kingdom.’⁹ Becoming a widow, while distressing, had the perverse side effect of rendering a woman far more rights than she had as a wife, or even as a single woman, when she was under the ultimate rule of her father. The legal implications were great, and widows were the leading group of female litigants in the English courts. Tim Stretton has explained that ‘widows were expected to take on responsibilities, to be aware of legal rights and duties and to be supremely competent immediately upon the death of their husbands.’¹⁰ By all accounts, a formidable task was ahead of them, one requiring much strength and tenacity.

However, Jennifer M. Panek has argued that English resistance to remarrying widows has been overemphasised, and that Protestant and English customs generally advocated remarriage.¹¹ Even in different English cities the remarriage rate could differ widely, especially after taking rural and urban areas, and their diverse lifestyles, into consideration. Some historians have looked at certain towns to gather information on the rates of remarriage over a number of years. Todd has conducted a survey on the remarriage rates of Abingdon, Berkshire, showing that between 1540 and 1720 widows became less likely to remarry, while Jeremy Boulton has studied the decline of widow’s remarriage in seventeenth and eighteenth-century London.¹²

The English situation was more peculiar than that of continental countries. Panek asserts that Italian prescriptive literature promoted the idea that widows should live lives of ‘not only celibacy, but maternal austerity’, and that Italian laws served as a deterrent for remarriage due to the loss of custody of children.¹³ This view is challenged by Hufton, who states that in Europe ‘heiresses and women of wealth still of marriageable age with years of childbearing ahead were repossessed and renegotiated in a new alliance by their families of origin. In Italian patrician

⁹ Barbara J. Todd, ‘The Remarrying Widow; A stereotype reconsidered’ in Mary Prior ed., *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London: Methuen, 1985) p. 81.

¹⁰ Tim Stretton gives a list of sources that historians have used to detect how prominent women were in law in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries including conduct books, statutes, legal commentaries, private papers and diaries have been used. Letters are not mentioned, but this does not mean they have not been examined; Stretton, ‘Widows at Law’, p. 193.

¹¹ Linda Anderson, ‘Reviewed Work; Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy by Jennifer M. Panek’, *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Winter 2005), pp. 1427-8.

¹² Todd, ‘The Remarrying Widow’, pp. 54-92; Jeremy Boulton, ‘London Widowhood Revisited; the decline of female remarriage in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries’, *Continuity and Change*, Vol 5, No. 3 (1990), pp. 325-55.

¹³ Jennifer Panek, *Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 21.

circles this even held true if they had had children.’¹⁴ Christiane Klapisch-Zuber’s work on widows in Renaissance Italy has also shown that widows were often encouraged to leave their young children in order to re-marry, but the same rule did not apply to widowers. The stepmother may have been a familiar figure in Florentine households, yet the stepfather was practically unknown.¹⁵ Therefore whilst in England there are records of younger widows fighting for the wardship and management of their children’s inheritance, this would have been less usual in Europe. In Renaissance Italy, women saw their autonomy diminish once they became widows, and they were still spoken of in relation to their husbands. Even on their deathbeds, husbands would plead with their wives to remain with his family, and not to leave with their dowry in order to live self-sufficiently. Thus rich widows who lived truly independently were the exception at the upper levels of urban society.¹⁶ Younger widows in particular were pressurised by their husbands’ families, who ‘struggled fiercely for control of their bodies and their fortunes’, but even when older women were widowed, they were still felt to be a threat to the stability of society and the reputation of good families.¹⁷ In contrast, by the later middle ages in England, under common law elite families increasingly relied on jointures to provide for widows, meaning that widows of wealthy landowners or those who had successive husbands could control considerable incomes which gave them significant power.¹⁸ The discussion around this topic highlights the complicated nature of widows’ options after bereavement, and emphasises the conflicting views that were held not just in England, but on the continent as well.

There is also the question of how widows were portrayed in popular culture in the early modern period, as this topic has also provided fruit for the discussion of remarriage. Cissie Fairchilds has offered the view that ‘in early modern Europe, society was uncomfortable with women who were not under the control of a patriarchal husband or father but lived independently, especially if they were wealthy

¹⁴ Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, p. 218.

¹⁵ Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 124-5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 121.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 120-2.

¹⁸ Barbara J. Harris ‘Property Power and Personal Relations: Elite Mothers and Sons in Yorkist and Early Tudor England’, *Signs*, Vol. 15, No 3 (Spring 1990), pp.609-10.

or powerful'.¹⁹ This was compounded by the problem of widows' sexuality. As many widows were not young women, and would have obviously had carnal knowledge, they became figures of scorn and derision. And what if a woman did want to continue with a sexual life via remarriage? Would she have been seen as pathetic or delusional? Popular culture at the time excelled in portraying such women as licentious comedy figures.²⁰ This may have served to depict widows as trappers of men; women who sought to ensnare men with their sexual appetites before leading them up the altar as their second (or third or fourth) husbands. It would also have dissuaded women who did not want to be a part of this stereotype. However, Panek has again sought to re-evaluate this opinion through the comedy of the period, arguing that in fact the lusty widow stereotype enabled remarriage by tempering any anxiety men may have felt about wooing widows.²¹

Looking at statistical evidence and stereotypes may be useful for providing a general overview of if and when widows remarried, but they are a somewhat two dimensional source. We learn very little about the personal lives and experiences of these women, some of who may have felt they had no choice but to marry again. Furthermore, their social standing and wealth could have a bearing on the resulting statistics. After reviewing the work of other historians, Elizabeth Foyster has come to the conclusions that gentry widows were less likely to marry in order to preserve their economic independence and those who were very poor could not find a man willing to take them on. Therefore it was the 'middling sorts' who were most likely to receive and accept proposals.²² And what of those who actively chose not to remarry? Although some widows found it necessary to remarry for economical, legal

¹⁹ Cissie Fairchild, *Women in Early Modern Europe 1500-1700* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), p. 109.

²⁰ Merry E. Wiesner comments that even though the picture of the 'lusty' widow was common in early modern literature, studies show that many women avoided pressure to remarry, retaining their independence. Unfortunately she does not give clear indication as to which studies she refers to; Wiesner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, p. 91.

²¹ Panek, *Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy*. For further discussion on the stereotype of women in plays of the early modern period and the topic of remarriage see Charles Carlton, 'The Widow's Tale; Male Myths and Female Reality in 16th and 17th Century England', *Albion*, Vol. 10 No.2 (Summer 1978), pp. 118-129. It should however be noted that the portrayal of lusty widows was not a stereotype unique to this period – one only has to be reminded of *The Wife of Bath* in Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* to understand that widows and remarriage had been a focus point for good stories for centuries. For analysis on how women in general were portrayed by particular playwrights see for example Barbara Smith, *The Women in Ben Jonson's Poetry; Female Representations in the Non-Dramatic Verse* (Aldershot: Scolar Press), 1995.

²² Elizabeth Foyster, 'Marrying the experienced widow in early modern England: the male perspective', in Cavallo and Warner, *Widowhood*, p. 112.

or romantic reasons, there was a proportion who found the idea of remarriage abhorrent. Alice Thornton was horrified by the rumour, cultivated before her husband was even dead, that she was to marry a young clergyman by the name of Thomas Comber, and Katherine Austen worried about the dishonour a second marriage would bring upon her and her family.²³

Resolute and Determined; Women who Remained Widows

Anne Newdigate

Anne Newdigate, 1574-1618, was clear in her intention that she would not marry again. Although much admired by her male contemporaries, it is evident in her letters that she would not take another husband. Vivienne Larminie described this as one of Anne's 'trump cards' in her quest for assistance for herself and her children, and there is no question that Anne was intelligent enough to be aware that her widowhood would enhance her pleas.²⁴ Francis Beaumont was a notable suitor, and was charmed by her eloquent and flattering correspondence, but she was unable to consider him or anyone else to be truly suitable for a second marriage. Anne's resilience was quite obvious in one of her letters which skilfully acknowledged that her duty in life was to take care of her children.²⁵ The steeliness of her character as she declared she would not take on another husband was admirable. In a sense she epitomised herself as the 'good' widow, someone who was prepared to independently provide for her kin without self martyrdom. Her grasp of business issues and her legal situation were evident as she listed her debts and what had to be undertaken to rectify the situation. Her lack of desire to marry again was keenly expressed in her language; Lady Newdegate-Newdigate exalted her as 'Good Brave Anne!'²⁶

Were Anne's motives truly selfless and brave or was she simply being realistic? We know from other correspondence and the history of her family life that

²³ Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', p. 81-2.

²⁴ Vivienne Larminie, 'Fighting for Family in a Patronage Society: the Epistolary Armoury of Anne Newdigate (1574-1618)' in James Daybell, *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 102.

²⁵ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B311.

²⁶ Lady Newdegate-Newdigate ed., *Gossip from a Muniment Room; being passages in the lives of Anne and Mary Fitton, 1574 to 1618* (London: D. Nutt, 1898), p. 90. An example of Anne's emphatic resistance to remarriage was 'I should be so accused a woeman to marrye again... I scorne to be engaged to any base fellowe.' Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B311.

her husband was dependent on her relatives, namely her father and her uncle for ‘humiliating’ generosity.²⁷ Furthermore her husband’s stepbrother, Henry, died in ‘a state of financial embarrassment’ in 1629 and although Anne had been dead for many years by this time, it does suggest that the brothers’ financial acumen had been left severely wanting; this could have given her the impression that men of her generation were not financially sound.²⁸ The most stable influences in Anne’s family life had been older men who had been mostly patient and obliging. It can be argued that Anne’s outlook on men who could have proved to be suitable spouses would not have been favourable, however gratifyingly she wrote her letters to them. If a man was to have had a hope of securing her affections he would have needed to be an extraordinary prospect. Elizabeth Foyster sums this up by explaining ‘a man who courted a widow could find his economic status and prospects under intense scrutiny, and his marriage proposals rejected if these did not match up to the widow’s expectations.’²⁹ Anne was pronounced in her mistrust of other men, stating ‘since so many devils goe in shapes of men that my judgement can not knowe the one for the other.’³⁰ Did she give a nod here to her dead husband, implying that her judgement had been marred by him? She was clearly aware that as a widow with a prospect some men would find attractive she had to be on her guard. There is an indication that no man can be worthy enough for her and her children ‘for if I looke for an honest man or A true friend; I must saye, as one of the Roman Emperors did; I must go to the graves for them, for they are all dead and buried.’³¹ Anne indicated that she had considered the possibility of marrying another man but this had proven to be undesirable, since there were so few men to whom she believed she could be partial to. Therefore she had become adamant that remarriage was not an option. Anne also demonstrated the potential pitfalls of remarriage at even the most basic level; namely finding a man you would be willing to marry. For all the various considerations involved when remarrying, it must be remembered that the potential bride had to consent to enter into a new marriage. If she had little regard or, at the very least, little respect for her new spouse her situation could have been unbearable. Clearly Anne

²⁷ Vivienne Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture; The Seventeenth-Century Newdigates of Arbury and Their World* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995), p. 30. See later in this chapter for more discussion on Anne’s financial state of affairs.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

²⁹ Foyster, ‘Marrying the Experienced Widow’, p. 114.

³⁰ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B311.

³¹ *Ibid.*

was unwilling to enter into a binding agreement which might have had an adverse effect on herself and her children.

Anne's rhetoric made it quite clear that far from being an appealing vision, remarriage was something she had great disdain for. As Lady Newdegate-Newdigate pointed out, 'it had been surmised that so comely and attractive a widow would be likely to marry again, and the mere suggestion of such a possibility seems to have roused Anne's keen indignation.'³² Indeed the most vitriolic vocabulary which flowed from Anne's pen pointed to her deep feelings on this point. She declared 'that should I be so accursed a woeman to marrye again... I scorn to be engaged to any base fellow.'³³ Her use of emotive words and the 'sibilant S' sound leaves the reader in little doubt as to the contempt in which she held such an idea. She moved on to say 'God deliver me for ever being tyed to anye of them,' showing that she regarded remarriage to be a type of restraint and probably quite stifling.³⁴ The notion of being 'tyed down' and her subsequent loss of liberty would have been detestable to someone who was in the process of working incredibly hard to preserve the status of her children.

Anne's consciousness of her independent standing as a widow was plain in her writing. In legal theory, upon remarriage everything gained by a widow's first marriage was passed onto her new husband.³⁵ She outlined succinctly the position she was in, not only at that point in her life, but in the future if she should dare to remarry, or in the event of her death. She instructed that money should be used to pay off her husband's debts, and money set aside for their daughters' portions and further legacies. Her son Jack was to get the remainder and she continued, 'if I marye I will have estate in nothing but my own jointure during my lyfe.'³⁶ She was aware of her legal position, but also keen to stress it was her children who were important and she would not lay claim to anything she did not perceive to be rightfully hers. She followed this up immediately with the forthright declaration that 'if I lyfe master of my selfe me thinks I deserve to be Mrs of my owne children.'³⁷ She defended her right to be in control of her five children, all of whom were under

³² Lady Newdegate-Newdigate, *Gossip from a Muniment Room*, p. 86.

³³ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B311.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Foyster, 'Marrying the Experienced Widow', p. 114.

³⁶ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B311.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

11, and also of herself because she felt she ‘deserved’ this right. It indicated that she had worked tirelessly and faithfully in her quest to nurture and maintain a stable family upbringing. Furthermore the use of the phrase ‘master of my selfe,’ showed Anne’s bold spirit and sense of self worth. She had been able to assert her independence and was highly reluctant to forgo any of it. Firm and formidable, she is resolute in her belief that she is her own master, and having lost the bonds of marriage, she is loath to be under someone else’s control.

Joan Barrington

Joan Barrington, in her widowhood, became the ultimate matriarchal figure. There was no question of Joan remarrying at the age of seventy, and she settled down to the combined roles of advisor, confidante and spiritual leader. Her authoritative stance was stamped on the correspondence sent to her. Although few letters from Joan survive, Arthur Searle has edited together over 250 letters of the Barrington family between 1628 and 1632. This period was at the start of Joan’s widowhood and vast majority of the letters enclosed are to her, with a select few written between family members and associates also included. Although they are not penned by Joan they provide an insight into how a widow of her status was regarded by her circle of acquaintance. Political and military news was discretely imparted. Advice was sought on making matches for female relations. Spiritual guidance and religious overtones were intricately and indelibly weaved through the words on the page. As Larminie summed up in her review of the collection;

We gain a picture of a circle in which women were not only fully occupied in the ever present household concerns of preserving fruit, dispensing physic, administering jointure lands and moulding future generations of the godly, but also as deeply obliged as their men folk to “advance the gospel” and “further the publicke good.”³⁸

Joan Barrington, nee Cromwell, married Sir Francis Barrington in 1579, and both were renowned for their firm and intense puritan beliefs.³⁹ According to Searle

³⁸ Vivienne Larminie, ‘Reviewed work(s): Barrington Family Letters 1628-1632 by Arthur Searle’, *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 399 (April, 1986), pp. 498-9.

³⁹ For more on Puritanism and the context in which the Barringtons lived, see Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); Patrick Collinson, *The Puritan Character; Polemics and Polarities in Early Seventeenth-Century English Culture* (William Andrews

this union became ‘a cornerstone of the puritan connection in parliament in the 1620s.’⁴⁰ Joan’s husband Francis was heavily involved in politics, most notably as senior knight of the shire of Essex.⁴¹ His opposition to the crown and his failure to comply with the forced loan led to him being incarcerated in Marshalsea towards the end of his life. Joan shared the duration of his imprisonment with him, presenting an image of unshakeable unity and solidarity, unquestionably strengthened by their religious devotion. Many Puritan works were dedicated to Sir Francis and the Barringtons exercised some influence in their parish by supporting a town lecturer.⁴² One such lecturer was James Harrison and his religious stance was pronounced in his correspondence to Joan, as was his devoted thanks for her ‘great love and the many bountiful expressions of it formerly and of late.’⁴³ Joan was a godmother to his son, and her account book shows regular gifts to the Harrisons, particularly around events such as baptisms.⁴⁴ To have Joan as your patron was of great benefit. Her religious devotion and that of her kin are clear in their letters. Frequent biblical references are made, and veneration of God, his blessings, and prayers addressed to him were abundant. The image of God, and the desire to work towards his teachings was of infinite importance and care was taken to stress the all encompassing envelope of His love. Joan’s son-in-law Sir William Marsham committed her ‘to God[’s] protection and safe conduct’ and Thomas Bouchier declared himself to be ‘your faithfull servant in the Lord Jesus, to whose protection I commande your Ladyship.’⁴⁵ Even the members of her family who do not appear to be so emphatic in their religious ardour would pepper their letters with such phrases as ‘God willing.’

Clark Memorial Library California: Castle Press, 1989); Patrick Collinson, *Godly People; Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London: Hambledon Press, 1983); William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment; The Coming of Revolution in an English County* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: London: Harvard University Press, 1983); Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England; The Caroline Puritan Movement, c. 1620-1643* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Ann Hughes comments that Puritan women had space within their own homes to develop their relationship with God yet were able to have a broader impact on their families and communities; Ann Hughes ‘Puritanism and Gender’, in John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 294-308

⁴⁰ Searle, p. 11.

⁴¹ Sean Kelsey, ‘Barrington, Joan, Lady Barrington (c.1558–1641)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn., Jan 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65888>

⁴² Searle, pp. 12-13.

⁴³ Searle, James Harrison to Joan Barrington, 29th June 1629, Letter 41, p. 70.

⁴⁴ Searle, James Harrison to Joan Barrington, October 1629 [?], Letter 68, n. 2, p. 94.

⁴⁵ Searle, Sir William Masham to Joan Barrington, July 1630 [?], Letter 155, p. 162; Searle, Thomas Bouchier to Joan Barrington, 2nd March 1629 [?], Letter 34, p. 61.

Religious zeal runs through the correspondence, sometimes forceful, sometimes meandering, but ever present and, in this context, a necessity for life.

Knowing what we do about Joan's religious passion, it may be surprising to learn that her spiritual devotion waned in the months after Sir Francis' death in 1628, and according to her contemporaries she experienced a 'crisis of faith.' One may have assumed that in seventeenth-century England, religious conviction after bereavement would have increased, or at least been maintained, as people sought to find comfort or an explanation of why their companion had been taken from them.⁴⁶ Meryell Littleton begged her aunt to 'pray to our good God to bestowe his blessings upon me and all mine,' thus asking for strength in her widowhood, while Anne Newdigate accepted it was God's decision to take her husband; 'it hath pleased God to visit my husband Sir John Newdigate with sickness which the physicians stand in doubt of his recovery.'⁴⁷ It is a shame that so few of Joan's letters from this period survive as they could have been used to gauge whether there was a marked difference in her religious rhetoric before and after her husband's death. Whatever the contrast, both in her writing and in her demeanour, it was enough for her contemporaries to not only comment upon it, but to offer guidance, gentle persuasion and even a reminder of her duty towards herself, God and those whom she presided over.

The letters of condolence Joan received in the weeks following Sir Francis' death stand as a testament to the high esteem in which she and her husband were held. The process of mourning had undergone a significant change in the early part of the seventeenth century, moving from a more restrained form of bereavement to an acceptable level of moderate grief. It has been noted that religious conventions were frequently adhered to in mourning letters as Ralph A. Houlbrooke asserts, 'Those who put pen to paper in early modern times to express their grief in the face of bereavement hardly ever did so without invoking religious consolations, though

⁴⁶ Joan, however, was not alone. Ann Hughes has suggested that for Puritan women in particular there may have been difficulties in bereavement, as they may have felt they were being punished by God for 'setting too much store by their earthly families'. She gives three examples of women (Mary Boyle Rich, countess of Warwick, Katherine Clark and Sarah Savage) who expressed guilt and fear that they had displeased their Lord and were punished accordingly; Hughes, 'Puritanism and Gender' in Coffey and Lim, *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, p. 299.

⁴⁷ Meryvell Littleton to Lady Muriel Knyvett, 16th June 1603, Westminster, BL, Eg. MS, 2714 fol. 300; Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, WCRO, CR 136 B309.

with varying degrees of conviction.⁴⁸ As Houlbrooke also points out, the eight surviving letters Joan received in the aftermath of her husband's death are useful because of the variation in tone and content.⁴⁹ The acceptable forms of mourning in society are mirrored in these letters; 'in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England rigorism and rigoristic moderation yield to increasingly more tolerant conceptions of moderation. Anxiety about mourning, however, never disappears'.⁵⁰ Rigorism, according to Pigman, was at its height during the reign of Edward VI, and whilst rigorism is not a clearly defined tool in the rhetoric of Joan's correspondents, there are elements which are similar.⁵¹

In the letters of condolence that Joan received, genuine outpourings of grief and emotive phrasing, coupled with religious sentiments, are frequent. Richard Whalley, Joan's brother-in-law used the triplicate 'truly noble, perfectly religious and most well merritinge common wealth's husband,' to express his regard, and urged the widow 'sister rejoyce; good madam rejoyce, even contrary to flesh and blood, rejoyce for his departure, show your humble thanckfullness to almighty God.'⁵² His repetition of the word 'rejoyce' symbolises the gratefulness they should have had for Francis' life and death, and that far from pitying him, or feeling despondent, they should celebrate that he has progressed to the glory of the Lord. He compounded this with lines that could be used as an epitaph; 'Hee lived in honour, dyed in peace, forewent God's heavy judgement – most like to befall us – and shall rise in glory eternall.'⁵³ Sir William Meux, Joan's son-in-law, also offered the opinion 'lett this be our comfort, that as hee lived, so dyed, happily chalking out a way for us to walk in, leaving behind him a good name, much honoured of all men.'⁵⁴ There seemed to be an authentic wish to comfort Joan in her hour of need, but with this came a reminder of her responsibilities. Lady Mary Eliot spoke persuasively of the 'faithfull, painfull, resolute captaine' who bravelye stood out not for the libbertyes

⁴⁸ Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 241.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

⁵⁰ G.W. Pigman III, *Grief and English Renaissance Elegy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 28.

⁵¹ Pigman defines rigorism as something which 'prohibits and condemns all grief for those who have died virtuously and are in heaven.' *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 29.

⁵² Searle, Richard Whalley to Joan Barrington, 22nd July 1628, Letter 1, p. 29.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

betix mane and man but betix God and man.’⁵⁵ Any subtle suggestion that Joan is expected to carry on in his image is affirmed by Mary’s closing lines, where she commented that ‘the loss of a Joshua in all affaires to you power maye be cantervailed with a Deborah.’⁵⁶ The allusion here is explicit. Joshua was the successor of Moses, and Deborah was the prophetess and judge of Israel who helped the Israelites free themselves from the Canaanites. Now that her extended family had lost their Joshua in Sir Francis, Joan was expected to replace him as their spiritual leader, and guide them through their turbulent times.⁵⁷

It may be wondered who was giving Joan the comfort and spiritual support she needed during her period of mourning. There appeared to be no shortage of acquaintances desperate to aid her in her crisis. Some letters achieved this more considerately than other. In a letter written in approximately 1628, her daughter Lady Elizabeth Masham gently reminded her mother of their faith in God; ‘there is no hapynes in any thing but in getting assuranc of God[‘s] love in Christ, and ‘tis the only thing, I thank God, which I take comfort in, and I know you will say the like by yourself.’⁵⁸

James Harrison was keen to give guidance to his patroness but was careful not to overstep the mark. He encouraged her to

goe with courage and resolution, fixe one ey upon your self, that your soule may ever be sensible of your need of the mercyes of God and the merites of the lord Jesus... keepe close unto the lord... make his word your rule and his spirit you guide; so shall your course be right and your conclusion sweete.⁵⁹

He urged her to remember her course through life, to be resolute in her understanding of God’s ways and to submit fully to her religious calling. God must be the light which shows her the way out of her personal darkness and ultimately leads her to her ‘conclusion sweete.’ However he was reluctant to offend Joan and

⁵⁵ Searle, Lady Mary Eliot to Joan Barrington, August 1628 [?], Letter 4, p. 33.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Another example of a woman lauded as another Deborah is Elizabeth I. Christopher Haigh mentions in his book *Elizabeth I*, that from the outset of her reign she was styled as the saviour of the English people, and that references to her as Deborah were made; Christopher Haigh, *Elizabeth I* (London; New York: Longman, 1988), pp. 7, 28, 159. See also Carol Blessing, ‘Elizabeth I as Deborah the Judge: Exceptional Women of Power’ in Lisa Hopkins and Annaliese Connolly eds, *Goddesses and Queens* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2007).

⁵⁸ Searle, Lady Elizabeth Masham to Joan Barrington, before 18th February 1629, Letter 28, p. 56.

⁵⁹ Searle, James Harrison to Joan Barrington, 29th June 1629, Letter 41, p. 71.

made it clear that ‘I write not these things as doubting, onely I thinke it not amisse to exhort, which even the best have need of and I know your ladyship will take well.’⁶⁰ He subtly flattered her by hinting he knew she was aware of how to live her life, and to therefore humour him telling her this, yet he still pointed out that even ‘the best’ need occasional tender direction. Joan does not seem to have taken umbrage with James; in his next surviving letter to her he beseeched, ‘your good ladyship continue still your holy care of maynetayneing faith and a good conscience,’ and even proceeded to give her seven rules to ensure that her belief stayed strong.⁶¹ Once more he tried to explain his endeavours stating, ‘it is my heart’s desire in absenc and presenc to doe your soule all the service I can... The God of heaven... in mercy heale all diseases of your soule...cleare all your doubts... and best serve to establish your ladiship’s heart in the assured hope of glory.’⁶² James felt he was in a good position to offer advice and that it would be accepted kindly in the manner in which it was offered. If Joan’s letters had survived it would be easier to make judgements on who she confided in, and how much guidance she sought. It is clear from James’ letters that while he was trying to be helpful, he noted his subservience and was loathe to ruin a relationship which had proven to be so fruitful to him and his family.

One person who perhaps should have heeded this observation was Roger Williams. Williams was at this time chaplain to the Masham family (headed by Joan’s son-in-law Sir William and daughter Lady Elizabeth) and is described by Searle as ‘a pioneer of religious liberty.’⁶³ Despite this Williams was deemed to be an unattractive match for Joan’s niece Jane Whalley, as he had little money and few prospects. Relations were therefore already strained when he wrote letters to Joan around April and May 1629. His first letter expressed hope that he may still win Jane’s hand, as he wished to give a good account of himself, and looked to present Joan with an image of a devoted servant eager to have her blessing. He declared, ‘To wrong your precious name and answer her kind love and want would be like gall to all the hony of my life, and marr my marriage joyes. The kind affection of your deare ladyship and worthy niece is of better merit and desent.’⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Searle, James Harrison to Joan Barrington, 17th July 1629, Letter 45, p. 74.

⁶² Ibid., p. 75.

⁶³ Searle, Roger Williams to Joan Barrington, April 1629 [?], Letter 37, n. 3, p. 63.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 65.

By the time of his next letter in early May his plan of marriage appears to have been scuppered, as he bitterly proclaimed, 'I doubt not but your good wisdom and love have fairly interpreted my carriage in that late treatie, and I also trust, quieted and stilled the loving affections of your unworthy niece, we hope to live together in the heavens though the Lord have denied that union on earth.'⁶⁵ The rest of his letter took the form of a religious diatribe on the problems Joan was incurring in her life. His tone was markedly different from his previous letter, and while he conformed to social niceties by addressing her as 'your ladyship' and signing off as 'Your ladyship's most faythfull and truly observant,' his manner betrays his true feelings. Even his title as the 'truly observant' can be interpreted as a barb, insinuating that he was the only person honestly aware of Joan's predicament, and therefore was justified in his harsh words. He was in apparent awe of this situation as he confessed 'it hath almost astonish me... that not only inferior Christians but ministers... faythfull and observant to your ladyship... such helps and means incomparable, should yet be driven to sigh, to say little, to suspend their judgments, to hope, but feare and doubt.'⁶⁶ In fact the men that Williams derided had expressed their misgivings in a more agreeable manner, as we have seen by James Harrison's correspondence. Williams may have believed he was being candid for Joan's sake, but the manner in which he did so was brutal and plain. It is possible that Williams' intention was to state the truth boldly, maintaining that it was for Joan's good, and thus his intentions were honourable. However it is more likely that his upset over his failed marriage plans evoked feelings of emotion which seeped into his letter. He admitted that some of what he had noticed would 'I trust deeply affect your ladyship', but still pursued his points relentlessly.⁶⁷

Williams excused himself for what he referred to by claiming that 'the Lord himself a message sent by me his unworthy servant', thus fully immersing himself in his religious role.⁶⁸ He certainly attacked his role with gusto; sparing Joan's feelings was not high on his list of priorities. Evidently he believed promoting his message purposefully was of greater importance. He was emphatic about the poor state Joan appeared to be in, commenting 'certainly (madame) the lord hath a quarrel against

⁶⁵ Searle, Roger Williams to Joan Barrington, 2nd May 1629, Letter 38, p. 66.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-7.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

you, Woe unto me if I hold my peace and hide that from you which may seeme bitter at present, it may be sweeter than hony in the later end.'⁶⁹ His maintained his aim was for the greater good, emphasising this with the lines 'what I now expresse to your ladyship hath long lyen like fire in my bones.'⁷⁰ His religious imagery of the fire which may be akin to those raging in hell, juxtaposed with the image of 'a soule gasping after Jesus Christ', was powerful and exuberant.⁷¹ He pressed religious reference after reference, quotation after quotation until he could be satisfied his aim has been accomplished. He even resorted to manipulating Joan emotionally by imploring her to consider not only her own welfare, but that of her kin. He argued, 'Call to mind what a cut... if you ever cast up your eye toward heaven and see so many blessed branches in the bosome of Christ, and so your stock rejected.'⁷² He implied that whatever course Joan decided to embark upon would have ramifications on those around her. This was a cruel shot at a woman who would make no mistake about the strength of Williams' words.

However displeasing William's words were, they carried some truth. Joan was a figure of sanctuary for many, a beacon of light, a replacement for her husband in terms of puritan guidance. Her family and close acquaintances would have felt a debt of gratitude to a woman whom 'they entrusted the upbringing of their children and from who they sought spiritual counsel, sanction for their matrimonial arrangements and intercessory prayer.'⁷³ If Joan was to lose her way spiritually, what would this have meant for their faith? Perhaps Williams felt he had a moral and sacred duty to be so insistent. As Larminie remarked in her review of Searle's edition, 'Sustained biblical imagery, relation of personal religious experience and outspoken spiritual advice delineate the closeness of their walk with God.'⁷⁴ Personal and public religious devotion was an emotive subject and the quarrel between Joan and Williams caused turbulence in the wider community. Sean Kelsey has commented that her son-in-law Sir William Masham warned Joan that the affair was bringing godly devotion into disrepute amongst their enemies.⁷⁵ When writing to her in July 1629, he seemed thankful that some sort of reconciliation was taking place;

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 68.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Larminie, 'Review', p. 498.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 498.

⁷⁵ Kelsey, 'Barrington, Joan, Lady Barrington', <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/65888>

‘What he wrote to your ladishipp was out of conscience and desire of your spirituall good, which is most pretious of him...I doubt not but you are well perswaded of him and will receive him into your former favour and good opinion.’⁷⁶ Whatever Williams’ intentions were, he exacerbated what Kelsey has deemed ‘the agonies of a woman whose heart-burnings were of the most intense, often black, and melancholic variety.’⁷⁷ The obligation Joan had towards those who loved and followed her was understood to be very strong. High social status coupled with spiritual resolution and comfortable wealth meant that many perceived her duties to others to be unquestionable. When this steadfastness began to look shakeable the foundations upon which many had based their lives looked to be untenable. The fact that this worried so many people is a testament to Joan and the power of the archetypal matriarchal widowed figure.⁷⁸

Despite her period of crisis, which appears to have been resolved after some duration, Joan was often called upon for advice on family matters. Thomas Bourchier touchingly and eloquently pleaded with her to give him guidance, asking her to ‘give me a drop from your fountain and tho I am unworthy of such a jemme... I humblye begg it abundantlye.’⁷⁹ One of the topics on which her recommendation

⁷⁶ Searle, Sir William Masham to Joan Barrington, August/September 1629 [?], Letter 64, p. 91.

⁷⁷ Kelsey, ‘Joan Barrington’, *ODNB*.

⁷⁸ It should be noted however that other denominations of religion had impressive matriarchal figures at the helm of their families. Catholic mothers were seen as the preservers of household religion and the educators of their daughters. Cissie Fairchild asserts that Catholic wives were possibly seen as the moral superiors of even their husbands, acting as their spiritual guides, and that is the post-Reformation Catholic Church they became pillars of their society; Fairchilds, *Women in Early Modern Europe 1500-1700*, pp. 233-5; see also Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, Chapter 10 and Ronald Corthell, Frances E. Dolan, Christopher Highley and Arthur F. Marotti eds, *Catholic Culture in Early Modern England* (Notre Dame and Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007). Elizabeth Cary, Viscountess Falkland (1585-1639), converted to Catholicism in 1626 to not only the embarrassment of her acutely protestant husband Sir Henry Cary (1575-1633), but also to the displeasure of the Charles I. Her devotion became a barrier between her and her family, so much so that her younger children were sent to live with her eldest son Lucius, but after the death of her husband, she sent her six daughters abroad to receive instruction in the Catholic faith. She also ‘kidnapped’ her two youngest sons asserting that as their mother, decisions about their habitat and education should rest with her. Her assistance in these matters came from other strong Catholic women such as Henrietta Maria and Mary, Countess of Buckingham, who was also a Catholic convert. Elizabeth’s conversion to Catholicism enabled her to create her own agency and authority, and she became a formidable matriarch. For more on Elizabeth Cary, see Stephanie Hodgson-Wright, ‘Cary, Elizabeth, Viscountess Falkland (1585–1639)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4835>; Elizabeth Cary and Lucy Hutchinson; Barry Weller and Margaret W. Ferguson eds, *The Tragedy of Mariam; With the Lady Falkland, Her Life, By One of Her Daughters* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1994); Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon; Catholicism, Gender and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca: New York, 1999), pp. 144-52.

⁷⁹ Searle, Thomas Bourchier to Joan Barrington, 26th January 1629, Letter 21, p. 49.

was sought regularly was that of marital matches, in particular for two of her granddaughters, Joan 'Jug' Altham and Joan Meux. While both girls' sets of parents were heavily involved in first finding suitable beaux and then conducting marriage negotiations, it was Joan they sought reassurance from, even if they did not always agree with her opinions. This provides a fascinating insight into the intricate and often delicate weavings of a young girl's future plans. The topic of matches and the discussions involved are covered more fully in the chapter on courtship; here Joan's involvement as confidante to her family is the primary concern.

The search for husbands for Joan's granddaughters cropped up repeatedly in the Barrington letters. Jug was successful, marrying Oliver St John, while Joan Meux was still unwed in 1632. From the outset Joan played the part not only of a grandmother giving advice, but also an intermediary; someone to run ideas past, or to go to when the process of matchmaking had slowed down. Sir Francis Harris, a relative of Sir Francis Barrington, was always willing to use his many connections to aid the Barringtons and he wrote to Joan in September 1629 regarding his assistance to the Mashams and the Meuxs. He had offered to help make a match for Jug, but was told there was another already in the offing. He also proposed to set up a match for Joan Meux. He seemed keen to be of service and thus wondered why he had not been kept informed of his cousin Jug's arrangements; 'there was another mache intreatye, which if it break offe I should forthe with here of it, but it is nowe 3 weeks past...and here nothing from them; but the offer being so fayre... I ame desirous to presse it with the more earnestness.'⁸⁰ On the subject of Joan Meux's quest he related; 'I wish the certaynety were known what Sir William Mewes will give with my cosin his daughter... if my cosin Mewes would bee perswaded to harken to a mache of 7 or 800^{li} a yeare... I should not dowbte but to recommend one of good note of quality.'⁸¹ The fact that Francis had included Joan in his deliberations on his efforts suggests that he believed she would have some influence on the subject, or at the very least would have been able to advise him as to how well the negotiations for his cousins' matches were taking place. He appreciated Joan's comments and accepted that she would be able to answer his questions. By late September Sir Francis had had no further correspondence from the Mashams or Meuxs, but he

⁸⁰ Searle, Sir Francis Harris to Joan Barrington, 4th September 1629, Letter 56, p. 84.

⁸¹ Ibid.

appeared to have heard from Joan so once again he chose to communicate with her, rather than the girls' fathers. He appeared slightly hurt that 'if they had not concluded in a mache they certified me of that they doe not imbrace this fayre offer of myne.'⁸² Yet he still reminded Joan of the conditions of these matches if they should prove attractive, so he must have expected her to relay this information to her daughters and sons-in-law. The fact that Sir Francis used Joan in the negotiations shows that it was expected she should be involved, and he trusted her to listen to and respect his endeavours.

By November 1629, the Mashams had commenced negotiations for Jug, but had hit a sticking point; the potential groom's family was unhappy with what they felt to be unreasonable demands. Lady Elizabeth Masham wrote to her mother in slight indignation of this, and claimed 'I did write to you what thay [the demands] were' before again explaining what they had requested, as if to seek reassurance from Joan that they had partaken in the right course of action.⁸³ She asked for Joan's assistance in the matter, concluding, 'I desire you seriously to consult with my brother Garad and to help me with your best advise I will send no answer of my letter till I here from you.'⁸⁴ However this match could not be resolved and by the end of November Sir William Masham was writing of two more potential suitors, 'Sir Frederick' and 'Mr Pykerine'.⁸⁵ Upon this matter we are directed to an interesting point; advice was not always followed, even when sought and given with the best intentions. Whilst Sir William admitted to Joan in one letter 'I should be glad to receive your direction on Mundaye next', two days later he wrote an apologetic reply, which stated unreservedly that Jug had refused to sell her land in order to satisfy the family of her suitor.⁸⁶ His wife Lady Elizabeth was certainly against this plan, having proclaimed in an earlier epistle, 'I hope ther wilbe no more speech of my daughter's parting with her land, which she would by no means yeald to.'⁸⁷ It is not clear whether Joan had suggested this strategy, or had advised her family to consider it, but it was soundly rejected. Obviously wishing not to offend, Masham explained, 'for myne part I never did diswade her, for in all those proceedings I

⁸² Searle, Sir Francis Harris to Joan Barrington, 26th September 1629, Letter 62, p. 89.

⁸³ Searle, Lady Elizabeth Masham to Joan Barrington, November 1629, Letter 79, p. 103.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁸⁵ Searle, Sir William Masham to Joan Barrington, 28th November 1629, Letter 83, p. 107.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Searle, Lady Elizabeth Masham to Joan Barrington, 24th November 1629, Letter 82, p. 105.

desire to avoyde that, not to persuade or dissuade, only to doe your commands and what my wife and daughter shall desire me to do.⁸⁸ Here stood a man firmly in the middle. Evidently there were pitfalls in giving and receiving this sort of counsel, and one can only imagine how Joan would have reacted.

Jug finally made a match with Oliver St John, and once again Joan was included in the process. Lady Elizabeth confided in her mother about her hopes for St John; 'He is a lawyer, but young, and therfor I think his practis is little, I beseech you to consider well of it and keep it very secret.'⁸⁹ Whilst we do not know Joan's reply, Elizabeth felt it was necessary in her following letters to emphasise to her mother that she was aware of how much guidance Joan had given to her, and of how essential her counsel was to the actions of the Masham family; 'I acknowledge my selfe very much bownd to you for your care of Jug Altham in this wayte business, wherein I woulde be loth to doe anything without your advice and aprobaton.'⁹⁰ She replicated this sentiment in her following letters almost to the exact wording, and repeatedly refers to the 'waitye', or 'weighty', business. Her repetition reflected the magnitude of arranging her daughter's match and had obviously weighed upon all of their minds. Therefore she probably felt that her appreciation of Joan's contribution could not go unrecognised. Furthermore Jug clearly felt the same way about her grandmother. Elizabeth wrote in a postscript, 'I beseech you if you think it not fit to proceed in the business that you will write your mind to Jug, for she desirs to be directed by you.'⁹¹ Joan's support continued to be forthcoming for in January 1630 Elizabeth requested for her mother's 'ernest prayers and continuance of your best advise,'⁹² and in March expressed similar sentences admitting 'I must acknowledg your former love expressed in this bisnes according to your constant care of me and mine and still I intreat the continuanc thereof.'⁹³

Sir William Meux writing in around January 1631 was also keen to display his awareness of such encouragement, insisting he was 'very sensible of my Lady Barrington's care and paines concerning the match propounded for my daughter in

⁸⁸ Searle, Sir William Masham to Joan Barrington, 30th November 1629, Letter 84, p. 107.

⁸⁹ Searle, Lady Elizabeth Masham to Joan Barrington, 30th December 1629 [?], Letter 97, p. 119.

⁹⁰ Searle, Lady Elizabeth Masham to Joan Barrington, Letter 99, p. 120.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 121.

⁹² *Ibid*.

⁹³ Searle, Lady Elizabeth Masham to Joan Barrington, 1st March 1630, Letter 118, p. 136.

Hampshire.⁹⁴ The more laborious search for a husband for Joan Meux was compounded by the fact that her father was loathe to be parted from her by too great a distance; if this had not been the case Sir Francis Harris confessed her 'could have tendred unto yow good maches 6 or 7 score miles offe.'⁹⁵ Meux confessed that it would have greatly saddened him to be living so far from his daughter, and this deep emotion was expressed in a letter he wrote to Joan in which he stated,

The truth is that I have bin carefull in the pursuit of a mach for my daughter in Dorsetsheer, neere unto me... I confess I like not the distance of place proposed by yowr ladyship but yet I must submit my self to him whoe governs all things, and shall always remaine nost thankfull for your love and care.⁹⁶

One must feel some sympathy for Meux. After striving to find a close match for his daughter he had been unsuccessful and had to submit to the will of his mother-in-law. Yet still he was careful not to spite her, and even thanked her for her watchfulness. Instead Meux sought comfort and explanation in his religious beliefs, conceding 'itt hath pleaseth God that my desires take not effect.'

Widows with the authority Joan had were seen as the directional leaders of their clan, wielding power and influence. However this meant that occasionally relations with family members became strained. This was particularly evident when it came to matters of inheritance, and specifically when the time came for the eldest son to lay claim to his estate. Often this would mean some displacement of his mother. While the transition was hoped to be smooth, it was often painful for a widow to say farewell to her marital home, leaving not just the structure of the building, but also to some extent her status and power. For the most part Joan Barrington enjoyed a friendly, if not always warm, rapport with her eldest son Thomas. Joan stayed in her marital home of The Priory for a period after Sir Francis' death, and Thomas and his wife Judith stayed in Barrington Hall. However, when the time came for her son and daughter-in-law to take over the estate, there was an undercurrent of tension in their correspondence. This may have been exacerbated by the close relationship Joan enjoyed with her son-in-law Sir Gilbert Gerard, whom she increasingly relied on and confided in.

⁹⁴ Searle, Sir William Meux to Joan Barrington, before 24 January 1631, Letter 169, p. 179.

⁹⁵ Searle, Sir Francis Harris to Joan Barrington, 23 December 1629 [?], Letter 91, p. 113.

⁹⁶ Searle, n. 2, p. 182.

In June 1629, when Joan was planning to stay at Harrow with the Gerards, letters from both Thomas and Judith betrayed bitterness that not only was she planning another sojourn, but that her prolonged stay at Hatfield with the Mashams had led to a cooling of affairs between them. Thomas appeared unhappy that his mother intended to move once more, rendering him unable to perform his filial duties. He claimed;

I am sorye to hear at this instant... that you are for Harrow; not that it were fitt to confine your desires, but that I and my wife wish that your convenience of staye at Hatfeild might have mett with ovr resolutions to attend yow thare, which will neither be so pleasing nor so commodious or convenient... with out you.⁹⁷

There is a note of sulkiness here, as if he felt Joan had snubbed him. Thomas was prone to fits of sullenness and he appeared to be brooding over the notion that his mother was staying for such long periods with other members of the family. Judith was also troubled by such thoughts, but worded her displeasure in a blunt, bolder way; 'I understood your intention the begining of next week to goe to Harrow, sence which time I have been much perplexed in my thoughts that you should the same week goe away wherin we resolved to attend you.'⁹⁸ She put the onus on Joan, subtly demanding an explanation as to why Joan should change her plans when she knew Thomas and Judith were coming. There is a sense that Judith found Joan's actions quite rude, although she was too polite or deferential to say it. She chided Joan, but in a manipulative way, warning her that her actions had hurt Thomas to the extent 'that his hart will not be easily be quieted againe, he believing, if seems by some encoragedment from your self, that you would have patience untell the begining of this terme.'⁹⁹ Clearly, there had been underlying tension for some time, and Judith was angered at what she saw as Joan toying with Thomas's plans and emotions. However, by the end of the letter she had tried to squash some of her resentment, and offered an olive branch to Joan. Judith was probably sensible to the fact that blame could be apportioned to both sides and she was keen to prove that she at least wanted to move away from any past tensions and dilute any conflict. She assumed the role of conciliator, assuming 'it must be my part to try to procure your forgetfulness of all errors or offenses that are past and to entreat you will be pleased

⁹⁷ Searle, Sir Thomas Barrington to Joan Barrington, June 1629 [?], Letter 40, p. 69.

⁹⁸ Searle, Lady Judith Barrington to Joan Barrington, June 1629, Letter 39, p. 68.

⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 69.

to make us happy in your company at Hatfeeld at least this sommer.' Through the strong characters of the women involved in the Barrington family, problems were untangled, and the daughter-in-law took it upon herself so amend matters with her mother-in-law, while the son was unable to do so.

Widowed Mothers and Their Sons

Maternal influence, according to Ralph Houlbrooke, was commonly thought to be strong in the early years of a boy's life, especially in gentry families, where 'maternal love and expectations may have been less heavily concentrated on the heir than were paternal.'¹⁰⁰ In their adult years, trust was shown by the son when leaving important business in their mother's hands. Elizabeth Gates and Eleanor dowager countess of Rutland both played active roles in the management of their sons' affairs during their absence, and John, earl of Wiltshire, Sir Thomas Arundell, Sir William St. Maur and Sir John Luttrell all named their mothers as co-executors of their wills.¹⁰¹ There is also evidence of maternal love through letter writing. Lady Brilliana Harley wrote many letters to her son Ned which contained affectionate sentiments and expressed a desire to share in his experiences aided by their mutual interest in politics and strong personal affinity.¹⁰²

The death of a husband could mean a power shift between the widow and her eldest son. As the head of the family, he was now the superior of his mother, and even though she gained economic independence, it was the son who was to be the leader and decision maker of the household. This could be a difficult enough transition, but when there was existing animosity between mother and son, quarrels were almost to be expected. This often manifested itself in the shape of conflict over their estate; as Barbara J. Harris has pointed out 'When they distrusted and disliked each other... the battleground was property, and the feud rarely broke out until the mother was widowed.'¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Ralph Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London and New York: Longman, 1984), pp. 182-3.

¹⁰¹ Harris, 'Elite Mothers and Sons', pp. 618-9.

¹⁰² Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, pp. 183-4.

¹⁰³ Harris, 'Elite Mothers and Sons', pp. 630-1.

A prime example of the power shift between mother and son can be seen in the Thynne family of Longleat. Joan Thynne had difficulties with her son Thomas; there was little love lost between Joan and her daughter-in-law Maria, and the tension that had arisen between mother and son since his clandestine marriage was magnified when she suddenly became a widow in 1604. As John Thynne had died intestate, Joan and Thomas were immediately involved in legal disputes and had to go to court over the administration of the estate of Longleat, the provision of her three younger children and the marriage portions for her two daughters. Elder sons often resented having to provide for younger siblings, as this could reduce or severely burden their inheritance.¹⁰⁴ Occasionally these sorts of disputes could run through generation of families, as seen in the family of Cecily, dowager marchioness of Dorset.¹⁰⁵ It is worth remembering Houlbrooke's opinion; if maternal affection was equally split amongst all children, then perhaps some male heirs felt no particular allegiance to their mothers' wishes. Thomas was reluctant to provide extensively and believed his siblings and mother were trying to defraud him.¹⁰⁶ Joan's position, like so many other widows of this period, was delicate; she could not afford to anger her son so entirely that she permanently lost his benefaction, but she also needed to provide for her other offspring. The exhausting legal process ran on for years, with various claims and counter claims being made.

One of the issues discussed at length in Joan's letters to Thomas is the money to be given to her daughters, in particular Dorothy, who was in the process of arranging a match and therefore needed to be able to stand well financially. In April 1607, Joan related the affair to Thomas, stating that Dorothy could make a good union in 'Mr Whitney's son' and asked 'may you think good now for her advancement therein.'¹⁰⁷ Knowing Thomas had the power sat uneasily with Joan, who as a strong matriarch would have found it painful to ask favours of the son who had found it so easy to disobey her. She attempted to soften Thomas by saying how grateful she and Dorothy would be if he should aid her; 'both your sister shall be bound to yield you her continual thankfulness, and myself to acknowledge your love

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 625.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 625-7; Cecily, dowager marchioness of Dorset openly feuded with her son Thomas about provisions for her younger children; after Thomas dies in 1530, his widow Margaret fought bitterly with her son Henry over the provision for her daughters.

¹⁰⁶ Wall, p. xxix.

¹⁰⁷ Wall, Joan Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 11th April 1607, Caus Castle, Letter 53, p. 38.

to her.’¹⁰⁸ Joan has played a subservient role here, knowing that her words will pass power to her son. This was stressed by the use of the words ‘bound’ and ‘acknowledge’. She realised that flattering Thomas may have been the key to helping her daughter. In case this wasn’t enough she attached a postscript detailing a short history of the Whitney family, even adding that there was a connection with the Audley family, from which Maria was descended.

However, it would appear that Thomas was unmoved by his mother’s pleas, and that the match for Dorothy had fallen through as in October 1608, Joan wrote again to ask for Thomas’ assistance. It had obviously been preying on her mind as she begged ‘I heartily pray you instance this matter and forward it by you countenance and pains what you may.’¹⁰⁹ By September 1611, after further pleas have been ignored, Joan was struggling to control her annoyance. She reproachfully stated, ‘I marvel much that you would not perform your promise in coming to me not yet send me some answer of my late sent letters... methinks you might have sent some messenger with answer unto them as I would have done to you.’¹¹⁰ She implored him to do what she considered to be the right thing financially, putting all feelings aside for her, and instead doing the best thing for his sister; ‘Therefore good son have a brotherly care for her good.’¹¹¹

What must it have cost Joan to label her son as ‘good’ when she clearly felt he was being anything but? Yet she focused on the task ahead and was relentless in her pursuit of her daughter’s dowry. She was a good example of a mother who remained involved with her adult son’s affairs, especially when they had an effect on the rest of the family. The dynamic between mother and son had been damaged in his youth, and continued until her death, when Thomas may have felt he was finally free of the shackles of his domineering mother. In Joan’s defence, she was a woman who had effectively managed a large estate and had an expertise in legal matters, and was not somebody who expected to be disobeyed. A strong dominant figure such as this showed a compliment to her young daughters by placing them as executors of her will ahead of the men in the family, which, according to Alison D. Wall,

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁰⁹ Wall, Joan Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 25th October 1608, Glazeley, Letter 59, p. 45.

¹¹⁰ Wall, Joan Thynne to Thomas Thynne, 24th September 1611, Caus Castle, Letter 67, p. 52.

¹¹¹ Wall, Joan Thynne to Thomas Thynne, October/November 1611 [?], London, Letter 68, p. 53.

demonstrated that she 'expected other women, at least in her family, to have a level of competence similar to her own, and did not think herself exceptional.'¹¹²

A Widow's Language?

Lynne Magnusson has surmised that 'the most usual note struck in the existing letters of sixteenth-century gentle women is of deference, often signalled by apology and self-deprecation'.¹¹³ This was often true in the rhetoric of widows, particularly if they were in need of assistance in matters pertaining to their legal or familial estates. As argued below, the rhetorical devices of Anne Newdigate became an important factor in her fight for her son's wardship after the death of her husband.¹¹⁴ However, the exploitation of a woman's vulnerability became a standard deferential trope, and in the case of widows, their religious, emotional and moral significance also became a tool in their letter writing.¹¹⁵ Caution must therefore be exercised when concluding whether the weakness displayed in their letter writing 'reflects a writer's genuine sense of inferiority as a woman, or rather a canny strategy employed for rhetorical effects.'¹¹⁶ Considering whether there is such trope as a 'widow's language' is a difficult task, not least because their widowhood usually resulted in a rise in their status. Therefore while there is evidence of letters written in a deferential manner, there are also letters written with a firm tone, and strong words; some examples of both these styles also come from the same women.

Anne Newdigate needed to use all her epistolary expertise in ensuring the survival of her family sphere during a period of unsteadiness. Driven by her necessity to acquire her son's wardship and control of his minority, her letters during the time just before her husband's death and the early period of her widowhood epitomised the courage and strength some women required during difficult episodes of their lives. Anne was not alone in fighting for control of her son; Katherine Blount, Joan Everarde, Elizabeth Huddleston, Honor Lady Lisle, Lucy Morton Lady

¹¹² Alison, D. Wall, 'Elizabethan Precept and Feminine Practise; The Thynne Family of Longleat', *History*, Vol. 75, No. 243 (January 1990), p. 33.

¹¹³ Lynne Magnusson, 'Widowhood and Linguistic Capital: The Rhetoric and Reception of Anne Bacon's Epistolary Advice', *English Literary Renaissance*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Dec. 2001), p. 3

¹¹⁴ For more information on this period of Anne's life, and in particular the finer details of her financial situation at this time, see Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture*, p36-9.

¹¹⁵ Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers* pp. 254-5.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

Maud Parr and Cecily Unton are all examples of widows who had to pay sizeable sums in order to purchase their sons' wardships.¹¹⁷ Reasons for wanting wardships could be economical, as well as emotional. Wardship gave the widows control over the heir's property until he came of age, and also the right to control his potentially profitable marriage affairs. Mothers also believed they had the best interests of their sons at the forefront of their actions and their affection for them gave them impetus to battle for them.¹¹⁸

The extent of Anne's financial discomfort and need for stability can be traced back even to the beginning of her marriage. Wed at 12, she and her husband John Newdigate lived at her family home and Anne's father Sir Edward Fitton financed John's stint at university. Over the years John proved himself to be devoid of any financial acumen and it was left to Sir Edward to smooth over his son-in-law's shortcomings.¹¹⁹ By 1595 John and Anne were able to move into the estate at Arbury, and also acquired the farm at Brackenbury through the Newdigate line. However financial difficulty was ever present as Anne explained in a letter to Lord Salisbury; 'My father Sr Ed Fytton giving 120L to my marriage my late uncle Mr Fra Fytton undertakeing 900L debts of my husbands 5 years since; out of his love to me and repayed them.'¹²⁰ By the time of John's death, he had failed to redeem himself financially and he was still in deep debt. Even the sale of 35 per cent of his inheritance 'whilst reducing his long term annual income failed in its short term goal of restoring financial equilibrium.'¹²¹ Anne inherited the entire estate in Warwickshire and by ensuring this was instructed in his will, John seems to have been keen for his wife to enjoy some of the financial dependence he had been so poor at providing. He instructed that 'my wife shall have possession of the whole during her life, not only thereby the better increase of my profits at Arbury.'¹²² However, there was a potential problem. When her eldest son Jack reached the age of twenty one, half the estate was passed to him, with the remaining half obtained by him on Anne's death. As Jack was only ten when his father died this prospect was not a favourable one. It laid the estate open to preying third parties who could exploit

¹¹⁷ Harris, 'Elite Mothers and Sons', pp. 614. Harris provides this helpful explanation of why so many women found themselves in this predicament;

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 614-5.

¹¹⁹ Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers*, p. 95.

¹²⁰ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B311.

¹²¹ Larminie, *Wealth, Kinship and Culture*, p. 30.

¹²² Ibid., p. 32.

it for their own gain, leaving the family in hardship. Therefore it was essential for Anne to gain the wardship of her son to prevent this from happening. Furthermore it would ensure that Anne had control over any affairs concerning Jack and would be able to take a more prominent part in overseeing his education and eventually choosing an appropriate wife.

The way in which Anne Newdigate presented herself throughout letters to her social superiors required some skill in consistency and tone. She needed to pitch the contents in the right manner, with a certain spark of passion, but never flashes of anger. Indignation was allowed on occasion where merited, for example when claims were pressed against her land, but this was not allowed to stray into bitterness. Her general frankness was present throughout her letters. She was candid about the trouble she and her children would be in if she could not secure a more promising financial future for them. The honesty with which she tackled her problem would have been appreciated by her contacts. Although she was held in esteem by those with whom she corresponded she had to nurture and nourish these relationships in a certain manner.

Anne set a tone of deference and self humility from the very beginning of her letters, always careful to never appear too ambitious or arrogant. Her letters to men of higher status of herself often started with the conventional salutation 'Right Honourable' or 'Most Honourable' and she even extended this when she felt it was appropriate; she addressed Lord Salisbury as 'Rightly honorable and all worthy of that title.'¹²³ Occasionally a more sentimental, yet still respectful opening was offered, in the instance of the epistle to Lady Gray which commenced 'My harts al honouring dearest La;' pointing towards a friendly, affectionate relationship between the pair.¹²⁴ Anne never presumed her correspondent had an obligation to aid her and in fact she often apologised for taking up their time and acknowledged the service they gave to her. She explained to Sir William Knollys 'being obliged to yor Losp by sundrie yor Noble favours to me worthless of any have presumed to troble yor Lo; in acquainting you with an unlooked for occasion proposed against my sonn'.¹²⁵ Throughout her letters Anne was careful to sound humble, presenting an image that

¹²³ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B308.

¹²⁴ Anne Newdigate to Lady Grey, WCRO, CR 136 B306.

¹²⁵ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B313.

she was nothing other than a mother maintaining the best interests for her son. As an intelligent woman, and a talented practitioner of the art of letter writing, she was able to create a persona suitable for her task. One of her letters to Lord Salisbury illustrated this superbly. She began with the line ‘Pardon this unmanerlie presumption of a most unfortunate woman,’ appearing courteous, yet leaving no doubt as to her being in need.¹²⁶

Women in this period were seen as the mediocre sex, weaker physically and mentally than men. Yet Anne was able to use this to her advantage with the portrayal of herself as a fragile and somewhat feeble female. Command of the tactic of weakness is impressively displayed in her letters to Sir Knollys and Lord Salisbury among others. This was signified in her physical state, her sexual inferiority and financial wellbeing. She compounded her physical exhaustion by frequently pointing out that she was ‘the unfortunate mother of five young children all nursed upon myne own breastes’, giving the picture of a woman worn out with looking after her offspring.¹²⁷ Despite her weariness she was still determined to provide for them, to the extent that she even provided the milk to nourish them all from birth. The use of the words ‘unfortunate’, ‘young’, and ‘nursed’ press the seriousness of Anne’s predicament and can even be seen to have connotations of the Virgin Mary, who gave birth and provided for her child under difficult circumstances. Her weakness due to her gender is also apparent in a letter to Sir Knollys as she expressed her dismay at her treatment in the Court of Wards due to her ‘being a woman and unfit for these affairs’.¹²⁸ She felt powerless to help her son, since as a widow she had no legal rights to obtain her son’s wardship. This is coupled with the knowledge that lack of success would have meant she would have been under immense financial strain and at risk of ‘the entire Newdigate inheritance passing into the hands of financially predatory third parties.’¹²⁹ If there was any doubt as to what was at stake she made it quite clear;

all my husbands lands in warwickshire were appointed mee in jointure, which come not to above two hundred pounds a yeare at the most. His other lands lye in Middlesex... which are rayseed to the uttermost and now

¹²⁶ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury/ Burleigh, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B307; Someone in the present era has queried who this letter was using pencil on this letter.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Anne Newdigate to Sir William Knollys, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B310.

¹²⁹ Vivienne Larminie, ‘Epistolary Armoury’, p. 99.

let for two hundred and twentie pound a yeare out of this which fourtie pound a yeare is estated onto my second sonn and.. long since convaied towards payment of debtes and daughters portions (having three) which commeth to a verie great somme for so small an estate.¹³⁰

To add to the suggestion of her weakness, Anne also used her perceived ‘friendlessness’ as a tactic in which to gain favour from those with power. While it is certain that Anne was not friendless in the popular sense of the word, here it is used to suggest she was without anyone who could have taken care of her and her family in their present state, and thus while she was hoping to be responsible for her own affairs she knew she could not do it without the right acquaintances. ‘In this heavie extremitie being altogether frendless,’ she hinted that if she were not in such a poor state of affairs she would not presume to ask for assistance.¹³¹ By appealing to the humanitarian side of a gentleman’s nature she was giving them not only a chance to help her, but to boost their own sense of self worth. To emphasise this she frequently referred to her ‘fatherless children’ who will be ‘utterly ruinate’ if her son’s wardship is not granted to her.¹³²

The use of persuasive devices, such as ‘rule of three’ and repetition is also apparent. The rule of three is used to emphasise a point by using three adjectives to describe something, or three words which lyrically stress a point. It would appear that Anne did this quite naturally, especially when she wished to provoke a certain thought or feeling. While the portrayal of the triplet of the ‘pore unfortunate woemon’ was a consistent theme, she most often used the rule of three when persuading her correspondent to act in an obliging manner. In a draft of a letter to Lord Salisbury she wrote of his ‘noble heart, disposition and worthy compassion of all’ highlighting three attributes which she felt he would be pleased to consider himself having.¹³³ In another draft letter she dwelt upon the ‘faithful promises and vowes and protestation’ that were given to her about the reward of her son’s wardship – thus not just one declaration of support for her, nor two, but three.¹³⁴ Anne also used triple wording when she wanted to underline to outsiders how she felt about those close to her. She described her son’s tutor as ‘a most honest civile

¹³⁰ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury/ Burleigh (see above), 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B307.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B309b.

¹³⁴ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B311.

faire conditioned man', eager for her correspondent to be left in no doubt of her strength of feeling.¹³⁵ In regards to repetition, it is noticeable that Anne often used the same words scattered liberally throughout her correspondence. Repeating words such as 'poor' and 'unfortunate' serve to remind the reader of the predicament of the writer. Similarly Anne's reiteration of her role as a widow and mother displayed the responsibility she has towards her children, and the necessity of providing for them. She left the recipients of her letters in no doubt of the hardship she was in, and if they were uncertain, her efforts to persuade them were keen indeed.

When analysing her persuasive devices, it is obvious that Anne was more than competent at the art of flattery. She was able to sufficiently compliment her correspondent, and did so with a certain subtleness, which, while leaving the reader in no doubt of her regard, did not sound insincere. This may have taken the form of a complimentary salutation; 'Rightly honorable and all worthy of this title,' being one such example.¹³⁶ Recognizing the recipient's prestige was an obvious attempt at sycophancy, but this could be accentuated by juxtaposing this with the flawed character of the writer. An instance of this is seen in a letter to Sir J Beaumont where Anne stated, 'I knowe now faulte ^in you^ worthe of condemnation therfore can not judge you mine own imperfections, I confesse them manye.'¹³⁷ Picking up on past kindnesses to those less auspicious can also have this effect. Appealing to Lord Salisbury's generosity in giving 'testimonie to poor widows and most unfortunate exhibitants' she reminded him of his duty towards those less fortunate to him, but did so in a way which would not offend or cause resistance.¹³⁸ Furthermore Anne did not forget to be thankful for any help she received from her contacts and again did this in a way which enhanced the recipient's sense of being beneficial. Her comfort is evident as she declared,

Being engaged in all bound dutie for your favourable support of mee and myne (relieving Myne almost dying spirittes) in granting unto mee thy wardshippe of my sonne which was the only comfort could in this time befall me;... If I should omit the acknowledgement of the great

¹³⁵ Anne Newdigate, Arbery, 25th May 1614, WCRO, CR 136 B312.

¹³⁶ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B308.

¹³⁷ Anne Newdigate to Sir J. Beaumont, WCRO, CR 136 B305.

¹³⁸ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury/Burleigh (see above), 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B307.

contentment received from your honour... I could no less then condone my selfe.'¹³⁹

The ease at which Anne could compliment served to ensure that she was perceived as an appreciative gentlewoman and one who was certainly worth aiding.

Anne's modesty can be seen as an attribute which she displayed in abundance. To say it is false modesty would be deceptive, as she clearly displayed it with enough sense so that she may seem respectful, but not insincere. However, we must also assume that the amount of reticence shown was one of her clever rhetorical tactics designed to persuade the recipient that she needed their help without appearing completely helpless. One of the ways in which she did this is to use the word 'humble' repeatedly throughout her requests. This suggests she was aware of the time needed to read, think about, and craft a reply to her epistle. In a letter to Lord Salisbury regarding the wardship of her son, she used derivatives of 'humble' three times and in one to Sir Knollys written in 1616 she used the same terms seven times in the main body of the letter, and eleven times in total throughout the letter.¹⁴⁰ Another habit was to sign off many of her letters taking her 'humble leave' and as a reminder 'humbly beseeches' her Lordship to help her. Furthermore Anne frequently referred to her 'humble sute' suggesting that what she sought was not out of turn, or extravagant, but merely what was best for her son and consequently her whole family. Her humility was emphasised by the lack of conceit evident in her writing – she was aware of the role she must adhere to; in one letter she confessed 'you are pleased to respect me in an higher estimation then I have or can deserve,' while in another she declared she was 'ceasing longer to detain you Losp from your more worthier affaires I humblie take my leave.'¹⁴¹ By doing this she once more highlighted the portrait she had created as a polite and unassuming lady.

However, there was a shard of steel running through Anne. This is perceptible in her letters which warn that although she had created a persona of a woman who was weak and in need of assistance, she was resolute in pursuing her ambition. It would seem that although she may have needed the support of men, she

¹³⁹ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B308.

¹⁴⁰ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B309b; Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, WCRO, CR 136 B313.

¹⁴¹ Anne Newdigate to Sir. J. Beaumont, WCRO, CR 136 B305; Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury/Burleigh (see above), 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B307.

had a firm grasp of the law and business matters pertaining to her estate. It would appear she was expertly knowledgeable about the debts relating to the estate; along with her steward William Whitehall she was able to work out that in order to safeguard her children's rights she would have to obtain the wardship and exploit her estates without extracting her jointure.¹⁴² She took care to explain this fully in a draft to Lord Salisbury, after some arithmetic visible on the fourth side of the sheet of paper. She explained

the thirds of me Joynture being lond [loaned] to the king's use and onerlye one thrid part of Brakenburye also lond to the King; the other tow parts to the Leassies so that I shall fine to the Kingand paye it yearlye rent during the menoritye of the ward; for the thirds of my owne which is absolutlye convayed me in jointure and shall loose so much out of my owne estate... my late uncle Mr Fra Fytton undertakeing 900L debts of my husbands... of which debt there is yet 200L to be payed; So that I loose my owne thrid part of Arberye; to purchase A thrid out of Brackenburye; and must... paye rent for them boeth.¹⁴³

Her business acumen coupled with motherly devotion, enhanced by her rhetorical prowess, made her ultimately successful in the pursuit of her aim.

Lady Elizabeth Russell was another woman who lived much of her adult life in periods of widowhood; the first period from 1566-74 after the death of Sir Thomas Hoby and the second from 1584-1609 after the death of John, Lord Russell. Her surviving letters from this era portray a woman who was at times vulnerable and lonely, but who demanded respect from her counterparts. She expected her views to be taken into consideration on a range of matters, from court matters to legal battles. She wrote a number of letters to her brother-in-law William Cecil, and then her nephew Robert Cecil, asking them for assistance on behalf of various acquaintances. Elizabeth Farber has commented that the number of people she helped 'appears to be impressive, reflecting not only her magnanimous and sympathetic disposition, but also her continuing interest and involvement in Court as well as local affairs.'¹⁴⁴ I would argue that is also showed an awareness in her status, not only as a widow, but as someone who was well connected with influential people. Farber points to Elizabeth's growing self confidence as a widow after the death of her first husband, with the realisation of her growing legal and business acumen and her prominent

¹⁴² Larminie, 'Epistolary Armour', p. 99.

¹⁴³ Anne Newdigate to Lord Salisbury, 1610, WCRO, CR 136 B311b.

¹⁴⁴ Elizabeth Farber, 'Lady Elizabeth Russell', p.37.

social position; this is manifested in the change in her letters to William Cecil 'the earliest... marked by a timid and awkward deference, the later ones concise and straightforward.'¹⁴⁵ By the time of her second spell of widowhood, Elizabeth had settled into her self-assumed role of adviser and advocator, and was adept at creating different personas through her writing.

Like Katherine, duchess of Suffolk, Elizabeth was often asked to make appeals or show her support for people who were in need of assistance, due to her close family connections with the Cecils. In her surviving letters, there are thirteen letters with references to her efforts to influence their actions, and it is evident that she expected her views to be taken into account at the very least, even if they were not agreed with. Her role ranged from defending the religious dissenter James Morrice, to supporting candidates eager for posts in the royal administration. When Elizabeth supported her acquaintances wholeheartedly this was often shown in her enthusiastic expression. This is shown in the consideration of two consecutive letters, one in support of an individual she had little acquaintance with, and one she knew more personally. As Farber points out, the contrast in her tone is marked; she had no motive for pleading for either candidate to have a place in the royal administration other than 'her apparent sense of duty to deceased members of her family who were unable to present the cases themselves'.¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth's recommendation of Henry Grey is short and to the point, offering little in the way of fervour and real interest.¹⁴⁷ She may possibly have been reserved because they were both widowed and she was mindful of the gossip it may have generated, but it was probable she felt little inclination to overly trouble herself in his pursuit of a role. In contrast, her letter in support of Matthew Dale as a Master of the Requests is far more forceful than her cool suggestion of Henry Grey. After hearing of the death of Ralph Rokesby, the incumbent Master, she immediately wrote to Robert Cecil in the anticipation of an early success. She wrote persuasively, highlighting not only the virtues of Matthew Dale, but also of the perceived good sense of Robert's choice; 'If you will get yourself credit...this man very much desired of my Lord Chief Baron and the rest of the Chief Judges as a most sufficient man...being so learned grave and

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.36.

¹⁴⁶ Farber, 'Lady Elizabeth Russell', p. 157.

¹⁴⁷ Farber, London, Elizabeth Russell to Robert Cecil 27th January 1596, pp. 157-160.

of such experience.’¹⁴⁸ There is also a nod to Elizabeth’s deference here; she is careful not to be too presumptive and therefore she ‘humbly’ thanked God for Robert’s presence and declared she was loath to take up more of his time.¹⁴⁹

Farber raises an interesting point about Elizabeth’s intentions around this period. In her notes on Elizabeth’s letter in 1593, she states that Elizabeth’s request that James Morrice, as a religious dissenter, would have stood no chance of becoming a Privy Councillor and a Master of the Rolls in a government who was focussed on suppressing religious dissenters.¹⁵⁰ As a distant relative she may have felt compelled to make a case for him, but in the later years of her life we still see Elizabeth pursuing other claims where the applicant was likely to be unsuccessful. In July 1598 she requested Robert’s assistance in helping her friend and neighbour Ascanious Yetsweirt to become a master printer, as he was not licensed to print books, whilst in February 1599 she requested a knighthood for her neighbour Andrew Rogers.¹⁵¹ By March 1599, it was clear that Robert Cecil’s patience had worn thin, and he was tired of his aunt’s presumptions. Elizabeth was forced to write a conciliatory letter to him, defending herself from accusations of meddling and taking advantage of her nephew.¹⁵² Here Farber points to Elizabeth’s flustered state by her errors in syntax and coherence, and it is clear that she felt discomfort in having to placate her nephew due to her own tenacity.¹⁵³ Why then did Elizabeth continue to be an advocate for seemingly hopeless cases? The answer possibly lies in maintaining and enhancing her autonomy. By offering advice to her powerful relatives, she was creating her own agenda, and if they were to listen to her words, it would have increased her sense of self worth. Status, it would seem, was an important concept to Elizabeth, and this can be seen in her self-stylisation ‘Elizabeth Russell, Dowager,’ even though this was not her true title. As an increasingly lonely, and apparently poverty-stricken, widow, her involvement with ambitious men gave her a purpose and kept her included within court life. This was heightened by her

¹⁴⁸ Farber, London, Elizabeth Russell to Robert Cecil, 15th June 1596, p. 162.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹⁵⁰ Farber, ‘Lady Elizabeth Russell’, p. 127.

¹⁵¹ Farber, Elizabeth Russell to Robert Cecil, London, 10th July 1598, pp. 229-32; Farber, Elizabeth Russell to Robert Cecil, London, 22nd Feb 1599, ‘Lady Elizabeth Russell’, pp. 233-36.

¹⁵² Elizabeth also meddled in other matters of Robert Cecil; she offered to be an intermediary between him and his cousin Antony Bacon in September 1596. Her letters to Anthony Bacon are in Farber, ‘Lady Elizabeth Russell’, p. 168-84; he resolutely declined her offer of assistance.

¹⁵³ Farber, Elizabeth Russell to Robert Cecil, London, March 1599 [?], ‘Lady Elizabeth Russell’, pp. 237-41.

residence in London, and her close proximity to court life. It helped alleviate feelings of isolation, gave her a level of control over court proceedings and helped her to integrate herself in political friendships.

At times we can perceive a similar sense of friendlessness and loss in Elizabeth's letters as those written by Anne Newdigate. In Elizabeth's case she displayed these feelings in order to gain a favour, in this instance, lodgings at Court. The context of this letter is important in understanding her miserable state; written in 1599 when the threat of a Spanish Invasion was high, she had a heightened sense of her own bleak future, and pleaded to be assisted in her quest for company. She invoked strong emotive language in order to aid her plea; 'Here I remain ... myself a desolate widow without husband or friend to defend me or to take care of me...myself so beggared by law and interest for relief of my children... For God's sake, aid and protect me in this my desolation.'¹⁵⁴ Her repetition of derivatives of 'desolate' and 'beggar' (which are used three and two times respectively) help her create the image of an elderly, isolated widow, who needed protecting from the tyranny of the Spanish fleet, and also tellingly, from her own loneliness. This was a far cry from some of the other letters documented above, where she was so formidable she was prepared to take gentlemen to court, and demonstrates the spectrum of her capability in writing.

By the end of the following year, her loneliness had developed into depression after the death of her daughter Bess, and Farber notes that a letter written to Robert Cecil at this time 'lacks the writer's customary energy of expression'.¹⁵⁵ Her tone was quite deflated, and she appeared to have felt she served no purpose. After acknowledging a desire to visit him, she admitted, 'This is all. I have no suit in the world to trouble you with.'¹⁵⁶ Herein lay the key to Elizabeth's purpose; she felt alive when fighting for something, indulging her counterparts' attempts to influence key figures at court, or tussling in her own legal battles. As an old, ill and tired woman, her fiery spirit had dimmed, and this was expressed in her lacklustre vocabulary. Furthermore her repetition once again of her existence as a beggar at the

¹⁵⁴ Farber, Elizabeth Russell to Robert Cecil, London, August 1599, 'Lady Elizabeth Russell', pp. 243-4.

¹⁵⁵ Farber, 'Lady Elizabeth Russell', p. 287.

¹⁵⁶ Farber, Elizabeth Russell to Robert Cecil, London, 8th December 1600, 'Lady Elizabeth Russell', p.288.

end of her letter served to emphasize how far removed she was from her comfortable lifestyle, and illustrated the portrayal of herself as a poor modest widow.

The use of such rhetoric became invaluable when she denounced two Justices of the Peace, Sir Samuel Sandys and M. Francis Dingley in 1608. They had seized thirty-two ewes from her pasture in Poden, claiming that they were to go towards the payment of the repair of a bridge in the village, which all residents were accountable for.¹⁵⁷ Elizabeth claimed that as she was not an inhabitant, she should not have to pay the fine, which was too high in her opinion.¹⁵⁸ Here she administered the language of a feeble, vulnerable widow, in order to ask Robert Cecil for his assistance. Similar rhetoric to that employed by Anne Newdigate was used, as she ‘humbly’ beseeched and ‘humbly’ entreated her nephew to help her. Gone are the sharp retorts and in place are evocative words which emphasise her sense of injustice; ‘suffer me not to take any wrong or dishonour by being contemptuously trodden on and overbrayed by my malicious inferiors... I hope they shall taste sharply of your displeasure, to teach more duty... Else, by my example, few will be widows so long as I.’¹⁵⁹

Katherine Willoughby, duchess of Suffolk, was the sole heir of William, Lord Willoughby and the fourth wife of Charles Brandon, duke of Suffolk. When Suffolk died in 1545, she endured widowhood for seven years, until she married Richard Bertie. Her two husbands were quite different; the first ‘a peer of the realm, a soldier and a courtier and the favourite of his king’, whilst the second was ‘a quiet scholarly man, of more humble birth, though still a gentleman’.¹⁶⁰ Harris describes Katherine as ‘an intelligent and forceful woman, well known for her sympathies with religious reform’.¹⁶¹ She was also well connected politically, and kept in regular correspondence with figures such as William Cecil. There are twenty surviving letters from the period between 1549 and 1552, which give an insight into their friendship and show the trust she felt towards him.

¹⁵⁷ Farber, ‘Lady Elizabeth Russell’, p. 347.

¹⁵⁸ Elizabeth may not have inhabited the village, but she did own property there, which made her accountable for the tax to repair it.

¹⁵⁹ Farber, Elizabeth Russell to Robert Cecil, after 6th May 1608, London, ‘Lady Elizabeth Russell’, pp. 348, 350.

¹⁶⁰ Evelyn Read, *Catherine Duchess of Suffolk* (Jonathan Cape: London, 1962), p. 10.

¹⁶¹ Barbara J. Harris, ‘Women and Politics in Early Tudor England’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 2 (June 1990), p. 278.

In 1549, Katherine was left as guardian of Mary Seymour, the daughter of the deceased Katherine Parr and Thomas Seymour. Prior to Seymour's execution, he had committed the care of his daughter to Katherine, yet there was little financial support alongside it. Perhaps Katherine had lost patience because of the responsibilities she faced with her own sons, which put a heavy burden on her finances. She described herself as having 'wearied [her]self', and although she was not so rude as to directly say it, it is clear that she would have preferred not to have been weighed with the problem of an infant orphan.¹⁶² It was in this context she wrote to Cecil bitterly in August of that year, complaining,

what a very beggar I am... the Queen's child hath layen, and still doth lie at my house, with her company about her, wholly at my charges. I have written to my Lady of Somerset at large, that there be some pension allotted unto her according to my Lord Grace's promise. Now, good Cecil, help at a pinch all that you may help.¹⁶³

Quite clearly no financial assistance promised to her had been made, and her tone became one of frustration and annoyance. To many other correspondents she may have been more biting in her rhetoric, but her words to Cecil portray a woman exploiting her vulnerability in order to make a forceful point. 'You may the better understand that I cry not before I am pricked' was the phrase used to illustrate the point that she had received only items which had use for the infant, and nothing which would pay for her keep. There is no record of any maintenance having been provided for Mary Seymour, but Katherine's letters show the burden of responsibility that was upon her as she wrestled with the obligation that had been put on her.

While it may be difficult to argue for the existence of a standard 'widow's language' which encompassed an exact style and rhetoric, there is an art to widow's writing, as they had different situations from married women, or spinsters, to contend with. Therefore it was necessary to adapt their writing, not only to different situations, but in different relationships. Anne Newdigate, although on good terms with Sir William Knollys, was forced to write in a deferential manner because she needed his assistance. Katherine, duchess of Suffolk's friendship with William Cecil

¹⁶² Katherine, duchess of Suffolk to Sir William Cecil, July 1549 in Read, *Catherine Duchess of Suffolk*, p. 72.

¹⁶³ Katherine, duchess of Suffolk, 27th August 1549, in Lady Cecilie Goff, *A Woman of the Tudor Age* (John Murray: London, 1930) pp. 175-6.

shaped her language in a different way to Elizabeth Russell; she had a friendship with him, whereas Elizabeth was his sister-in-law and her manner went from being more formal and subservient to more relaxed. Her letters to his son Robert, however show a shift in her tone as she often acted as the wise aunt and offered advice which was unrequested.

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By analysing the letters to and from widows in this period we are able to better understand some of the experiences they encountered once they had lost their husbands. The widows analysed here did not remarry and therefore regained a sense of autonomy and independence which enhanced their self worth. It also made them powerful, attractive figures in the eyes of others, and it is interesting to note that although there were men in society who expected women to conform to the idea of a demure, subservient model of widowhood, equally there were men who found more dominant, self-sufficient widows to be appealing examples of womanhood. For many women, becoming a widow made them stronger, at least mentally, as they rarely became so economically. Some such as Joan Barrington became such dominant matriarchs that they were kept fully informed on familial and legal matters, and were expected to provide guidance and advice on various matters. In Joan's case, her standing was so great that it was immediately assumed she would carry the spiritual mantle from her husband and lead forth with energy. Anne Newdigate was able to assume responsibility for her small children, and in maintaining her independence provided a more stable future for them. Joan Thynne, whilst not always enjoying happy relationships with her kin, was proven to be a formidable force in the dealings of her children. Experiences of widowhood did not need to conform to the stereotypes mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Instead women were able to carve out their own destiny and make their own indelible mark on those around them.

Conclusion

‘Writing as a woman was perceived to be writing badly... Stereotypes characterised women’s letters as gushing and chaotic like their speech... The trope of letters as talking on paper left women’s letters open to satire like their speech; even in orderly conversation, women were easily troped as disorderly.’¹ This was the opinion of authors of letter writing manuals in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Letter writing was an art form, a task to be laboured over, a platform for correct social etiquette to be adhered to. If the historian was to base his or her judgement on letter writing in the early modern period solely through the evidence of letter writing manuals, we may forgive them for concluding that epistolary convention was rigid, constricted and occasionally a little ridiculous in its presentation.

This thesis has argued that for unmarried women, the act of letter writing could be a rich experience. They were able to set their own agendas, cultivate friendships, and use various methods of rhetoric to enhance their self-expression. Single women were not the poor relations of married women, or men, in society. They were able to prove their worth in society as bright, accomplished women. Even those dependent on the patronage of family members, like Peg Adams, were able to create a sense of autonomy by ensuring that their letter writing played an integral part in the smooth running of their families’ lives. Through the examples of young girls, courting women, and widows, it is clear that single women were not ‘females without a function’.²

Single women were also able to create representations of themselves of which they were highly aware. Their female subjectivity was dependant not only on how they viewed themselves, but on how the recipient of their letters also saw them. This was ultimately dependant on the point they were at in their life cycle and by their life experiences thus far. Women writing courtship letters, for example, were influenced by different factors than widows. Dorothy Osborne and Lydia DuGard, aware of the difficulties public knowledge of their clandestine relationships would

¹ Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers, 2006), p. 43.

² Susan Whyman, ‘Gentle Companions: Single Women and their Letters in Late Stuart England’, in James Daybell ed., *Early Modern Women’s Letter Writing 1450-1700* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 177; See also Susan E. Whyman, *Sociability and Power in Late-Stuart England; The Cultural World of the Verneys* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

cause, had to conduct their courtships with William Temple and Samuel DuGard almost solely by letter. It was imperative that their letters displayed the woman they wanted their partners to see, and that they communicated their desires successfully as that was their only platform on which to do so. They used eloquent prose and arguments, preserving their modesty, yet showing their intelligence. Conversely, Anne Newdigate's financial and legal issues meant she had to apply a resilient, yet humble, persona when writing to those in authority. Anne was a skilled writer who employed persuasive devices such as the 'rule of three' and her perceived friendlessness to her advantage when conversing with those whose help she needed, and her ultimate aim in securing her son Jack's wardship was the continuing focus of her endeavours. As her motives were different to that of courting women, her language and tone were also of a different nature.

Letter writing, therefore, was an opportunity to communicate effectively and purposefully. By turn ladies were able to portray themselves as modest courting women, defenceless widows, or caring friends. Arbella Stuart's letter writing is a clear example of how single women could create personas in their writing depending on their frame of mind. This was not to say however that single women's writing was disingenuous. On the contrary, many single women welcomed the chance to engage with their creative inner self in order to express themselves on paper. Yet it is difficult to ascertain to what extent there was a 'typical' rhetoric used by various types of single women. We may argue for a particular courtship or widowhood rhetoric, or as Eve Tavor Bannet has noted, understand the different tropes that were used in letters of condolence or friendship.³ Yet to constrain single women fully to the commitment of these tropes steals from them their individuality and sense of self. Letter writing manuals may have had an influence on women, but the extent to which their advice appeared in their prose is debateable. Each woman, while following epistolary etiquette for the most part, was able to exhibit her own style and influence in her prose, and while certain conventions were clearly adhered to, this did not detract from the uniqueness of each author. In conclusion therefore, although women employed many rhetorical devices suited to their purposes in their letter writing, ultimately they were governed by their own expression and ability.

³ Eve Tavor Bannet, *Empire of Letters; Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1680-1820* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 58-61.

Emotional devices single women used in their letter writing spanned across the life cycle. Elizabeth and Martha Strutt begged their father Jedediah tenderly to come home after the death of their mother, as they were intensely worried for his health. Emotional blackmail was evident in the epistles of Anne Graham as she sought attention from George Shirley, and in Dorothy Osborne's writing as she tried to tempt William Temple out of his melancholic moods. As widows, Katherine Fitz-Walter and Margaret Shaftesbury used language to convey their sense of isolation and loneliness in order to provoke a response from Jane Stringer. Emotive vocabulary was used by all women in pursuit of replies to their letters; epistolary anxiety was a common theme, and women sought to receive answers using various sensitive methods. Many women used letter writing as a form of cathartic release, and to this end their writing could become a stream of free-writing, as they hurried to share their thoughts and feelings.

The bonds created and maintained by women through their letter writing are evident. Through this I have been fortunate to encounter a whole range of women, whose different personalities leapt from their letters: young impressionable girls eager to please, such as Esther Pease and Elizabeth and Martha Strutt; intelligent bright sparks embodied in Dorothy Osborne; strong matriarchs like Anne Newdigate, Joan Thynne and Joan Barrington; modest belles who bloomed throughout courtship and marriage like Isabella Strutt; and women who acted as the glue who bound circle of acquaintance together in the example of Jane Stringer. By analysing their letters it was clear that through letter writing, these women were able to create and maintain strong links with others. Bonds between these correspondents were also manifested in the subjects they wrote about. The depiction and illustration of health and illness, for example, may have been used as a conversational point, but in reality ensured a deep connection between writers; the confiding of ill health and the subsequent concern shown could strengthen their association. By examining ill-health in letters we can also analyse the change in writing of such topics; as the early modern period progressed, women began to be more comfortable conversing about health, though it is clear that there were some issues which were too private for interaction through epistolary means.

The early modern period was one in which much change took place, politically, socially and religiously. Yet the women examined in this thesis rarely

commented on the events in the wider world. This is not to say that women were particularly apolitical, and indeed as we can see particularly from the letters of widows, many single women were aware of the workings of the law and political realm. What is more reasonable to conclude is that for the women in this thesis, day-to-day changes outside of their immediate sphere were not commented upon. Even if these women were influenced in any way, they did not write of their thoughts, unless they were directly relevant to the reasons they were writing. Nor were religious overtones particularly strong in many of the collections; religion appeared to be more of a conventional overtone for many of these women who, rather than effusively promoting their devotion, made the odd biblical reference or referral to God's presence.

Although this is a thesis primarily concerned with the letter writing of unmarried women, where appropriate it was useful and prudent to use the epistles of certain men, especially when considering the arguments and merits for an all inclusive gender history. Joseph Strutt was an obvious example as he provided the responses to Isabella Strutt's writing; not only was this practical in following their story, but was vital in viewing a complete picture of their relationship. Isabella's expressions and rhetoric are far better understood when used in conjunction with Joseph's letters; it is clear that he was a successful, moral young man, and the high esteem in which she held him may have shaped her letters; this is not to say they were insincere, more that her self-awareness was heightened in her responses. The letters of Thomas Greene proved constructive in diminishing the myth that love letters were rigid, structured pieces, with little emotion or real sentiment shown. Through his letters we can also measure how women might act when confronted with a beau they had no time for; Jane Robinson dismissed his outpourings with not even a short reply. When considering father-daughter relationships, it was necessary to consider some of the letters of Jedediah Strutt in order to understand the reasons why his daughters were encouraged to embrace their education, and how important their self-enhancement was to their social mobility. By using this approach, a more encompassing, detailed picture of single women's lives can be achieved.

Myra Reymolds, writing in the early 1960s, concluded that 'Letter writing is a realm ascribed without question to women, and when chance has rescued from

oblivion any group of their letters, social history has been thereby enriched.’⁴ There is much work left to be done on the topic of single women’s letter writing, and future research could include the more in-depth analysis of comparisons between women’s letters before, during and after marriage, or whether certain topics became more prevalent during certain periods of history; for example, illness during epidemics, or education during the push for women’s schooling. Through my thesis I hope to have enhanced not only the spheres of social and gender history, but to have also added something to the debate on literary techniques and conventions of letter writing.

⁴ Myra Reynolds, ‘The Learned Lady in England, 1650-1760’ (Massachusetts, 1964), in Temma Berg, *The Lives and Letters of an Eighteenth-Century Circle of Acquaintance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 5-6.

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