

Elizabeth of Hardwick and Epistolary Negotiations: Noblewomen and Sixteenth-Century English Politics

Author: Madeline Chatfield B.A.

Macquarie University
Department of Modern History, Politics and International Relations

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Student Number: 42458986

Table of Contents

Abstract	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Dedication	iii
Introduction:	
“Experience hath declared them to be...lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment”: The Question of Women and Politics	1
Chapter One:	
“Nature doth paints them to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble and foolish”: Elizabeth of Hardwick, Homosocial Relationships and the Institutional Sphere of Tudor Politics	13
Chapter Two:	
“To my very goode frend”: Client-Patronage Networks of Authority, Noblewomen and the Informal Political Sphere	34
Chapter Three:	
“Charles Cavendishe hath so good & loving a wife, a rare & precious Iewell”: Marriage, a Currency of Political Power	50
Conclusion:	
Onwards: The Arbitrary Divide Between Gender History and Political History	63
Works Cited	67

Abstract

This thesis analyses the ways in which English noblewomen used epistolary conventions and letter-writing to engage as agents in the political sphere of sixteenth-century England. It provides a long-term historical context to current discourses, both public and scholarly, about the place and function of women as actors in the political sphere. This thesis presents a case study of one English noblewoman, Elizabeth of Hardwick, whose life marked a gradual ascent from the landed gentry to the heights of the English aristocracy, and who remains one of Tudor England's most prolific letter writers. Through a close reading of Elizabeth's correspondence, this thesis will demonstrate how it was possible for noblewomen to act as political agents in sixteenth-century England while simultaneously being historically disenfranchised individuals. I argue that Elizabeth of Hardwick utilised epistolary conventions such as gendered appeals to motherhood and textual structures based on the Ciceronian tradition of public political language in letters to members of her social network to maintain powerful political connections and to exert influence upon institutional political processes.

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For *Mum* and *Dad*.
Thank you for your unconditional love, support,
and for always encouraging me to read.

“Experience hath declared them to be...lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment”: The Question of Women and Politics

In the winter of 1558,¹ Elizabeth of Hardwick wrote a series of anxious letters to Sir John Thynne. These letters concerned the progression of a bill through Parliament - soon due to move from the House of Lords to the House of Commons - that would have a negative impact upon her ‘poore’ children.² Although there is no extant reply from Thynne to suggest what course of action he had taken, a letter from Elizabeth in the days after her initial plea to Thynne suggests that the bill had been defeated and she thanked Sir John Thynne for his aid in such a trying time.³ Despite the evidence in extant letters, such as those by Elizabeth of Hardwick, a persistent and problematic perception of the role of women in politics persists in both scholarly and public discourses. In both cases, women are largely excluded from mainstream political narratives, despite several decades’ worth of scholarship that has, convincingly, demonstrated otherwise. This thesis aims to correct these assumptions, and contribute intellectually to recent and more nuanced interpretations of how women acted as political agents in sixteenth-century England through a case study of one English noblewoman: Elizabeth of Hardwick.

Elizabeth of Hardwick was born in 1521 to John Hardwick and Elizabeth Leeke in Derbyshire. Throughout her life, Elizabeth was married to four men: she was betrothed and then married to Robert Batlow, heir to a neighboring estate, until his death in 1544; to Sir William Cavendish, a prominent courtier and Treasurer of the Kings Chamber, with whom she would have six children who survived to adulthood; to Sir William St Loe, Captain of the Guard to Elizabeth I; and finally, to George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, one of the premier aristocrats of the realm during the reign of the last Tudor monarch. Her life marked a gradual ascent from the landed gentry to the heights of the English aristocracy. Elizabeth was revered as an avid dynast, a fierce advocate for the prospects of her children, a prolific builder with Hardwick Hall and Chatsworth House in her portfolio, and a lifelong friend of

¹ All dates in this thesis will be given in the modern style.

² ID 111 Bess of Hardwick to Sir John Thynne, Senior, February [1558], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters: The Complete Correspondence, c. 1550-1608*, ed. Alan Bryson Alison Wiggins, Daniel Starza Smith, Anke Timmermann and Graham Williams, University of Glasgow, web development by Katherine Rogers, University of Sheffield Humanities Research Institute (April 2013) [accessed on 1 September, 2015] <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=111>.

³ ID 112 Bess of Hardwick to Sir John Thynne, Senior, 25 February [1558], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015] <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=112>.

Queen Elizabeth.⁴ She is simultaneously an exceptional actor in the political landscape of Tudor England, and an entirely typical noblewoman of her status.

In his seminal text, *Political History: Principles and Practice*, Geoffrey Elton, the doyen of Tudor political history stated that Tudor politics was solely the domain of men.⁵ In his view, the Tudor political sphere consisted only of institutions such as the Privy Chamber, the main advisory body to the monarch, the Parliament, and the Star Chamber, the judicial body responsible for the enforcement of laws against the aristocracy.⁶ Since Elton published his book in 1970, the history discipline has experienced a change of direction with historiographical movements such as post-structuralism, social history and gender history positing alternative theories of how politics worked. The efforts of these historiographical movements have led to the depiction of a political environment that is wholly more colorful, varied and wider than the Elton school of political history initially envisioned.

Despite the movement away from older interpretations of the political sphere and into newer areas of analysis that emphasise how apparently disenfranchised people enacted agency in politics, there still exists a large disconnect between women in Tudor England and newer conceptualisations of the political environment. This is despite the efforts of historians such as Barbara J Harris and Jacqueline Eales, who among others, have attempted to write women into the political narrative of Tudor England. Their efforts seem to have fallen on deaf ears, as there still exists the pervasive assumption that women have not engaged with politics for most of human history. The political history of women is yet to be considered part of the mainstream political narrative. In light of this, I aim to investigate how noblewomen used epistolary conventions to act as political agents through the case study of the correspondence of Elizabeth of Hardwick, countess of Shrewsbury. This thesis will demonstrate that epistolary conventions and letter-writing were legitimate methods that noblewomen could employ act as political agents in both the informal and formal spheres of Tudor politics. The amalgamation of the *ars dictaminis* and rhetorical influences of the humanist revival created a uniquely feminine rhetorical register, with gendered tactics and a language of public political friendship, that, when utilised by women, allowed them to navigate the disjunctures of patriarchy and complex networks of authority in Tudor England.

⁴ Elizabeth Goldring, "Talbot, Elizabeth [Bess of Hardwick], countess of Shrewsbury (1527?-1608)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26925>, accessed 1 Oct 2015].

⁵ Geoffrey R. Elton, *Political History: Principles and Practice* (New York: Basic Books, 1970), p. 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

The changes in the history discipline briefly mentioned above have led towards a reevaluation of what constitutes the political sphere, largely due to social history and post-structuralism. Post-structuralism, particularly, Foucauldian articulations of power, have had a significant impact upon how historians have reconsidered the operation of power and is most pertinent to this thesis. Michel Foucault, in his 1970 publication *The History of Sexuality*, posits that power is in fact a multiplicity of force relations that are inherent to every relationship. Foucault theorised that humans are used to viewing institutions such as government as a manifestation of power because they are tangible, but government is only, in his opinion, a terminal form of this power.⁷ This has had vast implications, such as a reconceptualisation of the political sphere, for the purely institutional view of power. This intellectual framework has contributed heavily to the recent changes in political history within the discipline.

This thesis will be placed at the intersection of two sub-categories of historical enquiry: political history and gender history. It will additionally involve epistolary history, which has been used by gender historians as a methodology and approach in which to study the authorial identity of noblewomen. This approach will not only provide the intellectual lineage of each sub-category, it will also provide analytic boundaries, and simultaneously, provide the opportunity to break the boundaries between sub-categories.⁸ This, I hope, will problematise the narratives of early modern political history and gender history that still, and persistently, remain distinct from one another.

The conversation in political history has shifted to focus on alternative interpretations of the political sphere that complicate the narrative of institutional power that dominated the Elton school of political thought. These newer interpretations have focused on the significance of relationships. David M. Loades posits that politics in Tudor England could be characterised by a relationship known as ‘good lordship’. Good lordship refers to a relationship between the aristocracy and the monarchy that is negotiated by marriage, client-patronage and childbirth, as these are the primary methods in which the upper classes of English society exchanged and perpetuated power.⁹ This is a sentiment also endorsed by Natalie Mears, who posits that social networks and clienteles are central to the role of governance and in addition to this, these social networks impacted upon the makeup of the Privy Council. The locus of early modern

⁷ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 92.

⁸ Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2.

⁹ David M. Loades, *Politics and Nation: England 1450-1660* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), p. 3.

English politics was, therefore, factional in nature and inextricably connected to wider influences.¹⁰ Politics in the sixteenth century was more than just institutions – the political sphere functioned on the relationships between people. More recently, Andrea Gamberini contributed a theoretical model in which these personal relationships could work, and a vocabulary in which to communicate and analyse these. Instead of the political sphere consisting entirely of hierarchical power, largely characterised by the oppression of the lower classes by ruling elites, Gamberini argues that different social orders could engage politically through ‘dialectic confrontations’. A dialectic confrontation could be as simple as a protest or a discussion. Through these confrontations, discourse and discussion on the ruling of a country is produced, hence a political environment is created.¹¹ These analytic structures have informed how early modern politics works and provide a theoretical framework in which the political involvement of people previously considered disenfranchised can be rescued.

Recently, these new ways of thinking about politics have been applied to case studies, albeit, case studies not necessarily concerned with aristocrats. These case studies have a central focus on communication as a means for subaltern political engagement. Filippo De Vivo centers his thesis on the concept of political communication. Political communication through gossip, for example, spread information out of secretive Venetian political meetings, but also provided a means in which common folk or ‘fickle people’ could engage with governance.¹² Tim Harris and Ethan Shagan have also been informative in their case studies of how communication was used as a political act. Tim Harris introduces protest as a method in which poorer people could effectively voice displeasure with their ruler. To demonstrate this, Harris refers to the introduction of the Amicable Grant of 1525 – a tax introduced by Lord Chancellor Thomas Wolsey to fund yet another war with France.¹³ In this case, anti-government sentiment translated into open rebellion, forcing the repeal of the tax. Similarly, Ethan Shagan uses the frame of oral communication to study the impact rumors had on governance during the Henrician Reformation. Shagan argues that rumors represent an undercurrent of antipathy to the government.¹⁴ Whilst these texts are all useful in their efforts

¹⁰ Natalie Mears, "Courts, Courtiers, and Culture in Tudor England," *The Historical Journal* 46, (2003): p. 706.

¹¹ Andrea Gamberini, "The Language of Politics and the Process of State-Building: Approaches and Interpretations," in *The Italian Renaissance State* ed. Andrea Gamberini and Isabella Lazzarini (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 407.

¹² Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*, p. 2.

¹³ Tim Harris, "Introduction," in *The Politics of the Excluded, C. 1500-1850*, ed. Tim Harris (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 15.

¹⁴ Ethan H. Shagan, "Rumours and Popular Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII," in *The Politics of the Excluded, C. 1500-1850*, ed. Tim Harris (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 32.

to delineate the wide expanse of the political environment in early modern Europe, they do neglect an analysis of women. Although Harris does refer to women in his introduction, and concludes that women still engaged in protests despite having a different relationship with institutional politics than men, the rest of the volume lacks gender specific analysis into how lower class women functioned as political agents.¹⁵ De Vivo also engages with the question of how women acted as political agents in Venetian politics, through their position as mistresses and prolific gossipers.¹⁶ However, both provide only a cursory glance at how women worked in politics. Despite the presence of limited material on women, these texts have provided valuable analytic structures and a vocabulary in which to approach the analysis of women in politics.

With the advent of women's history in the 1960s, attention began to turn to how women enacted agency and engaged as political individuals.¹⁷ Prior to the advent of second wave feminism in the 1970s, historical narratives were dominated by the anecdotes of men of power – predominately in the form of military, political and diplomatic history. The advent of the social history movement had altered this, and the disciplines attention turned to alternative narratives, such as that of the working class. However, as Linda Nicholson, in 'Feminism and the Politics of Postmodernism' points out, the frame of analysis was still centered on men.¹⁸ Social history measured the normative experience by the experiences of men and, like earlier incarnations of political, diplomatic and military history, neglected the narratives of women. In the 1970s, feminist historians attempted to rescue the female perspective and experience from obscurity and to write women back into the historical narrative.¹⁹ This has been somewhat successful, as there is now a wealth of literature on women. However, the feminist history project is by no means complete. There is still a noticeable disconnect between women and how they fit into the mainstream historical narrative.

One of the objectives of this thesis is to continue the original objective of women's history, which was to write women into the mainstream political narrative. This thesis will, however, draw also on gender analysis, which provides more sophisticated analytic structures that take into account power disparities and complexities that women's history was ill-

¹⁵ Harris, "Introduction," p. 19.

¹⁶ Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice*, p. 116.

¹⁷ Joan W. Scott, "Women's History," in *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, ed. Peter Burke (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), p. 44.

¹⁸ Linda Nicholson, "Feminism and the Politics of Postmodernism," *Boundary 2* 19 (1992): p. 55.

¹⁹ Merry Wiesner-Hanks, "Gender Theory and the Study of Early-Modern Europe," in *Practices of Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Megan Cassidy-Welch and Peter Sherlock (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), p. 7.

equipped to do. As Joan Scott in 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis' explains, gender theorists posit that gender is socially constructed, fluid and contingent on context. Such a difference in approach has significant implications for how we study female agency from historical period to historical period, but also within a single historical context. There are multiple articulations of woman in each context, and these are contingent on a variety of intersectional identities such as class and race. This affords historians the opportunity to see how gender and gender expectations are constructed around other intersectional contexts such as race and class.²⁰ The gendered expectations of an aristocratic woman, for example, were different to a woman in the peasantry. The differences between the expectations for each specific gender identity have significant implications for the type of political power or agency women can exert. Gender history also provides the opportunity study gender in a relational context; genders are usually defined and negotiated in terms of one another.²¹ Or, as Natalie Zemon Davis more succinctly puts it, 'we should not be working only on the subjected sex any more than a historian of class can focus entirely on peasants'.²² To understand the circumstances of women and the disjunctures of patriarchy that they function in, we must also understand the roles of men.²³ This thesis will utilise the insights of gender history as well as the objectives of women's history, and so sits at the intersection of both approaches.

The ways in which English early modern noblewomen acted as political agents through domesticity has been one of the richest areas of historiographical gender enquiry in recent decades. The key thinker in this area is Barbara J. Harris, who has provided important conceptual and historical frameworks, which heavily influenced the field of early modern gender studies.²⁴ Harris refers to the court as a political environment, a concept pioneered by historians such as David Starkey. However, Harris points out that fewer historians than needed have been particularly interested in the exploits of women within this paradigm. To illustrate this point, Harris employs the act of marriage brokering, and argues that much of the literature has been invested in how men exploited this socially valuable resource. Harris employs a variety of case studies across the aristocracy to demonstrate that marriage and kinship formed the basis of client/patron relations and were also primary areas of responsibility for women to

²⁰ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91 (1986): p. 1054.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1054.

²² Natalie Zemon Davis, "'Women's History' in Transition: The European Case," *Feminist Studies* 3 (1976): p. 90.

²³ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," p. 1054.

²⁴ James Daybell, "Introduction: Rethinking Women and Politics in Early Modern England," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1540-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2004), p. 2.

manage – this imbues a political significance to domesticity.²⁵ Whilst this work has been invaluable to beginning the discussion of how noblewomen acted as political individuals, the question of ‘what was the political sphere?’ remains. Harris makes clear that she means to convey that the boundaries between public and private spheres were not as clearly defined as previously thought.²⁶ In addition to this, these historians make it clear that childbirth, marriage and client-patronage are political acts, but a clear theoretical engagement with what constitutes politics in early modern England is still needed.

Harris acknowledges that it would be absurd to suggest that women acted in politics in the same manner as men, and the history discipline has, therefore, turned to analysing the specific gendered ways in which women engaged as political individuals. Understanding how patriarchy functioned, therefore, is pertinent to understanding how women could work within its bounds. Harris’s preliminary work has provided an invaluable perspective on how to articulate the way in which power and patriarchy simultaneously existed and were negotiated.²⁷ She adopts Theodore Koditschek’s definition of patriarchy as ‘a loosely connected constellation of related social systems that ensures the systematic subordination and social inferiority of women and their relative exclusion from access to wealth, status and power’. The key concept Harris focuses on is the idea that patriarchal structures were ‘loosely connected’ and posits that the disjunctures in this framework give women the opportunity to act, in a gendered way, as agents with access to wealth and power. Harris calls this a negotiation, and adds that although women exhibited some agency in this context, it was still limited.²⁸ This, as James Daybell argues in an essay on new approaches to women and politics in early modern England is a major contribution to the field.²⁹

Harris elaborates on these disjunctures in relation to domesticity, however other historians such as Natalie Mears have taken a different approach to gendered political action by studying the politics of the Elizabethan Privy Chamber. Mears has argued that although the roles of women in Elizabeth I’s Privy Chamber were largely domestic and very gendered – roles such as Mistress of the Robes, who was the ‘barometer of the queen’s mood’ – women

²⁵ Barbara J. Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," *The Historical Journal* 33 (1990): p. 260.

²⁶ Daybell, "Introduction," p. 2.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 2.

²⁸ Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 11.

²⁹ Daybell, "Introduction," p. 2.

were the Queen's (unofficial) representatives in marriage negotiations with Spain.³⁰ In addition to this, Karen Robertson notes that the position of lady-in-waiting to a female monarch was a position of immense power. In much same manner in which interpersonal relationships between men played out along the lines of male dominated Privy Councils in monarchies before, the close proximity of a lady-in-waiting meant she had the ear of the then monarch.³¹ Evidently, women could act as political agents, albeit through specific and gendered ways. Harris's definition in particular has been pivotal to understanding the complex and often contradictory nature of political engagement in Tudor England.

For historians of the early modern period, letters prove an invaluable source for the study of sixteenth-century noblewomen. Letters were produced in vast quantities, more so than any other early modern source material, and they were one of the most common forms of literature constructed by women in the early modern period. Letters provided women with a sense of authorial identity.³² Analysis of the epistolary genre - the study of letters, letter-writing rhetoric and letter structures throughout human history - has been one of the more recent methodologies and approaches in which gender historians have adopted to look at the careers of noblewomen and their political power.

Study into the rhetorical and textual conventions in early modern letters has been at the forefront of interdisciplinary cooperation between literary studies and history. Diana J Barnes in *Epistolary Community in Print, 1580 – 1664* explores the emergence of changes in letter-writing conventions and education from 1580 onwards. Despite her concentrated frame of analysis, Barnes does provide a look at the progression from medieval letters to early modern letters, and highlights the elements that change in these with the burgeoning wave of humanist rhetoric that came from the Italian peninsula. Perhaps most central to her analysis of early modern correspondence, Barnes attempts to demonstrate that early modern letters were based on examples from either Cicero or Ovid. In addition to this, Barnes posits that they were respectively gendered. Male letters were modeled on Cicero, in which Ciceronian public discourse, the language of heroic men, was reflected. Ovidian letters, on the other hand, were concerned with love but also feminine concepts of pain, loss and compliance within a context that power was unevenly distributed, and therefore are, according to Barnes, a more fitting

³⁰ Natalie Mears, "Politics in the Elizabethan Privy Chamber: Lady Mary Sidney and Kat Ashley," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England* ed. James Daybell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 67.

³¹ Karen Robertson, "Negotiating Favour: The Letters of Lady Raleigh," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Burlington, VT : Ashgate, 2004), p. 100.

³² James Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice: Women's Epistolary Rhetoric in Sixteenth-Century Letters of Petition," *Women's Writing* 13 (2008): p. 3.

model for feminine epistolary conventions.³³ As a result, Barnes argues that through this Ovidian model women managed to entrench themselves into epistolary discourse.³⁴

Whilst Barnes, working from an interdisciplinary literature perspective, emphasises the gendered aspect of humanist influences on letter-writing, the opinions of historians as to whether this was the case in practice differ. Gideon Burton delves more deeply into the rise of humanism and the revival of antiquity in letter-writing manuals during Renaissance. He also highlights the social and political importance of adhering to these conventions, adding that a failure to adhere to the elegant humanist script risked vilification. Burton analyses two predominant epistolary structures used in that period: that based on the oratorical tradition as outlined by Cicero, and that of the *ars dictaminis*.³⁵ Analysing these same structures, James Daybell has argued that women also engaged with what he calls the 'language of political friendship' that was 'predominately male' and part of the Ciceronian tradition. Daybell also explores how women manipulated the Ciceronian tradition, positing that they utilised tropes of female weakness, gendered expectations and fragility for strategic effect.³⁶ The gendered nature of female writing is also something touched on by Elizabeth Clarke, who argued that the correspondence of women has been dismissed due to gendered elements. Rather, Clarke posits that they purposefully engaged in gendered methods of communication to, in essence, engage at all.³⁷ Daybell calls this adaptation a 'distinctly feminine mode' of petitioning.³⁸ But nevertheless, it is a feminine mode of petitioning that has its roots in humanist rhetoric and the male literary tradition. These articles have provided analytic structures for my analysis of the letters of Elizabeth of Hardwick.

Most recently, gender historians among the likes of Erin A. Sadlack, James Daybell, Renee Baernstein and Carolyn James have employed analytic structures from epistolary history to more thoroughly analyse the letters of noblewomen. Sadlack centers her analysis on the letters of Mary Tudor Brandon, and demonstrates the meditated nature of the letter, with letter-writing drafts that show annotations from none other than the Henry VIII's advisor, Thomas Wolsey. Through this, Sadlack links the epistolary form to wider political movements

³³ Diana G. Barnes, *Epistolary Community in Print, 1580-1664* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), p. 9.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³⁵ Gideon Burton, "From *Ars Dictaminis* to *Ars Conscribendi Epistolis*: Renaissance Letter-Writing Manuals in the Context of Humanism" in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press: 2007), p. 92.

³⁶ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 4.

³⁷ Elizabeth Clarke, "Beyond Microhistory: The Use of Women's Manuscripts in the Widening Political Arena," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700* ed. James Daybell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 212.

³⁸ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 4.

via Wolsey's new allegiance with Mary, who would be, when restored, a powerful member of the Tudor aristocracy. Henry's forgiveness would have also maintained peace with France.³⁹ James Daybell's aforementioned article posits a promising theoretical model in which he elaborates on the various epistolary techniques that English noblewomen could have employed to manipulate their context.⁴⁰ Additionally, Daybell provided a wide survey of notable individuals that also employed these techniques for comparative purposes. Further contributing to this, Renee Baernstein argues that the education of women in epistolary arts and the basic literacy of elite women allowed an elite society to properly function. Letters facilitated power exchange.⁴¹ On the other hand, Carolyn James posits that the letters between Isabella d'Este and Francesco Gonzaga were methodically organised, transcribed and copied, which highlights their importance as administrative records.⁴² As letters were part of a pan-European political writing culture,⁴³ largely fuelled by the intermarriage of aristocrats throughout the early modern period, literature based in the Italian peninsula has also provided useful information on how to approach the politicised nature of the letter.

The space I wish to address is twofold: I aim to make the connection between noblewomen, their epistolary activities and politics more explicit that has been previously done, by linking the use of epistolary conventions to wider, and tangible, political change. As of now, more specific and concentrated literature is needed on members of the English aristocracy. There has been some work done specifically on Elizabeth of Hardwick. *Bess of Hardwick's Letters: The Complete Correspondence, c. 1550-1608*,⁴⁴ the project that has

³⁹ Erin A. Sadlack, "Epistolary Negotiations: Mary the French Queen and the Politics of Letter-Writing," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 41 (2010), p. 697. Karen Robertson in 'Negotiating Favour: The Letters of Lady Raleigh', also analyses the letters of less high-profile members of the English aristocracy. Robertson provides a more literal interpretation of the content of letters by Elizabeth Throckmorton, lady-in-waiting to Elizabeth I and secret wife of Sir Walter Raleigh. Robertson links Throckmorton's letters to the consolidation of the Essex and Cecil factions during Elizabeth's reign – a factional dynamic that had vast political consequences.

⁴⁰ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 4.

⁴¹ Renee Baernstein, "'In My Own Hand': Constanza Colonna and the Art of the Letter in Sixteenth-Century Italy," *Renaissance Quarterly* 66 (2013): p. 131.

⁴² Carolyn James, "Marriage by Correspondence: Politics and Domesticity in the Letters of Isabella D'Este and Francesco Gonzaga, 1490-1519," *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012): p. 324.

⁴³ Lawrence D. Green, "Dictamen in England, 1500-1700," in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell (South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2007), p. 107.

⁴⁴ Although the Bess of Hardwick's Letters archive have chosen to use 'Bess' as their form of address, Elizabeth of Hardwick identifies as 'Elizabeth' or 'E' throughout her letters. Out of respect for her authorial identity, I have consciously chosen to utilise 'Elizabeth' as the primary form of address throughout this thesis. Last names also pose a problem for brevity and clarity – Elizabeth was married four times throughout her life, and the signature on her letters reflect the change of last name. For this reason, I will utilise 'Elizabeth of Hardwick' in parts of this thesis that would otherwise be convoluted with the prolific use of Elizabeth as 'the' name of choice in the sixteenth century.

digitalised over two hundred and thirty of Elizabeth's letters, has produced two PhD theses on how education reform is reflected within her letters. Elizabeth of Hardwick has been mentioned in relation to her building projects, Chatsworth House and Hardwick Hall, and fleetingly as Elizabeth Talbot in Felicity Heal's work on food exchange.⁴⁵ In addition to this, James Daybell has analysed the political networks of Elizabeth of Hardwick.⁴⁶ However, much more analysis remains to be done on this extraordinary, yet simultaneously generic, member of the aristocracy, whose life marked an ascent from the landed gentry to the heights of the English aristocracy and who remains one of the most prolific early modern female authors in English history.

The first chapter of this thesis will investigate how Elizabeth of Hardwick utilised epistolary conventions to act as a political agent and engage with the institutional sphere of Tudor politics during the reign of Mary I. It will begin with a rhetorical analysis of letter structures, and how they contributed to the construction of the letter as a political artifact. The first chapter will also cover the use of gendered conventions such as appeals to motherhood and frailty, and how they aided Elizabeth in her engagement with institutional politics. Finally, through a content-based literal reading of the letters, I will demonstrate the awareness of institutional political processes that Elizabeth possessed, and analyse this in terms of new political theories such as that of the dialectic confrontation that enabled the otherwise disenfranchised to engage as political agents.

The second chapter of this thesis will investigate how epistolary conventions and letters enabled Elizabeth to act as a political agent through client-patronage, which was also facet of domesticity. I will demonstrate that epistolary conventions were utilised to strengthen and perpetuate the client-patron relationship, which was the fundamental structure of relations between the aristocracy for much of the early modern period. It will also involve a literal analysis of the letters to assess the significance of gift exchange, also predominately the responsibility of noblewomen, and how this facilitated the perpetuation of political relationships that could favour Elizabeth of Hardwick's circumstances. Chapter three, finally, is primarily concerned with marriage brokering, another facet of domesticity noblewomen were involved in. Marriage was the means in which the aristocracy exchanged land, title, money – these were all manifestations of political power. I will demonstrate that Elizabeth

⁴⁵ Felicity Heal, "Food Gifts, the Household and the Politics of Exchange in Early Modern England," *Past & Present* 199 (2008): p. 58.

⁴⁶ James Daybell, "Suche Newes as on the Quenes Hye Wayes We Have Mett': The News and Intelligence Networks of Elizabeth Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury (C. 1527-1608)," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1540-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 114.

used epistolary conventions to negotiate the transferal of these forms of political capital. Additionally, I will argue that the epistolary conventions in her letters demonstrate the conflicting nature of the social position noblewomen inhabited – afforded power by peerage, subjugated by sex and reliant on the receiver of her letters for political favour. Both chapters two and three aim to problematise the arbitrary divide between domesticity and politics, and argue that the domestic realm is better defined as an informal political sphere. This informal political sphere was the primary domain of noblewomen, who through this could act as political agents in sixteenth-century England.

“Nature doth paints them to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble and foolish”:
Elizabeth of Hardwick, Homosocial Relationships and the Institutional Sphere
of Tudor Politics

In February of 1558, Elizabeth wrote to her friend Sir John Thynne, detailing her concerns over a bill currently going before the English Parliament.¹ In this, Elizabeth also thanked him for his kind gentleness towards her in such a trying time.² This letter, amongst a collection of others in response to Thynne and other aristocratic men such as Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester and Sir Francis Walsingham, show an engagement with a side of politics traditionally thought to be the domain of men only – the institutional sphere. These letters also demonstrate that noblewomen were aware, conscious of and sensitive to legislative activity, despite prior historiographical assumptions that they did not engage with this element of English politics. Not only do such letters reflect that women were aware of legislation that impacted upon their interests, Elizabeth’s personal correspondence with individuals such as Dudley and Walsingham, highly visible figures in the Elizabethan court, speaks to the importance of and power of association in the homosocial networks of Tudor England.

In this chapter, I will investigate how Elizabeth of Hardwick engaged with the institutional political sphere through her letters and the epistolary conventions reflected within these. Epistolary conventions, when understood, are a method in which we can understand the nuanced and technical ways in which women negotiated intersectional identities of class and gender, and how they balanced these identities with their objective to satiate their political desires. The epistolary genre not only equipped women with rhetorical features in which to act as political agents, it facilitated their political agency by allowing women space, and a language, in which to negotiate power and relationships in a context in which they had limited legal and social rights.³ This chapter will approach the political

¹ ID 111 Bess of Hardwick to Sir John Thynne, Senior, February [1558], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters: The Complete Correspondence, C. 1550-1608*, ed. Alan Bryson Alison Wiggins, Daniel Starza Smith, Anke Timmermann and Graham Williams, University of Glasgow, web development by Katherine Rogers, University of Sheffield Humanities Research Institute (April 2013) [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=111>.

² ID 112 Bess of Hardwick to Sir John Thynne, Senior, 25 February [1558], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=112>.

³ Renee Baernstein, "'In My Own Hand': Constanza Colonna and the Art of the Letter in Sixteenth-Century Italy" *Renaissance Quarterly* 66 (2013): p. 139.

agency of Elizabeth of Hardwick in two ways. I will analyse the epistolary conventions, influenced heavily by the letter-writing conventions of both *ars dictaminis* and the humanist revival that operated in her letters. Additionally, I will also analyse how these letter-writing conventions perpetuated and consolidated the networks and relationships with men that tapped into political capital and the artery of power exchange in early modern England.

Personal networks and friendships were political capital in the courtly politics of early modern England. A widespread social network within Tudor England could have a significant impact on the ability of people to partake in the political sphere, as this was primarily the mechanism that allowed client-patron relationships to function and flourish.⁴ These social relationships facilitated the exchange of money, land, patronage and most significantly of all, power. For this reason, an effective network was integral to the political arsenal of Tudor noblewomen that provided connections to individuals with influence at court.

Individuals in the Tudor court did not passively experience social relations or society, a position held by more deterministic frames of analysis such as Marxist or Weberian schools of thought.⁵ Instead, individuals as political agents actively created, shaped and perpetuated a political culture by seeking out and consolidating individual relationships. In other words, individual relationships did not simply occur within or were determined by structures of class: although, class is a factor that undoubtedly plays into the trials and tribulations of the upper echelons of Tudor society. Rather, individual people were responsible for maintaining and seeking out friendships that added to the widespread and complex social networks that underpinned the political sphere in early modern England.⁶ When considered in relation to female agency, noblewomen were just as involved in perpetuating and consolidating these networks as men, but in specific gendered ways.

Elizabeth of Hardwick, by most accounts, had a widespread and varied social network, which aided her ability to fulfill her domestic roles and to also act as a political player. Through a close study of her correspondence, it is possible to link her to several high ranking members of the Tudor bureaucracy such as Sir William Cecil, Baron Burghley (twice principal secretary and treasurer to Queen Elizabeth) and his son, Sir Robert Cecil,

⁴ Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 270. Client-patron relationships will be analysed at greater length in chapter two.

⁵ Ronald F. E. Weissman, "Reconstructing Renaissance Sociology: The 'Chicago School' and the Study of Renaissance Society," in *Persons in Groups: Social Behaviour as Identity Formation in Medieval and Renaissance Europe*, ed. Richard C. Trexler (New York: Binghamton, 1985), p. 42.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

also principal secretary to Queen Elizabeth. In addition to this, Elizabeth's correspondence reveals relationships with two of Elizabethan England's most high profile individuals: Sir Francis Walsingham, principal secretary and rumored spy master to the Queen and Sir Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, and favourite of Elizabeth I. Other individuals, such as Sir John Thynne, who would later become a representative in Parliament, were called on by Elizabeth to come to her aid. What facilitated these relationships across wide swathes of distance was the letter, which was as much as political tool as it was a piece of literary art.

In the past, historians viewed the letter as a transparent piece of information; when in reality, it is a highly meditated piece of communication that adhered to set structures and existed within a broader letter-writing culture.⁷ This was part of a pan-European letter-writing culture, perpetuated by intermarriage between the aristocracy, as well as the proliferation of humanist rhetoric in the fifteenth century, that not only dictated the internal structure of a letter, but also tactics such as deference, gendered pleas, and manners.⁸ In accordance with the oratorical elements of the Ciceronian tradition, letters were often dictated to scribes. When the letter was received, it was read aloud to the intended recipient and an audience – this was especially the case for members of the English aristocracy and the monarch. Privy counsellors often witnessed correspondence to and from their monarch. The annotations and edits on the letters of Mary Tudor to her brother Henry VIII made by Thomas Wolsey testify to how language could be manipulated to elicit a certain response from a wider, and often factional, political audience.⁹ Letters were not private correspondence, they were constructed for a public audience.¹⁰ Thomas Wolsey's annotations testify to the true nature of what would become the early modern epistle – a meditated piece of communication with epistolary conventions that were used to manipulate the author's circumstances.

Early modern letters were influenced both by the medieval tradition of the *ars dictaminis* and the humanist revival of the early modern period. The *ars dictaminis* was the instruction on prose composition that applied rhetorical principles to letter-writing, and dictated how letters should be constructed. It originated in the eleventh century with the monk Alberic of Montecassino, who identified letter-writing as an independent genre rather

⁷ Baernstein, "In My Own Hand," p. 139.

⁸ James Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice: Women's Epistolary Rhetoric in Sixteenth-Century Letters of Petition," *Women's Writing* 13 (2008): p. 9. This is also covered extensively by Diana G. Barnes, *Epistolary Community in Print*.

⁹ Erin A. Sadlack, "Epistolary Negotiations: Mary the French Queen and the Politics of Letter-Writing," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 41 (2010): p. 698.

¹⁰ Baernstein, "In My Own Hand," p. 139.

than just an extension of oratory.¹¹ The pedagogical tradition of the *ars dictaminis* advocated that letters should be copied from models with rigid rhetorical structures. Letters, as instructed by the *ars dictaminis*, were to consist of the *salutatio* (salutation), *capatio*, *benevolentiae*, *narratio*, *petitio* (petition) and *conclusio* (conclusion).¹² This structure was transformed by later humanists who privileged invention and flexibility in letter-writing.

The initial Renaissance revival of antiquity in the Italian peninsula (but felt in other places of Europe due to the proliferation of a pan-European marriage culture and commerce), led to a series of cultural and intellectual changes that impacted upon letter-writing techniques. Although a predominant trope of Renaissance literature is the persistent reference to antiquity, the influence of the revival of antiquity on the letter-writing genre manifested through the changes to strict rhetorical structures. Despite the humanist distaste for models such as the *ars dictaminis*, which in their view stifled the invention of a letter, inevitably, strict rhetorical rules still persisted.¹³ The humanist revival led to the adaptation of the epistolary teachings of classical authorities such as Cicero and Ovid. The Ciceronian tradition, in particular, had a noticeable impact on early modern letters of petition, and was based on Cicero's public discourse and the heroic language of men. The Ciceronian tradition possessed an inherently political language that aimed to be persuasive through argumentation. The structure of Cicero's oratorical tradition consisted of the *exordium* (introduction), *narratio* (declaration with request or petition), *divisio*, *confirmatio* (amplification), *refutatio* (refutation) and *peroratio* (conclusion). The Ciceronian oral tradition had similarities in structure to the *ars dictaminis*, however, the main differentiating factor is that the Ciceronian oral tradition dictated that letters were intended to be read out loud.¹⁴

The Ciceronian tradition, with its emphasis on argumentation, had a significant impact upon letters of petition and letters of a political nature. Yet, this was not the only classical influence on early modern epistles. Ovidian epistolary conventions, taught throughout the English aristocracy and available in English translation by 1567, contributed to the letter-writing culture as a political channel that women could engage with legitimately.¹⁵ Ovid's

¹¹ Paul D. McLean, *The Art of the Network: Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence* (London: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 45.

¹² Ibid., p. 45.

¹³ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁴ Gideon Burton, "From *Ars Dictaminis* to *Ars Conscribendi Epistolis*: Renaissance Letter-Writing Manuals in the Context of Humanism" in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press: 2007), p. 92.

¹⁵ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 12.

Heroides demonstrated a model of feminine engagement in letter-writing that acted as a powerful subaltern discourse and allowed women to engage in a distinctly feminine language that Diana Barnes posits is capable of both critique and convention.¹⁶ This language was in tension with both sides of the female personality: the assertive and optimistic, compared to the melancholic and self-pitying.¹⁷ This was the rhetorical register that was utilised by Ovid's heroines, and widely emulated through the letters of early modern noblewomen to elicit sympathy in order to fulfill their objectives. Additionally, Erin Sadlack points to the importance the Ovidian tradition placed on the letter as a political tool in and of itself. Ovid's Penelope and Ulysses in *Heroides* demonstrates the importance of the letter in its inherent ability to perpetuate and maintain relationships at a distance –¹⁸ which, in a context where social networks with other aristocratic families could be so widespread, was an important maintenance tool. These rhetorical features were widely absorbed into the pedagogy of the epistolary tradition, and were tactics that noblewomen could engage to act, within a masculine framework of public political language, in specific and gendered ways.

During the fifteenth century, letter-writing in the Italian Peninsula experienced a transition phase between the *ars dictaminis* and the newer rhetorical flourishes of humanism.¹⁹ The distinction between the two forms in England, however, was less pronounced, as many of the letters of sixteenth-century England show the amalgamation of both traditions. In the pedagogical tradition, the *ars dictaminis* emphasised the initial *salutatio* and address as the most important elements of the letter.²⁰ Whilst the *ars dictaminis* proposed a strict model for the entirety of the letter, the emphasis remained on the *salutatio*. However, the influence of humanist rhetoric and classical traditions promoted the importance of the letter as an argument, hence the remaining structures that facilitated the argument such as the *narratio* and *confirmatio* took an increasing significance. This was the early modern incarnation of the letter of petition, which in formal and informal political circles and relationships was widely utilised to request favours and to seek patronage. James Daybell has proposed a structure for letters of request and petition that follows the consensus that letters in sixteenth-century England had features of both the *ars dictaminis*

¹⁶ Diana G. Barnes, *Epistolary Community in Print, 1580-1664* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), p. 9.

¹⁷ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 12.

¹⁸ Sadlack, "Epistolary Negotiations," p. 704.

¹⁹ McLean, *The Art of the Network*, p. 48.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

and the classical revival.²¹ Letters of request and petition generally held, depending on the situation, five main parts: the *exordium* (introduction), *narratio* (the declaration of the substance of the letter, which often included a request or petition), *confirmatio* (justification), *confutatio* (refutation of objections) and the *peroratio* (conclusion). In addition to this, good letters were framed with a salutation, or greeting, and a subscription.²² Coming from the pedagogical tradition of both the *ars dictaminis* and the classical revival, the internal structure of the letter was emphasised as critical. A well-constructed letter of petition was also a persuasive letter of petition. The rigid rhetorical structures emphasised in the pedagogical tradition enabled the letter to function as mechanism by which the sender could negotiate power disparities between individuals. It also allowed the letter to function as an argument for why the petition should be granted. These structures, influenced by a masculine language of public political friendship, were widely adopted by noblewomen during the early modern period. An understanding of these structural conventions is fundamental to understanding the method in which women negotiated relationships at the intersections of contradictory social constructions such as class and gender.

Determining the extent of Elizabeth of Hardwick's formal education in the epistolary tradition is difficult. Aristocratic women were undoubtedly well educated – Mary Tudor received the same education as her brother, King Henry VIII, in the humanist tradition.²³ Yet, whilst we are aware that most young men were educated by private tuition and in grammar schools, it is difficult to determine the extent of the education for many well-born young women. Nevertheless, Elizabeth's status as a gentlewoman, despite her family's dismal prospects in her early childhood after the death of her father, warranted some form of education.²⁴ Her basic literacy and her close conformity with epistolary conventions testify to this. This education would have also included training in domestic arts, such as running a household, something in which Elizabeth would be a formidable force.²⁵ Whilst it is difficult to discern the true extent of Elizabeth's formal education in the *ars dictaminis*, and her engagement with letter-writing manuals of the time such as William Fulwood's *The Enemy of Idleness* and or Ovid's *Heroides*, Elizabeth does display an awareness of the power of rhetoric in the letter. To an unknown correspondent in December of 1573, Elizabeth writes

²¹ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 5.

²² Ibid., p. 5.

²³ Erin A. Sadlack, *The French Queen's Letters: Mary Tudor Brandon and the Politics of Marriage in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 20.

²⁴ Elizabeth Goldring, "Talbot, Elizabeth [Bess of Hardwick], Countess of Shrewsbury (1527?-1608)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

²⁵ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550*, p. 32.

with instructions on how to write a persuasive letter to one of her sons. Elizabeth recommends a variety of tactics to the unknown recipient, and stated that he 'wylbe the more yours' if the recipient followed a set of conventions such as 'behoulding to hym', which can be read as deferring to him and 'you wyll euer bethankfull to hym.....requyt yt by all the good means that shall Ly in your powar', which sets up the interaction between the unknown recipient and Elizabeth's son as a transaction between client and patron, or at least, a plea for aid. Ironically, Elizabeth then instructs the recipient to be 'more earnyst and playn' in the letter, arguing that 'the more good yt wyll doe'.²⁶ Elizabeth ultimately suggests that this would be the best way to persuade her son to meet the recipient's objectives. With the absence of documentary evidence on the specifics of Elizabeth's education, this is a clear indicator that the art of letter-writing was a learned skill that Elizabeth was well versed in.

Elizabeth's *salutationes* enable us to see how power and status were negotiated and established in early modern letters. *Salutationes* were an important component of the rhetorical structure and set the tone for Renaissance epistles. The *salutatio* functioned as a polite introduction, consistent with social expectations of the time. However, the *salutatio* fulfills a more important purpose than this – the primary function of the *salutatio* was to establish the relationship between the writer and receiver of the letter.²⁷ As Erin Sadlack posits, *salutationes* were not merely pro forma demonstrations, they served a purpose as they 'fashion the roles' that each individual will play in the 'epistolary relationship'.²⁸ When used effectively, the *salutatio* would discriminate between the status of sender and receiver and therefore establish how the would-be patron should negotiate the relationship or respond to the request.²⁹ Consistent with convention, Elizabeth utilised *salutationes* across her letters of petition, and each individual salutation employed a variety of tactics to establish her letters, such as deference, which exerted pressure on social status, and the use of a vocabulary intent on consolidating interpersonal relationships.

Deference was the act of recognising and submitting to one's superiors, and was a commonly used convention in early modern letters, particularly when communicating with an individual of a higher rank.³⁰ Whilst a clear structure is evident throughout early modern epistles, there is a notable difference in the manner of address depending on the rank of the individual with whom Elizabeth was communicating. A comparison of the *salutationes* used

²⁶ ID 143, Bess of Hardwick to Unknown, December [1573], in *Bess of Hardwick's* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=143>.

²⁷ McLean, *The Art of the Network*, p. 45.

²⁸ Sadlack, "Epistolary Negotiations," p. 695.

²⁹ McLean, *The Art of the Network*, p. 45.

³⁰ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 9.

between Elizabeth and peers of the realm and with other lower ranking members of her social circle illustrates this. Despite its prolific use throughout the salutation, it is important to note that the tactic of deference was commonly adopted throughout her letters and is apparent in the other rhetorical sections.

In a letter dated 27 June, 1576, Elizabeth writes as her *salutatio* to Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester ‘to the right honorabell my vary good lord and cossen the therle of Lecester’. Whilst the traditional honorific of ‘right honorabell’, that Elizabeth utilised in one variety or another throughout most of her letters, is evident, Elizabeth goes on to emphasise Dudley’s title twice in the initial salutation – ‘my very good lord’ and ‘the therle of Lecester’.³¹ This similar greeting is also utilised in correspondence between Elizabeth and William Cecil, Baron Burghley, who was Lord Treasurer of England from 1572. In a letter to Lord Burghley, Elizabeth begins with ‘the Rights honorable my very good Lorde the Lord Burghley Lord Treasoror of England’.³² Here, Elizabeth applies an initial vocabulary of deference to the letter, and begins by emphasising not only her correspondent’s value as a personal connection for her, but also his superior rank and importance within the aristocratic strata.³³ Through the epistolary tactic of deference, Elizabeth established Leicester and Burghley’s social dominance, which functioned as a mark of respect within wider letter-writing culture. Elizabeth’s correspondence was always respectful, and this is important to note as polite self-presentation was also of importance in letters of petition. Even though Elizabeth employs deference to rank as a tactic in this particular relationship, her letters of petition were consistent with convention and always remained respectful.³⁴

The importance of these established roles comes to light when we consider the pressure that hierarchical expectations could exert on an individual. The use of an honorific was not simply a polite gesture, it also appealed to their status, and in addition to this, the political power they were capable of exerting.³⁵ In this case, ‘my lord’, directly challenges Dudley and Burghley to demonstrate their capabilities as peers in possession of power, and to demonstrate it through fulfilling the petition.

³¹ ID 110 Bess of Hardwick to Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, 27 June [1576], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=110>.

³² ID 162 Bess of Hardwick to William Cecil, Baron Burghley, 28 January [1582], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=162>.

³³ Sadlack, "Epistolary Negotiations," p. 695.

³⁴ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 9.

³⁵ Melissa Mariam Bullard, *Lorenzo Il Magnifico: Image and Anxiety, Politics and Finance* (Florence: L.S. Olshiki, 1994), p. 118-122.

Consistent with the use of the *salutatio* to differentiate the status between sender and receiver, Elizabeth's *salutationes* vary according to the rank of the individual with whom she is conversing. In her letter to Sir Francis Walsingham, principal secretary to Queen Elizabeth I, on 28 January, 1581, Elizabeth begins with 'to my honorable good frende' and 'Pryncipall Secretarye'.³⁶ Additionally, in her letter to Walsingham on 7 February, 1582 she begins with 'to my honorable good frend/Master Secritory walsingham'.³⁷ To other well-noted figures within the Tudor bureaucracy, such as Sir Robert Cecil, earl of Salisbury, principal secretary to Queen Elizabeth after Walsingham's tenure ended, Elizabeth uses a similar address. A letter to Cecil on 20 May, 1595 begins: 'to the right honorabell my very good frend'.³⁸ And, in her address to the Sir John Thynne of Longleat on 25 February, 1558 she writes 'to the Ryghte worchouppfull my uary frende'.³⁹ The consistent thread across these *salutationes* to powerful men is not so much her use of the language of deference, although status is referred to with the repeated use of official title such as 'Master secretary' – but rather, that she addresses them as her 'good friends'. By doing this, Elizabeth evokes the language of fictive kinship to highlight their status as friends and therefore consolidate another interpersonal bond.⁴⁰

The next rhetorical phase was the *exordium*, which acted as an introduction to the letter. The *exordium* was an introduction to the purpose of the letter, and is a consistent feature across the collection of Elizabeth's letters and amongst most letters of petition in general. Whilst the objective of the *exordium* was to introduce the initial purpose of the letter and to provoke a sense of good will,⁴¹ the *narratio* provided an opportunity to explain the overarching narrative or, in the case of letters of petition, problem. In addition to this, the *narratio* would often include a petition for aid that would hopefully resolve the issue or request that drove the letter. Throughout Elizabeth's letters, the *narratio* varies in length. For example, the letter from Elizabeth to Sir Francis Walsingham on 28 January, 1582, consists of twelve lines,⁴² while that addressed to Walsingham on 7 February, 1582, consists

³⁶ ID 144 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Francis Walsingham, 28 January [1582], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=144>.

³⁷ ID 148 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Francis Walsingham, 7 February [1583], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=148>.

³⁸ ID 124 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Robert Cecil, 20 May [1595], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters*: [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=124>.

³⁹ ID 111 Bess of Hardwick to Sir John Thynne, Senior, February [1558], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=111>.

⁴⁰ McLean, *The Art of the Network*, p. 51.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 48.

⁴² ID 144 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Francis Walsingham, 28 January [1582], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=144>.

of two.⁴³ Despite differences in length, the *narratio* is nearly always present throughout Elizabeth of Hardwick's letters. Early modern letters are purposive. Their nature as a political tool means that they have an inherent purpose, and the *narratio* facilitates this.

The *confirmatio* was the confirmation or justification element of the letter and it provided the opportunity for the author of a letter of petition to justify her argument.⁴⁴ The main distinguishing feature of this epistolary tactic and structural convention is the client's justification of why their request for aid should be heeded, and the importance of this aid for wider political purposes. It is also important to note that whilst the *salutatio*, the *exordium* and the *narratio* are consistently present across the collection of letters, the *confirmatio* is not. This speaks to their purpose. Several letters of Elizabeth's, such as that to Sir Robert Cecil on 20 May, 1595, do not include the *confirmatio* due to their nature. This particular letter was to congratulate Cecil on his recent promotion to principal secretary of Queen Elizabeth, one of the highest - and arguably one of the most significant - positions in the Tudor bureaucracy. It contains features such as the *salutatio* 'right honorabell my very good frend' and the *exordium* 'hir majesty had made special choyse of you',⁴⁵ along with the language of devotion and a vocabulary of kinship to create a connection between the two. However, it lacks the *confirmatio* and the *confutatio* because the purpose of the letter is not to petition or a request for aid, but rather it has the singular purpose of consolidating a fruitful network.

The *confirmatio* is heavily utilised through Elizabeth's letters of petition that request for aid – whether these be concerning legislative matters in letters to Sir John Thynne, or for the release of further funds for members of her family. The key difference here is a request for help, which must then be followed with a justification for why this aid should be granted.⁴⁶ This is what distinguishes the letter of petition as an argument, and it is consistent with the expectations for eloquent argumentation that proliferated through Europe in this context. In her letter to Walsingham on 28 January, 1581, Elizabeth writes about the death of her daughter, Elizabeth Stuart (Cavendish) and the money Queen Elizabeth I had bestowed upon her. Elizabeth petitions the Queen's principal secretary that the same amount of money be bestowed upon Arbella Stuart, Elizabeth's granddaughter. In the *confirmatio*, Elizabeth justifies this expense in two significant ways: the expenses would go towards

⁴³ ID 148 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Francis Walsingham, 7 February [1583], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=148>.

⁴⁴ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 5.

⁴⁵ ID 124 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Robert Cecil, 20 May [1595], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=124>.

⁴⁶ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 5.

Arbella's better education and training 'in good virtue and Lerninge.....so she maye soner be redye to attende on her Majestie',⁴⁷ and secondly, that because Arbella is growing up, she is in need of more servants of teachers to fulfill this initial aim. The initial justification of this letter appeals to potential benefit for Queen Elizabeth. Assuming that 'redye to attende' alludes to a potential position at court for Arbella as a lady-in-waiting to the Queen, Queen Elizabeth would gain a well-equipped and competent member of her household as a direct result of this grant.

There are also wider political implications at play through this *confirmatio*. Arbella, through her father, Charles Stuart, earl of Lennox, and in the same line, her great-grandmother, Margaret Tudor, was the great-great-granddaughter of Henry VII. Therefore, Arbella was a potential claimant to the English throne.⁴⁸ This was a position that would later place Arbella in the way of potential plots against her own life.⁴⁹ By 1581, it was clear that Queen Elizabeth would produce no heir to the English throne,⁵⁰ and speculation over who would ascend as monarch after her death played into factional politics and power plays of the time. The position of lady-in-waiting to the Queen, or a position in the Royal Privy Chamber, afforded the early modern noblewomen political capital in a context in which they were largely excluded from the bureaucracy.⁵¹ The two consecutive Tudor female monarchs changed the dynamics of gender and power in the late-sixteenth-century political sphere. Whilst domesticity had always been a valid political outlet for women through good lordship, gendered positions held by women, such as Mistress of the Robes in the Queen's Privy Chamber, were additional outlets.⁵² And whilst the factional conflicts of the era were still played out with the interpersonal relationships of men in bureaucratic capacities, the specific gendered roles inhabited only by women (directed by a sense of propriety) afforded them an advantage that their male colleagues did not have. The Mistress of the Robes, for example, was nicknamed the 'barometer of the Queen's mood', and as the name suggests,

⁴⁷ ID 144 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Francis Walsingham, 28 January [1582], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=144>.

⁴⁸ Rosalind K. Marshall, "Stuart [Married Name Seymour], Lady Arbella (1575-1615)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/601, accessed 1 Oct 2015].

⁴⁹ Sara Jayne Steen, "The Cavendish-Talbot Women: Playing a High-Stakes Game," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2004), p. 155.

⁵⁰ John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 251.

⁵¹ Karen Robertson, "Negotiating Favour: The Letters of Lady Raleigh," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 100.

⁵² Natalie Mears, "Politics in the Elizabethan Privy Chamber: Lady Mary Sidney and Kat Ashley," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England* ed. James Daybell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 67.

was privy to the emotional state of the reigning monarch.⁵³ In addition to this, the position of the lady-in-waiting in close proximity to the Queen meant that she most likely had the ear of the monarch.

A well-educated and well-instructed potential heir to the throne placed in proximity to the Queen would not only position Arbella as a likely candidate, it would also provide a Protestant and English alternative to her cousin, the Scottish king, James I. This is a particularly significant when considering the volatile political environment that was undeniably stoked by the presence of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, who was eventually executed for apparent involvement in the Babington Plot - an attempt to assassinate Elizabeth and restore a Catholic queen to the English throne.⁵⁴ An execution that Elizabeth's final husband, Lord Shrewsbury, presided over. The thorough education, and eventual placement of Arbella in the Queen's household, provided Elizabeth of Hardwick with a granddaughter in direct proximity to the monarch. This would allow her to use Arbella as a source of information and a connection in the court. This was in much the same fashion in which Elizabeth utilised her half-sister, Elizabeth Wingfield, who was lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth and who,⁵⁵ as demonstrated in chapter two, aided Elizabeth with information that helped consolidate client-patron relationships.

The *confutatio*, on the other hand, sometimes amalgamated in with the *confirmatio* and sometimes missing all together, is the refutation of objections – or alternatively, argumentative trouble-spotting. The objective of the *confutatio* was to rebut any potential objection to the letter,⁵⁶ and this could be for a variety of reasons – timing, or anything another individual might say in opposition to the letter. *Confutationes* are not always apparent in Elizabeth's letters, and once again, this is due to their purpose in the letter of petition or request.

The *peroratio* was the conclusion of the letter. Unlike previously discussed conventions that facilitated an argument, the *peroratio* functioned as a sign off that allowed the author to engage with a variety of tropes and social expectations to consolidate the contents of the letter. Whilst conventions such as the *salutatio* engage with the language of deference, usually applied through title, to define asymmetrical status that would establish the relationship for the rest of the letter,⁵⁷ the *peroratio* of Elizabeth's letters engaged with a

⁵³ Ibid., p. 67.

⁵⁴ Guy, *Tudor England*, p. 334.

⁵⁵ Steen, "The Cavendish-Talbot Women," p. 153.

⁵⁶ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 8.

⁵⁷ McLean, *The Art of the Network*, p. 47.

deferential tactic that James Daybell terms the rich vocabulary of entreaty.⁵⁸ This functioned as a final plea to fulfill the petition component of the letter. In addition to this, the use of appeals to God through prayer for the welfare of the recipient was a relatively common feature of the *peroratio*.

The vocabulary of entreaty is a form of deferential language that attempted to aggrandise the position of the individual petitioned. Daybell describes it as a heightened language of supplication and humility, which usually simultaneously plays on cultural scripts of feminine weakness, and exalts the recipient in the hope that he would aid the request.⁵⁹ By submitting before the recipient, it not only perpetuates the power of and flatters the individual, it also, much like the language of deference in the salutation, challenges the individual to prove and exercise his immense political power.

In particular, letters to Lord Burghley contain consistent use of the rich vocabulary of entreaty. For example, correspondence from Lettice Knollys, Dowager Countess of Essex and Francis Cooke, contained phrases such as ‘beseeches’ and ‘most humbly’ repeatedly throughout to exalt Cecil and motivate him to act. This seems to be a repetitive theme in letters to Burghley. Although Daybell suggests that this language is contingent on the individual (and uses comparisons to demonstrate noblewomen taking a more direct tact),⁶⁰ the language of entreaty is an enduring theme throughout Elizabeth’s letters of petition to powerful men of the aristocracy. In a letter to Burghley on 28 January, 1582, Elizabeth utilises phrases such as ‘I beseeche your Lordship’ and ‘I take my leave of your Lordship beseeching your Lordship’.⁶¹ In the letter to Walsingham on 28 January, 1582, Elizabeth writes ‘beseeching your accustomed frendelie care to recomende this my suit and petition to her Majestie’.⁶² In a letter to Sir Robert Cecil on 20 May, 1595, Elizabeth writes ‘and so beseeching God to bless you’,⁶³ and to Leicester, Elizabeth writes ‘I beseeche your Lordship’.⁶⁴ These are just a few examples of Elizabeth’s strategic and liberal use of the

⁵⁸ Daybell, “Scripting the Female Voice,” p. 9.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶¹ ID 162 Bess of Hardwick to William Cecil, Lord Burghley, 28 January [1582], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=162>.

⁶² ID 144 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Francis Walsingham, 28 January [1582], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=144>.

⁶³ ID 124 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Robert Cecil, 20 May [1595], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=124>.

⁶⁴ ID 110 Bess of Hardwick to Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester, 27 June [1576], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=110>.

language of entreaty, which was commonly applied in the conclusion as a tactical means of challenging the bureaucratic power of men such as Robert Cecil to grant her petition.

Elements of the classical tradition of public and political letter-writing heavily influenced the letters of Elizabethan noblewomen, especially in their structural forms. However, these conventions were further adapted by women to include gendered pleas, such as appeals to motherhood, wifely duties or gendered language that conformed to conventional gender scripts. These gendered pleas within a rhetorical framework appealed to the language of public political friendship, but also the expectations of women at the time.⁶⁵ This created a uniquely gendered method in which women could engage as political agents. These gendered conventions allowed women to navigate a volatile political context within what Barbara Harris terms as the 'disjunctures of patriarchy'.⁶⁶ Women were barred from institutional political activities, such as holding public office in the wide swathes of the Tudor bureaucracy, simply by the virtue of their sex. However, their domestic duties, a phrase which stands as an inclusive banner for upholding and perpetuating client-patronage networks, marriage brokering and childrearing, were what Mary Laven terms as 'the smallest political building block of early modern rule'.⁶⁷ This was a legitimate avenue in which women could create personal connections or appeal to legislature, whilst still remaining within the limits of what patriarchy dictated to be proper.

In a series of letters sent in the February of 1558, Elizabeth wrote to Sir John Thynne regarding a bill before Parliament that could severely impact upon her family and others, and requested that he come to London to prevent its passing. In this letter, Elizabeth utilises gendered tactics to negotiate her interference in an environment inhospitable to women. The bill in question is one that went before the House of Lords and the House of Commons in February of 1558, during the last sitting of Parliament in the reign of Mary I. The Bill for the Taking away of young unmarried Women, having Lands or Goods, under the Age of Sixteen Years, was brought from the House of Lords on 8 February,⁶⁸ and debated in the House of Commons between 9 - 12 of February on three occasions.⁶⁹ It was not common practice to

⁶⁵ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 4.

⁶⁶ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550*, p. 11.

⁶⁷ Mary Laven, "Encountering the Counter-Reformation," *Renaissance Quarterly* 59 (2006): p. 719. Marriage brokering will be analysed in greater depth in chapter three.

⁶⁸ "House of Commons Journal Volume 1: 08 February 1558," in *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 1, 1547-1629* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1802), 48, accessed September 2, 2015, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/commons-jrnl/vol1/p48b>.

⁶⁹ "House of Commons Journal Volume 1: 09 February 1558," in *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 1, 1547-1629* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1802), 48, accessed September 2, 2015, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/commons-jrnl/vol1/p48g>.

keep transcripts of parliamentary proceedings in sixteenth-century England (in fact, it was forbidden, proceedings were secret, and the Hansard was not introduced until the eighteenth century),⁷⁰ so details of the discussion of this bill are not accessible. However, from what we can discern, it aimed to remove the right for unmarried female to inherit property or money after the death of a relative. The mere fact that Elizabeth engaged with a bill of this nature is revealing of the variety of instances in which noblewomen could act as political agents in sixteenth-century England. Not only does it demonstrate direct institutional engagement, rather than more traditional modes of engagement such as client-patronage, this also demonstrates that the institutional sphere of the English Parliament was certainly not as airtight as the bureaucracy intended it to be.

Elizabeth's language seemed frantic and desperate, which is understandable, considering the apparent severity of the bill that was to go before the House of Lords and her initial instructions to make haste to London. This bill had significant implications for the patrimony of the sixteenth-century English aristocracy. Land, title and money were passed on through marriage and childbirth, and the heritage, political clout and stability of an aristocratic family were perpetuated through these acts.⁷¹ The Bill for the Taking away of young unmarried Women, having Lands or Goods, under the Age of Sixteen Years was a direct challenge to this, and aristocratic families, such as those of Elizabeth's with daughters under the age of sixteen and unwed, stood to lose much with the progression of such a bill.

Whilst Elizabeth may have been genuinely distressed, and this manifested through her tone throughout the letter, a closer reading reveals a definite structure and the use of gendered conventions that appealed to contextual expectations of women and are consistent with letter-writing guides of the time. The most apparent gendered convention that Elizabeth utilises in her letter to Sir John Thynne, Senior, is an appeal on behalf of her children. She writes: 'ther ys abyll yn the parlament howse agenste me. yt ys aganarall byll and dothe towche many. and yt pass yt wyll not only ondo me and my poore chyldery[n] but agreat nombert of hothers'.⁷² Gendered tropes, such as pleas on behalf of their position as wives and mothers, as well as pleas of fragility and female weakness, were widely utilised by sixteenth-century English noblewomen to satisfy their political objectives.⁷³ Childrearing

⁷⁰ Peter Lake and Steve Pincus, "Rethinking the Public Sphere in Early Modern England," *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006): p. 276.

⁷¹ Barbara J. Harris, "Property, Power, and Personal Relations: Elite Mothers and Sons in Yorkist and Early Tudor England," *Signs* 15 (1990): p. 608.

⁷² ID 111 Bess of Hardwick to Sir John Thynne, Senior, February [1558], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=111>.

⁷³ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 16.

and wifely duties played a very important part in the socio-political landscape of early modern England. The position noblewomen took as advocates for the interests of their children and their estates were legitimate political channels in which they exerted power and influence, namely through perpetuating client-patron relationships with other families and negotiating exchange of titles and land in marriage brokerage.⁷⁴ These political frameworks will be discussed at length in chapter two. Yet, these very same expectations that noblewomen were supposed to fulfill, such as motherhood and wifely duties, were tropes that were routinely utilised in letters by noblewomen to legitimise their political activities within the constrained and often contradictory disjunctures of patriarchy.⁷⁵

In this letter to Thynne, Elizabeth appeals for aid on behalf of her children. Although the instructions on her letterhead to make haste with such an important appeal denotes a level of urgency and panic - which is understandable considering the severity of the legislation that would impact heavily upon her unmarried young daughters – it is also entirely likely that she was engaging with the gendered language of appeal. This was a widely used epistolary tactic among female members of the aristocracy, who hoped to emphasise maternal bonds as a means of securing their objectives. This language styled woman in the image of the natural mother and the dutiful wife, which appealed to gender expectations of their role within the family.⁷⁶ Elizabeth states that the bill will ‘undo me and my poore chyldery[n]’. Whilst Elizabeth does suggest that the bill will undo her, she deflects the impact of the bill primarily onto her children. Elizabeth engages the emotive, melancholic language of self-pity reflected in the Ovidian tradition through ‘poore chylderyn’. Through this, Elizabeth also applies an additional rhetorical convention, that being the depiction of women as objects of pity or suffering. The use of ‘poor children’ is most likely a ploy to elicit a sympathetic response from Sir John Thynne.⁷⁷ Additionally, Elizabeth fashions her primary concern to be her children, positioning herself as the mother, and therefore emphasising her duty to act on their behalf.⁷⁸ The significance of such a gendered presentation becomes particularly relevant when placed in the context of the discussion: Elizabeth engaged in the institutional political sphere, typically only the domain of men. This domain extends beyond the household, but by using gendered tropes that fulfill her expectations as a wife and mother, Elizabeth creates a moral justification for engaging

⁷⁴ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550*, p. 99.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷⁶ Ralph A. Houlbrooke, *The English Family 1450-1700* (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 19.

⁷⁷ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 12.

⁷⁸ Barbara J. Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," *The Historical Journal* 33 (1990): p. 262.

with a matter that extends far beyond the domestic sphere,⁷⁹ despite the fact it may still impact heavily upon the domestic sphere.

Noblewomen engaged in gendered self-presentation that emphasised tropes of feminine weakness and restraint to manipulate cultural scripts of the context. By utilising these negative scripts to their own advantage, noblewomen would be able to manipulate male expectations to produce a favourable end for their petition. For example, noblewomen, such as Lady Julyane Holcroft, utilised the trope of the naïve woman to avoid repaying loans. James Daybell also utilises the example of Gertrude, marchioness of Exeter who justified her ill-advised association with the maid of Kent as due to gullibility, directly contingent on her femininity.⁸⁰ Whilst gendered stereotypes such as irrationality, gullibility and naivety have traditionally been used as a means to dismiss women, noblewomen adapted this unique tactic in letters to use gendered expectations to their advantage. Although Elizabeth is not as explicit in her gendered pleas as Gertrude, or Lady Julyane Holcroft, Elizabeth does engage with gendered self-presentation through her letters by routinely drawing attention to her uncomely boldness. In her aforementioned letter to Thynne, Elizabeth writes that ‘I wolde not thus bouldely haue sente for you’.⁸¹ Elizabeth also applies this language to other letters, such as her letter Walsingham on 7 February, 1582, in which she made ‘bould to be a troblesome sutor vnto you’,⁸² and that to Matthew Parker, archbishop of Canterbury, on 6 May, 1568, in which she declares ‘I am bold in those respectes to beseche your grace’.⁸³ This language acted as a polite precursor to what could be an inconvenient request, enticing the individual to aid the petition.⁸⁴ To the men that she petitions, Elizabeth draws attention to her uncharacteristically unfeminine behaviour, which purveys the serious nature of her request and the urgency in her communication. It draws

⁷⁹ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 16.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 15. James Daybell refers to this event as the ‘nun of Kent’. The maid of Kent, or alternatively the nun of Kent, are terms used to refer to an English Catholic nun by the name of Elizabeth Barton, who was regarded by her contemporaries as a prophetess. Barton claimed to receive revelations from the Virgin Mary and God. The Tudor administration indulged her for a time, until she prophesied that divine authority would dethrone King Henry VIII if he married Anne Boleyn. With her influence and prophecy seen as a precursor to political instability, Barton and five of her chief supports were arrested and executed in 1533. Ethan Shagan provides a good summation of these events in *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*.

⁸¹ ID 111 Bess of Hardwick to Sir John Thynne, Senior, February [1558], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=111>.

⁸² ID 148 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Francis Walsingham, 7 February [1583], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=148>.

⁸³ ID 238 Bess of Hardwick to Matthew Parker, 6 May [1568], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=238>.

⁸⁴ Lynne Magnusson, "A Rhetoric of Requests: Genre and Linguistic Scripts in Elizabethan Women's Suitors' Letters," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. James Daybell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 58.

upon cultural scripts that depict women as both submissive – and therefore complicit – and also prone to the influence of emotions. The apparent gravity of Elizabeth's petition has forced her to act in such a bold - or alternatively, hysterical, way - and to defy and yet also reinscribe the submissive feminine script.⁸⁵ It is through the gendered self-presentation that Elizabeth can act in a bold way to both legitimise her petitions and satisfy her political objectives.

For a context in which the process of legislature was supposed secret, and in a context where prior historiographies would have us believe that women did not engage with institutional politics, it seems remarkable for anyone, let alone a woman, would be privy to the inner workings of the English Parliament in the sixteenth century. Yet, through her correspondence with Sir John Thynne over a series of two letters, Elizabeth demonstrates knowledge of not only parliamentary process, but also how a specific bill progressed from the House of Lords to the House of Commons. In an initial letter to Thynne regarding this matter, Elizabeth sets out a chronology for the progress of this potentially threatening legislation through Parliament. By the time Elizabeth's letter had been sent in early February 1558, this bill had already been debated in the House of Lords. Elizabeth initially mentions in her letter - 'yt hathe bene twyse rede yn the lords howse and yt shalbe brought yn agayne of Monday or tewyesday'. Elizabeth then goes on to detail 'so that yt ys thought yt wylbe wedynnesday or thourysday or yt be brought yn to the lowar howse'.⁸⁶ Despite the lack of transcripts on the debate regarding the bill to strip unmarried heiresses under the age of sixteen of their inheritance, the machine of the Tudor bureaucracy did keep journals of the House of Commons and the House of Lords, that when published in the nineteenth century detail the bill and the dates in which it was debated. The House of Commons journal stipulated that this bill was brought down from the House of Lords on the 8 February, 1558. The House of Commons Journal also stipulated that the bill was also debated on the 9, 11 and 12 of February.⁸⁷ Minor inconsistencies notwithstanding, the bill moved to the House of Commons on 8 February, which was a Tuesday, and was debated in the House of Commons

⁸⁵ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 12. Additionally, Erin Sadlack in 'Epistolary Negotiations: Mary the French Queen and the Politics of Letter-Writing' also discusses the recurrent image of the emotional female. Prior factual interpretations of the letters of Mary Tudor Brandon have depicted Mary to be a 'weeping' and hysterical women, when in reality this presentation was the result of a rhetorical construction to gain sympathy from her brother.

⁸⁶ ID 111 Bess of Hardwick to Sir John Thynne, Senior, February [1558], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=111>.

⁸⁷ "House of Commons Journal Volume 1: 09 February 1558," in *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 1, 1547-1629* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1802), 48, accessed September 2, 2015, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/commons-jrnl/vol1/p48g>.

on 9 February, which was a Wednesday.⁸⁸ True to Elizabeth's chronology, this bill was debated in the House of Commons on the Wednesday, and early into the next week.

Whilst Elizabeth's correspondence with Sir John Thynne demonstrates her knowledge of parliamentary process, it also demonstrates, on a far more simple level, that Elizabeth engaged with governance and did not passively experience the reaches of government. Within the rapidly expanding field of new political history, attention is being paid to ways of conceptualising how people often excluded from the persistent narrative of high politics engaged with governance. These newer analytic structures envisage a political environment far more complex and widespread than the actions of a few men in the Privy Council, or halls of Parliament,⁸⁹ which is the traditional tack that this thesis has taken so far in chapter one. Despite Elizabeth's clear privilege when it comes to social class, she was still not entirely included in the institutional political sphere of Tudor England. By virtue of their sex, women were excluded from formal engagement with the political sphere.⁹⁰ In the early modern period, the primary political channel in which noblewomen could legitimately engage as a political agent was through domesticity. If, as in Elizabeth's case, occasion called to go beyond this, epistolary tactics such as deference and gendered pleas were used to defy patriarchal structures,⁹¹ and justify what would have otherwise been seen as an intrusion and a departure from acceptable behavior.⁹² The particular gendered ways that Elizabeth, and women of the aristocracy in general, applied to their letters are testament to the certain and limited ways that women could engage politically.

When Elizabeth expressed her distaste for The Bill for the Taking away of young unmarried Women, having Lands or Goods, under the Age of Sixteen Years in the House of Lords, she engaged in what Andrea Gamberini describes as a dialectic confrontation. A dialectic confrontation is a plurality of voices and positions in any given political body. The impact of the dialectic confrontation is the interrogation of governance, or policy, by the act of voicing a perspective. This therefore produces a plurality of voices, which, in turn, created political discourse and furthermore, it corrupted the perception that governance is rigidly hierarchical and absolute. Through engagement, dialectic confrontations possess the

⁸⁸ Days of the week are noted in Latin.

⁸⁹ Natalie Mears, "Courts, Courtiers, and Culture in Tudor England," *The Historical Journal* 46 (2003): p. 706.

⁹⁰ Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," p. 260.

⁹¹ Sadlack, *The French Queen's Letters*, p. 19.

⁹² Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 16.

capability to alter relations of authority.⁹³ This has been one of the newer theoretical frameworks that have been produced in the expansion of new political history and the study of the political engagement by factions, social groups and otherwise historically disenfranchised individuals. A dialectic confrontation could be as simple as acknowledging a bill, or in Elizabeth's case, voicing an opposition to legislation. This qualifies as a political act because it produces discussion and facilitates engagement with governance, in direct contrast to the formerly hierarchical conceptions of how politics functioned in which people passively experienced rule.

This speaks to the wider idea of discourse being a subversive force in the political sphere of early modern England. Communication, in varying forms, was in and of itself a political act. Common people utilised tactics such as protest to voice their displeasure with governance, which was the case with the Amicable Grant of 1525, a tax introduced without parliamentary permission by Lord Chancellor Thomas Wolsey to fund yet another war with France. The Amicable Grant was repealed after outrage on behalf of the people, outrage that culminated in the open rebellion of ten thousand workers in Lavenham, one of the worst riots England had seen in a century.⁹⁴ Common, or those whom De Vivo terms 'fickle' people, also utilised other forms of political communication such as gossip. Mistresses in the Venetian Republic spread gossip sourced from their high-powered lovers, an act which contravened the supposed secrecy of the inner workings of governance.⁹⁵ For Elizabeth specifically, her open disapproval of the The Bill for the Taking away of young unmarried Women, having Lands or Goods, under the Age of Sixteen Years, displays not only engagement, but also discussion on the negative impacts of this legislation. The consistent key factor across all of these examples is that these individuals were not passive, and they utilised various forms of communication to voice opposition. Elizabeth, through her letters, demonstrates resistance against the law of the land that could severely impact upon her interests.

Whilst much work has been done on how noblewomen acted as political agents through domesticity, how noblewomen acted as political agents and engaged in an institutional sense is a less covered area of historical enquiry. As demonstrated, Elizabeth of

⁹³ Andrea Gamberini, "The Language of Politics and the Process of State-Building: Approaches and Interpretations," in *The Italian Renaissance State*, ed. Andrea Gamberini and Isabella Lazzarini (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 407.

⁹⁴ Tim Harris, "Introduction," in *The Politics of the Excluded, C. 1500-1850*, ed. Tim Harris (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 15.

⁹⁵ Filippo De Vivo, *Information and Communication in Venice: Rethinking Early Modern Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 2.

Hardwick used a variety of epistolary conventions such as rhetorical structures to argue for aid, and gendered pleas and tactics such as deference to construct persuasive letters that were a means to her political objectives. Through a close reading of her letters, it is evident that Elizabeth engaged with the institutional parliamentary process, rather than just the domestic political realm, as has been the traditional political domain for women. In addition to this, her letters demonstrate how epistolary conventions were used to perpetuate and facilitate important social relationships that integral to a political network in sixteenth-century England.

“To my very goode frend”: Client-Patronage Networks of Authority, Noblewomen and the Informal Political Sphere

In a letter dated to 21 October, 1567, Elizabeth Wingfield wrote to her half-sister Elizabeth of Hardwick, and informed her that her husband Anthony Wingfield had presented Elizabeth's gift of venison to the Queen. Queen Elizabeth had, apparently, greatly enjoyed the gift, and expressed her love and affection for Elizabeth of Hardwick.¹ The subject matter of gift-giving occupies much of Elizabeth's correspondence. In this regard Elizabeth was not unique, as gift-giving was a practice enthusiastically engaged with by much of the aristocracy in sixteenth-century England.² Gift-giving was one among many manifestations of the 'client-patron relationship' that was a pervasive and vital network of authority and power exchange within the aristocracy. Client-patronage was the domain of both men and women, however, this relationship was negotiated in respectively gendered ways. For noblewomen, client-patron relations were part of their domestic portfolio, and this tied into their role as a wife and their responsibilities as mothers.³ Whilst prior interpretations of the lives of women have relegated this historical contribution of women to the private side of the public/private dichotomy, a close study of the letters of Elizabeth of Hardwick reveals that women elicited tangible political change by the negotiation of these complex power networks of Tudor England through their domestic roles.

Chapter one demonstrated how noblewomen cultivated interpersonal relationships and engaged with the institutional political sphere through epistolary conventions. It also discussed the relationships that Elizabeth forged with powerful bureaucrats, which were also, to some extent, a practice in client-patron relationships. This chapter, on the other hand, will analyse the letters of Elizabeth of Hardwick to reveal how she utilised gendered scripts and hierarchical rhetorical registers to effectively fulfill her role as a client and to achieve tangible political goals from her domestic roles. Letters are a valuable resource in which to interrogate how gift-exchange and informal political relationships, such as the

¹ ID 096 Elizabeth Wingfield to Bess of Hardwick, 21 October [1567], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters: The Complete Correspondence, c. 1550-1608*, ed. Alan Bryson Alison Wiggins, Daniel Starza Smith, Anke Timmermann and Graham Williams, University of Glasgow, web development by Katherine Rogers, University of Sheffield Humanities Research Institute (April 2013) [accessed on 15 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=96>.

² Felicity Heal, "Food Gifts, the Household and the Politics of Exchange in Early Modern England," *Past & Present* 199 (2008): p. 44.

³ Barbara J. Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," *The Historical Journal* 33 (1990): p. 270.

client-patronage networks of women, were negotiated – these inherently political and mediated documents rely on hierarchical and gendered scripts to function effectively as political tools and for us, facilitate an understanding of how the degrees of social difference in client-patronage worked. This chapter, along with chapter three, argues that what historians have generally identified as ‘the domestic sphere’ (a phrase used for convenience) is actually better understood as an informal political sphere – a space in which noblewomen were able to act as political agents through acts that were simultaneously political and domestic, such as client-patronage and marriage.⁴ This informal political sphere operated as a complement to the formal, institutional sphere of politics that was discussed in chapter one. Its operation demonstrates the extent to which the political in early modern England extended beyond the confines of institutions and professional, male-dominated spaces.

Client-patron relationships were a crucial aspect of early modern life. This relationship has been an enduring feature of courtly life since antiquity and is a socio-political arrangement that permeated cultural, political and social contexts in the early modern period.⁵ The client-patron relationship underpinned relations between the aristocracy, and the networks formed by this relationship enabled the exchange of power and favour.⁶ In essence they allowed an elite society to function. It formed the basis in which marriage negotiations were undertaken, in which aristocratic families forged networks and in which children were raised in households of a higher status.⁷ This was an inherently political relationship that facilitated the exchange of favour and the creation complex networks of allegiance and authority. Whilst both men and women engaged in client-patronage, women did so in a particularly gendered way. Patronage, in both the French and English incarnations, refers to the support of a social inferior.⁸ A patron could be any individual in possession of political connections, wealth, goods or relationships that clients required access to in order to advance their personal situation. A client would, commonly through the medium of letter, engage the patron in communication through epistolary tactics such as deference. The relationship would then be fostered and perpetuated by the client through gift-exchange and by epistolary tactics in letters of petition to satisfy their objectives. The

⁴ Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 175.

⁵ Sharon Kettering, "Patronage in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 17 (1992): p. 839.

⁶ Helen Payne, "Aristocratic Women, Power, Patronage and Family Networks at the Jacobean Court, 1603-1625," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1540-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 164.

⁷ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550*, p. 175.

⁸ Kettering, "Patronage in Early Modern France," p. 847.

literature on client-patronage attests to its endurance, ranging from most of continental Europe in the early modern period, to how it facilitates business transactions in current day communist China.

The proper characterisation of the client-patron relationship as an emotional friendship or strategic relationship has been subject to historical debate. Sharon Kettering has summarised this dispute in relation to the French court. Historians such as Yves Durand and Roland Mousnier emphasise the fidelity aspect of early modern relationships and suggest that there are two predominant forms, that of fidelity and those relationships of personal gain, *clienteles*. The terminology should, in their argument, be reflective of the genuine aspects of emotion and devotion that do exist in these relationships.⁹ Others, such as Kettering herself, argue that ‘friendship’ is contextually complex in meaning, and that it is a vague description for what was essentially a business transaction that played to cultural scripts such as the moral obligation to reciprocate services undertaken by clients for patrons.¹⁰ The definition of client-patronage that will be utilised in this thesis is reflective of both these schools of thought; client-patron relationships were indeed simultaneously friendships and social arrangements exploited for political gain. Client-patronage was negotiated within the parameters of an affective vocabulary, with references to fictive kinship and friendship as prolifically used tactics in client-patron letters. However, friendship had a socio-political purpose in the context of the sixteenth-century aristocracy. This affective vocabulary fostered a utilitarian bond.¹¹ The phrase client-patronage will be utilised to describe a relationship that was undoubtedly inherently political, but may also contain elements of genuine affection between individuals.

A close study of Elizabeth of Hardwick’s letters reveals the complex ways in which women negotiated their positions as both clients and patrons. The letters reveal not only Elizabeth’s position as a client – that included the use of gifts to engage high-ranking members of the Tudor aristocracy such as Lord Burghley, Lord Dudley, Elizabeth I and Walsingham - but also they speak to Elizabeth’s position as a patron. They hint at the reach of Elizabeth’s network, which went from lesser members of English society, to Queen Elizabeth I herself. The letters also reveal the types of gifts that Elizabeth privileged, such as venison. Most significantly, the letters to and from Elizabeth that concerned client-patronage reveal the multiple registers Elizabeth needed to have a masterful grasp of in order to

⁹ Ibid., p. 850.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 839.

¹¹ Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 76.

negotiate this relationship effectively. Her letters contain many of the epistolary conventions discussed in chapter one that were used to navigate relationships with not only men, but women as well.

Gift-exchange was a vital component of the client-patron relationship, as it appealed to social scripts that dictated the reciprocation of services. Although the analysis of letters in this thesis is largely devoted to the epistolary conventions apparent in Elizabeth's correspondence with her clients and her patrons, the significance of gifts within client-patron relationships is still a pivotal point in need of clarification. Gifts were not gratuitous or simple expressions of goodwill in aristocratic circles during the early modern period, although they may appear to be spontaneous and what Mauss terms to be 'disinterested'.¹² Although the gift as a show of affection was common and an entirely plausible angle of interpreting this act, the act of gift-giving was also predominately propelled by self-interest, and appealed to cultural scripts that dictated that the act of gift-giving would be, at some point, reciprocated.¹³ The language of client-patronage was a vocabulary of affection for utilitarian means, and the gift-exchange of objects of affection fulfilled the same utilitarian objective. Gift-giving, therefore, had an important function in the client-patron relationship. The act of a client giving a gift to the patron indebted the patron to reciprocate,¹⁴ and the reciprocation could be in the form of many of the assets that the patron held.

Gift-giving was an endeavor that Elizabeth of Hardwick embarked on with enthusiasm. On several occasions in her letters, Elizabeth enquired after the status of gifts she has sent. And in several letters received by her from contacts, such as her half-sister Elizabeth Wingfield, among with many others, the status of Elizabeth's gifts were discussed.¹⁵ She was, indeed, a prolific gift giver. Yet this behaviour was not unusual, and was shared by many other notable members of the English aristocracy, such as Honour Plantagenet, viscountess Lisle, who by no coincidence sent gifts to Thomas Cromwell and to her niece Mary Arundel's husband, Robert Radcliffe, 1st earl of Sussex around the time her two eldest daughters reached the age suitable for introduction at court in 1536.¹⁶ The use of

¹² Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, trans. Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen & West Ltd, 1969), p. 1.

¹³ Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p. 4.

¹⁴ Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," p. 266.

¹⁵ Elizabeth received correspondence with updates on the status of gifts from individuals other than her half-sister, Elizabeth Wingfield. For example, Elizabeth received word from her servant John Kniveton on 23 December, 1579, that some venison pies she had ordered to be sent were mouldy and 'not worth the giving'. Additionally, letters such as that from Edwin Sandys, archbishop of York on 7 July, 1584, thank Elizabeth for the gift of a 'fat stag' that included some form of offer from Elizabeth.

¹⁶ Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," p. 266.

the gift as a means to perpetuate relationships and as a method for facilitating the exchange of assets in a client-patron relationship is clearly illustrated within Elizabeth's letters. For example, Elizabeth routinely lavished gifts upon Queen Elizabeth I. In several letters, Elizabeth Wingfield communicates the progress of gifts sent to the Queen. On 2 January, 1576, Wingfield writes to confirm that Queen Elizabeth had received Elizabeth's gifts of clothing, and was so impressed she 'geue out such good speches of my lord and yow ladyship as I neuer hard of better'.¹⁷ In another letter, dated to 21 October, 1567, Wingfield informs Elizabeth that her gift of venison was received well by Queen Elizabeth, and that 'her magisty did talke one longe owre with master wyngfeld of my lorde and you so carefully'.¹⁸

The political implications Elizabeth's enactment of the client-patron relationship through gift-giving and correspondence become even more significant when we take into account the tangible political change Elizabeth was able to secure through her clientage activities. More so than usual, the late-sixteenth century was a volatile political context. By 1567, Mary Stuart's hold on the throne of Scotland had become untenable and she abdicated in favour of her son, James. Soon after, Mary fled to England for protection. As a Catholic alternative to the Protestant Queen, and a member of the extended royal family, Mary's presence in England enflamed factional political tensions.¹⁹ Key questions for Elizabeth I and her Privy Council were: where could Mary be sent? Which aristocratic family could be trusted to look after, but also keep an eye on, such an important and potentially threatening political figure? In the following year, correspondence between Elizabeth of Hardwick and her husband, George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury, reveal a bid on their behalf to become custodians of the Scottish Queen. In a letter from Hampton Court in the December of 1568, Talbot writes to Elizabeth with many thanks for the supply of venison and potages that he has bestowed upon Lady Francis Cobham and Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester. This in and of itself is a political act, as the gifting of valuable foodstuffs such as venison would aim to consolidate relationships between Talbot and two very influential individuals – one of whom, Lady Cobham, was a member of Elizabeth's inner circle. Perhaps the most significant feature of this letter is the information Talbot provides regarding the bid he and

¹⁷ ID 097 Elizabeth Wingfield to Bess of Hardwick, 2 January [1576], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 15 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=97>.

¹⁸ ID 096 Elizabeth Wingfield to Bess of Hardwick, 21 October [1567], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 15 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=96>.

¹⁹ Retha M. Warnicke, *Women of the English Renaissance and Reformation* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 165. John Guy in *Tudor England* also describes the enflamed political situation in the aftermath of the arrival of Mary Stuart in England.

Elizabeth had made to become the Scottish Queen's custodians. Talbot goes on to reveal the subtle hint the Queen had given him concerning the custody of the Scottish Queen, in which he wrote that Elizabeth I had addressed him with, 'as good words/ as I cold wysche declarenge that or it were longe I shuld well perseve che dyd so truste me As che dyd few/ chew old nott tell me wherin but doute it was About the custody of the scotes queen'.²⁰ This letter is one of a series concerning the relationship between the Talbots and the Queen throughout the years of ensuing political instability with Mary Stuart's presence in England.²¹ As demonstrated earlier, Elizabeth and Talbot had made concerted effort in the past through the medium of gift-giving to maintain the Queen's patronage with the understanding, or hope, that, at some point, Elizabeth I would fulfill the social script that obligated a patron to reciprocate.²² The information passed on by Talbot signifies a significant development in this relationship, likely a result of the persistent petitioning and gift-giving on behalf of Elizabeth and Talbot. Although the custody of Mary Stuart would be far from established for years to come, custody of the Scottish Queen was eventually given to Elizabeth of Hardwick and Talbot. Mary remained in the custody of the Talbot's until 1585, when she was transferred into the custody of Sir Amias Paulet, two years before her eventual execution in 1587.²³

The significance and symbolism behind a gift could have a significant impact upon the client's desired objectives in the exchange. Foodstuffs were particularly common and significant gifts, but did, however, also contain a strict social hierarchy within their value. Common fruits and vegetables, such as apples and pears, were gifts for the lower echelons of society. The aristocracy prized rare foodstuffs. Venison had particular significance in Tudor England, due to its presence exclusively on the deer parks of the aristocracy and the social and political capital that came with the act of hunting.²⁴ Venison is repeatedly referred to throughout Elizabeth's letters. Elizabeth gave Elizabeth I venison on at least one occasion, a gift so significant it elicited speeches praising Elizabeth and Talbot for their

²⁰ ID 065 George Talbot, sixth earl of Shrewsbury to Elizabeth of Hardwick, December [1568], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=65>.

²¹ See also letters 097 and 096, in which Elizabeth's gift-giving activities are particularly concentrated within the same period of time.

²² Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, p. 4.

²³ Sara Jayne Steen, "The Cavendish-Talbot Women: Playing a High-Stakes Game," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2004), p. 149.

²⁴ Heal, "Food Gifts, the Household and the Politics of Exchange in Early Modern England," p. 57.

kindness.²⁵ The more tenuous ground of gift-exchange is also evident throughout Elizabeth's letters. In a letter dated to the 8 December, 1585, Elizabeth's half-sister Elizabeth Wingfield details the discussion she had with Lady Francis Cobham, close friend of Queen Elizabeth I and Lady of the Bedchamber, regarding potential gifts for the queen. Wingfield and Lady Cobham 'long congarde of the matter' and 'she was much against yow honor giuinge money'. Instead, Lady Cobham, who, as Lady of the Bedchamber was the 'barometer of the Queen's mood', suggested that Elizabeth should find 'any fine reare thinge to haue bestowed thurty or fortye pounce'.²⁶ Rather than being a gratuitous display of kindness, this correspondence indicates that there was serious thought and strategy behind the art of gift-giving in sixteenth-century England. This letter demonstrates the anxiety surrounding an appropriate choice of gift.²⁷ In a context in which significant meaning was assigned to different goods, and a misstep, particularly in a gift to the monarch, could have dire social consequences. Wingfield goes on to emphasise this point in the letter, 'if yow honor had geuen money I feare yt woulde haue bene ell liked'.²⁸ Whilst a well-chosen gift could provoke a positive response, such as a laudatory speech from the Queen, an inappropriate gift would have consequences of its own.

Letters are a privileged place to study client-patron relationships because they are framed by a hierarchical vocabulary – the study of which provides insight into how noblewomen negotiated the power disparities client-patronage relied on. The tactic of deference is part of this hierarchical vocabulary, and was a common tool utilised in the correspondence of client-patron relationships by both men and women, as it played to scripts that acknowledged a disparity in status.²⁹ In chapter one, I explored deference as a gendered tool which women, based on Ovidian epistolary models, utilised to exalt and flatter men in order to fulfill their political objectives.³⁰ Whilst deference could be used along gendered lines, it was also an epistolary tactic concerned with status, as it relied on the acknowledgement of social superiors. Elizabeth's correspondence with Queen Elizabeth I,

²⁵ ID 097 Elizabeth Wingfield to Bess of Hardwick, 2 January [1576], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 15 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=97>.

²⁶ ID 098 Elizabeth Wingfield to Bess of Hardwick, 8 December [1585], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 15 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=98>.

²⁷ Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*, p. 67.

²⁸ ID 098 Elizabeth Wingfield to Bess of Hardwick, 8 December [1585], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 15 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=98>.

²⁹ Lynne Magnusson, "A Rhetoric of Requests: Genre and Linguistic Scripts in Elizabethan Women's Suitors' Letters," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. James Daybell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 58.

³⁰ James Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice: Women's Epistolary Rhetoric in Sixteenth-Century Letters of Petition," *Women's Writing* 13 (2008), p. 9.

for example, is rife with a vocabulary of deference, an expected convention when in corresponding with the reigning monarch. In a letter to Elizabeth I on 17 March, 1578, Elizabeth introduces the vocabulary of deference in the *salutatio* with 'to the quenes moust excelente magyste'.³¹ This is consistent in two letters on 9 and 29 January 1603, which also begin with 'to the quenes most excellent magesty'.³² Additionally, the *exordium* contains phrases such as 'your most excellent Majestie' and 'most gratius souerigne' that further emphasise the height of Elizabeth I's status,³³ but also effectively challenged the Queen to utilise it.³⁴

Noblewomen negotiated client-patron relationships in specific ways that were rhetorically female, and this is evident when compared to male letters of a similar nature. Additionally, women did not only utilise gendered language in client-patron letters to men. Through the close study of correspondence to and from Elizabeth of Hardwick, it is evident that women also applied distinctly gendered language as an epistolary tactic in their client-patronage correspondence with other women. Gendered self-presentation in letters between women did not, in the case of Elizabeth herself, take the form of playing to cultural scripts such as naivety and the prolific depiction of women as afflicted by hysteria (this is, however, a tact she took in reference to her granddaughter, Arbella Stuart, with a criticism of her mental state that sits at intersection of gendered language and ageism). Rather, Elizabeth's use of a gendered vocabulary was consistent with her domestic role at a mother. Elizabeth utilised tactics such as appeals to an Ovidian vocabulary of melancholy and the cultural script that perpetuated the notion of a natural bond between mother and child to validate her intervention.³⁵ Client-patronage, as a yet another facet of domesticity and a method in which power and favour was exchanged through the aristocracy, interplayed with and facilitated the keen interest early modern noblewomen had in regulating and molding the lives of their extended families.³⁶ Their position as the guardians of the interests of their children and grandchildren was, therefore, a cultural script routinely played to in order to carry out their objectives. Elizabeth of Hardwick appealed to these gendered scripts to persuade her patron,

³¹ ID 120 Bess of Hardwick to Elizabeth I, 17 March [1578], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=120>.

³² ID 128 Bess of Hardwick to Elizabeth I, 9 January [1603], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=128>.

³³ ID 120 Bess of Hardwick to Elizabeth I, 17 March [1578], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=120>.

³⁴ Melissa Mariam Bullard, *Lorenzo Il Magnifico: Image and Anxiety, Politics and Finance* (Florence: L.S. Olshiki, 1994), p. 118-122.

³⁵ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 16.

³⁶ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550*, p. 175.

Elizabeth I, to intercede on her behalf with her granddaughter and potential heir to the throne, Arbella Stuart. The repair of the relationship between Arbella and Elizabeth would have had significant political repercussions should Arbella ascend the throne.

A close textual analysis of the letters of Elizabeth reveals the use of appeals on behalf of her children and the Ovidian vocabulary of melancholy – these were uniquely feminine rhetorical registers that were used in client letters to elicit sympathy, and create a moral justification and domestic cover for requests. The clearest example of Elizabeth engaging with this language as the client of a prominent women is in correspondence with Queen Elizabeth I. This correspondence sought to capitalise on the beneficial advantage that would have been afforded to Elizabeth should the queen intervene, for her granddaughter Arbella's better interests. In three letters to the Queen, Elizabeth intervenes on behalf of her daughter, Elizabeth Lennox and her granddaughter, Arbella Stuart. In a letter on 16 March, 1578, Elizabeth thanks the Queen for her 'gracious goodness to grante vnto my poure dowter lenex the custody of har chylde'.³⁷ This letter adheres to the letter of petition structure explored in chapter one. However, of further interest here is the overt use of melancholic language that Elizabeth engages with as she thanks the Queen for restoring custody of her granddaughter. Elizabeth utilises 'poor daughter Lennox' in this letter, applying the Ovidian vocabulary of pain and loss to her daughter's situation. This was a powerful subaltern discourse that Elizabeth employed to elicit sympathy for her daughter's situation.³⁸ By applying this tactic, Elizabeth intends to evoke pity,³⁹ with the intent of stirring sympathy and emotion in the receiver and patron, who in this case, is the Queen.

The use of gendered language appealed to a feminine script that justified Elizabeth's intrusion in her granddaughter's affairs. The role of the mother in sixteenth-century England was in part to act as an advocate for their children, but also younger consanguinal kin (and in the case of step-children, affinal kin) in their matrilineal line.⁴⁰ In an additional letter on 29 January, 1603, Elizabeth applied gendered language through appeals to the bonds of motherhood: 'the bad perswasions of some, have so estraunged hir [Arbella] minde and natural affection from me, that she holdes me the greatest enemy she hath, and hath given

³⁷ ID 120 Bess of Hardwick to Elizabeth I, 17 March [1578], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 15 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=120>.

³⁸ Diana G. Barnes, *Epistolary Community in Print, 1580-1664* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), p. 9.

³⁹ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 12. Pity, according to Erasmus, was a method by which the 'deepest emotions will be stirred'.

⁴⁰ Harris, "Tudor England," p. 261.

hir self over to be ruled and advised by others so that the bonde of nature being broken'.⁴¹ Here, Elizabeth appeals to the culturally recurrent idea of natural motherhood, and the responsibility mothers and grandmothers had to pursue their child's interests.⁴² Elizabeth employs this cultural script to validate her intervention into Arbella's affairs and the control that she wishes to exert over Arbella's life. Arbella's close proximity to the throne and her position as a potential heir meant that both Elizabeth of Hardwick and Elizabeth I had a vested interest in her associations and more importantly, who would advise her. Elizabeth, in particular, had a political interest in her advisory capacity. There was a long European tradition of noblewomen acting in an official, or unofficial, advisory capacity for their ruling children. This was an extension of their role as a mother, which imbues political significance in domesticity.⁴³ The sixteenth century saw powerful women, such as Catherine de' Medici, act as regent for her young son, King Charles IX.⁴⁴ In England, women such as Margaret Beaufort, mother of King Henry VII, were an integral part of early Tudor governance (although in an unofficial capacity). Beaufort, in particular, was noted for her involvement in the marriage negotiations between Margaret Tudor and James IV of Scotland.⁴⁵ Elizabeth had a vested political interest in altering Arbella's immediate circle; if Arbella became queen of England, Elizabeth's role in an advisory capacity would entail a significant increase in political power.

Elizabeth changes rhetorical register and evokes the script of the easily persuaded and naïve woman to justify her granddaughter's behavior, rather than her own, and to reaffirm her claim to counsel in correspondence with her patron, Elizabeth I. In letters such as that on the 29 January, 1603, Elizabeth, then the Dowager Countess of Shrewsbury, writes to Elizabeth I pleading with the Queen to intervene on the destructive behavior of Arbella, who, according to Elizabeth had fallen victim to be advised by others 'so that the bonde of nature being broken'.⁴⁶ Women routinely utilised the perceived inherent naivety and

⁴¹ ID 129 Bess of Hardwick to Elizabeth I, 29 January [1603], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 15 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=129>.

⁴² Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 16.

⁴³ James Daybell, "Introduction: Rethinking Women and Politics in Early Modern England," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1540-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate 2004), p. 2.

⁴⁴ William Monter, *The Rise of Female Kings in Europe, 1300-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 28.

⁴⁵ Desmond Seward, *The Wars of the Roses: Through the Lives of Five Men and Women of the Fifteenth Century* (New York: Viking, 1995), p. 281.

⁴⁶ ID 129 Bess of Hardwick to Elizabeth I, 29 January [1603], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 15 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=129>.

gullibility of women as excuses for their behavior,⁴⁷ and Elizabeth employs this same cultural script to depict her granddaughter in need of aid and subject to unscrupulous and negative external forces. This appeals further to the cultural trope of the helpless woman, which becomes even more significant when the objective of this particular letter of petition is taken into consideration. The letter ends with a plea on behalf of Elizabeth for the Queen to find Arbella a suitable husband, with the hope that it would be the antidote to her behavioural problems and, if the trope of the vulnerable and skittish woman is anything to go by, a source of strong moral counsel and protection. The use of a gendered vocabulary, in this case, facilitates not only Elizabeth's intervention in her granddaughter's life, but also allowed Elizabeth effectively to petition the Queen, her patron, to act as a marriage broker on her behalf and to create a suitable marriage match that would, most importantly, not infuriate the Queen. This would have been a more desirable outcome than what would eventuate – Arbella's accepted the advice of her friends and Edward Seymour, first earl of Hertford, that she should marry his grandson, Edward Seymour. Although the marriage did not eventuate, Arbella and Seymour were questioned as such a union could produce another heir and would be seen as a potential plot to take the throne.⁴⁸

The prolific use of such gendered scripts in correspondence between Elizabeth of Hardwick and Elizabeth I signify further complexities in the relationship between gender and power in sixteenth-century England. Whilst there are other examples in the archive of women utilising gendered tactics as method of satisfying their political objectives with other women, Elizabeth's particular use of the gendered epistolary tactic that emphasises feminine weakness, vulnerability and inherent stupidity speaks to the unique gender identity of a female monarch in the early modern period. The title of queen is distinctly feminine, and is typically reserved for the consort of the king. Monarchy in early modern Europe meant kingship.⁴⁹ It utilised a masculine vocabulary, as it was a traditionally masculine position and identity. Male children were prioritised as heirs to the throne. In her famous Tilbury speech before English navy faced the Spanish Armada, Elizabeth I is said to have stated that she 'has the body of a weak and feeble woman, but the heart and stomach of a king'. More verifiable, however, is the statement Elizabeth made to a Swedish diplomat in 1561, she

⁴⁷ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 12.

⁴⁸ Rosalind K. Marshall, "Stuart [Married Name Seymour], Lady Arbella (1575-1615)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004, [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/601, accessed 9 Sept 2015].

⁴⁹ Mortimer Levine, "The Place of Women in Tudor Government," in *Tudor Rule and Revolution: Essays for G. R. Elton from His American Friends*, ed. John W. McKenna and Delloyd J. Guth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 110.

said: 'I have the heart of a man, not a woman'. Indeed, the generation of female monarchs who governed Europe in the early modern period, such as: Isabella I of Castile, who referred to herself as 'king', Mary I of England, who involved iconography of both kingship and queenship in her coronation and Jeanne III d'Albret of Navarre, who ruled as regent for seventeen years, all emphasised masculine traits to validate their legitimate hold of the throne. Female monarchs purposefully appropriated masculine behaviors to create an alternative gender identity in which they were biologically and physically female, but with the male, rational traits that would validate, and most importantly, not corrupt, their rule in a context where the legal and social status of women appeared to be limited.⁵⁰ When faced with the influx of female monarchs, the gender identity of the monarch was cobbled together from the tradition of both king and consort.⁵¹ The mix of epistolary conventions used here reflects this. That Elizabeth knew it was acceptable to use such gendered tactics to undermine the behaviors of woman in correspondence with a female monarch testifies to this.

Elizabeth of Hardwick acted as both a client and patron. A close study of Elizabeth of Hardwick's correspondence shows that she functioned typically in her position as a client through gift-giving and gendered epistolary scripts, it also reveals the multiple registers of client-patronage that women had to negotiate. Elizabeth, consistent with her station at the height of the English aristocracy during her marriage to George Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury, also took to the position of patron. Several letters to Elizabeth during this period demonstrate this – and whilst Elizabeth employed deferential language, a gendered vocabulary and epistolary tactics in her letters to her superiors, Elizabeth's inferiors did much the same to her.

A prime example of Elizabeth being petitioned as a patron is the correspondence from Elizabeth Smyth. Not much is known of Smyth, other than her name and the lack of title included in the post-script, that indicates her position in the landed gentry or at least, the higher strata of the middling sort in Tudor England. On 10 December, 1578, Smyth wrote to Elizabeth a letter that detailed her many thanks to Elizabeth for becoming godmother to Smyth's daughter and for the christening gifts that included a small bowl with a cover.⁵² Smyth's letter is a typical example of communication with a patron. Additionally, it also

⁵⁰ Renee Baernstein, "'In My Own Hand': Constanza Colonna and the Art of the Letter in Sixteenth-Century Italy " *Renaissance Quarterly* 66 (2013): p. 136.

⁵¹ Monter, *The Rise of Female Kings in Europe, 1300-1800*, p. 126, 131, 139 and 140.

⁵² ID 168 Elizabeth Smyth to Bess of Hardwick, 10 December [1578], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=168>.

provides a case study into the alternative political channels that were facilitated by client-patron relationships – in the case of Elizabeth, it provides an opportunity to engage critically with the political implications behind choice of godparent in sixteenth-century England.

Smyth engages in many of the same epistolary conventions that Elizabeth utilises in her letters to patrons, in order to consolidate this valuable socio-political tie. Smyth's *salutatio* addresses Elizabeth as 'the Right honorable; my very good Lady the Cownetesse of Shrewsbury'.⁵³ Here, Smyth engages in a vocabulary of deference (which is also applied generously throughout the letter) to exalt Elizabeth's status and also highlight the disparity between their social positions. By positioning herself as the social inferior through deferential language, Smyth has established the roles within the relationship that both must play – Smyth as the client and Elizabeth as the patron.⁵⁴ This is an epistolary tactic also utilised in other letters to Elizabeth, such as that from Katherine Herbart, countess of Pembroke and daughter-in-law to Elizabeth, who, despite their status as family, entwines repeated reference to 'your ladyship' with a vocabulary of affinal kinship.⁵⁵ Additionally, in her letter on January 26, 1593, Susan Wingfield, dowager countess of Kent, refers to Elizabeth as 'the Righte honorable & good lady the cowntis of Shrewsberye' and goes further to address her in the *exordium* as 'my honorable good lady'.⁵⁶

Smyth engages with a vocabulary of entreaty to endear Elizabeth to her cause. Elizabeth herself routinely used this language as she dealt with social superiors and bureaucrats. Smyth utilises this vocabulary even more so than Elizabeth, using the phrase 'humbel' on six separate occasions through the letter in varying contexts, from 'moste humbely crauinge pardon' to 'I most humbely thancke'. In another example of the language of entreaty, Smyth utilises the common phrase of 'besehinge' (beseech) to persuade Elizabeth in her *perioratio*.⁵⁷ There is a direct relationship between disparity in status and the extent to which such language was deployed in a letter, as demonstrated in Elizabeth of Hardwick's letters to patrons earlier in this chapter and in chapter one. As Elizabeth was a

⁵³ ID 168 Elizabeth Smyth to Bess of Hardwick, 10 December [1578], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 15 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=168>.

⁵⁴ Erin A. Sadlack, "Epistolary Negotiations: Mary the French Queen and the Politics of Letter-Writing," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 41 (2010): p. 295.

⁵⁵ ID 196 Katherine Herbart, countess of Pembroke to Bess of Hardwick, 23 March [1575], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 17 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=196>.

⁵⁶ ID 032 Susan Wingfield, dowager countess of Kent to Bess of Hardwick, 26 January [1593], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 15 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=32>.

⁵⁷ ID 168 Elizabeth Smyth to Bess of Hardwick, 10 December [1578], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 16 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=168>.

high-ranking member of the aristocracy, subtle differences arose in address and the degrees to which this language was deployed. The use of language such as the vocabulary of entreaty was in part contingent on social class, and letters are framed in hierarchical scripts that stress social difference. This was a technique in the pedagogical tradition of epistolary taught to women by texts such as Angel Day's *The English Secreterie*.⁵⁸ Smyth was without title and was corresponding with her patron, a member of one of the most powerful peerages of the sixteenth century - her use of the language of entreaty is more profound due to the power disparity in their relationship.

Elizabeth of Hardwick's letters provide an opportunity to study the creation of networks of kin. The selection of godparents was a method of expanding this network.⁵⁹ Godparents in early modern English society reflected more on the social, political and secular ties of the parents than the spiritual welfare of the child. Godparents were usually selected from social circles or consanguinal kin, and this could vary, according to David Cressy, from the neighbours or patrons of the parents. Although the act of becoming a godparent to a child of a lesser status was not a direct form of client-patronage, it did act to establish or re-establish links of social significance between kin and create wider communities of allegiance and authority. In some cases, godparentage was the result of petition on behalf of a client, and such an act further perpetuated the client-patron relationship. Kin is used to refer to not only to consanguinal or affinal kin, but also to friends, social and economic connections, that become part of a broader network of fictive kinship.⁶⁰

Through a more literal interpretation of content in the letters, the correspondence between Elizabeth Smyth and Elizabeth of Hardwick indicates an articulation of this relationship. Smyth writes to Elizabeth and thanks her for accepting 'parte of my lettell one, so that therby your honor hath bownde both me and myne'. Smyth additionally thanks Elizabeth for a gift of 'a Boule with a couer; for the whiche I moste humbley thancke your honor in my gerles behalfe'.⁶¹ The relationship between a godparent and godchild was slightly different than traditional examples of aristocratic patronage that usually involved the accumulation of girls from well-to-do families in service of a noblewoman. The relationship

⁵⁸ Magnusson, "A Rhetoric of Requests," p. 57

⁵⁹ John Bossy, "Godparenthood: The Fortunes of a Social Institution in Early Modern Christianity," in *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe 1500-1800*, ed. Kaspar von Greyerz (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), p. 197

⁶⁰ David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 157.

⁶¹ ID 168 Elizabeth Smyth to Bess of Hardwick, 10 December [1578], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 16 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=168>.

between godparent and godchild, although less formal than it was in the medieval period, was often enduring. Yet, the child would not be taken into the home of Elizabeth and the position of Elizabeth as godmother was more a reflection of the Smyth's desire for kinship with Elizabeth than out of primary concern for their daughter. It is entirely plausible that Smyth picked the godmother of her daughter to exploit the political capital a connection of kin to Elizabeth of Hardwick would enable. Smyth's perpetuation of this relationship reflects the use of a client vocabulary, with gendered scripts and deferential language throughout her letter to Elizabeth. Well-chosen godparents cultivated a particular image that elicited social respect and political capital, and this is reflected throughout the early modern period as parents often delayed the brokering process – with no concern for ecclesiastical repercussions – so that their child may have the best sponsor.⁶² The act of brokering for godparentage is prolific throughout the diaries, ledgers and letters of the landed gentry. The effort parents dedicated to securing a godparent of the highest status, usually in the form of a patron, testifies to its importance in the nexus of sixteenth-century English political sphere.

It is evident that Elizabeth was also the victim of the ruthless climate around the selection of godparents for aristocratic children. The use of the godparent to cultivate fruitful networks of authority, and an extension of client-patronage, is reflected in correspondence with Thomas Arundel, Elizabeth's grandson-in-law and earl of Arundel. Arundel wrote to Elizabeth on 27 June, 1607, and detailed that the initial plans to make Elizabeth godmother had been changed. Typically, grandparents had a special claim to godparentage of first-born children.⁶³ However, Queen Anne had expressed her desire to be godmother to the male child. Although Arundel expresses regret for the circumstances through 'contrary to oure expectation' and 'may diuert the Queene from her intende',⁶⁴ their plan to follow through with the desires of the monarch display the fraught and politically sensitive environment surrounding the position of god parent in early modern England – a reigning monarch was, undoubtedly, a better godmother status-wise.

Client-patronage was part of a noblewoman's domestic portfolio of responsibilities. It should not, however, be relegated to the annals of history as an aspect of domesticity that sits on the private side of the ever pervasive public and private dichotomy. Client-patronage was one of the vital structures of aristocratic relations – it facilitated the exchange of money

⁶² Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death*, p. 157.

⁶³ Bossy, "Godparenthood," p. 198

⁶⁴ ID 004 Thomas Howard, earl of Arundel to Bess of Hardwick, 27 June [1607], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 16 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=4>.

and favours between aristocrats, but also enabled the relationship aptly termed as good lordship to function between the aristocrat and the monarch. Elizabeth of Hardwick utilised epistolary conventions such as feminine scripts and a vocabulary of deference, paired with the anthropologically significant act of gift-exchange, to negotiate her role as both client and patron. Her letters are a privileged space in which to consider how noblewomen utilised a distinctly gendered and hierarchical register to negotiate the complexities of gender and class. Elizabeth had a masterful command of these tactics - gendered registers and gift-exchange were used in her client-patron relationships to successfully enact tangible political change in Tudor England. This testifies to the nature of domesticity as an informal political sphere - which in contrast to the institutional political sphere that was inherently inhospitable to women - afforded women a distinctly gendered outlet in which to act as political agents in Tudor England.

“Charles Cavendishe hath so good & loving a wife, a rare & precious
Jewell”: Marriage, a Currency of Political Power

On 15 July, 1582, Elizabeth of Hardwick wrote to Sir Thomas Cornwallis, the grandfather of her recently deceased daughter-in-law, Margaret Kitson, and asked him to aid her in her efforts to perpetuate the ties of affinal kinship that the marriage had afforded her son.¹ Marriage performed an important social function in early modern Europe. For the vast majority of noblewomen, their first marriage was for the purposes of furthering the objectives of their family.² At the summit of society, this was true for Mary Tudor, whose first marriage to King Louis XII of France put an end (briefly) to geopolitical tensions in the area.³ This was also true for Margaret Tudor, whose marriage to James IV of Scotland managed, again temporarily, to placate tensions between the Scots and England. On a more general level throughout the aristocracy and the gentry, marriage was the primary means to perpetuate lineage. Marriage facilitated the exchange of land, assets, money and titles – these were all forms of political capital in the early modern period.⁴ Perhaps most significantly of all, marriage, like client-patronage, also contributed to the creation of complex network of association and authority in Tudor England.

This chapter will study the epistolary conventions Elizabeth of Hardwick used to effectively act as a marriage broker. Noblewomen were heavily involved in the process of marriage brokering - it reflected their gendered responsibility to act as advocates for not only their children, but other younger cosanguinal kin and affinal kin, such as stepchildren.⁵ Marriage also provided an opportunity for women to create valuable networks of authority and association that much like client-patronage, created channels of political power and could potentially be exploited for their gain. A close study of Elizabeth's letters in relation

¹ ID 175 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Thomas Cornwallis, 15 July [1582], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters: The Complete Correspondence, c. 1550-1608*, ed. Alan Bryson Alison Wiggins, Daniel Starza Smith, Anke Timmermann and Graham Williams, University of Glasgow, web development by Katherine Rogers, University of Sheffield Humanities Research Institute (April 2013) [accessed on 30 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=175>.

² Kimberly Schutte, "Marrying out in the Sixteenth Century," *Journal of Family History* 38 (2013): p. 4.

³ Erin A. Sadlack, "Epistolary Negotiations: Mary the French Queen and the Politics of Letter-Writing," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 41 (2010): p. 693.

⁴ Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 43.

⁵ Barbara J. Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," *The Historical Journal* 33 (1990): p. 260-261.

to one particular marriage between Charles Cavendish and Margaret Kitson reveals the masterful ways in which Elizabeth negotiated conflicting identities of status and gender with her desire to satisfy her objectives. The epistolary pedagogy facilitated this. Through the use of tactics such as gendered rhetorical registers and hierarchical scripts, Elizabeth elicited wider political change – although on a small scale – through the maintenance of valuable ties of kin. She accomplished this in a distinctly gendered way, and through a distinctly gendered role. Although her role as a mother is typically deemed to be private, family orientated and domestic, the political change she was able to elicit through these gendered scripts testifies to the sentiment referred to in chapter two – that the domestic sphere is an informal political sphere in which noblewomen were able to provoke political change.

The political framework of marriage brokering often allowed noblewomen to forge connections beneficial not only to their family's interest, but also to their own.⁶ Harris posits that wealthy widows had a particular preoccupation with this, although marriage brokering was a common activity of noblewomen.⁷ Elizabeth of Hardwick's children were all the product of her marriage to Sir William Cavendish, and after his death in 1557 she assumed primary responsibility brokering their marriages.⁸

Elizabeth of Hardwick was noted for her abilities as an indomitable marriage broker. Her lineage is testament to this - out of her eight children with Sir William Cavendish, the six who survived into adulthood made amicable marriages within the aristocracy. Through her activities as a marriage broker, she negotiated the marriage of her daughter, Elizabeth Cavendish, to Charles Stuart, earl of Lennox and grandson to Margaret Tudor. This marriage produced a potential heir to the English throne, Arbella Stuart. Upon her own marriage to George Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury, Elizabeth negotiated the marriage between Mary Cavendish and Gilbert Talbot and Henry Cavendish and Grace Talbot. It was relatively common for stepsiblings to marry one another, and was a means of ensuring not only another profitable match for one's children, but for also assuring that patrimony would look after stepsiblings should the marriage break down. For example, with the death of George Talbot in 1590, Elizabeth's daughter, Mary Cavendish, became the countess of Shrewsbury

⁶ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550*, p. 61.

⁷ Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," p. 261.

⁸ Sybil M. Jack, "Cavendish, Sir William (1508-1557)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4943, accessed 1 Oct 2015].

after her mother by virtue of her marriage to Gilbert.⁹ Through her match making activities, Elizabeth managed to tap into the artery of power exchange within the aristocracy, and created a network of children and grandchildren that forged connections to peerages such as the earldom of Norfolk, the duchy of Devonshire and the earldom of Pembroke (that the current monarch, Elizabeth II, is a descendent of hers is a testament to Elizabeth's activities as a formidable matriarch).

Despite the persistence of the idea of marriage as a romantic construct in recent years, the arranged marriages of the English aristocracy – and the European aristocracy in general – can hardly be characterised as such. That said, many aristocratic couples did develop affection for one another.¹⁰ Marriage negotiations were fraught, and the negotiations surrounding the initial betrothal, the sudden death of a new spouse, or the entitlements of land caused friction between extended family members. Elizabeth's correspondence provides material for a particularly revealing case study of the process: the negotiations of the marriage between her son Charles Cavendish and a Margaret Kitson. This marriage was short-lived due to the untimely death of Margaret; however, the letters after the bride's death reveal the sheer amount of negotiation that continued in a betrothal arrangement and the sorts of assets shared between families.¹¹ Extant letters demonstrate the negotiations between Elizabeth of Hardwick and Sir Thomas Kitson leading up to the marriage of Charles Cavendish and Margaret Kitson. After the death of Margaret in 1582, the archive also displays the issues that arose between extended family members as Elizabeth attempted to negotiate the transferal of assets to her son, which she believed were still rightfully his to inherit after the death of his wife. Elizabeth negotiated this discord and this discussion by appealing directly to not only Sir Thomas Kitson himself, but also to his father-in-law – Sir Thomas Cornwallis – an arguably more influential individual than Kitson. Through a close study of these letters, it is evident that Elizabeth utilised epistolary conventions to ensure the fulfillment of her objectives.

It is first pertinent to consider the political ramifications that would occur if assets failed to pass between families in the negotiation of a marriage. Money, land and other assets were validating entities for the aristocracy of Tudor England.¹² They facilitated

⁹ Elizabeth Goldring, "Talbot, Elizabeth [Bess of Hardwick], Countess of Shrewsbury (1527?-1608)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26925, accessed 3 Oct 2015].

¹⁰ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550*, p. 62.

¹¹ Carolyn James, "Marriage by Correspondence: Politics and Domesticity in the Letters of Isabella D'Este and Francesco Gonzaga, 1490-1519," *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012): p. 321.

¹² Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," p. 260.

engagement with client-patron relations, the giving of gifts and the ability to house a monarch or host parties that would perpetuate connection building between members of the aristocracy. They also facilitated the acquisition of more assets, such as strategic funding to buy titles, or even the dowry of a female child to make a good marriage that would further the families interests.¹³

Through a close study of the correspondence that relates to the marriage negotiations pertaining to Charles and Margaret, it is evident that Elizabeth utilised epistolary conventions to negotiate this tension and ensure the best outcome for herself and her son. The Kitson family did not have a title, although Sir Thomas Kitson was a knight of the realm. They did, however, possess money and assets. The Kitsons were members of the gentry,¹⁴ and through her mother's line, Margaret was also the granddaughter of English politician, Sir Thomas Cornwallis. The marriage between Charles and Margaret would have been an affable match. Although Kitson did not have a title, the letters display an economic value that she could bring to the relationship. Her extended family were also well connected to influential individuals within the Tudor bureaucracy. The position Cornwallis inhabited in the social fabric of Tudor England as an enduring institution, in particular, is a significant political connection for Elizabeth would have wanted to exploit. Cornwallis had a strong relationship with William Cecil, a high-ranking bureaucrat in the Tudor bureaucracy, whom Elizabeth repeatedly attempted to court. Despite the fact that Cornwallis was heavily involved in the governance of Mary I and hence deemed a politico-religious threat, his loyalty to the future Elizabeth I when she was incarcerated in the Tower of London and his involvement in a wider organised alliance of parliamentarians who blocked distinctly religious legislation that favoured Catholics, earned him friends and respect throughout her reign.¹⁵ As a former Privy Counsellor and parliamentarian, he embodied the sort of social nexus that a noblewoman, and by extension, her young son with bureaucratic ambitions, could capitalise on.

Elizabeth's letter to Cornwallis in the summer of 1582 utilises rhetorical structures and gendered registers to negotiate the tensions between status and gender, and the desire to

¹³ Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550*, p. 57.

¹⁴ Joy Rowe, "Kitson Family (Per. C. 1520-C. 1660)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2014
[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/73910>, accessed 3 Oct 2015].

¹⁵ Ann Weikel, "Cornwallis, Sir Thomas (1518/19-1604)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008
[<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6343>, accessed 3 Oct 2015].

secure one's political objectives. This letter is a multilayered and complex political artifact. To fulfill her political objectives, Elizabeth had to negotiate the tensions between status, as the wife of one of the most powerful peers of the realm, and gender, her position as a woman, in endearing Cornwallis, a social inferior, to her favour. Whilst the typical *salutationes* seen in letters to members of the Tudor bureaucracy and to nobles of a more significant lineage have the strong and repetitive use of the language of deference, the *salutatio* in Elizabeth's letter to Cornwallis does not. Elizabeth begins her *salutatio* simply with the address of 'syr Thomas Cornewalles'.¹⁶ There is no laudatory reference to peerage, administrative position or any honorific title other than 'sir', nor does Elizabeth evoke the language of kinship. She simply refers to him by name. A letter on 10 June, 1582, to Lord Thomas Paget with a request to intervene in this discord to ensure the settlement of land to Charles further emphasises the unembellished nature of this *salutatio*. Elizabeth addresses Paget as 'the right honorab[le] my very good Lord the Lord Paget' - the honorific title is repeatedly emphasised. The vocabulary of deference was typical of the *salutatio* and it served more than a pro forma function, its primary aim to cast the sender in a submissive role.¹⁷ It was an epistolary tactic utilised to establish the power dynamics of the relationship.¹⁸ This relatively unembellished *salutatio* suggests that this was correspondence between individuals of an equal or even asymmetrical status. Here, Elizabeth effectively establishes her social dominance. At this point in her life, she was the wife of one of the most powerful peers in the realm. The *salutatio* reflects her status as a social superior. In contrast, Cornwallis, a high-profile Catholic, had long retired from his life in the institutional political sphere due to the ascension of Elizabeth I, and lived out the rest of his life at the family estate in Suffolk.¹⁹

The use of an unembellished *salutatio* is a consistent feature across Elizabeth's letters that involve social asymmetry. For example, a letter to her servant James Crompe on 8 March, 1561, that concerning the management of the household and builders, began simply 'to Iames crompe'.²⁰ Similarly, in a letter sent to William Lacye on 11 March, 1593, in

¹⁶ ID 175 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Thomas Cornwallis, 15 July [1582], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 30 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=175>.

¹⁷ Sadlack, "Epistolary Negotiations," p. 695

¹⁸ Paul D. McLean, *The Art of the Network: Strategic Interaction and Patronage in Renaissance Florence* (London: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 45.

¹⁹ Ann Weikel, "Cornwallis, Sir Thomas (1518/19-1604)", *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6343>, accessed 3 Oct 2015].

²⁰ ID 100 Bess of Hardwick to James Crompe, 8 March [1560], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 30 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=100>.

response to his claim that he has a right to sixteen shillings per year from Elizabeth, Elizabeth addresses him as ‘master William Lacye esquire at Hanhame’.²¹ Once again, apart from the customary use of master, this *salutatio* is relatively unembellished. The *salutatio* was a method writers’ could employ to assert dominance or submission. As discussed in chapter one, it dictated the roles within a relationship. The significance of its use becomes particularly evident when we compare the use of the *salutatio* in Elizabeth’s correspondence with other knights. Cornwallis was a knight, but had a relatively stark *salutatio* in comparison to other individuals such as Sir Francis Walsingham, whom Elizabeth usually addressed as ‘Pryncipall Secretarye to her Majestie’ and ‘my honorable good frende’.²² Another example of the disparity in address between knights is Elizabeth’s correspondence with Sir Julius Caesar on 31 January, 1604, in which she addresses him ‘to the right worshipfull Sir Julius Cecer knight Master of the requestes to the Kinges most Excellent Majesty’.²³ The *salutationes* to Walsingham and Caesar, among many others, also feature recurrent reference to not only honorific title, but also their official capacity as members of the Tudor and Stuart bureaucracy. It directly acknowledged their position of power over the internal affairs of England and as a representative to the monarch. Whilst Cornwallis was, like these men, a knight, his lack of official capacity in the formal political sphere is reflected through Elizabeth’s address to him. This nuanced use of address testifies to the masterful way that Elizabeth navigated the complex power structures, differentiating between people with technically the same honorific title,²⁴ but in vastly different positions power in Tudor society.

Challenges to social scripts are a recurring tactic throughout Elizabeth’s letters of petition, and are a subtle, but powerful script utilised by noblewomen to secure their political objectives. Through the widespread analysis of political letter-writing culture of the sixteenth-century England, it becomes evident that this was a prolific, and effective,

²¹ ID 160 Bess of Hardwick to William Lacye, 11 March [1593], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 29 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=160>.

²² ID 144 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Francis Walsingham, 28 January [1582], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 30 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=144>.

²³ ID 161 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Julius Caesar, 31 January [1604], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 30 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=161>.

²⁴ Lynne Magnusson, "A Rhetoric of Requests: Genre and Linguistic Scripts in Elizabethan Women's Suitors' Letters," in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England*, ed. James Daybell (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), p. 65. Magnusson goes into detail on the different deferential registers that noblewomen utilised, and argues that class is a poor framework in which to define the use of deferential tactics. Instead, Magnusson posits that Bourdieu’s ‘literary market’ is a more apt model in which to understand how noblewomen chose rhetorical scripts. If this were a survey of the use of deferential registers by noblewomen, I would agree. However, in the specific analysis of Elizabeth of Hardwick’s letters, class is a recurrent and consistent framework in which she tailors *salutationes*.

technique. Chapter one provided an in depth exploration of a similar dynamic, the challenge to power, that functioned on its ability simultaneously to exalt the political power of the recipient of the letter and to provoke them to use this power. Through the act of exalting, the sender applies pressure on the recipient to use this power granted by status, or indeed, prove that he or she is worthy of that status by granting the sender's petition.²⁵ The prolific use of honorific titles across the letter-writing culture of the early modern period largely functioned to accomplish this. However, there are variations on this technique; such as those that appeal to prior displays of affection and relationships that challenge the individual to adhere to the script of that preexisting behaviour, and to accomplish this by fulfillment of the petition. The language of a challenge was nuanced and subtle, but nevertheless conveyed a tangible threat. Failure to adhere to what I will term the 'social script' that backs a challenge,²⁶ was, in and of itself, a social faux pas in Tudor England.

Elizabeth applies this behavioural challenge within the structural conventions of her letter to Cornwallis. Elizabeth points to 'your good liking & hartie affection (as I hard) was so grounded towards gym'.²⁷ Significantly, Elizabeth does not say that she had heard this information directly, in fact, she makes a point of stipulating that she had heard of Cornwallis's comments through a third party. Whether or not this is the case, Elizabeth has drawn more people into the conversation. She has established, in the context of the letter, that more than one individual knows of his good opinion towards her son, and establishes in the process a social expectation and social precedent to which he is obligated to follow.

Through this precedent, Elizabeth created a social script, which Cornwallis had to follow. To allow the power dynamics of her social script to function, Elizabeth directly challenges Cornwallis. Elizabeth does this in her *narratio*: 'I doubte not but you will continue the same in a beneficiall soerte every waye & asmoche to his comoditie'.²⁸ Elizabeth places a moral expectation upon Cornwallis that if defied, would reflect badly upon him. This language has a significant relationship with the lack of deferential quality in the *salutatio* – Elizabeth has established herself as a social superior and this, combined with a challenge to his integrity, exerted pressure on Cornwallis to fulfill the social script. What

²⁵ Melissa Mariam Bullard, *Lorenzo Il Magnifico: Image and Anxiety, Politics and Finance* (Florence: L.S. Olshiki, 1994), p. 118-122.

²⁶ Lynne Magnusson, "A Rhetoric of Requests," p. 57. Lynne Magnusson's work on social scripts has been influential to my thinking, particularly through her summation of Angel Day's *The English Secreterie* and the way in which social scripts were utilised to manipulate power relations.

²⁷ ID 175 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Thomas Cornwallis, 15 July [1582], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 30 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=175>.

²⁸ ID 175 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Thomas Cornwallis, 15 July [1582], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 October, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=175>.

may seem a kind and noble interpretation of his character is in actuality, a veiled threat with implied social ramifications. Whilst Cornwallis was a locus of political connections, the earldom of Shrewsbury was, at this point in English history, one of the most powerful peerages in the land. Through her own, and perhaps even her husband, George's, connections and wider influence, Elizabeth could make the Cornwallis's social situation uncomfortable – this consequence is hinted to in the style of threat. Elizabeth makes explicitly clear that his reputation may be harmed if he refuses her; his integrity, good word and honesty threatened.

Elizabeth's letter to Cornwallis switches between two modes of address: rank and family. The change in mode reflects the internal tensions between gender, class, and the political objectives Elizabeth hoped to meet. As we have seen, Elizabeth utilised status and behavioural challenges through subtle epistolary techniques in order to obligate Cornwallis to fulfill her petition. However, Elizabeth's bold behaviour could only go so far. The purpose of the letter - to act as an advocate for her son and to maintain important political ties of affinal kinship – called for a negotiation of the complex, often contradictory and fraught epistolary terrain of the context. Whilst Elizabeth was a peer of the realm, her wider political objectives and the future of her son were contingent on Cornwallis's help. To complicated matters further, Elizabeth was also a woman. The alternative modes of this letter engage with epistolary techniques such as the vocabulary of entreaty, gendered appeals on behalf of her children and the affective language of friendship to validate her bold behaviour.²⁹ This was a literary space and subaltern discourse that enabled the political intrusion of women.³⁰

Much like most of the letters of petition explored in chapter one, Elizabeth's letter to Cornwallis conforms to the five-component structure that was culturally prolific throughout sixteenth-century England due to the *ars dictaminis* and the Ciceronian tradition. There are two more obvious tactical conventions Elizabeth applied in her letter to Cornwallis. The first is the use of a vocabulary of entreaty, paired with the language of friendship. As typical of letters of petition in the sixteenth century, Elizabeth engaged with the language of friendship, which was an affective vocabulary that aimed to create a utilitarian relationship between sender and receiver.³¹ Elizabeth applies terms such as 'welcome as to any your best

²⁹ James Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice: Women's Epistolary Rhetoric in Sixteenth-Century Letters of Petition" *Women's Writing* 13 (2008): p. 16.

³⁰ Diana G. Barnes, *Epistolary Community in Print, 1580-1664* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), p. 9.

³¹ McLean, *The Art of the Network*, p. 51.

friend' and 'most hartely crave your goodness gym and what frendship' at various interludes throughout the letter to establish a relationship between sender and receiver.³²

The vocabulary of entreaty aimed to submit the sender before the receiver, and was a heightened language of supplication and humility.³³ Elizabeth engages this vocabulary within her letter, but rather than using terms such as 'beseech', which was applied liberally throughout letters of the time, she writes that 'I herfore moste hartely crave your goodness hym'.³⁴ This phrase functions in much the same way as more common terms as 'beseech' – it placed the sender in submission of the receiver. Elizabeth's employment of this important epistolary tact is a significant signal that she had attempted to balance the power dynamics of the letter.³⁵ Whilst she asserted her authority as a social dominant in the *salutatio*, the language of entreaty submits her before Cornwallis in order to fulfill the social script of her status as a woman.

Gendered appeals on behalf of children were a convention noblewomen applied to a letter in order to justify otherwise bold and inappropriate behaviour, or to negotiate a relationship with a male receiver.³⁶ This is a tactic Elizabeth utilised prolifically throughout her letters. As seen in chapters one and two, Elizabeth regularly applied appeals on behalf of her children or cosanguinal kin as a method to justify her bold activities. For example, her letter in February of 1558 to Sir John Thynne, which in order to justify her intrusion into the political sphere, warranted use of 'my poore chyldery[n]'.³⁷ Additionally, we have seen Elizabeth utilise this gendered vocabulary and the emphasis of maternal bonds to justify a request for aid to Elizabeth I by a description of her granddaughter, Arbella, 'hath given hir self over to be ruler and advised by others so that the bonde of nature being broken'.³⁸ In this particular context, the switch of mode to appeal to Cornwallis in the context of family reflects the tensions between her status as a peer and her position as a woman. Despite her social status, she was still a woman and would, as shown with countless other examples of correspondence between noblewomen and men, use gendered techniques in order to flout the otherwise reserved expectations of women.

³² ID 175 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Thomas Cornwallis, 15 July [1582], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 October, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=175>.

³³ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 9

³⁴ ID 129 Bess of Hardwick to Elizabeth I, 29 January [1603], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 October, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=129>.

³⁵ Magnusson, "A Rhetoric of Requests," p. 59.

³⁶ Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice," p. 16.

³⁷ ID 111 Bess of Hardwick to Sir John Thynne, Senior, February [1558], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 October, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=111>.

³⁸ ID 129 Bess of Hardwick to Elizabeth I, 29 January [1603], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=129>.

Elizabeth deploys a distinctly gendered vocabulary in several instances throughout the letter. Her purpose for writing the letter, in the first place, is the most evident example of this. Elizabeth engages with Cornwallis as an advocate for her adult son. She repeatedly states ‘my son, Charles’ throughout the letter – which, in and of itself, is a validating epistolary tack. Although Elizabeth may have contacted Cornwallis to assert her dominance and simultaneously advocate for ties of kinship that would benefit herself, doing so on behalf of a child is consistent with domestic expectations of noblewomen that provided a safe cover for otherwise bold actions. Additionally, Elizabeth applied the use of maternal imagery to reinforce kinship and justify her involvement in the relationships between men. Elizabeth begins, ‘I haue always had so good likinge of hym [Sir Thomas Kitson] as I hold hym no lesse deare than one of my owne and even so haue care of hym’.³⁹ Elizabeth employs maternal imagery and evokes ties of kin to emphasise the importance of this relationship to her in order to indicate connectedness. Whilst marriage was undeniably a business transaction, it was a business contract negotiated and padded with terms of endearment and an affective vocabulary of affinal kinship.⁴⁰

Marriage was a complex negotiation of political networks and a means for the transferal of political and economic capital such as land and money.⁴¹ This is further reflected in additional follow-up letters many years after the death of Margaret Kitson. Additional letters, such as that on 24 November, 1582, Elizabeth thanked Cornwallis for his aid. Apparently, Cornwallis had come through for Elizabeth and had finalised paperwork between ‘my brother Sir Thomas Kitson and me’.⁴² In additional letters, such as that to Lady Elizabeth Kitson, mother to Margaret Kitson, on 8 April 1594, Elizabeth states ‘I hartely praye you procure my good brothe[r] to loke vp the saide obligacion and articles of Covenantes and to delyver th[em] to this bearrer’. Elizabeth reminds Lady Kitson that on the fourth day of February in the twenty-third year of the Queen, ‘assuraunces of land to be made to my sonne Charles & my daughter Margaret’.⁴³ These were assurances to which covenants were performed once the marriage between Charles and Margaret had been held.

³⁹ ID 129 Bess of Hardwick to Elizabeth I, 29 January [1603], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 30 October, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=129>.

⁴⁰ McLean, *The Art of the Network*, p. 51.

⁴¹ James, "Marriage by Correspondence," p. 321.

⁴² ID 204 Bess of Hardwick to Sir Thomas Cornwallis, 24 November [1582], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 1 October, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=204>.

⁴³ ID 236 Bess of Hardwick to Lady Elizabeth Kitson, 8 April [1594], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 30 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=236>.

In the letter sent on 8 April, 1594, Elizabeth further engages epistolary techniques that negotiate relationships of affinal kinship to ensure the transferal of a deed. However, in this letter we see the Elizabeth's rhetorical register change. Whilst letters between Elizabeth and men utilise distinctly gendered elements - as well as letters with the Queen, that are testament to the complex gender identity of the reigning female monarch –⁴⁴ the gendered dynamics between Elizabeth and women of a socially inferior status are, understandably, different. Elizabeth repeatedly utilises the language of fictive kinship throughout her letter to Lady Kitson, often referring to her as 'good Sister', 'louing sistar' and 'asured frend'. Although Elizabeth always remains polite in address, the repeated reference to contract and the law in the *narratio* establishes the gravity of the letter, but also acts as a veiled threat. Elizabeth points to 'assuraunce past by law accordingly to all our Contentmentes', and hints that she is substantiated by the legal estate in her demands. Elizabeth also utilises similar phrases such as 'loke vp the saide obligacion', that acts as an additional threat to exert pressure on Lady Kitson and remind her of her obligations in the marriage contract. Overall, however, Elizabeth's language is more openly demanding than in similar letters addressed to men. She displays little to no restraint in her provision of very specific instructions and contingency plans should any problems complicate the exchange of deeds.⁴⁵ The complexity of gender relations displays how versatile the application of epistolary techniques were. It also displays the level of mastery required by Elizabethan noblewomen to negotiate such complex relationships and power dynamics.

Letters are testament to the anxiety that surrounded marriage as a political connection in the early modern period. The relationships created by marriages between members of the aristocracy and the landed gentry were politically invaluable and it was a priority to cultivate and maintain these relationships.⁴⁶ On a geopolitical scale, the implications could range from the unification of aristocratic estates or the potential of peace between two kingdoms. Marriage was a thread that held together and perpetuated vast, complicated and often, volatile social networks that were inherently political.⁴⁷

Unfortunately for the aristocracy of sixteenth-century Europe, this is exactly what they were - volatile. They were political networks that were subject to all manner of issues. As

⁴⁴ William Monter, *The Rise of Female Kings in Europe, 1300-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 126.

⁴⁵ ID 236 Bess of Hardwick to Lady Elizabeth Kitson, 8 April [1594], in *Bess of Hardwick's Letters* [accessed on 30 September, 2015], <https://www.bessofhardwick.org/letter.jsp?letter=236>.

⁴⁶ James, "Marriage by Correspondence: Politics and Domesticity in the Letters of Isabella D'este and Francesco Gonzaga, 1490-1519," p. 321.

⁴⁷ Schutte, "Marrying out in the Sixteenth Century," p. 4.

effective as marriage was, it was equally problematic in a number of ways. Problems began to occur for the prospects of a family and their wider social network when marriages broke down, when betrothals were unresolved and fell through,⁴⁸ or when, in the case of Margaret Kitson, the new bride died. Marriage did not guarantee peace, either. When Margaret Tudor was married to King James IV of Scotland in an attempt to placate tensions in the north, peace was short-lived and it seems that not even the marriage of the Princess of England to the Scottish King could prevent the Battle of Flodden Field.⁴⁹ These letters mark an attempt on behalf of Elizabeth to consolidate and maintain a potentially fruitful network with a family after the death of an important pawn in the marriage market. This was an important network that was at risk with such unfortunate, but common, circumstances. Elizabeth's anxiety, and ultimately her purpose for writing the letter as laid out in the *narratio*, testifies to this. Elizabeth wished for her son to remain as affinal kin to the Kitsons and their extended family.

The institution of marriage was a vital channel of political power for the aristocracy. Marriage was the means by which land, title and money were exchanged between the aristocracy. Additionally, it facilitated the creation of complex networks of authority and relationships that acted as channels of power that could be exploited by noblewomen. Although marriage brokerage by noble widows has been classed as an aspect of the domestic portfolio,⁵⁰ the impact of marriage, and the ability of noblewomen to tactfully maneuver marriage brokering, testifies to the better understanding of 'the domestic sphere' as an informal political sphere. Elizabeth of Hardwick was a prolific marriage broker, and her extant letters testify to this. As this chapter demonstrated, Elizabeth utilised epistolary conventions such as gendered registers and rhetorical structural conventions to negotiate her conflicting identities as a peer and a woman, in order to negotiate complex networks of affinal kinship and achieve tangible political goals (although on a small scale) for her and her son's interests. Whether it be on a smaller scale, with the maintenance of networks that could aid her son's political career, or on a larger scale, with the marriage of her daughter, Elizabeth Cavendish, to Charles Stuart (a marriage that would produce an heir to the English throne), Elizabeth of Hardwick's marriage brokering activities problematise the narrative of purely institutional power. Her activities demonstrate that women could act as political

⁴⁸ Erin A. Sadlack, *The French Queen's Letters: Mary Tudor Brandon and the Politics of Marriage in Sixteenth-Century Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 28.

⁴⁹ Trevor Chalmers, "James IV (1473-1513)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Sept 2012 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14590>, accessed 7 Oct 2015].

⁵⁰ Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," p. 261.

agents and enact political change through this informal political sphere in specific and gendered ways.

Onwards: The Arbitrary Divide Between Gender History and Political History

This thesis has demonstrated, through an individual case study of Elizabeth of Hardwick, that women had the potential to act as political agents in sixteenth-century England. One of the primary methods in which enabled them to accomplish this was through letter-writing and skillful use of epistolary conventions, which afforded women a sense of authorial identity. Epistolary conventions allowed noblewomen to use the language of public political friendship,¹ rhetorical structures and gendered techniques to navigate the disjunctures of patriarchy.² Through these mechanisms, Elizabeth was able to exert tangible influence on the political landscape of Tudor England and ensure favourable outcomes for herself and her family.

As demonstrated in chapter one, Elizabeth of Hardwick engaged directly with the institutional political sphere of Tudor England. Through a close textual analysis of her correspondence, it is evident that Elizabeth employed a variety of tactics to engage legitimately with men and a political environment typically deemed inhospitable to women. Elizabeth's letters adhered to an amalgamation of rhetorical structures influenced by the medieval letter-writing manual, the *ars dictaminis*, and the humanist revival that adopted structural conventions from the Ciceronian oral tradition. The elements of these structures all performed specific functions that set up a relationship between the sender and receiver, and allowed the sender to argue their petition effectively. Elizabeth proved herself adept at this process.

Elizabeth effectively navigated the disjunctures of patriarchy by utilising gendered language and feminine scripts that appealed to her distinctly feminine position as a wife and mother. Elizabeth routinely utilised appeals on behalf of her children or other younger consanguinal kin in the matrilineal line as moral justification for her otherwise bold intrusion into a context of institutional political influence, rather than just domestic political influence. Elizabeth also navigated these disjunctures by appealing to distinctly feminine

¹ James Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice: Women's Epistolary Rhetoric in Sixteenth-Century Letters of Petition," *Women's Writing* 13 (2008): p. 4.

² Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550: Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (New York : Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 11.

cultural scripts of irrationality, gullibility and hysterical behavior. Through this gendered self-presentation, Elizabeth justifies the bold behavior in her requests.

A literal analysis of the letters of Elizabeth of Hardwick reveals her awareness of parliamentary process in a context in which women have predominately been depicted as having no interaction with the institutional political sphere. Not only does it display an awareness of parliamentary process and procedure, it also speaks newer incarnations of political theory that are sympathetic to subaltern methods of political engagement,³ such as the use of gossip to spread sensitive information. In this case, parliamentary process was technically secret; yet, a noblewoman knew of the nature of this bill and could track accurately its progression from the House of Lords to the House of Commons. This extant letter to Thynne problematises a recurrent perception of politics that depicts it as an insular and exclusive process. By voicing opposition to this legislation, Elizabeth engages in political discourse and manages to elicit tangible political change for her, and her children's, interests.

Elizabeth of Hardwick utilised epistolary conventions and gift-exchange to create and perpetuate client-patron relationships. These relationships were fundamental to the ties between the aristocracy and the monarch in the early modern period. Elizabeth actively cultivated client-patron relationships through the gifting of valuable foodstuffs such as venison to powerful individuals such as Elizabeth I, Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester and Frances Newton, Baroness Cobham. Through doing so, Elizabeth was performing a cultural script that dictated any gift be reciprocated at some point – this was the dynamic in which client-patron relationships were established and perpetuated.⁴ Elizabeth additionally utilised epistolary conventions in her letters to Elizabeth I, for example, and also applied gendered tactics to this correspondence to justify requests for aid from her patron on behalf of her children.

Chapter two, most significantly, covers the intersection between gift-exchange and epistolary conventions in the client-patron relationship, and the tangible political changes that could occur when noblewomen utilised these. The presence of Mary Stuart in England posed a tangible threat to the stability of Elizabeth I's reign. A close textual analysis of letters in the lead up to the decision regarding which noble family would have custody of the former Scottish queen, reveals that in their collective bid win custody, Elizabeth of

³ Diana G. Barnes, *Epistolary Community in Print, 1580-1664*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2013), p. 9.

⁴ Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), p. 4.

Hardwick and her husband, George Talbot, earl of Shrewsbury, utilised gift-exchange and epistolary tactics to further their relationship with Elizabeth I. Through this, they employed cultural scripts of client-patronage that would ultimately endear her to their cause. Indeed, the Shrewsburys were eventually given custody of the Scottish Queen. Gift-giving and the perpetuation of client-patron relationships fell under the broader domestic duties of Tudor noblewomen – yet, as demonstrated, these domestic duties could have a tangible impact upon the political situation of a family and the broader political environment of Tudor England.

Elizabeth of Hardwick was an indomitable marriage broker, and her lineage testifies to this. Elizabeth tapped into the artery of power exchange in the English aristocracy and made advantageous matches for most of her children, and in doing so, facilitated the exchange of forms of political capital such as land, money and vital networks of authority. Chapter three explores the fraught process of marriage brokering through epistolary conventions in Elizabeth's letters of negotiation – primarily through the marriage of her son, Charles Cavendish, to Margaret Kitson. Testament to the complex nature of the expanded political sphere in England, Elizabeth displays a masterful use of epistolary conventions to negotiate the power afforded to her by class, to the disjunctures of patriarchy dictated by her gender, and to the political objectives she must satisfy in the given piece of correspondence.

Perhaps more significantly, Elizabeth's desire to perpetuate ties of affinal kinship on behalf of her son speaks to a significant anxiety surrounding marriage. Marriage was a political act and a political institution, which in the lower levels of the gentry could mean the unification of two estates, but for a monarchy could mean the unification of two countries and a cease in geopolitical tensions. Marriage was how the aristocracy exchanged money, titles, blood, and it was how they created complex networks of affinal kinship.⁵ Marriage was an effective means of creating these networks, however, it was also fraught. Negotiations were fallible, spouses died and as a result, the delicate structures that came from marriage were prone to destruction. Elizabeth of Hardwick utilised epistolary conventions to maintain these delicate ties that could have an impact on the future prospects of her son. Marriage was a powerful political act, and it primarily fell under the portfolio of domestic responsibilities for widowed noblewomen. Noblewomen were an integral part of the perpetuation of the most prolific and volatile of political acts that, undoubtedly, enabled the ruling elite to exist. Finally, although the domain of noblewomen has been dubbed 'the

⁵ Carolyn James, "Marriage by Correspondence: Politics and Domesticity in the Letters of Isabella d'Este and Francesco Gozaga, 1490-1519," *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012): p. 347.

domestic sphere', it is in actuality more aptly described as an informal political sphere – chapters two and three have demonstrated that the operation of this informal political sphere through client-patronage and marriage,⁶ and reveal a political environment far more expansive than just the institutional sphere of politics.

This thesis demonstrates the problematic nature of arbitrary distinctions between political and gender history, and in doing so, demonstrates that in the case of Elizabethan noblewomen, gender and political history are one in the same. The close analysis of Elizabeth of Hardwick's correspondence through the methodological framework of epistolary studies provides an insight into the gendered and masterful ways in which Tudor noblewomen, in general, navigated a tumultuous and often contradictory political environment. This thesis dispels the notion that powerful women are a novelty of the last few decades of institutional politics – rather, that their contribution to the political sphere is continual and adaptable aspect of political history.

⁶ Barbara J. Harris, "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England," *The Historical Journal* 33 (1990): p. 260.

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