

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: "IN WRITING IT MAY BE SPOKE":  
THE POLITICS OF WOMEN'S LETTER-  
WRITING, 1377-1603

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Examining significant moments of women's letter-writing from throughout the late medieval and early modern periods, I argue that the epistolary genre enabled fifteenth- and sixteenth-century women to craft representations of themselves on paper that preserved their modesty yet allowed them to intervene in the public sphere. I also contend that women's letters drew legitimacy from the literary traditions that first established the epistolary genre as appropriate for women's use. My dissertation is one of the few works of medieval and early modern literary scholarship to examine the developing intertextual dialogue between fictive and historical letters.

The introduction provides a brief survey of literary depictions of letters, noting that works by Ovid, Chaucer, and Gower suggest that letters are often the best means for women to communicate. In the first chapter I assert that Christine de Pizan specifically chose the epistolary genre for her political and social commentary because of the authority of its classical, literary, and humanist traditions and because of the flexibility of its conventions. Christine is unique among medieval female letter writers in that she not only writes letters, but also writes about them, signaling her command over

the epistolary genre itself. The second chapter studies Mary Tudor Brandon's letters to her brother Henry VIII; they reveal affinities with literary letters from works by Chaucer, Ovid, and Malory. Given her careful attention to audience and the extent to which her letters reflect fictional concerns, Mary's letters are an excellent case study of women's political and literary activity during the period. In chapter three, I study the rhetorical strategies of women's petitionary letters to Elizabeth I and her Privy Council, in which they ask for monetary relief, patronage, or legal assistance, and I contend that the letter was the foundation of one of women's earliest political rights, the right of petition.

Ultimately, I argue that women used letters to establish a connection with men and women in power, and thus, to let their voices travel to places they could not, to garner influence on political, social, and economic affairs.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **“In writinge it mai be spoke.”**

In John Gower’s story of “Apollonius of Tyre,” King Artestrathes asks his daughter Thaise which of three noble suitors she wants to marry.<sup>i</sup> Instead of answering her father directly, Thaise writes a letter explaining that she is ashamed to speak aloud her preference for a different man: Apollonius. Professing that “the schame which is in a Maide / With speche dar nocht ben unloke,” Thaise insists that she may only communicate her desire in a letter: for only “in writinge it mai be spoke.”<sup>ii</sup> In Gower’s tale, letter-writing thus becomes a substitute for direct speech and satisfies the demands of feminine modesty. This dissertation argues that literary traditions of female epistolary activity enable women writers to circumvent restrictions on their ability to speak with authority and to influence political situations from which they might otherwise have been barred.

Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century women’s extant letters testify to their authors’ extensive involvement in political affairs even as their content speaks to the care with which their writers crafted their letters to represent themselves. The letter is a versatile genre, one that allows its writers opportunity for verbal play with its physical nature, its form, and the principles of its art. Through the letter, women can make connections with their readers and script versions of events to influence their readers’ perceptions.

The liminal public and private nature of the epistolary genre allows women writers to have a voice yet still remain screened, forestalling accusations of immorality. Jennifer Summit notes that “[u]nlike oratory, writing could take shapes that actually upheld the demands of female modesty, privacy, and chastity.”<sup>iii</sup> Though here Summit



refers to Elizabeth I's careful crafting of her image as a poet, her words are even more aptly applied to the letter. The letter acts as the sender's voice, giving the sender a degree of influence; but because the sender is not immediately present and speaking, *per se*, she is protected from any negative association of speech with sexuality.

Since the classical era, epistolary theorists have considered absence and presence as fundamental elements of the letter's *raison d'être*. In *Ad Familiares*, Cicero claims that "the purpose in fact for which letter-writing was invented, is to inform the absent of what it is desirable for them to know, whether in our interest or their own."<sup>iv</sup> For Cicero, a letter requires the separation of its sender and recipient. Other theorists push this definition further. Erasmus's famous description of the letter as "a mutual exchange of speech between absent friends" follows Jerome, who wrote that "Turpilius the comedian said, 'It [letter-writing] is the unique way of making absent persons present.'"<sup>v</sup> The letter eliminates the distance between sender and recipient as each participant in the epistolary exchange imagines the presence of his counterpart. At the same time, the letter exists because of absence; the separation of a letter's author and addressee necessitates their written communication.

Ambiguously straddling the public/private divide, the letter creates an "absent presence" that effects an opportunity for late medieval and early modern women writers to speak modestly in public.<sup>vi</sup> Although the reader knows that a woman has sent the letter, a piece of paper stands in her place, screening her from view. But the letter is not merely a screen; rather, it inherently attracts attention because when a person reads a letter, she holds a private conversation with its author; unless someone else reads the letter, its sender's identity and words remain hidden. In *De conscribendis epistolis*,

Erasmus imagines the exchange of letters as “whispering in a corner with a dear friend, not shouting in the theatre, or otherwise somewhat unrestrainedly. For we commit many things to letters, which it would be shameful to express openly in public.”<sup>vii</sup> Seth Lerer and Lisa Jardine both argue that the letter’s very intimacy cries out for attention and that Erasmus’s characterization of the letter only highlights its theatrical nature.<sup>viii</sup> The spectacle of watching someone read a letter initiates a voyeuristic desire to know the contents. Such drama makes the letter a particularly effective vehicle for women’s communication. The elements of epistolary theatricality and the elusiveness of the letter’s “absent presence” combine to fashion a genre that is receptive to the demands of female modesty yet possesses a potent ability to attract an audience. Letters thus reject a dichotomous gendering of public (masculine) and private (feminine) spheres. Given that scholars have long sought to complicate this binary relationship, the epistolary genre holds particular import for early modern studies because extant letters demonstrate that women could exert political influence without physically venturing outside the domestic sphere.<sup>ix</sup>

Letters are also important because they are easily accessible. Evidence of women’s letter-writing extends at least as far back as the Roman empire, when Cicero exchanged correspondence with women.<sup>x</sup> The Catholic church hierarchy long encouraged women to participate in public affairs via letters; Joan Ferrante notes that as early as the fifth century, popes were calling on queens and noblewomen to fight against heresy, mediate disputes, and influence their husbands through letters.<sup>xi</sup> Within the church, examples of women letter writers abound; the extensive letter-collections of Hildegard von Bingen and St. Catherine of Siena testify to the influence a woman could

garner through her epistolary connections. Héloïse's letters to Abelard helped to establish her international reputation for learning; after his death, she maintained a correspondence with Peter the Venerable and other ranking members of the church as she managed the affairs of her convent, the Paraclete, so well that it became one of the most eminent and prosperous religious houses in France.

Although historical precedents play a vital role in establishing the letter as a suitable genre for women writers, literary traditions of fictional women's letters play an equally important part. As ancient as Cicero's correspondence is Ovid's *Heroides*, a collection of fictional epistles in which Ovid assumes the voices of classical heroines who send letters to their absent lovers.<sup>xii</sup> Following Ovid's example, many canonical writers, including Chaucer, Gower, and Shakespeare, employ letters as devices to foster the illusion of a woman's authentic voice. These literary letters foreground the relationship between the writer and her creation, especially the letter's ability virtually to embody the sender and carry her voice where she is physically unable to go. Fictional depictions also portray the letter's ability to forge connections between sender and recipient; particularly if the recipient reads the letter aloud, the sender's words would become the reader's own. Even as the letter protects the woman writer's modesty, literary representations establish the letter as a physical manifestation of the woman's voice that simultaneously creates a link between itself, its writer, and its reader.

Because epistolary tropes figure prominently in literary texts, in this introduction I briefly review three classical and medieval literary case studies as part of a survey of theory and scholarship surrounding the genre of the letter. Ovid's *Heroides*, Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* all illustrate precepts that

shape women's epistolary traditions. After reviewing the conventions they establish, I survey the scholarship on women's letters to demonstrate how women became familiar with epistolary practices and manipulated the letter to influence public matters. Finally, I demonstrate how my dissertation contributes to an understanding of the scope of women's literary activity by considering historical women's letter-writing in conjunction with fictional letters.

If we divorce the letter from the literary traditions that have established the epistolary form as an appropriate vehicle for women's writing, we cannot gain an accurate sense of women's ability to speak through the epistolary medium. Arguably the oldest literary depiction of women's letter-writing, Ovid's *Heroides* possesses important implications for women's use of the epistolary genre. Ovid's epistles intimate that the epistolary genre is well suited to women; nearly all of his heroines successfully employ letters to achieve their desires, whether that be to persuade a straying husband to return home or punish a betraying lover by publishing his infamy to the world. For example, Penelope utilizes the letter to find Ulysses and order him to come home. An audience familiar with Homer's story would know that eventually the Greek hero would return on his own, but in the world that Ovid imagines, Penelope's letter is what lures Odysseus back. Other Ovidian letters are similarly effective; Dido's epistle recording Aeneas's treachery becomes the instrument of her revenge, permanently tarnishing his reputation. In this fashion, the *Heroides* establish that the letter effectively conveys the immediacy of a woman's voice without regard for considerations of time or space, thus allowing her to persuade her audience despite her physical absence.

Through the *Heroides*, Ovid also implies that the letter can convey the virtual

presence of the sender. His Phaedra tells Hippolytus that “Unto these mylde requests of mine / I added teares withall: / When so thou reade the lynes, surmise / thou sawiste the drops to fall.”<sup>xiii</sup> Hippolytus’s act of reading will invoke her weeping image before him, and Phaedra expects the poignancy of this picture to move him to return to her. In a similar vein, Leander erotically imagines Hero’s receiving his letter as she would his person:

Go blissefull scroll to Heros handes,  
than snowe (quoth I) more white,  
First will she thee receiue,  
and after touch with lip  
When she with tooth shall go about  
the signed seale to rip.  
These whispring wordes I spake  
in soft and silent sort:  
The reast my writing hande did will  
my Paper to report.<sup>xiv</sup>

For her part, Hero hopes that her letter will assuage the pain of their separation and forestall Leander’s departure until the waters are calm: “Let louing lynes ysent, abridge / some part of lingringe paine.”<sup>xv</sup> Both of these lovers expect their letters to substitute for their persons. Such an idea eventually becomes a commonplace not only in literary depictions of letter-writing, but also in historical letters. The letter’s ability to convey presence offers certain rhetorical possibilities, especially if a woman writer is unable to state her ideas in person.

Phaedra's weeping emphasizes the letter's materiality and illustrates how a writer could create a closer relationship with the letter and thence its recipient through the residue of her tears. Medieval writers use this concept frequently. For example, Chaucer's Pandarus advises Troilus to "biblotte" his letter to Criseyde "with thi teris ek a lite," thus making his writing representative of his pain and desire.<sup>xvi</sup> Gower's tale of an incestuous brother and sister takes the idea even further. When Canace's pregnancy becomes apparent, Machaire flees and their father orders Canace to commit suicide. Her letter to her brother details their father's relentlessness, reiterates her continued love for Machaire, and confirms her intent to die for him. She asks Machaire to bury their son with her if he dies and to remember them both:

Now at this time, as thou schalt wite,  
with teres and with enke write  
This lettre I have in cares colde:  
In my riht hond my Penne I holde,  
And in my left the swerd I kepe  
And in my barm ther lith to wepe  
Thi child and myn, which sobbeth faste.  
Now am I come unto my laste:  
Fare wel, for I schal sone deie,  
And thenk how I thi love abeie.<sup>xvii</sup>

This haunting image of Canace, sword and pen in her hand, baby in her lap, signals her enshrining within the letter. Gower's narrator Nature focuses intensely on the act of writing, indicating the depth of the connection between Canace and her missive. Her

tears have mixed with the very ink, and her blood will stain the page; this letter represents her final utterance, her last chance to influence future events. Through it her request for remembrance is fulfilled. Gower uses the ill-fated lovers' story not to condemn the sin of incest, but to denounce the sin of the father's wrath. Thus, not only do Canace's words result in the depiction of her father as a merciless tyrant, but her letter also shapes the manner in which her memory will be preserved. Gower thus portrays the letter as an extension of its writer, performing her will even after her death.

In the *Confessio Amantis*, the narrator and the letter act in collusion, but in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, women's letters resist the narrator's stated intentions. Chaucer's narrator must do penance by recounting stories of good women in order to appease the God of Love for having slandered women in other works. Despite this charge, the narrator appears to hurry through each legend, frequently omitting major details of its subject's life in favor of describing the men she knew. In "The Legend of Cleopatra," for example, the narrator needs only eight lines to jump from Cleopatra's wedding to the battle of Actium; only forty-nine of the legend's 125 lines describe the actions of the Egyptian queen.<sup>xviii</sup> But even while thus abridging tales, the narrator nevertheless includes the text of some of the women's letters. Given that most of the legends are told in third person, when the narrator "quotes" the text of letters by Dido and Phyllis, for instance, he provides a place where the women speak directly, their words unmediated by paraphrase or narration. In Phyllis's case, the narrator interrupts his transcription after seventeen lines to comment: "al hire letter wryten I ne may / ...Hire letter was ryght long and therto large."<sup>xix</sup> Despite his stated intention to abbreviate, he is pulled along by the power of her voice: "here and ther in rym I have it layd, / There as

me thoughte that she wel hath sayd.”<sup>xx</sup> Phyllis’s words captivate the narrator so completely that he continues to quote her for another thirty-seven lines, almost to the end of the tale. Although the narrator claims that he initially intended to include only “a word or two,” Phyllis’s own words occupy fully one-third of her tale.<sup>xxi</sup> By flouting the narrator’s intent in this fashion, Phyllis’s letter underscores the power of the female epistolary voice, illustrating that her words can be so compelling that she can wrest control of the story away from her biographer.

Such literary depictions suggest cultural awareness of the existence and influence of women’s letters in the late Middle Ages, demonstrating that letter-writing was recognized as a genre appropriate for women’s use. Yet only in the last twenty-five years have scholars turned their attention to women’s letters as a specific medieval and early modern phenomenon worthy of study. Albrecht Classen and Joan Ferrante have surveyed extensive historical evidence of women letter-writers, showing that women participated in correspondence on political, religious, literary, and social matters.<sup>xxii</sup> Essay collections such as *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre* and a special issue of *Disputatio* on the late medieval epistle have analyzed the different rhetorical strategies of medieval women letter-writers such as Christine de Pizan, Margaret Paston, and Hildegard von Bingen.<sup>xxiii</sup> Early modern letters have similarly received much attention.<sup>xxiv</sup> James Daybell has investigated issues of authorship, collaboration, and influence, while Sara Jayne Steen and Susan Fitzmaurice have employed rhetorical and linguistic approaches to argue that women letter-writers display a complex self-representation tailored to their specific audiences.<sup>xxv</sup> Scholarship on late medieval and early modern women’s letter writing has addressed a range of issues:



women's literacy and access to formal rhetorical principles; the recovery of texts; the material letter; questions of collaboration and authorship; the development of women's subjectivity; the craft of self-representation; and the letter's ability to influence politics and its literary connections.

Study of women's letters benefits from the strong foundations of scholarship on epistolary rhetoric and writing. Surveys of the letter's history and form have outlined the rhetorical and religious traditions informing the development of letter-writing as a genre.<sup>xxvi</sup> The formal medieval *ars dictaminis*, ruling that letters should imitate the classical oration, had established a five-part structure: the salutation, exordium, narration, petition, and conclusion.<sup>xxvii</sup> Yet Giles Constable notes that the forms were widely disregarded and that the only consistent elements of medieval letters are the salutation and subscription.<sup>xxviii</sup> Constable also observes the extensive use of letters to disseminate news and ideas and argues that it is almost impossible to make a distinction between public and private letters during the medieval period since medieval authors were always aware that they addressed multiple audiences.<sup>xxix</sup> Such characteristics of the letter help to explain the significance of the epistolary genre for women writers and the extent of the influence its use could give them.

Scholars have taken pains to determine the ways that women might have learned the principles and forms of letter-writing, since most women, it is assumed, would have lacked sufficient education in a rhetorical form initially developed for papal scribes and secretaries and later practiced extensively by humanists. Studies of women's education showing that many women were highly educated have revised these assumptions, as have reconsiderations of categories of literacy. David Cressy and Keith Thomas have

demonstrated that both men and women took part in literary activities through a variety of means, including reading aloud and employing scribes.<sup>xxx</sup> Furthermore, as Alison Truelove contends, although most women might not be formally educated in letter-writing principles, the evidence of surviving letters by women demonstrates their awareness of the precepts of letter-writing and the structure of a letter, an awareness presumably derived from a culture of epistolarity, including contact with other letters or with scribes.<sup>xxxii</sup>

Historians have also pursued the implications of cultural writing practices for women letter-writers. For instance, collaborative writing was common; in addition to the amanuenses frequently employed by both men and women, letter-writers also sought advice on the best way to write a particular letter. James Daybell advocates considering the influence of third parties when evaluating a letter's rhetorical strategies, but he also argues that the final version of a letter represents the way "a woman wished to project herself," no matter what changes might have been suggested by a secretary.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Writing is also shaped by cultural linguistic practices; Susan Fitzmaurice pursues the ways that letter-writers draw on formulaic language to convey specific meaning to their readers.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Analyzing a postscript that Dorothy Osbourne writes to William Temple ("You will never read half this letter, tis soe scribled, but noe matter, tis much worth it"), Fitzmaurice observes: "[the postscript] appears to predict that William will be unable to get through the letter, and in order for the expression to have any effect as a prediction, he must not be in a position to read the postscript. Of course it is not a prediction but a form of apology for the work that her reader must perform in order to reach the postscript."<sup>xxxv</sup> Apologies for poor handwriting frequently convey the early modern

letter-writer's humility; such phrases rely on shared cultural knowledge of the modesty topos to interpret the apology correctly.

Epistolary conventions also involve the form, layout, and physical properties of a letter, each of which communicates meaning to the letter's recipient. Jonathan Gibson notes that even the blank space on letters, such as a gap between the letter's salutation and the rest of the text, can express civility.<sup>xxxv</sup> A letter-writing manual by Antoine de Courtin insists that writers use an entire sheet of paper, regardless of the letter's length, to indicate the sender's esteem for the recipient.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Alan Stewart and Heather Wolfe address the issue of seals, noting that "[a] personal seal with embroidery floss underneath it was suggestive of a personal or intimate letter. A black seal represented mourning."<sup>xxxvii</sup> Such material elements of the letter convey messages that are also intended as part of the epistolary communication.

Handwriting, too, expresses meaning. Formal presentation letters by Arbella Stuart and Queen Elizabeth are beautifully written, while their less formal letters often employ a virtually illegible scrawl. Letter-writers often apologize for poor handwriting, and letter-writing manuals emphasize the importance of developing a legible hand. In *De recta Graeci et Latini sermonis pronuntiatione*, Erasmus, for example, writes that even a speech by Cicero written in a difficult hand will displease the reader: "It either loses its elegance when so written, or the reader completely rejects it or is utterly worn out. The consequence is that you neither instruct your reader because he cannot understand you, nor please him because he finds it hard to read, nor convince him because he is exhausted with fatigue."<sup>xxxviii</sup> Scholars have also debated women writers' tendency to employ a specific hand. Whereas Giles Dawson and Laetitia Kennedy-Skipton contend that

sixteenth-century women were far more likely to write in the italic hand, James Daybell and Jonathan Goldberg argue that the hand's growing popularity amongst late sixteenth-century noblemen suggests that italic is a more likely indicator of class than a signal of gender.<sup>xxxix</sup> More important than script was knowing who actually wrote the letter. As Arthur Marotti notes, texts handwritten by the author tended to have stronger personal associations and therefore greater worth.<sup>xi</sup> Literary references to the significance of the sender's hand witness to the truth of his assertion: Shakespeare's much-abused Malvolio might never have obeyed the contents of "Olivia's" letter had he not believed it was written in her hand.<sup>xli</sup>

Letter-writing manuals not only advise their readers on such matters of layout, mechanics, and tone, but also insist that the letter primarily functions to convey the sender's thoughts. Angel Day's *The English Secretorie* defines an epistle as that which we "doe tearme a Letter, and for the respectes thereof is called the messenger, or familiar speach of the absent, for that therein is discovered whatsoever the minde wisheth in such cases to have delivered."<sup>xlii</sup> "Whatsoever the mind wishes to have delivered" —these words aptly describe sixteenth-century women's careful fashioning of letters as representations of themselves. According to Sara Jayne Steen, multiple drafts of Arbella Stuart's letters indicate the precision of the lady's words, each choice calculated to have the maximum impact on her audience.<sup>xliii</sup> Steen contends that "Letter-writing under any circumstances involves modeling a self in prose."<sup>xliv</sup>

This idea of the letter as a kind of fiction represent an important development in the history of women's letter-writing; scholars recognize that the letter denotes a woman's mediated self, not a mythical authentic voice speaking literal truth about

historical events. Whereas Rebecca Earle asserts that “the idea of the sensible self developed most strikingly” in the eighteenth-century, Steen and Natalie Zemon Davis have demonstrated that such self-awareness develops much earlier.<sup>xlv</sup> In *Fiction in the Archives*, Davis focuses on the creative self-fashioning and narrative-shaping that lie at the heart of sixteenth-century pardon letters. My own work on Christine de Pizan in the first chapter of this dissertation demonstrates that women letter-writers have long been highly conscious of the ways they can represent themselves differently to different audiences.

In shaping their letters, women develop personal subjectivity and seize political agency. Joan Ferrante argues that letters reveal medieval women’s roles at the heart of public affairs.<sup>xlvi</sup> Letters from women compiled in nineteenth-century editions, such as Mary Ann Everett Green’s *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain*, testify to the extensive corpus of women’s political letters. Women also use the letter to participate in the power networks of gift exchange. Fifteenth-century English noblewomen write letters to request favors, act as intermediaries for patronage or petitions, and intervene in disputes; Jennifer Ward observes that “what the letters show as a whole is that women were ready to exercise power.”<sup>xlvii</sup> Networks of correspondence provide letter-writers an avenue for political influence and facilitate women’s exchange of ideas.<sup>xlviii</sup>

Although scholars working on literature from the eighteenth-century and beyond have placed historical and literary letters, within the medieval and early modern periods, such comparative study is both less common and more recent.<sup>xlix</sup> Seth Lerer’s *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII* reads Tudor letters through the lens of fictional letters

such as those of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*. Lynne Magnusson's *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue* similarly places literary works and historical letters in conversation with one another.<sup>1</sup> Such studies have enhanced not only our understanding of the historical letter but also the role of letters within canonical literature.

Building on the work of these scholars, my dissertation bridges the disciplinary divide that once almost wholly abandoned the letter to the purview of historians. The letters analyzed in the following chapters, which address a myriad of subjects from women's advice on political matters to marital affairs to requests for financial assistance, have literary and rhetorical merit. I argue that we need to understand these letters as rhetorically crafted documents that form an important part of women's literary history. By placing archival letters within their contemporary literary contexts, I demonstrate a developing dialogue between fictive and historical letters in which each influences the creation and growth of the other.

In the following chapters, I deliberately avoid trying to produce any kind of chronological narrative; rather I examine significant moments of women's letter-writing from throughout the late medieval and early modern periods. I examine these texts within their cultural context to get a better understanding of women's literary practices. Although it may sound simplistic to argue that women are influenced by what they read, the repeated failure to consider women's letter-writing as a literary art stems in part from neglecting to analyze the ways that women use intertextual references to convey multiple layers of meaning. By considering canonical literature in conjunction with historical women's letters, I demonstrate that an interdisciplinary and intertextual approach to women's letters, blending historiographical, literary, and rhetorical methodologies,

produces a more accurate representation of women's literary and political activity in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-centuries. Women's letters are the product of their lived experience and their culture, their education and their reading, their intellect and their persuasive abilities. Only by studying these works within their full historical and literary context can we fully appreciate the accomplishments these letters represent.

Chapter one asserts that Christine de Pizan used the epistolary genre for her political and social commentary because the letter has flexible conventions and possesses the authority of its classical, literary, and humanist traditions. Her extensive corpus of letters, including her *Epistre au dieu d'amours*, the *Epistre d'Othea*, her contributions to the debate about Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, and her advisory political letters to the nobility of France, reveal how a woman could successfully participate in humanistic correspondence. Christine is unique among late medieval female letter-writers in that she not only writes letters, but also writes about them, creating her own fictional representations of women's letter-writing. In descriptions of letters in her poetry and in fictional letters embedded in non-epistolary works, such as *Le livre du duc des vrais amans*, Christine depicts the letter as a lasting record of the sender's argument and emphasizes the flexibility of epistolary conventions that enable the writer to persuade her audience more effectively. Thus enhancing the letter's authority, Christine signals her command over the epistolary genre itself, claiming women's right to participate in epistolary exchanges.

That Christine's letters were widely known in France and England is of particular interest because Mary Tudor Brandon, the subject of chapter two, had access to Christine's works, notably the *Epistre d'Othea*. Mary, who did not hesitate to blackmail

her brother Henry VIII into approving the marriage she wished to contract, wrote over thirty letters to Henry and then-Archbishop Thomas Wolsey that reveal affinities with literary letters from works by Chaucer, Ovid, Malory, and Froissart. These letters influenced Mary's awareness of the letter as a fiction she could use to establish a voice. In light of her careful attention to audience and the extent to which her letters reflect fictional concerns, Mary's letters provide insight into women's political and literary activity during the period.

Frequent depictions of women's letters in Elizabethan drama demonstrate that women's participation in epistolary correspondence had become commonplace in sixteenth-century England. Chapter three argues that women letter-writers, drawing on the authority established by literary traditions, used letters to participate in political affairs on a widespread basis. Scholars have long recognized the significance of women petitioners to Parliament in the seventeenth-century, but hundreds of letters preserved in the National Archives in London reveal sixteenth-century women asking Elizabeth and the leading nobles of her court for monetary relief, patronage, exemption from recusant fines, or legal assistance.<sup>li</sup> Records of the Privy Council confirm that these women, even those belonging to lower classes, were granted audience, provided that they could find a scribe to take their dictation. Based on this evidence, I contend that the letter was the foundation of one of women's earliest political rights, the right of petition.

A character in Madeleine de Scudéry's 1684 dialogue, "Conversation on the Manner of Writing Letters," argues that "letters are the only consolation for absence."<sup>liii</sup> De Scudéry acknowledges how letter-writing enables women to exchange news and maintain friendship networks. Her work signals the widespread acceptance of women's



letter-writing; as her characters contend, “there have always been ladies who wrote admirably well.”<sup>liii</sup> Yet de Scudéry’s felicitous definition of the letter is even more applicable to women’s letter-writing in the fifteenth- and sixteenth-centuries. For those women, letters were the best consolation for an absence dictated by the demands of modesty. The epistolary “moments” I discuss in this dissertation reveal that women were able to employ letters strategically to undermine such strictures and garner influence on political affairs. Their efforts illustrate the truth of Gower’s suggestion###in writing a letter, a woman might speak.

**CHAPTER ONE:**  
**Reading and Writing the Epistolary Genre: The Letters of Christine de Pizan**

Christine de Pizan's 1405 poem *Livre de la cité des dames*, her celebration of female achievement, includes the story of Novella Andrea, a woman so well educated that she could lecture in place of her father, a Bolognese law professor, whenever he was otherwise occupied. Sitting in his chair, Novella is depicted as concealing herself behind a curtain to avoid distracting the students with her beauty.<sup>liv</sup> With that veil shielding her presence, but vested with the patriarch's authority, Novella is presented as infiltrating a world of masculine authority. Yet her listeners must have known that there was a woman behind the curtain; the presence of the curtain, the absence of a visible speaker, would guarantee their knowledge even as the mystery of the screen must have titillated the students listening to her.

Novella has entered her father's world of scholarship, but with no written record of her words or ideas, she survives only as a signifier that women can be well educated in traditionally masculine areas of learning. Christine, too, sought to enter her father's world of study; she explains that her father, Tommaso da Pizzano, court physician and astrologer at the French court of Charles V, initiated her education. When her father and husband died within a few months of one another, Christine turned to her father's teachings in order to support herself and her family; she began to write.<sup>lv</sup> Her literary output spanned genres from courtly verse and romance to biography; over time she composed letters, poems, and tracts on subjects ranging from women's education to arms, chivalry, and political advice. Like Novella, Christine participated in almost exclusively masculine fields of study, but the astrologer's daughter, unlike the law professor's, would

leave a legacy of ideas and claim a space for women in the realm of scholarship. Infiltrating her father's world required that Christine carefully select specific genres to master; of her many undertakings, the epistolary genre proved one of her most successful choices. Over the course of her career, not including dedicatory epistles, Christine would write three verse epistles, three prose letters, and over eleven epistles embedded in fictional works; she would also participate in an epistolary literary debate: the *querelle de la Rose*. In this chapter, I argue that Christine chose the letter as a vehicle for both political and social critique precisely because traditions surrounding the epistolary genre had established it as appropriate for women's use. Moreover, the unique flexibility of the letter's conventions enabled Christine to make sophisticated rhetorical arguments targeting multiple audiences. To demonstrate why Christine so frequently employs the epistolary genre, I first examine the properties of the letter that make the epistolary genre so receptive to Christine and place her work within the literary and humanistic epistolary traditions of her period. As her literary fame grew, Christine positioned herself as an advisor to princes; following the trajectory of her epistolary career, I analyze the ways that Christine manipulates the letter's capacity to address multiple audiences and the methods by which she employs personal experience as a source of authority. I argue that Christine ultimately signals her mastery of the epistolary genre by writing epistolary rhetorical theory through the letters embedded in her works of fiction.

### **Why the Letter?**

Christine's relationship with the letter is complicated. Scholars have often

wondered why she chose the epistolary genre to communicate her ideas, since frequently texts that Christine calls “epistres” or “lettres” seem to be of altogether different genres. For example, Nadia Margolis points out that *L’epistre de la prison de vie humaine* more resembles “a consolatory treatise than properly dictaminal letter.”<sup>lvi</sup> Christine’s *Epistre Othea*, her “experiment in literary form” as Mary Ann Ignatius calls it, is the extreme example; supposedly an historical letter from the goddess Othea to Hector, with Christine’s gloss and allegory on that letter, this text defies generic conventions. Christine’s willingness to play with the epistolary form has even led to some confusion over which of her texts can be called letters. For example, Earl Jeffrey Richards identifies *Le livre du dit de Poissy* as a letter, while Nadia Margolis and Barbara Altmann consider *Poissy* a debate poem.<sup>lvii</sup> Yet the question remains: why did Christine choose the letter at all?

The answer lies in the rhetorical and material complexity of the letter as a form of writing. A barrier in that it prevents the recipient from seeing the sender personally, the letter connects the sender and recipient, as literary depictions of letters such as those in Ovid’s *Heroides* had long established. The generic conventions of formal letters and the epistolary topoi used in fictional letters provided any late medieval letter writer with a wide array of tools through which to make her argument. The letter also carries the relative permanence of writing; unlike the spoken word, it allows the writer to influence a reader across the literal distances of time and space and often the metaphorical distances of class, nationality, or, in Christine’s case, gender. Ultimately such elements made the letter a formidable means of persuasion, should Christine be able to claim it for women’s use.

Like Novella's curtain, letters provide a veil for Christine. Behind the letter, she could be shielded from accusations of immodesty, accusations she faced after her repeated court appearances in the property disputes after her husband's death.<sup>lviii</sup> But also like Novella's curtain, the screen of the letter is a permeable barrier, one that reveals Christine as much as it shields her. For Christine shreds the veil even as she uses it, standing as an example of a virtuous, intelligent, speaking woman and therefore re-writing the rhetorical tradition to allow other women to follow her. Paradoxically, as Christine's authority to write increases with her growing reputation and skills, she emphasizes her femininity more and more in her letters, underscoring that hers are woman's words.

In her early epistles, Christine is clearly wary of accusations of impropriety; consequently, she constructs screens behind which she can shield her femininity. For instance, her 1399 verse epistle, *L'epistre au dieu d'amours*, makes Cupid, the god of love, its speaker. Christine's own narrative voice is absent; she even refrains from using the allegorical dream vision framework she wields to such effect in her later works.<sup>lix</sup> Christine signals her involvement in the text only by including the word "Creintis," an anagram for "Christine" meaning "fearful," at the work's end. The riddle of "Creintis" contributes to the writer's modesty topos; her audience would know who authored the work. Yet such a play on words reinforces Christine's hesitation to reveal herself too directly as the letter's author, perhaps especially because it represents her first foray into the issues surrounding the treatment of women. Approximately one year later, in the *Epistre Othea*, Christine acknowledges more personal involvement in the production of the verse letter, but she claims merely to be its translator and commentator, not its author.

After each four-line verse, she includes a gloss on the verse and then a religious allegory for the reader. Christine thus still refrains from overtly stating her own authorship.

In keeping with her increased involvement with this text, Christine hints more strongly at her presence in *Othea* than in the *Epistre au dieu d'amours*. Instead of a simple anagram, here Christine employs manuscript illustrations to display her femininity. For readers of the Middle Ages, pictures could be as important as text in presenting information. The illuminations, whose creation she had carefully supervised, show Christine presenting her writings to her noble patrons. Furthermore, manuscript representations of Othea giving her letter to Hector strongly resemble depictions of Christine herself.<sup>lx</sup> By emphatically placing herself in the magnificent illuminated scenes of the manuscript, Christine ensures her reader's awareness of her gender.

As Christine's scholarly and literary reputation increases, she continues to shred the thin veil of the epistolary form that had shielded her from criticism. After *Othea*, Christine signs her name emphatically. She closes her *Epistre à Eustache Morel* with this signature: "Christine de Pizan, anelle / De Science, que cest an celle / Occupacion tint vaillant, Ta disciple et ta bienveillant," ("Christine de Pizan, servant of knowledge, who valiantly labors in this occupation, your well-meaning disciple").<sup>lxi</sup> Similarly, her letter to Pierre Col about Jean de Meun's celebrated *Roman de la Rose*, part of an epistolary exchange now commonly known as the *querelle de la Rose*, ends by noting that the missive was "written and completed by me, Christine de Pizan, the second day of October, the year 1402. Your well-wishing friend of learning, Christine de Pizan" ("escript et compleit par moy, Cristine de Pizan, le ii<sup>e</sup> jour d'octobre, l'an mil. III<sup>C</sup>. et deux. Ta bien vueillant amie de science, Cristine de Pizan").<sup>lxii</sup> In both instances,

Christine strongly emphasizes her own authorship, even twice declaring her name to Col, whose letter had insulted her capacity for knowledge and education as a woman.

Christine she flaunts her femininity to her readers, defying cultural expectations of a woman's inferior ability.

Christine publicizes the *querelle* letters herself by collecting and presenting them to Queen Isabel and Guillaume de Tignonville, the Provost of Paris. The diversity of Christine's audience in these letters leads Marilyn Desmond to argue that the *querelle* letters represent certain quandaries inherent in epistolary rhetoric. But where Desmond follows Derrida in asserting an intrinsic instability in the letter, I argue that the very flexibility of epistolary conventions create a rhetorical opportunity for Christine. For instance, Desmond contends that because the letters of the *querelle* would be read by people other than the stated recipient, Christine could not effectively tailor her rhetoric to a specific audience. Because letters in the Middle Ages are always both public and private, Desmond observes that the *querelle* letters often worked at cross purposes:

the social and rhetorical limitations of the epistolary format made it difficult for such antagonistic letters [of the *querelle*] to “truly arrive at their destinations,” in the Derridean sense of the phrase. We should not allow the consequent “internal drift” of these epistles to obscure the critical issues that emerge from this literary debate that proved so formative to Christine's authorial development as well as to the early modern *Querelle des femmes*.<sup>lxiii</sup>

Yet I contend that Christine's awareness of multiple audiences reading her letters is part of her rhetorical strategy. Sometimes she shifts her mode of address to avoid criticizing

noble readers too closely, while at others she deliberately acknowledges different groups of readers to intensify an emotional appeal.

Desmond sees the epistolary genre presenting problems that Christine had to overcome, yet she acknowledges the epistle's rhetorical power: "unlike a sermon or a conduct book--both of which reinforce the status quo-- the persuasive strategies of an epistle offer an opportunity to sustain a critique of cultural practices such as reading and sexuality."<sup>lxiv</sup> I argue instead that Christine recognized that the challenges the letter poses, such as the possibility of multiple audiences and the lack of her physical presence, were a source of its rhetorical strength. The tradition of the letter as a medium for advice, critique, and communication makes it particularly appropriate for Christine as she sought to influence the political and social matters of her day.

Still, the letter's history with regard to women sends contradictory messages. On the one hand, authors like Ovid had established the genre as appropriate for women's use; before Christine, historical women had used the letter for centuries in order to comment on important matters.<sup>lxv</sup> On the other hand, the formal letter stemmed from a learned humanistic tradition not usually receptive to female participation.<sup>lxvi</sup> Christine's effective employment of the letter would not only influence the powerful, but also firmly establish the letter as a rhetorical genre available to both men and women.

Christine's scholarly activity, while not unheard of for a woman in the early fifteenth century, was still something of an anomaly, especially given that Christine was not a member of the nobility. The dual obstacles of gender and class created a gap between Christine and her audience that should have precluded Christine's literary activity; yet instead of barring her from her choice of profession, the gap became an



aspect of Christine's authorial stance. Jennifer Monahan notes that Christine's persona is "one whose femininity is generally emphasized, and one whose authority as speaking subject is at least partially grounded in her status as outsider or marginal figure."<sup>lxvii</sup>

Christine frequently describes herself as apart from others, the "lone voice crying in the wilderness."<sup>lxviii</sup> Such references establish Christine's ethos; she represents no faction and speaks from no motivation but a desire to counsel others to live rightly. Her arguments are drawn from her unique blend of humanist education and life experience as a woman; she takes the very things that set her apart and uses them as a source of strength.

Through her writing, Christine is able to advocate a variety of political and social reforms, but her purposes extend beyond making such commentary. Instead, Christine expands the boundaries of rhetoric, allowing women the opportunity to participate in the epistolary tradition and giving them a platform from which to speak publicly. Throughout her later epistles, she constantly reminds her audience that their writer is a woman capable of subtle thought and argument.

Christine's letters reveal a complicated response to epistolary traditions and conventions, and her rhetorical strategies are based on both literary authority and personal experience. Authority is a matter of paramount concern to Christine; she depended on patronage for her family's survival, and thus needed to be taken seriously by patrons for financial reasons as much as she desired her readers to accept her as a scholar with ideas worth considering. Traditionally, authority in the Middle Ages required evidence of significant study, since authors were expected to cite numerous classical, biblical, and patristic works in their arguments.<sup>lxix</sup> But women's education seldom

included such knowledge. In her letters, therefore, Christine frequently blends traditional masculine sources of authority with references to wisdom obtained from personal experience, thus creating a new kind of rhetoric open to both men and women.

Yet there remains a genuine metaphorical distance between Christine and her readers that she must cross in order to advise her audience. Literary traditions of female epistolary writing provide her with the means to bridge the gap and help to explain why Christine so frequently chose the letter as a vehicle of expression. From Ovid's *Heroides* to Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, writers had depicted the letter as a means for women to express their ideas. Literary letters, whether written by Penelope to Ulysses or by Canace to her brother Machaire, set the pattern that women's letters could travel great distances, that the letter could go where the woman could not. Thus the epistolary genre is a logical choice for Christine to use in order to best express her thoughts, to help her to cross even metaphorical distances. With its flexible conventions, its capacity to shield and yet reveal, and its customary function as a woman's emissary, the letter allows Christine to surmount the very real barriers of class and gender that might otherwise have silenced her. Additionally, the letter's classical origins, the rhetorical *ars dictaminis*, and the tradition of humanist letters all serve to give the epistolary genre strong authority, especially to advise princes###advice which recurs throughout Christine's later writings.

### **Standing at Epistolary Crossroads: The Impact of Letter-Writing Traditions**

Christine's early fifteenth-century letters stand at the intersection of several epistolary traditions, each of which displays a certain ambivalence about the relationship between women and letters. While history includes a long tradition of women writing

letters, female letter writers before the fifteenth century tended to belong to either the aristocracy or the Church. Women could theoretically participate in the scholarly circle of humanist epistolary exchanges, but such correspondence required a high level of education unavailable to most women.<sup>lxx</sup> Plentiful literary depictions of women's letter-writing provide a model for women's writing, yet such examples are complicated by their exclusively male authorship and undermined by the frequent misogynistic representations of the fictional women in question. Before analyzing how Christine uses epistolary conventions, we must consider the reasons why it was so important for her to master and ultimately transform a genre whose literary and historical traditions delivered contradictory messages about its accessibility to women writers.

Christine's education by her father and upbringing at the French court of Charles V, a king noted for his patronage of scholarship, ensured her awareness of the historical uses of letters for political, religious, and personal ends. In 1372, Charles had commissioned a translation of John of Salisbury's twelfth-century treatise on government, *Policraticus*, from which Christine took both the title and theme for her *Le livre du corps de policie* or *Book of the body politic*.<sup>lxxi</sup> In *Policraticus*, John of Salisbury included a letter by Plutarch congratulating Trajan, whom medieval scholars considered to be an ideal monarch, on his virtue and success as a ruler. Citing the examples of Seneca, Quintilian, and Socrates, Plutarch explains that he is all the more grateful for Trajan's moral behavior since people tend to punish the teacher for a student's transgressions. To forestall any such difficulty on his part, he has written a treatise for Trajan; should the emperor ever slide into moral decline, Plutarch will "invoke the present letter as witness that you do not advance the advice of Plutarch in the destruction

of the empire.”<sup>lxxii</sup> Plutarch’s missive thus underlines the letter’s function as a dual witness, both to attest to Plutarch’s skill in teaching should Trajan remain virtuous, and to exempt him from blame, should Trajan ignore his advice. Christine’s contemporaries, including Jean Gerson, her ally in the *querelle de la Rose*, frequently cited Plutarch’s letter when they wrote about good government, and the popularity of the reference led Christine to mention it in her *Corps de policie*.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

Although Christine would thus readily have recognized men’s use of letters for political ends, examples of political letters by women would have been harder to find. This is not to say that she did not know that women wrote letters. Her experience at court would have shown her noblewomen conducting political, economic, and personal business via letters. Christine was equally aware of religious women’s letter-writing. In *Le livre de la cité des dames*, for example, she mentions that the Blessed Anastasia exchanged letters with Saint Chrysogonus through the intermediary of another Christian woman, “A laquelle celluy saint [Chrysogonus] envoya par une bonne dame christienne celement plusieurs epistres la admonnestant de pacience; et pareillement luy en envoya elle par ycelle bonne dame.”<sup>lxxiv</sup> Christine also knew about Héloïse, the learned twelfth-century nun whose famous correspondence with her husband and then spiritual advisor Abelard had been translated by Jean de Meun. Yet, Christine refers to Héloïse only once in all of her writings, and then to criticize Pierre Col in the *querelle de la Rose* by comparing him to Héloïse, who would rather be called Abelard’s whore than a crowned empress: “Tu ressambls Helouye du Paraclit qui dist que mieux amerroit estre meretrix appellee de maistre Pierre Abalart que estre royne couronnee.”<sup>lxxv</sup> Richards argues further that the absence of reference to Héloïse in Christine’s writings indicates that

Christine “constructed a different female voice in her correspondence,” especially since “[a]ccording to Ami, [a character in Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose*] Héloïse was the woman who had through study overcome her female nature, a position inalterably opposed to Christine’s understanding of the affinity of all humanity, including women, for study.”<sup>lxxvi</sup> None of the women letter-writers known to Christine would have provided her the example of a woman, much less a woman without the authority of either class or religious status to protect her, who wrote humanistic advice epistles, the kind of writing that would have the political and social impact Christine eventually achieved.

A fifteenth-century woman attempting to participate in even vernacular humanist activity faced a two-fold problem. First, she required sufficient education; then, she needed a justification for such participation. The core principles of humanism involved the recovery of classical language, texts, ideas, and values in order to teach men virtue and wisdom, that they might better serve the state. The underlying premises of humanism therefore split along the private/public divide; while correspondents might embrace the idea of women gaining in virtue through scholarship, they were much less receptive to women’s participation in public affairs. Therefore scholars are divided on the extent to which women were able to practice humanist attitudes and pursuits. Susan Groag Bell points out that philosophers like Leonardo Bruni, who wrote a treatise on the education of girls in 1405, encouraged women to edify themselves through learning.<sup>lxxvii</sup> Using the example of Isotta Nogarola, an Italian woman born in 1418, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine argue that study “consigned [a fifteenth-century woman] to marginality, relegated her to the cloister,” since she was unable to join the public arena.<sup>lxxviii</sup> They contend that the fundamental values of humanism are tied to the preservation of societal

values that barred a woman's participation in public affairs.

Yet Christine does join in public debate, twenty years before Nogarola was even born, and, as Bell notes, before Bruni wrote his treatise.<sup>lxxix</sup> From the very first, she intervenes in such debate through the letter, a very important genre to humanists. Nicholas Mann observes that “the letter, thanks above all to Petrarch, was to become one of the most favoured and versatile literary genres of the Renaissance, encompassing private and political discourse, scholarly and philosophical enquiry, and all manner of literary enterprises.”<sup>lxxx</sup> By using the letter to communicate political advice and participate in public debate, Christine signals that she is aware of the conventions of humanist discourse.

In her earliest humanist endeavors, Christine writes letters on a topic on which she can speak from experience: the treatment of women. Following the publication of *L'epistre au dieu d'amours, The Letter of the God of Love*, in which Christine purports to write a letter from Cupid condemning the abuse of both fictional and real women, she enters the literary debate on the *Roman de la Rose*. Whereas Christine had once assumed the fictional role of Cupid's amanuensis to defend her sex, in the *querelle de la Rose* she writes letters in her own voice attacking the *Roman* for its negative characterizations of women. In this exchange of letters with fellow scholars, Christine relies on traditional classical and religious authority to support her arguments. Yet she contends that, as a woman, she understands the truth about women better than those who must rely on supposition rather than experience: “de tant comme voirement suis femme, plus puis tesmoingnier en ceste partie que celui qui n'en a l'experience, ains [sic] parle par devinailles et d'aventure.”<sup>lxxxix</sup> Basing her argument on personal experience as well as

study gives Christine a source of authority her opponents cannot share as she joins them in epistolary debate.

Separated by gender from her fellows in the debate, Christine strategically employs her sex to bolster her argument. Her opponents alternately characterize her femininity as a subject of praise, then of scorn. After the first exchange of letters between Christine and Jean de Montreuil, the provost of Lisle, Gontier Col, one of the king's secretaries, sends Christine a letter asking for a copy of her response to Montreuil. In that letter, dated September 13, 1401, Col praises Christine as a woman of high learning, ["femme de hault et eslevé entendement" (9)]. But he implies that she is a mere front for her male confederates who, sharing her dislike of Jean de Meun's work, have encouraged her to criticize it, since a woman's censure might diminish the poet's reputation all the more (10). After Col reads the copy of the letter she sends him, he writes another letter full of furious condescension at her presumption and demands that she correct the manifest error and folly she has committed through her arrogance. He accuses her of acting as a passionate woman, "corrigier et admender de l'erreur manifeste, folie ou demence a toy venue par presompcion ou outrecuidance et comme femme passionnee en ceste matiere."<sup>lxxxii</sup> Christine's learning may justify her presence in the debate, but her sex renders her vulnerable to attack.

Christine's lack of familiarity with some of the conventions of letter-writing becomes apparent in her contributions to the *querelle*. Presumably Christine had learned a notorial style of writing from her husband, Etienne de Castel, who had been a notary, then a royal secretary.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Her own education and her exposure to his work taught her aspects of the *ars dictaminis*, such as the letter's five-part structure. From her first

epistle, *L'epistre au dieu d'amours*, Christine follows the rhetorical art's pattern of *salutatio*, *exordium*, *narratio*, *petitio*, and *conclusio*, altering it only for specific rhetorical purposes. But she had not yet learned all of the stylistic elements practiced by the humanists, such as the use of familiar "tu" instead of formal "vous." Gontier Col calls her attention to this matter, explaining that he does not intend offense by using the familiar form; rather that it was his custom to do so when writing to his friends, especially when they are learned: "c'est et a esté de tousjours ma maniere quant j'ay escript a mes amis, especialment quant sont lectrez."<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Thereafter, Christine almost always uses "tu" in her letters, with the exception of her letters to the queen.<sup>lxxxv</sup> Frequently she explains to noble correspondents, such as the duchess Marie of Berry, that in doing so, she follows the style of poets and orators, ("le stille en ceste partie des poetes et orateurs").<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Thus, as her familiarity with the epistolary genre increases, she self-consciously emulates her fellow scholars, demonstrating that she belongs among their ranks.

Stylistic modes of address were not the only aspects of vernacular humanism to inflect Christine's epistles. Earl Jeffrey Richards examines Christine's great debt to humanism, arguing that most of her subject matter comes from humanist concerns; Christine's epistles, especially those in verse, display a "courtly veneer...to present essentially humanist material, a typical interweaving of courtly conventions (often exploded) and humanist content."<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Richards also credits Petrarch's influence for Christine's shift from light, playful courtly verse to more serious prose.<sup>lxxxviii</sup> He further notes that Christine owes her very system of argumentation, of knitting together biblical and classical history, to the humanist tradition.<sup>lxxxix</sup> Arguing that the strength of



Christine's letters lies in her synthesis of dictaminal, humanist, and courtly traditions, Richards nonetheless insists that "the power behind this synthesis was preeminently humanist, for it was the power of erudition, of learning, of study, and this power was ideally open to all."<sup>xc</sup> Mastering the humanist tradition and gaining acceptance within humanist circles afford Christine tremendous authority on which she capitalizes to gain both patrons and respect for her ideas.

Since humanist techniques are not the sole origin of Christine's authority, I want to situate Christine's work in a broader context of literary letters.<sup>xc<sup>i</sup></sup> Christine's letters demonstrate the influence of both courtly verse epistles and letters embedded in literary works; these sources in turn help to establish her authority as a writer, to inspire new content, and to supply Christine with motifs and literary conceits that she employs throughout her entire epistolary corpus.

Scholars have considered the extent of Christine's borrowing of subject matter from authors such as Boccaccio,<sup>xc<sup>ii</sup></sup> but none has observed the effect of the literary tradition of women's letter-writing on Christine's authority. Poets from Ovid to Chaucer and Gower depict women writing letters, creating a model for female letter-writers.<sup>xc<sup>iii</sup></sup> Yet these fictional women writers are almost universally tragic victims. The classical heroines of the *Heroides*, Ovid's collection of imaginary epistles, almost all commit suicide immediately after penning their reproaches of their lovers. Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* follows Ovid's pattern, telling the stories of women like Dido and Phyllis, while in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, Canace writes her letter to her brother Machaire with sword in her lap and pen in her hand. Despite the tragic endings of their writers, these letters are represented as having the power to travel vast distances, command the

reader's attention, take revenge on the women's betrayers, and preserve the woman's memory and last wishes.

Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* emphasizes women's letters in a different light; throughout her relationship with Troilus, Criseyde writes letters that serve as a measure of her affection for the Trojan prince. It is uncertain whether or not Christine knew of Chaucer's *Troilus*, but she certainly knew Guillaume de Machaut's *Le Livre dou Voir Dit*, or *The Book of the True Poem*, an extended poem detailing a love affair that incorporates the lengthy correspondence of the poet-narrator and his lover.<sup>xciv</sup> Like Ovid, Machaut's creation of letters in a woman's voice suggests the propriety of women letter-writers, but unlike the fictive authors of the *Heroides*, his lady, Toute-Belle, lives happily, spared the disasters that attend the Ovidian heroines. Examining the relationship between Christine and Machaut reveals a case study of the extensive influence of literary works on Christine's letters.

In Machaut's poetic world, the woman writer's subject is limited to the personal realm: her love, her poetry, and her body. Although Christine would certainly have condemned Machaut's lady's decision to have an affair, she could still see the potential of the letters to afford Toute-Belle a means of self-expression and communication. Toute-Belle had a right to speak on matters concerning her person, a lesson Christine took to heart. But instead of limiting the power of letters to illicit love affairs, Christine transforms the genre. The literary tradition gives her the authority to write, and humanism the model of letter she preferred. Yet even though humanism dominates her letters, the literary legacy is still present. In all of her letters, Christine draws on that literary authority, together with the rhetoric of personal experience, to justify her

speaking on subjects ranging from the ethical treatment of women to the need for peace among the French nobility.

The scope of Machaut's influence on Christine can also be seen in the epistolary techniques and conceits that Christine employs in her works, especially her *Livre du duc des vrais amans*, or *Book of the duke of true lovers*, written between 1403 and 1405. Like Machaut's *Voir Dit*, the *Duc des vrais amans* is the story of a love affair; but unlike Machaut's poem, Christine ends her tale with the lovers' unhappiness, damage to their reputations, and uncertainty about the future. Although the outcome of love differs in the two poems, the letters in both works share literary motifs involving epistolary functions and conventions.

Letters are the foundation of Machaut's poem. As William Calin observes, "The letters and poems are central to the plot of *V[oir]D[it]*, the skeleton on which the story itself hangs. In a sense, the story exists to set them off, to explain why they were composed."<sup>xv</sup> The forty-six epistles embedded in the 9090-line *Voir Dit*, approximately half of which were supposedly written by Toute-Belle, would have underlined for Christine not only the extent of readerly interest in women's letters, but also the potential of the epistolary genre to provide a narrative frame. Christine's *Duc des vrais amans* includes the texts of comparatively fewer letters than Machaut—eight letters in 3580 lines—but frequent exchanges of poetry as well as letters between Christine's duke and his lady underscore the ongoing nature of their correspondence.

Calin points out that Machaut's letters add verisimilitude to his narrative, creating a sense of the passing time and actual distance between the lovers (173). For instance, Toute-Belle writes her lover that she "received his letters from the Thursday before

Christmas” (“Jay receu vos lettres des le iuedi devant noel.”<sup>xcvi</sup> Calin contends that “the letters and poems serve to guarantee the narrative’s authenticity. Machaut creates the illusion that they existed first as historical fact and that he wrote the frame-story later to explain how they came into being” (176). Machaut’s letters also follow dictaminal standards, constructing an artificial sense of reality (177).

In the *Duc des vrais amans*, Christine’s letters similarly follow the five-part dictaminal structure; like Machaut, Christine details the circumstances of delivery, giving details about messengers and the distance the letter needed to travel. Midway through the work, when the lady reconsiders her decision to end her affair with the duke, Christine conveys the urgency of the lady’s message through the realistic description of the messenger and his ride:

taking mercy,  
she wrote back to me in great haste.  
She charged the messenger  
to carry her letter quickly,  
and he took it upon himself not to stop  
until he had brought it to me.  
Bearing the urgent letter,  
the messenger did not stop all night long  
until he finished his journey at break of day before  
the castle gate.  
(Et adonc a de sa grace  
Me rescript très bien en haste,

Au message qu'il se haste  
De les porter bien en charge;  
Il de non finer se charge  
Tant qu'il les m'ait apportées.  
Le message o les hastées  
Lettres toute nuit ne fine  
D'aler tant qu'il se termine,  
au point du jour, a la porte  
Du chastel.)<sup>xcvii</sup>

These details lend consequence to both the duke's anguish over losing the lady and her desire to ease his pain, deepening the reader's appreciation of the intensity of their love.

Like Machaut, Christine includes dates in two of her letters: the ones exchanged between the lady and her former governess, Sebille de Monthault. Here Christine's text details Sebille's closings: "Composed in my castle, January 8," ("Escript en mon chastel le viiie jour de janvier") and "written at La Tour, the 18<sup>th</sup> day of January," ("Escript a la Tour le xviii<sup>e</sup> jour de jenvier").<sup>xcviii</sup> Scholars agree that Sebille's letter, in which the governess advises the lady to break off the affair since it will harm both her honor and her reputation, represents Christine's voice of reason in the poem, critiquing a system of courtly love that condoned adultery. Granting the additional touch of reality that the date confers to these specific letters subtly underscores the import of their contents.

In addition to these structural elements, Christine also borrows some of Machaut's epistolary conceits. For example, Machaut follows the courtly love tradition that the lover's health is tied to the beloved, including the idea that a letter itself can heal a

suffering heart. Toute-Belle rejoices that her letter had the power to give her lover both health and pleasure, “Car certainement plus grant ioie ne me porroit avenir / comme de faire chose qui vous donnast sante et leesce).”<sup>xcix</sup> Equally, when the lady in *Duc des vrais amans* learns of the duke’s passion, she responds with a letter to prevent him from dying, as he believes he will, should she not share his love: “j’ay recue voz douces et amoureuses lettres...ou vous dites que, se brief secours n’avez, vostre vie convient finer. Si vous rescrips mes lettres pour respondre ad ces choses.”<sup>c</sup> Christine thus suggests that the letter can substitute for the beloved, a tangible sign of the regard s/he shares with the letter’s recipient.

Christine also employ’s Machaut’s conceit that tears link the letter with the sender. When the lover Amant in *Voir Dit* believes that his lady has been unfaithful, he recovers only when a messenger from Toute Belle explains that he saw Toute Belle weep piteously all over the letter. Her tears prove the truth of her claim that she has been true to Amant: “Les larmes vi piteusement / Descendre de la fontenelle / Dou cuerinet de toute belle / Quant ces lettres furent escriptes / Et en plourant furent maudites / Les langues des faus mesdisans / Si fort que passet a x. ans / Ne vi chose si fort maudire.”<sup>ci</sup> For Christine, too, tears can serve as a measure of the lover’s truth, especially if the page bears the actual marks of weeping. When the duke receives word that the lady wishes to take Sebille’s advice and end the affair, he writes her a pitiful plea to reconsider, begging her to forgive the stains on the letter, “And please pardon me if this letter is stained with my tears for, upon my soul, it was not in my power to restrain them or to make them cease until I had written the letter” (“Et me vueilliez pardonner que ainsi sont ces lettres effacées de mes larmes, car, sur mon ame! il n’estoit en ma poissance de les restraintre

ne faire cesser jusques je les eusse escriptes!)”<sup>cii</sup> Like those of *Toute Belle*, the duke’s tears bear witness to the strength of his emotions and win the lover’s acquiescence to the affair’s continuance.

Machaut’s influence on Christine, so clearly demonstrated in *Le livre du duc des vrais amans*, is not confined to the fictional letters embedded in her romance. Motifs from his courtly verse are apparent in her more political epistolary works, such as *L’epistre à la royne*, which Christine composed in 1405, about the same time that she completed the *Duc des vrais amans*. Even as Christine takes up more serious issues in her writing, she continues to use courtly conventions, signalling that she is still drawing on the authority that courtly texts accord to women’s letters and appropriating that tradition to open a space for herself within the humanist discourse of advice to princes. Christine’s letter asks Queen Isabel to mediate between the warring dukes of France. Addressing a serious political matter worthy of humanist concern, the letter nonetheless begins with references to Christine’s tears: “Most high, powerful and revered Lady, may your excellent dignity not disdain or despise this tearful voice of mine, your humble servant,” (“Trés haulte, puissant et très redoubtee Dame, vostre excellent dignité ne veuille avoir en desdaing ne despris la voix plourable de moy, sa povre serve”).<sup>ciii</sup> At the conclusion, she re-iterates her lamentation, “Thus I will finish my epistle, begging your worthy majesty that she receive it well and that she be favourable to the teary request of mine written on behalf of your poor subjects, the loyal French people” [“Si fineray a tant mon espitre, suppliant votre majesté qu’elle l’ait agreable et soit favourable a la plourable requeste par moy escripte de vos povres sujiez, loyaulx François” (80-1)]. Christine’s tears underscore her sincerity and signal the intensity of her desire for the queen to act.

Although Richards acknowledges that Christine's use of the courtly "vos" instead of "tu" and of phrases like "tres haute dame," "enhance the epistle's courtly veneer, a practice completely consistent with Christine's earlier epistolary habits," the dominant influence he proposes is humanism.<sup>civ</sup> In his view, the letter is a model of the dictaminal art that employs the humanist intermingling of classical and biblical sources. But Christine's formal language and courteous addresses to the queen are not the only indications of courtliness; her tears are also a legacy of that model.

Christine's use of the tear motif indicates that the influence of courtly verse is an important part of her rhetorical argument. Mentioning her tearful voice at the outset is part of her *exordium*, or *benevolentiae captatio*, in which she must seek the goodwill of the letter's recipient, the Queen. Medieval epistolographers viewed the *salutatio* and *exordium* to be of such importance that letter-writing manuals devoted far more space to devising appropriate formulae for these sections than they did to explaining ways to relate the facts of the situation inspiring the letter.<sup>cv</sup> As Christine shifts from the *exordium* to the petition to the Queen, she again emphasizes weeping, this time that of the French people:

For this reason, High Lady, do willingly hear the complaints and pitiful regrets of the suffering and suppliant French people now full of affliction and sadness, and who cry with tearful voices to you, their supreme and revered Lady, praying, by the mercy of God, that a humble pity may show to your tender heart their desolation and misery, so that you can procure and obtain peace between these two princes.

[Pour ce, haulte Dame, ne vous soit grief oïr les ramentevances en piteux



regrais des adouléz supplians Francoys, a present reampliz d'affliccion et  
tretresse, qui a humble voix plaine de plours crient a vous, leur souveraine  
et redoubtee Dame, priant, pour Dieu mercy, que humble pitié vueille  
monstrer a vostre begnin (sic) cuer leur desolacion et misere, pay cy que  
prouchaine paix entre ces II. haulz princes (72-3).]

Christine beseeches Isabel to listen to these tearful voices, including her own, begging her to make peace. Her tears mark Christine as a member of the French people who need the Queen's help so desperately, and so give her standing on the issue. Like the rest of Isabel's subjects, Christine will suffer if the enmity between the noblemen continues; thus, she has the right to plead for the Queen's intervention.

The motif of shared grief also marks Christine's later epistles, the *Lamentacion sur les maux de la guerre civile*, written in 1410, and *L'epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, written 1416-1418. Yet tears are not the only such residue of courtly conceits in these letters. Nadia Margolis notes that the prison theme Christine uses in *L'epistre de la prison* is similarly drawn partly from courtly traditions, appearing in works such as Alain Chartier's *Complainte d'un prisonnier d'amour* and Jean Froissart's *La Prison Amoureuse*, which includes the text of many verse epistles.<sup>cvi</sup> Captive in the titular prison of love, Froissart's narrator exchanges letters with a friend in hopes of finding solace in shared frustration and of discovering the best way to behave in a love affair.<sup>cvii</sup> In *L'epistre de la prison*, Christine and her audience, Marie, the duchess of Berry, mourn the French losses at Agincourt, a matter much more serious than a love affair. Christine's subject demands graver treatment; her use of the prison theme also suggests the influence of theological motif of the body as prison.<sup>cviii</sup> Conflating religious and courtly traditions

in this fashion signals the elevated stakes; Christine and Marie's grief is born out of a momentous tragedy; unlike Froissart's romance, the only way out of their prison is to trust God. But by invoking the courtly elements of the prison motif, Christine recalls the remedy offered by Froissart to suggest that she and Marie may take comfort from one another just as Rose and Flo do in *La Prison Amoureuse*.

The work of Eustache Deschamps, a court poet and contemporary, offered Christine a model for using courtly verse to address serious issues. Margolis notes that Deschamps, in his art of poetry, *L'art de dictier*, "promulgated the same ideals of brevity, substance, wisdom and straightforwardness [as Christine] in at least one ballade, and thus demonstrated by example the extent to which serious material can be conveyed via traditional courtly lyric genres, a talent Christine would perfect in her own poetry."<sup>cix</sup> Deschamps wrote poems on topics ranging from legal corruption to military campaigns to celebrations of royal marriages. His works include sixteen verse epistles, called *lettres*, and over 142 *chançons royal*, political poems with short envois, addressing specific individuals.<sup>cx</sup> Although Christine would eventually critique many of the ideas Deschamps expresses in his poetry, his example testified to the possibility of writing courtly verse on weighty political and social affairs.

The poetry exchanged between Christine and Deschamps indicates their respect for one another.<sup>cx</sup> In 1404, Christine addressed a verse epistle to Deschamps praising him as her "chier maistre et amis," ("dear master and friend"); he responded with a flattering ballade lauding her as the most eloquent of the nine muses, ("Muse eloquent entre les ix, Christine.")<sup>cxii</sup> In his response, Deschamps plays on Christine's use of "seulette," "little woman alone," to describe herself by exclaiming that she is unique in

her acts in France, (“seule en tes faiz au royaume de France”).<sup>cxiii</sup> Lori Walters notes that this is high praise on Deschamps’s part, since he “confirms the image that she projects of herself” and proclaims her as a great poet; in fact, at the end of the poem, he asks to become her disciple.<sup>cxiv</sup>

Christine found a rhetorical model in Deschamps’s advocacy of brevity and clarity.<sup>cxv</sup> Deschamps was a master of indirect political criticism. The *envoi*, or send-off, at the end of each *chançon royal* might address a prince, but never with direct condemnation; instead Deschamps reserves his specific political criticism for works in Latin.<sup>cxvi</sup> Richards argues that while Christine attempted such broad critique in some of her ballades, ultimately, she found the form dissatisfying, leading her to switch to prose (152). Yet Deschamps’s model of addressing courtly politics remained important to Christine’s verse and prose throughout her career. In her last three epistles, *L’epistre à la royne*, *L’epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, and *Lamentacion sur les maux de la guerre civile*, Christine masterfully manipulates direct and indirect address to avoid offending her patrons.

In her 1405 *L’Avision Christine*, Christine claims that she has abandoned pretty things for higher matters, “choses jolies” for “plus haulte matiere.”<sup>cxvii</sup> Despite such claims, her relationship with courtly and literary traditions remains strong throughout her career. As she synthesizes literary and humanist conventions, she creates a form of authority accessible to both men and women and seeks to eliminate the misogyny that runs so frequently through courtly and humanistic literature. The examples provided by fictional letters and verse epistles give Christine the authority she needs to participate in humanist debate and also provide her with various tools of argumentation. Although

literary, humanist, and historical models set up contradictory premises about the relationship of women and letters, Christine stands at the crossroads, drawing strength from each mode of discourse to create the unique blend of authority that allows her to write. Christine's interactions with each discourse enable her to take full advantage of the epistolary genre's unique conventions in order to persuade her readers.

### **Epistolary Audiences and Advice**

In her conduct book for women, *Le livre des trois vertus*, Christine reproduces one of the letters from *Le Livre du duc des vrais amans*: the one written by Seville de la Tour, the lady's governess, advising against a love affair. Christine explains that a governess will choose to write a letter in such a circumstance because "[w]hat is written in letters sometimes is better remembered and makes a deeper impression on the heart than what is merely spoken. Therefore, she will express once more, by letter, a warning she will already have given several times verbally ("ce qui est escript en lettres est aucunes foiz mieulx retenue et plus perce le cuer que ce qui est dit de bouche, de lui escrire et signifier par lettres de rechief l'admonnestement que dire lui souloit.)<sup>cxviii</sup> Christine thus marks her awareness that the letter has special qualities that make it an effective tool of persuasion. In the passage from *Trois vertus*, she underlines the letter's difference from speech; the relative permanence of its writing gives it the potential to succeed when ephemeral speech has failed.

Christine's words about the permanence of writing resonate in multiple ways. A letter can be re-read by the recipient, shown to others, and re-written, copied, for the use of all. Such relative permanence potentially engenders both power and danger, especially

in cases where the sender is of a lower class or station than the recipient. If well-received, such a letter acts as an enduring ambassador of good will, a tangible reminder of the sender's wisdom or affection that might move the recipient to patronage. In the worst case, a letter may act as evidence; if not well-received, the letter is still a lasting reminder of the sender, but to her detriment. Hence the letter-writer requires extreme care in judging her words and audience.

When Christine removes Sebille's letter from its original context in *Le duc des vrais amans* by copying it into *Trois vertus*, she widens the scope of this letter's influence, and shifts its frame so that it is no longer a warning for the fictional lady alone; instead it now furnishes advice for her female readers. *Trois Vertus* is a conduct book dedicated to Marguerite of Nevers, granddaughter of the duke of Burgundy; yet it offers guidance for women of all classes, with sections directed to princesses, ladies, merchants' wives, laborers' wives, and even prostitutes. This re-location of Sebille's letter in *Trois vertus* demonstrates both Christine's awareness of a letter's potential to persuade people beyond the original occasion and her confidence that this letter is so well written that it will overcome the obstacles presented by a more diverse audience. Indeed, she demonstrates her faith in the letter by placing it at the very end of the section of the book dedicated to princesses. The letter represents her final words on the subject of a princess's virtue, which require no further elaboration or conclusion to persuade the ruler to moral conduct.

In broadening the audience for her letters, a writer like Christine could hope to persuade many readers, thus accomplishing the twofold effect of improving social conditions and individual morality, while garnering for herself ever more influence and

increased reputation. At the same time, the letter is a peculiarly vulnerable genre. Beyond the problems of interception or forgery, the letter is susceptible to misreading, especially when it attempts to target a multi-faceted audience comprised of a specific addressee and wide-ranging potentially antagonistic secondary readers. In the Middle Ages, a writer expected that her letter would be read by multiple readers; at court or at home, the letter's recipient would be expected to share her news. But anticipating the scope of such an audience and devising arguments that would persuade additional readers could prove difficult.<sup>cxix</sup> Furthermore, while a letter carries the sender's speech, that speech is frozen in time. Unable to react to the recipient, the writer can only attempt to anticipate possible responses. The more people who view the letter, the more problematic such anticipation.

Christine frequently addresses a letter to a specific reader, but calls out to other readers, directing its course. Such expansions of the audience enable Christine to make a series of sophisticated rhetorical moves, sometimes intensifying the overall strength of her argument, sometimes converting the overhearer into targeted audience, sometimes protecting herself as she criticizes the actions of the ruling class of France. Christine's three epistles inspired by the political crisis ensuing from the power struggles of the French aristocracy illustrate some of the wide-ranging strategies she employs with regard to audience. In *L'epistre à la royne*, *L'epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, and *Lamentacion sur les maux de la guerre civile*, Christine draws on the flexibility of the epistolary genre as she manipulates the boundary between the stated primary audience and the secondary audiences to persuade each reader of her political position.

Written in 1405, Christine's *L'epistre à la royne* seems on first reading a

straightforward appeal to Queen Isabel asking her to mediate between the warring dukes of France. Christine crafts the letter according to models of the *ars dictaminis* while employing a wide array of rhetorical appeals designed to spur the Queen to action. The result is a letter whose form is of such high quality that John Stevens, a fifteenth-century English ecclesiastical judge, included it in his compilation of dictaminal manuals and exemplary medieval Latin and French letters.<sup>cxx</sup>

From the outset of *L'epistre à la royne*, Christine constructs a multi-layered persona that emphasizes her humility and her duty to speak. Exalting the Queen's power and influence, Christine claims that she is merely the poor servant ("povre serve"), who out of desperation addresses the Queen whom everyone acknowledges as the medicine and sovereign remedy for the kingdom ("la medecine et souverain remede de la garison de ce royaume").<sup>cxxi</sup> At the same time, Christine delicately maneuvers away from accusing the Queen of either ignorance or wrongdoing by suggesting that Isabel's exalted status precludes her ability to gauge the extent of the problems her nobles' squabbling has caused the kingdom. Christine's strategy to avoid insult opens the way for her to offer herself as a true voice of the French people. Indeed, she has an obligation to speak out; according to her *Livre du corps de policie*, Christine maintains that "if there is a case sometime where the common people seem to be aggrieved by some burden, the merchants ought to assemble and from among them choose the wisest and most discreet in action and in speech, and go before the prince or the council, and bring their claims for them in humility and state their case meekly for them," ("s'il avient cas quelque foys que le commun leur semble estre grevé par aucune charge, assembler d'entre eulx les plus saiges et les plus discrez en fair et en parole, et aler devers les princes ou devers le

conseil et la faire leur clameur en humilité et dire leur cas debonnairement”).<sup>cxxii</sup> Once her authority to speak is established, Christine crafts a multi-layered argument designed to persuade Isabel to act. She details the potential dangers to France, (e.g., the destruction of the kingdom and eternal discord among the French nobility); explains the rewards that will accrue to Isabel personally (namely, spiritual benefits and renown) if she intervenes in the quarrel; and lists exemplary queens who have acted righteously to preserve their people, including classical, biblical, and historical examples, (Veturia, Esther, and Queen Blanche of France, respectively).

Belying that very epistolary craft, Christine attaches to the letter a *rondeau* that suggests that the letter was written hastily. This *rondeau* is addressed to a “noble lord,” (“noble seigneur”) who will present the letter to the queen. Under the usual system of court patronage, Christine would give the letter to the highest-ranking person she could, who would then offer it to the queen. In this case, the nobleman is no mere intermediary, but part of Christine’s audience, since she asks him to take the letter in good part. The *rondeau* not only demonstrates her familiarity with court customs but also apologizes for the quality of the writing, which has been inscribed in Christine’s own hand:<sup>cxxiii</sup>

Take in good part, if you please, this writing done

By my hand after one hour past midnight.

Noble Lord, for whom I wrote it

Take it in good part.

Whenever you want it will be better rewritten for you

But I did not have any other clerk at the moment.

Take it in good part, if you...



(Prenez en gré, s'il vous plaist, cest escript  
De ma main fait après mie nuit une heure.  
Noble seigneur, pour qui je l'ay escript  
Prenez en gré.  
Quant vous plaira mieulz vous sera rescript  
Mais n'avoye nul autre clerc a l'eure.  
Prenez en gré, s'il v...) <sup>cxxiv</sup>

Some critics accept Christine's word that she wrote the letter hurriedly. <sup>cxxv</sup> Others argue that the letter's exemplary adherence to dictaminal models suggests that the poem instead represents a humanist *apologia* similar to the phrase, "written hastily," *escript hastivement*" that Gontier Col employs in one of his *querelle* letters. <sup>cxxvi</sup>

Nevertheless, the *rondeau* also signals that the letter's audience is not limited to Isabel. Christine's reference to the person "for whom I wrote it," ("pour qui je l'ay escript") can be read as an acknowledgement that she has written the letter at the nameless lord's request, as a statement that she intends the letter to help his cause, or as an indication that the letter has a personal message for him. Her repeated requests to "Prenez" the letter "en gré," "take it in good part," illustrate how much she wants the letter to please him. But above all, the poem indicates that Christine has an agenda in this epistle that extends beyond her desire to persuade the Queen to settle the dispute between the dukes of Burgundy and Orleans.

The seigneur in question is most likely one of the very dukes whose enmity for one another had sparked the conflict about which Christine is so concerned: Louis, the duke of Orléans, or John the Fearless, the duke of Burgundy. <sup>cxxvii</sup> Marie-Josèphe Pinet,

one of Christine's principal early biographers, argues that Christine gave the letter to the duke of Orléans.<sup>cxxviii</sup> Presumably, his close position to the queen would guarantee that Isabel read the letter.<sup>cxxix</sup> Because Orléans and Isabel were political allies against Burgundy, it is possible that Christine might have used Orléans to gain access to the Queen, especially since Christine had spent considerable time in his court and had already dedicated several works to him, including *Le debat des deux amants* and *Le dit de la rose*.<sup>cxxx</sup>

Despite Orléans's suitability for the role of addressee, Burgundy still seems the more likely choice. Charity Cannon Willard pursues Pinet's subsequent observation that the contents of the letter represent a pro-Burgundian stance.<sup>cxxxi</sup> For even after naming Orléans the referent of "noble seigneur," Pinet writes unequivocally, "I do not hesitate to see, in her [Christine's] *Epistle to the Queen*, a pro-Burgundy work, in a time when the Burgundian cause could, to a certain degree, be identified with the cause of France."<sup>cxxxii</sup> Willard further observes that the poet-patron relationship between Christine and Orléans was ending. By 1404, two successive dukes of Burgundy had become the primary objects of Christine's hopes for patronage; John's father, Philip of Burgundy, had even commissioned Christine to write a biography of his brother, King Charles V.<sup>cxxxiii</sup> Time would justify Christine's decision to switch patrons; in February of 1406, records show that Burgundy paid Christine the generous sum of 100 écus for the biography of Charles V, another book, and "which books and *others of her letters* and poems are pleasing to my lord" ["lesquelz livres et *autres de ses epistres* et dictiez mond sgr a tres agreables" (emph. mine)].<sup>cxxxiv</sup> Given the timing of Burgundy's payment, a mere four months after Christine composed *L'epistre à la royne*, his subsequent generous patronage, and the

content of Christine's letter, a dedication to Burgundy in the *rondeau* seems all the more likely.<sup>CXXXV</sup>

Regardless of which duke Christine intended to address, the *rondeau*'s existence indicates that the letter functions on multiple levels of meaning, acting as a genuine plea for diplomacy but also as a work gifted to a potential patron. Christine asks the duke to review the work before a final copy is made for presentation to Isabel because her dependence on patronage ensures her need to be certain that the letter would not unduly offend the Queen, her careful rhetoric notwithstanding. Such a cautious move indicates the extent of Christine's experience in court life. That experience would guarantee that she would take steps not only to preserve her reputation, but also to further it. That is, in showing to the duke this sophisticated display of her mastery of epistolary rhetoric, Christine is also asking for his approval, and hopefully, his remuneration. Above all, *L'epistre à la royne* is an unambiguous statement of the dangers to France and its people should the two dukes not reconcile their differences. As such, the letter represents not only Christine's request for the Queen's mediation, but also her plea for the dukes themselves to see reason.

Certain elements within the letter proper confirm Christine's concern with the secondary audience indicated by the *rondeau*. Early in the letter, Christine rehearses for the Queen the difficulties facing France. Yet while she seeks to motivate Isabel to action, Christine also squarely casts blame on Orléans and Burgundy. In no uncertain terms, she prophesies the ruin of France should the two noblemen not make peace; affirming that the kingdom will be destroyed and an eternal hatred divide the nobility of France, she calls the enmity between the two dukes "dyabolique"(72-3). Christine implies that although

France requires the queen's intercession, it ultimately demands the nobles' reconciliation.

Christine further indicates that she is addressing the dukes as well as Isabel when she strategically manipulates her language to include the noblemen. First she details the potential spiritual benefits of peacemaking to Isabel and lists a series of positive examples for the Queen to emulate; then she returns to the peril facing the country, at which point her terminology shifts. After addressing Isabel specifically and using singular pronouns gendered female throughout, she begins to use plural pronouns and verbs, opening up the source of blame to the leaders of France generally: "what shame it would be to this kingdom that the poor people, deprived of their possessions, should beg, because of the famine, in foreign lands, telling how those who had to protect them ruined them!" ["quel honte a ce royaume qu'il convenist que les pouvres, desers de leur biens, alassent mendier par famine en estranges contrees en racomptant comment *ceulx* qui garder les *devoient* les *eussent* destruits!" (78-9, *emph. mine*)]. In part, Christine's shift to the plural avoids accusing Isabel alone of neglecting her duty, but the change also includes the warring dukes in her condemnation. That Christine intends to include them is underscored by her comment a mere seven lines later: "Moreover, a prince or princess who would be so obstinate in sin that he/she would render no account to God or to such great sufferings, should be reminded, if he/she were not completely made, of the very variable turns of Fortune, which can change and transform itself at any time." ["Et oultre ce, seroit encore a notte a cellui *prince ou princesse* qui le cuer aroit tant obstiné en pechié, qu'il n'accompteroit nulle chose a Dieu ne a si fortes douleurs, s'il n'estoit du tout *fol ou folle*, les très variables tours de Fortune, qui, en un tout seul moment, se puet changier et muer" (80-1, *emph. mine*)]. Christine's use of "prince ou princesse,"

followed by the masculine and feminine adjectives throughout the line, hitherto unprecedented in the letter, accentuates the expansion of her audience to include the dukes at the very moment she is making a strong call for peace.

As is her wont, Christine then provides a historical example to prove her point; she cites the story of Queen Olympias, “mere du grant Alexandre,” who became a tyrant after Alexander’s death (80). Though Christine’s primary addressee is Queen Isabel, naming Olympias evokes the memory of her son, Alexander the Great, who also fell from Fortune’s wheel. In this fashion, Christine subtly reminds her readers of both men and women’s susceptibility to fate. Moreover, in mentioning Olympias, Christine also solicits a male audience: in her *Livre de la mutacion de fortune*, she uses the same tale to critique the folly of men who forget the vagaries of Fortune: “O all men, much vain glory / Behold, see in this story / How cruel Fortune from renown / In brief time, perversely casts down;” (O tout homme, ou maint vaine gloire, / Mire toy, mire en ceste istoire, / Vois se Fortune la perverse, / En peu d’eure, de moult hault verse!”).<sup>cxxxvi</sup> The allusion is quite pointed; Christine had offered *Mutacion de Fortune* to the duke of Burgundy in 1403. She might well expect this reference to remind his son of the lesson she had then taught.

Should the noble in question fail to heed the illustration of Olympias, Christine provides further reinforcement, swinging her attention wholly to the masculine:

What happens to the powerful man thus welcomed by Fortune? If he did not act wisely in the past, and by the means of love, pity, and charity had not first attracted God and not done well in this world, then his whole life and actions are told in public and put to shame. And as a dog is pursued

by all who are chasing it away, this man is trampled by all, and they all shout at him that he is being deservedly treated

[Mais qu'en advient-il, quant Fortune a ainsi acqueilly aucun puissant? Se si saigement n'a tant fait le temps passé, par le moyen d'amours, de pitié et charité qu'il ait acquiz Dieu premierement et bien vueillans au monde, toute sa vie et ses faiz sont racontez en publique et tourne en repprouche. Et tout ainsi comme a un chien qui est chacié tous lui queurent sus, et est celli de tous deffoulez, en criant sus lui qu'il est bien employez (80-1)].

Throughout this passage, Christine underscores that she is discussing the problems a man will face if he does not act well while in Fortune's favor. This jarring shift from the feminine examples and language addressed to Isabel emphasizes that the lords also must heed Christine's wisdom. Nor is it a case that Christine is generalizing, and thus using the masculine article as a default. If that were the case, for example, one might expect similar patterns in *Trois vertus*. Written in the same year as *L'epistre à la royne*, this conduct book, also addressed to women, uses feminine articles throughout the work, even though Christine might well have expected at least one man to see it, since it was dedicated to the daughter of the duke of Burgundy and possibly written at the duke's instigation.<sup>cxxxvii</sup> Despite the possibility of the duke's inclusion in the audience of *Trois vertus*, Christine designs that book for women, and hence she employs feminine articles. Shifting to the masculine in *L'epistre à la royne* is thus no mere accident.

By incorporating the dukes into her audience, Christine is surely hoping to persuade them to settle their differences. But such inclusion also enables her to make some of the complex rhetorical shifts necessary to maintain an appropriate mode of

address to the nobility. Never does she directly attack Isabel, nor even imply that the culpability for any ensuing trouble will fall to the queen alone. Equally, in a work so clearly addressed to the queen, Christine can subtly suggest a course of action to the dukes, even criticize their choices, without making the direct attack that would almost certainly incur their displeasure. In this fashion, she makes the susceptibility to re-reading and the subsequent complexity presented by multiple audiences a strength of the letter.

Christine similarly addresses multiple audiences in *L'epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, only here she acknowledges them openly within the body of the letter. Writing in the aftermath of Agincourt, Christine addresses her letter primarily to Marie de Berry, duchess of Bourbon, but then explains that she will speak through the princess “a toutes,” “to all ladies” who are still grieving over the heavy French losses (4-5). Just as she did in *L'epistre à la royne*, Christine shifts between audiences to avoid making any direct criticism of Marie, yet that is only one aspect of her motivation for weaving together two separate audiences. Additionally, in stating her intention to comfort the grief of all Frenchwomen, Christine adds greater exigency to the letter. By naming both types of readers explicitly, Christine ensures that each audience is aware of the other’s presence, and she manipulates that awareness to enhance the potency of her argument for each reader.

Audience is a crucial dimension of *L'epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, helping to explain why Christine chose the epistolary genre for this work. Scholars agree that *L'epistre de la prison* belongs to the *consolatio* genre, with some noting that it seems more like an essay than a letter.<sup>cxxxviii</sup> Christine’s choosing the wider audience may

contribute to that perception, since she often moves away from direct address to speak of general precepts for appropriate mourning. But to characterize this work an essay ignores the late medieval popularity of the genre of the letter of consolation. Christine herself emphatically titles the work a letter and throughout refers to it as such. The *L'epistre de la prison* also incorporates standard epistolary elements, retaining what Giles Constable calls: “[t]he only indubitable signs of epistolary form”: the salutation and subscription.<sup>cxxxix</sup> Although Christine delays the salutation until line twenty, its presence in the letter nevertheless confirms the text’s epistolarity and emphasizes the presence of Christine’s intended audience.

Christine’s choice of Marie de Berry as the addressee for *L'epistre de la prison* is crucial.<sup>cxl</sup> Marie could well be seen as an exemplar for other women. Although both her son-in-law and three cousins had been killed at Agincourt and her husband and son taken captive by the English, she successfully governed her husband’s estates and attempted to negotiate his release.<sup>cxli</sup> Yet beyond Marie’s exemplary qualities, Christine had further motivations for her choice. From the letter’s outset, Christine affirms that although her work would be an appropriate gift for many princesses of France, she addresses Marie in recompense for the duchess’s “great charity, extended to me in this present time of affliction when friends are missing,” [“ta large charité a moy estendue en cestui temps d’affliction presente ou amis sont faillis” (2-3)]. Christine also had a long history of patronage with Marie’s family; her father, Duke John of Berry, had supported Christine generously, and was given several works by Christine, including her *Les sept psaumes allegorises* and *Lamentacion sur les maux de la guerre civile*. Marie herself was the dedicatee of one of Christine’s ballades.<sup>cxlii</sup> Christine had even awarded her a place in the



*Cité des Dames*, praising her as one of the great ladies of France: “is she not everything which every princess must be, devoted to her love, well-bred in everything, beautiful, wise, and good? In short, her virtues shine forth in her good conduct and honorable bearing,” (“n’est elle toute telle que a estre appartient en toute haulte princepce de grant amour a son seigneur, bien moriginee en toutes choses, belle, saige et bonne? Et, a tout dire, a son bel maintien et port honnourable apperent ses vertus”).<sup>cxliii</sup> Such prior connections, coupled with Marie’s virtue, grief, and generosity at such a difficult time, make the princess an ideal recipient of Christine’s consolatory epistle.

In highlighting Marie’s charity, Christine not only establishes Marie’s virtue, but also reinforces her poet-patron relationship with the Duchess. Beyond any financial benefits Christine might derive by strengthening their association, in naming her obligation to Marie, she also draws on the authority of that obligation. That is to say, Christine owes Marie a debt; as a humanist poet of some reputation, her best means of repaying Marie would be to attempt to console the Duchess through her writing. Positioning herself as Marie’s client also helps Christine to establish her ethos; if Marie (and her father) had thought Christine worthy of past patronage, it follows that her present offering also merits attention. But ultimately, as a humanist, Christine has a desire and an obligation to advise princes on right behavior. Whereas a male humanist might neglect women, Christine is an ideal advisor to a princess, since not only have her education and experience taught her how to advise women but also they have helped her to recognize that princesses have the same need for counsel as their princely counterparts.

Extolling Marie’s generosity is a form of flattery that Christine sustains throughout the letter. That flattery takes several forms, of which the most common is the

direct compliment, including addressing Marie as “tres noble dame,” or describing her “loyal et amant courage,” or highlighting her renown, power, and riches, “renomee entre les plus grans, habondant en honneurs, puissant en seigneurie et grant terrienne et souffisamment aisiee en richescs” (6, 22, 44). Christine also pays Marie the implied compliment of assuming Marie’s good judgment: she presupposes that Marie will always choose the best action or way of thinking. Not only does Christine praise Marie within the letter, but she also holds her up as an example of righteous behavior to the secondary audience. In speaking to Marie, Christine claims to address all ladies, a largely rhetorical move on Christine’s part that enables Marie to know that her goodness and generosity have just been upheld as an example to all the women of France.

Making sure that Marie is aware of a secondary audience thus facilitates Christine’s argument, both to flatter and to avoid criticism. Just as she did in *L’epistre à la royne*, Christine frequently shifts to a general third-person “whoever” when she wishes to criticize a behavior. For example, she proclaims, “Whoever doubts God’s vengeance is a fool!” [“a dire des vengences de Dieu, folz est qui ne les doute!” (14-15)]. The explicit presence of a secondary audience further distances the “qui,” or “whoever” from Marie. Such rhetorical distance allows Christine to pose a series of similar statements, without causing offense, statements accumulating in an argument with which Marie and the other women she addresses cannot disagree: that they must take comfort and trust in God and in the promise of salvation for themselves and their loved ones.

The dual audience, however, also exists for comfort. The connection between Marie, Christine, and the ladies of France is their grief, and Christine invites Marie to

find reassurance in the knowledge that she is not suffering alone. In essence, Christine establishes a community, an earthly city of ladies, whose purpose is to bring the women of France together to console one another and to gain the wisdom and courage to live righteously in the face of the terrible disaster that had befallen them and their loved ones.

Christine's letter guides the community to such wisdom. In this letter, the last Christine would write, she employs her skill in argumentation, scholarship, and experience to educate her readers. The effect makes *L'epistre de la prison de vie humaine* seem like a new addition to *Trois Vertus*, one titled, "here is set forth the ways to cope with tragedy." For in this letter, just as in *Trois Vertus*, Christine is concerned with the wider community of women, and she makes arguments applicable to all of those reading the letter.

In addressing Marie directly as a representative of all the women of France, Christine allows the rest of the audience to take pleasure in the intimacy of a woman-to-woman exchange. The other women have the voyeuristic pleasure of listening in on Christine's words of advice to a noblewoman, but also the knowledge that they are not truly voyeurs, but guests invited to listen and take heed to the message being delivered. In effect, the letter sustains a tone of private consolation even as it reaches out to a greater public, encouraging the readers to see that it speaks to a matter of grief for the whole nation, and that the only way to encompass such grief is to live according to Christian doctrine and trust in the hope of a better life after death.

By affirming Marie's virtue and ability to accept God's plan, Christine challenges all of her readers to live up to the same standards. But through the letter itself, she provides them another example: her own. In the opening to *L'epistre de la prison de vie*

*humaine*, Christine mentions that this letter has taken a long time to write, and notes that “I will tell at the end the reason why I did not finish it earlier,” [“dont l’excusacion de plus tost n’avoir achevé diray en la fin” (4-5)]. This brief teaser enhances her readers’ anticipation for an explanation that Christine delays until the very last paragraph of the letter:

Written in Paris by me, Christine de Pizan, your humble and obedient, praying humbly that you will not take it badly, nor think less of me that you have not received this present epistle from me sooner; may your kindness receive it with pleasure, and may a sufficient excuse for the fault of having written too much—although for a long time it has been in my mind for you—if you please, consist in the great worries and disturbed thoughts because of many sorrows that, since the moment I started it long ago, have kept my poor understanding, for its weakness, in such check with all these sad thoughts and ideas, that it has not been in my power to finish it earlier than this twentieth day of January of the year 1417.

[Escript a Paris par moy, Cristine de Pizan, ton humble et obeissant, suppliant humblement que a mal tu n’aies, ne moins gré ne m’en saches se plus tost n’as de moy eue ceste presente espitre; la quelle ta benignité veuille en gré recevoir, et me soit du default de tant y avoir mis—quoyque dés pieça elle feust pour toy en ma pensee—s’il te plaist, souffisant excusacion pluseurs grans ennuis et troubles de courage qui, a cause de maints desplaisirs qui, depuis le temps que je le commençay qui fut dés pieça, ont mon povre entendement, pour sa foiblece, tenu si empeschié en

tristes ymaginacions et pensees qu'il n'a esté en ma puissance the plus tost  
l'avoir achevé que a cestui .xxe. jour de janvier, l'an mil CCCCXVII).<sup>cxliv</sup>

Christine thus suggests that she was unable to finish the letter because she too was caught in the “slough of despond,” as it were. Her “great worries and disturbed thoughts” have prevented her from writing an argument on consolation. Once she was like her readers, afflicted by grief and unable to work, but gradually the truth of her arguments enabled her to go on living. When Christine exhorts Marie, “Oh revered Lady, shall we not then believe the Holy Scriptures and true faith in God, without having and holding them firmly?” (“O redoubtee Dame, ne croirons-nous donques les Saintes Escriptions et la foy de Dieu vraie, sans la quelle avoir et tenir fermement,”) her use of “nous” or “we” is significant.<sup>cxlv</sup> She, too, has traveled the path of despair and now she invites Marie (and through her, all French women) to follow her example. In between the opening and this final paragraph, Christine has poured out all of the wisdom and comfort she can provide; here she invites Marie and the other ladies to act, that is, to pray, to live well, to be patient, to cease grieving, and to trust God. This letter represents Christine’s own form of action. Christine symbolizes an “Everywoman” whose individual journey mirrors a universal one; this experience establishes her right to speak on the subject. While Christine’s quotations from religious and classical authority are important parts of her argument, her authority is founded on her experience, and she uses that experience to reach out to her audience.

Christine’s use of personal experience and her close connection to an individual reader help to make this letter so effective as consolation. Charity Cannon Willard notes that other French responses to Agincourt, such as Alain Chartier’s *Le livre de quatre*

*dames* and *Quadrilogue Invectif*, fall short of Christine's *L'epistre de la prison de vie humaine* because neither "has the emotional tension or the genuine expression of sympathy for the bereaved characterizing Christine's letter."<sup>cxlvi</sup> While its title alludes to all human life, *L'epistre de la prison de vie humaine* is an intensely feminine piece addressed to women and concerned with acknowledging the worth of women's reactions to national tragedy.

Christine also employs her personal experience effectively in *Lamentacion sur les maux de la guerre civile*, recalling her own memories and the difficulties she has suffered as a widow to evoke sympathy for the widows and orphans created by civil war. In addition to signifying her experience, Christine's tears evoke the biblical prophet Jeremiah, who grieves when the kings and people of Israel ignore God's commands to repent, precipitating the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>cxlvii</sup> Following Jeremiah allows Christine to suggest that if her audience does not heed her warning, France will suffer the same fate as Jerusalem. To similar effect, she also refers to John the Baptist and the prophecies of Isaiah by describing herself as "a poor voice crying in this kingdom," ("povre voix criant en ce royaume") echoing the gospel descriptions of John as "The voice of someone crying in the desert."<sup>cxlviii</sup> Modeling herself on such biblical figures both enhances Christine's authority and underlines the seriousness of the crisis facing the French people.

In his admonitions, Jeremiah addresses both royalty and commoners; Christine follows his path by including both groups in the general audience of *Lamentacion*.<sup>cxlix</sup> Unlike her other letters, which begin with a specific salutation, the *Lamentacion* opens with an epigraph instead of a specific addressee: "Whoever has pity, let him put it to use / The time which requires it has come" ["Qui a point de pitié la mette en oeuvre, / Veez-cy

le temps qui le requiert,” (84-5)]. After the epigraph, Christine begins the letter with her own tears, lamenting the discord among the French rulers and crying out to the various princes and the Queen of France, then to all wise men, clerics, and all the women of the French realm, begging them to take appropriate action and reminding them of their obligations. It is only halfway through the letter that Christine specifically addresses the King’s uncle, John, the Duke of Berry. In upsetting epistolary convention in this fashion, Christine highlights the significance of the letter’s audience and demands that her reader consider the reasons for the omission.

By failing to specify an audience at the outset, Christine implies that there is no single individual to whom she should write. Too many people are contributing to the impending disaster and none is listening to reason. Christine therefore figures herself in the first line as the “Seulette a part” or “the little woman alone,” a persona she had frequently evoked in her earlier courtly verse poetry (84). Christine paints a despairing picture of herself crying out, looking for someone who has pity to respond to her plea. In this way, Margarete Zimmermann suggests, “the lamenting female voice of the *Lamentacion* subsequently turns into both a ‘voice crying in the desert’ and the voice of an incisive Cassandra.”<sup>cl</sup> These images thus help Christine to establish her ethos, but it also signifies the purpose of her writing. The absence of an identified audience invites its fulfillment; Christine wants someone to answer her call.

Given the severe language of *Lamentacion*, Christine logically deflects her salutation. Eventually, after a series of appeals to different people, she focuses solely on the Duke of Berry. Despite the initial deflection, in choosing the duke, Christine is still censuring one of the most powerful princes of the realm. Mary McKinley observes that

Christine's use of the epigraph is designed to provide "a graceful way out [of this dilemma]...If, and only if, the duke responds to the plea for pity and action, he takes the place of 'Qui' just as Christine is the referent of 'Seulette.'"<sup>cli</sup> If the duke listens to Christine, he will underline her authority. Replacing the traditional salutation with an epigraph thus neatly manipulates the duke into the position Christine desires.

According to dictaminal manuals, omitting a salutation can also imply subtle messages. As Linda Leppig points out, "Anonymous from Bologna," the author of an 1135 treatise, "The Principles of Letter-Writing," dictates that a letter writer might leave the salutation out in order to "declare the scorn or anger or passion of an indignant mind."<sup>clii</sup> Leppig observes that Christine might well want to indicate her anger at the French nobility in this manner. But I note that the author of "The Principles of Letter-Writing" also explains that one might choose to skip the salutation out of fear; he cites Sallust: "who I am you will learn from what is being sent to you."<sup>cliii</sup> In this case, I contend that Christine is not hiding her identity, but instead acknowledging the power of those to whom she is writing. Given their rank, perhaps the strength of her ensuing criticism is better left diffused among several people, rather than targeted at a single individual.

In the *Lamentacion*, Christine soon begins her quest to find a specific addressee, as she turns from the picture of her despair to a frantic series of appeals to various individuals, starting with the princes of France and proceeding to include most of the kingdom. Naming so many individuals in the audience calls attention to the actual audience. The lack of general literacy and the limitations of manuscript circulation make it unlikely that all the common folk of the kingdom would have read Christine's letter.



Leppig argues that Christine may have imagined that her work would be read aloud or circulated at court, but even if only the duke of Berry saw the letter:

its rhetoric is designed to embrace all segments of society. By rhetorically expanding the scope of the audience, Christine capitalizes on the emotional value of the body politic as a paternalistic construct of government and renders her legal argumentation more poignant by confronting those responsible for the near collapse of the realm with their victims.<sup>cliv</sup>

In this way Christine intensifies the urgency of her argument largely through pathos and emphasizes that the actions of the nobility have consequences for all the people of the kingdom.

By playing with epistolary conventions regarding audience, Christine also underscores that all the members of her stated audience have the responsibility and the power to act in some way, and that such action is required of all of them in order to avert war. Her addresses to the princes highlight their central role in the crisis; she attempts to shame them into ending the fighting by evoking terrible pictures of the aftermath of war and decrying the dishonor of fighting one's own family (84-7). Similarly, Christine urges the Queen to act by reminding her of her authority and the dangers to her children: "Who prevents you from restraining now this side of your kin and putting an end to this deadly enterprise? Do you not see the heritage of your children at stake? You, the mother of the noble heirs of France, Revered Princess, who but you can do anything, and who will disobey your sovereignty and authority, if you rightly want to mediate a peace?" ["Et qui te tient que tantot celle part n'affinz tenir la bride et arrester ceste mortel emprise? Ne

vois-tu en balance l'heritage de tes nobles enfants? Tu, mere des nobles hoirs de France, redoubtee princesse, qui y puet que toy, ne qui sera-ce, qui a ta seigneurie et auctorité desobeira, se a droit te veulx de la paix entremettre?" (88-9)]. In each case, Christine tailors her appeal to the specified audience, honor and chivalry for the princes, and pride and maternal love for the queen.

Christine then turns her attention to additional members of her audience: the sages, the clerics, and the women, again assigning each faction a role according to its power and choosing those arguments most likely to appeal. Christine invites the wise men to turn their attention to the highest affairs of the realm, rather than the "petites choses" or "small things" with which they had been occupied (88-9). Christine further compares France to the city of Ninevah, which God intended to destroy had not the people listened to Jonah's warning and repented (88-9). In this comparison, Christine parallels her situation with that of Jonah, bearing God's message, and warns the clerics that they must similarly intercede for France with their prayers.

Sages and clerics might conceivably have had access to the work, but Christine's exhortation to the women of France represents a more problematic situation. In naming three different groups of women, "dames, damoiselles et femmes du royaume de France," Christine calls upon both noble and common women.<sup>clv</sup> If she genuinely hoped that her work might somehow reach women of lower classes, these passages in which she implores them to weep for their country affirm the place of women within the kingdom, according them certain duties and considerations (88-9). It is also possible that Christine might be addressing the members of her daughter's convent at Poissy.<sup>clvi</sup> But even if none of the common women of France ever saw the letter, Christine's specific address to

them also indicates how she conceived the potential power of women in society.

Zimmermann notes that by calling on these women, Christine “seeks to weld women into a group capable of political action.”<sup>clvii</sup> In effect, Christine assigns them political power, as though by articulating their place, she could also grant them its reality.

After urging her audience to act, Christine also cites classical examples to provide women with some alternatives for appropriate political action. First she advises that, like Argia and her ladies, the women of France should weep, lamenting the losses of their husbands and loved ones. Then Christine invokes the example of the Sabine women, who, with their children, walked out onto a battlefield in order to make peace between their husbands and fathers (86-7). Both models are particularly well-suited for the people of France; like Argia, the women too will be made widows, and like the Sabine ladies, the men fighting with one another ought to be natural allies. History celebrated these women for their actions; so too, Christine seems to promise, will it laud the women of France.

Through these exemplars Christine sets up a gradually escalating pattern that eventually calls for women’s direct political intervention. As Zimmermann notes, Christine asks women to “move from passive lamenting...to political action, to peacemaking.”<sup>clviii</sup> Such intervention on their part is within their scope; the Church long encouraged medieval women to attempt to reconcile warring parties. The women of France should ultimately emulate the Sabine ladies, who effectively employ passive resistance to mediate between warring factions.

Although the Sabine women’s intervention appears to represent more direct action than Argia’s weeping, undercurrents in Argia’s story suggest that Christine’s

recommendation to imitate her is much more radical than it initially appears. Argia's story was well-known to Christine, who had read it in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, and then included her in the *Cité des Dames* in 1405. There Christine follows Boccaccio to describe in gruesome detail how Argia, after great travail, searched among the bodies of the dead for her husband's rotting corpse; after finding his body, she kissed and tended it, and then burned it in Antigone-like defiance of the king's orders. Whereas Boccaccio stops the story there, Christine proceeds to explain that "after having done all this, like some woman wishing to risk death in order to avenge her husband, she struggled and fought so fiercely, aided by a great number of other women, that they pierced the citadel walls, captured the city, and put all inside to death," ("quant elle ot tout ce fait, comme celle qui vouloit exposer son corps a mort pour vengier son mari, fist tant et y mist tel paine a l'aide des autres femmes, dont grant quantité y avoit, que les murs de la cité furent perciés et guaignerent la ville et tout mirent a mort").<sup>clix</sup> Thus in *Cité des Dames*, Argia's lament is only a prelude to action. In citing only the Theban woman's tears in *Lamentacion*, which was written five years after *Cité des Dames*, Christine leaves the greater threat unspoken, her earlier work preserving a vision of the power Christine is prepared to claim for her peers.

In *Lamentacion*, Christine's own words illustrate the shift from lament to direct action. Her work opens with her bitter proclamation, "Alone, and suppressing with great difficulty the tears which blur my sight and pour down my face like a fountain," ["Seulette a part, et estraignant a grant paine les lermes qui ma veue troublent et comme fontaine affluent sur mon visage." (84-5)]. Christine's tears hinder her work; they even erase her writing. Through her lament, she reaches out to the female community she

creates in the letter when she calls on the women of France to “cry mercy for this grievous storm!” [“criez misericorde pour ceste grief tempeste!” (88-9)]. Christine’s grief reaches its height when she imagines the fate of her country; overcome, she drops the pen to wipe her tears. Then, from the depths of her grief, she recalls that “Dieu est misericors. Tout n’est past mort,” “God is merciful. All is not dead” (90-1). Upon this reflection, Christine turns away from grief to action; in the very next line, she exhorts the Duke of Berry to make peace. At that moment, *Lamentacion* shifts gears to focus wholly on the duke. From this point onward, the text becomes Christine’s chosen form of action, as she employs her rhetorical skill to persuade the duke to intervene.

This latter portion of the *Lamentacion* is cast in the form of a properly dictaminal letter, a letter that represents Christine’s attempt to bolster the courage of the demoralized French people.<sup>clx</sup> In effect, Christine embeds a letter within a letter; once she addresses the duke of Berry, the rest of the *Lamentacion* follows dictaminal models, with salutation, exordium, narration, and petition. She first identifies a specific audience: “Oh, Duke of Berry, Noble Prince, excellent father and scion of royal children, son of a king of France, brother and uncle, father of all the antiquity of the lily!” [“O! Duc de Berry, noble prince, excellent souche et estoc des enfans royaulx, filz de roy de France, frere et oncle, pere d’antiquité de la fleur de liz toute!” (90-1)]. Barring the use of “oh” instead of “to,” Christine’s opening is a precise salutation, identifying the duke’s various titles, titles designed, one might add, to highlight his relationship with the warring nobles and evoke his sense of duty towards them. The exordium follows, as Christine seeks the duke’s good will, commiserating with his pain over the rancor between his nephews. Listing the causes of his pain, she gives an effective narration, which in turn, is succeeded by the

petition, as she begs the duke to take action and make peace amongst his kin. In this embedded letter, Christine follows her usual pattern of weaving logical argument together with historical and classical examples for the duke. Keeping the focus on the duke alone, she concludes the entire *Lamentacion* in traditional epistolary fashion, blessing him and begging that he listen to her: “poor voice crying in this kingdom, wanting peace and welfare for all, your servant Christine, moved by her very fair mind” [“povre voix criant en ce royaume, desireuse de paix et du bien de vous touz, vostre servante Christine, meue en tres juste entente” (94-5)].

In this fashion, Christine has listened to her own call, and acted on behalf of France with the best tools at her disposal. Just as she did in *L’epistre de prison de vie humaine*, Christine models the action she recommends to her audience. Where in the earlier letter Christine overcomes her grief over the aftermath of Agincourt by placing her faith in God, just as she has encouraged her readers to do, in *Lamentacion* she bids the women of France turn from sorrow to action, just as she does within the letter. Even if the audience of *Lamentacion* were fictional, and no actual woman read the letter, Christine’s exhortations to the ladies of France evoke women’s power in service to their country, an idea that rebounds reflexively on Christine, the only woman who certainly knew the letter’s contents.

Following Argia’s course, Christine is inspired by her tears to act. Mary McKinley, who acknowledges that tears are both “a conventional topos of the *complainte*...[and] a means of expression acceptable in women,” nevertheless emphasizes the threat that tears represent for Christine’s writing, since they literally endanger her work.<sup>clxi</sup> But tears also form a connection between the writer and the letter.

Through her grief, Christine invokes the literary trope of the link between a letter and the tears of the sender. Just as her contemporaries Gower and Chaucer would do with characters like Canace or Troilus, Christine uses the image of a writer weeping over her work to signify the strength of the connection between herself and the page.

Although the image of Christine's tears emphasizes her presence in the work, such presence can also cause a problem for a female author. In view of her society's negative associations of women's speech and sexuality, a speaking woman risked damage to her reputation, a problem with which Christine had personal experience. In *L'Avision Christine*, she details the monetary and legal difficulties she faced after her husband's death, and remarks bitterly that because of her need to visit various noblemen to ask for support, she was accused of impropriety: "Was it not said of me throughout town that I had lovers?. ("ne fut it pas dit de moy par toute la ville que je amoye par amours.)"<sup>clxii</sup> However, by the time Christine wrote the *Lamentacion*, her literary and scholarly reputation was sufficiently established to ensure she no longer need fear such accusations; rather it was in her interest to foster the aspect of the letter that emphasized her connection to the work.

Through these three epistles, *L'epistre à la royne*, *L'epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, and *Lamentacion sur les maux de la guerre civile*, Christine assumes her place within the ranks of the vernacular humanists, advising members of the royalty and nobility on proper behavior. Mediating between the ruling and common classes, Christine seeks to preserve peace by inculcating the virtue of justice in the former group and the virtue of loyalty in the latter. In informing each group of its duties, Christine fulfills the bourgeois's obligation to speak truth to princes that she outlines in her 1406

political work, *Livre du corps de policie*. She also demonstrates her proficiency in manipulating epistolary conventions to persuade her diverse audiences. For Christine, the letter is a truly effective way to communicate her political ideals.

### **Writing the Epistolary Genre**

In the *Cité des dames*, Rectitude answers the fictional Christine's concerns about the truth of men's claims that women are fickle by citing Christine's own discussions of Ovid and Jean de Meun in her *Epistre au dieu d'amours* and *Epistres sur le Roman de Rose*. Rectitude assures "Christine" that she need say no more on the subject, since Christine herself countered the false charge sufficiently, "Car toy meismes as assez souffisantment traittié la matiere" (927-8). In this fashion, Christine reinforces the authority of her previous works, since no less an allegorical figure than Rectitude affirms their worth. As references in the *Cité* confirm previous works, later ones draw on the authority and ideas of the *Cité*, so that Christine's entire body of writing functions collectively to make certain arguments about women and society. Examining Christine's early poetry and prose illustrates that her use of intertextuality to enhance her scholarly authority is an ongoing strategy that persists throughout her engagement with the epistolary genre.

Christine further underscores her right to participate in the epistolary genre by writing *about* letters. Her fictional depictions of letter-writers and their work create a sort of meta-epistolarity: she attempts not only to reinforce the letter's authority as a genre, but also to establish a woman's right to employ the letter for the serious ends of political commentary and moral suasion. Critics have often noted that Christine's texts act



collectively, that the concerns of one work echo those of another as she refines her arguments through different genres and styles in both poetry and prose.<sup>clxiii</sup> Certain themes recur. Christine's concern regarding the detrimental effects of certain kinds of fiction on readers, exemplified in her condemnation of works by Jean de Meun and Ovid in *L'epistre au dieu d'amours*, is amplified in her letters in the *querelle de la Rose*. Christine then pursues the issues of the *querelle* debate, such as defamation of women and domestic violence, in other texts such as *Cité des dames*.<sup>clxiv</sup> But just as Christine expands her arguments about women's issues in other works, so, too, does she seek to increase the authority of the epistolary genre by writing about letters in other non-epistolary works, characterizing the letter as a particularly effective vehicle for conveying persuasive argument.

In contrast to the overt references to her previous works in *Cité*, Christine also unobtrusively reinforces her authority by re-using her work without calling attention to it. Edith Benkov notes that when Marotele, the shepherdess in *Dit de la pastoure*, sings Christine's poems from previously written collections, Christine creates "a uniquely gendered authority...allowing both Marotele and Christine the writer a self-referentiality through artistic creation and self-conscious citation."<sup>clxv</sup> In the *querelle* debate, Christine employs the same language to describe herself criticizing Jean de Meun as she uses in the *Cité des dames* to describe Leuntium, a Greek woman who dared to confront the philosopher Theophrastus.<sup>clxvi</sup> Such intertextual references buttress her scholarly authority and enhance the merit of her works.

Christine also uses the power of intertextuality to make subtle arguments. For instance, her writings to and about Queen Isabel demonstrate how Christine might safely

criticize the queen's behavior without incurring royal displeasure. In 1405, Christine placed Isabel directly in two of her works, the *Cité des Dames* and *Epistre à la royne*, where she praises the Queen and then urges her to act. Thelma Fenster argues for an indirect appearance as well; she contends that it hardly requires a great leap to imagine that Sebille de la Tour's condemnation of the love affair in *Duc des vrais amans*, composed at the same time, might easily refer to rumors current about Isabel's behavior:

Christine would have been taking a two-pronged approach to the problem of the queen's reputation: first she enhanced her image in the *Cité* and encouraged her to tend to matters of state in the *Epistre à la Reine*; second, she admonished her privately in the *Duc des vrais amans* with a tale whose characters are at several, exquisitely discreet removes from the queen and duke themselves but whose point—if indeed relevant to Isabel's activities—could not have been mistaken.<sup>clxvii</sup>

Christine's habit of presenting patrons with collections of works would have encouraged readers to see her writing as presenting certain cohesive arguments, especially on the subject of love and women. Isabel was the recipient of one such collection, a magnificently illustrated manuscript containing both the *Cité des Dames* and *Duc des vrais amans*.<sup>clxviii</sup>

With its humanist, classical, and literary traditions, the epistolary genre, already held considerable authority, authority that Christine intentionally draws upon in choosing it. But over her career, Christine's relationship with the letter shifts from simply writing within the confines of the genre to claiming authority over the genre itself. Christine is unique among medieval female letter-writers in that she not only writes letters, but writes

about them, creating her own fictional representations of women's letter-writing. In works such as the *Othea*, *Duc des vrais amans*, *Trois vertus*, and *Le livre des trois jugemens*, Christine advises readers how they should read letters; in the process, she not only enhances the authority of the letter to persuade its audience but she also fashions a strong feminine tradition of letter-writing.

One such sketch of the letter's influence comes in the *Cité des dames*, when Christine praises the lady Carmentis for inventing the alphabet. She writes that:

because of this one woman's learning, men can conclude agreements and *maintain friendships* with distant people and, *through the exchange of responses*, they can know one another without having seen one another.

In short, all the good which comes from the alphabet and thus from letters cannot be told; for they describe and facilitate the understanding and knowledge of God, celestial things, the sea, the earth, all people, and all things.

[par la science de celle femme pueent faire hommes acors et *joindre amistiez* a plusieurs personnes longtaines de eulx (et, *par responce* que ilz *donnent les uns aux autres, eulx*) entrecongnoistre sans s'entreveoir. Et, a brief parler, tout le bien qui vient de lettres ne pourroit estre racompté: car ilz descriptent et font entendre et congnoistre Dieu, les choses celestes, le mer, la terre, toute personnes et toutes chose. (emph. mine)].<sup>clxix</sup>

Christine links the knowledge that people obtain through the letters of the alphabet, that is, learning, with the exchange of letters, which Carmentis's invention has made possible.

Through the written alphabet, people are able to correspond with one another and so share information and ideas on all matters earthly and celestial. Christine thus re-writes the history of letter-writing by tracing its origin back to a woman, then establishes the importance of letters by explaining how much knowledge is circulated through them.

Even before this reference in the *Cité*, Christine had attempted to show that women have long been involved with the epistolary tradition. Written between 1399 and 1400, her *Epistre Othea* is a complicated text composed in a tri-partite structure of text, gloss, and allegory.<sup>clxx</sup> As a letter, the entire text is ostensibly a message from the goddess Othea to the Trojan prince Hector, instructing him on chivalric and moral behavior through one hundred classical and mythological exempla. Through the glosses and allegorical sections associated with each part of the letter, Christine preserves the fiction that her role is merely to provide scholarly and religious commentary on Othea's letter.

Scholars have long attempted to explain the odd structure of *Othea*, leading many to ask why Christine chose to designate this work as an epistle at all.<sup>clxxi</sup> One answer to that question lies in Christine's attempts to reinforce the authority of the epistolary genre in general. If the gloss and allegory were temporarily stripped away from each exemplum, *Othea* would remain a letter written by a woman that precisely follows dictaminal form, opening with a salutation that could be found in any letter-writing manual:

Othea, goddess of prudence  
Who addresses hearts great in valor,  
To you, Hector, noble and powerful prince,

Who is ever flourishing in arms  
 Son of Mars, the god of battle,  
 Who carries out and wages feats of arms,  
 And of Minerva, the powerful  
 Goddess, who is mistress of arms,  
 Successor of noble Trojans,  
 Heir of Troy and of its citizens  
 Salutation I put in front  
 With true affection, without pretense.  
 [Othea, deesse de prudence,  
 Qui adrece les bons cuers en vaillance,  
 A toy Hector, noble prince poissant,  
 Qui en armes es adez flourissant,  
 Filz de Mars, le dieu de bataille,  
 Qui les fais d'armes livre et taille  
 Et de Minerve, la deesse  
 Poissant qui d'armes est maistresse,  
 Successeur des nobles Troyens,  
 Hoir de Troye et des citoyens,  
 Salutation devant mise,  
 Avec vraye amour, sanz faintise.]<sup>clxxii</sup>

Following dictaminal conventions, Othea appropriately details Hector's rank and lineage, while greeting him in such a way as to confirm her good will towards him and inspire

him to trust her. In the exordium, Othea continues to inspire amity through praising the prince; she then proceeds to the narration, in which she outlines his potential for greatness and her role as a counselor. The petition occupies the bulk of the letter, as Othea teaches Hector correct behavior by citing examples of men and women such as Hercules, Perseus, Ceres, and Medea. The anonymous twelfth-century dictaminal manual, “The Principles of Letter-Writing,” notes that a petition of this sort would be called didactic: “when we seek, through precepts, that something be done or not done.”<sup>clxxiii</sup> At the end of her letter, Othea confirms its didactic nature:

One hundred authorities I have written to you;

If they are not despised by you,

For Augustus learned from a woman,

Who taught him about being worshipped.

[Cent auctoritez t’ay escriptes,

Si ne soient de toy despites,

Car Augustus de femme apprist

Qui d’estre aouré le reprint.]<sup>clxxiv</sup>

According to “The Principles of Letter-Writing,” “[i]t is customary for [the conclusion] to be used because it is offered to point out the usefulness or disadvantage possessed by the subjects treated in the letter.”<sup>clxxv</sup> Othea follows this model, suggesting to Hector that he might be as great as Augustus should he, too, follow a woman’s advice. At its heart, then, *Epistre Othea* is a letter written precisely according to the conventions of the epistolary genre. Since Christine imagines that the text was written for a prince of Troy, she thus creates a model of women’s letter-writing as ancient as the art itself.

The *Othea*'s entire focus is on a woman's speech and "another" woman's subsequent gloss and commentary. In her first gloss, Christine immediately establishes that Othea is really a woman, not a goddess. While the Greeks often mistook heroic or illustrious people for gods, she observes, truly they were just people, although the greatness of Othea's wisdom would understandably tempt others to think her a goddess.<sup>clxxvi</sup> Hence Christine establishes the capacity of women's understanding; Othea is a woman of such learning and perception that all her contemporaries worship her. Ultimately, Othea's humanity is particularly significant in light of the scholarly and religious exegesis with which Christine surrounds the text. Not only does Christine's commentary demonstrate that women are capable of complex scholarly analysis, but also that ordinary women's letters are worthy of such critical attention.

Similar attention to the scope and influence of women's letters may be found in the fictional letters embedded in Christine's narrative poems, such as those in *Duc des vrais amans*, where the governess Sebille pens a letter that could properly belong to the medieval mirror-for-princes genre.<sup>clxxvii</sup> She scolds the lady's adulterous actions and reminds her former charge of the proper behavior a lady should display. In true sibylline voice, the governess warns her former charge of the dangers to her reputation should she continue her affair with the duke; when the lady disregards the advice, the letter's prediction is fulfilled. This fictional representation of a woman's letter is thus of a vastly different order than those of the *Heroides*, heretofore the model of women's correspondence. Sebille's letter, full of rational, affectionate, sensible advice, is the antithesis of the desperate letters penned by Ovid's victimized heroines.

But not all letters within the *Duc des vrais amans* are similarly virtuous. The

letters exchanged between the lady and her beloved illustrate the dangerous uses to which letters can be put. The duke sends a letter to gain access to his lady, and a letter from him also persuades her to renew the affair, against the good advice of Sebille Monthault.<sup>clxxviii</sup> This situation is precisely the one Christine condemns in *Trois vertus*, when she rebukes maids for granting lovers access to their mistresses by delivering their letters.<sup>clxxix</sup> Letters between husbands and wives are excellent, but letters from lovers must be shunned.<sup>clxxx</sup>

Christine continues her attack on illicit love letters by demonstrating their weaknesses. In the *Duc des vrais amans*, Christine initially appears to follow the courtly love tradition, affirming that letters have the power to heal the beloved's pain. Furthermore, in references to letters in other works, including *Cent balades d'amant et de dame* and *Trois jugemens*, she apparently confirms that power. Yet in all these works, the sad conclusions to the affairs conflict with this courtly commonplace. In balade fifty-six of *Cent balades d'amant et de dame*, L'amant exclaims that "these letters have brought me joy," ("Ces letres m'ont raporté / Joye").<sup>clxxxii</sup> Yet the recurring refrain, "God, when will we be together?" ("Dieux! quant serons nous ensemble?") undermines the healing effects of correspondence. Letters are not enough to sustain love; rather, the speaker longs to see the lady in person. Such an assertion contradicts the courtly convention that a letter suffices as a substitute for the beloved. In *Trois jugemens*, Christine also employs the idea that letters are sufficient consolation for enforced distance between lovers, but once again, that claim is belied by the outcome—a year later, the lover has found a new lady.<sup>clxxxii</sup> If these letters were truly powerful enough to incorporate the sender fully, the lovers could withstand the pain of time and distance.

Christine only undermines the efficacy of illicit letters in these poetic



characterizations of the epistolary genre. By contrast, her description of Sebille de la Tour's letter included in *Trois vertus* enhances a letter's authority. Christine introduces Sebille's letter by writing that "Anyone who already has read it may skip it but it is good and profitable for all high-born ladies and any others to whom it might apply;" ("Si la puet passer oultre qui veult, se au lire lui anuye or se autre foiz l'a veue, quoy qu'elle soit bonne et prouffitable a ouir et notter a toutes haultes dames et autres, a qui ce puet et doit apertenir").<sup>clxxxiii</sup> Trusting that many people will already have read the previous work, Christine suggests that those who have read the letter before may pass over it now because such an excellent letter would already be inscribed in their memories. A mere reference to it should suffice to recall its lessons. While an individual recipient might save a letter as a tangible reminder of the important ideas within, such a memento would not be necessary. In this manner Christine implies that the good letter is permanent not only in writing, but also in memory.

Through such descriptions, Christine shapes the way her audience should read letters and demonstrates that letters have extraordinary power to advise and to persuade effectively, but only if used properly. In this fashion, she signals her command over the epistolary genre itself, and so claims women's indisputable right to participate in epistolary exchanges. When Carmentis devised the alphabet, she established the foundation of all written knowledge and communication. By taking control of the epistolary genre through her descriptions and comments, Christine follows her foremother's example. Just as a woman's invention enabled the history of writing letters, so now a woman shows people the right way to read and to write those letters.

## Conclusions

In a final note on Christine's letters, Nadia Margolis asks why Christine's famous *Ditié de Jehanne D'Arc* is not written in epistolary form, especially since Christine's contemporary, Alain Chartier, did choose the letter to celebrate the successes of the Maid of Orléans.<sup>clxxxiv</sup> But Christine's choosing the *ditié*, or tale, instead of the letter for Joan's story does not negate the importance of her relationship with the epistolary genre. The immense significance of Joan's triumphant defeat over the English invaders precluded the need for letters. In her previous works, Christine had employed the letter precisely because of the flexibility of its conventions and the authority of its traditions. To praise Joan, typifying as she did the best of Christine's claims for women, Christine no longer needed the additional support that the epistolary genre could provide.

Scholars generally agree that the *Ditié* represents Christine's unexpected return from retirement: her joy over Joan's deeds virtually demanded her song of praise after she had concluded her career. For Christine's last word on the epistolary genre, therefore, we should look not to her final letter, *L'epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, but rather an embedded letter placed at the beginning of her contemplative work, *Les heures de contemplation sur la Passion de Nostre-Seigneur*, or *The Hours of Contemplation on the Passion of Our Lord*.<sup>clxxxv</sup> Written sometime during Christine's retirement in the abbey at Poissy, this work is a book of hours on the subject of the Passion of Christ. Significantly, Christine's dedicatory letter indicates that women in particular will find the text useful; the poignant images of Mary at the foot of the cross and the presence of the Magdalene at the tomb help to mark the importance of women's reactions to Christ's death and suggest that, in meditating on these images, Christine's readers can join the

biblical women in weeping for Christ. At the outset of the work, Christine explains that her pity for women has led her to write this text; therefore, she sends all women a letter to direct them to the work. Thus, in the tradition of *Lamentacion sur les maux de la guerre civile* and *L'epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, Christine writes a letter that creates a community of women readers.

In the letter from *Les Heures*, Christine prescribes meditation using her text to alleviate the grief and pain felt by women. Describing the *Heures* as “outstanding medicine,” the letter shows Christine’s audience how to read the work and why it is important. She explains that in order to use the letter well, her readers must contemplate “the pains and griefs suffered for us so patiently by the King of Heaven, Creator of all things, in His very holy and worthy humanity.” The *Heures* will teach patience and give her audience spiritual guidance if they read properly. Such instructions necessitate the letter’s presence at the outset of the *Heures* in order to ensure that women receive the full benefits of the remedy Christine has prescribed.

Although Christine marks Frenchwomen as in especial need of such remedy, her letter generously embraces all women, “to you my ladies and young ladies, and in general to all of the feminine sex, to whom this [letter] can belong and touch,” (“a vous mes dames et damoiselles, et generalement toutes du feminin sexe, a qui ce peut appartenir et touchier”). The work opens with a short third-person narrative of Christine’s decision to write for women out of pity: “that is, [pity] places at this opening, the present letter addressed to [women],” (“et pour ce, met a son principe le present epistre adressant a icelles”). Only a letter will work to call women’s attention to the *Heures*; a good letter, according to Christine’s principles, will reach its audience and impress its subject matter

upon them.

Significantly, this letter links all of Christine's previous writing to the *Heures*. Christine explains that "For you, who in various ways have been cast down, especially in this kingdom of France, both through the death of friends by various events, and through other losses: exile, displacements, and many other hardships and dreadful periods. For that, my aforesaid ladies, I continue my previous writings in which I have already spoken to you about these same matters," ("vous a en divers cas couru sus, par especial en cestui royaulme de France, tant de mort d'amis par pluseurs accidens, comme de toutes autres pertes: exil, dechacemens et maintes autres durtés et horribles perilz. Pour tant, mes dessus dictes maistresses, en continuant mes autres escriptures passées autrefois adressans à vous, au meisme propos).” Christine's references to exile and the loss of loved ones clearly point to the same political strife she had addressed in *L'epistre à la royne*, *L'epistre de la prison de vie humaine*, and *Lamentacion sur les maux de la guerre civile*. In the *Heures*, Christine continues her earlier efforts to counsel and guide the women of France. Although she explains that she has already written much of profit to women, she now writes this work inspired by Holy Scripture because women's need is greater than ever.

Claiming divine inspiration for the work is only part of Christine's authorial strategy; like so many of her earlier letters, in the dedicatory letter to *Heures*, Christine crafts a blend of personae designed to enhance her authority on the subject and persuade her audience to read further. In addition to the spiritual subject, Christine positions herself once more as the humble servant, "vostre servante" who seeks only to assist the women of France in their grief over political turmoil and war. At the same time, she

emphasizes her scholarship, underscoring that she has translated scripture from Latin into French, “put into the form of the reading of the Hours, according to the texts of Sacred History and the words of several holy doctors, arranged in such a way that they can be the themes of meditation.” Unlike the Christine who merely “glossed” the *Othea*, this Christine, writing at the conclusion of her literary career, confidently proclaims her control of the text and her ability to synthesize the works of previous *auctores* and distill sacred texts into a form easily accessible to women’s use.

Christine’s final letter follows the epistolary rhetoric she had devised in *Trois vertus*, the *Duc des vrais amans*, and *Othea*; it directs readers how to read. Through this letter, Christine addresses a diverse audience and creates a multi-layered persona that can convey both humility and confidence. Most important, it exemplifies Christine’s attempts to incorporate women’s concerns in her political and religious commentary.

In carving out a space for women in the previously male humanist tradition of correspondence, Christine de Pizan proves women’s capacity for scholarly argument and moral advice. Her example justifies women’s participation in serious political situations, especially through the medium of the letter. Through her epistles both historical and fictional, Christine re-fashions the epistolary tradition to include a place for women’s voices and claim the authority of the letter as their own.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**“By the hand of your lovyng suster Mary:”**  
**Letters, Literature, and Politics in Early Tudor England**

Christine de Pizan’s reputation for scholarship had extended into England during her life and her work remained popular there through the sixteenth-century. Among the many members of the nobility familiar with her work was Lady Margaret Beaufort, whose extensive collection of books included a copy of Christine’s *Epistre d’Othea*.<sup>clxxxvi</sup> Records of her son King Henry VII’s library indicate that he possessed three copies of the *Othea* in his holdings at Richmond.<sup>clxxxvii</sup> Even if the Tudor royal family were unaware of the specific political allegories Christine created with the work’s original manuscript illustrations, they knew that the *Othea* represented a woman’s letter of advice to princes and that through the *Othea* Christine claimed women’s ability to write serious letters capable of influencing important political situations. Henry’s youngest daughter Mary would take that lesson to heart, using letters rhetorically to advance her own ambitions. For Mary, letters were an avenue to power she would use all of her life, but she wrote her most crucial series of epistles in the aftermath of the scandal of her second marriage, when her decision to marry a man of her own choosing left both of them in considerable peril.<sup>clxxxviii</sup>

When Mary, defying the conventions of the period, insisted that her elder brother Henry VIII honor his promise to let her marry “wer as my mynd ys,” after the death of her first husband King Louis XII of France left her a young widow, she made a choice that quite literally left alliances between England, France, and Spain hanging in the balance.<sup>clxxxix</sup> In secretly wedding an English nobleman named Charles Brandon, the

duke of Suffolk, Mary not only initiated an international scandal, but also thwarted Henry's plans to use her to further consolidate his political power in Europe by marrying her to Charles V of Spain or Emperor Maximilian. Yet Mary, through her letters, managed to soothe Henry's considerable ire over her defiance and win his ultimate approval of the match. Her choice of the epistolary genre as a means of persuading Henry was born not merely out of necessity, but out of her awareness that letters were a powerful political tool that women could employ to shape their responses to events and further their own ambitions.

For Mary, that awareness stemmed from literary representations of women's letter-writing that portray the letter as an extension of the self, a message that could travel where the sender could not and speak when the sender was unable to do so. Fictional letters in works by Ovid, Chaucer, Malory, and Froissart explore the relationship a letter creates between the sender and the recipient and the dangers of a letter's forgery or interception. In this chapter, I argue that Mary's letters were influenced by the nuances of such fictional epistolary concerns and that her interaction with fictional letters gives her models for her own correspondence.

Too often, Mary's biographers have depicted her as an hysterical woman whose weeping and pleading eventually persuaded her brother to give in to her antics. They read her letters as fact, instead of recognizing that her letters are rhetorically crafted to represent herself and her ideas in the best possible fashion. This idea that historical letters have a fictive or literary quality is no longer revolutionary. Scholars like Margreta de Grazia and Arthur Marotti have helped to challenge traditional categories of "history" and "fiction."<sup>CXC</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis has extensively analyzed the ways that people

shaped their renditions of events in their requests for pardon, while Sara Jayne Steen has noted that women play multiple roles in their letters as they interact with their audiences.<sup>cxci</sup> To read Mary's letters as precise historical record is to ignore the extent to which she shapes her letters to her own advantage.

What is significant is that Mary herself was conscious that the letter was a fiction of sorts; the epistolary examples she knew, whether from her own experience or through her reading, clearly shape their own conception of truth to influence their reader's emotions or opinions. Such awareness only confirms the need to analyze Mary's letters as the complex rhetorical arguments they are. Such analysis can reveal much about the influence of reading on writing as well as about women's literary activity in early sixteenth-century England.

Mary's letter-writing is of particular note because it is possible to trace much of her reading material and hence to track the influence of her reading on her letters, which contain sophisticated rhetorical arguments that reveal a deft attention to audience.<sup>cxcii</sup> Addressed to her brother Henry VIII and then-Archbishop Wolsey, these letters, most of which survive in the British Library's Cotton collection, represent Mary's response to the politics of marriage in early modern Europe and thus they also have important implications for our understanding of women's political involvement in the early sixteenth century.<sup>cxciiii</sup> Therefore, after detailing the circumstances of her marriages, I examine Mary's attention to her audience and her rhetorical strategies; I then study the various ways that literary depictions of letter-writing influenced her letters. Finally, in light of Mary's education and experience, I consider the implications of her decision to wed Brandon as a conscious political choice.



## Marriage Scandal

When Mary had agreed to marry Louis, she first exacted a promise from her brother Henry that she be allowed to choose her second husband after Louis's death. Given his age and ill health, the Tudor siblings knew well that Louis could pass away at any time. Mary's letters to Henry suggest, moreover, that they both understood that she preferred his best friend, Charles Brandon, the duke of Suffolk.<sup>cxiv</sup> Even during her farewell to Henry immediately before leaving for France, she secured Henry's promise yet again, as she later reminded him in her letters: "I beshiche yowr grace that yow wel kype all the promises that yow promest me wane I take my leffe of yow be the w[ater s]yde."<sup>cxv</sup>

The French people welcomed Mary to Paris with extensive pageantry celebrating her role in making peace between England and France. Louis seems to have been delighted with his bride; not only did he shower her generously with jewels, but his last letter to Henry also praises Mary effusively: "[Mary] has hitherto conducted herself, and still does every day, towards me, in such manner that I cannot but be delighted with her, and love and honour her more and more each day; and you may be assured that I do, and ever shall, so treat her, as to give both you and her perfect satisfaction."<sup>cxvi</sup> Louis's happiness was short lived; he died a mere three months after Mary's arrival in France.

The death of Louis and the accession of François I threw the political alliance between England and France into disarray, with Mary emerging as pawn to multiple factions. Immediately before Louis's decease, Henry's chief minister, then-Archbishop Thomas Wolsey, perceiving the possible dangers of Mary contracting herself with a

French nobleman, had written to warn her: “I moste humbly beseech the same nevyr to do any thyng but by the Advyse of hys grace [Henry] whom in all thinges is [obscured]... And yf Any mocions of maryage or other fortune to be mad onto yow in no wyse geve heryng to them. And this don ye shalt not fayle to have the kyng fast and lovyng to yow and to Ateyne to yow [obscured] desyre.”<sup>cxcvii</sup> If she obeys Henry, Wolsey promises never to forsake her and to help her to return home and attain the “[acomp]plyshement of yowr desyre.” One can assume that he meant the marriage with Brandon.

In certain respects Wolsey was wise to warn the young widow, since François immediately began to cast around for a French marriage for the dowager queen, thus keeping her dower revenues in France and preventing Henry from forming an alliance elsewhere through Mary’s hand. Mary wrote back to Wolsey indignantly, “wher as yow a vyse me that I shulde macke no promas, my lord I trust the kyng my brother & yow wold nat reken in me souche chyld hode. I trust I have so horderd my selfe so sens that I came hether that I trust yt hath ben to the honar of the kyng my brother & me sens I came hether & so I trust to conteneu.”<sup>cxcviii</sup> In mentioning the accomplishment of her desires, Wolsey may also have been warning Mary against contracting a marriage with Brandon, who was sent to Paris to negotiate not only her return, but also as much of her revenue and jewels as possible. To forestall any possible ambitions on Brandon’s part, Henry made the nobleman promise not to contract himself to Mary before allowing him to leave for France.<sup>cxcix</sup> It seems that Henry did not dream that Brandon, whose station depended wholly on the king’s favor, would disobey him. Mary herself claimed that she feared that Brandon might have been sent to lure her home to England, only to find that Henry would marry her elsewhere.<sup>cc</sup>

There were several matches that Henry could choose for Mary's second marriage. Brandon and the other ambassadors reported that rumors in the French court spoke of a marriage with the Duke of Lorraine.<sup>cci</sup> Other suitors included Charles III, the Duke of Savoy, John of Portugal, William of Bavaria, even Charles of Castile and the Emperor Maximilian.<sup>ccii</sup> Further gossip surrounded the new French king's own intentions. Mary repeatedly claims that François had been importuning her in her bedchambers, implying that he acted on his own behalf. She writes Henry on February 15, 1515 that she had to tell François about her desire for Brandon lest he harm Brandon from jealousy, or worse, resume his former "fantasy & sutes."<sup>cciii</sup> Maria Perry points out that there was more than sufficient pretext for François to divorce Claude and marry Mary.<sup>cciv</sup>

Ultimately, Mary took control of the situation. When Brandon arrived in Paris, she issued him this ultimatum: marry her within the next four days or lose her forever. He acceded to her wishes, and they were married privately in a ceremony witnessed by François and select members of the French court. While Mary had achieved her own wishes, she now faced the formidable task of soothing the wrath of her older brother, a brother who might have loved her dearly, but who would later execute two of his own wives. Moreover, her new husband had committed a capital offense in wedding her without her brother's permission, especially since Henry had no male heir as yet. Facing a genuine threat, Mary desperately needed to obtain the king's pardon for Brandon and herself. Using the letter to communicate events to Henry or his council or Wolsey, she paints a picture in the manner most advantageous to her position, highlighting her role in the marriage or downplaying Brandon's at need. The rhetorical dexterity she displays in her letters testifies to her proficiency in shaping her version of events.

## The Rhetoric of Epistolary Self-Fashioning

In the Christmas season of 1516, William Cornish and the children of the Chapel Royal played “ye storry of troylous and pandor,” a choice of subject that underscores the popularity of Chaucer’s story of Troilus and Criseyde at the Henrician court.<sup>ccv</sup> Letters play a vital role in *Troilus and Criseyde*; Chaucer uses letters as plot devices to introduce the couple to one another, to illustrate their continuing affection, to add verisimilitude to the story, and to indicate the end of the affair. Over the course of the poem, Chaucer depicts the letter as a connection between sender and recipient and as a measure of the sender’s investment in a relationship, ideas that recur throughout Mary’s correspondence with her brother Henry.<sup>ccvi</sup>

Both Troilus and Criseyde struggle to write letters that will create a precise impression on one another, and in their first epistolary exchange, each crafts a specific image of the relationship. After absorbing a litany of advice from Pandarus and saying a prayer for guidance, Troilus writes a letter exalting Criseyde as “his righte lady.../ His hertes life, his lust, his sorwes leche” and humbling himself as of “litel worth.”<sup>ccvii</sup> Such terms of endearment suggest that some connection between them already exists, and he invites her to excuse his boldness in writing, to take pity on him, and to accept his concept of the relationship. For her part, Criseyde decides that his letter is well-written, but she rejects the intimacy he proposes, writing that “She nolde nought, ne make hireselven bonde, / In love; but as his suster, hym to plesse.”<sup>ccviii</sup> Both writers define their association differently and use their letters to give life to their individual visions.

Just as Troilus and Criseyde do, Mary manipulates epistolary conventions to fashion a specific relationship with her brother throughout their correspondence. All of

her letters work to position Henry as loving brother and Mary as his loyal, loving sister. She depicts Henry in the manner she wants him to behave and reminds him constantly of the image of herself she wants him to consider. All of the earliest letters after Louis's death open with salutations such as, "[mine o]wn good and most kynde brother," "most kynd and lovyng [brother]," "My most dear and most entirely beloved brother."<sup>ccix</sup> In addition, Mary also shows him what behavior she expects of him in the future. In effect, she is telling him that if he acts in accordance with her wishes as described in the letter, he will fulfill his role as a kind and loving brother. She is scripting the role she wants him to play, a tactic she uses throughout the course of the letters. In fact, in one letter she beseeches Henry "to be goode lorde and brother to me" no less than five separate times.<sup>ccx</sup> Such repetition underscores the importance of her need for Henry to act as she hopes, for if he reacts badly, it could mean disaster for Brandon and herself. Through such greetings and appeals, Mary reminds Henry of his real affection for his youngest sister.

Furthermore, letter writers in the sixteenth-century would have expected a secondary audience, that people other than the addressee would read a particular message; letters were thus to some degree always public, especially those letters written to the king. Wolsey almost certainly read every letter Mary sent, and other councilors might also have seen her words. Mary was undoubtedly familiar with such practices, and writes her letters with both audiences in mind. Emphasizing her status as Henry's sister reminds the secondary audience that she has a certain power, the influence she wields through the king's affection for her and the status she maintains as a potential heir (or mother of heirs) to the throne. Moreover, salutations that praised Henry so effusively

serve to establish in writing a permanent record that Henry is a good brother to her. Mary offers this testimony as a further gift for Henry that flatters his vanity, since he knew well that other people would read her tribute to his fraternal love. Such gestures mattered in an age where people expected their letters to act as public performance as well as private communication.

Mary's closing signatures tell Henry how to read Mary herself. Her references to "yowr lowyng Marie," "yowr humbel and lovyng suster Mary quene of france," "yowr lovyng suster and trowe sarvante Mary Quene of france," and "by yowr lovyng and most humble sister Mary" underscore her love and loyalty to Henry.<sup>ccxi</sup> Closings such as "trowe sarvante" not only affirm Mary's commitment to her brother, but they also suggest that she has served Henry in the past by marrying Louis. Although Mary emphasizes her humility, her signatures also accentuate her status as queen of France, for which she merits respect. Using her title thus reminds Henry that she has fulfilled her side of their bargain by the waterside and implies that Henry should now reciprocate.

These salutations and signatures are not merely *pro forma* demonstrations that Mary is familiar with epistolary conventions, though they do function in that manner. Rather, the specific form she chooses fashions the roles she and Henry will play in this epistolary relationship. The importance of this rhetorical construction of reader and sender is demonstrated through the letters' revisions. For example, in a draft of a formal letter to Henry, one which was probably intended for public reading to his council and corrected by Wolsey, Mary herself emphasizes the bonds of affection between herself and Henry in the salutation, but Wolsey's corrections change that emphasis to one of humility alone.<sup>ccxii</sup> For instance, he alters her opening sentence "in most tender and

loving manner possible” to “in most humble manner.” Like Mary, Wolsey seems to have understood that the salutation set the tone of the letter. No part of the letter was exempt from scrutiny, since each contributes to the effectiveness of the overall argument.

Although Mary carefully portrays Henry in a positive light throughout the course of the letters, casting Henry in such a role conflicts with her oft-repeated argument that she married Brandon because she was afraid, afraid that she was being deceived, afraid that she would never be allowed to marry as she chose, afraid that Henry would break his promises to her. It is impossible to reconcile such fear with her account of Henry as the good and loving brother, in whom “al my trowst ys yn ...and so shale be dewring my lyfe.”<sup>ccxiii</sup> Having placed Henry in the role of her benefactor, almost her savior, Mary needed a fall guy, as it were, and she found it in Henry’s Privy Council. She cast blame for her fears on a powerful group of Brandon’s noble rivals, especially the Duke of Norfolk, who hated Brandon with a passion. Accordingly, she tells Henry that she preferred to “put me yn yowr marcy acomplyschyng the maryage thanne to put me yn t[the o]rder of yowr concell.” Above all, she assures him, she did not act so swiftly out of any “synswale Apend[ite], [sensual appetite],” but out of fear that Henry’s council “wolde never [con]cente to the maryge betewn [my] sayde lord and me.”<sup>ccxiv</sup> Such characterization preserves Henry’s status as the reasonable, trustworthy brother, while simultaneously suggesting he not be ruled by his councilors, but instead that he act independently. Thus in effect, she creates a situation in which Henry would act from a position of even greater power; granting mercy to her and Brandon against the advice of his council would demonstrate the strength of Henry’s rule.

Mary’s letters reveal her ability to influence her brother through appeals to his

affection, politics, practicality, reputation, and above all, economics. Written between Louis's death and the marriage to Brandon, one of Mary's letters to Henry demonstrates several of these appeals. First, through her customary opening, "most kynd and lovyng brother," she tenderly recalls his affection for her and then begs that he remember his promise regarding her marriage: "I be shiche yowr grace that yow wel kype all the promises that yow promest me wane [when] I take my leffe of yow be [by] the water syde."<sup>ccxv</sup> Despite the initial humble tone, by the end of the letter, her gentle words change to bold threats should he not accede to her request to marry Brandon. She reminds him that "yowr grace knowethe well that y ded mary for yowr pleasure at thys tym and now I trost that you wel sowfor me to [marry as me liketh for] to do."<sup>ccxvi</sup> Then, she pleads for him to

be good lord and brother to me, for sere, [Sire] and yf yowr grace wol hav graunted me maryde yn onny place savyng wer as my mynd is, I wel be ther wer as your grace nowr no othyr shal have any goye [joy] of me, for I promise yowr grace yow shal her that I wel be yn some relygeious howse, the whiche I thyncke yowr grace wole be very sory of and yowr reme [realm].

In effect Mary blackmails Henry: if he does not hold to his promise, as any good king and brother would, she will enter a convent. All of her language is couched in terms of Henry's concern for her, yet her implied threat is strong; should she enter the convent, he would lose control over her dower and the chance for any benefits that might derive from her marriage, including the possibility of additional heirs to the throne. Mary even reminds Henry that the realm itself would disapprove of his forcing her to make such a



choice. With this peculiar threat, perhaps Mary means that Henry's reputation would be damaged if people knew that his pressure on her to marry drove her to a convent, or that the people have an interest in her happiness as well as the benefits and prestige her marriage might bring them. In this, Mary may be appealing to the popularity she possessed as a princess whom poets celebrated as bringing peace between England and France.

Such a reference to her popularity demonstrates how Mary carefully fashions her own identity in these letters. She attends to her reputation when she argues adamantly that she did not act precipitately out of carnal desire, or "synswale Apend[ite]," but rather out of fear that the marriage would be forbidden.<sup>ccxvii</sup> When she attempts to soothe matters between herself and Henry, she reminds him that, "I have obtaynede as mych honowre in thys Raym [as] was possybele to any woman."<sup>ccxviii</sup> Although she frequently humbles herself to Henry, she still takes pride in her own reputation and influence.

Another letter that Mary wrote before her marriage to Brandon attempts to win Henry's approval via a different means, by invoking his responsibility to protect her and preserve her reputation. In this letter she describes how she has been forced to tell the new king of France, François I, of her preference for Brandon, and she begs that Henry will confirm his intentions to let her marry the duke; otherwise François will continue to plague her: "I humbly besche [beseech] your grace to conseder, yn case ye make deffycoulte [difficulty] to condescend to the promesys [promises as I] wyche [wish], the frenche kyng [will] take nown [new] courage to renew hys suttes to me, assuryng yow that I hade rather to be out of the world thyn yt so shold hapyne [happen]."<sup>ccxix</sup> Mary affirms that by honoring his promise, Henry will prevent her from being harassed by the

French king. As a would-be chivalric king, Henry is doubly bound to protect her, since she is both his sister and a widow.

After Mary decided not to rely on her brother's chivalry and proceeded with the marriage to Brandon, she then had to calm Henry's considerable ire. Soon after her marriage, Mary sent two letters to Henry: the first was a holograph letter addressed to the king; the second, which survives only in a draft corrected by Wolsey, was a formal defense of her actions, possibly intended for Henry's council. Each letter presents her situation in a different fashion according to the audience; both ask for clemency, but the holograph version makes a strong appeal to Henry's emotions, while illustrating Mary's understanding of English politics and her brother's temperament. In the holograph letter, she is initially humble and contrite: "I wile not yn any wyse denye but that I have offndyd yowr grace for the wyche I do put my selefe [self] most humbly in yowr clemens and marcy."<sup>CCXX</sup> After Mary makes the requisite apology, her rhetoric shifts gears as she assures Henry that she forced Brandon to take action:

I knowe wele that I constrayned [hym] to breke syche promesses as [he] made yowr grace as wele for fere of leesyng of me as allso that I assrtinned hyme that by thyre consent [the council's] I wolde never [come] yn to Englonde, and nowe that yowr grace knowythe the boothe offenses, of the wyche I have bene the only occasyone, most humbly & as yowr most sorrofowle swster requereryng you to have compassyon apone us boothe and to pardon our offenses.

Mary tells Henry that the full responsibility lies with her, and then she calls on his fraternal affection to mitigate his anger.

The composition of the second letter, which survives only as a draft, reflects a careful negotiation between Mary and Wolsey over how to present her appeal.<sup>ccxxi</sup>

Wolsey had gone to Dover when Mary and Brandon reached Calais and he sent his secretary Brian Tuke to Mary in order to draft her formal case; Tuke then brought the letter back to Wolsey for his approval. Wolsey added and deleted several sentences, then Tuke presumably made a fair copy for Mary to sign and send to Henry, although that version is not extant. Although Mary directed the original draft, a letter complete in itself, Tuke left considerable space between each line to allow Wolsey room to alter Mary's words.<sup>ccxxii</sup> Early modern letter writers frequently requested another person's help in drafting important letters; Mary knew as she dictated that Wolsey would make changes, but she would have approved the final draft with her signature.<sup>ccxxiii</sup>

Both the original and the corrected versions of the letter rehearse the full matter of Mary's marriage much more formally, with a clear recognition on her part that it presents her case to the world. Here, Mary details the circumstances of her first marriage, reminding the readers of Louis's age and decrepitude. But the original letter emphasizes that she married at Henry's request, foregrounding the fact that:

at suche tyme as ye first moved me to mariage, Sire, my lorde and late  
husband kyng loys of ffraunce, whose soule our lorde have in his mercy,  
shewing unto me the grete weale of peax [peace] whiche shulde ensue of  
the same. Though I understode that he was verray aged and sikely,  
[sickly] yet for the helping forthe of good peax I was contented and upon  
yor said mocion and desire I made you this answerre: that I coude be  
contented and aggreable to the said mariage.

Wolsey trims the references to Henry's instigation of the affair, emphasizing the good the marriage brought:

where as for the good of peax and for the furtherance of yor affayres ye moved me to marye with my lorde and late husband king loys of fraunce whose soule god pardon. Though I understode that he was verray aged and sikely [sickly] yet for the advauncement of the said peace, and for the furtheraunce of your causes, I was contented to conforme my self to your said mocion.

The letter thus reminds Henry and his council that Mary has sacrificed herself for their cause, and both versions suggest that it was Mary's marriage that effected peace between the two nations.

After prompting Henry to remember her service, Mary reminds him of his promise, that "if I shulde fortune to overlive the said late king, I mygt with yor good wil frely chose and despose my self to any other mariage at my libertie, withoute any sute labor yor displeasure." Mary argues that she otherwise would never have agreed to the first marriage, and that Henry knows she has always had a mind to Brandon, whom he himself has favored until this time. What is interesting is that Wolsey deletes the reference to "without any sute." Mary claims that she had complete liberty to choose Brandon without consulting Henry at all.<sup>ccxxiv</sup> Wolsey may have believed this too incredible a claim for her to make.

When Mary moves from recounting the past to assessing the present, her rhetorical appeal shifts direction. She underscores her love for Brandon and her resolve to wed him:

So it is brother as ye wel knowe I have always born good mynde towardes my lorde of Suffolk and hym as the cace doth nowe requyre with me I can love before al other, and upon hym I have perfetely set my mynde, settled and determynd. And upon the good comferte whiche I have that ye wil observe your promyse, I shal playnly certefy you that of your said promyse the mater is so farre forthe that for no cause erthely I will or may varye or change from the same. And of me and of myne own towardnes and mynde only hathe it proceded.

Crossing out Mary's words and substituting new phrases above them, Wolsey substitutes several lines exculpating Brandon completely:

remembering the grete vertues whiche I have seen and perceyved hertofore in my lorde of Suffolk, to whom I have always ben of good mynde as ye wel knowe. I have affixed and clerey determynd my self to mary with hym and the same [I] assure you hath proceded onely myn own mynde, withoute any request or labor of my said lorde of Suffolk or of any other person. And to be playn with your grace I have so bounde my self unto him that for no cause erthely I wol or may varye or change from the same.

Mary's language maintains her responsibility for the union and underscores her declarations of love for Brandon and her trust that Henry will keep his promise, but Wolsey omits her affectionate assertions. Yet in both the original and corrected drafts Mary's determination remains clear.

The climax of Mary's appeal in this letter reveals the extent of her knowledge of

her brother's motivations. Expressing her confidence in Henry's love for her, Mary tells him that she has entered his jurisdiction in Calais, where she waits for his word. She then satisfies his greed, offering to give him much of the wealth she had obtained in France. But where Mary promises to give Henry a yearly sum from her French dower revenues and "al the hoole dote [dowry] whiche I have founde the meanes to recover as largely as it was delivered with me and besides also to geve unto you the half of al suche plate of gold and jewlys...of my said late husband," Wolsey alters a crucial word, changing "half" to "all" the gold plate and jewels.<sup>ccxxv</sup> In effect, he rejects her initial bid and makes a counteroffer. Although the final version of this letter is not extant, Mary's official grant to Henry does survive, where she confirms the gift of *all* the gold plate but reserves some jewelry, offering Henry the "choysse of syche spessyale jewelles as my sede late howsbande kyng of france gaufe me."<sup>ccxxvi</sup> In making this offer, Mary knew her brother well; her letter appeals to Henry's love and his integrity, but above all, to his pockets. Apparently it was this letter (and promise) that finally moved Henry to forgiveness, since the couple were invited to return to England to celebrate their wedding publicly.

### **Education of a Tudor Princess**

Mary's rhetorical acuity most likely stems from her encounters with the epistolary culture of her society, not any advanced education in classical rhetoric. Although like all the Tudor children, she was well taught, there is no indication that Mary was the accomplished scholar her nieces Mary I and Elizabeth or her granddaughter Jane Grey would later be.<sup>ccxxvii</sup> As the third daughter born to Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, Mary was educated with future matrimonial alliances in mind. Raised at Eltham with the

future Henry VIII, Mary would most likely have had access to Henry's tutors, including the poet John Skelton, though records also indicate she had a schoolmaster of her own in her entourage.<sup>ccxxviii</sup> Mary was fluent in French; she had been introduced to French conversation at the age of five, and in 1512, she studied under John Palsgrave, who would later write the much-celebrated French textbook *L'Esclaircissement de la langue francoyse*, in order to perfect her knowledge of the language.<sup>ccxxix</sup> Moreover, she almost certainly knew Latin.<sup>ccxxx</sup>

Mary was also thoroughly trained in courtly arts such as dancing and music. Sharon Michalove, discussing children's education at court, notes that it "consisted of two parts—*noriture* and *letrure*. *Noriture* consisted of etiquette, athletics, dancing, music, the composition of poetry, and other artistic and physical achievements. *Lettrure* stressed reading and writing in French, English, and Latin, the study of practical rather than imaginative literature, and fostered the study of grammar and history."<sup>ccxxxi</sup> Connections made at court through such shared activities would serve aristocratic children well later on, providing the basis for networks of influence and favor so vital to success at the Tudor court.

It was in the courtly endeavors, Michalove's *noriture*, that Mary excelled. When Philip and Joanna of Castile were blown off course and forced to land in England in 1506, Henry VII determined to use the occasion to demonstrate England's worth as an ally and welcomed the royal couple with extravagant hospitality.<sup>ccxxxii</sup> Mary, who had been proposed for the hand of Charles, Philip and Joanna's son (afterwards Emperor Charles V) was similarly on display. One of the herald chroniclers records how Mary danced for Philip several times, following which "my Lady Mary played on the lute, and

after upon the claregalls, who played very well, and she was of all folks there greatly praised, that in her youth, in everything, she behaved herself so very well.”<sup>ccxxxiii</sup> The importance of this favorable impression soon became apparent; negotiations for her marriage with Charles, Prince of Castile, soon resumed and one year later, in 1507, a treaty confirmed the betrothal, which took place the following spring. Though young, Mary possessed considerable worth on the marriage market; her personal achievements enhanced that value, a connection of which she herself could hardly escape being aware.

In truth, Mary’s education was threefold in nature; besides her intellectual activities and courtly arts, she was also trained in household management. Long before classical study in Latin became accepted for girls, they were educated to manage their households and lands. As Michalove observes, “A classical education might be a nice accomplishment, but knowing about provisioning, attending to the illnesses of the household, protecting the estates in the absence of fathers, brothers, and husbands, and dealing with legal matters were vital to the smooth running of estates.”<sup>ccxxxiv</sup> Mary’s grandmother Margaret Beaufort had made certain that she received a thorough education in household administration, perhaps even teaching her granddaughter rudimentary medicine.<sup>ccxxxv</sup> Certainly Mary knew embroidery and probably plain sewing; years later, Juan Luis Vives would write of the importance of teaching girls “to handle wolle and flaxe” in his *De Institutione Foeminae Christianae*, or *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, translated by Richard Hyrde in 1529.<sup>ccxxxvi</sup> Such skills were considered of utmost importance to ensure that girls were brought up to be womanly and modest, but still be effective managers of their husband’s property.

Yet Margaret Beaufort’s influence on young Mary did not stop with household



activities. A well-known scholar, patron of learning and proponent of education, Margaret supervised the education of her Tudor grandchildren; through Margaret, Mary would have been exposed to the popular secular and devotional works of the day.<sup>ccxxxvii</sup> For Margaret as well as for her son Henry VII and grandson Henry VIII, literature served as a means of teaching chivalry.<sup>ccxxxviii</sup> Such beliefs led them to collect a wide range of romances, chronicles, and religious texts in their libraries. As John Guy notes, “Henry’s [VII’s] library contained few English or Latin works but was filled with French vernacular writings###the works of Froissart, Chartier, Christine de Pisan, and others. Prose romances were well represented along with French translations of classical texts.”<sup>ccxxxix</sup>

Margaret’s will indicates her ownership of some specific books. In addition to a variety of devotional texts, Margaret possessed Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, a volume of Gower, (perhaps the *Confessio Amantis*), the *Siege of Troy*, a volume of Boccaccio, a ‘french book’ prefaced by Genesis, and a volume of Froissart’s *Chronicles*.<sup>ccxl</sup> Furthermore, she also owned “a prynted booke which is callid Magna carta in frensch”<sup>ccxli</sup> Additionally, Margaret herself received books as bequests. Her mother-in-law, Anne Neville, had left her a copy of *Legenda Sanctorum*, a book of saints’ lives (translated into English) as well as a French translation of the Latin poet Lucan’s works.<sup>ccxlii</sup> In 1472, Anne Vere bequeathed Margaret a copy of Christine de Pizan’s *Epistre d’Othea*.<sup>ccxliii</sup> This collection indicates the kind of books that the reading community to which Mary belonged would have read.

Although there is no independent record of books owned by Mary, one of the best records of the books with which she was familiar comes from John Palsgrave’s French

textbook, *Lesclaircissement de la langue francoyse*, published in 1530. In 1512, Palsgrave had been hired as Mary's French instructor in preparation for her departure to the continent as Princess of Castile; he later accompanied Mary to France as her secretary when she married Louis XII in 1514.<sup>ccxliiv</sup> At some point after beginning his work with Mary, he began writing *Lesclaircissement*. In his dedicatory epistle to Henry VIII, Palsgrave declares that he is:

Desirous to do some humble service unto the nobilite of this victorious realme, and universally unto all other estates of this my natyfe country, after I was commaunded by your most redouted hyghnesse to instruct the right excellent princes, your most dere and most entirely beloved suster quene Mary douagier of France in the frenche tonge.<sup>ccxlv</sup>

He then notes that Mary and Charles Brandon encouraged him to continue his work after he showed them *Lesclaircissement*'s first two books on pronunciation and on grammar; their support led him to complete a third volume which greatly expanded sections on grammar and vocabulary.<sup>ccxlvii</sup>

A written record of Palsgrave's teaching, *Lesclaircissement* frequently employs examples from medieval literature to illustrate grammatical constructions. As a result, the references in this textbook provide an excellent starting place for identifying works that Mary would have known. Gabriele Stein notes that Palsgrave's references to English authors like Chaucer and Lydgate make *Lesclaircissement* "a social document reflecting the literary tastes of the early sixteenth century."<sup>ccxlviii</sup> Although Palsgrave often omits the source of his English examples, with the exception of the *Canterbury Tales*, he almost always names the French work; there are plentiful examples of lengthy quotations from

Jean Lemaire de Belges's *Epistres de l'amant vert* and *Les illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troye*, Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*, and Octovien de Saint-Gelais's translation of Ovid's *Heroides*. The popularity of these works at the French and Burgundian courts underscores the likelihood that Mary would be familiar with them.<sup>ccxlviii</sup>

Through these texts, Mary would receive an education that enabled her to converse with her peers and impress her listeners with her wit, intelligence, and charm. These texts would also expose her to a variety of fictional letters that represented the complex relationship between a letter and its sender and recipient. Many of these works depicted letters as having extraordinary power to influence political situations, models Mary would not forget when she faced the political dilemma caused by her second marriage.

### **Reading Letters: The Influence of Fiction**

In the preface to *Blanchardyn and Eglantine*, a romance commissioned by Mary's grandmother Margaret Beaufort, William Caxton contends that the book is as appropriate an exemplum for young ladies as devotional literature would be. He offers the book for:

all vertuose yong noble gentylnen & wymmen for to rede therin, as for their passe tym...And in lykewyse for gentyl yonge ladyes and damoyseyllys, for to lerne to be stedfaste & constaunt in their parte to theym that they ones have promysed and agreed to suche as have putte their lyves ofte in Jeopardye for to playse theym to stande in grace, As it is to occupye theym and studye over moche in bokes of contemplacion.<sup>ccxlix</sup>

The book would be particularly appropriate for Mary as both education and entertainment, and given its connection to Margaret, it seems likely that Mary would have read the text, especially since she apparently favored French romances in her choice of reading material.<sup>cc1</sup> Within romances, women use letters to powerful ends; in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, Lancelot, Guinevere, Tristram, and Isoud all send letters to maintain contact with one another, to obtain advice, to gather and disseminate news, and to influence events. Isoud, who even engineers Tristram's escape from her husband's prison through letters, is an excellent example of a woman who employs letters strategically in service of her love.<sup>cc1i</sup> According to the tradition established in these romances, to emulate Isoud or Guinevere, Mary has but to pick up her pen.

Works such as Ovid's *Heroides*, Chaucer's *Troilus* and the *Canterbury Tales*, or Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, would have exposed members of the Tudor court to the idea that a letter was a channel uniquely appropriate for women, since it could travel places they could not, and speak for them in a time when women's speaking out loud was still considered at best inappropriate. Letters also abound in the romances that were widely available in both English and French, in manuscript and in print, during this period.<sup>cc1ii</sup> Authors had begun to explore the nuances of the implications of epistolary relationships and to experiment with letters as literary devices, exploring the extent to which a physical document could embody the authority and presence of its writer. Through her reading, Mary learned well both the advantages and the shortcomings of the epistolary genre.

Mary's letters reveal the interconnectedness of reading and writing letters. Many of the epistolary concerns that occupied literary writers appear in Mary's letters: the value of one's own hand, the use of the letter politically, the concern over the letter's

reliability, the performance of the letter as a public and private document, the letter as a connection, even the use of the letter as a means of scripting past events to influence future decisions. Because her letters also reflect the epistolary conventions of other historical letters, we cannot isolate what influence comes directly from her reading and what from the culture in which she lived. But fictional letters also form a part of Mary's epistolary culture; there exists an almost symbiotic relationship between historical and literary letters, in which fiction takes elements from everyday experience, and experience takes its cue from fiction. Mary's letters illustrate the strength of such connections, and while she emulated the ideas suggested in her books, ballads would later be written about her experience.<sup>ccliii</sup> Letters such as Mary's provide the opportunity to probe such connections.

According to literary traditions established by the *Heroides*, a letter was an appropriate outlet for a woman's voice. Mary would have known the text well, since Palsgrave's second most regularly cited work in *Lesclaircissement* is Octovien de Saint-Gelais's translation of Ovid's *Heroides*.<sup>ccliv</sup> Palsgrave refers to several of the epistles, including those of Penelope, Dido, Oenone, Phyllis, Medea, Hermione, and Hypermnestra, which suggest that women's letters are a means of persuasion effective where all else fails.<sup>cclv</sup> For instance, when Palsgrave quotes Penelope, he chooses lines from the opening of her letter: "seul a toys suys ayes en souvenir."<sup>cclvi</sup> The full context of this quotation is: "Puis que tu es du retour paresseux / O Ulixes de cuer tresangoisseux / Penelope ceste epistre tenvoye / Affin que tost tu te mettes en voye / Ne rescripts rien, mais pense de venir / Seule a toy suis ayes en souvenir" (vv. 1-6, "Since you are lazy in returning, O Ulysses of the much-suffering heart, Penelope sends you this letter, in order

that you will soon return. Write nothing back, but think of coming. I am keeping only you in mind.”).<sup>cclvii</sup> Penelope can only reach Ulysses via a letter, and she fully expects to do so, for her letter to travel where she herself cannot physically reach. Speaking for Penelope in the only way possible, the letter becomes a tangible reminder of all that her husband has missed. Ultimately, Penelope hopes that the letter will re-forge a connection between them, and bring him home.

Where Penelope seeks to persuade Ulysses to return to her, Dido uses her letter successfully to punish Aeneas. Palsgrave cites Dido’s letter to the Trojan prince more than any other part of the *Heroides*; on two different occasions, he calls attention to Dido’s powerful list of grievances: that she received Aeneas into her city and that she gave him her realm.<sup>cclviii</sup> This letter represents Dido’s revenge for Aeneas’s betrayal; by rehearsing their arguments and making herself an object of pity, she hopes to shame him personally and publicly, to make him feel pangs of guilt over her death and to tarnish his reputation as a noble prince. The letter itself is strongly linked to her death. As she writes, the sword he left her sits in her lap; the letter mingles with her tears and soon thereafter, her blood: “La je tescri & jai pres de ma main / Ton espee qui me occira demain / De mes larmes le piteux glaive arrouse / Qui maintenant en mon giron repose / et tost sera en lieu de pleurs et larmes / Taint de mon sang par tes rigoureux termes” (vv. 408-13). Dido’s tears enshrine her body in the letter, which itself is both her lasting memorial and the instrument of Aeneas’s punishment. Her epistolary accusations pursue him across the ocean to accuse him long after her death.

Mary would be well aware that Ulysses eventually does go home, and that the name of Aeneas is forever linked with that of Dido. In the world Ovid imagines, these

letters are successful. Although the tragic examples of these heroines might not be models to follow, Ovid's rendering of their letters remained popular for almost two millennia, sending even sixteenth-century readers the message that letters are an appropriate medium for women to use. They travel where the sender cannot herself go, and, when written well, can accomplish a woman's desires. When Mary found herself isolated in France, unable to speak to her brother in person, the Ovidian tradition of letters carrying a woman's voice across the water would make the epistolary genre a logical choice for Mary's use.

Beyond the *Heroides*, French writers who sought to console Mary after Louis's death not only address her via letters, but also write letters in her name, thus imagining her participating in epistolary activity. When Louis died, Mary went into seclusion, according to French custom, and the court alternated between preparations for mourning the previous king and crowning the new. While composing eulogies for the dead king, writers attached to the court did not neglect his bride. John Benedict Moncetto of Chatillon, vicar general of France, wrote Mary a long epistle detailing an imaginary conversation between the widowed queen and himself. Mary Ann Green describes that in this letter, "Mary expresses her doubts of the wisdom of Providence, particularly referring to the death of good men," quotes scholarly authority, and proclaims her great sorrow, only to be answered with Moncetto's sermons on the griefs of Jesus Christ and the transitory nature of earthly things.<sup>cclix</sup> Jean Bouchet, a French poet-historian, wrote a verse-epistle, purportedly from Mary to Henry, on the subject of her grief.<sup>cclix</sup> These letters, one directed to her, in which "she" speaks, and the other seemingly in her own voice, underscore that influential members of the court understood the letter as an

appropriate genre for Mary's voice.

Literary works such as these not only establish the epistolary genre as a woman's medium, but they also give instructions on how best to write an effective letter. Some authors, especially Ovid and Chaucer, explore the implications of a letter's physicality and its ability to represent the sender. The *Heroides* and *Troilus and Criseyde* are each concerned with the ways that people read letters and the various roles a letter can perform; for instance, they consider the importance of the letter's length as an indication of affection and address the significance of the sender's choice to write the letter in her own hand. In effect Ovid and Chaucer create a code by which to read the underlying messages a letter can send. In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer portrays the dangers of letters that are forged or intercepted; this motif recurs throughout many medieval texts, including Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and Skelton's *Magnificence*, that incorporate letters in some way. In what follows, I analyze the different ways that these authors portray letters and how Mary's letters respond to such epistolary themes and concerns.

For Chaucer, letters punctuate crucial moments of the relationship between the lovers, whose affair even begins and ends through an epistolary exchange. Chaucer follows his source, Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, in making Troilus first approach Criseyde in writing, but Chaucer alters the scene so that, instead of a mere device for making contact, the scene between Pandarus and Troilus presents a crucial idea about the physicality of the letter. When Troilus, realizing that his letter will contribute to Criseyde's first personal impression of him, nervously asks Pandarus for assistance, Pandarus advises Troilus to blot his writing with tears to make the letters a representative of his pain and desire (II, 1027). Troilus heeds the advice, bathing his missive with "salte



teris” and kissing the paper before mentioning that a blissful destiny awaits it, “my lady shal the see!” (II, 1086-92). Through his tears, Troilus has been physically incorporated into the letter; when Criseyde touches the letter, she will be in contact with him. Through that tenuous connection Troilus is able to approach Criseyde while maintaining a veil of discretion and allowing her to consider his request without being faced with the immediacy of his person.

The physical connection between Troilus’s person and his letter illuminates the moment of near violence with which the letter is delivered to its addressee. Pandarus eagerly brings the missive to Criseyde, but when she resists the idea of accepting the letter, he angrily states, “Refuse it naught;” then he “hente hire faste, / And in hire bosom the lettre down he thraste” (II, 1155). Words like “thraste” or thrust, and “hente” or grabbed, indicate the intensity of the moment. In the face of Criseyde’s reluctance to read, Pandarus becomes desperate; it is very much in his personal interest to see his niece and Troilus become lovers. By forcing her to take the missive, and more, by thrusting it down into her clothing, he has essentially initiated the relationship through an act that approximates rape. In contrast, Boccaccio's Criseyde accepts the letter much more readily; she smiles at Pandarus, “took the letter and put it in her bosom.”<sup>clxi</sup> Chaucer's violent alteration of the scene underscores the importance of Criseyde's accepting the missive. That letter, mixed with Troilus’s own tears, symbolizes the man himself. Pandarus knows that if Criseyde accepts the letter, she is effectively beginning a relationship with the Trojan prince.

A letter also indicates its sender’s intentions and emotions. When Criseyde responds to Troilus’s initial love letter, she tells Pandarus that she never did anything

“with more peyne than writen this” (II, 1231-2). The epistle might have been painful for Criseyde, but when Pandarus peers over Troilus’s shoulder to examine it, he notes happily how much ink is on the page (II, 1320). At the end of the work, once Criseyde is in the Greek camp and involved with Diomedes, she must apologize to Troilus that her letters are so short. They do not, she lies, mean that she doesn’t love him: “Th’entent is al, and nat the lettres space” (V, 1630). In the lovers’ relationship, ink equates with time, which equates with caring; as Criseyde’s affection wanes, so do her letters’ length, as though she is deliberately giving him less of herself. Thus, through the letters, Chaucer is revealing the course of the relationship, could Troilus but see.

Recognizing this code sheds light on the letters Mary writes to Louis before her passage across the Channel. Anxiously waiting for Mary to arrive in France, Louis sent frequent word of his eager desire to see her, and begged that she write to him in the meanwhile. The king began to fret so much over the delay in preparations for her journey that the two commissioners charged with arranging Mary’s arrival, Louis the duc de Longueville and Sir Thomas Bohier, pleaded with Mary to write the king to stave off his complaints.<sup>cclxii</sup> Although Mary responded by sending the impatient monarch a series of epistles assuring him of Mary’s affection, the letters are marked chiefly by their brevity and formality. Judging by Criseyde’s measure of a relationship, Mary’s letters indicate little enthusiasm for her royal husband. In one letter, Mary even acknowledges the brevity, “And because by my cousin you will hear how all things have taken their end and conclusion, and the very singular desire that I have [to see you and to be in your company] I forbear to write to you a longer letter,” (“Et pour ce que par mon cousin vous entendnez come toutes choses out pris fin et conclusion, et le tres singulier desire que jay

[words omitted] vous faire plus longue lettre”).<sup>cclxiii</sup> She knows that the message she is sending is almost insultingly short, and must give some justification to avoid offense.

Mary also counteracts the difficulties presented by the letter’s length by writing to him with her own hand, a fact she highlights in her closing, “de la main de votre humble compagne Marie.” In that same letter, she thanks Louis for writing to her with his own hand. These letters thus subscribe to the literary trope found in Hypsipyle’s letter to Jason that suggests a letter was more valuable if the sender actually wrote it herself. By the act of writing, the sender engages with the letter more closely, thus rendering it an indication of one’s esteem for the recipient. In the *Heroides*, Hypsipyle’s her letter to Jason reproaches him for not writing news of his success to her in his hand, (“en ta main,”) saying that she would have been happy to boast of his deeds if only she’d heard about them from him, “spoken and told by *your pleasing hand*, [I would be] telling everyone that Jason wrote me,” [“Dire & compter par *ton plaisir escript* / Disant par tout iason le ma escript” (emph. mine, vv. 31, 43-44).]<sup>cclxiv</sup> A letter in Jason’s own hand will prove his enduring love, not only to herself, but to those who doubt his affection. Here Hypsipyle underscores the performative nature of the letter. Not merely a private expression of his love, the letter’s arrival and its contents would publicly demonstrate Jason’s continued commitment to her.

The trope that posited the value of letters produced by the writer’s own hand occurs frequently in Mary’s letters: she notes the significance of her own writing, or begs the recipient to write with his own hand. Nearly all of Mary’s letters to Henry are written in her own distinctive hand, a fact she underscores with her signature, “by the hand of your lowyng suster Mary.”<sup>cclxv</sup> When she writes Henry about her conversations with

François, she tells her brother that she has asked the French king “of hys hande [to] wrete unto y[our] grace” and ask for Henry’s consent to the Suffolk marriage. She begs Henry “to [adve]rtysse the sayd kyng by [wr]yteyng of yowr owne hand of your playsour.”<sup>cclxvi</sup> Henry’s written permission will stave off François’s importunity, and the fact of his own writing will be sufficient reassurance of the seriousness of Henry’s intent. Mary’s awareness of the importance of letters written by the sender lasts throughout her life; one of the last letters she writes, this one to Lord Lisle in Calais to recommend the bearer John Williams as a soldier for Lisle’s service, asks that Lisle “wole advertise us by this berer in your writing.”<sup>cclxvii</sup>

For Hypsipyle, the value of a letter in Jason’s hand is closely tied to the concept of the letter as a point of contact between sender and recipient, an idea that Chaucer frequently employs in *Troilus and Criseyde*, where reading and writing letters sustains the lovers. When Troilus is absent, Pandarus runs back and forth bearing letters “to quike alwey the fir” between them (III, 484-88). When Criseyde is absent from Troy, Troilus re-reads her letters repeatedly:

The lettres ek that she of old tyme  
hadde hym ysent, he wolde allone rede  
an hondred sithe atwixen noon and prime,  
refiguring hire shap, hire wommanhede,  
withinne his herte, and every word or dede  
that passed was (V, 47-74).

Letters function not only as a memorial, but as a means of re-creating Criseyde’s self. She is so identified with the letter, reading her words helps Troilus to “refigure her

shape” before him.

Throughout her stay in France, Mary experiments with this theme of a letter’s ability to sustain a relationship. In her early correspondence, she refers to the letter mainly as a point of contact with Henry, and chides him for not upholding his end: “Marvelyng moche that I never herd from you syns the departynge, so often as I have sent and wryttn to you; now am I left post a lone in effecte.”<sup>cclxviii</sup> Here the frequency of Mary’s letters stands in stark contrast to Henry’s failure to write her at all; she fears lest this indicates a waning in his affection for her.

After Louis’s death, Mary’s characterization of Henry’s letters changes; they are often not only contact but also a source of comfort providing a strong connection to Henry. She writes, “thancke yow for the good and kynde letters that yow have sent me, the wyche has bene the grettys comfort myt be to me yn thys worlde, dessyryng yowr grace so for to contene, for thyr ys nothyng so gret astor [as for] me as for *to se yow*.”<sup>cclxix</sup> Her description draws on the precise vocabulary of fictional epistles, that in receiving Henry’s letters, she *sees* him. Such language evokes the figure of Troilus after Criseyde’s departure; the association created by the letter is so strong it invokes the presence of the sender. Yet, in the same passage, just like Penelope ordering Ulysses not to write again but come home, Mary hopes for the greater comfort of Henry’s literal presence and urges him to bring her home. In this fashion Mary simultaneously employs and challenges the literary convention of epistolary connections. A letter might console for a time, but ultimately it fails to satisfy the desire for actual presence.

After the second marriage, Mary’s characterization of the letter changes yet again; this time she emphasizes the letter’s public/private dimension. Like Hypsipyle chiding

Jason for not writing to her, so Mary asks Henry for both private comfort and public demonstration when she literally begs Henry to write to her and Brandon. Since all communication was being funneled through Wolsey, who had conveyed the king's displeasure, the act of writing on Henry's own part might indicate his forgiveness, or at the least allow Mary to hope for it. In nearly every letter written from France, Mary links Henry's compassion to his letters and pleads for both. In the holograph letter to Henry written immediately after the marriage, she solicits him: "as yowr most sorro fowle swster requereryng [you] to haue compassyon apone [us] boothe and to pardon owr offenses and that yt towele [it will] playse your grace to wryt to me & my Lord of sowffelke sowme comftabele wordes for yt should be the grettyst comfote for us."<sup>cclxx</sup> Such constant association of letters with comfort underscores the authority of the letter, when the act of writing itself symbolizes renewed affection, and thus pardon. Deprived of Henry's letters, Mary and Brandon are denied the king's "presence" in any form. In an age where access to the monarch equals power, such alienation signals the depth of their fall from grace. If a letter should arrive, its very existence would invoke the presence of the king, and thus amount to absolution. In this way, the letter itself acts as a public performance; when Mary implores Henry to write to her, she is aware of this epistolary theatricality.

While Mary's reading taught her rhetorical techniques, it also illustrated the dangers of letter-writing. One of the greatest risks to a letter's sender was the letter's interception. Late medieval and early Tudor texts frequently demonstrate that letters are a vulnerable means of communication; even heroes and heroines such as Malory's Tristram and Isoud have no compunction about trying to intercept Mark's letters to

determine the extent of his plots against Tristram. Guinevere and Lancelot are furious with Mark for putting his accusations against them into written form, lest someone else read the letter and discover their affair. Fear of detection abounds in courtly romance, and as a result, lovers are particularly careful about their letters. The jealous mother-in-law in Chaucer's *The Man of Law's Tale* is able to plot successfully against Custance precisely because she is able to intercept letters to and from the king. The letter is dangerous because it lacks the ephemeral quality of speech. The permanence of writing has the potential to harm both sender and recipient should the letter be used as evidence of wrongdoing or even of the sender's secret affairs or opinions. Providing constant reminders about potential abuse, fictional letters thus remind the prudent letter-writer to guard her written words carefully.

In "The Man of Law's Tale," Chaucer depicts the letter as dangerous precisely because it carries the king's authority but is vulnerable to interference in a way that the king's person is not.<sup>ccclxxi</sup> In King Alla's absence, his wife Custance gives birth, but his jealous mother Donegild intercepts the letter bringing news of the child and replaces it with a forgery telling Alla his wife gave birth to a monster. Although grieved, Alla never thinks to question the messenger; he takes the letter's validity for granted because it is under seal. His mother then substitutes his merciful response with an order to exile Custance and the child. This letter, too, is under seal, and so the constable never investigates and obeys his king's "wishes." Ironically, this is exactly what Alla expects of his subordinate; despite the fact that he is told his subjects have repudiated his wife and child, he expects his written word alone to quell any rejection of Custance. When Alla returns and is furious over the fate of his wife and child, the constable is protected

by showing the king “his” letter. The king never punishes him; the constable acted rightly in obeying his master’s seal. By contrast, the messenger and his mother fare badly; the messenger is tortured to discover how the forgeries occurred, while Alla slays his mother with his own sword. Such violence underscores the depth of their crime in forging the king’s authority.

Not only does this episode emphasize the letter’s vulnerability, but it also highlights the crucial role of the messenger. In “The Man of Law’s Tale,” Donegild encourages the messenger to overindulge in drink and “whil he sleep as a swyn,” she crept in and stole the letters out of his box.<sup>cclxxii</sup> Other authors besides Chaucer express frustration with irresponsible messengers; in the *Shyp of Folys*, published in England in 1509 by Wynkyn de Worde, Sebastian Brant criticizes foolish messengers who tarry with their messages, deliver verbal messages to people other than the addressee, break open and read letters or even return without an answer.<sup>cclxxiii</sup> Brant acknowledges the value of a diligent messenger, “Messengers prudent & wyse one can not prayse you to moche / whan ye employe yourselfe to do your message truely.” Where Brant scolds messengers for doing more than their office, in Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, Tristram is grateful for his messenger’s initiative. She not only carries written letters, but she also brings verbal news of Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinevere to himself and Isoud when she returns to Cornwall. Many letter writers depend on their messengers to deliver news in this fashion, but her loyalty to Tristram and Isoud is such that she even shows them King Mark’s letters to Arthur threatening Tristram. When even the heroes of the tale are amenable to intercepting letters, the potential dangers of a written message are readily apparent, as is the need for a reliable messenger who is capable of adding verbal tidings to the written



communication.

This dynamic plays out in Mary's letters—the issue of what can be written and what must be left to speech. Mary's letters reflect the vulnerability of letters when she defers details while recounting a story, indicating they will either be communicated orally or written by others. Such deferral is, in part, a gesture of modesty. In two letters Mary sends to Henry and Wolsey on October 12, 1514, protesting Louis's decision to dismiss her servants, including Jane Guildford, who was to be her advisor, Mary's circumspection is crucial. Therefore Mary tells Wolsey only that "I am sure the nobill menn & gentillmen can schew [show] you more then becometh me to wryte yn this matter."<sup>cclxxiv</sup> But her desire for caution probably motivated Mary more than her need for modesty. If Louis were to read a lengthy series of complaints against him or perhaps even to know some of her plans or fears for the future, it might well cause her difficulty. As a result, she prudently writes to both Henry and Wolsey only of her general need for good counsel in the future but adds, "as my mother Guldeford can more playnly schew your grace than I can wryt."<sup>cclxxv</sup> To both of these letters penned by scribes, she appends a postscript in her own hand, "yef [give] credens to my mowder geldeford be yowr lovyng suster Mary quene of France." Using her own writing marks the significance of her message, but even more, her postscript authorizes Guildford's speech.

In this manner, Mary highlights the relationship between the messenger and the message. Literary messengers must frequently provide some means of authenticating their messages, whether by a token or password. In Caxton's romance *Blanchardyn and Eglantine*, the provost shows Eglantine a ring from her lover to prove that Blanchardyn has come to rescue her.<sup>cclxxvi</sup> Equally, a note within the letter affirming that the courier is

worthy of trust and that s/he has a verbal message in addition to the letter authorizes the messenger to speak. In this way, speech supplements the written communication, ensuring that dangerous ideas are not permanently inscribed, while the written document exists to endorse the truth and reliability of the speech. Following this pattern, Mary's postscript thus indicates that Guildford's message was of great importance and that Mary desperately wants Henry and Wolsey to understand that Guildford's oral communication comes from Mary herself.

Mary protests Guildford's dismissal because she fears being left alone in France without a reliable counselor. She writes Henry that all of her attendants have been discharged save only "such as never had experiens nor knowlech how to advertyse or gyfe me counsell yn any tyme of nede which is to be fered more shortly then your grace thought at the tyme of my departynge ....Any channs happe other then weale I shall not nowe [know] wher nor of whom to aske any good counsell to your pleasure nor yet to myn own proffitt."<sup>cclxxvii</sup> Richardson suggests that Mary was alarmed at the prospect of being alone in France after Louis's death, when she would have to deal with François and Louise of Savoy.<sup>cclxxviii</sup> The specter of Louis's ill health might well have motivated her, but Mary also had immediate need for counsel; in addition to the personal concerns of a young bride, she had become queen of a foreign court and would need guidance in the particular customs and political maneuverings of the French nobility. She writes Wolsey that "I have not yet seen yn fraunce eny lady or Jentillwomann so necessary for me as sche [Guildford] ys nor yet so mete to do the kyng my brother service as sche ys."<sup>cclxxix</sup> Mary trusted that an Englishwoman would have Henry's and her interests at heart; she could not say the same for the members of Louis's court.

Mary's protest not only indicates her awareness of the politics of the French court, but also those of the English. She complains to Henry about the duke of Norfolk's failure to defend her wishes: "I mervell moche that my lord of northfolke wold at all tymes so lyghtly graunt every thyng at ther requestes...I wold god my lord of yorke had comm with me yn the romme of my lord of northfolke for I amm I sure I schuld have bene moch more at my hert[s ease] then I am now."<sup>cclxxx</sup> Her letter to Wolsey also expresses her fears that Norfolk has undermined her case and declares her desire that Wolsey had come in the duke's stead. Mary's complaint signals that she belongs to the Wolsey-Suffolk faction opposing Norfolk's political influence.

The Guildford affair demonstrates Mary's political awareness and her willingness to use letters to negotiate additional influence. All of Mary's letters to Henry and Wolsey are political; she is writing to persuade them to agree to a marriage with enormous impact on public affairs. But frequently her letters attempt other kinds of political intervention, such as asking for pardon or for patronage. In these, too, she draws on the letter's appropriateness as a device for women as established in literature, most especially the model set her by authors such as Christine de Pizan, whose *Epistre d'Othea* employs the device of a goddess teaching a man how to live and govern well.

Christine's *Othea* literally illustrates a woman writer's use of the letter to advise readers on political events; according to Sandra Hindman's work on the manuscript tradition of the *Othea*, the illuminations in Christine's presentation copies use heraldic symbols to link Louis of Orleans, the individual nobleman to whom she dedicates the work, with the Trojan prince Hector, the recipient of Othea's letter.<sup>cclxxxi</sup> Since the illustrations of Othea also strongly resemble portraits of Christine, her message is clear.

Like Hector, Louis should heed Othea/Christine's lessons on chivalric and moral behavior in order to rule well. In light of the antagonism between Louis and the dukes of Burgundy and Berry, Christine's arguments for prudence, patience, and wisdom resonate politically. Hindman argues that even after Louis's assassination, Christine maintained the illustrated references in order to use the duke as a symbol to inspire the queen, the dauphin, and the duke of Berry to govern France wisely.<sup>cclxxxii</sup> Such visual gestures convey pointed political commentary.<sup>cclxxxiii</sup>

Even if Mary were not familiar with the political implications of illustrated manuscripts of the *Othea*, the work was extremely popular in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries as a manual on chivalry. At its simplest level, the book represents a goddess of wisdom, Othea, advising the Trojan prince Hector on upright behavior. She argues that if he listens to her, he will achieve greatness: "Because I know that you will always be / the most valiant among the valiant and will have / the most renown above all others / provided that I be loved by you" ("Car je sçay qu'a tous jours seras / Le plus preus des preus et aras / Sur tous autres la renommee, / Mais que de toy je soye amee").<sup>cclxxxiv</sup> Within the world she imagines, Othea's prediction comes true; Hector was acknowledged as one of the greatest princes in history because he was both noble and wise. Christine suggests that for her noble readers to imitate Hector, they need only listen to Christine's wisdom.<sup>cclxxxv</sup> Thus the very existence of the *Othea* affirms the right of a woman to use letters to accomplish political ends.

When Mary asks for patronage or pardons, she often does so in a manner inspired by such advice literature. She emphasizes to her readers that acting rightly will rebound to their personal benefit, bringing them renown, influence, and even spiritual grace. For

example, when writing to Wolsey on behalf of Anthony Savage, the brother of Mary's servant Susan, she first explains all the reasons why Anthony deserves help, then tells Wolsey that "And in so doying your grace shall not only do amerytorius dede to be rewardyd of god but also bynde me at altymes to be as redy to do your grace or any of yours as ffarre plesars as knowethe our lord."<sup>cclxxxvi</sup> Just as Christine expounds on Othea's advice by giving both moral and spiritual explication of each text, Mary sounds like a teacher showing Wolsey the spiritual and moral benefits to be derived from his intervention as well as the political ramifications of her gratitude. Works like Christine's *Othea*, which circulated throughout the reading communities to which Mary belonged, help to establish that women can take such a didactic tone and give such political and religious instruction through a letter.

Even though Mary's status during the marriage scandal is ambiguous, she continues to try to obtain patronage for her people. On April 3, 1515, Mary writes to Wolsey requesting that John Palsgrave receive a benefice that had opened up in England. Since mid-March Wolsey had been communicating Henry's anger to her and Suffolk, yet Mary's tone is no different than in her letter to Wolsey written the previous November 13 also asking patronage for Palsgrave.<sup>cclxxxvii</sup> Focusing on the service Palsgrave has done her in the past, Mary emphasizes that Wolsey should do the favor for Mary's sake, "Beseching you my lord at myne instaunce and for my sake to be so good lord unto my servunt Johnn palgrave maister of Arte whiche hath doon unto me right good and acceptable service to his and his friendes great charge." Even though Mary is in disgrace she trusts that Wolsey will continue to act at her behest. In so doing she lays claim to the influence she should possess as Henry's sister and as the dowager French queen; making

the request at this time effectively implies that her disgrace is only temporary and that exchanging favors with her is in Wolsey's future interest. Mary is aware of the theatre of politics: being seen to continue as usual may lessen the appearance of scandal.

Mary frequently attempts to script events through letters that tell people what to do, how to act, and what to believe. In this, she follows a literary tradition that depicts women's letters in precisely this fashion; Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* illustrates this phenomenon through the story of Elayne, the woman whose unrequited love for Lancelot led to her death. Following the Ovidian tradition of the dying maiden's last voice, Elayne orders her letter to be placed with her body, thus linking her writing to her physical presence: "And whan the letter was wryton word by word lyke as she devyseyd, thenne she prayed her fader that she myght be watched untyl she were dede. And whyle my body is hote, lete this letter be put in my ryght hande, and my hande bounde faste wyth the letter untyl that I be colde."<sup>cclxxxviii</sup> Having scripted even the details of her funeral, Elayne orders her body to be placed in a barge on the Thames, where eventually it will float to Camelot. The spectacle attracts Arthur's attention; when he and his court investigate, Guinevere spies the letter, and Arthur reads it aloud in his castle to a great company of knights; all present weep at the contents.<sup>cclxxxix</sup> The king sends for Lancelot, who sorrowfully explains his conduct but protests that love cannot be commanded; nevertheless, as Elayne requested in the letter, he will offer her mass-penny and, at Arthur's urging, will order a richly appointed funeral.

While Arthur is king, Elayne's voice dominates this scene. She commands the sympathy of all and by extension, defames Sir Lancelot. Her corpse lies there as an indictment of his lack of chivalry, one of the most crucial aspects of the knight's

reputation. She has chosen to make a spectacle of her death that succeeds in reaching King Arthur and thence Lancelot. The beauty of her corpse and richness of her barge command the attention of all, and the bargeman's refusal to speak ensures that her letter alone explains the situation. Arthur himself breaks the seal on the letter. One can only assume that such a scene is playing precisely as Elayne desired when she ordered her letter fixed in her dead hand. The context thus places the letter in powerful relief; all is focused on her words.

Through the spectacle of her death, Elayne attempts to expose Lancelot as a false knight. What she desires from such exposure remains a matter of debate. Georgiana Donavin argues that through the vehicle of Elayne's letter, Malory is commenting on the degradation of morals in Arthur's court; Elayne is trying to force Lancelot to take responsibility for his actions.<sup>ccxc</sup> It is also possible that she is acting out of pain of his rejection, that she wishes to tarnish his reputation as punishment for his inability to love her. Or, Dido-like, Elayne may be seeking to link her name with Lancelot's perpetually. Whatever Elayne's goals, even Guinevere initially condemns her knight, saying that he might have done "somme bounte and gentilnes that myghte haue preserued her lyf"(531). Thus Elayne's letter nearly costs Lancelot everything; both his chivalric reputation and Guinevere's love for him are at stake. Eventually Lancelot successfully pleads his case and is forgiven, but he must assume the cost of fulfilling Elayne's last request regarding her funeral and put his grief at her death on display in order to preserve his reputation.

Elayne's letter thus achieves her desire, albeit at terrible cost; Lancelot's name is forever linked with hers.<sup>ccxci</sup> Although Elayne's letter fails to discredit Lancelot or to start any crusade of moral reform among Arthur's knights, it has won her the pity and

honor of the whole court and ensured the preservation of her memory as Lancelot's lover. The pathos of her letter wins her compassion and attention, not only from Arthur and his company, but from Malory's readers.

Malory's work was not the only English romance to show how women could script events through their letters. The late fourteenth-century *Athelston* features a queen whose direct plea fails to move her husband Athelston to mercy, but whose letters to the Archbishop initiate the rescue of his innocent nephews. In *Valentine and Orson*, a tale of two noble brothers separated at birth, which was translated from the French by Henry Watson for Wynkyn de Worde circa 1505, a woman's letter to Valentine and the peers of France instigates the rescue of her brother, who was later known as Charlemagne.<sup>ccxcii</sup> In 1510, de Worde printed Robert Copland's translation of *Apollonius of Tyre*, the story in which a princess writes a letter to her father, telling him that she prefers to marry Apollonius.<sup>ccxciii</sup> Had Mary read these romances, which were readily available to her, she would have been reminded yet again of the idea that women could relate otherwise immodest ideas in letters and script events to their liking through writing.

Even in her earliest correspondence with Henry, Mary demonstrates her awareness of such theatricality by emphasizing the connection between her political influence in France and her frequent communication with Henry. For example, on October 18, 1514, in one of Mary's first letters to Henry as Louis's queen, she asks Henry, on her husband's behalf, to set a reasonable ransom for François Descars, a friend of the dukes of Brittany and Angoulême, as well as the king. Granting such a favor would not only be a form of repayment for all the kindness that the dukes had shown her, but also a sign to the French king and his dukes of Mary's influence; she writes that she



wishes them to “thynk hee [Descars] shulde be the mor favord for my sak.”<sup>ccxciv</sup> She wants the highest ranking nobles in France to know that she has political power to be reckoned with and that she is worth consulting on such matters.

Mary scripts situations not only through her own letters, but also through others’ messages, since people expected to have their actions and conversations reported back nearly verbatim in letters. For example, when Brandon and his fellow ambassadors, Dr. Nicholas West and Sir Richard Wingfield, called on Claude, the new queen of France, and Marguerite d’Alençon, the king’s sister, they report the entire encounter back to Henry in tedious detail in their February 8, 1515 letter.<sup>ccxcv</sup> The ladies in question, moreover, expect this to be the case; they are aware of Henry’s status as overhearer, and prudence in the face of such knowledge would necessitate a certain calculation, or at least forethought, with regard to their statements and actions. Sharing this awareness, Mary also makes use of the convention to send messages to Henry. For example, when she first greets Brandon and the ambassadors on their arrival in France after Louis’s death, they give her Henry’s letters to her; according to Brandon’s February 8 report, she responds:

that she was much bound to God that he had given her so good and loving a brother which she has always found both a father and a brother and now especially in her most need. Wherefore she prayed God that she might live no longer than she should do that thing that should be to your contentation and pleasure with as good and honorable words as was possible.<sup>ccxcvi</sup>

These phrases represent both the general flattery Mary wished to direct toward Henry and

her desire to serve him in all ways.

Mary also has a habit of directing events, deftly asking François to write to Henry and vice versa; she even tells the two kings what content their letters should contain and that they should write in their own hands.<sup>ccxcvii</sup> When the scandal surrounding her second marriage occurs, she uses every tool at her disposal, sending not only her own carefully crafted epistles, but conducting a virtual chorus of letters from Brandon, François, and Queen Claude, each with its own specific part to play in persuading Henry to relent.

Brandon's letters reveal frequent evidence of collaboration with Mary. His duty as ambassador and his culpability in the marriage led him to write often to both Henry and Wolsey. Often he echoes Mary's ideas precisely; for example, he writes Henry in February that François's initial harassment of Mary was "non thyng to her honnar."<sup>ccxcviii</sup> Mary had insisted to Henry in her letter on the same subject, that François's "seute" was not in accordance "with my honoure."<sup>ccxcix</sup> More telling is how each reports what the other has written, as when Brandon assures Henry, "Sire as sche has wretten to you of her own hand sche es contentt to gyef [give] you hall yt her grace shall have by the ryth [right] of her wosbound [husband]."<sup>ccc</sup> When Mary talks about the disposition of her dowry, she tells Henry that, "I thynck my lord of sowffolke wole write mor playndler to yowr grace than I do of thys maters."<sup>ccci</sup> The couple clearly discussed the content of their letters before writing.<sup>cccii</sup>

Such collaboration indicates the extent to which these letters are rhetorically fashioned and highlights the importance of examining these letters with such fashioning in mind. For example, given the drama of Mary's story, one might expect it to be better known. Although most histories of the period are more occupied with the later events of

Henry's reign, Brandon's words to Henry describing Mary's demand for immediate marriage have done even more to ensure Mary's obscurity: "I newar sawe woman so wyepe," he writes.<sup>ccci</sup> Mary's biographers have often used that line to depict Mary as a silly romantic woman who cried until she got her way. Richardson, whose work is the standard biography of Mary, writes:

Doubt must have vanished when she saw him, for she spilled it all out in a frenzy of tears and passion: her fear of Louise, her alarm over Francis and his persistent threats of a forced marriage, and her desire to marry Brandon, himself. Though not an emotional man, he was deeply touched. The wild torrent of words, incoherent at the time, contained a store of information, and concealed within it he recognized a desperate determination that would brook no denial. Unsure of the proper response he wrote an undated and very studied letter to the King (170).

Richardson grants that Brandon's description of the scene was a calculated, carefully written missive, yet he never questions that it was telling the truth. His account influences later writers. Maria Perry, who wrote a biography of Mary in 1998, quotes the "never saw woman so weep" line, then remarks, "It was the incontrovertible truth. Henry knew as well as Brandon what a torrent Mary could shed, when she wanted her own way" (111). Of course, Mary may well have wept copiously on seeing Brandon, but in the end it is far more interesting and productive to consider why the couple emphasize this image of the king's sister. In a series of letters where everything is so crafted, this too is a form of artful persuasion. Mary and Brandon, knowing the chivalric code of their time, might have chosen to emphasize a weeping, helpless Mary, desperate for Brandon's

aid, to help excuse their defiance of royal authority. Characterizations of a hysterical Mary highlight why scholars have not given Mary's actions and writing serious critical attention. Worse, if we take the letters at face value, we ignore how much Mary and Brandon's letters are crafted representations of events.

### **A Lady in a Romance**

After concluding Chauntecleer and Pertelote's avian debate about dreams and prophecy, Chaucer's Nun's Priest interrupts his tale to assure his fellow pilgrims that "This storie is also trewe, I undertake, / As is the book of Launcelot de Lake, / That wommen holde in ful greet reverence."<sup>ccciv</sup> The Nun's Priest's association of women with romance is not just fiction; Carol Meale has traced extensive evidence of women owning romances and bequeathing the books to their daughters.<sup>cccv</sup> Noting the opening lines of *Havelok the Dane*, "Gode men / Wiues maydnes and alle men," Meale also points out that authors of romance imagined women in their audiences.<sup>cccv</sup>

According to Caxton's preface to *Blanchardyn and Eglantine*, women who read romance ought to emulate it. Felicity Riddy argues that besides entertainment, women would have found practical advice for educating their children and managing their households within romances.<sup>cccvii</sup> Acting somewhat like a conduct book, romances not only illustrate appropriate behavior, but also confirm societal mores about love, marriage, and politics. For example, they reinforce connections between politics and love by underscoring the idea that when heroes marry their ladies, they also win kingdoms. This not-so-subtle theme runs throughout courtly romances, thus reminding noblewomen who read the books that while beauty and grace were important, much of their personal value

would stem from their status as heiresses or their ability to make alliances through marriage. Studying the patterns set in romance can provide insight into Mary's situation, in light of the political issues surrounding her marriage.

Froissart's *Meliador* clearly renders the nature of such love-politics and represents the significant functions that letters perform in this enterprise.<sup>cccviii</sup> Early versions of *Meliador* were probably written in the 1360s, inspired by Froissart's residence in England during Edward III's Scottish wars; Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann argues that *Meliador* was "largely a commissioned work, and that the needs of the English crown were the intellectual driving force behind the ideology of the text."<sup>cccix</sup> By aligning *Meliador* with Cornwall and King Arthur, and his rival Camel with Scotland, Froissart established a parallel with the Plantagenets versus the Bruces. Probably well known in its day, *Meliador* openly exemplifies that the genre of romance conveys political overtones.<sup>cccx</sup> Full of love, chivalry, and tournaments, and set in King Arthur's realm before the fall, before the advent of Lancelot and Guinevere, *Meliador* would seem exactly the type of epic to appeal to Mary.

*Meliador* has politics at its heart, especially the politics of marriage.<sup>cccxi</sup> Although *Meliador* is an epic romance interweaving several different love stories, the central unifying plot line involves a five year series of tournaments designed to select the best knight in the world, who will then have the right to marry Hermondine, only child of the king of Scotland, and consequently, inherit the realm (1610-1613). One participant in the tournament, the importunate knight Camel à Camois, plainly articulates his political ambition: "I will be King of Scotland yet, I tell you" ["Je serai encore, je le di, / Rois d'Escoce" (vv. 2425-26)]. The matter is of great concern to the world; the moment

Meliador, son of the duke of Cornwall, wins the first tournament, Florée sends news to King Arthur: “[Go] Right to Carlion the city, in the presence of the noble King Arthur, and tell him of the virtue of the knight of the golden sun [Meliador], and say also to the king, when you are before him, that such a knight has never been seen” [“Droit a Carlion la cité, / Devers le noble roy Artu, / Et li recordés la vertu / Dou chevalier au soleil d’or, / Et dittes bien au roy encor, / Quant vous serés par devant li, / C’onques tel chevalier ne vi” (vv. 9278-84)]. When Meliador is ultimately judged the best, Arthur awards him “the helm for the prize, also the realm of Scotland, and yours the beautiful body [of Hermondine]” [“nous li donnons le hyaume / Pour le pris, ossi le royaume / D’Escoce, et le vostre gent cors” (vv. 2962-64)].<sup>cccxi</sup>

Dembowski notes that this connection between politics and love enables women to take such a strong role in *Meliador*.<sup>cccxiii</sup> For instance, Florée, knowing the truth about Camel’s unsuitability for Hermondine, arranges the idea of the tournament as a means of delaying Hermondine’s marriage and distracting the violent, impetuous Camel from pressing Hermondine too closely (vv 1565-97). As Dembowski observes, “The men rule, but the ladies modify, arrange, and ‘order’ this chivalric world. Each tournament is proclaimed by the high and mighty, but planned by a Florée or a Phenonee” (114). Thus Froissart depicts a chivalric world as a place where women have political influence of a kind.

In *Meliador*, letters accomplish women’s desires. Recognizing that Hermondine cannot hope to persuade Camel to wait for the tournament unless she gives him some kind of hope, Florée instructs her to deceive him via a letter. Hermondine offers to let him participate as her knight.<sup>cccxiv</sup> Dembowski observes that the ladies believe that

Camel cannot win; in this chivalric world, he is too flawed a knight to earn the title of the most worthy (116). Hermondine objects, however, to Florée appending a poem to the letter that suggests that Hermondine is ready to love Camel: “the letter pleased her well, but the *rondelet* [poem] was too much.” [“la lettre bien li plaisoit, \ Mais dou rondelet c’estoit trop” (vv.2161-2)]. Florée counters that it is sometimes necessary to lie in a good cause and reminds Hermondine that Camel is holding Florée’s father hostage until he is allowed to wed Hermondine (2173-2184). For Florée, the ends justify the means.

*Meliador* thus suggests that letters are a representation of events fashioned by the writer, that letters can deceive, and ultimately, that such deception is justified in a noble cause. Florée and Hermondine lie deliberately to mislead an unwanted suitor; they use letters to maintain the connection between *Meliador* and Hermondine, and they act directly to make sure their marriages are appropriate for themselves and for their realms.<sup>cccxv</sup>

The picture of marriage *Meliador* creates is highly suggestive of the type of power a woman could hope to wield, even a century later. Dembowski contends that

The chivalric world, the world of men, the world of *Meliador* would simply not function “correctly” without the occasional discreet push in the right direction that the ladies give. Thanks to their cleverness and this moral latitude, the women of *Meliador* play a role that foreshadows the function of diplomats...Women help fate (117-8).

Using such ladies as a model, as Caxton urges romance readers to do, would provide Mary with ample justification for such epistolary intervention in her own life. Romances not only remind Mary that her marriage is political, but also show her how to use letters to influence the outcome of her marriage. In *Meliador*, Froissart suggests that women are

practically obliged to ensure that matters of marriage and politics are resolved correctly, and that to do so, they may push the boundaries of morality slightly to achieve the desired end. Such a message has powerful implications for Mary Tudor.

Patterning her behavior on romance was not a new idea to Mary, who grew up in the center of a court whose displays often centered on the Arthurian tradition. Gordon Kipling describes how, at the wedding ceremony of Prince Arthur and Catherine of Aragon in 1501, the knights glorified their prince with Arthurian spectacle. Among the knights honoring Arthur and Catherine rode Sir Charles Brandon in “an oriental costume such as Sir Palomides might have worn in Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*: ‘the guise of a Turk or a Saracen, with a white roll of fine linen cloth about his head, the ends hanging pendant wise.’”<sup>cccxvi</sup> In 1506, Mary found herself at the heart of the pageantry when a tournament’s conceit centered on a letter from the Lady May to the Princess Mary, begging her to defend the honor of Lady Summer. Then, in 1507, Mary participated in “‘The Justs of the Months of May and June,’” probably as the May Queen herself, who sends a letter inviting all knights to the tournament, a spectacle in which Charles Brandon would also ride.<sup>cccxvii</sup>

After Henry VIII’s accession to the throne, Mary seems to have been at the heart of most of her brother’s courtly displays, as she joined him frequently in masques, disguisings, and tournaments. Edward Hall’s *Chronicle* describes one such event in the first year of Henry’s reign, in which the king and his gentlemen appeared in disguise at a banquet, to be met by ladies themselves disguised as Egyptian princesses, “so that the same ladies semed to be nygrost or blacke Mores. Of these foresayd vi ladyes, the lady Mary, syster unto the kyng was one. . . After that the kynges grace and the ladies had



daunsed a certayne tyme they departed every one to his lodgyng.<sup>cccxviii</sup> Richardson notes that Mary often joined her brother in this fashion; “whether in the guise of rustic maiden or African princess, her name always appeared somewhere in the list of masquers.”<sup>cccxix</sup> Surrounded by pageantry, Mary is immersed in the romance tradition and its codes of behavior.

When the crises surrounding her marriages occurred, it would be easy for Mary to place herself in the chivalric tradition, to see herself as the heroine in a romance with gallant lovers fighting for her in tournaments and kings vying for her hand. Soon after Mary had left for France, Brandon followed her, sent with other English champions to compete in a tournament held in Mary’s honor. All accounts indicate the tournament was a huge success for the English, and especially Brandon, who triumphed over all comers, to the disgust of François the dauphin (later François I<sup>er</sup>). Hall’s account reads like a romance, in which the young queen “stode so that all men might see her and wondered at her beautie, and the kyng was feble and lay on a couche for weakenes.” After the success of the English knights Brandon and Thomas Grey, Marquis of Dorset, Hall relates that François inserted a German ringer into the tournament specifically to defeat Brandon:

The Dolphin [François] brought a man secretly, which in all the court of Fraunce was the tallest and the strongest man, & he was an Almayne and put him in the place of an other person to have had ye duke of Suffolke rebuked. The same great Almayne came to the barres fyersly [fiercely] with face hyd, because he would not be knowen, and bare his spere to the duke of Suffolke with all his strength, and the duke him received, and for all his strength put hym by strong strokes from the barriers.<sup>cccxx</sup>

Proclaimed the tournament's undisputed winner, Brandon remained in France until Christmas, and Louis showered him with praise.<sup>cccxix</sup> It is easy to see how Mary might cast herself in the role of a Guinevere or Isoud, with her knight winning glory in the lists below.

Unlike Guinevere or Isoud, however, Mary behaved with scrupulous care for both her husband and her reputation, whatever hopes she may have entertained regarding her future. Although she remained faithful to Louis until his death, afterward Mary would adhere to the code set by romances such as *Meliador* and attempt to shape events the way such heroines would. Indeed, such action would not only be a right, but an obligation, since her reading already established that women should try to influence events so that all would end well. Ultimately, her books taught her that the letter was one of her most effective tools in influencing the outcome of her second marriage, but even more, they reminded her that her marriage was a political act.

### **Political Capital**

Even without romances to prompt her, Mary could not escape the knowledge that her marriage was political at its heart. Having married her sister Margaret successfully to the King of Scotland, her father Henry VII constantly sought a suitable match for his youngest daughter, one which would bring a powerful alliance to England. Though he had encouraged negotiations with France and Portugal, Henry's main focus lay with the young prince Charles of Castile, and in 1507, he succeeded in bringing about a betrothal between the two.<sup>cccxii</sup> When Henry died in 1509, he left provisions for his daughter's dowry, but noted that if the marriage with Charles were not consummated, he still hoped

that Mary would ““be married to some noble Prince out of this our Realm.””<sup>cccxxiii</sup> Mary’s value lay in her ability to secure alliances between realms. Mary’s betrothal to Charles signaled such a firm alliance between England and the Low Countries that Henry VIII sent troops to aid Margaret of Austria against the Duke of Guelders simply because she was Prince Charles’s aunt.<sup>cccxxiv</sup>

The accession of Henry VIII led to changes in England’s diplomatic policies; the new king sought war against France, and in 1511, joined a papal alliance with Spain, Venice, and the Empire, designed to return the lands of Bordeaux to the papal crown. In so doing, Henry hoped to check the French king Louis XII’s designs on Scotland and increase his own lands and prestige therein.<sup>cccxxv</sup> He may even have hoped to press the old claim to the French crown.<sup>cccxxvi</sup> Despite one invasion, in which the English captured the French town of Tournai, and the plans for a second incursion, the Spanish king Ferdinand and Emperor Maximilian of Austria each sought separately to undermine the alliance and make peace with France, and the consummation of Mary’s marriage to Charles became a significant negotiating point.<sup>cccxxvii</sup> After the capture of Therouanne and Tournai in 1513, Mary’s marriage to Charles was set to be consummated before the following May. But Ferdinand’s overtures to France were well received, and he began to dissuade Maximilian from the English alliance; as a result, the marriage was repeatedly postponed, despite the completion of preparations for Mary’s departure, down to the sumptuous gowns made in the Flemish fashion. Finally, when both Ferdinand and Maximilian deserted the Holy League, the new pope Leo X advised Henry, given the treacherous behavior of his allies, to make his own peace with France, and a furious Henry listened to the pope’s counsel. In July 1514, Mary renounced her betrothal with Charles, and on the twelfth of August,

Henry wrote the pope that Mary would marry Louis XII of France.<sup>cccxxviii</sup>

Mary could hardly have escaped awareness of how her personal affairs reflected the affairs of nations. Preparations for her marriage to Charles had been both expensive and elaborate, Henry having determined to impress everyone with the sumptuousness of his sister's apparel and appointments. Maria Perry notes that the inventory of Mary's plate and jewels is over eleven pages long; the fabrics for her clothes had been chosen by Henry himself.<sup>cccxxix</sup> Similar display was devised for her proxy marriage to Louis, which made her the recipient of gifts from all over Europe. Her new husband sent her the fabulous Mirror of Naples, a huge diamond pendant with a large pearl, which Henry had assessed at sixty thousand crowns. This time her trousseau cost Henry more than forty-three thousand pounds.<sup>cccxxx</sup> In marrying Mary to Louis, Henry had secured a match with the most powerful monarch in Europe and therefore, he made certain that her clothing reflected well on England by emphasizing the wealth she brought to France.

Mary also knew that her marriage brought peace between the two nations, since outbreaks of fighting between the English and French continued right up to her marriage.<sup>cccxxxi</sup> When Hall describes the situation in his *Chronicle*, he emphasizes that the French proposed peace and marriage simultaneously:

The French kyng by an heraulde wrote to the king of England, that he marveled greatly why he made him so sore war, and brent and toke his townes, slew and robbed his people with oute any cause geven on his parte, ... whereupon in June ye French king sent a commission with the president of Roan and the generall boyer and certayne other nobles of Fraunce to entreate peace and allyaunce betwene both the prynces: &

farther by cause that they knewe that the mariage was broken betwene the prince of castell and the lady Mary (as you have hard) they desyred thesayde lady to be espoused to the French king, affirming a great dower and suertes for the same, with great treasures.<sup>cccxxxii</sup>

Moreover, since Louis had no son, if Mary were to produce an heir, she would create a powerful lasting alliance between England and France. Perry observes, “Against the titanic background of Habsburg-Valois power struggles, Mary had been asked, more literally than any bride in history, to shut her eyes and think of England.”<sup>cccxxxiii</sup> As queen of France, Mary would ascend the throne of one of the most powerful realms in Europe; such consideration was more than sufficient to quell any objections to the difference in age between the bride and her new lord, most of which stemmed from the Dutch and Spanish quarters, resentful of the Anglo-French alliance.<sup>cccxxxiv</sup> As Hall notes, “The Dutchmen heryng these newes were sory, and repented them that they receyved not the lady, and spake shamefully of this mariage, that a feble old & pocky man should mary so fayre a lady.”<sup>cccxxxv</sup> Their mockery stemmed mainly from bitterness at the lost alliance. The disposition of Mary’s person was thus continually linked to the politics of kingdoms.

The role of Mary’s marriage in the peace between England and France became more and more apparent as she was welcomed into her new realm. Accompanied by two thousand English horsemen, two hundred archers, and a large selection of the English nobility, Mary’s procession made its way into Abbeville, where she formally met Louis.<sup>cccxxxvi</sup> Great festivities attended the celebration of the marriage service, topped only by Mary’s triumphant entry into Paris for her coronation, where she was met by seven separate pageants proclaiming the joy of France at receiving her. Their verses,

praising God for sending Mary and making peace between England and France, liken her to the Virgin Mary: “As the peace between God and men / by means of the Virgin Mary, / was already made, so now are / we Frenchmen relieved of our burdens, / For Mary is married amongst us again.” (“Comme la pais entre Dieu et les hommes, / Par le moyen de la Vierge Marie, / Fus jadis faicte, ainsy a present sommes / Bourgoys Francoys, deschargez de nos sommes, / Car Marie avecque nous se marie.”)<sup>cccxxxvii</sup>

Such lavish display continued throughout the three months of Mary’s tenure as queen of France, a time during which Louis literally showered her with jewels and proclaimed his happiness with her to all who would listen. When Henry wrote to thank Louis for his care of Mary, Louis wrote back expressing “the satisfaction that I have with my queen, my wife, your good sister; who has hitherto conducted herself, and still does, every day, in such a manner that I cannot but be delighted with her, and love and honor her more and more each day.”<sup>cccxxxviii</sup> Sadly, Louis’s happiness was short-lived; he died only three days after his letter to Henry, leaving Mary’s status a matter of great contention. Once the young widow emerged from seclusion, having reassured the dauphin François d’Angoulême that she did not carry the king’s child, negotiations began for her disposition: was she to be re-married in France, return to England, or be wed to some other prince, perhaps even Charles of Castile? But these possibilities ran counter to Mary’s own inclinations, and although her subsequent actions in choosing her own husband were the stuff of fairy tales, they were also the stuff of politics.

Mary knew well the potential ramifications of incurring Henry’s displeasure, but many historians, depicting Mary as a frivolous, headstrong young woman who manipulated her way into a love match, seem reluctant to give her the political credit she

deserves. That such credit is merited becomes apparent when one considers the evidence of Mary's political maneuvering in the French court. The episode of François Descars's ransom, for example, demonstrates that Mary understood how the networks of courtly influence function. She tied her request for the ransom to Henry's affection for her. When Henry failed to respond to her first letter on the subject, she persisted, writing him that she trusts that "though I be farre from you that your grace wyll not forgett me" and that he will set the ransom.<sup>cccxxxix</sup> A ransom for Descars will demonstrate to the court that she has political power, and Mary wants the court to recognize her influence.

In addition to her sororal connections, Mary possessed some influence as Louis's much-adored queen. Yet she was aware that she needed the advice of others to determine the best means of conducting herself in a foreign court. When Louis dismissed most of her English attendants, the new queen's chief concern was that she would have no one whom she trusted to advise her. She wrote to Henry on October 12, 1514: "yf Any channs happe other then weale I shall not [k]nowe wher nor of whom to aske any good counsell to yor pleasure nor [y]et to myn own proffitt."<sup>cccxli</sup> Accordingly, when Brandon was visiting, she asked him and his fellow ambassadors for their aid, disclosing to them several incidents which showed that she needed help.<sup>cccxli</sup> His letter to Wolsey, dated November 18, 1514, describes how the English ambassadors then called several high-ranking French nobles to the queen:

and shewed vnto theym that the quene had sent for us and desired us that we wold send for theym and desire theym on hir bihalff and in the name of the king our maister that they wold be good and loving to her and that they wold gyve hir counsaill frome tyme to tyme how she myght best

order hirselffe to content the king wherof she was moost desirous and in hir shuld lak no goode wille. And bicause she knew well they were the men that the king loved and trusted and knew best his mynde therefore she was utterly determyned to love theym and trust theym and to be ordered by thair counsaill in all causes, for she knew well that thoes that the king loved must love hir best and she theym.<sup>cccxlii</sup>

Brandon subsequently notes how well pleased the noblemen were at her flattery and how they not only promised their aid, but they also told her they would inform the king of her determination to please him. The scene Brandon describes depicts a woman whose understanding of the political maneuverings of a court would enable her to manipulate situations to her best advantage. It also reflects Mary's awareness of the political alliances formed between members of the court and her recognition of the need to seek as many allies as possible.

Mary well understood court politics; she would not be ignorant of the dangers she faced in choosing her own husband, nor, in light of her previous experiences with political marriage, would she fail to realize the wide-ranging political implications of her decision to marry an English nobleman. In marrying Brandon, Mary maintained the current peace with France; both Brandon and Wolsey were proponents of the French alliance, so her new husband would pose no threat to relations across the channel.<sup>cccxlili</sup> By refusing to wed any of the other candidates for her hand, Mary prevented a shift to an Anglo-Burgundian or Anglo-Spanish alliance.<sup>cccxliv</sup> In essence, she refused to be the means of instigating yet another policy shift in English relations with Europe. As the queen dowager of France, Mary allowed England's diplomatic connection to France to



remain strong.

Mary's choice of Brandon also had significant ramifications for the English succession; in the event that Catherine did not give Henry a son, any of Mary's children could conceivably be designated Henry's heir. With her elder sister Margaret in Scotland, the idea of returning home to help produce English princes might not have been far from Mary's mind. When she gave birth to a son, the English court recognized his potential status through a sumptuous christening and lavish gifts presented to him.<sup>cccxliv</sup> Mary's decision to wed Brandon seems further justified given that Henry's will would later stipulate that after his children and their heirs, the crown should follow the line of Mary the French queen rather than that of the Scottish Stuarts, even though Mary was the younger of his two sisters.<sup>cccxlv</sup>

Mary was also well aware that both she and Brandon had personal and political value to Henry. In an age that set great store by pageantry and display, she knew their consequence in the eyes of the world. Celebrated for her beauty, charm, and wit throughout Europe, Mary would bring that reputation back to the court of England, enhancing its cultural standing. As one of Europe's most honored knights, Brandon offered similar enhancement. On a personal level, both she and Brandon genuinely cared for Henry, who reciprocated their affection and enjoyed the stimulation of their presence at banquets and tournaments. Additionally, their loyal support would be a particularly valuable gift to a monarch whose control over his nobles was yet at issue.

None of these motivations negates Mary's wish to marry for love. But neither does marrying for love negate the politics of her decision to wed Charles Brandon. History has condemned Mary to relative obscurity; the events of her life merely make a

good story, a woman who used tears to get her own way and marry for love. Such a verdict fails to recognize that her second marriage was a conscious political action on her part, and that her letters were carefully crafted arguments designed to convince her brother that her choice is just, and more, hers to make. What such judgment also overlooks is that in wedding without permission, Mary defied Henry VIII, the pleasure-seeking, selfish, arrogant monarch who would later execute two wives and divorce two others. Henry apparently had genuine affection for Mary, but this was not a man noted for tolerating women's defiance.<sup>cccxlvi</sup>

And Mary's letters do defy Henry's wishes even as she manipulates epistolary conventions to soften the blow. When Mary threatens her brother that she would rather remain in "some relygeious howse" than be married "yn onny place savyng wer as my mynd is," she communicates her firm resolve to wed as she pleases. At the same time, she develops her letter according to dictaminal models, securing Henry's good will by cushioning her rhetoric with flattery, reminding Henry reasonably that an honorable man keeps his promises, and re-iterating the fairness of her request. Only then does she show him how determined she is to make her own decisions, decisions which are important to the whole realm. This letter represents a sophisticated rhetorical appeal that reveals her understanding of the workings of the epistolary genre as well as a deft attention to audience. That Mary's rhetoric eventually succeeds in mollifying Henry indicates how vital epistolary communication could be for both personal and national affairs.

This letter also reflects the influence of Mary's reading, especially Ovid. Mary's sense that a letter is a means of accomplishing one's desires, that a woman can be daring, and write plainly what she hopes, even threaten the man who breaks his promises, seems

to stem directly from his epistles. Her letters echo Phyllis warning Demophoon of the consequences to his reputation for abandoning her, Dido accusing Aeneas, or Hero calling for Leander to come to her. Literature gave Mary the models of women who accomplish their desires through letters; she took those lessons to heart, leaving her letters as evidence to testify to her own strength of purpose, political acumen, and rhetorical sophistication. Ultimately, Mary Tudor Brandon's letters are not significant merely because they provide the entertaining details of an early modern soap opera, but because they are her best means of self-representation as she shapes her response to the politics of kingdoms.

### CHAPTER THREE Petitioning Power

The right of petition in Tudor England originates in the concept of the parental government: the idea that the good ruler cares for the welfare of her citizens as would a father or mother, and that subjects may approach the ruler, like child to parent, for protection and aid.<sup>cccxlvi</sup> From the outset of her reign, Queen Elizabeth signified her benevolent rule by emphasizing her willingness to hear her people's requests. In *The Passage of Our Most Dread Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth through the City of London to Westminster the Day Before Her Coronation*, Richard Mulcaster writes:

her grace's loving behavior, preconceived in the people's heads, upon these considerations was thoroughly confirmed, and indeed implanted a wonderful hope in them touching her worthy government in the rest of her reign. For in all her passage she did not only show her most gracious love toward the people in general, but also privately. If the baser personages had either offered her grace any flowers or such like as a signification of their goodwill, or moved to her any suit, she most gently, to the common rejoicing of all the lookers-on and private comfort of the party, stayed her chariot and heard their requests.<sup>cccxlix</sup>

The Elizabethan age abounds with spectacle: progresses, masques, religious ceremonies, plays, and even executions. This particular progress was a consummate act of theatre on Elizabeth's part, staged to portray her as a generous and beneficent ruler. By involving her common subjects so directly in that theatre, the Queen not only encouraged them to petition further, but she also invited them to imagine themselves within this theatrical

world, to recognize that they too played parts in the political drama Elizabeth was producing.

By staging this particular scene at the beginning of her rule, Elizabeth establishes that petitioning is also a dramatic moment. Petitioners to the Queen and her Privy Council were required to stage their requests and perform the reasons why their petitions should be granted before any action might be taken. In shaping their supplications, petitioners had to consider the most effective way to persuade their listeners that they speak truth and deserve assistance. As a result, petitioners frequently employed conventional phrases, such as “poor and daily orator,” and “utterly undone,” to frame their requests and help the audience to read the petition in a certain fashion. The act of petitioning evolved into a genre of its own, with identifiable language, characters, and situations.

When playwrights include petitions in their plays, they draw on the cultural significance of petitions to convey specific messages to the audience. For example, since a good ruler treats petitioners justly, depicting a king’s response to a petition becomes a kind of shorthand for reading the character, a device George Whetstone’s 1578 play *Promos and Cassandra* exploits to great effect.<sup>cccl</sup> Because drama reflects the cultural practices of petitioning in this way, examining how petitions are employed within plays can provide an avenue of exploration into the phenomenon of petitioning within early modern England. In this chapter, I consider the ways that drama constructs the values related to petitioning: the ruler’s relationship with her subjects, the writer’s connection to her petitionary letter, and the reader’s struggle to discern a letter’s truth.

Although women wrote many kinds of letters to Elizabeth over the course of her

reign, I focus exclusively on petitionary letters from the years 1570 through 1600 because these letters testify to the scope of women's epistolary activity during the period. In effect, petitionary letters represent a blending of the traditions of letter-writing and petitioning, both of which enabled women to communicate ideas and to pursue political agendas. Suppliants can exercise their legitimate rights of petition; and like the literary letters that carry their writers' voices where they themselves cannot go, the written petition can penetrate a sealed-off court, can travel to other places, or be forwarded to other readers. These petitions are legal documents, but they are also literary in the sense that their authors display a sophisticated blend of rhetorical strategies and literary tropes to fashion self-representations calculated to appeal to their audience.

It is impossible to trace direct literary influence on petitioners in the same way I did in the previous chapters on Christine de Pizan and Mary Tudor Brandon, given that the background of women whose petitions survive varies widely with regard to class and education. But these petitioners draw on the literary conventions of letter-writing and petitioning that were part of their culture, which we can see exemplified in the plays of the period. When a woman sought to frame a petition, she relied on a cultural awareness partly influenced by these dramatic models. Therefore, in each section of this chapter I examine several dramatic conceptions of both petitioning and letter-writing to see what ideas are available to historical women. By examining these women's petitions as rhetorical compositions and placing them within their cultural context, I demonstrate that studying the petitionary letter contributes to a better understanding of the scope of women's literary and political activity during the sixteenth-century.

Both fictional and historical petitions demonstrate that women, whether married,

widowed, or single, had the same right as men to petition the crown. In the morality play *Godly Queene Hester*, an early Tudor re-telling of the biblical story of Esther, Hester petitions her husband Assewerus to spare her and the Jewish people from the machinations of his councilor, Aman, “Noble prince and our espouse moste deare, / I beseche youre grace at my supplication, / The precepte youre grace sente at Amans desyre, / Againste me and all the Iewishe nation, / May be reuoked.”<sup>cccli</sup> The fictional portrayals of petitioning women are echoed in reality; over fifty petitions from the period 1570 to 1599 are preserved in the National Archives outside London, where Privy Council records refer to hundreds of other petitions no longer extant. Proclamations from the period acknowledge without comment the existence of petitioners (also called suitors) of both sexes; if a suitor should arrive at court, notes one 1594 proclamation, “Porters shall informe the partie of this order, and shall direct *him or her* to the Chamber of one of the Masters of Requests.”<sup>ccclii</sup> Neither Elizabeth nor her councilors made any distinction between the rights of men and of women to ask their assistance.

The surviving petitions testify that women from all classes had the right to participate in government on this individualized basis.<sup>cccliii</sup> Thus petitioning was one of women’s earliest political rights. Although current historians might cite additional rights belonging to some women—a widow’s right to pursue lawsuits or to make wills, for example—early modern women themselves perceived the petition as their first natural right in society. Even three hundred years later, in her “Discourse on Woman,” Lucretia Coffin Mott would argue that a woman “is deprived of almost every right in civil society, and is a cypher in the nation, except in the right of presenting a petition.”<sup>cccliv</sup>

## Women, Letters and the Problematic Process of Petitioning

Portraying a woman's plea for help and a monarch's ready assent, *Godly Queene Hester* stages the personal petition as a powerful means of ensuring that justice is done. After Hester makes her impassioned plea for her people, King Assewerus bids her "Stande ye vp Lady, and approche ye neare / your petition we graunte it gladlye" (1086-7). First performed in the mid 1520s and published in 1561, this play echoes the critical role of the personal petition within the system of Tudor government.

Despite the existence of the Court of Requests, which during the reign of Henry VII was formally established as an outlet for addressing the complaints of the poor, Elizabethan petitioners hoping for redress of grievances or for legal or monetary assistance continued to send their pleas directly to the Queen, to the Privy Council, and to individual nobles.<sup>ccclv</sup> Many factors influenced a petitioner's choice to bypass the legal avenue to the Court of Requests. Women petitioning for the release of a prisoner may have chosen to appeal to those who could immediately order a husband's pardon. Other petitioners cite poverty as their reason for making direct appeals. For example, in her October, 1583 petition to Sir Francis Walsingham for help obtaining an alms room, Katherine Barthram explains, "I am destitute of ffrendes and have spente all that I am able to make about the obteyninge of this sute."<sup>ccclvi</sup> Tim Stretton notes that if a woman lacked funds to go to court:

she could petition to gain entry *in forma pauperis* and have an attorney and other legal counsel supplied and her fees waived. Nevertheless, the ancillary costs of litigation, such as travel and accommodation, combined with women's ignorance of their legal opportunities, meant that the silent



majority were not in a position to defend their customary interests in central courts such as Requests.<sup>ccclvii</sup>

Geoffrey Elton notes that petitioners were probably hoping that direct intercession by the Council would expedite their requests.<sup>ccclviii</sup> A speedy resolution in most cases was much to be desired, especially given that it would reduce the fees one needed to access officials or to pursue a suit; but speed alone cannot explain the volume of petitions directed to the uppermost echelons of government.

Elizabeth encouraged petitioners to appeal to her directly. Scenes such as her Coronation Day spectacle spread the idea that the Queen would dispense justice to all of her people. And even though both the Queen and the Privy Council on multiple occasions sought to decrease the number of petitions, their own rhetoric often undermined these attempts. In trying to make exceptions for those with extraordinary circumstances, they encouraged suitors to think of addressing the Queen or Council as a sort of court of last resort. This conception caught hold; in her 1587 petition, the Countess of Shrewsbury casts the Privy Council as the “Laste and principaleste relevers of the most distressed.”<sup>ccclix</sup>

The extent to which Elizabeth or the Privy Council remained involved in a petition varied from case to case; the Council often appointed arbiters to investigate further. Sometimes the Council required the arbiters simply to report their findings; more frequently they authorized the arbiters to take appropriate measures, consulting the Council only if new issues arose or if difficulties transpired in gaining the parties' cooperation. Elizabeth, too, participated in the fledgling bureaucracy; the Council registers frequently refer to actions taken because the Queen had directed them to attend

to a certain petition.

Although the tradition of petitioning depicted in *Hester* shows the queen kneeling before her husband, in practice, personal appearance before the monarch with every petition was impossible; therefore written petitions were common. Many petitioners employed scribes, so that even if the petitioner herself could not write, she was still able to petition.<sup>ccclx</sup> Even when a person was physically present, a written bill was necessary; if granted, the bill would be endorsed as proof of the grant, then the petition itself could be forwarded to clerks for further processing.<sup>ccclxi</sup> A written paper could also be easily passed to other parties for further investigation. Records of individual cases listed in the *Acts of the Privy Council* indicate that a petition meeting with the Council's favor was usually referred to arbitration, so that after a full hearing, arbiters could determine what measures were appropriate in each case.

In the biblical story of Esther, petitioning in person represents a problem; Esther tells Mordecai that if she approaches the monarch without advance leave, she could be killed. Access to the ruler was a crucial issue; as both Queen and Council sought to decrease the number of petitioners hanging about the court, the written petition became a more important means of approach. In October of 1589, Elizabeth's councilors ordered their scribe to record in the Council register itself an order limiting the number of petitions brought to the Council because the petitioners were interfering with Council business:

Whereas by reason of the multitude of private suiters resorting daylye to her Majesties privye Counsaill, the lordes and others of the same are continually so troubled and pestred with the said private suitors and their

causes as at the tymes of their assembling for her Majesties speciall services they can hardly be suffred (by the importunity of the said suiters) to attend and proceed in such causes as doe concerne her Majesty and the State of the Realme.<sup>ccclxii</sup>

They affirmed their determination not to hear any matter that might be more appropriately dealt with in other existing courts; at the same time they resolved to continue accepting petitions of last resort, those from suppliants who had not been given justice in the courts, or those whose affairs dealt with matters of threat to the security of the Queen and realm. Yet a mere two years later when the frustrated Council noted that the previous order had not been obeyed, they directed the Masters of Requests to read all petitions submitted to the Council and to direct the parties to other appropriate courts wherever possible.<sup>ccclxiii</sup>

Although the Council's orders make no distinction between petitions sent in writing and accompanied by the physical suppliants, there can be no doubt that the primary concern of both Queen and Council had to do with literal bodies. Suitors not only disrupted the business of the realm when their pleas were heard, but they also neglected their own responsibilities in the meantime, waiting on the chance of seeing the Queen or Council. The Council registers illustrate Elizabeth's preoccupation with discouraging such behavior. On September 5, 1589, one of the Privy Council secretaries recorded the Council's decision to ask the Lord Deputy of Ireland, Sir John Perrot, to look into the case of Agnes Chamberlen, who had repeatedly asked the Queen to help her recover some lands of which she had been deprived. If Chamberlen was telling the truth, Perrot was to see justice done. If his investigation determined no grounds for her appeal,

then the Queen commanded “some punishment don on her [Chamberlen].” Elizabeth was concerned that too many suitors had “used the like pretences to coller their repaire hither here to begge and live lewdelie beinge otherwise hable to worke for their livinges.”<sup>ccclxiv</sup> Chamberlen’s case demonstrates that when petitioning slid over the fine line into pestering, the results could hold danger for the suppliant.<sup>ccclxv</sup> And although both written and oral petitions could interrupt business, a written petition could wait until the Queen or her councilors had the time to attend to it; the demands of a speaking, present person were much harder to ignore.

Even more serious than the disruption caused by petitioners was the ubiquitous menace of plague and the threat of contagion the suitors might carry. In 1592 and in 1593, Elizabeth issued proclamations ordering suitors to stay away from the court in order that she and those attending her might “bee the better preserved from the infection of sicknesse in this time.”<sup>ccclxvi</sup> Suitors could not approach the court without extraordinary cause, and even then were required to obtain a license from the Lord Chamberlain, Vice Chamberlain, or some other member of the Privy Council. But if the party in question only wanted to deliver a letter, s/he might send it past the gates into the court where her physical presence was forbidden.

Women petitioners in particular faced the additional problem that petitioning was deemed public display, and so immodest. All petitioners disrupt the order of everyday business; when that petitioner is a woman pleading for her cause, she is acting directly in contrast to early modern ideals of appropriate feminine behavior, and thus is judged unruly. A female petitioner’s presence is particularly unsettling, especially given that her grounds for petition often grew out of legal or monetary disputes, and therefore almost

always stemmed from conflicts with men. While petitioning the Queen or Council might be understood as a right, women who did so were likely subverting the immediate authority of the men around them.

By contrast, a written letter mitigates the problematic presence of the body. Practicality already necessitated a written record of the petition; in the absence of the physical petitioner, the petition became a letter from the suppliant to her rulers. Even more importantly, the petitionary letter could draw on literary traditions of letter-writing that figure the letter as a tangible representation of the sender's voice. As the letter itself effaced the physical presence of the petitioner, the language of presence within the petition could re-inscribe her. Petitioners referred to themselves as "oratrixes" or "oratrices" and sought to write themselves present, kneeling before Queen or Council.<sup>ccclxvii</sup>

The style and form of written petitions reveal the influence of dictaminal models. The petitionary letters include subscriptions that identify and flatter the person/s being petitioned; they almost always conclude with prayers, and occasionally with traditional closings and signatures. Supplicants paid attention to the layout and appearance of the petition. When Elizabeth, Lady Russell, and the other residents of the Blackfriars wanted the Council to stop Richard Burbage's attempt to build a theater in their district, they wrote a petition using a beautiful italic hand for the opening and the signatures, and laid out the names of the residents in two neat columns.<sup>ccclxviii</sup> The petitions penned by professional legal scribes were usually written across the page in landscape orientation, leaving a large white space at the bottom of the page. Letter-writers were cognizant of the appearance of the letter; Antoine de Courtin's 1675 letter-writing manual, *The Rules*

*of Civility*, advocates using a whole sheet of paper, even for a six-line letter, to “show reverence and esteem.”<sup>ccclxix</sup> Elizabethan petitions anticipated Courtin’s rules; their writers paid careful attention to details of script and layout, sometimes even decorating descenders of letters with large swirls.<sup>ccclxx</sup> For petitionary letters, using the full page may indicate more than esteem; since writing across the wider horizontal page creates the illusion that the petition itself is shorter, scribes may be subtly suggesting the humble stance of the petitioner and/or that her request is only a small one.

Tropes of humility prevail throughout petitionary letters, regardless of the petitioner’s class or gender. The simple act of petitioning places the petitioner in the subordinate position; thus a rhetoric of service and a submissive tone are common elements of the genre. In the moment of petitioning, class becomes unimportant with regard to the simple right to petition (though not, of course, with regard to the additional influence nobility would carry). That is, subject-hood alone, not class, serves as a warrant for a person’s claim on the rulers. If class is no barrier to petition, neither is gender. That men and women enjoy the same ability to petition, employ the same format for petitions, and use the same language, testifies to women’s right to participate as subjects in administering the affairs of the realm, at least with regard to their individual affairs.

Beyond the rhetoric of humility, written petitions also reflect certain shared beliefs about the act of writing a petition. For instance, by promising to pray for her listeners, a petitioner makes a significant offering, a worthy form of exchange for the justice she seeks. Underlying this rhetoric is the idea of the body politic, that subjects give their loyalty, devotion, and service to the sovereign, who supplies protection and

wise government. Another theme that runs throughout many petitions is the idea of incorporating the writer into the letter, so that she can be present metaphorically at the time that it is read. Truth is of paramount concern; petitioners, conscious of the possibility that they will not be believed, take pains to present proofs of their honesty. That these ideas recur throughout many petitions is unsurprising, given that plays from the period testify to their currency in Elizabethan culture.

### **The Bargains of the Body Politic**

Early modern playwrights frequently staged the act of petitioning, partly because watching a character plead for help or pardon creates an opportunity to create dramatic tension, but also because the ruler's response to a petition provides a code for understanding the ruler as either just or tyrannical. Even a short petition scene enables the playwright to establish tone and set the stage for the events to come. Consider the poignancy of Titus Andronicus's kneeling plea before the Tribunes of Rome, begging that his sons' lives be spared: "O reverend Tribunes, O gentle aged men, / Unbind my sons, reverse the doom of death, / And let me say, that never wept before, / My tears are now prevailing orators!"<sup>ccclxxi</sup> When his eldest son Lucius remonstrates with him, Titus concedes that the stones at his feet are the only audience for his grief, that the Tribunes are harder than stones, and Rome cannot afford leaders such as these. Titus's petition underscores the absence of justice in Rome, which has become "a wilderness of tigers" (III.i.53). By contrast, other plays, such as the anonymous 1592 play, *A Knacke to Knowe a Knave*, present the monarch as just when he treats petitioners fairly. In the process, these plays stage the relationship between the ruler and his/her people and explore the

duties each owes to the other as part of a successful body politic.

George Whetstone's 1578 two-part play, *The Historie of Promos and Cassandra*, provides the best example of such multifaceted stage petitions. An early source of Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, Whetstone's play depicts the full bureaucratic process of petitioning even as it employs petitions to highlight the contrast between different rulers. The central plot of *Promos and Cassandra* is very close to Shakespeare's play, except that when Promos demands that Cassandra sleep with him in response to her petition to spare her brother Andrugio's life, she actually does so. When Cassandra appears before Promos, pleading eloquently for justice and mercy, Promos promises her marriage and her brother's pardon as incentives to agreeing to his condition, then revokes both promises after he takes her virginity. His response to her righteous petition signals the depth of his wickedness, enabling the audience to understand that under his rule, no one receives justice. Promos's lax rule fosters an environment of political corruption, bribery, and legalized extortion.

Five separate acts of petition in *The seconde parte of the Historie of Promos and Cassandra* illustrate the opposite, that a good king will dispense justice after listening to his people. At the very end of the first play, Cassandra has decided to avenge herself and her brother by appealing to King Corvinus, "The king is just and mercyfull," she proclaims, "he doth both heare and see: / See mens desarts, heare their complaynts, to Iudge with equity."<sup>ccclxxii</sup> When the second play opens, Corvinus has come to visit Promos in response to Cassandra's plea. Thus Whetstone places Corvinus in direct opposition to Promos from the start, simply by their differing responses to petitions. The King sends out messengers to declare that complaints against government officials should



be brought before Sir Ulrico, a member of his Privy Council, and that anyone knowing of serious crimes may appear before the King himself.<sup>ccclxxiii</sup> Cassandra steps forward once more to accuse Promos, who is condemned to marry her, then be executed for the supposed murder of Andrugio. Once married to Promos, Cassandra petitions for his life, but although the King pities her, he denies her request, preferring “the helth of this, our common weale” (V.ii.9). Fortunately for Promos, Andrugio, whose life was secretly spared by the jailor, re-appears before Corvinus to petition for himself and, out of pity for Cassandra, for Promos’s life as well. With this last petition, the story cycles back to the beginning and effects a full resolution; under Corvinus, Andrugio receives the mercy he merits and Promos, now spared, learns the value of mercy and justice for all people, regardless of rank.

A scene with Ulrico and the petitioners depicts precisely the ideal of Elizabethan justice; the privy councilor hears the pleas of the people, sorts out the truth, and presents the full matter to the King, who dispenses justice. Whetstone further emphasizes that the King’s justice extends to people of all classes by making a poor petitioner kneel directly before Corvinus, who helps him. The poor Clowne rejoices, saying that for two years he had no help, then:

O Leard, ych thought the King could not bide, on poore men to looke,  
But God save his Grace, at fyrst dash, my Supplication he tooke:  
And you hard, how gently, he calld mee poore man, and wild me goe,  
For my Pasport, I kenne not what, to good syr *Ulrico*.  
Well, chull goe fort, and hope to be with Master *Prostros* to bring:  
But ere ych goe, chul my Ballat, of good King *Corvine* sing.

The Clownes Song.

You Barrons bolde, and lustie Lads,  
Prepare to welcome, our good King:  
Whose comming so, his Subjectes glads,  
As they for joye, the Belles doo ryng....  
Who checks the rytch, that wrong by might,  
And helpes the poore, unto his right.  
The love that rygour gettes through feare,  
With grace and mercie, he doth wyn:  
For which we praye thus, everie where,  
Good Lorde preserve, our King Corvin (III.iii.295-315).

Thus, Whetstone not only illustrates that Corvinus is right to dispense justice to all of his subjects, but also that the grateful subject owes love and loyalty to his sovereign. In fact, the Clowne's gratitude is so great that he *immediately* stops to pray for his King's long life. In this fashion, Whetstone stages the contract between the different elements of the body politic. The King's duty is to protect his people and to treat them fairly; in return, the subject is obligated to give the King his fealty, love, and prayer. This bargain is echoed by the noble characters at the end of the play; when Corvinus pardons Andrugio and Promos, all present immediately confirm their loyalty by praying, "God preserve your Majestie" (V.iv.134). Corvinus responds by reminding Promos to "measure Grace, with Justice evermore" (V.iv.140). With this bargain sealed, the play affirms that health has returned to the commonwealth.

Petitioners throughout Elizabeth's reign echo the belief that the Queen or her

deputies will grant their authors justice. In return, the supplicants promise their prayers for the monarch's well-being. Such prayers demonstrate the petitioner's fulfillment of the contract of the body politic, while conveying the implicit trust that the petition will then receive just treatment. The act of petitioning thus confirms the suitor's place within the commonwealth.

That women share this right to petition indicates that they are members of the political community and possess the right to participate in its social contract. For example, in a 1581 letter, Edith Bulman begs for Elizabeth's aid in regaining the ownership of copyhold lands forcibly taken from her.<sup>ccclxxiv</sup> She requests that Elizabeth will grant her "your highnes broade Seale of England, whereby shee may be restored to her peaceable possession againe; otherwise she is utterly undon for ever. And your said Subject, accordinge to her most bounden dutie, shall daylie pray to god for the prosperous preservacion of your highnes' royall estate longe to reigne over us." Bulman's conclusion emphasizes her identity as Elizabeth's subject; by promising to pray for the Queen's long reign, she fulfils her communal responsibilities. Bulman's final "us" in "reign over us" further underscores that Bulman understands herself as part of the English state.

Within Elizabethan society, such prayers commanded respect. Jane Donawerth includes prayer amongst the many offerings, such as poetry, clothing, food, and money, that Englishmen and women would offer each other in a gift-exchange system vital in building and maintaining community.<sup>ccclxxv</sup> Offering prayers actually enhances the petitioner's ethos; not only does the prayer establish the person as godly, but it also shows that she understands her role within society, her duty to her sovereign, and her

willingness to participate in the social exchange. That ethos is enhanced by the conventional petitionary rhetoric of prayer in which the individual requests that God grant specific favors. Underlying the petitioner's promise is an assumption that God will grant the worthy petitioner's request. And in a parallel that could only flatter, the petitioner thus suggests that the Queen should follow God's precedent and similarly grant her wish.

Although such prayers provide a formulaic closure to a petitionary letter, their authors nonetheless manipulate the formula to enhance the effectiveness of their arguments. Usually, the choice of prayer is tied to the category of request; for example, a petition for help in recovering lands or goods will conclude with a prayer for the audience's prosperity. In 1576, Anne Lanesdall, who, like Bulman, had been cheated out of her lands, vows to pray for Elizabeth's "prosperous Reigne...longe to endure" if the Queen will assist her in regaining what is hers and her children's.<sup>ccclxxvi</sup> When Margaret Powell, a former servant of the Lady Burghley, begged for Robert Cecil's financial assistance because "it hath pleased god to visite [her husband] with longe and greevous sicknes," she concludes her plea with the promise that she, her sick husband, and their five poor children will pray for Cecil's "good estate in all health and honor."<sup>ccclxxvii</sup> Re-iterating her husband's sickness in the last line gives added dimension to her prayer for Cecil's health. By linking the prayer with the request, petitioners emphasize community; each participant in a petitionary exchange has the power to assist the other to achieve specific ends.

More than just a nicety, tailoring prayers in this fashion is a strategic rhetorical move that becomes vitally important to the petitioner's self-fashioning. This is especially

the case when the petitioner is a recusant. Given the political climate and the fears of Catholic plots against Elizabeth, a recusant's prayer for the Queen's long life and continued reign is inherently politically charged. In April 1586, mere months before the exposure of the Babington plot to assassinate the Queen, Elizabeth Beaumont petitioned the Justices of Leicestershire that she be remitted the financial penalty assessed for recusancy:

althoughe my hartye good will is with all dewty and humilytie to yeld unto her Majestie (yf I were able) as mucche as anie poore subjecte her highness hath, yet in verye truthe (as my state stondesth), my yerelie necessarye charges being defrayed, there will remaine no overplus of my poore stipend....I do most humbly submitte myself to the princelye clemencye of her highenes, ffor whose longe and prosperowsse reigne over us, I do and will contynuallie praye.<sup>cclxxviii</sup>

Beaumont's humble submission and desire for Elizabeth's long reign distance her rhetorically from the enemies of the Queen. Instead, she allies herself with Elizabeth's loyal subjects, in the hopes that doing so may establish that her failure to pay the fine lies in her financial situation, not in any defiance of the law. A prayer for Elizabeth in a letter to the Justices of Leicestershire is especially interesting; given that petitioners usually only offer to pray for the addressee, including the Queen emphasizes Beaumont's loyalty. Similarly, in 1570, the very year that Pope Pius V issued the bull excommunicating Elizabeth, Dorothy Keill petitioned William Cecil that her husband John be released from the Marshalsea prison, and in return promises to pray for "the Quenes Majesties long reigne over us in health victorie and honor and also for your honores contynuall good

successes in all your doings.<sup>ccclxxix</sup> In this fashion, petitioners emphasize their devotion and fidelity to the Queen.

Petitioners need not be suspected of disloyalty to recognize the rhetorical power of a targeted prayer. In about 1598, Margery Lennard petitioned Elizabeth for her husband's right to succeed to her brother's title as baron of Dacre. Lennard's petitionary letter underscores her loyalty to Elizabeth as she lists the historical precedent for allowing women to inherit titles in England. She argues that all titles are founded on Elizabeth's divine authority as God's deputy, "as the titles & dignities of all the Politicall Nobilitie of this your highnes kingdom & flowing from your royall throne as from the first spring and fountayne by ye speciall prerogative that God hath inseparably annexed thereonto."<sup>ccclxxx</sup> Leaving unspoken Elizabeth's assumption of her father's throne, Lennard focuses on the sacred relationship between the monarch and her nobles: "Whereunto your said suppliant and servant in all humilitie and obedience doth most willinglie submitt both her selfe and the whole cause who with her husband and many children (sonnes and daughters) accordinge to their bounden dueties doe daielie praye to God Almightye for the longe and happie preservacion of your royall estate and most sacred parson." Lennard unabashedly proclaims her many offspring, and thus advertises the likelihood that her line will continue the title, underscoring her argument's foundation in the sacrosanct nature of the right of inheritance and its basis in Elizabeth's divine authority.<sup>ccclxxxi</sup>

Like the poor man who praised King Corvinus in *Promos and Cassandra*, these women promise to pray for Elizabeth or the Council out of gratitude for their help. In doing so, they pledge their loyalty in return for justice. Thus their prayers implicitly call for the Queen and her councilors to fulfill their side of the contract and provide the justice

these women seek. Through their prayers, the petitioners confirm their participation in the body politic, especially given that the specific subjects of prayer###Elizabeth's health, long life###all have strong implications for the prosperity and security of the realm.

### **Standing, Showing, and Speaking: The Language of Presence**

Immediately following Bassanio's felicitous choice of the leaden casket in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, the messenger Salerio brings him a letter from Antonio explaining the downfall of the merchant's fleet and the forfeiture of his bond to Shylock. Appalled, Bassanio exclaims to Portia, "Here is a letter, lady, / The paper as the body of my friend, / And every word in it a gaping wound / Issuing life-blood" (III.iv.261-4). Bassanio's words might seem melodramatic, but it is no mere metaphor he offers. Within literary traditions exists an epistolary communion, wherein the letter so incorporates the voice and person of its sender, that through the paper and ink, the sender virtually appears as the letter is read. At the very least, the letter becomes the closest possible representation of the sender, with the hand that writes linked with the pen it holds, and the letter acting as the tangible evidence of the union.<sup>ccclxxxii</sup>

Only such a close connection between sender and letter could explain Julia's behavior in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, when she tears Proteus's love letter, then collects and kisses the pieces individually:

And here is writ "Love-wounded Proteus."

Poor wounded name! My bosom, as a bed,

Shall lodge thee till thy wound be throughly healed,

And thus I search it with a sovereign kiss...

Lo, here in one line is his name twice writ:

“Poor forlorn Proteus,” “passionate Proteus.”

“To the sweet Julia.” —That I’ll tear away.

And yet I will not, sith so prettily

He couples it to his complaining names.

Thus will I fold them one upon another.

Now kiss, embrace, contend, do what you will. (I.ii, 104-30)

Julia’s excessive actions, kissing and embracing the letter, lodging the pieces in her bosom, are certainly comedic, yet comedy does not entirely negate the close link between the letter and Proteus’s person; indeed, the humor depends on her imagining Proteus in place of the letter. In preserving the piece containing both their names, Julia envisions the paper as the literal union of herself and her love, and bids them share what pleasure they would. But Julia is not alone in so depicting the letter; the very next scene witnesses Proteus exclaiming over her response, “Sweet love, sweet lines, sweet life! / Here is her hand, the agent of her heart. / Here is her oath for love, her honour’s pawn. / O that our fathers would applaud our loves / To seal our happiness with their consents” (I.iii, 45-9). Proteus, too, sees Julia in her writing, joining her life with her lines.

Given the difficulties surrounding a petitioner’s access to the court, and the Queen and Council’s attempts to limit individual access, the letter’s ability to speak for its sender becomes particularly important. Absence of the petitioner’s physical presence could be an advantage, especially for women, given issues of modesty, but the lack of such presence potentially renders a petition less immediate, and thus, less effective. An epistolary vocabulary that enables a letter to reproduce such a presence metaphorically



provides one resolution for the problem.

Vocabulary throughout petitionary letters sustains a language of presence even when the petitioner cannot deliver her petition in person. When referring to themselves, male petitioners often use the word “orator,” while women employ the feminine versions, “oratrix” or “oratrice.”<sup>ccclxxxiii</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that both these words might denote “a petitioner or suppliant.”<sup>ccclxxxiv</sup> Both simultaneously suggest the rhetorical situations of speaking eloquently aloud, pleading for a cause. A petition read aloud to the Queen or Council thus carries the woman’s voice directly into the room. “Suppliant” is another common self-referent in the petitions.<sup>ccclxxxv</sup> Evoking images of kneeling or begging, this gender-neutral term emphasizes the petitioner’s humility. Verbs similarly evoke presence. Often, a petitioner will explain that she is *showing* the facts of the matter. Margaret Androwes and her son, whose ship *The Gift of God* was sunk by Sir Francis Drake in the Lisbon expedition, open their petition to the Council, “In most humble wise beseching sheweth unto your honors your poore and dailie orators.”<sup>ccclxxxvi</sup> Still other petitionary letters exhibit complaints; Margaret Aston “exhibited” her proofs against John and Richard Daniel when she petitioned the Earl of Leicester about a land dispute in 1575.<sup>ccclxxxvii</sup> Such diction encourages the audience to imagine the petitioner standing before him.

When Androwes and her son refer to themselves as “poor and daily orators,” they employ another typical element of petitionary letters: language suggesting a recurring nature of the plea. The letter preserves the petitioner’s speech at one moment in time, and every time the letter is re-read, the supplicant makes her request again. Sometimes the reiteration is literal; Mary Harte writes to Burghley twice in three days for a renewal

of a commission, while Walsingham receives three letters about Mary Scott's inability to pay a fine for recusancy.<sup>ccclxxxviii</sup> But usually, the phrase is metaphorical####daily requesting assistance contributes to the immediacy a petition might convey. Since the moment of writing the request is frozen in time, every re-reading evokes the petitioner's presence again.

In recompense for daily suits, petitioners customarily promise daily prayers for the audience. The Androwes' petition states: "And they shalbe bound daily to praie for the prosperitie of your honors longe to continue." Margaret Overend ups the ante further, promising to pray *hourly* for Sir Francis Walsingham if he will intervene in the lawsuit between herself and Phillip Smith.<sup>ccclxxxix</sup> In an economy of prayer, repetition is a valuable currency; even more than that, repetition suggests an ongoing relationship between the supplicant and her audience.

Connections between the letter and its sender are strengthened all the more when a letter is marked with tears or blood. For example, in Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Bel-Imperia is forced to write a letter in her own blood to reveal Horatio's murder. The extremity of this action prefigures her resolve to die to punish Horatio's killers. Through such conceits, these plays perpetuate the idea that the letter can incorporate the self; through the letter, a person can speak and even appear before the listener.

Petitionary letters use tears to evoke presence. For example, when Thomas Appletree accidentally discharged a gun on the Thames while the Queen was sailing, both he and his companion Barnebe Actton were committed to the Marshalsea; Actton's mother Annies and Appletree wrote separate petitions mentioning tears.<sup>cccxc</sup> Annies

wrote to the Council, begging, “In moste humble and nolese [no less] Lamentable wise with wepping tears and bowinge knees beseching your honors, Annies Actton, wedow.”<sup>cccxcxi</sup> The evocative imagery summons a vivid picture of the mother desperately afraid for her son. Yet Appletree’s petition on his own behalf uses the exact phrase, “with weeping tears and bowinge knees.”<sup>cccxcii</sup> The repetition does not lessen the power of the image; rather it suggests that each petitioner considered that the phrase would be an effective way to convey the appropriate level of grief to the audience; conjuring their presence through their tears, each petitioner figuratively kneels before the Council.

### **The Anxiety of Truth**

Tears were also a powerful warrant of truth when concerns over such truth were great. In August of 1571, Francis Walsingham wrote to Robert Dudley from France, “the poor Protestants here do think then their case desperate; they tell me so with tears, and therefore I do believe them.”<sup>cccxciii</sup> Although words can infuse a sense of presence into the letter, the letter’s static nature always creates a telling absence. A petitioner’s letter captures one moment in time; although petitioners might use the sense of immediacy to rhetorical advantage, the very frozenness has an inherent vulnerability, for the letter cannot respond to its audience’s reaction. The author might try to anticipate questions, but however she might represent herself, ultimately she is not in attendance. A writer may lie to represent events to her best advantage, but in her absence, the petitionary letter cannot be pressed for further information; its ink will neither blush, nor sweat, nor tremble. Whereas an individual might give way to questioning, a letter remains stoic. How much weight of truth, then, could a letter bear?

This anxiety over veracity is magnified by the copious literary examples of letters

that lie and mislead, letters that are forged and intercepted; examining these plays reveals an early modern cultural anxiety over letters. Time and again playwrights emphasize that someone who trusts a letter without good reason is a fool. As early as 1515, the eponymous king of Skelton's *Magnificence* falls into ruin because he imprudently believes a counterfeit letter establishing Fancy's good credentials as an advisor. Francis Marbury's morality play, *The Marriage Between Wit and Wisdom*, first performed circa 1571, sees Wit led astray when Fancie fabricates a letter from Wisdom. Even unforged letters can lie; in Robert Greene's 1589/1590 play *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, Edward Lacie tests the love of his fiancée Margaret by sending her a false letter explaining that he must wed someone else.<sup>cccxciv</sup> In all of these instances, the physical absence of the letter's sender facilitates the deceit, since the reader cannot question the sender regarding the letter's truth.

Yet plays also send contradictory messages; other letters communicate genuine news of vital import. *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* would have ended vastly differently had Friar John been able to deliver Friar Laurence's explanation of Juliet's supposed demise. Poor Iphigenia would never have come to Aulis had Menelaus not treacherously intercepted Agamemnon's remorseful letter warning her and Clytemnestra, according to the 1555 translation of *Iphigenia at Aulis* by Jane, Baroness Lumley.<sup>cccxcv</sup> Other genuine letters which do reach their intended readers are ignored or disbelieved; Hieronimo should trust Bel-Imperia's bloody missive, yet her accusations are so fantastic and their method of delivery so suspicious, he hesitates to accept the letter's authenticity until he sees her in person.

Nowhere is this tension between true and false letters better exploited than in

Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*, in which the Machiavellian Barabas the Jew turns to letters to achieve his malignant purposes. In order to punish the governor he hates, Barabas forges letters to counterfeit a challenge between the governor's son Lodowick and Don Mathias, who kill one another in a duel. After Barabas's daughter Abigail discovers her father's culpability in her lover Mathias's death, she retreats to a convent, where she writes to her father advising him to repent. The idea of repentance is repugnant to Barabas, who concludes that he must poison the entire nunnery to silence her, but the dying Abigail confesses in a letter to a priest the full truth of her father's deeds. The story grows more convoluted, with letters remaining at the forefront of the action, as the courtesan Bellamira uses love letters to deceive Ithamore, Barabas's accomplice. Once involved with her, Ithamore blackmails his former employer with haughty letters that enrage Barabas, who exclaims, "this angers me, / That he, who knows I love him as myself, / Should write in this imperious vein."<sup>ccccxvi</sup> Ultimately, Bellamira informs on Barabas, and the violence intensifies as the play draws to its bloody conclusion.

Marlowe's play stages his society's anxiety regarding the veracity of letters. On one level, *The Jew of Malta* presents a simple dichotomy; some letters lie and some tell the truth. But Marlowe further complicates the issue of the letter's truthfulness, since even deceitful letters can effect positive ends—Bellamira's love letters may be dishonest, but the resulting affair leads ultimately to the exposure of Barabas's crimes. Marlowe's play advises an appropriate level of suspicion toward the letter. Potentially it offers truth, but readers should seek additional evidence, since the sender's absence means that the letter can be exploited more easily than verbal communication, where the person is

available for questioning.

In *The Jew of Malta*, Abigail's confessional letter stands out from others in the play because its occasion provides a substantial warrant of truth. As a dying declaration, her words carry weight. But what constitutes proof of veracity? Enumerating the difficulties early modern courts experienced in ascertaining the truth, Elizabeth Hanson explains that although all witnesses must take oaths to guarantee truth, the accused may not be forced to accuse himself. A statement from the accused "had to be verified, not by his conscience, but by 'other meanes and men.'"<sup>cccxcvii</sup> Hanson's account of the standards of proof sheds light on the dilemma a petitioner faced. Like the accused in a court case, a petitioner's word required corroboration, especially when her suit involved a confrontation with another person.

Hanson contends that one major difficulty of judicial torture (aside from ethics) lies in the conflicting assumptions that truth resides in the body, from which torture could literally extricate it, and that truth is ultimately unknowable since oaths promising truth stem from an interior conscience.<sup>cccxcviii</sup> But how much more difficult is it to prove truth when the assertions come from a letter separate from any physical body that might be further questioned? Ultimately, the petition's audience must determine the credibility of each individual situation. Frequently, if the Privy Council found a petition plausible, they recommended the case to an arbitrator whose responsibility it was to hear the case fully and determine a just response. Therefore, a petitionary letter needed to present a case strong enough to sway the reader either into immediate action or into appointing a proxy with authority to take charge of the matter. Although it would be overly dramatic to state that a woman petitioner only got one such chance, examples like that of Agnes

Chamberlen, who was to be punished for petitioning the Queen so frequently if her suit failed, demonstrate the perils of repeated supplication.

Petitionary letters reveal the supplicant's awareness of the precariousness of her position. She must make it clear beyond doubt that her letter is true and that her audience would be right to trust her. Petitioners employ a wide array of strategies designed to demonstrate their reliability; they supply testimony or offer witnesses. Some, such as Barbara Naylor, who lost her investment when the pirate John Cornelious attacked the ship carrying her goods, proffer evidence; for Naylor, the records in the Customs house in Sandwich, where she had paid her duty, could corroborate the amount of the damages she was requesting.<sup>cccxcix</sup> Naylor's offering independent confirmation intimates that she has every expectation that official records will support her claim. When such authentication cannot be obtained, petitioners rely on rhetorical devices to enhance their ethos and thus make their pleas more believable.

Unsurprisingly, those petitions most concerned with proof are those from recusants or those accused of recusancy, women whose religious beliefs rendered them automatically suspect, and whose truth was most difficult to substantiate. When assessed the financial penalty for recusancy, the widow Margaret Blackwell acted decisively, sending two sets of letters on November 26, 1585, one to the Privy Council and one to Walsingham separately.<sup>cd</sup> In her petitions, she explains that she and her deceased husband had gone to St. Andrew's Church in Castle Baynard Ward for thirty years. Because she refused to join her neighbors in the Blackfriars at their parish church, they reported her as a recusant. In support of her assertions, she supplies a formal certificate from the parson and church wardens at St. Andrew's, testifying to her attendance in their

church: “Margarett Blackwell of London, widdowe,...dothe use as ofte as she comethe to London to resorte to the devyne servyce in our paryshe church of Saint Andrewes in Castell baynarde warde in wytnes wherof we the parson and Churchwardeyns of the saide paryshe Church of Saint Andrewes have to this present bill sett ovr handes.” Seizing every opportunity to verify her conformity to Elizabeth’s laws, Blackwell actually includes a separate certificate in each petition. Such measures are unsurprising; given the difficulty of ascertaining religious belief, the certificates proving attendance represent objective evidence of her truth.

Blackwell is fortunate in being able to submit a written declaration with her petition. In the absence of such a document, petitioners might resort to witness testimony. For example, when Jane Bowes was called by Elizabeth’s commissioners to declare what sum of money she would contribute to the crown as a penalty for recusancy, Bowes petitioned that she be allowed to subscribe only five pounds, “with most humble protestation of my dutie and allegiance unto her Majesty.”<sup>cdi</sup> Admitting that the amount is small, Bowes asserts that her living is only thirty-four pounds a year, “so found by the othe of twelve men, by inquisition of offyce within these fiftene years last past.” Bowes begs the commissioners, whom she calls “my verie good freindes,” to certify the truth of her statements unto the Privy Council.

Whether because of friendship or because they believed the oath of the twelve men, in their letter to the Privy Council, the justices of Leicestershire endorse the offers made by Bowes and another recusant, Walter Whitall, but they stop short of full support, indicating their unwillingness to swear absolutely to the truth: “The Sugiestions made by eyther of them to Induce your honors to accept of ther offers we thinck to be true but that



we know not the certenty of the valew of ther lyvinges, And therefore knowe not houe ther offer may be Increased. But referre the same therefore to your good Lordeshippes consideracions.”<sup>cdii</sup> Despite Bowes’s oath, the justices are careful to distance themselves from her slightly even as they grant her their approval. But by contrast, another recusant, Elizabeth Beaumont, who offers no testimony, gets no endorsement. Bowes’s testimony helped her so far, at least. All three letters were forwarded to the Council so that they could judge for themselves.

Those petitioners possessing neither documentation nor testimony of necessity rely on their rhetorical skill. In October of 1585, Mary Scott writes three letters about her inability to pay a recusant fine. On October 18, she addresses Anthony Radcliffe, the sheriff of London, who forwards her letter to Walsingham without comment.<sup>cdiii</sup> In the letter, Scott explains that her husband has died only four days previously, that his will is not yet gone through probate, that the bulk of his goods will go to his two sons, and that she has only a small jointure to live on. She offers no proof of her economic situation, but emphasizes her status as a new widow to evoke pity: “And therefore [I] humblie desire yow (at the prayer of afflicted poore widowe) of this my case to make your favorable reporte unto my good Lordships of her Majesties Counsell, to whose supream Authoritie & Wisedomes alwaies I most humblie refer my selfe.” On the same day, Scott writes to Walsingham directly; here, too, she explains the matter briefly and submits herself humbly to his protection.<sup>cdiv</sup> The only significant difference between the two letters is that in the latter, she casts the sheriff as an impediment, contending that he is “pressinge upon me notwithstandinge for the monye,” and that she appeals to Walsingham as a result. A week later, Scott heightens her rhetoric to counteract any

negative perceptions Radcliffe may have given by writing Walsingham directly.<sup>cdv</sup> She explains in detail the small amount of money left to support her two young daughters and herself and throws herself at the Secretary's mercy:

My case which, your honors pytefull eye considered, I hoape there appereth no willful defaulte. But I a poore widowe lefte in meane estate & verie unable to performe suche charge of me demaunded most humbly crave your honors most favorable Regarde, that thereby I may be set free from this Imposition, which as it is not in me to performe, So am I verie fearefull to be returned contempuous unto Suvreaine Authority which I so gretly reverence. That knoweth our Lorde whoe ever preserve your honor in all happynes.

In the end of her petition, Scott submits herself wholly to Walsingham and attempts to portray herself as a destitute widow and a deeply loyal subject of Elizabeth. Since her only proof is the sincerity of her language, Scott relies heavily on such ethos and pathos to persuade Walsingham.

Sometimes a petitionary letter's rhetorical stance had a positive effect on the outcome. In November of 1595, Elizabeth Blechenden and several other residents of Peasemarsch, near Rye, petitioned the Council because the townspeople were not allowing them to rebuild the dike that protected their homes near St. Mary marsh.<sup>cdvi</sup> The petitioners explain the full history of the dike: Queen Mary had ordered them to construct a wall around the marsh, where subsequently they built houses, a barn, and two windmills, to the benefit of the town of Rye. But when they attempted to repair a breach in the wall caused by floods, the townspeople intervened by denying them access to the

wall and appealing to Thomas, Lord Cobham, Warden of the Cinque Ports, falsely alleging that the harbor was much improved by the breach in the march. As a result, all the buildings are threatened. In response to this petition, the Privy Council registers show that the Council, including the Lord Cobham, must have agreed, since they sent a letter to the commissioners of sewers in Sussex in January 1596, ordering them to halt the previously-sanctioned changes being made to the Rye harbor in light of new information they received.<sup>cdvii</sup>

Although they supply a map of the area, Blechenden and her fellow petitioners rely mostly on their ethos to prove the truth of their appeal. Portraying themselves as reasonable people seeking equity, they point out all that they have done for the town and highlight the inequitable treatment they have received in exchange. Equity, “natural justice applied to individual problems,” notes Elton, was one of the major concerns of the Elizabethan justice system.<sup>cdviii</sup> In 1531, for example, Sir Thomas Elyot had defined a public weal, or republic, as “a body living compact or made of sundry estates & degrees of men, which is disposed by the order of equitie and governed by the rule and moderation of reason.”<sup>cdix</sup> Equity was thus the foundation of law. Knowing their demonstrable equity to be one of their strongest arguments, Blechenden and her neighbors appeal to it wherever possible, explaining that they had tried to repair the wall themselves, “as right & equitie wolde,” even flattering the Council, “knowing your zeale unto equitie.” Avowing their intent to abide by whatever the Council deems appropriate, they request only that the Council appoint some independent commissioners to look into the matter: “suche as shall be affectid more to Justice then to parties.” Such language distances them from the behavior of the townsfolk, who “in evill and unlawfull manner

assembled” to prevent the repair. Throughout the petition, they are careful to avoid insulting Lord Cobham, who was in fact a member of the Privy Council, placing the full blame for the matter on the lies of the town’s deputy mayor John Baytie and “others of the meaner sorte.”

Petitions like this one figure the Privy Council as the divine instrument for discovering truth, so that miraculously, the truth will out. Emphasizing their trust in the Council’s justice in this fashion enables these women to allay any suspicion of dishonesty. They have presented their cases for judgment without fear; implicitly they insinuate that they are telling the truth. While documentation and testimony certainly helped one’s case, a plenitude of examples survive where the woman’s rhetoric alone sufficed to persuade her audience. In such instances, she needed to construct a solid case, relying on appeals to pity, demonstrations of logic, and credible protestations of sincerity and loyalty to win her appeal.

### **Wives, Widows, and the Authority of Marriage**

By staging a wife’s ability to petition for her family, the petitions that take center stage to mark key moments of Shakespeare’s *Henry VI* trilogy can help us to read actual petitionary letters. In *Henry VI, Part III*, the hapless Henry, his kingdom lost to Edward IV, ponders the fate of his wife in the French court, where she and their son have gone to plead for military aid. Deeming his cause lost because Warwick has also travelled to France on Edward’s behalf, Henry muses: “Louis [is] a prince soon won with moving words. / By this account, then, Margaret may win him—/ For she’s a woman to be pitied much. / Her sighs will make a batt’ry in his breast, / Her tears will pierce into a marble

heart, /...Ay, but she's come to beg; Warwick, to give."<sup>cdx</sup> Henry characterizes Margaret's pitiable tears as effective orators, but concedes that their position is too weak for her to win the French king's favor.

Henry's speech illustrates a key feature of a woman's petition: the right of a wife to plead on her husband's behalf and to be his legitimate representative and advocate in matters that advance his interest. Historians such as Barbara Harris contend that as long as women remained committed to furthering their husband's ambitions, they could exercise considerable authority.<sup>cdxi</sup> Margaret goes to France to sue for Henry, and in her petition, emphasizes her personal relationship with Henry. She even dissociates herself rhetorically from queenship, lamenting that she was "Great Albion's queen in former golden days, / But now mischance hath trod my title down, / And with dishonour laid me on the ground, / Where I must take like seat unto my fortune / And to my humble state conform myself" (III.iii.7-11). Margaret underscores her status as a wife and mother by focusing her plea on Henry and Edward's losses:

Henry, sole possessor of my love,  
Is of a king become a banished man,  
And forced to live in Scotland a forlorn,  
While proud ambitious Edward, Duke of York,  
Usurps the regal title and the seat  
Of England's true-anointed lawful King.  
This is the cause that I, poor Margaret,  
With this my son, Prince Edward, Henry's heir,  
Am come to crave thy just and lawful aid.

An if thou fail us all our hope is done (III.iii.24-33).

She is there to be her husband's voice, with her claim on Louis grounded in her husband's royalty. Only when Warwick addresses her disrespectfully as "Injurious Margaret" does Margaret claim her title, indignantly exclaiming, "And why not 'Queen'?" (III.iii.78). Up until the moment when her queenly authority is challenged, Margaret speaks for her husband; when her status is contested, she asserts her own right, but abandons the rhetorical position of wifely concern. Such would indicate that her original choice of expression was a deliberate move intended to sway Louis. Making that choice in turn points to the authority that wifely status conferred on a woman, enabling her to assume her husband's mantle.

Historical women consistently make the same appeal in their petitions, especially when their husbands are incapacitated because of incarceration, exile, illness, or other difficulty. In March, 1586, the wives of mariners from the ships the *Emanuel* and the *Julian* petitioned the Privy Council for help getting their husbands released from a Spanish prison and for financial assistance until they returned. Collectively identifying themselves as wives, the women emphasize their husbands' misery:

Your honours poore and daiely Oratrices, the wieves of the Masters and others of the Companies of the late good Englishe shippes, the Emanuell and Jullyan of London, most lamentably complayninge doe shewe to your honours: That whereas their poore husbandes went forth to Spaine on marchantes affaires, when all thinges to their knowledge went in quiett, and hopinge of a good voiage, lefte your poore Oratrices with very little at home, and yet more did take uppon credit; Soe it is, righte honorables,

that they themselves for noe offence by them done or pretended are stayed, lying in prison almost starved, their shippes and goodes made confiscat and are spoyled to their great losse and utter ymperishment.<sup>cdxii</sup>

The only reference to themselves is to their impoverishment, their husbands having left them very little money.<sup>cdxiii</sup> Instead, they concentrate on their husbands' peaceful intent, business affairs, and current desperate state. They beg that the Council will move Elizabeth to help them obtain some financial aid and find means to negotiate "the more speedier release of their poore husbandes out of their extreame misery."<sup>cdxiv</sup> In return, the wives "and all theirs" promise to pray daily for the Council. In this fashion, they conform to their expected roles, offering their gift of prayer in exchange for their sovereign's protection. But while the gift is theirs, the wives' petition largely centers on their spouses. Their own suffering stems from their husbands' captivity, and only by speaking for their husbands can they make their own claim.<sup>cdxv</sup>

Some women employ the opposite tactic; although they speak for their husbands, they emphasize their suffering in their husband's absence, using emotional appeals to evoke pity. For example, on July 18, 1578, Ursula Morton petitions Burghley for the release of her husband Robert from the Gatehouse prison at Westminster.<sup>cdxvi</sup> In contrast to the mariners' wives' pleas, Morton's petition underscores her suffering: the loss of their money and house, her lack of friends and her brother's impending death. Without Burghley's intervention, "your said oratrice and hir husband are like to be utterlie undone...And your said orator & oratrice accordinge to there bounden dewtie shall praie to god for the preservation of your honor." In contrast to the wives of English Protestants

in Catholic jails, Morton focuses on herself in the plea, perhaps because her husband is in an English jail for suspicious actions.<sup>cdxvii</sup>

Morton's closing prayer assumes a strong degree of agency by binding her husband to pray with her for Burghley. Women who make such promises in their petitionary letters not only voice their husbands' desires but also commit them to action. In 1580, Anne Alen wrote to Elizabeth petitioning that her husband Martin's sentence of exile be lifted.<sup>cdxviii</sup> Alen praises the Queen for her "abundante clemencie" in commuting Martin's original death sentence to exile; she characterizes Martin's offence as a "heynous" one "committed againste your Majestie." She then shifts attention to herself, explaining that since Martin's exile to Normandy, she "is broughte to extreme povertie and necessitie, like to pearishe for lacke of relief. In tender consideracion whereof, youre saide oratrice most humbelie besecheth your highenes, for the tender mercie of god, to be so good and generous to hir saide husbände as to graunte to him your gracious pardon." Anne does not suggest that Martin himself merits clemency in his own right; rather her suffering is the catalyst for her request, and it is she who beseeches Elizabeth. At that point she promises that, if Martin is allowed to come home, he will "contynue the rest of his lief to Labor and traveill in his vocacion for the relief of him of your saide oratrice & theirre ffamilie in the waie of honestie and trouthe." Alen has not merely committed her husband to prayer; in effect she obliges him to reform his behavior for the rest of his life. In doing so, Alen goes beyond merely speaking for her husband; she claims authority over his actions.

Throughout the petition, Alen emphasizes her humility and her loyalty to Elizabeth, so that her character can serve as a legitimate warrant of Martin's good



conduct. Her concluding prayer promises that she and Martin will “duringe theire Lives accordinge to theyre bounden dueties dailie praie unto allmightie god for the preservacion of your highenes longe in moste roiall magnificens to endure and raigne over us.” This undertaking is consistent with other such pledges in its expressions of duty and lifelong commitment; it differs in the level of flattery of the “most royal magnificence” of the queen.

Echoing Queen Margaret’s speech to King Louis in *Henry VI, Part III*, all these petitions stress their desperate need for the audience’s help; “An if thou fail us all our hope is done” (III.iii.33). Whatever situation prompts the petition will cause the “utter undoing” of the petitioner and her family. Even more so than wives, widows regularly employ this extreme rhetoric. Sometimes, as Harris notes, phrases such as “poor widow” are manifestly inappropriate, given the financial and social status of the women in question.<sup>cdxix</sup> But when petitioners plead their imminent and “utter undoing,” they imply a specific meaning that cannot be dismissed as mere hyperbole. In February 1590, Joan Johnson joined her late husband’s business partners, Richard Arnold, Adrian Ansthorp, John Stower, and George Bassett in petitioning the Privy Council for some letters of reprisal against the French towns Conquett, Brest, and Nantes.<sup>cdxx</sup> Her husband Titus’s ship, the *Jonas of London*, had been attacked by pirates from the said towns, who killed all the English sailors, including Titus, and stole the ship and all its cargo. Johnson and the other ship owners were seeking to recover their losses by getting permission to seize goods from any French ships sailing out of those towns. In their petition, the group alleges that the seizure of their property is “contrarie to all equity and to the utter undoing of ye said poore widdow for ever, & to ye great damage & hinderance of your honors

poor Orators.” The distinction between the “utter undoing” of the widow and the “great damage & hindrance” of the men suggests that the phrase holds significance. On the one hand, the group may be making a practical distinction; as a widow, Johnson would likely face greater financial difficulties than the other owners. But at the same time, the phrase figures the woman as wretched and helpless.

In a society that both religiously and romantically emphasized the need to take care of widows, especially the destitute, there was a rhetorical value in claiming such an abject position. Through such self-identification, the petitioner implicitly creates a sense of obligation in her audience because a chivalrous man or a compassionate monarch ought to respond to such an appeal, regardless of the social status of the woman who makes it.<sup>cdxxi</sup> When Elizabeth Longstone desires that Secretary William Davison take her son into his service, she flatters his good will to all “suche as are widowes and ffatherlesse.”<sup>cdxxii</sup> Although Longstone and Davison were probably of the same class, she nevertheless takes the rhetorical position of the “poore suter unto yow.”<sup>cdxxiii</sup>

Such language underscores the misery of the supplicant, whose pain acts as a justification for making the petition. Because she has been so injured, she has grounds for public petition; the greater the hurt, the greater the claim. The effectiveness of this rhetoric within the paternalistic structures of Tudor government is attested by the case of the widow Alice Knottisforde.<sup>cdxxiv</sup> A lawyer named Walter Lee cheated Alice out of her husband’s money by persuading Alice and her husband Thomas that he would protect Alice’s inheritance should she survive her husband. Deceived by the lawyer’s smooth promises, Thomas Knottisforde placed much of his property in Lee’s name, with the understanding that Lee would transfer it to Alice. After Thomas’s death, Lee eventually

stole almost all the couple's lands and goods through a series of scams. In her petition to the Privy Council, Knottisforde describes herself as "utterlie impoverished and defrauded cossined and deceaved of all she had or might have or enjoye," and she asks that the Council call Lee before them to answer for his treachery. This account is not wholly free of exaggeration; at the time of her petition, she still owned a house at the least. Nevertheless, Knottisforde truly did suffer at Lee's hand; by accentuating the depths of her misery, she hopes to move her audience to action.

Although reading the full litany of Lee's fraudulent ploys might make any reader wince at Knottisforde's gullibility, her petition does persuade the Privy Council to intervene. When Lee was apprehended so that he might appear in front of them "to awnswere that matter of fraude and deceit before theirr Lordships," the swindler managed to escape custody.<sup>cdxxxv</sup> On March 2, 1585, "for the help of the said gentlewoman," the Council attempted to coerce his attendance by decreeing that two men who owed Lee debts should not pay him until he satisfied the Council by coming to them. To underscore the seriousness of their intent, they indicated that "the behoof of their Lordships pleasure was it should be recorded in this Register Booke amongst other Actes of the Cownsell" so that all would know Lee's perfidy.<sup>cdxxxvi</sup>

According to contemporary political theory, the Council was entirely justified in its action. Thomas Elyot's *The boke named the Governour* notes: "Forasmuch as the sayde persons, excelling in knowledge, whereby other be governed: be ministers for the only profit & commoditie of them which have not equal understanding...[governors] do employe all the powers of their wittes, and their diligence to the onely preservation of other their inferiours."<sup>cdxxxvii</sup> Because the Council thus has a duty to act on behalf of the

people in this fashion, petitioners stress the depth of their difficulties. Nor was this characterization limited to petitions made to the Council; petitions to individuals employ it as well. When Edith Bulman pleads for Elizabeth's intercession, she claims that without the Queen's help, "she is utterly undon for ever."<sup>cdxxviii</sup> Katherine Barthram, begging Walsingham to fulfill his promise to get her patent for an alms-room signed, writes, "now unless you extende your helpe towards me in this behalfe, I knowe not whiche way to Enjoye this her Majesties graunte for that I am destitute of ffreundes and have spente all that I am able to make aboute the obteyninge of this sute."<sup>cdxxix</sup>

Although they frequently tried to encourage suitors to seek the proper channels of justice, the Council always permitted those who had been unfairly treated in other courts, or who had knowledge of conspiracies or crimes against the crown, to come to them directly.<sup>cdxxx</sup> As a result, both wives and widows underscore that the petition is their last hope. For example, two merchants' wives, Alice Smythe and Avery Sedgwick, petitioned the Council because Sedgwick and her husband had been evicted from Smythe's tenement by John Croke. In their letter, they make it clear that they cannot receive justice elsewhere, because Croke, who claims title to the tenement, is "verie wealthe & greatlie frended"; the sheriff and beadles of the town support him.<sup>cdxxxi</sup> Casting their audience in the role of protector, these petitioners flatter subtly with the inference that their readers are the ones with true power to act.

While these petitioners rely on their social weakness alone as a justification for petitioning, other women, especially widows, draw authority to proceed from their duty to protect their children and their children's inheritances. Like Shakespeare's Constance in *King John*, who lobbies the French king to protect her son Arthur's claim to the throne

of England, historical women had the responsibility to make claims on behalf of their children. Noting that a large percentage of noblemen appointed their wives to oversee their estates and the upbringing of their children in their wills, Harris contends that these roles were natural extensions of a wife's duties.<sup>cdxxxii</sup> Lower class men also trusted their wives with bringing up their children. Cheryl Fury shows that while men might appoint advisers to assist their wives, they granted their widows custody of their children. For example, she cites Robert Eyles's 1601 will giving "all his property to his wife, Bridget, 'desieringe her of all [the] love that ever hath byn betwixte vs to have a motherly Care and regarde of those Children which god hath given vs.'<sup>cdxxxiii</sup> Women did fulfill these responsibilities; in 1587, Margaret Delamarch petitioned the Privy Council's intervention because her husband's brothers had wrongfully taken charge of her husband's property. Apparently Delamarch's husband distrusted his brothers, and had "willed manie times before his death shold haue nothinge to doe therewith [his goods], nor anie waies medle with his children nor their porcions (as by a lettre of Nicholas Badouin minister might appeare)."<sup>cdxxxiv</sup> The Council determined to call all parties before them to sort out the matter and ensure that Delamarch and her children received their rights. In this manner, husbands could transfer their authority to their wives, who, in effect, were thus given permission to petition.

Some women mention their children only in passing; some include them as part of a major emotional appeal. In October, 1596, Anna Morgan, widow of Sir Thomas Morgan, presented to Robert Cecil warrants given her husband by Leicester and Peregrine Bertie, Lord Willoughby, in exchange for the company of men he outfitted for service in the Low Countries. The bulk of her petition summarizes the number of men,

the dates they served, and the cost of outfitting them. Only at the very end of the letter does she mention that the debt is all that she has for “the maintenaunce of her self and three female Children.”<sup>cdxxxv</sup> Presumably the bulk of her husband’s estate passed to her son, and Morgan left her the debt as a means of support. Similarly, Margery Lennard only mentions her children at the end of her petition for the title to the barony of Dacre as a way of suggesting to Elizabeth that she has plenty of heirs to succeed her if Elizabeth grants the petition.<sup>cdxxxvi</sup> For Lennard, her children are an ancillary detail, included to make one small point of a complex rhetorical appeal.

Other women put their children at the center of their petitions, emphasizing their need to provide for them. On May 27, 1576, Anne Lanesdall petitioned the Queen’s help in recovering her copyhold lands, whose titles she had entrusted to Sir George Bowes, who claimed the land for himself, “to the utter disenherison and undooinge of your said Oratrix and children for ever.”<sup>cdxxxvii</sup> Her husband Christopher, who had been one of Elizabeth’s guard, left the land for her use during her life, and afterwards, for the use of their two children. She begs for the Queen’s aid, so that she “and the same Children maye Enjoy their rightes.” If Bowes is not stopped, Lanesdall implies, she will have failed in her duty to her husband and their children.

Asking that Bowes should be punished “ffor example set,” Lanesdall employs another common persuasive device: the concern for potential negative effects on the community. When Elizabeth, Lady Russell, had a dispute with her landlord Lovelace that resulted in her being locked out of her house, she wrote an indignant petition to the Privy Council requesting that because Lovelace and his men behaved so riotously and lewdly towards her, they strip Lovelace of his commission as a justice of the peace “to

the example of other hereafter.”<sup>cdxxxviii</sup> Even the formidable Bess of Hardwick, in the course of her stormy public battles with her husband, petitioned for the Privy Council’s assistance in ending the estrangement between herself and the earl, “the separacion of whome maie geve daungerous example to the worlde.”<sup>cdxxxix</sup> Voicing such concerns validates these women’s proceedings. If they are not preserving their familial rights, they can protect the values of the society. Such rhetorical moves also signal that women perceive their actions as having an effect on the community at large. By demonstrating their concern for the welfare of their community, they declare their membership in the public weal.

### **In Her Own Right**

In *Richard II*, immediately preceding the quietly poignant image of Richard sitting alone in his cell at Pomfret, Shakespeare gives his audience a wildly contrasting chaotic scene with a husband and wife set at odds with one another. The Duke and Duchess of York have each come before their nephew, the newly-crowned King Henry, with their son Aumerle, the Duke to condemn his son for treason, the Duchess to plead for her son’s life. Intensifying the strength of their appeal, mother and son sink to their knees to humble themselves before Henry, only to be joined by York, who is not to be outdone by their gesture of submission. Although he emulates them, the Duchess immediately distances his action from theirs, setting herself squarely at odds with her husband as she dismisses his imitation as feigned and insincere:

Pleads he in earnest? Look upon his face.

His eyes do drop no tears, his prayers are in jest.

His words come from his mouth; ours from our breast.

He prays but faintly, and would be denied;

We pray with heart and soul, and all beside.

His weary joints would gladly rise, I know;

Our knees shall kneel till to the ground they grow.

His prayers are full of false hypocrisy;

Ours of true zeal and deep integrity.

Our prayers do outpray his; then let them have

That mercy which true prayer ought to have (V.iii.98-108).

Rarely in drama do we see a wife petitioning thus, not merely disagreeing with her husband, but contradicting him, criticizing his actions, and undermining his words. The Duchess asserts that the Duke's actions are false; hers stem from true zeal and integrity. Caught between his uncle's indignation and his aunt's refusal to move before she hears the word pardon, not once but twice, Henry grants her plea, telling Aumerle: "Your mother well hath prayed; and prove you true" (V.iii.143). With her tearful supplication, the Duchess has won her son his pardon and his life.

The Duchess finds the authority to challenge her husband in her role as a mother, whose love for her son and desire to protect her family's interest moves her to action. The archives reveal that married women did petition the Queen and Council in their own right for their own causes. Such petitioners do not necessarily defy their husbands; women who petition for inheritance rights sometimes speak more persuasively as daughters instead of wives, while women with more court contacts than their husbands write because theirs is the political influence so vital to the success of a suit. But there



are married women who, like the Duchess of York, petition in direct opposition to their husbands' wishes, and who, like the Duchess, must therefore find authority in other legitimate roles, such as mother or subject, in order to persuade.

These petitionary letters reveal an array of complex rhetorical devices individually shaped to best persuade their audience of the sender's worthiness and the justice of her plea. Often the writers will cobble together authority from multiple sources. For example, Isabel Frobisher and Phelippe Zouche position themselves as faithful wives and loyal subjects; both suggest that they are protecting their husbands from the consequences of their own folly and that their actions uphold the rights of the Queen, stressing that duty to the crown comes before all. Yet their complex maneuverings reveal the precariousness of their positions. Women who work on behalf of their husbands with marital approval have much less to fear; their rhetoric is more assured because they are behaving in accordance with societal mores that allow them to act in these certain circumstances.

Because their husbands are alive and able to speak, these petitioners illustrate the creative ways that sixteenth-century women negotiate the limitations placed on their right to speak in public. By exploiting the opportunity that arises in the conflict of their different roles as mothers, wives, daughters, sisters, and above all, subjects, these women are able to make claims on the crown to accomplish personal ends. Although these suits often advance family interests, these petitions nonetheless encapsulate a moment in which women are perceived as individuals separate from their husbands, acting to achieve their individual desires.

For Isabel Frobisher, the explorer Martin Frobisher's wife, the petition is actually

a means of regaining her status as a wife. In her petitionary letter to Elizabeth, Frobisher describes how she has dissuaded her husband from taking part in several treasonous plots, including an assassination attempt and separate plans to free Thomas Howard, the duke of Norfolk, and Gerald Fitzgerald, the earl of Desmond, from the Tower.<sup>cdxl</sup> As a result of her interference, Martin's co-conspirators Warrham St. Leger and Jerome Brett have persuaded him to go before the Privy Council to deny that Isabel is his wife. His public denunciation has cost Isabel her good name; lacking community support, she and her children by her first marriage are in danger of starvation. Maintaining that she has acted to preserve Elizabeth's safety, she begs the Queen to force Frobisher to acknowledge her as his lawful wife and take her back. Frobisher crafts a complex self-representation in her petition, weaving together her loyalty to the Queen, her suffering, her attempts to protect both husband and children, and her undeserved shame as a means of positioning herself as someone worthy of Elizabeth's assistance.

Throughout the petition, Frobisher appeals to Elizabeth's pity by emphasizing that her marriage was a good one before she interfered in Martin's plots. Her husband and she had been close; he told her about the last plot in particular because he wanted her to go to Spain with him; "My husbände beinge desirous to have me with him brake thease thinges to me persuadinge me to go with him this jornaie." Now, at St. Leger's instigation, he has repudiated her; for revealing these conspiracies, Isabel and her children are wholly undone. The pathos of her petition suggests that Elizabeth owes her a debt, since she has lost a good life for the Queen.

Because these political intrigues have undermined her wifely status, Frobisher emphasizes her standing as Elizabeth's subject, basing her claim to Elizabeth's help on

her loyalty to the Queen. In each of the four conspiracies she outlines, Frobisher explains that she contradicted her husband's wishes because "I had a care of the dutie I owe to your majestie." Calling herself a "true subject," Frobisher notes that she had feared "some trouble mighte growe theron (as I thoughte) towards your majestie." When Martin Frobisher had revealed that the last plot included plans for Elizabeth's assassination, "I flatlye denyed to be anye of the companie." The duty she owes Elizabeth enables her to condemn her husband's plans, so that wifely submission is abandoned in favor of her obligation to serve the monarch. In this fashion, Frobisher attempts to forestall any criticism for defying her husband.

Frobisher's concern for Elizabeth's well-being above all else subtly suggests her hope that the Queen should reciprocate, despite any other considerations. And there were other considerations. Despite his admittedly dubious reputation, Martin Frobisher had potential value to the crown. For fifteen years he had been engaging in the piracy/privateering that was part of Elizabeth's complex naval strategy. In the wake of the St. Leger plot, Martin received no punishment; James McDermott notes that Martin had the favor of some members of the Privy Council, including Burghley and the Earl of Warwick.<sup>cdxli</sup> At about the same time as Isabel's petition, Martin petitioned the Privy Council for the right to mount a voyage to discover a north-west passage to the Pacific Ocean, a trade route of great potential worth.<sup>cdxlii</sup> In the face of her husband's usefulness, Isabel had only her past service to the Queen to offer in exchange for help.

To increase the value of her service, Frobisher stresses her *personal* role in foiling the dangerous conspiracies "touchinge your Majesties person and estate": "So that with dutiefull persuasions I caused to let the truste be loste, And so that enterprise was

dashed.” She also professes to have considerable powers of persuasion; regarding the plan to free Desmond, Isabel writes that she had “founde him [Martin] fully perswadid to accomlishe this pretence” until she dissuaded him. The final plot exposed includes the Queen’s assassination; Martin had told her that “there was one determined to give yor Majestie a gird which you shoulde hardlye escape.” Isabel explains that she had expected her refusal to join Martin would “perswade with my husbände from thease dealinges as hertofore I had donne, and he seamed to take all I saide in good parte.” Ultimately, she informed the Privy Council. In this fashion, Frobisher suggests that she has personally saved the Queen’s life and preserved the safety of the realm.

Within the confines of this representation of events, Frobisher imagines that Elizabeth will reciprocate if she can simply reach the Queen directly. Frobisher begs that Elizabeth will be gracious enough to read it personally because if “your Majestie mighte vouchsafe to viwe it yor self there weare some hope of redresse for me.” She assumes a strong connection to the Queen, trusting that if the Queen could just be made aware of all that she has done, Elizabeth would relieve her suffering. In fact, she casts Elizabeth as her sole earthly source of help, “so that ther is none but god & yor highnes for me to complaine to.” Because her husband by denying their marriage has discredited her in front of the Council, no one but the Queen will believe her and grant her favor. Her petition must penetrate the layers of bureaucracy surrounding the Queen; if Elizabeth reads it herself, the Queen’s grace will recognize Frobisher’s truth. Placing such trust in the Queen implies Frobisher’s faith in Elizabeth’s power and just government.

In addition to her loyalty to Elizabeth, Frobisher must accentuate her reputation as a good wife and counteract the shame done to her “good name.” Isabel claims that,

although Martin “denied me to be his wife, never married to him but such a one as he had kepte,” she can prove that she was lawfully married to Frobisher five years previously in the parish of Walbrook in London. Since that time, Isabel contends, “no waie in discredit I ame to be judged by anie frende or kinne that my husbände hath for my behavior or dealinges towards him.” By alleging that her neighbors know that she has been a faithful wife for twenty years, Isabel challenges the damage St. Leger and her husband have done to her reputation. Furthermore, she stresses, “Neither is theare cause that he renounce me beinge his wiefie that never offendid him but by persuading him from such enterprise as are above written.” When Frobisher lost her reputation, she lost all credibility; therefore, she must re-establish her honor in order to persuade the Queen to act on her behalf.

In the absence of witnesses, Frobisher relies on rhetoric to demonstrate her wifely concern and prove that she is a good wife. When detailing her husband’s conspiracies, Isabel nevertheless contrives to excuse his behavior, “for as much as he knowith he doth no wrong.” In addition, Isabel dissuades Martin from each plot by citing the danger to Elizabeth and her fears that each scheme would be his “utter destruction.” She also admits her husband’s sovereignty in other matters. Martin, she explains, has taken all of her first husband’s money, but he has the right, “It is his.” Through such language, she acknowledges his authority over her and depicts herself as a loyal spouse.

Underscoring her maternal concerns adds another dimension to Isabel’s self-representation. Arguing that Martin should not be allowed to take the inheritance her first husband left for their children, Isabel contributes to the impression of a good mother desperate to take care of her children. She tells Elizabeth that in the year since Martin

has repudiated her, she and her family have had no relief “but such poore provision as I have bene driven to make as to sell soche apparel fro my backe.” Her friends have turned against her for marrying Martin against their advice in the first place. She begs that the Queen will order her husband to account for the money taken from “her poore fatherles children.” In doing so, Frobisher contributes to her ethos by suggesting that she is only asking for what is right and just.

In addition to illustrating her wifely and motherly concern, Frobisher also testifies to her personal good name. Never before has she had her honesty questioned, nor was she ever called before the Council for any reason. In witness of this, Sir James Acroste, a member of the Queen’s own Council who has known her for many years, can show that Isabel has not “been accomptid a meddler of matters.” With these words, Frobisher attempts to distance herself from the class of informants and spies so prevalent in Elizabethan England. Her care for the Queen is her sole motivation.

In return for that care, Frobisher claims that she has suffered miserably; her pain validates the justice of her claim. Her petition declares: “A truer cause never came before your majestie neither greater tormente offereth to a poore womman then hath bene to me Sithence I have revealed the laste conspiratie.” She has lost her husband, impoverished her children, been subjected to great shame, and endured “the losse of all ...frendes” as a result of the damage to her reputation. Using the language of torment and suffering, Frobisher claims the authority of virtual martyrdom, since all that she has done was “for the dutie that I owe unto yor Majestie.” Despite all that she has undergone, Frobisher’s loyalty to the Queen remains intact, and she and hers will pray for the Queen throughout their lives if Elizabeth will assist her.

Frobisher's petition thus incorporates many of the elements of the petitions discussed above: the promise of prayer, her duty as a subject, her reliance on the Queen alone for help. At the same time, the extremity of Frobisher's position forces her to employ stronger rhetoric. Of necessity, she crafts a blend of identities—subject, mother, wife, and sufferer—to create a sympathetic position and so persuade the Queen. No record survives of Elizabeth's response, but if Frobisher won any reaction from the Queen, it was insufficient. Some four to seven years later, Frobisher wrote to Walsingham from a poorhouse, calling herself "the most miserable poore woeman in the world," and petitioning him for financial assistance for herself and some of her grandchildren "untill Mr frobushers retourne."<sup>cdxliii</sup> These words strike an ambiguous note: did Isabel mean Martin's return from the sea or return to her? The latter certainly never happened. Nevertheless, her 1574 petition to the Queen remains a sophisticated attempt to gain the Queen's assistance despite her precarious social position.

Circumstance and class doubtless exacerbated Frobisher's difficulty since she had no contacts at court; other women of higher class were able to criticize their husbands' actions with greater security than did Frobisher. In 1590, Phelippe Zouche, daughter-in-law of Sir John Zouche, petitioned the Queen to put an end to Sir Matthew Arundel's attempt to buy her family's manor of Ansty. Although Elizabeth held the reversion of the manor, meaning that Phelippe's husband Francis could not sell it without crown permission, Arundel pretended to have gotten the Queen's consent and would not relinquish his claim to the property. An earlier petition from Phelippe had already won favor; "althoughe your highnes of your princely clemencie in March last, at the humble petition of your said suppliant and in favoure of her and of her children, vouchsaved too

signifye your Royall pleasure to bee, that the said bargayn should not proseed where of Sir Mathewe hath had notice, yet hath he gonne forward with his assurans.”<sup>cdxliiv</sup> This time, therefore, Phelippe asks that the Queen appoint some noblemen to oversee the matter so that the manor will be returned.

Like Frobisher, Zouche strongly underlines her service to the Queen. She is Elizabeth’s “poore obedient Subject” reporting a violation of the Queen’s rights and decree. Zouche emphasizes that “no perfect estate may (by lawe) bee assured against your Suppliantes issue.” In her closing prayer, Zouche confirms her loyalty and submission to Elizabeth, “And your said subiect shall daylie pray to god, for the prosperous estate of your most Royall Majestie Many happie yeares to raigne and Trioumphe over us.” The final lines of the prayer create a direct contrast with Arundel; whereas he challenges the Queen’s sovereignty, Zouche and her children submit to Elizabeth’s will and pray for her long rule.

Also like Frobisher, Zouche shifts the blame away from her husband. Not only had Arundel deceived them by pretending to have the Queen’s reversion, but he had also “used most extreme crosses to oppresse the poore gentleman [Francis].” Even worse, in maintaining the agreement with Francis, Arundel is defying Elizabeth’s own orders, as expressed by her previous letters. By focusing on Arundel’s transgression and her own duty, Zouche skirts any possible criticism she might face for advising the Queen of her husband’s disobedience in selling the manor without Elizabeth’s blessing.

If Zouche evades the issue of her husband’s responsibility, Margaret Harper calls attention to her husband Edward Maxey’s perfidy. On January 23, 1590, Harper petitioned the Privy Council to enforce a decree made by the Queen’s High



Commissioners ordering that Maxey allow her a yearly revenue of nine pounds for her maintenance, since the couple no longer lived together.<sup>cdxlv</sup> Maxey, she alleges, “is a fugitive person, leadinge his lyfe in obscure places, frequentinge lewde & vicious companye, & most willfully wastinge & spendinge his goodes & substance, not only to the great impoverishinge of hime selfe, but also to the utter undoinge of yor saide Suppliant.” She also asks that Maxey be ordered to “put in Suerties for the saftie of yor said Suppliantes person, for that she goeth daily in daunger & hazard of her lyfe, by hime.” In painting such a vicious picture of her husband, Harper makes her request for financial support seem like a reasonable claim.

However logical her request for sureties and revenue, Harper’s tactics are relatively unusual, and she is careful to provide corroboration of her accusations. Claiming the backing of the church, she enumerates the members of the High Commission who made the original order for allowance: “the right Reverent ffather in god, the Lord Archbishope of Caunterburie his grace, the right worshippinge the Deane of Westminster, Mr Doctor Awbery, Mr Doctor Lewyn, & Mr Doctor Cosyn.” Support from the ranking English religious leaders is powerful testimony to the justice of her appeal. By contrast, Maxey’s willingness to defy such men by refusing to pay out of an “obstinate minde, without the feare of god, or regard of Laue or authoritie,” speaks ill of his character, and confirms the truth of her assessment of him.

Beyond the Commissioners’ endorsement, Harper has a certain degree of influence; her first husband was Sir William Harper, a former Lord Mayor of London. She makes certain that the Council is aware of her status by identifying herself as “yor pore distressed Suppliant Margaret Harper late wyfe of Sir William Harper of the Cyty of

London knight, deceased, & nowe wife of Edward Maxey gent.” She emphasizes the prestigious first marriage rather than the unfortunate second union.

Harper’s demeanor in the petition further underscores her trustworthiness; her traditional language of humility, beseeching and supplicating the Council members enhances her ethos. She then reasonably explains the circumstances of her request for a yearly revenue, that Maxey is profligately spending all of their money, to her “utter undoing.” Equally, she refrains from making exorbitant demands; she is not claiming the right to oversee all their income, nor is she asking for a huge allowance. Harper flatters the Council, citing their “accustomed goodnes” to others, and submits wholly to their authority, asking that Maxey pay sureties, only “yf it stand with yor honors good lykinge.” Her offers to pray continually for the Council members’ health, prosperity, and felicity, although conventional, still serve to mark the contrast between her behavior and that of Maxey. Through such devices, Harper criticizes her husband Maxey deeply while still maintaining a good reputation.

The petitions of Frobisher, Zouche, and Harper underscore that a woman had status other than that of wife; early modern women clearly perceived themselves in a variety of roles, any of which could be drawn upon to strengthen their rhetorical position. Still other petitions reveal that even women who acted in accordance with their husbands’ wills could frame their requests as individuals separate from their spouses. Sometimes the woman’s decision to distance herself from her husband was born of necessity. These women make requests that will benefit their families, and in this sense, they are fulfilling their roles as loyal wives, but when they represent themselves, they choose to highlight other identities.

Elizabeth Gaywood's 1570 petition to Elizabeth stresses her personal responsibility for an unspecified offense in order to protect her husband. Calling herself the Queen's "poore and sorouefull prisoner in the Tower," Gaywood explains that "for lacke of experience & knouledge of yor Majesties lawes she hathe fallen not onely into ye daunger and breache of the saide lawes, but also into the highe displeasure of yowe her dere Soveraigne Ladie."<sup>cdxlv</sup> She humbles herself before Elizabeth, begging for the Queen's pardon and asking restoration to favor and freedom. Her signature, "yor Majesties most humble and obedient subject Elysabeth Gaywood," further emphasizes that she is petitioning as subject to monarch. Only after underscoring her culpability and remorse does Gaywood mention the misery that she has caused her husband John. Because of her, her husband's goods are utterly dispersed, "wasted and spoyled, ther haye and harvest like to be loste and ungathered whiles her husband remaynethe here a sutyr for his said wife." Contrasting her folly and youth with her husband's diligence in trying to help her, Gaywood distances her husband from her transgression. She is "a verie yonge wife & newly married," and her husband may "never be able to recover, and yet of her folie was never giltie." By claiming the guilt as wholly her own, Gaywood can even petition for a remission of the penalty, since to levy a fine would be to punish her husband undeservedly. In her petition, she does not speak for her husband, but rather as a penitent subject, and so she exonerates him for her behavior.

John Gaywood's presence hovers around the edge of his wife's letter as an object of pity. By contrast, Jone Dennys's husband Nicholas figures in his wife's 1583 petition to the Privy Council only as a marker of her identity: "Jone dennys the wief of Nichlas dennys of St katheryne nighe the Tower of London ffelt maker."<sup>cdxlvii</sup> In this petition,

Dennys claims that she and her mother have been cheated out of their rightful inheritance by John and Edward Brodell; therefore, Dennys's whole focus is on her relationship with her father and her rights to his property. Therefore Jone lays aside her identification as Nicholas's wife in favor of her status as "daughter unto one Robert Scott late of Mottrome in the Countye of Chester late deceased."

The Dennys case is convoluted. During the reign of Queen Mary, Dennys's father Robert Scott had loaned 700 pounds to his brother, Bishop Cuthbert Scott, in exchange for the lease of the parsonage of Mottrom. Robert died, Cuthbert had repaid only 200 pounds, but promised to see the lease continue to Robert's wife and children while he finished paying the debt. After Queen Mary's death, the Catholic bishop Cuthbert was forced to flee overseas, where he died. Cuthbert had ordered the Brodells to manage his affairs and to answer the debt, but Dennys alleges that far from settling the debt, the Brodells actually evicted her mother Grace and the rest of the family from the parsonage and refused to pay any of the remaining 500 pounds. Dennys therefore begs the Council to call the offenders before them to answer for themselves.

Dennys's standing in the case is founded on her filial responsibility to her mother and her rights as her father's child; therefore she emphasizes the father-daughter connection. She explains that the Brodells have not "answered to your Oratrixe or other the Children of the said Robert Scott their father." In relating the story, she uses the phrase "yor said Oratrixes father" or some variant thereof several times. Repeating the phrase as often as possible reminds the Council that she is entitled to make this claim.

Jone Dennys acts alone in petitioning for her rights; neither her mother, her siblings, nor her husband are mentioned as plaintiffs in the case. Dennys emphasizes that

her whole family has suffered; the Brodells have acted “to the greate deceavinge and utter undoinge of *them* for ever” [emph. mine]. But throughout the rest of the petition she uses singular nouns and pronouns: “yor Oratrixe ys verye poore, and not able to sue for *her* right by thordynarye course of the Lawe” [emph. mine]. This is her individual petition, her poverty, and her right, not a petition from the whole Scott family. Moreover, Dennys closes with a singular prayer, “she shall daylie praye unto god for your honorable preservacions Long to contynewe.” “She shall pray,” not even “she and hers” will pray. There may have been practical reasons for this choice; her siblings may have been too young to join her or she may have been the most persuasive person. Regardless, Dennys’s petition leaves an impression of a lone woman confronting two men who have cheated her terribly. Perhaps the Scott/Dennys families preferred to convey such an impression by leaving Jone to act on her own, at least rhetorically. The decision to do so gained her a personal audience with the Council; the petition notes: “the Plaintyf to be called with all.

Sometimes a woman’s petition emphasized her actions for practical reasons; if she possessed a personal connection to her audience, it was only logical to draw on that relationship. In 1599, Margaret Powell petitioned Robert Cecil for financial relief because she and her first husband once served his parents, the Lord and Lady Burghley, as well as his uncle Justice Cooke.<sup>cdxlviii</sup> By identifying the document as “The humble peticion of Margaret Powell, whose husband Thomas powell, a longe tyme served yor honors late honorable father the Lord Burghley her selfe alsoe a longe tyme served yor honors late honorable mother the Lady Burghley and the worshippfull Justice Cooke yor deceased unckle,” Powell underlines her connection to Cecil because her service to

Cecil's family entitles her to claim his assistance.

Powell never mentions her second husband, the man whose sickness has occasioned their financial difficulties, by name. Instead, Powell describes him only as "an other honest man, whome it hath pleased god to visite with longe and greevous sicknes." She refers to her new husband only to increase the pathos of their appeal. Powell needs only to establish that he is worthy of help and that she has not squandered their money, but her primary claim derives from the service of her first husband and herself.

Court connections probably also led Jane Bolding to petition the Queen on behalf of her husband in 1582.<sup>cdxlix</sup> Bolding identifies herself as the wife of Edward Bolding, shoemaker, but also as the daughter of one of the Queen's yeomen, and cousin of one of the Queen's maids of honor. Yet unlike Powell and her second husband, Jane's petition remains focused on Edward, whose service in Ireland under Walter Raleigh cost him an arm, "which to cure, hath cost him and I all that ever wee were able to borrowe...he hath utterly lost the use ther of, whereby he is in no wyse able to followe his facultie to the utter undoinge and ympoverishment of us and three small comfortles children."

The petition's inscription underlines that Jane is the petitioner, not Edward: "In consideration whereof shee desyreth hir Majestie to extend hir gracious compassion towards their reliefe." When Bolding details the circumstances of her husband's wounding, she maintains a third person description, "my saide poore husband." Yet Edward cannot be allowed to slip out of the picture, and after Jane finishes narrating the family circumstances, she shifts to using plural language. Jane begs Elizabeth that "our pittiefull estate gracyouslie considered," the Queen will "graunte unto us somewhat to

maynteine and releyve us and our said poore children withall.” Her rhetoric escalates as she then promises that “uppon our knees wee, as wee are bounden, shall daylie pray unto thallmightie for the moste happie and prosperous preservacion of yor most royall highenes in healthe and Tranquyllitie longe to rule and reign over us.” In examining the petitions of seamen’s wives, Cheryl Fury observes that women usually petition for specific help (amnesty for a husband imprisoned rather than pensions) because the crown was only “begrudgingly moving toward a recognition of obligations towards its veterans,” much less their wives.<sup>cdl</sup> If such reluctance on the part of the Elizabethan government to grant charity to wives extended to soldiers’ wives, Bolding’s move to include her husband within her plea becomes a crucial part of her request.

Perhaps Edward’s pride preferred that Jane be the supplicant. Perhaps the Boldings imagined the greater impact of a petitionary letter from a woman devastated by her husband’s loss. Regardless, Jane Bolding’s petition represents a blend of persuasive devices and a complex self-representation that reveals how sophisticated such petitionary letters could be in their efforts to move the reader. She appeals to Elizabeth’s pity; for a shoemaker, losing an arm meant losing his livelihood and his ability to support his family. Jane also emphasizes her allegiance to Elizabeth, “In moste humble and pittiefull manner besecheth yor excellencie yor poore and true subiect Jane Boldinge.” Thus she suggests that Elizabeth reward her loyalty and her husband’s service. Even their final prayer is appropriately tailored to the situation: coming from a man wounded in battle and a woman whose husband has suffered such a loss, a prayer for the Queen’s “tranquility” resonates with multi-layered meaning.

Although all of these women petition in their own right, they still mention their

husbands. Petitions that avoid references to marital status are rare and their authors position themselves carefully. Alice Smallwood's decisive letter to the Privy Council in April of 1587 asks that the councilors prevent Mr. Brook and the bishop from proceeding against her at common law until she has time to establish proof of her claim, giving the Council a chance to review the full case. She desires that "for Jesus sake not to move me to Anie Arbetrament for me cownsele hath warned me the contrarie."<sup>cdli</sup> Perhaps because she had already had contact with the Privy Council on this matter, Smallwood's petition is short and hurried. With only the cursory offering to "daylye praye for yor honors," Smallwood's petition builds no specific identification as mother, wife, sister, daughter, widow, subject, or even the common labels of suppliant or oratrix. Instead, her petition conveys the impression of a determined woman, active in her legal affairs, who ventures to ask the Council to vary from their accustomed solution of arbitration but to see her directly when she is ready.

Whereas Smallwood is sufficiently confident to ignore convention and to omit reference to her status, other women without husbands seek alternative roles that will authorize their speech. Jayne Gouldwyar's 1580 petitionary letter to Walsingham seeks her release from the Clink, where she has been a prisoner for the last twelve months.<sup>cdlii</sup> Gouldwyar constructs a complex series of identities designed to convince the chief secretary that she deserves her freedom. At the same time, her promises to give no further offense reveals a careful negotiation between religious conviction and her allegiance to the Queen. The result is a petition whose words have been painstakingly chosen to convey the right message.

Gouldwyar outlines no less than five separate roles to describe herself:



yor pore and daylie oraratrixe Jayne Gouldwyar, a pore afflyctted creator,  
and one that hayth lyvd presoner in the Clynke this twellmoneth for hir  
consiaunce hawyngge ffyve small children dryven to seke ther harde  
adventure in this wycked ayge by reson of the trobles of me ther poure  
mothar Whoo is and Ewar wylbe a lovyngge and dughtiffull subiect to her  
magiste.

Jayne's first four categories of self-identification###a daily petitioner, an afflicted creature, a prisoner, and a mother of five###demonstrate her attempts to appeal to Walsingham's pity; Gouldwyar evokes a terrible picture of a miserably worried mother locked in prison while her young children are left alone to shift for themselves for a year. That image underscores the rationality of her request that Walsingham release her for two months to settle her affairs, especially since she promises to pay "sufficiente bayll" and to return after the two months to the Marshalsea prison for as long as the Queen pleases.

The last of Jayne's five categories, that of "lovyngge and dughtifull subject," reassures the Chief Secretary that the petitioner is no danger to the Queen. At the same time, her insistence that she has been imprisoned "for hir consiaunce" suggests that she is suffering for religion's sake. Although Gouldwyar never specifies what religious leanings the government found so offensive in her petition, if Gouldwyar is a Catholic, her offer to "yelde hir bodye To the Marshalse" instead of to the Clink at the end of her parole is two-edged. In 1583, the Bishop of London pronounced the Marshalsea "the blackest spot" amongst London prisons for its permissiveness towards papists, especially since some of the prisoners had been found celebrating mass together the year before.<sup>cdliii</sup> Her Catholicism could explain the otherwise enigmatic change.

Although Gouldwyar concedes that she will not commit any offence “by instructing any others of hir Majesties subjectes,” she still holds whatever beliefs caused her incarceration. Immediately she undermines her proffered compromise by insisting that she “but desiar[s] to lyve according to my Contiance till [till] shouch tyme as it maye please god that I maye confarr with shouch as shall perswayd me that I stand in Error.” The ambiguity of this statement, that she will change her mind as soon as someone persuades her that she is wrong, allows her to profess a flexible open mind. At the same time, that statement professes her intent to follow her conscience until that unspecified day of conversion. Thus, even as she apparently grants a concession, she preserves her right to dissent.

Gouldwyar’s concluding prayer contains further possibilities for slippage. After professing her allegiance to the Queen and her willingness, once her children are taken care of, to stay in prison for as long as Elizabeth wishes, Gouldwyar vows to “offar upe to god hir dayle prayers for the longe and prosperus estayt of hir Majestie with increse of vartue.” Read one way, Gouldwyar makes the innocuous suggestion that she is praying for Elizabeth’s benefit. At the same time, an ironic reading of this prayer implies that Gouldwyar believes the Queen requires an increase of virtue. Gouldwyar’s careful maneuvering throughout the petition creates sufficient leeway to enable the existence of such veiled criticism.

A note on the back of the petition in a different hand indicates that Gouldwyar is “To be released.” The addendum gives no indication as to the length of time of her release—whether she was completely free or whether she was being given the two months she had requested. Thus, regardless of any ambiguity, Gouldwyar crafts an

effective petition through her emotional appeals, her reasonable tone, and her professions of allegiance to the Queen. Despite mentioning no husband, through her multi-faceted self-presentation, Gouldwyar garners sufficient authority to persuade Walsingham that she merits the liberty for which she pleads.

The petitions by Gouldwyar, Frobisher, and Zouche in particular represent a discursive moment when women act in their own right, stepping outside the boundaries society decreed for them. One 1653 law digest defines the legal status of a wife: ““After marriage, all the will of the wife in judgement [sic] of the law is subject to the will of the husband; and it is commonly said a *feme coverte* hath no will.””<sup>cdliv</sup> These petitioners demonstrate that such definitions describe an early modern cultural ideal more than the reality. Women such as Bolding, Dennys, Powell, and Gouldwyar illustrate that women did act on their own behalf, while Frobisher and Zouche prove that women did oppose their husbands. Petitioning against a husband’s wishes, pursuing legal cases, asking for financial assistance, and requesting liberty are hardly the acts of individuals who had no will and no political agency.

## **Finale**

Epistolary petitions by early modern women demonstrate that regardless of their class or education, women were able to craft sophisticated rhetorical arguments and that writing was an important aspect of their lives. Their petitions appeal to their audiences, employ a variety of literary tropes, and draw on several different epistolary conventions. Through their petitions, these women create unique self-representations worth examining in order to see the different ways that sixteenth-century women negotiate the limitations

placed on their right to speak

The juxtaposition of fictional petitions alongside historical petitionary letters reveals that petitioning is inherently dramatic. Authors are aware of the roles open to them, and they manipulate conventions of language and style in order to persuade their audience to listen further. Plays from throughout this period consider what it means to petition the government and how a petitioner could do so effectively. When playwrights stage the acts of petitioning and letter-writing, they represent an early modern cultural awareness of the petitionary letter's ability to influence its readers.

These petitions also illustrate that Elizabethan women had a role in government. Through their letters, women were able to participate in the political sphere. Although their right to involve themselves is grounded in their individual situations, they were able to influence many types of political situations. When Margaret Shaw petitioned Walsingham to ask Elizabeth to write to Philip of Spain for her husband Randall's release from prison, she intervened in international affairs, as did the wives of the mariners of the *Emmanuel* and the *Julian*, whose husbands were similarly held hostage.<sup>cdlv</sup> When Joan Johnson requested some means of reprisal against the pirates who killed her husband and stole his goods, she engaged in maritime and economic matters. Elizabeth Blechenden's request to repair the wall around the marsh in Rye would have had considerable impact on ports, harborage, and community relations. Isabel Frobisher's petition justified her claim to assistance because she had helped to foil an assassination attempt on Elizabeth herself. These women ask for help in their personal lives, but the implications of their writing extend far beyond themselves.

Sometimes they even succeed. Katherine Poleson's petition to Walsingham

asking that her husband be freed from debtor's prison eventually gained his release.<sup>cdlvi</sup> Alice Knottisforde won the Privy Council's judgment in her favor, with an order to apprehend the man who cheated her. Margery Lennard secured the right to her brother's title. Other women obtained sought-after further arbitration: Ursula Morton had her husband's case examined, while Jone Dennys was called to appear before the Council to present her case in person. Jayne Gouldwyar won her freedom. But whether records survive today of their success or failure, the very existence of a woman's petition testifies to her success in claiming her place within society and her right to a voice in its affairs.

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<sup>i</sup> All references are to volume one of Russell Peck's edition of the *Confessio Amantis* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000).

<sup>ii</sup> Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, VIII.894-6.

<sup>iii</sup> Jennifer Summit, *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380-1589* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2000), 168.

<sup>iv</sup> "cuius causa inventa res ipsa est, ut certiores faceremus absentis si quid esset quod eos scire aut nostra aut ipsorum interesset." *Ad Fam.I.48*. Cicero, *Ad Familiares [Letters to Friends]*, vol. I, trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 2001), 234-5.

<sup>v</sup> See Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993), 150. Jardine elaborates on the connection between the two writers and quotes Jerome's Latin letter: "Sola, inquit, res est, quae homines absentes praesentes facit" (266, n10).

<sup>vi</sup> I borrow Jardine's phrase; see *Erasmus, Man of Letters*, 153.

<sup>vii</sup> Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters*, 151.

<sup>viii</sup> Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters*, 151. Seth Lerer, *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII: Literary Culture and the Arts of Deceit* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 11.

<sup>ix</sup> See for example, Anne Jacobson Schutte, Thomas Kuehn, and Silvana Seidel Menchi, eds., *Time, Space, and Women's Lives in Early Modern Europe* (Kirkville, MS: Truman State UP, 2001).

<sup>x</sup> For example, Cicero includes letters to his wife Terentia throughout the *Ad Familiares*.

<sup>xi</sup> Joan Ferrante, "'Licet longinquis regionibus corpore separati': Letters as a Link in and to the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 76 (2001): 881.

<sup>xii</sup> The *Heroides* were available two centuries before Petrarch re-discovered Cicero's

letters in 1345. John Richmond traces the textual transmission of Ovid's work, noting the popularity of the *Heroides* from the twelfth century onwards. See Richmond, "Manuscript Traditions and the Transmission of Ovid's Works," *Brill's Companion to Ovid*, ed. Barbara Weiden Boyd (Leiden, Boston, and Koln: Brill, 2002), 462.

<sup>xiii</sup> I have used George Turberville's 1567 translation, *The Heroycall Epistles of the Learned Poet Publius Ovidius Naso in English Verse* (London: Henry Denham, 1567; Early English Books: 1475-1640, 1837, no. 24), p. 25, fol. Dir. "Addimus his precibus lacrimas quoque; verba precantis / perlegis et lacrimas finge videre meas!" Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, ed. Grant Showerman (1914; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1963), 56.

<sup>xiv</sup> Turberville, *The Heroycall Epistles*, 118, fol. Pviv. "Protinus haec scribens, 'felix, i, littera!' dixi, / iam tibi formosam porriget illa manum, / forsitan admotis etiam tangere labellis, / rumpere dum niveo vincula dente volet.' / talibus exiguo dictis mihi murmure verbis, / cetera cum charta dextra locuta mea est." Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, 244.

<sup>xv</sup> Turberville, *The Heroycall Epistles*, 134, fol. Rvir. "leniat invisas littera missa moras." Ovid, *Heroides and Amores*, 274.

<sup>xvi</sup> Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, II.1027. All Chaucer references are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry D. Benson et. al (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

<sup>xvii</sup> Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, III.297-306.

<sup>xviii</sup> Chaucer, *Legend of Good Women*, lines 580-705.

<sup>xix</sup> Chaucer, *Legend of Good Women*, lines 2513-15.

<sup>xx</sup> Chaucer, *Legend of Good Women*, lines 2516-17.

<sup>xxi</sup> Chaucer, *Legend of Good Women*, line 2495.

<sup>xxii</sup> See Albrecht Classen, "Female Epistolary Literature from Antiquity to the Present: An Introduction," *Studia Neophilologica* 60 (1998): 3-13; "Female Explorations of Literacy: Epistolary Challenges to the Literary Canon in the Late Middle Ages," *Disputatio, Volume 1: The Late Medieval Epistle*, eds. Carol Poster and Richard Utz (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1996): 89-121. See Ferrante, "Licet longinquis regionibus corpore separati'" and *To the Glory of Her Sex: Women's Roles in the*

*Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1997).

<sup>xxiii</sup> See Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus, eds. *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993). *Disputatio, Volume 1: The Late Medieval Epistle*, eds. Carol Poster and Richard Utz (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1996).

<sup>xxiv</sup> The continued interest in the scope of early modern epistolary activity is evident in the forthcoming books: Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb, eds. *Women's Letters Across Europe, 1400-1700: Form and Persuasion* (Aldershot: Ashgate), and Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter-Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (Newark: U of Delaware Press).

<sup>xxv</sup> See James Daybell, ed. *Early Modern Women's Letter-Writing, 1450-1700* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) and "Women's Letters and Letter Writing in England, 1540-1603," *Shakespeare Studies* 27 (1999): 161-87. Sara Jayne Steen, "Introduction," *The Letters of Lady Arbella Stuart* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994) and "Behind the Arras: Editing Renaissance Women's Letters," in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985-1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Binghamton, NY: Renaissance English Text Society, 1993): 229-38; Susan Fitzmaurice, *The Familiar Letter in Early Modern English: A Pragmatic Approach* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002).

<sup>xxvi</sup> See James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1981): 194-268; Giles Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections* (Turnhout: #Éditions Brepols, 1976); and Roger Chartier, Alain Boureau, and Cécile Dauphin, *Correspondence: Models of Letter-Writing from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Christopher Woodall (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997).

<sup>xxvii</sup> For a complete overview of the different sections of a letter, see "The Principles of Letter-Writing," an anonymous twelfth-century letter-writing manual edited by James J. Murphy in *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1971), 1-26.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, 17.

<sup>xxix</sup> Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, 39, 22-3.

<sup>xxx</sup> See David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and writing in Tudor and*



*Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980); Keith Thomas, "The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England," in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, ed. Gerd Baumann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 97-131. For more information on early women's education, see Kathi Vosevich's essay, "The Education of a Prince(ss): Tutoring the Tudors," in *Women, Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain*, eds. Mary E. Burke, Jane Donawerth, Linda L. Dove, and Karen Nelson (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 2000), 61-76; Barbara J. Whitehead, ed. *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe: A History 1500-1800* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999); and Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 2002).

<sup>xxxix</sup> Alison Truelove, "Commanding Communications: the Fifteenth-Century Letters of the Stonor Women," in Daybell, *Early Modern Women's Letter-Writing*, 50. Truelove further argues that letters on formal subjects were more likely to observe epistolary conventions.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Daybell, "Women's Letters and Letter Writing in England, 1540-1603," 170.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Fitzmaurice, *The Familiar Letter in Early Modern English*. See especially chapters 2 and 3, "Context and the linguistic construction of epistolary worlds," and "Making and reading epistolary meaning," 35-86.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Fitzmaurice, *The Familiar Letter in Early Modern English*, 39-40.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Jonathan Gibson, "Significant Space in Manuscript Letters." *Seventeenth Century* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 4.

<sup>xxxix</sup> See *Letterwriting in Renaissance England*, eds. Alan Stewart and Heather Wolfe (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004), 36. Published in conjunction with the exhibition "Letterwriting in Renaissance England" shown at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, from November 18, 2004 through April 2, 2005.

<sup>xxxix</sup> *Letterwriting in Renaissance England*, 36.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Quoted in *Scribes and Sources: Texts from the Writing-Masters*, Selected, Introduced and Translated by A.S. Osley (Boston: David R. Godine, 1980), 29.

<sup>xxxix</sup> Giles E. Dawson and Laetitia Kennedy-Skipton, *Elizabethan Handwriting, 1500-1650* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), 10. See Daybell, "Women's Letters and Letter

Writing in England, 1540-1603,” (162-3); and Jonathan Goldberg, *Desiring Women Writing: English Renaissance Examples* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997), 135 and *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990).

<sup>xl</sup> Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1995), 26-7.

<sup>xli</sup> Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, II.v. All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

<sup>xlii</sup> Angel Day, *The English Secretorie* (1599, Imprinted at London by P.S. for C. Burbie); ed. Robert O. Evans (Gainesville, FL: Scholars Facsimile Reprint, 1967), 1.

<sup>xliii</sup> Steen, *The Letters of Lady Arbella Stuart*, 10.

<sup>xliv</sup> Steen, *The Letters of Lady Arbella Stuart*, 40.

<sup>xlv</sup> Rebecca Earle, “Introduction: letters, writers, and the historian,” *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945*, ed. Rebecca Earle (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 2. Steen, “Behind the Arras: Editing Renaissance Women’s Letters,” 230, and Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1987).

<sup>xlvi</sup> Ferrante, *To the Glory of Her Sex*, 3.

<sup>xlvii</sup> Jennifer C. Ward, “Letter-Writing by English Noblewomen in the Early Fifteenth Century,” in Daybell, *Early Modern Women’s Letter-Writing*, 36-8.

<sup>xlviii</sup> Margaret Ezell, *The Patriarch’s Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill, U of North Carolina Press, 1987), 73-83. I borrow the phrase “correspondence networks” from Ezell.

<sup>xlix</sup> Earle, *Epistolary Selves*, 10-11, 5n, provides an excellent survey of scholarship on post-Renaissance letters, including Linda Kauffman’s *Discourses of Desire: Gender, Genre and Epistolary Fiction* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1986) and Elizabeth Goldsmith’s *Writing the Female Voice: Essays on Epistolary Literature* (London: Pinter Publishers, 1989). For discussion of letters in literature, see Georgiana Donavin, “Locating a Public Forum for the Personal Letter in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*,” *Disputatio*,

19-36; and John McKinnell, "Letters as a Type of the Formal Level in *Troilus and Criseyde*," *Chaucer Studies III: Essays on Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. Mary Salu (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979), 73-89.

<sup>1</sup> See Lerer, *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII*, and Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue: Dramatic Language and Elizabethan Letters* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999). Other examples from opposite ends of the medieval and early modern periods include Karen Cherewatuk, "Radegund and Epistolary Tradition," Cherewatuk and Wiethaus, *Dear Sister*, 20-45, and James Fitzmaurice and Martine Rey, "Letters by Women in England, the French Romance, and Dorothy Osborne," *The Politics of Gender in Early Modern Europe*, eds. Jean R. Brink, Allison P. Coudert, and Maryanne C. Horowitz (Kirksville, MS: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1989), 148-60.

<sup>ii</sup> Marilyn L. Williamson, *Raising Their Voices: British Women Writers, 1650-1750* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990), 260.

<sup>iii</sup> Madeleine de Scudéry, *Selected Letters, Orations, and Rhetorical Dialogues*, ed. and trans. Jane Donawerth and Julie Strongson (Chicago and London: U of Chicago Press, 2004), 150.

<sup>liii</sup> de Scudéry, *Selected Letters*, 142.

<sup>liv</sup> Quotations from the 1405 French poem are taken from Maureen Cheney Curnow's edition, "The *Livre de la cité des dames* of Christine de Pisan: A Critical Edition." (Ph.D., Vanderbilt University, 1975). For a direct English translation, see Earl Jeffrey Richards's edition of *The Book of the City of Ladies*, rev. ed. (New York: Persea, 1982, 1998). Paraphrases, unless otherwise indicated, are my own. For Novella's story, see Curnow, II, 874-5; Richards, 154.

<sup>lv</sup> It is possible that Christine had shared some of her husband's work as a scribe before his death and so contributed to the family finances, but it was only after the deaths of her father and her husband that her work became her sole source of income. See Charity Cannon Willard's biography, *Christine de Pisan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea, 1984), 44-7.

<sup>lvi</sup> Nadia Margolis, "'The Cry of the Chameleon': Evolving Voices in the Epistles of Christine de Pisan," *Disputatio, Volume 1: The Late Medieval Epistle*, eds. Carol Poster and Richard Utz (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1996): 58.

<sup>lvii</sup> Earl Jeffrey Richards, "'Seulette a part:' The 'Little Woman on the Sidelines' Takes Up Her Pen: The Letters of Christine de Pizan," in *Dear Sister*, eds. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 139. Margolis notes that Richards includes *Poissy* in a list of Christine's verse epistles without explanation, but that the editor of the poem, Barbara Altmann, classifies the work as a debate poem ("The Cry of the Chameleon," 65, n41). Christine herself names the poem a *dit* or tale. Altmann explains her reasons for categorizing the work as a debate in the introduction to her edition of the poem, *The Love Debate Poems of Christine de Pizan* (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 1998), 12-17.

<sup>lviii</sup> Christine describes these accusations in her *L'Avison Christine*. See *Christine's Vision*, trans. Glenda K. McLeod (New York and London: Garland Publishing, 1993), 111-16. For a French edition, see *Pizan's L'Avision-Christine*, ed. Mary Louise Towner (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1932; repr. New York: AMS Press, 1969), 153-60. See also Cannon Willard, *Life and Works*, 39-40.

<sup>lix</sup> See Maurice Roy, *Oeuvres Poétiques de Christine de Pisan* 3 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot, 1886; repr. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1965), II. 1-27.

<sup>lx</sup> Sandra Hindman considers the relationship between Christine and Othea and the resemblance of Louis of Orléans to Hector in analyzing *Othea's* political significance. See *Christine de Pizan's Epistre Othea: Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1986), 42-51. Marilynn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorm discuss how illuminated manuscripts construct the reader as spectator and how the images of Christine's *Othea* perform visual gestures that communicate meaning more effectively than a description; *Myth, Montage, & Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 2003), 2-8. Both books also contain extensive sets of plates with manuscript illustrations.

<sup>lxi</sup> Roy, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, II. 301. English translation from *The Selected Writings of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski (New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1997), 111.

<sup>lxii</sup> French quotation from *Le Debat sur Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Eric Hicks (Paris: Éditions Honoré Champion, 1977), 150. The English translation is mine.

<sup>lxiii</sup> Marilynn Desmond, "The *Querelle de la Rose* and the Ethics of Reading," in *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, eds. Barbara K. Altmann and Deborah L. McGrady (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 177.

<sup>lxiv</sup> Desmond, "The *Querelle de la Rose* and the Ethics of Reading," 177.

<sup>lxv</sup> For a survey of women's letter-writing, especially women encouraged by the Church, see Joan Ferrante's essay "Licet longinquis regionibus corpore separati: Letters as a Link in and to the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 76 (2001): 877-95.

<sup>lxvi</sup> Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine argue that few women were trained as humanists; those who were so educated had no public outlet for their skills; "Women Humanists," in *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986), 29-57.

<sup>lxvii</sup> Jennifer Monahan, "Authority and Marginal Status: Authorial Stance in Christine de Pizan's *Livre du Corps de Policie* and *Livre de la Paix*," in *Au Champ des Escriptions*, ed. Eric Hicks, Diego Gonzalez and Philippe Simon (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2000), 41.

<sup>lxviii</sup> Christine's repeated references to herself as a "poor voice crying out" [e.g., *Lamentacion sur les maux de la guerre civile*, "a poor voice crying in this kingdom," "povre voix criant en ce royaume" (94-5)] recall the gospels that identify John the Baptist as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy about "The voice of someone crying in the desert" (John 1:23; Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:2; Luke 3:4, following Isaiah 40:3). For the text of the *Lamentacion*, see Josette A. Wisman's edition and translation, *The Epistle of the Prison of Human Life, with an Epistle to the Queen of France and Lament on the Evils of Civil War* (New York: Garland, 1984). Hereafter I cite this text as *Epistles*.

<sup>lxix</sup> Marjorie Reeves traces the roots of *auctoritas* and medieval writers' need to cite previous *auctores*, beginning with God as the word; "The Bible and Literary Authorship in the Middle Ages," *Reading the Text: Biblical Criticism and Literary Theory*, ed. Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 12-63. On medieval concepts of authority, see also A.J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

<sup>lxx</sup> There were exceptions; Maddalena Scrovegni (1356-1429) was one of the first Italian women humanists. See *Her Immaculate Hand: Selected Works By and About The Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy*, eds. Margaret L. King and Alfred Rabil, Jr. (MRTS, 1983; repr. Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1997), 33-5.

<sup>lxxi</sup> Salisbury's book was translated for the king by Denis Foulechat in 1372. For a full description of Christine's use of the body politic metaphor and her debt to John of Salisbury, see Kate Langdon Forhan's introduction to her translation of *Le livre du corps de policie*, the *Book of the Body Politic* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), xx-xxiv.

<sup>lxxii</sup> John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, ed. and trans. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 66.

<sup>lxxiii</sup> For Christine's reference to the letter, see Kate Langdon Forhan's translation, 4. For a French edition, see Robert H. Lucas, *Le livre du corps de policie* (Geneva: Libraire Droz, 1967), 2-3. For the popularity of Plutarch's letter, see Sandra Hindman, *Christine de Pizan's "Epistre Othea:" Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1986), 28-9.

<sup>lxxiv</sup> Cheney Curnow, *Livre de la cité des dames*, II, 1019. "To whom this saint secretly sent many letters in care of a Christian lady, exhorting her [Anastasia] to be patient, and she likewise sent him letters through this same good lady." Richards, *City of Ladies*, 246.

<sup>lxxv</sup> Richards, "'Seulette a part,'" 141-2. For Christine's line, see *Le Debat sur Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Eric Hicks (Paris: Éditions Honoré Champion, 1977), 146. I have taken all French quotations of the *querelle* letters from Hicks's edition; the English translation is mine. Héloïse's line reads: "God is my witness that if Augustus, Emperor of the whole world, thought fit to honour me with marriage and conferred all the earth on me to possess for ever, it would be dearer and more honourable to me to be called not his Empress but your whore." *The Letters of Abelard and Héloïse*, ed. and trans. Betty Radice (London: Penguin, 1974), 114. In the *Roman de la Rose*, Jean de Meun cites these lines to argue against marriage, saying that Héloïse preferred to be Abelard's lover rather than his wife. See *The Romance of the Rose*, 3rd ed. ed. Charles Dahlberg (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), 160-1. Richards also notes that Gontier Col had copied Jean de Meun's translation of the couple's letters, making them popular while Christine was writing. Since Col was Christine's opponent in the *Rose* debate, Héloïse's letters were probably even further contaminated in Christine's eyes ("Seulette a part," 142).

<sup>lxxvi</sup> Richards, "'Seulette a part,'" 141.

<sup>lxxvii</sup> Bell, "Christine de Pizan: Humanism and the Problem of a Studious Woman," *Feminist Studies* (Spring-Summer 1976): 174.

<sup>lxxviii</sup> Grafton and Jardine, *Humanism to the Humanities*, 44-5.

<sup>lxxix</sup> Bell, "Christine de Pizan: Humanism and the Problem of a Studious Woman," 174.

<sup>lxxx</sup> Mann, "The Origins of Humanism." *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 5.

<sup>lxxx</sup> “[I know it] all the more truly because I am a woman, who can better testify in this matter than one who has not had experience who thus speaks by predictions and by chance,” *Le Debat sur Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Eric Hicks (Paris: Éditions Honoré Champion, 1977), 19.

<sup>lxxxii</sup> Hicks, *Le Debat sur Le Roman de la Rose*, 23. Col wants Christine to “correct and amend this manifest error, folly, or madness, which comes from the presumption or audacity of this impassionate woman in this matter.”

<sup>lxxxiii</sup> Willard, *Life and Works*, 34-5.

<sup>lxxxiv</sup> Hicks, *Le Debat sur Le Roman de la Rose*, 24. “This has always been my manner when I have written to my friends, especially when they are well-read.”

<sup>lxxxv</sup> Margolis concludes that Christine would have been understandably suspicious of Col’s familiar tone; she discusses the implications of the shift in register, especially given that Christine’s opponents usually wrote in Latin, and only switched to French when addressing her; “Cry of the Chameleon,” 44. For more on Christine and Latin, see also Thelma Fenster’s “‘Perdre son latin:’ Christine de Pizan and Vernacular Humanism,” in *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, ed. Marilyn Desmond (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1998), 91-107. Fenster considers Christine as part of the growing trend of scholars to prefer the vernacular, and analyses how Christine forces her *querelle* opponents to write in her style by moving them to the vernacular as well (104).

<sup>lxxxvi</sup> Wisman, *Epistles*, 6.

<sup>lxxxvii</sup> Richards, “‘Seulette a part,’” 149-50.

<sup>lxxxviii</sup> Richards, “‘Seulette a part,’” 157.

<sup>lxxxix</sup> Richards, “‘Seulette a part,’” 163. Numerous studies address Christine’s relationship to humanism; I have focused on this article by Richards since he deals exclusively with her letters. For more general studies, see also the section on Christine in Patricia Ranft’s chapter, “Women Humanists,” in *Women in Western Intellectual Culture, 600-1500* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 175-91; Richards, “Christine de Pizan, the Conventions of Courtly Diction, and Italian Humanism,” in *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, eds. Earl Jeffrey Richards, Joan Williamson, Nadia Margolis, and Christine Reno (Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 250-72;

Susan Groag Bell, "Christine de Pizan: Humanism and the Problem of a Studious Woman"; and Thelma Fenster, "'Perdre son latin.'"

<sup>xc</sup> Richards, "'Seulette a part,'" 166.

<sup>xc<sup>i</sup></sup> Nadia Margolis highlights the influence of French vernacular works, especially those of Eustache Deschamps, on Christine's epistles in her essay, "'The Cry of the Chameleon,'" 40-1.

<sup>xc<sup>ii</sup></sup> See, for example, Patricia Phillippy's essay, "Establishing Authority: Boccaccio's *De Claris Mulieribus* and Christine de Pizan's *Le livre de la cité des dames*." *Romanic Review* 77 (1986): 167-93.

<sup>xc<sup>iii</sup></sup> For discussions of Ovid's influence on Christine, see Richards, "'Seulette a part,'" 148-9 and Jane Chance's translation, *Christine de Pizan's Letter of Othea to Hector* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997), 12-13. For a general survey of Chaucer's relationship to Christine's contemporaries and models, see James Wimsatt's *Chaucer and His French Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1991). While Wimsatt only treats Christine tangentially, he does demonstrate that Chaucer's work was well-known across the Channel. It is also entirely possible that Christine knew Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, since it was composed circa 1390. In *Les heures de contemplation sur la Passion de Notre-Seigneur*, Christine mentions that she is able to translate Latin. See Willard, *The Writings of Christine de Pizan*, 347. Images of women writing letters were prolific in France, as seen in the works by Machaut and Froissart.

<sup>xc<sup>iv</sup></sup> See *Le Livre dou Voir Dit*, ed. Daniel Leech-Wilkinson and trans. R. Barton Palmer (New York and London: Garland, 1998). All French and English quotations taken from this edition. Machaut also influenced Chaucer greatly. See R. Barton Palmer's collection, *Chaucer's French Contemporaries: The Poetry/Poetics of Self and Tradition* (New York: AMS Press, 1999), especially William Calin's essay, "Machaut's Legacy: The Chaucerian Inheritance Reconsidered," 29-46.

<sup>xc<sup>v</sup></sup> "*Le Livre du Voir-Dit*." *A Poet at the Fountain: Essays on the Narrative Verse of Guillaume de Machaut*. (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1974), 171.

<sup>xc<sup>vi</sup></sup> Machaut, *Voir Dit*, L3, 47.

<sup>xc<sup>vii</sup></sup> For the French edition, see Roy, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, III. 179, lines 3288-3298. For the English translation, see Thelma Fenster's *The Book of the Duke of True Lovers* (New



York: Persea, 1991), 127. All quotations are taken from these editions.

<sup>xcviii</sup> Roy, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, 161, 111; Fenster, *Duke of True Lovers*, 171, 120, respectively.

<sup>xcix</sup> “For surely no greater joy could come to me than to compose something to heal and please you,” Machaut, *Voir Dit*, (L3, 46).

<sup>c</sup> Roy, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, 132-3; “I have received your sweet, loving letter...in which you say that if you don’t obtain help quickly, your life must end. So I write you my letter in order to respond to that,” Fenster, *Duke of True Lovers*, 92.

<sup>ci</sup> “I saw the tears pitifully / Drop down from the little fountain / In the tiny heart of All-Beautiful / As this letter was written. / And with these tears, the speech of false slanderers has been condemned / So strongly that in the past ten years / I have seen nothing condemned this much,” Machaut, *Voir Dit*, lines 8626-8633.

<sup>cii</sup> Roy, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, 177; Fenster, *Duke of True Lovers*, 125.

<sup>ciii</sup> Quotations and translations are taken from Josette A. Wisman’s edition and translation, *The Epistle of the Prison of Human Life, with an Epistle to the Queen of France and Lament on the Evils of Civil War* (New York: Garland, 1984), 70-71.

<sup>civ</sup> Richards, “‘Seulette a part,’” 163.

<sup>cv</sup> Ronald Witt, “Medieval ‘Ars Dictaminis’ and the Beginnings of Humanism: a New Construction of the Problem,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 35.1 (1982), 13-14. For an example of a medieval letter-writing manual, see Anonymous of Bologna, “The Principles of Letter-Writing,” which devotes ten pages to the salutation and exordium, but less than half a page each to the narration, petition, and conclusion; *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1971), 1-26.

<sup>cvi</sup> Margolis, “‘The Cry of the Chameleon,’” 58, and n80.

<sup>cvii</sup> See Laurence de Looze’s edition and English translation, *Jean Froissart: La Prison Amoureuse (The Prison of Love)* (New York and London: Garland, 1994). Froissart was also much influenced by Machaut’s *Voir Dit*.

<sup>cviii</sup> Margolis, “The Cry of the Chameleon,” 58, and n80.

<sup>cix</sup> Margolis, “The Cry of the Chameleon,” 40. The full title of Deschamps’s work is *L’art de dictier et de fere chançons, balades virelais et rondeaux*.

<sup>cx</sup> For an anthology of Deschamps’s work in French and English, see *Eustache Deschamps: Selected Poems*, eds. Ian S. Laurie and Deborah Sinnreich-Levi, trans. David Curzon and Jeffrey Fiskin (New York and London: Routledge, 2003). See also Gaston Reynaud’s twelve volume *Oeuvres Complètes de Eustache Deschamps* (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot, 1843; repr. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1966).

<sup>cx</sup> The literary debt Christine owed to Deschamps has been well documented by Richards and Margolis in their surveys of Christine’s epistles, and by Lori Walters, particularly with regard to the exchange of poems between Christine and Deschamps, “Fathers and Daughters: Christine de Pizan as Reader of the Male Tradition of *Clergie* in the *Dit de la Rose*,” *Reinterpreting Christine de Pizan*, eds. Earl Jeffrey Richards, Joan Williamson, Nadia Margolis, and Christine Reno (Athens, GA and London: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 63-72.

<sup>cxii</sup> Christine’s epistle may be found in Roy, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, II, 295-301. Deschamps’s reply can be found in *Selected Poems*, 180-1.

<sup>cxiii</sup> Deschamps, *Selected Poems*, 180-1.

<sup>cxiv</sup> Walters, “Fathers and Daughters,” 69.

<sup>cxv</sup> See Richards, “Courtly Diction and Italian Humanism,” 254; Margolis, “Cry of the Chameleon,” 40; and Walters, 69-70.

<sup>cxvi</sup> Richards, “Seulette a part,” 150.

<sup>cxvii</sup> Towner, *Pizan’s Lavision-Christine*, 164. For an English translation of the whole passage, see McLeod, *Christine’s Vision*, 119-20.

<sup>cxviii</sup> Quotations from the French are taken from *Le Livre des Trois Vertus*, edited by Charity Cannon Willard, with Eric Hicks (Paris: Champion, 1989). The English translation is taken from *A Medieval Woman’s Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies*, trans. Charity Cannon Willard, ed. Madeleine Perner Cosman (New York: Persea Books, 1989). French edition, 110; English translation, 139.

<sup>cxxix</sup> Giles Constable notes: “[I]n the Middle Ages letters were for the most part self-conscious, quasi-public literary documents, often written with an eye to future collection and publication. . . . medieval letters were often intended to be read by more than one person even at the time they were written. They were therefore designed to be correct and elegant rather than original and spontaneous”; *Letters and Letter-Collections* (Turnhout: Éditions Brepols, 1976), 11.

<sup>cxxx</sup> Richards notes that the letter’s inclusion in Stevens’s work (All Souls MS. 182) indicates “that Christine quickly attained contemporary recognition and by a compiler of a formulary manuscript in England, no less, as an accomplished letter-writer in prose” (“Seulette a part,” 162-3). He also explains how Christine’s departures from the traditional five-part dictaminal model show that Christine combines a series of narrations and petitions to the queen. He then analyzes how Christine follows humanistic practices in suggesting historical, Scriptural, and classical exemplars for the queen to emulate, exemplars that demonstrate the history of women’s achievement, similar to her strategy in the *Cité des dames*.

<sup>cxxxi</sup> Wisman, *Epistles*, 70-71.

<sup>cxxxii</sup> Langdon Forhan, *Book of the Body Politic*, 99-100. Lucas, *Le livre du corps de policie*, 184.

<sup>cxxxiii</sup> Noting that she writes in her own hand may indicate a special favor on Christine’s part. Charity Cannon Willard notes that Christine’s use of this phrase, “escript de ma main” follows legal formulae, and suggests that it is a sign of Christine’s familiarity with official writing, either through her husband’s employment as a notary or by acting herself as a clerk after his death. See *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works*, 46-48. Willard elsewhere argues reasonably that this copy of the *Epistre* preserves a sample of Christine’s own hand (“An autograph Manuscript of Christine de Pizan?” *Studi Francesi* vol. 9. issue 27 (Sept-Dec 1965): 452-57.

<sup>cxxxiv</sup> Wisman, *Epistles*, 82-83. The *rondeau* survives in only one of the four copies of the letter: Bibliothèque Nationale MS Fr. 580.

<sup>cxxxv</sup> Margolis argues that the informal tone in the letter almost amounts to “woman-to-woman conversation”; “The Cry of the Chameleon,” 56. Wisman contends that the lack of extensive quotations so common to Christine’s other works seems to signal a work completed in haste (*Epistles*, xxv).

<sup>cxxvi</sup> Richards, “Seulette a part,” 162.

<sup>cxxvii</sup> Charles VI’s frequent bouts of madness created political turmoil regarding the issue of who should govern the realm during the king’s periods of incapacitation. His wife, Queen Isabel, and his brother, Louis of Orléans, became political allies; in August of 1405, their attempt to remove the young dauphin from Paris on learning of Burgundy’s pending arrival with an army in tow caused the political crisis that inspired Christine’s letter. Burgundy brought the king’s son back to Paris, and Orléans and Isabel waited outside the city, first together in Melun, then separately in Vincennes and Corbeil, respectively, until peace was made between the warring dukes in Vincennes that October 16.

<sup>cxxviii</sup> Pinet, *Christine de Pisan, 1364-1430, # Étude Biographique et littéraire* (1927; repr. Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1974), 131. Pinet follows Raymond Thomassy, who first suggested the duke of Orléans, the king’s brother, as the subject, given his status as a patron of poets. See Thomassy, *Essai sur les écrits politiques de Christine de Pisan* (Paris, 1838), 133-40. Thomassy cites Christine’s haste in writing as a sign of her desperation to bring about peace.

<sup>cxxix</sup> Despite history’s long-standing verdict that the queen and her brother-in-law were lovers, research by contemporary scholars suggests that such a relationship was unlikely, and furthermore, that there was no outright accusation of adultery until the end of the fifteenth-century. There were rumors of scandal generally connected to the Queen and the Duke; and the Religieux of St. Denis specifically condemned them for indulging in pleasures of the flesh, but the context could suggest excessive luxury. See R.C. Famiglietti, *Royal Intrigue: Crisis at the Court of Charles VI, 1392-1420* (New York: AMS Press, 1986), 39-45; and Rachel Gibbons, “Isabeau of Bavaria, Queen of France (1385-1422): The Creation of an Historical Villainess,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser. 6 (1996): 51-73, especially 62-5.

<sup>cxxx</sup> The illustrations in Christine’s *L’epistre Othea* clearly indicate that she intended that work for his notice, as Sandra Hindman establishes in her study, *Christine de Pizan’s “Epistre Othea:” Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1986). Taking this past relationship between Christine and Orléans together with his connection to Isabel, many scholars, including Josette Wisman, follow Pinet’s argument. See Wisman’s introduction to *Epistles*, 83.

<sup>cxxxii</sup> Willard, “An autograph Manuscript?,” 456. Willard also notes that Burgundy pursued a course of political and social reforms with which Christine seems to agree, especially with regard to education; see *Life and Works*, 155-71.

<sup>cxxxii</sup> Je n’hésite pas à voir, dans son *Epistre à la royne*, un écrit pro-bourguignon, du

temps où la cause bourguignonne pouvait, en une certaine mesure, s'identifier avec la cause française." Pinet, *Étude Biographique*, 133; my translation.

<sup>cxxxiii</sup> Willard, *Life and Works*, 169-71.

<sup>cxxxiv</sup> The French passage is quoted from Willard's "An autograph manuscript," 456-7; the English is Willard's translation in *Life and Works*, 170.

<sup>cxxxv</sup> It is even conceivable that both dukes would see the letter. If it were composed at Burgundy's behest, presumably the queen might well still show it to Orléans after she read it. Equally, if Orléans had commissioned the letter, it is possible that Burgundy might also be sent a copy during the October negotiations between the two rivals.

<sup>cxxxvi</sup> Qtd. in Willard, *The Writings of Christine de Pizan* (New York: Persea, 1994), 274, n 7. For the French, see Suzanne Solente, ed., *Le livre de la mutacion de fortune*, vol. IV (Paris: Editions A & J Picard, 1965), 23273-23276.

<sup>cxxxvii</sup> See Willard's introduction to her translation of *Trois vertus*, 39-40.

<sup>cxxxviii</sup> See, for example, Willard, *Life and Works*, 201, and Margolis, "'The Cry of the Chameleon,'" 58.

<sup>cxxxix</sup> Constable, *Letters and Letter-Collections*, 17.

<sup>cxl</sup> Christine mentions that the work was commissioned by someone else, but that she has chosen to dedicate the work to Marie, causing scholars to speculate that the original patron may have passed away. Wisman rejects Susanne Solente's speculation that the Duke of Berry, Marie's father, and a generous patron to Christine, was the likely candidate by pointing out that Christine would almost certainly have mentioned that specifically (*Epistles*, xxii). In any case, Marie was an obvious choice for Christine's dedication, once the original commissioner of the work was no longer at issue.

<sup>cxli</sup> Willard, *Life and Works*, 197.

<sup>cxlii</sup> Roy, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, I.229-30.

<sup>cxliii</sup> Cheney Curnow, *Livre de la cité des dames*, II, 968; Richards, *City of Ladies*, 213.

<sup>cxliv</sup> Wisman, *Epistles*, 66-9; I have emended her translation slightly.

<sup>cxlv</sup> Wisman, *Epistles*, 6, my translation.

<sup>cxlvi</sup> Willard, *Life and Works*, 201.

<sup>cxlvii</sup> See, for example, Jeremiah 4:19; 8:18; 9:1; and 13:17. For a survey of Christine's biblical and philosophical sources, see Wisman, *Epistles*, xxviii-xxx. For the work as a *complainte*, see Margarete Zimmermann, "Vox Femina, Vox Politica: The *Lamentacion sur les maux de la France*." *Politics, Gender, and Genre*. ed. Margaret Brabant. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), 117-19, and Linda Leppig, "The Political Rhetoric of Christine de Pizan: *Lamentacion sur les maux de la guerre civile*," also in *Politics, Gender, and Genre*, 143-48.

<sup>cxlviii</sup> Wisman, *Epistles*, 94-5. See John 1:23; Matthew 3:3; Mark 1:2; Luke 3:4, following Isaiah 40:3.

<sup>cxlix</sup> See Jeremiah, 13:18; 14:17; 21:3-7; 21:11-14; and 22:15.

<sup>cl</sup> Zimmermann, "Vox Femina, Vox Politica," 119-20.

<sup>cli</sup> McKinley, "The Subversive 'Seulette,'" 158.

<sup>clii</sup> Leppig, "The Political Rhetoric of Christine de Pizan," 152-3.

<sup>cliii</sup> See the treatise, "The Principles of Letter-Writing," in James J. Murphy's edition of *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*. (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1971), 20.

<sup>cliv</sup> Leppig, "The Political Rhetoric of Christine de Pizan," 153.

<sup>clv</sup> Zimmermann, "Vox Femina, Vox Politica," 122. For the quotation, see Wisman, *Epistles*, 86.

<sup>clvi</sup> Christine's daughter entered the convent in 1397 at the same time as the princess Marie, daughter of Charles VI. The prioress at that time was Charles's aunt, Marie of Bourbon; admission to the abbey required the king's permission, and Willard notes that the two hundred sisters were almost all members of the nobility (*Life and Works*, 43). Christine describes the convent in her *Dit de Poissy*.

clvii Zimmermann, “Vox Femina, Vox Politica,” 123.

clviii Zimmermann, “Vox Femina, Vox Politica,” 122-3.

clix Cheney Curnow, *Livre de la cité des dames*, II, 830-1; Richards, *City of Ladies*, 126. For Boccaccio’s version of Argia, see *Famous Women*, edited and translated by Virginia Brown, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2001), 116-21.

clx Linda Leppig argues rightly that, with the exception of the salutation, the entire piece follows dictaminal models, (“The Political Rhetoric of Christine de Pizan,” 152).

clxi McKinley, “The Subversive ‘Seulette,’” 159.

clxii McLeod, *Christine’s Vision*, 114; Towner, *Pizan’s Lavision-Christine*, 157.

clxiii See for example, Marilyn Desmond’s essay, “The *Querelle de la Rose* and the Ethics of Reading” on Christine’s concern over the effects of reading, 167-80. Roberta Krueger traces Christine’s theories on education in “Christine’s Anxious Lessons: Gender, Morality, and the Social Order in the *Enseignements to the Avison*,” in *Christine de Pizan and the Categories of Difference*, ed. Marilyn Desmond (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1998), 16-40.

clxiv Marilyn Desmond discusses Christine’s concern over the negative influence of the *Roman de la Rose* on its readers at length in “The *Querelle de la Rose* and the Ethics of Reading,” 170-77.

clxv Benkov, “Listening to the *Pastoure*” *Au Champ des Escriptions*, 446.

clxvi Christine writes that she “dared to correct and attack,” (“osa repprendre et redarguer”). Margolis, “Cry of the Chameleon,” 46-7.

clxvii Fenster, “Who’s a Heroine? The Example of Christine de Pizan” in *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, eds. Barbara K. Altmann and Deborah L. McGrady (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 121-2. Fenster acknowledges that there is no solid proof of a love affair between Isabel and Orléans, but, citing Gibbons, notes that Isabel and the Duke were being condemned for excessive expenditures on luxuries, and that the Religieux de Saint-Denis had warned the couple about dishonor and scandal. See

Gibbons, "Isabeau of Bavaria," 63.

clxviii BL Harley MS 4431.

clxix Cheney Curnow, *Livre de la cité des dames*, II, 748; Richards, *City of Ladies*, 78-9; I have slightly emended Richards's translation.

clxx French quotations from *Othea* are taken from Gabriella Parussa's edition, *Epistre Othea* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1999); English quotations from Jane Chance's translation, *Christine de Pizan's Letter of Othea to Hector* (Cambridge, DS Brewer, 1997).

clxxi See for example Mary Ann Ignatius's "Christine de Pizan's *Epistre Othea*: An Experiment in Literary Form," *Medievalistic et Humanistica: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Culture* 9 (1979), 127-42; Hindman's *Christine de Pizan's Epistre Othea*, pps. 25-33; Margolis, "'Cry of the Chameleon,'" 51-2; and Richards, "'Seulette a part,'" 148-9.

clxxii Parussa, *Othea*, 197-8; Chance, *Othea*, 35.

clxxiii Murphy, *Three Medieval Rhetorical Treatises*, 19.

clxxiv Parussa, *Othea*, 340; Chance, *Othea*, 119.

clxxv Murphy, *Three Medieval Rhetorical Treatises*, 19.

clxxvi Parussa, *Othea*, 199-200; Chance, *Othea*, 36-7.

clxxvii For a full discussion of the letter's didactic and prophetic nature, see Thelma Fenster, "Who's a Heroine?," 117-21.

clxxviii For the text of the duke's initial letter to the lady, see Roy, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, III, 128-30; Fenster, 88-90; for the text of the letter in which he persuades her to renew the affair, see Roy, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, III.175-7; Fenster, 123-5.

clxxix Willard, *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor*, 213-14.



clxxx Willard, *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor*, 129.

clxxxii Quotation from Roy, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, III, 266; translation is my own.

clxxxiii For the text of the lover's letter, see lines 898-1012; for the lady's, see lines 1022-92; Barbara Altmann, *The Love Debate Poems of Christine de Pizan*, (Gainesville: UP of Florida, 1998).

clxxxiiii Willard, *A Medieval Woman's Mirror of Honor*, 139.

clxxxv Margolis, "'Cry of the Chameleon,'" 70, note 83.

clxxxvi Pinet includes the text of the first half of the letter in her biography of Christine, p. 184. Willard translates the whole of the letter into English in her *Writings of Christine de Pizan*, 346-47. There is no complete French edition of the letter. For the French text of the Hours, see Roy, *Oeuvres Poétiques*, III.15-26. Pinet notes that not much is known about the composition of this work, but observes that Christine's description of her previous writing and subject matter indicates a date after the *L'epistre de la prison de vie humaine* and before the *Ditié*, 183-5. French quotations are from Pinet; translations are my own.

clxxxvii Rebecca Krug, *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England*. (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2002), 78.

clxxxviii See Henri Omont, "Les Manuscrits Français des Rois D'Angleterre au Chateau de Richmond," *Études romanes dédiées à Gaston Paris* (Paris: Emile Bouillon, 1891), 1-13. Henry's copies of *Othea* are found in two miscellanies, one labelled *Metamorfoze* (Royal MS. 17 E IV) and one *Le Chemyn de vaillance* (Royal MS. 17 F. III). Both copies were printed in Paris by Bossuat in 1490. The third is catalogued as *Fables de Ysopet et Orthea* (sic), (BL MS Harley 219). These works remained in the English royal family's holdings. See *The Libraries of Henry VIII*, ed. James P. Carley (London: British Library, 2000), 12, 14, 26. Carley details the contents of each miscellany.

clxxxix For Mary's chief biographies, see Mary Ann Everett Green's *Lives of the Princesses of England*, vol. 5 (London: Henry Colburn, 1854); Walter Richardson's *Mary Tudor, the White Queen* (Seattle: U of Washington Press, 1970); Hester W. Chapman's *The Sisters of Henry VIII* (Bath: Cedric Chivers, 1974); and Maria Perry's *The Sisters of Henry VIII: The Tumultuous Lives of Margaret of Scotland and Mary of France* (Da Capo Press, 1998). Green is an excellent source; though dated, her information is scrupulously documented. Richardson's work is also helpful, but some of

his conclusions are unwarranted based on the evidence. Perry provides helpful background but focuses on Mary and her sister Margaret largely in terms of their relationship to their brother.

<sup>clxxxix</sup> Undated, January or February 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 249v/fol. 253v (new foliation).

<sup>cx</sup> Margreta de Grazia, "What is a Work? What is a Document?" *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985-1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Binghamton, NY: Renaissance English Text Society, 1993): 199-207, and Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell UP: 1995).

<sup>cxci</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1987). Steen, "Behind the Arras: Editing Renaissance Women's Letters." *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts*, 37.

<sup>cxcii</sup> Literature was a strong influence on Mary's epistolary technique, but the tradition of the formal *ars dictaminis* cannot be discounted, nor can the history of women writing letters. See Joan Ferrante, "'Licet longinquis regionibus corpore separati': Letters as a Link in and to the Middle Ages," *Speculum* 76 (2001): 881.

<sup>cxci</sup> Most of Mary's letters are preserved in BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI. Unfortunately, nearly all the letters pertaining to the marriage crisis, while clearly written in the spring of 1515, are undated, perhaps deliberately. Brandon goes to France in early February and the couple are married secretly some time in February. In the beginning of March, Mary suspects pregnancy (wrongly); on March 5, 1515, Brandon confesses the marriage to Wolsey and mentions his fears of pregnancy (BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 176<sup>r</sup>/fol. 180<sup>r</sup> (new)). A second marriage takes place openly, probably at the end of March. (Richardson, *The White Queen*, 173). On April 16, the couple leave Paris for Calais, and on May 2, they sail for Dover. I have followed the order established by the *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII* 21 vols., ed. J.S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, and R.H. Brodie (London: HMSO, 1862-1932) and accepted by her biographers and historians. Wherever possible I have given the dates, but otherwise I have tried to indicate a simple formula of before or after the marriage. Also, Mary's letters suffered greatly in the Cotton fire in 1731, resulting in frequent places where the words are too scorched to read, if not lost altogether. Wherever possible I have compared my transcriptions against other sources, such as Mary Ann Everett Green's *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies*, vol. I (London: Henry Colburn, 1846), Henry Ellis's *Original Letters Illustrative of English History* (1827; repr. New York: AMS, 1970), or the *Letters and Papers of Henry VIII* (hereafter *L&P*). I have silently supplied obvious letters but where large gaps occur, I have indicated conjecture with brackets. Also, I have

silently expanded scribal abbreviations, added punctuation, and regularized u/v and i/j throughout.

<sup>cxci</sup>v Undated, probably late March, early April, 1515. PRO SP 1/10/79r-80r.

<sup>cxci</sup>v Undated, January or February 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 249r/fol. 253r (new).

<sup>cxci</sup>vi BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol.146, qtd. in Green, *Lives of the Princesses of England*, 71.

<sup>cxci</sup>vii Undated, late December, 1514. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 268r/fol. 273r (new).

<sup>cxci</sup>viii BL MS Cotton Vespasian F.XIII, fol.202br/fol. 281r (new).

<sup>cxci</sup>ix Wolsey, in his letter to Brandon, states that Henry cannot believe that Brandon would break “yowr promysse made to hys grace in England” with regard to marriage with Mary. ?/1515. *L&P* II.i, 224, 74.

<sup>cc</sup> Undated, probably March, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 242r-v/fol. 246r-v (new).

<sup>cci</sup> *L&P* II.i, 139, 49-50.

<sup>ccii</sup> Richardson, *The White Queen*, 143.

<sup>cciii</sup> Dated, February, 15, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 245r/fol. 249r (new). Brandon also writes Henry that Mary told him the same story (BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol.161.)

<sup>cciv</sup> Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 110.

<sup>ccv</sup> Seth Lerer, *Courtly Letters in the Age of Henry VIII: Literary Culture and the Arts of Deceit* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 34. Lerer highlights the applicability of the story of Troilus and Criseyde, particularly with regard to the role of Pandarus, to the court politics of Henry VIII. Mary was likely present at this performance. According to Richardson, both Mary and Brandon were in London for the Christmas festivities of

1515, and left “early in the New Year” (*The White Queen*, 197). Both Mary and Brandon attended the celebration of Wolsey’s receiving the Cardinal’s hat on November 15, 1515 (*L&P* II.i, 1153, 303-4). Brandon at least was still in London on December 22 when he witnessed Wolsey’s receipt of the Great Seal from the Archbishop of Canterbury (*L&P* II.i, 1335, 359). There is no further reference to either Mary or Brandon in the state papers until January 10, when Brandon wrote Wolsey from Norwich to affirm that he would return to London for additional business (*L&P* II.i, 1397, 385). Richardson’s assertion that the couple would have remained at court for the holidays is reasonable; they were close to Henry, who frequently demanded their presence at court.

<sup>ccvi</sup> Allen Frantzen notes that under the Tudors, “*Troilus and Criseyde* was admired not only as an example of English love poetry but as an example of highly ornate art valued far above the ‘common speech’ of *The Canterbury Tales*.” *Troilus and Criseyde: The Poem and the Frame* (New York: Twayne, 1993), 22. Caxton printed an edition in 1483.

<sup>ccvii</sup> *Troilus and Criseyde*, II.1065-6; II.1078. All references are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry D. Benson, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

<sup>ccviii</sup> *Troilus and Criseyde*, II.1223-4.

<sup>ccix</sup> The salutations stem from BL MSS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 251r/fol. 255r (new); Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 249r/fol. 253r (new); and PRO SP 1/10/79r-80r, respectively. Undated, 1515.

<sup>ccx</sup> Undated, January or February, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 249r/fol. 253r to fol. 250r/fol. 254r (new).

<sup>ccxi</sup> These letters are likewise written in the spring of 1515, but undated. The closings belong to BL MSS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 252r/fol. 256r (new); Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 250v/fol. 254v (new); Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 246r/fol. 250r (new); and Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 243r/fol. 247r (new), respectively.

<sup>ccxii</sup> Undated, probably March, 1515. PRO SP 1/10/79r-80r.

<sup>ccxiii</sup> Undated, January or February, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 249r/fol. 253r (new).

<sup>ccxiv</sup> Undated, probably March, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 242v/fol. 246v (new).

<sup>ccxv</sup> Undated, January or February, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 249r/fol. 253r (new).

<sup>ccxvi</sup> This particular letter was badly damaged by fire. In her edition of the letter, Mary Ann Green notes (*Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies*, I, 188), that Joseph Grove, who had access to Mary's letters before they were damaged in the 1731 Cotton fire, quotes the passage fully in his *History of the life and times of Cardinal Wolsey*, as "That your grace well knows what I did as to my first marriage was for your pleasure, and now I trust you will suffer me to do what I like." I therefore follow Green in supplying the words "pleasure" and "marry as me liketh for to do" since based on the size of the gaps in the original and Grove's quotation, they seem a reasonable formulation of Mary's original words.

<sup>ccxvii</sup> Undated, probably March, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 242r/fol. 246r (new).

<sup>ccxviii</sup> Undated, probably March, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 247v/fol. 251v (new).

<sup>ccxix</sup> Undated, January or February, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 246r/fol. 250r (new).

<sup>ccxx</sup> Undated, probably March, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 243r/fol. 247r (new).

<sup>ccxxi</sup> PRO SP 1/10/79r-80r. The letter exists as a draft in a scribal hand, written by Wolsey's secretary Brian Tuke, according to the *L&P*, II.i, 227, 76. In the letter itself, Mary refers to her determination to wait in Calais until she hears from Henry. But Richardson, Chapman, and Perry all agree that Wolsey only met Mary and Brandon after they landed in Dover (*The White Queen*, 187, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 190, and *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 113, respectively). Green asserts that the Mary wrote the letter under Wolsey's direction while she was in Calais in late April 1515. (*Lives of the Princesses of England*, 101). It seems clear that Mary did write under Wolsey's direction, but that she did so through the intermediary of his secretary.

<sup>ccxxii</sup> Reading only Tuke's evenly spaced lines reveals a complete letter that echoes Mary's phrasing in other letters. That spacing, plus the specific changes that Wolsey made to this original content, makes it highly likely that Mary dictated the first version.

<sup>ccxxiii</sup> There is no signature on this incredibly messy draft, which also makes it unlikely that this was the final form sent to Henry, since every other letter bears at least Mary's signature (most surviving letters are actually holograph). For more on collaborative revision of letters, see James Daybell, "Women's Letters and Letter Writing in England, 1540-1603," *Shakespeare Studies* 27 (1999): 161-87.

<sup>ccxxiv</sup> In light of her earlier letters, Mary surely knew that Henry was expecting her to get his approval; however, in a letter to Henry after the marriage, Brandon indicates that when he told Mary that he had promised not to marry her without Henry's permission, "sche sayd yt the kyng me brodar es counttent" BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 181r/185r (new). Regardless of what either Mary or Brandon knew or believed, they chose to claim that Mary believed that with Henry's promise, she had his approval.

<sup>ccxxv</sup> Mary's suggestion that she recovered her dowry is a little specious; Brandon and his fellow ambassadors Dr. Nicholas West and Sir Richard Wingfield had worked very hard to secure her dowry, and while Mary may well have assisted in the negotiations, to claim sole responsibility is exaggeration on her part.

<sup>ccxxvi</sup> PRO SP 1/10/81r.

<sup>ccxxvii</sup> Richardson, *The White Queen*, 23.

<sup>ccxxviii</sup> Richardson, *The White Queen*, 22.

<sup>ccxxix</sup> Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, xiv-xv; Richardson, *The White Queen*, 23.

<sup>ccxxx</sup> Green confirms Mary's knowledge of Latin (*Lives of the Princesses of England*, 3), as does Richardson (*The White Queen*, 23). As part of his argument, however, Richardson incorrectly cites Richard Hyrde's introduction to Margaret More Roper's translation of Erasmus's *Precatio dominica*, 31. This introduction, which is addressed to Frances S, compliments Frances's mother and notes how much she benefited from Latin, but Frances S is not Frances Brandon, Mary's daughter. Hyrde specifies that the author of the translation is also her kinswoman; Frances Brandon was not related to Margaret More Roper. Betty Travitsky's candidate for Frances S., Frances Staverton, More's niece, is a far more likely identification [*The Paradise of Women: Writings by Englishwomen of the Renaissance*. (New York: Columbia UP, 1989), 35]. Hyrde spent time in the More household and Frances Staverton and Margaret More Roper were kinswomen. Such a false association, however, does not negate the probability of Mary's familiarity with Latin, especially given our knowledge of the education provided most other Tudor royal children and John Skelton's role as Henry VIII's tutor. Additionally, Margaret Beaufort, who herself regretted not knowing Latin, may well have seen to it that

her granddaughter did not suffer the same regret (Krug, *Reading Families*, 66). In 1515 Isabella of Aragon chose to write in Latin when begging Mary's assistance for her son (BL MS Cotton Vespasian F.III, fol. 50). That alone would not indicate proficiency in Latin, given the availability of secretaries and translators, but it is one more piece of evidence, since Isabella required a shared tongue to make her plea.

<sup>ccxxxii</sup> Michalove, "Equal in Opportunity? The Education of Aristocratic Women 1450-1540," *Women's Education in Early Modern Europe, A History 1500-1800*, ed. Barbara J. Whitehead (New York, Garland Publishing, 1999), 58.

<sup>ccxxxiii</sup> Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 39-41.

<sup>ccxxxiv</sup> Qtd. from BL MS Cotton Vespasian, C.XII, fol. 239 in Green, *Lives of the Princesses of England*, 4.

<sup>ccxxxv</sup> Michalove, "Equal in Opportunity?" 48.

<sup>ccxxxvi</sup> Richardson, *The White Queen*, 23; Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 32. Margaret was well known for her teaching of both young noblewomen and noblemen in her household, (Michalove, "Equal in Opportunity?" 57).

<sup>ccxxxvii</sup> Vives, *The Instruction of a Christian Woman*, eds. Virginia Walcott Beauchamp et al (Urbana: U of Chicago Press, 2002), 16.

<sup>ccxxxviii</sup> Richardson, *The White Queen*, 26.

<sup>ccxxxix</sup> John Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988), 77; Krug, *Reading Families*, 91-2.

<sup>ccxl</sup> Guy, *Tudor England*, 77. For a complete listing, see Omont, "Les Manuscrits Francais," note 2, and Gordon Kipling's "Henry VII and the Origins of Tudor Patronage," *Patronage and the Renaissance*, eds. Guy Fitch Lytle and Stephen Orgel (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1981), 117-64.

<sup>ccxli</sup> For the Gower reference, see Susan Powell, "The Lady Margaret Beaufort and her Books" *The Library* 6<sup>th</sup> series, 20.3 (September 1998): 202. For Boccaccio, see Michael K. Jones and Malcolm Underwood, who argue that the Boccaccio in question may have been Lydgate's *Fall of Princes* [*The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 241, n. 34]. Powell makes

a convincing argument for a French translation of Boccaccio's *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* ("The Lady Margaret Beaufort and her Books," 201-2, n. 25). For the Genesis and Froissart, see Jones and Underwood, 241.

<sup>ccxli</sup> From Margaret's will, qtd. in Powell, "The Lady Margaret Beaufort and her Books," 202.

<sup>ccxlii</sup> Jones and Underwood, *The King's Mother*, 173.

<sup>ccxliii</sup> Krug, *Reading Families*, 77-8. A.I. Doyle notes in the appendix to Curt Buhler's edition of Stephen Scrope's translation of the *Othea* that it is uncertain which version of the book was bequeathed to Margaret, the Scrope translation prepared for Humphrey Stafford, the duke of Buckingham, Anne's father, or "the version re-dedicated to a 'high princess' (perhaps herself [Anne] or her mother), or even the French" [*The Epistle of Othea*, Early English Text Society, No. 264 (London: Oxford UP, 1970), 126]. Notably, Doyle also speculates that Anne Neville (Anne Vere's mother) may also have shared Chaucer's *Troilus* and *The Romant of the Rose*, which likely belonged to her, with Margaret at some point (126-7). Rebecca Krug makes a detailed argument for book-sharing between Anne Neville, Anne Vere, and Margaret Beaufort, and further posits that Margaret became such a noted patroness of printed books out of a perceived moral obligation to share books with others (*Reading Families*, 77-83).

<sup>ccxliv</sup> When Louis dismissed Mary's English attendants, Palsgrave returned to London. See Gabriele Stein, *John Palsgrave as Renaissance Linguist* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 4. Mary did not neglect her former teacher and on two separate occasions in 1514 and in 1515, wrote to Wolsey to request patronage for Palsgrave. (November 13, 1514, PRO SP 1/9/158; April 3, 1515, PRO SP 1/10/106R).

<sup>ccxlv</sup> *Lesclaircissement de la langue francoyse*, 1530. STC 19166, 2nd ed. EEBO (Early English Books, 122:07). fol. Aii r (Image 2).

<sup>ccxlv</sup> *Lesclaircissement*, fol. Aii v (Image 3).

<sup>ccxlvii</sup> Stein, *John Palsgrave as Renaissance Linguist*, 174-5. For example, she notes that in 1513, about the same time that Palsgrave began writing *Lesclaircissement*, Pynson printed Lydgate's *Troy Book*.

<sup>ccxlviii</sup> Gordon Kipling notes that Palsgrave's emphasis on Lemaire de Belges is especially understandable given that at the time of Mary's wedding to Louis, Lemaire was France's chief poet-historian, and his *L'Amant Vert* was so popular it had run through three



editions in 1510, 1512, and 1513. He argues that Mary's wedding actually helped Lemaire become known in England, where his work had particular influence on John Skelton. See *The Triumph of Honor: Burgundian Origins of the Elizabethan Renaissance* (The Hague: Leiden UP, 1977) 24-6. For more on the influence of Ovid's *Heroides* on French authors, see also Yvonne LeBlanc's essay "Queen Anne in the Lonely, Tear-Soaked Bed of Penelope: Rewriting the *Heroides* in Sixteenth-Century France" *Disputatio* 1 (1996): 71-88.

<sup>ccxlix</sup> Leon Kellner, ed. *Caxton's Blanchardyn and Eglantine* (1890, repr. London: Oxford UP, for the Early English Text Society, 1962), 1. Jones and Underwood argue that the choice of *Blanchardyn and Eglantine* was political, since the romance plot seems to mirror political events surrounding the betrothal of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York (*The King's Mother*, 181-2).

<sup>cccl</sup> Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 92. Although Perry's assertion is undocumented, it seems a reasonable supposition, given the number of such romances available to Mary in her family's libraries. Also, numerous romances were printed by Caxton, de Worde, and their fellows in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries; for a detailed list, see W. R. J. Barron, *English Medieval Romance* (London: Longman, 1987), 241-2.

<sup>cccli</sup> Written circa 1470 and printed in 1485 by William Caxton, Sir Thomas Malory's popular re-telling of Arthurian romance *Le Morte D'Arthur* provides an excellent case study of fictional letters, since Malory frequently employs letters as a narrative device, especially in the love story of Tristram and Isoud. Mary would have been familiar with the Arthurian tradition popular in England during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In addition to Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, several other Arthurian romances were circulating in print and in manuscript during this period of Mary's life, including *King Arthur's Death*, *Legend of King Arthur*, *Sir Lancelot du Lake*, and numerous others. A copy of the *Romance of the Holy Grail* had belonged to Elizabeth of York and her mother Elizabeth Woodville [Janet Backhouse, "Illuminated Manuscripts associated with Henry VII and Members of his Immediate Family," *The Reign of Henry VII: Proceedings of the 1993 Harlaxton Symposium*. ed. Benjamin Thompson (Stamford, Lincolnshire: Paul Watkins, 1995), 180-1]. For a complete list of holdings of Henry VIII, see Carley's *The Libraries of King Henry VIII*. Furthermore, Tudor culture saw a resurgence of the Arthurian myth as a means of evoking England's glory. According to Kipling, Henry VII consciously tried to remodel England as a new Camelot; building the magnificent palace of Richmond "nicely complemented that other symbolic gesture of his reign. By naming his son Arthur, Henry had promised England a new Arthurian reign. Now he would give it a Camelot too" (*Triumph of Honor*, 4-5). Kipling also notes the prevalence of Arthurian pageantry in the tournaments given during the early Tudor period, precursors of the lavish Elizabethan spectacles (*Triumph of Honor*, 127-31). Caxton's edition is a timely version of the Arthurian tradition to examine here. All references are to James Spisak's edition, *Caxton's Malory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U California Press, 1983).

<sup>cclii</sup> Douglas Kelly notes that the sixteenth-century saw the proliferation of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century prose versions of the stories of Lancelot, Tristan, and other heroes. Citing the desire of François I to “evoke a glorious, noble past,” he states that Renaissance humanists, “while scorning the popularity of medieval romances, looked to them for material with which an epic poet, imitating Ariosto in Italy, might amalgamate ‘French’ or Arthurian matter in a Homeric epic as the Renaissance understood it” [*Medieval French Romance* (New York: Twayne, 1993), 76-7]. John Guy notes the prevalence of prose romances in the libraries of Henry VII and Henry VIII (*Tudor England*, 77). *The Libraries of Henry VIII* lists sixteen romances in Henry’s collection, including several Arthurian texts, such as *Lancelot du Lac* and *Mort Artu*, and various romances, such as *Cleriadus and Meliadice*, *Guy of Warwick*, *Gesta Romanorum*, and *Apollonius of Tyre* (396). Barron surveys romances circulated in both print and manuscript in England from 1216 to 1534 (*English Medieval Romance*, 238-42).

<sup>ccliii</sup> Richardson provides the full text of one such ballad from *The Suffolk Garland*, which focuses solely on the gap in rank between Mary and Brandon and makes no mention of Louis. Mary’s determination to wed Brandon despite Henry’s opposition comes through clearly: “But let him [Henry] say what pleaseth him, / His liking I’ll forego, / And chuse a love to please myself, / Though all the world say no” (*The White Queen*, xiv-xvi).

<sup>ccliv</sup> For information on the frequency of citations in Palsgrave, see Gordon Kipling, “Henry VII and the Origins of Tudor Patronage,” 130. Ann Moss’s study, *Ovid in Renaissance France* (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1982), provides a thorough survey of Latin editions of Ovid’s *Heroides* printed in France before the seventeenth century. Saint-Gelais’s translation of the *Heroides* is printed in 1503 in Paris by Anthoine Vérard; Gallica, the online library of the Bibliothèque Nationale, has this edition in its archives, (*Epitres d’Ovide traduites en français par Octavien de Saint-Gelais*). All references to the *Heroides* are taken from this online edition.

<sup>cclv</sup> For Palsgrave’s references to Penelope’s letter to Ulysses, see fol. iv v (Image 77), fol. Cxxix r (Image 201); to Dido’s letter to Aeneas, fol. v r (Image 77), fol. vii r (Image 79), vii v (Image 80), fol. lxxx r (Image 152), fol. CCCCxiii r (Image 487), fol. CCCCxiii v (Image 488); to Oenone’s letter to Paris, fol. vi r (Image 78), fol. Cxxvi v (Image 199); to Phyllis’s letter to Demophoon, fol. xiii v (Image 86), fol. Cxxiii v (Image 196)\*; to Medea’s letter to Jason, fol. lxxxix v (Image 152), fol. lxxxix r (Image 153); to Hermione’s letter to Orestes, fol. lxxx r (Image 152); to Hypermnestra’s letter to Linus, fol. lxxx v (Image 153). \*In this instance, Palsgrave errs; the quotation is actually found in Phaedra’s letter to Hippolytus.

<sup>ccclvi</sup> Palsgrave, *Lesclaircissement*, Fol. Cxxix r (Image 201);

- <sup>cclvii</sup> Saint-Gelais, *Heroides*, Image 1. (The 1503 edition is not paginated).
- <sup>cclviii</sup> Palsgrave, *Lesclaircissement*, fol. lxxx r (Image 152); fol. CCCCxiii r to fol. CCCCxiii v (Images 487-88). In Saint Gelais, *Heroides*, v. 194.
- <sup>cclix</sup> Green, *Lives of the Princesses of England*, 74-5.
- <sup>cclx</sup> Green, *Lives of the Princesses of England*, 75. Green notes that the work, which was commissioned by the Prince of Talmond, son of the Comte de la Tremouille, is mainly a vehicle for praising the dead king. Of interest is that “She is made to declare that for three months she has been unable to write to her brother, as her tears spoiled the paper whenever she began.” Thus, this fictive version of Mary’s voice acknowledges the power of a letter, especially when the sender is somehow linked physically to the paper itself.
- <sup>cclxi</sup> R.K. Gordon, *The Story of Troilus* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 1978), 53.
- <sup>cclxii</sup> For de Longueville, September 2, 1514, see BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 142. For Bohier’s letter, see *L&P* I.ii, 3202, 1357.
- <sup>cclxiii</sup> Original, undated, probably September 1514, BL Additional MS 34208, fol. 27r. Trans. by Mary Ann Green, in *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies*, I, 172-3. The manuscript in the British Library is a modern copy of the French holograph original, held in the Bibliothèque du Roi in Paris. Whoever transcribed it left a gap between the words “jay” and “vous;” working directly from the French original, Green supplies a translation of the missing phrase.
- <sup>cclxiv</sup> St. Gelais, *Heroides*, Image 61. Later editions, such as the 1546 printing, read “plaisant.”
- <sup>cclxv</sup> This letter is written a year after her marriage to Brandon, September 9, 1516. BL MS Cotton Caligula B.VI, fol. 106v/fol. 119v (new).
- <sup>cclxvi</sup> Dated, February 15, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 245r/fol. 249r (new).
- <sup>cclxvii</sup> Dated March 30, 1533. BL MS Cotton Vespasian F.III, fol. 17br/fol. 40r (new).

cclxviii Dated October 12, 1514. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 253r/fol. 257r (new).

cclxix Undated, January, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 251r/fol. 255r (new).

cclxx Undated, probably March, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 243<sup>r</sup>/fol. 247<sup>r</sup> (new).

cclxxi All references are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed., ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

cclxxii “The Man of Law’s Tale,” 745.

cclxxiii Two competing translations were published in England in 1509; one version, by Henry Watson, was published by Wynkyn de Worde, and supposedly commissioned by Margaret Beaufort. According to Jones and Underwood, Margaret’s involvement was fairly minimal####the work only published after her death####but they point out that de Worde’s citation of her patronage provides further example of the power of her name, even posthumously (*The King’s Mother*, 185-6). The work’s popularity would likely ensure Mary’s familiarity with the text; Wynkyn de Worde’s connection to Margaret Beaufort strengthens that likelihood. I have cited Watson’s edition (STC 3547, 1509 edition; EEBO, Early English Books 1475-1640, 517:04; Image 116; [Enprynted at London : In Flete strete by Wynky[n] de worde prynter vnto the excellent pryncesse Margarete, Countesse of Rychemonde and Derbye, and grandame vnto our moost naturall souereyne lorde kynge Henry ye. viii., 1509).

cclxxiv Dated October 12, 1514. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 143v/fol.146v (new).

cclxxv Dated October 12, 1514. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 253r/fol. 257r (new).

cclxxvi Kellner, *Blanchardyn and Englantine*, 158.

cclxxvii Dated October 12, 1514. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 253r/fol. 257r.

cclxxviii Richardson, *The White Queen*, 109.

cclxxix Dated October 12, 1514. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 143v/fol. 146v.

cclxxx Dated October 12, 1514. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 253r/fol. 257r.

<sup>cclxxx</sup> See Hindman's *Christine de Pizan's Epistre Othea: Painting and Politics at the Court of Charles VI*. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1986).

<sup>cclxxxii</sup> Hindman, *Christine de Pizan's Epistre Othea*, xx.

<sup>cclxxxiii</sup> Marilyn Desmond and Pamela Sheingorn's book *Myth, Montage, & Visuality in Late Medieval Manuscript Culture* argues that the images of Christine's *Othea* perform visual gestures that communicate meaning more effectively than would a verbal description (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 2003), 8.

<sup>cclxxxiv</sup> French quotations from *Othea* are taken from Gabriella Parussa's edition, *Epistre Othea* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1999), 198; the English is my translation.

<sup>cclxxxv</sup> Jennifer Summit discusses Christine's influence in England, while arguing that the obscuring of Christine's authorship in many transmissions of her text de-emphasizes her status as a female author. See *Lost Property: The Woman Writer and English Literary History, 1380-1589* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2000), 61-108. Although Summit's argument is compelling, it doesn't negate the likelihood of Mary's familiarity with Christine as an author of the work, since she would have known Christine through French editions belonging to her father, brother, and grandmother in addition to Scrope's English translation.

<sup>cclxxxvi</sup> Dated September 28, 1519. *L&P*, III.i, 455, 160.

<sup>cclxxxvii</sup> April 3, 1515, PRO SP 1/10/106r; November 13, 1514, PRO SP 1/9/158.

<sup>cclxxxviii</sup> Malory, *Morte d'Arthur*, 529-30.

<sup>cclxxxix</sup> The letter reads: "Moost noble knyghte Sir Lancelot, now hath dethe made us two at debate for your love; I was your lover that men called the Fayre Mayden of Astolat. Therfor unto alle ladyes I make my mone, yet praye for my soule and bery me atte leest, and offre ye my Masse-peny; this is my last request. And a clene mayden I dyed, I take God to wytnes. Pray for my soule, Sir Lancelot, as thou art pierles" (530).

<sup>ccxc</sup> Donavin, "Locating a Public Forum for the Personal Letter in Malory's *Morte Darthur*." *Disputatio* 1 (1996): 19-36.

<sup>ccxc</sup><sup>i</sup> This device follows the Ovidian tradition of the *Heroides*, and it is a device that Malory will also use with the letter Sir Perceval leaves on the body of his sister to explain her role in the quest of the Holy Grail. Lancelot finds it and spends a month in prayer, inspired by her example. (*Morte d'Arthur*, 493-4).

<sup>ccxc</sup><sup>ii</sup> H.S. Bennett, *English Books and Readers, 1475-1557*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1969), 161. *Valentine and Orson*, ed. Arthur Dickson, 204 (London: EETS, 1937), 302.

<sup>ccxc</sup><sup>iii</sup> Bennett, *English Books and Readers*, 162, 191.

<sup>ccxc</sup><sup>iv</sup> PRO SP 1/9/147.

<sup>ccxc</sup><sup>v</sup> Dated February 8, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 161r-v/fol. 165r-v (new).

<sup>ccxc</sup><sup>vi</sup> Brandon's spelling is almost incomprehensible; therefore I have modernized this quotation. The original follows, "yt sche was moche bovndon to god yt he had gyefwon her soo good and lofyng a brodar wyche sche has hall was fond bowth a fadar and a brodar and nhow spyssealle in her most nede wher fo sche prayd god yt sche myth lyef non lyngar dyn sche schold doo yt thyng yt schold by to yovr covnttent tassevn and plyssvr wyet as good and honnarabyll wardes as was possebbyll." Dated February 8, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 161r/fol. 165r (new).

<sup>ccxc</sup><sup>vii</sup> Dated February 15, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 244r/fol. 248r (new).

<sup>ccxc</sup><sup>viii</sup> Undated, February, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 159r/fol. 163r (new).

<sup>ccxc</sup><sup>ix</sup> Dated February 15, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 244v/fol. 248v to fol. 245r/fol. 249r (new).

<sup>ccc</sup> Undated, probably February, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 179r/fol. 183r (new).

<sup>ccci</sup> Undated, probably March, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 247r/fol. 251r (new).

<sup>ccci</sup><sup>ii</sup> This pattern continued when the coupled returned to England; on at least four

separate occasions, the two would send virtually the same letter, nearly word for word, when asking for favors. A scribe would pen the missive, then each would then sign his/her respective letter. For example, when Mary was having difficulty collecting her dower payments from France in 1525, she and Brandon both write to Wolsey to ask him and Henry to write to François. Dated August 3, 1525. *L&P*, IV.i, 1542 and 1543, 693. For details on their letters to Wolsey about sending an agent to France re the dowry, see *L&P*, IV.i, 1641 and 1642, 736. For their letters to the Grand Master of France on behalf of Anthoine du Val, Mary's clerk in France, see *L&P* IV.ii, 4392, 1925, and 4615 and 4616, 2007.

ccciii Undated, probably February, 1515. BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 182<sup>r</sup>/fol. 186<sup>r</sup> (new).

ccciv "The Nun's Priest's Tale," 3211-13.

cccv See Carol Meale, "alle the bokes that I haue of latyn, englisch, and frensch': laywomen and their books in late medieval England," *Women and Literature in Britain, 1150-1500*, ed. Carol Meale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 139-141. She notes that men shared this interest in romance; many men mention romances in their wills. Also women left such books to husbands and sons as well as daughters.

cccvi Meale, "'Gode men, Wiues maydnes and alle men': Romance and Its Audiences," *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. Carol Meale (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994), 209.

cccvii Meale cites a paper Riddy delivered the conference on "Women and the Book in the Middle Ages" at St. Hilda's College, Oxford, "'Gode men, Wiues maydnes and alle men,'" 221, n. 43.

cccviii Froissart was famous at the English court; manuscripts of his chronicles of English history dominate the library of Henry VII, according to Omont's catalogue. Mary would have been familiar with Froissart because her French tutor John Palsgrave would use excerpts from his works to illustrate various grammatical constructions and vocabulary; see *Lesclaircissement* for examples. Gabriele Stein notes that after Jean Lemaire de Belges, Froissart is the author Palsgrave cites most frequently in his lists of vocabulary (*John Palsgrave as Renaissance Linguist*, 191). It is also interesting to note that Sir John Bouchier, Lord Berners, who would translate Froissart's *Chronicles* for Henry VIII, starting about 1520, was Mary's chamberlain in France (S.L. Lee, "Introduction." *Duke Huon of Bordeaux*. EETS, 40-41. pps. xli-xlvi). Berners also translated the romance *Huon of Bordeaux* and *The Castell of Love*; his translations weren't begun until five years after the scandal of Mary's marriage, but the link further underscores Mary's connection to a literary circle familiar with Froissart and romance. It is also possible that a

manuscript containing Froissart's complete works of poetry that Froissart had presented to Richard II in 1395 might have accompanied Mary to France. See Laurence de Looze, "Preface," *La Prison Amoureuse* (New York: Garland, 1994). Although it is uncertain whether the manuscript did return to France with Mary, it seems a reasonable supposition, given that the manuscript was discovered in the French Bibliothèque Royale in 1544, only thirty years later (xxiv).

<sup>cccx</sup> See Beate Schmolke-Hasselmann, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance: The Verse Tradition from Chretien to Froissart*, trans. Margaret and Roger Middleton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 276. Froissart served as Philippa of Hainault's personal secretary while Edward III was occupied with affairs in Scotland. Schmolke-Hasselmann argues that Froissart, like Chretien de Troyes, and other writers of Arthurian romance, was a master "of the technique of hidden allusions to contemporary political events disguised as pseudo-historical literary fiction" (275). She builds on Armel Diverres's work, "Froissart's *Meliador* and Edward III's policy towards Scotland," to track the English-Scottish metaphor that suggests that Meliador's eventual victory signals the righteousness of Edward's actions in Scotland (272-5). For Diverres's work, see *Melanges R. Lejeune*, vol 2, ed. F. Dethier (Gembloux, 1969), 1399-1409.

<sup>cccx</sup> Peter Dembowski notes that Froissart "wrote boastfully of [*Meliador*] in his poetry and in his chronicles. He incorporated in it the lyric poems of one of his patrons (who was one of the most powerful lords of the time) and was proud of having read the work aloud to another great *seigneur*, who was an influential French author in his own right," *Jean Froissart and his Meliador: Context, Craft, and Sense* (Lexington, KY: French Forum, Publishers, 1983), 17.

<sup>cccx</sup> All references are to Auguste Longnon's edition of *Meliador*, 3 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Firmin Didot, 1895; repr. New York: Société des Anciens Textes Français, Johnson Reprint Corp., 1965).

<sup>cccxii</sup> The connection between politics and marriage is made plain throughout the work, to the point that the knights who came in second, third, etc., each marry heiresses of corresponding rank. Dembowski notes that in this manner Froissart underlines the importance of hierarchy (*Jean Froissart and his Meliador*, 71-2).

<sup>cccxiii</sup> Dembowski, *Jean Froissart and his Meliador*, 113.

<sup>cccxiv</sup> As Dembowski points out that "This letter is only a 'white lie.' Any knight can hold Hermondine 'pour sa dame'" (*Jean Froissart and his Meliador*, 116, quoting v. 2181). When Hermondine suggests that Camel may fight for her, she is not promising to reciprocate with her love. According to the codes of courtly love, many lovers could



serve one lady.

<sup>cccxv</sup> For example, Florée offers to help Meliador and Hermondine exchange letters (17731-39).

<sup>cccxvi</sup> Kipling, *Triumph of Honor*, 127. See pages 127-131 for a full description of the tournament pageantry. Richardson argues for Mary's presence at the banquet and tournament, given that records indicate rich new dresses were ordered for the princess. *The White Queen*, 18.

<sup>cccxvii</sup> Kipling, *Triumph of Honor*, 132-34.

<sup>cccxviii</sup> *Hall's Chronicle Containing the History of England, during the reign of Henry the Fourth, and the Succeeding Monarch, to the end of the Reign of Henry the Eighth* (London: Printed for J. Johnson et al, 1809; repr. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1965), 514.

<sup>cccxix</sup> Richardson, *The White Queen*, 60.

<sup>cccxx</sup> Hall's *Chronicle*, 572.

<sup>cccxxi</sup> Dorset reported to Henry that "The Queen continues her goodness and wisdom and increases in the favour of her husband and the Privy Council. She has said to my Lord of Suffolk and me that the King her husband said to her that my Lord of Suffolk and I did shame all France and that we should carry the prize into England." Qtd. in Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 107.

<sup>cccxxii</sup> Henry's negotiations at the time were extensive, as he sought marriages not only for Mary and his son Henry, but also for himself. Candidates included Margaret of Austria and Marguerite d'Angoulême, and though neither marriage was to take place, Henry did win Margaret of Austria as an ally in supporting the match between Mary and Margaret's nephew Charles.

<sup>cccxxiii</sup> Richardson, *The White Queen*, 58.

<sup>cccxxiv</sup> Richardson, *The White Queen*, 63-4.

<sup>cccxxv</sup> Richardson, *The White Queen*, 63-4.

<sup>cccxxvi</sup> Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, p. 58.

<sup>cccxxvii</sup> For a more detailed account of these diplomatic maneuverings, see Richardson, *The White Queen*, 63-75. Ferdinand seems to have feared the Empire's alliance with England, and so sought private peace with France, while Maximilian was shopping for the best possible advantage for his lands, despite his daughter Margaret's insistence that England would prove a far better friend than France in the long term.

<sup>cccxxviii</sup> Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 80-7.

<sup>cccxxix</sup> Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 81.

<sup>cccxxx</sup> Richardson, *The White Queen*, 84.

<sup>cccxxxi</sup> Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 87.

<sup>cccxxxii</sup> Hall's *Chronicle*, 569.

<sup>cccxxxiii</sup> Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 90.

<sup>cccxxxiv</sup> Perry, *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, 89.

<sup>cccxxxv</sup> Hall's *Chronicle*, 569.

<sup>cccxxxvi</sup> Green, *Lives of the Princesses of England*, 40.

<sup>cccxxxvii</sup> Qtd. in Green, *Lives of the Princesses of England*, 58; I have amended her translation. The verses were written by the poet Pierre Gringoire, who presented Mary with a magnificently illuminated copy, now preserved in the British Library, MS Cotton Vespasian B.II.

<sup>cccxxxviii</sup> BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol.146, qtd. in Green, *Lives of the Princesses of England*, 71.

<sup>cccxxxix</sup> Dated October 20, 1514. PRO SP 1/9/148.

<sup>cccxl</sup> BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 253r/fol. 257r (new).

<sup>cccxli</sup> Brandon refuses to give such details in his letter, implying that he would rather not trust such things to writing.

<sup>cccxlii</sup> Brandon to Wolsey, BL MS Cotton Caligula D.VI, fol. 156r/fol.160r (new).

<sup>cccxlili</sup> Both Wolsey and Brandon would receive pensions from Louis for their help in facilitating his marriage to Mary (Richardson, *The White Queen*, 80). Brandon was even accused of being too pro-French, especially regarding negotiations about returning the city of Tournai to the French.

<sup>cccxliv</sup> As for choosing François himself, assuming such an offer was made, Mary may well have hesitated because not only did she prefer Brandon, but also she was friends with Claude, François's wife. Louis had deemed Claude an appropriate companion for Mary, the two were often together, and Claude would even write Henry on Mary and Brandon's behalf after their marriage, despite any embarrassment caused by François's behavior to Mary.

<sup>cccxlv</sup> Richardson, *The White Queen*, 199-200.

<sup>cccxlvi</sup> Richardson, *The White Queen*, 269. His decision ultimately made possible the events leading up to the execution of Mary's granddaughter Lady Jane Grey after the death of Edward VI.

<sup>cccxlvii</sup> Mary's biographers cite Henry's affection for Mary as evidence that Mary was in no great danger from her brother. Richardson argues that Henry was "not yet the vindictive person he was to become" (*The White Queen*, 180). Although Mary herself counted on Henry's love enough to try to bear the brunt of his anger, that doesn't negate the threat, especially to Brandon. Even if one were able to rule out execution, exile remained a viable alternative; Mary and Brandon were given no indication that they were allowed to return to England when they left Paris for Calais.

<sup>cccxlviii</sup> Elizabeth, as is well known, portrayed herself as both man and woman, father and mother, emphasizing whichever qualities might suit her best for the situation throughout the course of her reign. See Carole Levin, *Heart and Stomach of a King* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994) and A.N. McLaren, *Political Culture in the Reign of Elizabeth I* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999).

<sup>cccxlix</sup> *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, eds. Leah Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 53.

<sup>cccli</sup> Whetstone's play is a proto-*Measure for Measure*; Promos, an early version of Angelo, demands that Cassandra sleep with him to protect her brother; no Mariana-figure intervenes here, however. Cassandra petitions both Promos and the King: one abuses and one protects.

<sup>cccli</sup> *A New Enterlude of Godly Queene Hester, Edited from the Quarto 1561*, ed. W.W.Greg (London: David Nutt, 1904), Chadwyck-Healey Electronic Database, English Verse Drama Full-Text Database, lines 1065-1085.

<sup>cccliii</sup> Emphasis mine. The proclamation, dated August 20, 1594, is titled, "A Commandment that no suiters come to the Court for any private suite except their petitions be indorsed by the Master of Requests." *A Book Containing All Such Proclamations As Were Published During the Raigne of the late Queene Elizabeth, Collected Together by the industry of Humfrey Dyson* (London: Printed by Bonham, Norton, and John Bill, 1618), STC 7758.3, 327.

<sup>cccliii</sup> Petitions could have been delivered to the Queen separately or could have accompanied a suitor speaking in person.

<sup>cccliv</sup> I thank Jane Donawerth for pointing me to this reference. The speech was delivered in 1849 and first printed in 1850. See *Lucretia Mott: Her Complete Speeches and Sermons*, ed. Dana Greene (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1980), 154. For more on early modern women's legal rights, see Anne Laurence's *Women in England: 1500-1760, A Social History* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 227-49; and W.R. Prest's "Law and Women's Rights in Early Modern England." *The Seventeenth Century* 6 (Autumn 1991): 169-87.

<sup>ccclv</sup> This is not to suggest that appealing to Requests was unpopular. In fact, by 1562, Elizabeth had to increase the number of judges from two to four to keep up with the volume of petitions from her subjects. See G.R. Elton, *The Tudor Constitution. Documents and Commentary*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982), 187-88.

<sup>ccclvi</sup> PRO SP 12/163/40. All of the petitions cited in this chapter are located in the Public Records Office in London, hereafter PRO. In all quotations, I have regularized i/j and u/v, silently expanded abbreviations, and added punctuation. Garthine Walker's recent study of women and crime in early modern England notes that people who turned to petition often cited their inability to pursue cases in the courts because of financial

difficulty. See *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 222.

ccclvii See Stretton, “Women, Custom, and Equity in the Court of Requests” in *Women, crime and the courts in early modern England*, eds. Jennifer Kermode and Garthine Walker (Chapel Hill, NC and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 185.

ccclviii Elton, *The Tudor Constitution*, 103-4.

ccclix PRO SP 12/207/17. 6?/1587.

ccclx Many people in the early modern period employed scribes to write their letters. Keith Thomas argues that “a literate person in a country village could always supplement his income by writing accounts, letters, and bills for neighbors;” “The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England,” in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition*, ed. Gerd Baumann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 106.

ccclxi G.R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1953), 278.

ccclxii *Acts of the Privy Council*, PRO PC 2/16/357. October 8, 1589.

ccclxiii PRO PC 2/18/363-4. June 27, 1591.

ccclxiv PRO PC 2/16/266. September 5, 1589.

ccclxv This despite the New Testament parable of the old woman and the corrupt judge (Luke:18), who only grants the woman’s just petition because she badgers him.

ccclxvi *Proclamations published during the Raigne of Elizabeth*, 312. October 12, 1592.

ccclxvii See, for example, Dorothy Keill’s 1570 petition to Cecil, PRO SP 12/75/61; Anne Lanesdall’s May 27, 1576 petition to Elizabeth, PRO SP 15/24/80; or Katherine Poleson’s June 1589 petition to Walsingham, PRO SP 12/224/115.

ccclxviii PRO SP 12/260/116. November, 1596. The rest of the petition is in secretary hand.

<sup>ccclxix</sup> Qtd. in *Letterwriting in Renaissance England*, eds. Alan Stewart and Heather Wolfe (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004), 36. Published in conjunction with the exhibition “Letterwriting in Renaissance England” shown at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC, from November 18, 2004 through April 2, 2005.

<sup>ccclxx</sup> See, for example, Jane Bolding’s 1582 petition to Elizabeth, PRO SP 12/157/70.

<sup>ccclxxi</sup> *Titus Andronicus*, III.i.23-26. All quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, eds. Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

<sup>ccclxxii</sup> George Whetstone, *The first parte of the Historie of Promos and Cassandra*, (London: Richard Ihones, 1578), Chadwyck-Healey Electronic Database, English Verse Drama Full-Text Database, IV.iv.34-5.

<sup>ccclxxiii</sup> George Whetstone, *The seconde parte of the Historie of Promos and Cassandra*. (London: Richard Ihones, 1578), Chadwyck-Healey Electronic Database, English Verse Drama Full-Text Database, II.iii.55-80.

<sup>ccclxxiv</sup> PRO SP 12/151/31. The *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic* indicates the most likely date is 1581; *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, of the reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth, and James, 1547-1625*, Vol. 2, eds. Robert Lemon and Mary Anne Everett Green (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1856-72).

<sup>ccclxxv</sup> Jane Donawerth, “Women’s Poetry and the Tudor-Stuart System of Gift Exchange” in *Women, Writing, and the Reproduction of Culture in Tudor and Stuart Britain*, eds. Mary E. Burke, Jane Donawerth, Linda L. Dove, and Karen Nelson (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2000), 3. Such gifts, Donawerth argues, are a means of community-building in which women were full participants.

<sup>ccclxxvi</sup> PRO SP 15/24/80. May 27, 1576.

<sup>ccclxxvii</sup> PRO SP 12/273/65 1599?

<sup>ccclxxviii</sup> PRO SP 12/189/17II. April 6, 1586.

<sup>ccclxxix</sup> PRO SP 12/75/61. 1570. While Keill does not identify her husband as a

Catholic, he was suspected of conspiracy at the very least, making her prayer for the Queen significant. In 1562, the Privy Council ordered that John Keill be taken to the Tower to be examined by the Lieutenant and the Master of the Rolls. (*Acts of the Privy Council*, volume 7, p. 123); in 1570, Keill was ordered transferred to the Marshalsea prison, where he and his fellows Avery Philipps, John Poole, and William Hearle were to be kept in separate wards and forbidden to communicate with any other prisoners (*Acts of the Privy Council*, vol 7, p. 401). E. D. Pendry notes that many religious dissenters were incarcerated in the Marshalsea, which became notorious for its laxity in allowing them to celebrate mass; *Elizabethan Prisons and Prison Scenes*, vol. 2 (Salzburg, Austria: Institut fur Englische Sprache Und Literatur, Universitat Salzburg, 1974), 248.

ccclxxx PRO SP 12/269/72. 1598? Leonard's claim is eventually granted, and she and her husband Samson become the Lady and Lord Dacre.

ccclxxxi Such strategic deployment of prayer indicates that petitioners paid attention to the smallest level of detail. Moreover, such tailoring demonstrates that even though these petitionary letters are formal legal documents, they are nevertheless works by individual authors. And even if scribes ensured that the documents followed appropriate patterns, the women adapted form and structure to suit their rhetorical needs. Ultimately, no matter how much impact the scribe had, a woman still approved the final version in sending it. James Daybell notes that both men and women commonly employed secretaries and that professional scribes might freelance for people of the lower classes. He also argues that although letter-writing was often a collaborative endeavor, nevertheless women most likely were able "to exert a strong degree of control over the writing process;" "Women's Letters and Letter Writing in England, 1540-1603," *Shakespeare Studies* 27 (1999): 176. Although Daybell refers to the specific situation of upper-class women who employ scribes, his argument is still relevant to the petition. Not only do members of the nobility and gentry submit petitionary letters, but also the specificity of all these letters points to the influence of the individual petitioner in the composition of her letter.

ccclxxxii Reaching back to Ovid's *Heroides*, such traditions take several different dramatic incarnations. One of the most common involves the delivery of love letters, the very acceptance of which implies the sender's welcome. Nicholas Udall exploits the comedic potential of this idea as early as 1553, in his school comedy, *Ralph Roister Doister*; much of the play's action revolves around the much harassed Dame Custance's attempts to forbid her servants to accept any letters from Ralph or his parasite Matthew Merrygreek (1566; repr., Oxford: Oxford UP, for the Malone Society Reprints, 1934). Such dramatic representations of the close association of letter and sender explain the attempts by so many stage fathers to prevent their daughters from receiving mail. When a letter successfully slips through any parental guard, it has enormous power to bring comfort to separated lovers, as in *Tancred and Gismond*, a play staged before Elizabeth in either 1567 or 1568 by Robert Wilmot, Christopher Hatton, and other gentlemen of the Inner Temple. Here, to circumvent her father's unreasonable refusal to allow her to wed, Gismond presents her beloved Guisnard a cane with a letter hidden within telling of her

love and explaining how he might safely visit her in secret. Guisnard exults in the letter that came from his love's "sweet hand" and links the letter and the lady closely. Robert Wilmot, R. Stafford, Sir Christopher Hatton, Henry Noel, William Allen, *The Tragedy of Tancred and Gismund*. Compiled By The Gentlemen of the Inner Temple, and by them presented before her Maiestie. Newly revived and polished according to the decorum of these daies (London: Printed by Thomas Scarlet, and are to be solde by R. Robinson, 1591), Chadwyck-Healey Electronic Database, English Verse Drama Full-Text Database, lines 99-101.

ccclxxxiii Plural petitioners use the masculine form when there are both men and women involved in the petition. However, individual women occasionally use the masculine "orator" rather than oratrix." See for example, Mary Hart's July 3, 1578 petition to Lord Burghley. PRO SP 12/125/5. Also, Margaret Shaw switches from "oratrix" to "orator" over the course of her petition. PRO SP 12/126/38. October, 1578.

ccclxxxiv *OED Online*. s.v. "Orator," 2a; "Oratrix," 1a, <http://dictionary.oed.com/entrance.dtl> (accessed May 2, 2005).

ccclxxxv It is difficult to say if there is any significance to the choice of "oratrix" versus "suppliant." In one instance, however, Jane Shelley, who uses "suppliant" throughout her petition, refers to herself as "oratrix" but crosses it out immediately in favor of "suppliante." PRO SP 12/148/39. March, 1581. Shelley may simply have preferred to be consistent.

ccclxxxvi PRO SP 12/225/78. August, 1589.

ccclxxxvii PRO SP 15/24/31. 1575?

ccclxxxviii For Mary Harte, see PRO SP 12/125/5, on July 3, 1578 and PRO SP 12/125/9, on July 6, 1578. Mary Scott's letter to Anthony Radcliff was forwarded to Walsingham together with other recusants' responses, PRO SP 12/183/24, October 18, 1585. Mary also requested that Radcliff include a letter from herself to Walsingham on the same date, PRO SP 12/183/25. One week later, she wrote directly to Walsingham again, PRO SP 12/183/54. October 25, 1585.

ccclxxxix PRO SP 12/229/90. 1589?

cccxc One of the Queen's bargemen was wounded in the arm, and Appletree and Actton were taken into custody as possible assassins. When Appletree's lack of intent became apparent, he and Actton were both granted pardons.



<sup>cccxcxi</sup> PRO SP 12/131/50. July, 1579.

<sup>cccxcii</sup> PRO SP 12/131/51. 7/1579. Written in the same hand, both petitions echo certain other phrases, indicating that the same scribe recorded the individual pleas. Whether the scribe introduced the phrase to both petitioners or whether he incorporated good ideas from the first into the second is impossible to say. It is impossible to determine conclusively which petition came first, but I would argue for Actton's. She does not mention the Queen's pardon in her plea while Appletree does so. A royal pardon would be a powerful supplement to her petition, so it seems logical that it had not yet occurred when Actton's petition was written.

<sup>cccxciii</sup> Qtd. in Carole Levin's *The Heart and Stomach of a King*, 59.

<sup>cccxciv</sup> See John Skelton, *Magnificence*, ed. Paula Neuss (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1980); Robert Greene, *Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay* (London: Edward White, 1594); Francis Marbury, *The Marriage Between Wit and Wisdom* (University Press, 1971. Chadwyck-Healey Electronic Database, English Verse Drama Full-Text Database (LION Online) <http://lion.chadwyck.com/>).

<sup>cccxcv</sup> Jane, Baroness Lumley, trans., *The Tragedie of Euripides called Iphigeneia translated out of Greake into Englisshe* (Printed for the Malone Society by Charles Whittingham & Co, 1909. Chadwyck-Healey Electronic Database, English Verse Drama Full-Text Database (LION Online) <http://lion.chadwyck.com/>); Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. William Tydeman (London: Penguin, 1992).

<sup>cccxcvi</sup> *The Jew of Malta, Drama of the English Renaissance*, Vol. I, eds. Russell A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1976), lines 44-46.

<sup>cccxcvii</sup> Elizabeth Hanson, "Torture and Truth in Renaissance England," *Representations* 34 (Spring 1991), 63. Her essay is largely concerned with court cases involving Catholicism and treason but it still offers insight into the dilemma over the veracity of petitionary letters.

<sup>cccxcviii</sup> Hanson, "Torture and Truth," 66-7.

<sup>cccxcix</sup> PRO SP 12/171/76. June, 1584. Naylor petitions Walsingham for restitution on her lost investment.

<sup>cd</sup> PRO SP 12/184/46. The four documents are catalogued together; 46I is Blackwell's petition to the Council; 46II is the Parson's certificate sent to the Council; 46III is Blackwell's petition to Walsingham; and 46IV is the certificate for Walsingham.

<sup>cdi</sup> PRO SP 12/189/17I April 11, 1586. To Henry Skipwith, Brian Cave, Thomas Cave, and William Cave.

<sup>cdii</sup> PRO SP 12/189/17. May 13, 1586.

<sup>cdiii</sup> Radcliffe's letter is PRO SP/12/183 23. October 17, 1585; Scott's is PRO SP 12/183/24. October 18, 1585.

<sup>cdiv</sup> PRO SP 12/183/25. October 18, 1585.

<sup>cdv</sup> PRO SP 12/183/54. October 25, 1585.

<sup>cdvi</sup> PRO SP 12/254/75. November, 1595.

<sup>cdvii</sup> The Council register for the years 1595-6 is now missing, so this entry is taken from the *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, New Series Vol 25, ed. John Roche Dasent (London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, by Mackie & Co. 1901), 183-4.

<sup>cdviii</sup> Elton, *Tudor Constitution*, 153-4.

<sup>cdix</sup> *The boke, named The governour deuised by sir Thomas Elyot Knight*, STC (2nd ed.) 7642 (London: Thomas East, 1580), Page 1, folio Air.

<sup>cdx</sup> *III Henry VI*, III.i.34-42.

<sup>cdxi</sup> See Harris's chapter, "Wives: Partnership and Patriarchy," in *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550, Marriage and Family, Property and Careers* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002), especially pages 61-62. See also Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Deputy Husbands," in *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Oxford UP, 1980), 35-50.

<sup>cdxii</sup> PRO SP 12/187/3 March 27, 1586.

<sup>cdxiii</sup> According to Cheryl A. Fury, such a state of affairs would be typical, since barring a small advance, merchant seamen weren't paid until the successful conclusion of a voyage. Furthermore, in the event of shipwreck or other loss of goods, the mariners themselves were held responsible and could have their wages docked or withheld altogether; *Tides in the Affairs of Men: The Social History of Elizabethan Seamen, 1580-1603* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2002), 93-101.

<sup>cdxiv</sup> Dale and Julius Caesar had been granted jurisdiction over admiralty affairs during a vacancy in the Lord Admiral's office. See *Calendars of State Papers, Domestic*, vol 2, p. 224, between items 20 and 21. [The document is part of a folio of Admiralty documents (Elizabeth 237, fol. 66) extending over several years; individual items in the folio were calendared at their respective dates but not numbered.]

<sup>cdxv</sup> The mariners of the *Emmanuel* had been detained in 1584 because one of the crew neglected to remove his hat before a procession of the Blessed Sacrament and The *Julian*, or *Gillian*, had been detained in Spain during the 1585 embargo; (Fury, *Tides in the Affairs of Men*, 115). Unable to effect the mariners' release, the Council could attempt to alleviate their wives' suffering, and in doing so, at least try to provide the men's families with some measure of comfort. As a result, they called for Wolfstan Dixie, the Lord Mayor of London, to summon the ships' owners to ask them to assist with the situation. The owners, John Byrd and John Watts, protesting their losses and citing the lack of precedent for such intervention, declined to help, and Dixie forced them to write their own letters to the Council explaining why (PRO SP 12/187/57). The mariners received no help; the men of the *Emmanuel* were condemned to death. and five of the *Julian's* crew perished of starvation in prison (Fury, *Tides in the Affairs of Men*, 168). Byrd and Watts, who received letters of reprisal against Spanish ships, presumably were able to recoup their fortunes, since both backed ships again.

<sup>cdxvi</sup> PRO SP 12/125/31.

<sup>cdxvii</sup> Morton's plea was successful in at least gaining some action on the matter. On July 30, a mere twelve days later, the Council ordered that her husband be examined further to be certain that he had no ill intentions in trying to leave the country. PRO PC 2/12/234.

<sup>cdxviii</sup> PRO SP 12/146/122.

<sup>cdxix</sup> Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 25.

<sup>cdxx</sup> PRO SP 12/230/115. February, 1590.

cdxxi Garthine Walker also argues that because poor men and women were less likely to be able to support themselves, they had less value within the community, and thus were unable to draw on the authority such value might bring them. As a result, she notes that poorer men and women often “used the language of rights, entitlement and natural justice as a way of reinforcing their claims.” *Crime, Gender and Social Order*, 248.

cdxxii PRO SP 12/194/36. October 12, 1586.

cdxxiii Longstone’s letter is holograph, implying that she is educated, and she writes familiarly to Davison, suggesting that she is a member of the same class.

cdxxiv PRO SP 12/185/50. 1585.

cdxxv *Acts of the Privy Council*, vol. 14, microcard 1 of 6, p. 16-17.

cdxxvi *Acts of the Privy Council*, vol. 14, microcard 4 of 6. p. 292. Jan 25, 1586.

cdxxvii First written in 1531, the book was reprinted in 1580. Thomas Elyot, *The boke, named The governour*, fols. Aiiiijr and Aiiiijv.

cdxxviii PRO SP 12/151/31. 1581?

cdxxix PRO SP 12/163/40. October, 1583.

cdxxx PRO PC 2/16/357. October 8, 1589.

cdxxxi PRO SP 12/165/15. 1583?

cdxxxii “Seventy-seven percent (403) of 523 knights and noblemen with surviving wives selected them as executors or supervisors of their estates...An even larger percentage### 86 percent of 114 fathers###appointed their widows as guardians of their noninheriting minor children,” Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, 129.

cdxxxiii *Fury, Tides in the Affairs of Men*, 229. See especially “Widowhood,” (219-24); and “Seamen and their Children” (228-231).

cdxxxiv PRO PC 2/14/330. April 23, 1587.

<sup>cdxxxv</sup> PRO SP 12/260/85. October, 1596. The *DNB* indicates that Morgan was survived by one son, Maurice, and two daughters, Anne and Catherine. Possibly the third child Lady Morgan mentions was another female relative or ward (*DNB*, s.v. “Thomas Morgan”).

<sup>cdxxxvi</sup> PRO SP 12/269/72. 1598?

<sup>cdxxxvii</sup> PRO SP 15/24/80. May 27, 1576.

<sup>cdxxxviii</sup> PRO SP 12/245/135. October, 1593. All that survives of this petition is an abstract of its contents sent to Burghley, Russell’s kinsman.

<sup>cdxxxix</sup> PRO SP 12/207/17. June, 1587.

<sup>cdxli</sup> PRO SP 12/95/92. May, 1574. This petition is described in the *Calendar of State Papers* as that of a petition from “a poor woman to the Queen” (Vol. 1, p. 478, item 92). However, it is manifestly clear that Frobisher is the woman in question. In “The Ancestry of Sir Martin Frobisher,” W. Wheater writes that Martin Frobisher had joined Thomas Stukeley’s conspiracy with Philip II of Spain to invade England and that he was supposed to convey Sir Warrham St. Leger and Jerome Brett, Stukeley’s English cohorts, to Spain. See *Gentlemen’s Magazine* (November, 1868): 856-7. For a full account of Frobisher’s relations with St. Leger, who was betraying his co-conspirators and reporting to the Privy Council, see James McDermott, *Martin Frobisher: Elizabethan Privateer* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2001), 89-92. McDermott cites Wheater’s observation that Isabel tried to dissuade her husband, but concludes that she was ignored (90). Drawing on an unknown source, Wheater notes that Frobisher’s wife helped to reveal the plot: “Her hostility was brought about by her personal dislike for St. Leger; and ‘some jarre happened between Furbisher and her.’ What was the direct result of her interference we do not know” (857). To the best of my knowledge, no one has hitherto associated this petition with Isabel Frobisher, but the author’s references to Warrham St. Leger, Jerome Brett, and Thomas Stukeley as her husband’s confederates and her husband’s subsequent repudiation of her make it clear that this petition is by Isabel Frobisher.

<sup>cdxlii</sup> McDermott, *Martin Frobisher: Elizabethan Privateer*, 91. For a letter describing Burghley’s good opinion of Martin Frobisher, see page 75.

<sup>cdxliii</sup> *The Calendar of State Papers* dates this petition May, 1574, but it should be later in 1574. In the petition, Isabel explains that she is writing a little more than a year after the

events she described to Burghley; Martin Frobisher got involved with St. Leger and Brett in the last plot in late 1573 (McDermott, 89). On November 23, 1573, Frobisher was called before the Privy Council to answer questions (*Acts of the Privy Council*, viii). For more on English interest in the passage and Frobisher's proposal, see McDermott, *Martin Frobisher: Elizabethan Privateer*, 95-107.

cdxliii PRO SP 12/151/17. The *Calendar of State Papers* offers the date of 1581 (Vol. 2, p. 36, item 17). McDermott places the petition at the earlier date of 1578 while Martin Frobisher was off on an expedition (252). The contents of this petition indicate that Isabel is living in a poor room in Hampstead with the grandchildren. By the time she died in 1588, she had returned to the town of Snaith, her first husband's hometown. One hopes that she received better treatment there. *The Parish Registers of Snaith, Co. York Part II. Burials, 1537-1656*, ed. William Brigg. (Privately Printed for the Yorkshire Parish Register Society, 1919), 72.

cdxliv PRO SP 12/235/45.

cdxlv PRO SP 12/230/36.

cdxlvi PRO SP 12/75/75.

cdxlvii PRO SP 12/163/34. Dennys has no compunction in revealing a close connection to the Catholic Cuthbert Scott. Having been cheated, she petitions, regardless of her uncle's religion.

cdxlviii PRO SP 12/273/65.

cdxlix PRO SP 12/157/70.

cdl Fury, *Tides in the Affairs of Men*, 218.

cdli PRO SP 12/200/30. April 11, 1587. A month earlier, on March 2, 1587, the Privy Council registers show that Smallwood had petitioned the Queen, and that the Council had asked the Master of the Rolls to look into the matter further and report back to them what he thought best. PRO PC 2/14/312.

cdlii PRO SP 12/146/132.

<sup>cdliii</sup> Pendry, *Elizabethan Prisons and Prison Scenes*, 248-9.

<sup>cdliv</sup> Laurence, *Women in England*, qtd. on p. 227. A *feme covert*, Laurence notes, denotes a wife in common law terminology.

<sup>cdlv</sup> PRO SP 12/126/38. October, 1578. A different hand records that the previous May, Elizabeth wrote Philip; apparently that letter had little effect.

<sup>cdlvi</sup> PRO SP 12/224/115. June, 1589. Her husband John Poleson was a Danish citizen, who was owed a debt by Sir Walter Lewson. When Lewson refused to pay, Poleson was unable to pay his own debts. After lengthy intervention by the Privy Council, Poleson was released from the Counter in Wood Street. See *Acts of the Privy Council*, vol. 17, card 2 of 7, p. 46; vol 19, 3 of 7, p. 207, June 9, 1590; vol 19, 4 of 7, p. 130, June 16th, 1590; vol 19, 5 of 7, p. 369, August 9, 1590; vol 19, 6 of 7, p. 420, September 6, 1590; vol. 19, 6 of 7, p. 468-9, September 29, 1590.

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