

***The Lisle Letters:***  
**Lady Honor Lisle's epistolary influence**

by

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation offers an original contribution to Tudor studies by examining The Lisle Letters as an illuminating example of how aristocratic Tudor women used the epistle to manipulate networks of obligation and gain socio-political influence. Women, such as Lady Honor Lisle, the primary subject of this study, fashioned letters to create and maintain communities of influence in order to assist their families, advance their social position, and bring various other projects to fruition. By using the lens of practice theory to examine the Lisle Letters, I will demonstrate that the relational aspects governing an individual's agency, in the light of ever-changing variables – friends, kinship groups, societal knowledge, socio-economic status, and so on – are what allowed aristocratic women such as Lady Lisle to exercise influence, despite the fact they could not hold official positions of power, such as judge, magistrate, or Lord Privy Seal. I will argue that women's involvement in the socio-political world was a perpetual process of negotiation and adjustment within a web of imbricated relations, and that mastery of this diplomatic process could put considerable power in a woman's hands. The Lisle Letters highlight the importance of the epistle as a particularly important device of power accrual. The epistle, with its underpinning of obligation, its various styles, and its discursive conventions, allows us to consider how power was accessible outside of purely formal channels in a social (and political) context that attached great importance to written entreaties and the informal cultural rules surrounding them; it is because of such rules and conventions, that we discover, in the letter, a privileged tool for bridging the gap between formal and informal avenues of power. The Lisle Letters, for example, allow mistress and servant to traverse boundaries of gender and class by using the stylized rhetoric of patronage and the warm and more natural language of friendship. The various discursive styles allow for the boundaries between mistress and servant to be crossed by establishing intimate connections and trust – an area that has been little examined in epistolary scholarship. The letters further illustrate how the epistle could be used to create and maintain bonds across international borders – making connections and accruing influence to assist in a bid for upward mobility. The Lisle Letters also document Lady Lisle's negotiations with one of the key power figures of the Tudor era, Thomas Cromwell, in the male public arena of the court. The letters show us not simply

her personal strategies and tactics, but how she uses all of her resources, including the conventions of the epistle, to negotiate a better hand than the one she had been dealt. By examining the language of obligation and such rhetorical scripts as deference and assurance, we can see how women manipulated the epistle to create alliances and reinforce previous associations to bring their personal projects to fruition.

**Keywords:** Lisle Letters; Plantagenet; Renaissance women; power; women's agency; epistles

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my mother Gabrielle Figueiredo and to my husband Morgan Nicholsfigueiredo. If it were not for their encouragement, wisdom, patience, and unconditional love, I would not have completed this scholarship.

To my sister Nicole, my dear friend Dorritta Fong, and my mentor and friend, Sheila Roberts, for their countless hours of reading and advice, thank you. For my friends Elizabeth McCausland, Cindy Nichols, Robert McAdams, and Ryan Miller, I thank you for offering assistance and support throughout. Thank you to Paul Saunders, Jon-Paul Henry, Meg Stainsby, Jim McCarthy and Brian Swail for their editing expertise and guidance. To my Douglas College support network Christine Dewar, Susan Smythe, Calvin Wharton, Nancy Squair, Jaqueline Hoekstra, Kate Yoshitomi, and Barb Sekhon, thank you for always cheering me on. For the PhD student group, Jennifer Scott, Christine Lyons, Naava Smolash and Christina Alt (far, far away) it was wonderful to have your encouraging voices every step of the way.

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## Introduction

The Lisle Letters provide intimate details about Lady Honor Lisle, a powerful and dynamic upper-class Tudor woman. These letters, authored by or addressed to Lady Lisle or her husband Arthur, describe not only the political, social, and cultural events of her time, but also Lady Lisle's own attempts to advance her family's position within the aristocracy.<sup>1</sup> The six hundred letters, written over a seven year period (1533-1540) during the dangerous middle years of the reign of Henry VIII, catalogue the projects of a woman who insists on an active position in the political world.<sup>2</sup> Lady Lisle was Honor Grenville by birth, the daughter of a landed Devonshire family. She became Honor Basset by her first marriage and, upon the death of her husband 13 years later, married Arthur Plantagenet, Viscount Lisle, the bastard uncle of Henry VIII, elevating her social status from country gentry to aristocracy. This second union added to her cultural cachet by linking her Grenville/Basset kinship ties to the extremely prestigious royal Plantagenet network, and most importantly, it gave her access to court life and placed her in close contact with the main power brokers of her time: Henry VIII and Thomas Cromwell, the Lord Privy Seal.

Although only forty-one of Lady Lisle's over six hundred and fifty letters have survived, they demonstrate the surprising degree of influence that a well-positioned sixteenth-century English aristocratic woman could command.<sup>3</sup> Like other aristocratic

<sup>1</sup> The Lisle papers were seized in 1540 and are preserved in the British Public Record Office and published in the *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*. See Muriel St Clare Byrne, ed. hereafter cited as LL. St. Clare Byrne has done a brilliant job of organizing and contextualizing these letters and I am indebted to her work.

<sup>2</sup> See Harris "Women and Politics in Early Tudor England". Harris's seminal essay provides both a historical and conceptual view of women's political roles and broadens the definition of what constitutes power and influence.

<sup>3</sup> Although St Clare Byrne estimates Honor Lisle wrote over six hundred and fifty letters, only forty-one are preserved in the State Papers, and only one brief letter to her faithful servant John Husee remains.

Tudor wives, Honor Lisle was responsible for maintaining her household, which demanded she be a skilled and multi-talented manager. As the wife of the Deputy of Calais, she was expected to entertain the many important groups that passed through that outpost on their way to and from England. She also took care of her large extended family: she educated her daughters in France, placed two daughters at the English Court, and situated her sons in well-placed homes where they received fine educations. Lady Lisle arbitrated disputes, managed her own properties through various stewards and lawyers, and intervened on behalf of numerous friends and former servants.<sup>4</sup> In the words of Muriel St. Clare Byrne, the first modern compiler of the letters (1981), if “you needed something done [Lady Lisle] was the one to contact” (*Abridged* 16); she was the one who could adeptly safeguard her family’s legal and financial standing, engineer change when it suited her needs, or help an associate or friend when she saw fit.

For example, in June of 1536 William Popley, Cromwell’s confidential clerk, wrote to Lady Lisle to ask for her support in awarding a man a position at Calais.<sup>5</sup> Lady Lisle responded that, due to a recent Parliamentary Act, her husband now had less ability to make appointments, but that Popley should “send [his] friend as shortly as [he] may....and my lord will admit him” (Vol. 3 #721).<sup>6</sup> She also notes that if he had made his request before Michaelmas they could have easily helped him. Nevertheless, she says, “since the Commissioners were here, as it is comprised in the Acts he [her husband] cannot give no room,” yet she still maintains that if Popley sends his man she “will ensure they will find him a place” as she will “entreat my Lord Comptroller and the Vice-Treasure that they shall be content” (Vol.3 #721). Indeed, upon the gentleman’s arrival they did find him a suitable position. This exchange illustrates an intriguing economy of influence that will be examined in this dissertation. It shows not only Honor Lisle’s intelligence and influence, but also her utter confidence in her ability to manage men of

<sup>4</sup> Eileen Power asserts that it is difficult to describe the position of women in any age, for the “position of women is one thing in theory, another in legal position, yet another in everyday life” (9) and Honor Lisle is an excellent example of this complexity.

<sup>5</sup> William Popley was Cromwell’s agent who primarily did legal work for him; see *LL* Vol. 2 p 276-77.

<sup>6</sup> The Parliamentary Act was passed in order to stop the abuses that were standard procedure in the government of Calais. The new restrictions made it so the Deputy would have to get permission from the Vice Treasurer and the Lord Comptroller before awarding any official positions. (*LL* Vol. 3 #721).

standing, who “shall be content” with her decisions. Since the requested position was an official one within the outpost of Calais and not a household one, Popley should have written to her husband, the Lord Deputy of Calais, rather than to his wife.<sup>7</sup> Popley’s decision to address Lady Lisle suggests that men in Tudor society were aware that women often had the power to exercise influence in the granting of positions, and that men acted on this knowledge and attempted to exploit female connections. Honor’s response demonstrates her awareness of the politics of the time; although away from Court, she knows of the Parliamentary Act, and more importantly, understands how it can potentially affect her family’s power. In other words, she is aware of formal political rules and the extent of her own power to manipulate and circumvent them. Lady Lisle’s response also illustrates her pragmatic nature. She offers a practical plan of action, and it appears that she and Popley are quite willing to sidestep the new “formal” procedures and instead use their informal networks of influence to achieve their desired outcomes: he gets his friend placed and she will be recompensed later for her act of influence. Both benefit and expand their ties of mutual obligation.

In sharp contrast to the 1536 letter, in an earlier letter to Lady Lisle, dated October of 1534, Popley threatens to inform his master Cromwell that Lady Lisle interfered “much in my lord’s business concerning the King’s causes” suggesting that his concern was that Lady Lisle was a woman of influence who could effect change (Vol.2 #268). This letter suggests an inconsistency in Popley’s attitude toward Lady Lisle. In one instance, he sues for her assistance, and by doing so acknowledges that she has power and influence in the socio-political realm; yet in another instance, he protests her involvement in that same realm on the basis that a woman should not be involved in the political world of men and official power. Popley’s behaviour, however, is politically consistent; when Lady Lisle’s power works favourably for him he readily accepts her involvement but when her power works against him he strategically chastises her for “meddling” in the business of men. By doing so, he sets her up at a disadvantage so he can impose on her later. These exchanges between Lady Lisle and William Popley illustrate an emblematic but significant example of Tudor women’s complex, and

<sup>7</sup> In Popley’s previous letter to Lord Lisle in March of the same year he did not mention placement of his man – there is no record of him dealing with anyone but Lady Lisle on this matter (*LL* Vol. 3 #650).

seemingly even paradoxical, relationship to power: the evident significance of their socio-political influence is always being matched by claims by powerful men that it does not, or should not, exist by virtue of their gender.

## Gender and Power

Theory in church doctrine, law, philosophy, and science decreed that women's gender disqualified them from exerting influence within the public domain. In practice, however, women utilized their positions as prominent women to influence their world; denied formal authority, they found other ways to achieve agency. Popley asks Lady Lisle to use her informal influence to assist him, having earlier rebuked her for the very influence he would later seek to exploit. Notions of formal and informal power, and who could and could not access it, were not clearly delineated, and although patriarchal society attempted to maintain a division of the socio-political world and the domestic world, these examples suggest that the world of power was complex, intertwined and certainly not off limits to aristocratic women. It would be a mistake to accept as fact Tudor gender dynamics that in theory denied women power, because in practice powerful men sought out women's influence when it suited them and denied its existence when it was strategically necessary or useful to do so.<sup>8</sup>

According to the social and political rules of the time women should not be involved in politics or the public world. However, the correspondence to and from Lady Lisle, demonstrates that the manipulation of epistolary conventions was an important mechanism of persuasion (and thus agency) that allowed certain women to access the imbricated spheres of power and to bring about change in their world, an exertion of

<sup>8</sup> See Sylvia Walby's *Patriarchy at Work*; Marilyn Lake, "Women, Gender and History" (7-8); Joan Kelly, "The Doubled Vision of Feminist History" (181-210); Joan Bennett, (250-25); Julie Hardwick, *The Practice of Patriarch*.

female will otherwise considered unseemly or impossible.<sup>9</sup> Through an examination of how power works in the life of one aristocratic family, and for one particular matriarch, I will argue for a view of power that is neither monolithic nor dichotomized into strictly informal and formal spheres, but is instead accrued by diverse means, official and unofficial, and varies according to the projects undertaken and the individuals in play. Lady Lisle has some claim to power due to her status as an aristocratic woman, but it is also her ability to use the epistle as a tool to manipulate the socio-political world that allows her to play the game of upward mobility with such skill. The Lisle collection reveals how Lady Lisle's use of the epistolary genre to manoeuvre around gender restrictions and push her power to its limits, and, more broadly, exposes the interplay between female power and early modern gender roles at a micro-level. My analysis of the correspondence to and from Lady Lisle will allow me to establish that the epistolary genre's unique features – its obligatory nature, formal and informal style, and variety of discursive conventions – permitted Lady Lisle to accrue and wield greater influence in the socio-political world.

This analysis is important on three levels. First, it rectifies a lacuna in the critical record; the nature of Tudor women's socio-political power has not been adequately investigated, and little has been written on the Lisle letters, which offer unique insights into a woman whose manipulation of formal and informal power networks was fascinatingly complex, and at times highly effective. Second, it theorizes a way of viewing power and influence that allows for a productive reconsideration of the

<sup>9</sup> Peter Erickson and David Underdown argue that during the late Middle Ages and the early modern period the relative freedom of women began to change, and because of this a "gender crisis" occurred and officials – church, law, parliament – began to reinforce rules and regulations that impinged on women's already limited place. The authorities of England responded to the crisis with increased gender regulations and stratification – women were not to be involved in the public domain (church, philosophy, medicine, parliament, law, international affairs etc). These new measures attempted to reinforce not only the appropriate gender behaviours of each sex, but the subservience of women to men, lower class to upper class, and the relegation of women back to the domestic sphere. These measures included an abundance of advice literature to be written for women on how to properly behave. However, Steve Ozment and Joyce Irwin suggest that the increase in this type of literature was really an indication that sixteenth century women were defying traditional roles; they were pursuing educational and business opportunities, taking an active lead in religion, and showing an interest in politics. Men felt threatened and wrote corrective literature calling for obedience and humility because women were actually showing independence, thus what was being acted in the world was very different from what was being prescribed by patriarchal society.

complexities and variegated nuances in women's writing and women's lived experience in the Tudor period. Each chapter will provide a case study – with a focus on an individual project in which Lady Lisle must negotiate with individuals in various power positions and where she (and others) will use a variety of epistolary conventions in order to bring her projects to fruition. By analysing these letters we can revise our opinions of how aristocratic Tudor women accrued and wielded power, how through the fostering of affectionate epistolary ties, one such woman secured the assistance of servants, international allies, court friends and kin, and official power brokers to access both informal and formal avenues of power.<sup>10</sup> Although power during the reign of Henry VIII did emanate primarily from the monarch in a formally top-down way, I will argue that it was much more fluid than it appeared, since it was affected by gender, class, and one's ability to use informal networks to secure influence. Finally, I will show how Lady Lisle adapted conventions governing epistolary exchange in order to fashion herself as a strong ally with influence. Her letters helped her act on behalf of other women in need, to provide prestigious paid positions for her daughters at court, to secure her son's inheritance, to negotiate for her husband's annuity, and to attempt to save her own jointure.<sup>11</sup> Letters, in Lady Lisle's hands, were a privileged genre for manipulating complex social networks in order to exert influence on a broad spectrum of social, political, economic, and legal affairs. The epistle was, in this sense, a legitimate form of public intervention for Tudor aristocratic women that opened up avenues of influence for them that were not necessarily available in the face-to-face world. The epistle is a genre

<sup>10</sup> I am not arguing that Lady Lisle's power is "formal" but that her elite status, as an aristocratic matriarch, allows her access to formal power and the ability to negotiate with those who hold it. She may be marginalized due to gender but powerful due to her status – her class, marriage, kin, friends, regional affiliations, age etc.

<sup>11</sup> Achieving power during the reign of Henry VIII was a difficult thing for both women and men. Power emanated from God, then to the King, and from the King to all others, meaning that access to the monarch was at all times central for those seeking power (Loades 9). During the reign of Henry VIII, royal supremacy, the absolute rule of the King, was paramount, and as Falkus argues, "Henry came to identify his interests and will with those of the country and of God, an assumption of personal authority which took him to a position of power in Church and State unequalled by any of his predecessors or successors in English history" The King and the nobility who served him had a relationship of mutual advantage – a reciprocity of power – but one that was imbalanced in favour of the king (18). As well states Linda Levy Peck "Favourites, whose power was based on the personal affectation of the monarch, rather than on status or office, had existed in Europe and in England throughout the Middle Ages and sixteenth century". This was a significant way for power to be dispensed (117). See David Loades, *Power in Tudor England* and David Falkus.

that works in the intersections of formal and informal structures, the same liminal spaces of power within which aristocratic women like Honor Lisle had to operate.

## Women and Politics

I do not refer to the traditional definition of formal politics, which focuses on institutions such as the monarchy, courts, parliament, and other administrative bodies, when I speak of the political world.<sup>12</sup> Instead, I use Barbara Harris's wider definition of "politics," one that conceives of power in terms of influence and agency. She demonstrates that politics extends far beyond the restricting spheres of government and policy to include family issues, accumulation of assets, preservation of status and reputation, and the upward mobility of family members' interests through marriages and careers.<sup>13</sup> While Tudor women were formally subordinate to men, they were capable, circumstances permitting, of gaining access to indirect forms of formal socio-political power. Scholars such as Barbara Hanawalt and Karen Cherewatuk have posited that women only had "informal power" because they were unable to hold magisterial positions (where formal power was dispensed and held), but this dissertation builds on their work by showing that this informal power wielded by female aristocrats could penetrate more formal structures of power. Informal and formal power existed as aspects of an imbricated system of influence that could be commanded by both men and women. What I will refer to as "formal power" is what many political historians call 'authority,' "power that is formally recognized and legitimated," usually in the form of a

<sup>12</sup> James Daybell, in his book *Women and Politics in Early Modern England 1450-1700* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) argues that the scope of the term politics was originally very narrow as it was defined through male dominated state institutions such as law courts, parliament and the church. His book presents a number of essays that discuss politics in a much broader framework.

<sup>13</sup> See Barbara Harris, "Women and Politics". Also see Caroline Bland and Marie Cross, *Gender and Politics in the age of Letter-Writing, 1750-2000*, as they clearly show how politics have moved from a very narrow study of institutions and political principles to a "much broader study of power in all its forms and relations in all spheres of life" (8). As well, Phyllis Rackin in "Misogyny Everywhere" also argues to broaden the definition of political power she claims women exercised political authority and had considerable economic power" (51).



position such as judge, council member, King, Lord Privy Seal (277).<sup>14</sup> Women did not wield formal power – they did not take on the role of magistrate or judge or councillor – but they did wield informal power, that is “the ability to shape political events” (Wiesner-Hanks 277). They could use their vast array of informal avenues of power (friends, servants, kin, regional affiliations, status etc.) to access the benefits or rewards of formal power.<sup>15</sup>

Women did indeed shape political events without formal positions, argues Merry Wiesner-Hanks, who describes their primary means of exerting such influence:

Through the arrangement of marriages, they established ties between influential families; through letters or the spreading of rumours, they shaped networks of opinion; through patronage, they helped or hindered men’s political careers” and they achieved influence on their own behalf (289).

Thus, while Tudor society certainly subscribed to large, all-encompassing ideas about women, declaring that they were naturally weaker than men, lower in status, suitable only for the domestic realm, and unworthy of engaging in the public world of politics, theology, science, or law, these restrictions were not watertight. They were ideals prescribed by Tudor patriarchal society in order to maintain the status quo, but not reflective of the actual horizon of women’s influence. When I refer to the ideals of patriarchal society I am referring to “a system of interrelated social structures through which men exploited women” and attempted to deny them access to decision making processes (Walby 51). I am not using the term to suggest a simplistic view of male oppressors and female victims, but am instead taking into account Judith Bennett’s discussion of how women were also a part of the “historical operations of patriarchy”;

<sup>14</sup> See Barbara Hanwalt, “Lady Honor Lisle’s Networks of Influence” (193-94); Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus also examine women’s access to routes of power in their book *Dear Sister* (11-17). Both authors posit that women only had access to informal power, without clearly articulating that this was a very lucrative means of achieving influence or that power was not neatly divided into spheres of formal and informal. Also see Carole Elvin and Patricia Sullivan, *Political Rhetoric, Power and Renaissance Women* and R. W. Connell, *Gender and Power*.

<sup>15</sup> The ability to access power that was wielded by official holders of power positions is an important distinction. Women did not obtain official positions such as judge, lawyer, Member of Parliament, but they could use the official power bestowed on these individuals through the manipulation of their own informal networks and get them to lend, or bestow it temporarily on them in a form of patronage.

that women also “colluded in, undermined, and survived it”; that they opposed it; and even, at times, used patriarchal restrictions to their advantage (254).<sup>16</sup>

There has, in the past, been little research conducted on women’s political role in the histories of the early modern period (with the notable exception of Queens); however, this has begun to change, argues Weisner-Hanks, due to two historiographical trends. The first trend is the broadening of the definition of politics – from a narrow definition that includes only formal politics (institutions such as church council and court), to anything in society that has to do with power relations between individuals. These “informal” power relations are now deemed political. The idea is that it is not only clergy and laity, king and subject, or parliament and council, that is political, but the relationship between, master and servant, husband and wife, and so on—the scope is larger. This broadening of the scope of what is deemed political allows scholars to see how people could shape their world through informal power relations. The second trend that has helped to expand research on women’s political roles is the examination of the dichotomy of male/female, whereby male is public/official and female is private/domestic, and to broaden the “public” realm to include acts that were once deemed private. David Cressy takes issue with the separation of what is often termed the “private” domain and the “public” domain and argues that all life in early modern England was public, or at least had public, social, or communal dimensions. He suggests that these divisions were called upon as a way to keep women in their place, but he discredits the idea that these binary divisions defined social reality, arguing that transactions of everyday life were intertwined with the community. The so-called “private affairs” of a family constantly seeped into, and overlapped with, the wider public domain and thus were in effect a part of this domain.<sup>17</sup> The identification of formal power as solely exercised through assigned magisterial positions, or wholly in the hands of men, or outside women’s “private”

<sup>16</sup> The term patriarchy has caused problems within feminist studies as it suggests that it was the sole determining cause of female subordination and tended to suggest that there was a simple oppositional relation between the sexes. See Joan Bennett’s “Feminism and History” and Sylvia Walby’s *Patriarchy at Work*.

<sup>17</sup> The distinction made between private and public is inaccurate, he argues, for even “within the recesses of domestic routine, every action, every opinion, was susceptible to external interest, monitoring or control”, and women were active participants in the public/private domain even if theoretically they were not to be (Cressy, *Literacy* 187).

domain, fails to give us a complete picture of how political power, broadly defined, functioned at the time.

Certainly women's informal power was in many ways more tenuous and difficult to accrue than the formal power that could be commanded by men; yet, it was nonetheless effective and could readily be used to destroy or enable a powerful man's career, as Wiesner-Hanks aptly suggests (290). There was some separation between formal and informal power; women could not assume the legitimate positions through which formal power was dispensed, but they could access it through other channels. Consequently, the two forms of power intersected, allowing those who were more marginalized to use informal power to gain access to formal power. Power did not reside in a vacuum, emanating solely from on high; it existed in a web of relations, and women were part of that web so were able to use their status, acumen, and rhetorical ability to access it. Lady Lisle's use of the epistle not only illustrates how she accrued and wielded informal power networks, but how she used these informal networks to gain indirect access to more formal networks of power.

One of the main ways of exercising agency, argues Barbara Harris, is through both the institutions of marriage and the family, which are so often associated with women's disempowerment. Harris argues that aristocratic early modern women contributed to their families through these institutions, and thus wielded influence in the socio-political world.<sup>18</sup> In "Property, Power, and Personal Relations: Elite Mothers and Sons in Yorkist and Early Tudor England", Harris specifically provides a number of examples of women influencing projects on which they had "a somewhat different perspective from their fathers and husbands" (631). The assertion that upper-class early modern women actively worked on projects and agendas that were not necessarily ones that their husbands might have favoured is one that I will expand on when examining Honor Lisle's letters (609). The Lisle letters are a record of a woman who attempted to push her husband in the direction of her own projects of interest, occasionally assumed

<sup>18</sup> For more information on women and power see Barbara Harris in *English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550*. See also David Starkey, *The Reign of Henry VIII*. Patricia Crawford's examination of women and voting in Orgel, 1991, 6:74 and Amy Erickson (61-78) on women and employment.

his position at court and often acted as the primary determiner of the family's social and political agenda.<sup>19</sup> While Harris suggests that women were able to forge their own paths and influence their husbands, I argue that Lady Lisle acted for and in lieu of her husband, and at times even in opposition to him. She was not solely “the woman behind the man,” but a woman who acted on her own behalf (sometimes in conflict with her husband's plans) in order to help her husband, her family, and ultimately herself – a woman who was not afraid to oppose the males in her life or co-opt their influence to use as her own.

In order to work on their own agendas, which included ones their husbands might not have wanted, early modern women had to be able to side-step the gender strictures of society that limited their ability to negotiate for annuities, inheritances, or positions and use their networks of influence to bring their projects to fruition. Feminist scholars such as Joan Scott, Gisel Block, and Linda Kerber have suggested that informal access to power was more available to socially privileged women than modern observers have tended to suggest. These scholars have built on and challenged the separate spheres approach to understanding the operation of power, arguing that it is inadequate because it does not factor class, race, age, kin, friends, regional affiliation, and ideological commitments like religion into the equation.<sup>20</sup> Current scholars argue for a more

<sup>19</sup>Lord Lisle's ineptness, both as head of the household and Deputy of Calais, made it necessary for Honor to take on the role she was best suited for – director of all the Lisle enterprises – and some of the many letters addressed to her indicate this. People wrote to Honor because they recognized that she was best able to ‘move’ her husband to action. See Byrne Vol. 2 #259, 286, 278, 406, 499; Vol. 3 #597, 606; Vol. 4 #376. I am not claiming that she attained any formal position of power but that she could be the Lisle representative in their public formal issues (and not just their informal domestic issues).

<sup>20</sup> Initially, in the 1970's and 80's, in an attempt to see how and what women contributed to the development of society, scholars began to examine the idea of separate spheres – domestic and public. This organizational theory dominated much of feminist studies for over thirty years, and scholars such as Linda Kerber, Nancy Isenberg, Robert Shoemaker, and Jane Rendal examined the private domestic world of women as compared to the public political world of men. This shift in thinking led to a positive view of this female sphere and scholars such as Nancy Cott, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, and Estelle Freedman, examined how women bonded through kinship networks and a variety of shared experiences such as family, marriage, religion, and rituals such as birth preparations and lying in. See Robert Shoemaker, *Gender in English Society 1650-1850*; Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: Woman's Sphere in New England 1780-1835*; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth Century America” and Estelle Freeman, “Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism 1870-1930”.

relational approach when examining gender, which is why feminist scholars now look at the intersection of gender with cultural, social, and political relationships. As Natalie Zemon Davis has argued, in order to examine women's lives and contributions to the world, it is crucial to examine both women and men to find out "how they functioned to maintain the social order or to promote its change" (88).<sup>21</sup> Modern scholars now work to examine gender in a more complex way, illustrating how early modern women were not treated simply according to their gender identity; instead, a number of other physical, social, and economic factors intermingled to influence women's status and claim to social power.

With recent attention being drawn to these other life factors, Katherine Lewis, Noel Menuge, and Kim Phillips point out that "[o]ne of the major shifts in thinking has been towards emphasizing the particularity of certain groups of women, and recognition of the differences in identity between one group and the other" (xi).<sup>22</sup> They argue that a woman's life cycle identity (whether she is a maid, wife, or widow) is a far greater indicator of status than gender alone. As well, women's social circumstances, legal rights, regional identity, access to economic resources, representation in textual and visual form, and their social status all vary according to their life phase (xi-xii). Rebecca Krug has argued that women who participated in practices that were traditionally considered masculine could only do so if they "were not tightly defined by the rules of gender" (12).<sup>23</sup> She explains,

For many women and the dominant individuals around them –a group composed primarily of their husbands, sons and fathers – the advantages of such misrecognition clearly outweighed the disadvantages. Women of

<sup>21</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis argues that it makes little sense to examine only the 'subjected sex' and that it was crucial to examine the history of both in order to see how they affected the world both by maintaining it and by altering it. See her article "Women's History in Transition: the European Case"; Joan Kelly's "The Doubled Vision of Feminist History", as well as Joan Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis"; and Gisela Bock, "Women's History and Gender History: Aspects of an International Debate". For the significance of men in the domestic sphere see John Tosh, *A Man's Place*.

<sup>22</sup> See Lewis, Katherine J., Noel, James Menuge, and Kim M. Phillips. *Young Medieval Women*. For an interesting discussion of the varying importance of gender in relation to other social factors, see Toril Moi, "Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Culture".

<sup>23</sup> See Krug, Rebecca *Reading Families: Women's Literate Practice in Late Medieval England*.

privileged circumstances such as Margaret Beaufort, Margaret Paston, and Elizabeth Stoner were especially unlikely to recognize gender as a classification that superseded all other principles of social division (12).

Although women's gender was a limiting factor, it was not the only issue in play, and certainly not the pre-eminent determinant of a woman's influence. Different stages of life changed how a woman was viewed and treated by her family and society.<sup>24</sup> Honor Lisle, as a member of the Grenville family and the widow of John Basset, was a socially mature individual who had lived a responsible, independent existence. She commanded a great deal of authority and respect in her own right. Her second marriage to Arthur Plantagenet moved her into the realm of the upper aristocracy, and she had accumulated the experience and awareness to make good use of her informal influence. The status Lady Lisle earned prior to her second marriage was, as we shall see in

<sup>24</sup> Early modern women, especially widows, were more empowered before the Victorian regime, which dictated a separation of spheres (private and public) and much closer living accommodations; the Victorian husband tended to be in the home and in town and thus had a great deal more control over his wife and household. During the Tudor Period, there was a great deal of separation between husband and wife – husbands were often away performing diplomatic work for the King, managing other estates, etc. Communication between husband and wife was therefore often sporadic – exchanged through messenger or epistolary correspondence – and women had a great deal more freedom. Women of the Tudor period often had to run the household entirely on their own, were responsible for managing businesses, entire estates and all of the monetary, social, and political aspects of their family's lives. Thus Tudor women, more than their Victorian sisters, were allowed more room to manoeuvre, and could utilize status and personal worth as a means of influence that was not discounted solely because of gender.

greater detail, tied to her name and character as well as her husband's.<sup>25</sup> Yet, this status was very much hers to command as she saw fit.

## Lisle Scholarship and the Lives of Women

Although the publication of Muriel St Clare Byrne's six volume collection of *The Lisle Letters* initially led scholars such as David Mathew, A.L. Rowse, and Roger Merriman engaging with the collection, they tended to draw from it solely to highlight the lives of great men (Lord Cromwell, Edward Seymour, and courtiers of Henry VIII), paying Lady Honor Lisle herself little attention.<sup>26</sup> Other scholars have reviewed the letters, but mainly provide a summary of the collection and a critique of the research techniques of the editor rather than a comprehensive exploration of the collection itself, or its unique

<sup>25</sup> Many letters are addressed to my "Lady Deputy"; a title indicating that people knew her reputation and that she could command action. Her marriage to the Deputy of Calais may have given her the unofficial title of Lady Deputy, but it was not one that would normally be used in correspondence. Her involvement in the socio-political world, and her shrewd business sense, gave the title substance and convinced others to use it; in short, Lady Lisle's title is a manifestation of the respect and deference she was accorded by others in her society due to her influence. David Starkey notes, "All the players of the political game knew that noble titles, honorific offices, pedigrees and tables of precedence were the score-cards of the power game" (*Rivals* 8). In Lady Lisle's score card the Archbishop of Palermo wrote a letter – an official document – that addresses Honor as "Lady Deputy"; the Ambassador of the King of England, Monsieur John Hacket, bequeathed a gift to the Lady Deputy in his will along with the Duke of Norfolk, the Earl of Wiltshire, and Sir Brian Tuke: Lady Lisle was the sole female beneficiary. He states in his will that the gift is a "token of remembrance and gratitude" (Vol. 2, p 286). The Archbishop himself writes to Lord Lisle to tell him that Hacket "bequeathed unto my Lady Deputy of the said Calais a little cup of silver," but no gift was included for Lord Lisle (Vol. 2, p 286). Although her title was an honorific one, it was used by others to signal their deference and respect for her – otherwise, "my good and gracious Lady Lisle," would have been more than sufficient an address.

<sup>26</sup> See David Mathew, *The Courtiers of Henry VIII*; Roger Merriman, *Life and Letters of Thomas Cromwell*; A.L. Rowse, *Court and Country: Studies in Tudor Social History*.

status as a record of a woman's lived experience.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, scholars who specialize in epistolary prose, such as James Daybell, Karen Robertson, Jane Couchman and Anne Crabb, have gleaned evidence from the Lisle collection in order to make broad claims about women letter writers in general, in an attempt to uncover the corpus of early modern secular works written by women.<sup>28</sup> Their inquiries into early modern women's correspondence, which focus for example, on the use of scribes, the relation of private and public worlds, and epistolary conventions, have been enlightening for this dissertation, but the Lisle letters themselves have only been of tangential interest in their studies. The most recent scholarship that has more fully focused on *The Lisle Letters* has come from Janelle Day Jenstad, Catherine Mann, and Susan Broomhall, who have studied them to decipher women's birth practices, clothing, gifting, and

<sup>27</sup> Historian M.L Bush gives a fine account of the complex Lisle-Seymour disputes over lands formerly belonging to Lord Lisle's first wife, and A. J. Slavin surveys the reform policies of the time, examining Cromwell, Cranmer and Lord Lisle's involvement in these; but once again, each is used for the examination of historically great men and their dealings. V.H.H. Green, Mortimer Levine, Hugh Trevor-Roper, and A. R. Bridbury have reviewed the letters, but provide mainly a summary of the collection. Few early scholars have examined the Lisle letters with an interest in examining the literary work of Lady Lisle herself. See M.L Bush "The Lisle-Seymour Land Disputes: A Study of Power and Influence in the 1530's,"; A.J. Slavin "Cromwell, Cranmer and Lord Lisle: A Study in the Politics of Reform." V.H.H. Green, "The Lisles in their Letters,"; Mortimer Levine, "The Lisle Letters"; Hugh Trevor-Roper, "Upstairs Downstairs in the Sixteenth Century," and A. R. Bridbury, "The Lisle Letters".

<sup>28</sup> James Daybell, *Women Letter Writers in Tudor England* (3, 65-9, 93, 81-3, 153, 163, 189, 205, 236), where he uses concrete examples from the Lisle letters themselves. Also see Daybell, *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing*. Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb, who have examined the form of the letter and the strategies of persuasion women used to achieve their goals, especially within the realms of the familial, the religious and the socio-political. See *Women's Letters Across Europe, 1400-1700*. For recent scholarship of the fluidity of boundaries see Linda Pollock, "Living on the Stage of the World"; Retha Warnicke, "Private and Public: The Boundaries of Women's Lives in Early Stuart England", Patricia Crawford, "Public Duty, Conscience, and Women in Early Modern England".



affection in Renaissance Europe.<sup>29</sup> These scholars have used aspects of the Lisle letters to support arguments about women's place in society, but it is only Barbara Hanawalt who specifically engages with Lady Lisle's power.

Hanawalt, in her article "Lady Honor Lisle's Networks of Influence," suggests that in spite of patriarchal ideology "men as well as women built their careers and gained access to power on exactly the same basis: spouse, kin, and connections" (209). Toward the end of her article, however, she concludes that women were in a position of relative powerlessness because they had no claim to formal power (209). She argues that "the spheres in which men and women could exercise power were very different. Women's power was, for the most part, limited to the domestic realm" and since they only had "informal access to the broader political scene," they could "only attempt to manipulate their environment beyond the home" (209). She theorizes that because women were limited to the "domestic realm" and "denied magisterial roles" (official titles and positions that were granted only to males), they were thus almost powerless beyond the home (209). Hanawalt proposes that Lady Lisle's role was "a subordinate position in the male world of politics. . . . [I]t was her duty to be circumspect and to accept male dominance" (206). Although I agree with much of the substance of her work, I will challenge, in particular, her claim that Lady Lisle accepted male dominance and that she "knew the limit of her power" (206). What the letters illustrate is that aristocratic women did not necessarily accept male dominance, or any limitations imposed on them because of their gender, and instead brought about material change in the political world and at times could gain access to formal networks of power.

<sup>29</sup> Janelle Day Jenstad focuses on Honor's lying-in to argue that the accoutrements of this ritual are symbolic of women's rank and position, and that the items illustrate the Lisle participation in the economy of mutual obligation – one in which reciprocal exchange is an expectation of each interaction. Catherine Mann examines the role of clothing in female networks during pregnancy and the ways in which John Husee, Honor's servant, was able to participate as her representative in those networks when she could not be physically present herself. As well, in "Duty and Devotion in The Lisle Letters", she uses the letters to show how a household was made up of affective relationships even when members had left the physical household domain. See Janelle Day Jenstad "Lying-in like a Countess: *The Lisle Letters*, the Cecil Family, and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*"; Catherine Mann "Whether your ladyship will or ne": Displeasure, Duty and Devotion in The Lisle Letters; Catherine Mann "Clothing Bodies, Dressing Room: Fashioning Fecundity in *The Lisle Letters*"; Karen Newman, "Sundry Letters, Worldly Goods: The Lisle Letters and Renaissance Studies".

In my reading, the distinction between command and manipulation is not nearly as determinate as Hanawalt suggests. She argues that women were barred from magisterial roles and were relatively powerless because they could not command beyond the home, but I argue that gender limited the kinds of prizes to be won, not their value. An aristocratic woman, for example, would not expect to campaign to become a magistrate herself but she could use the same techniques a man might use to secure the position for someone else – for example, she could push for her son’s appointment in myriad ways and tap into official power to help gain this prize for him. Women did operate within certain limitations, but Hanawalt’s conclusion that women’s power was, for the most part, “limited to the domestic sphere” (209) (i.e. the role of wife, mother, household manager) needs to be reconsidered. I will argue that aristocratic women’s access to monarchical and governmental influence could parallel that of many men, even though they were barred from gaining direct access.

While Hanawalt states that men could exercise considerable direct and formal power because they had access to magisterial positions themselves by virtue of their gender, she does not acknowledge that only a very small percentage of men held these magisterial roles, and the roles themselves were often relatively inconsequential in terms of political clout (as we see with Lord Lisle, who, despite holding formal position, was in many respects less influential and esteemed than his wife). The limited number of magisterial positions meant that very few men actually attained them, and even when in office they often exercised very little real authority – they too had little access to formal power. This did not prevent gentlemen from jockeying for influence, but this would be achieved primarily by tapping into unofficial networks – household, international, court, kin – and persuading individuals in both formal and informal positions to assist them with whatever their current project might be. Thus, both the private and the public are intimately connected and utilized by both women and men.

Scholars of the Tudor period have also not made a parallel argument that aristocratic men – younger sons of aristocratic families, male cousins, male friends – were unable to access formal power because they did not hold magisterial positions. However, the system of primogeniture, not unlike the gender system in some respects, assigned aristocratic younger sons lower status and fewer rights than their first born

brothers.<sup>30</sup> These disenfranchised men needed to be fit into a system that had few places for them (for instance, as lower level clerks or clergy), and thus had to spend the bulk of their days negotiating in the realm of informal power. Sherry Ortner reminds us that, while women were indeed formally excluded from the socio-political realm, we sometimes forget that “most men [were] excluded from leadership and public initiatives as well” (136).<sup>31</sup> Institutionally and structurally men of the upper classes could attempt to gain formal power positions, but they required the exercise of informal power to secure them; that women could not secure the specific prize of an “official position” does not change the fact that they could draw from formal avenues in order to be successful in achieving their personal projects. Thus, informal avenues were not only the primary way aristocratic individuals accrued influence, but also the very mechanism that allowed women and men to negotiate with official power brokers and use their power to bring their projects to fruition.

Formal power was primarily available within patriarchal institutions such as the church, the court, and the monarchy, and meted out through magisterial positions; thus, it has led to two main ways of viewing individuals such as Tudor women – either as passive victims subordinated to patriarchal society or as anomalous radical resisters. Yet, these representations, claims Sherry Ortner, are constraint-based and are too

<sup>30</sup> Helen Payne looks at women of the Jacobean Court and argues that although the patriarchal norms of the court prevented women from holding high office, and therefore from obtaining direct and formal power, it prevented the majority of men from doing so as well, due to the scarcity of positions. See Payne “Aristocratic Women, Power, Patronage and Family Networks at the Jacobean Court 1603-1625” and Karen Cherewatuck and Ulrike Wiethaus in *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*. They argue that women writers of secular prose had access to informal avenues of power “even if the direct exercise of political power was barred, again placing a limit on women’s influence, many men had the same limit” (11).

<sup>31</sup> She suggests that we tend to succumb to what she calls the “big man bias” (not the male bias) where we presume that most men were important (or had important positions) and this prevents us from seeing the degree to which “many men are as disadvantaged as women when it comes with respect to property, marriage, and the like” (*Gender* 136).

simplistic and reductive.<sup>32</sup> She argues that scholars who have portrayed women either as individuals dominated by patriarchal society and its ideology (victims of patriarchy) or as transgressive dissenters who resist patriarchal forces (radical anomalies) reduce women's achievements to a reaction against the dominant patriarchal ideology. Instead scholars need to view women operating within this ideology as active agents working to achieve their own agendas (2). Ortner uses "practice theory" – which melds together constraint-based theories with attention to human agency – to argue that people are not only influenced by social structures, but that they influence their social structure in turn as well. She examines power relationships between women and the formal and informal institutions of power, and argues that this methodology helps to convey the complexity of the relationships between women and the social structures of their time.

Ortner bases her ideas on two key works that attempt to deal with human agency and the structures that constrained humans: Anthony Giddens' *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis*, and Pierre Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Each text, in its own way, sets out to "deal with the inter-play between every-day practices and social systems and present them as dialogic rather than as oppositional – exchanges between individuals or groups of different levels or society, with different levels of influence" (135). Ortner's concept of practice theory essentially "restores people to the social process, the individuals who are part of the doing/the action, without losing sight of the larger institutions that constrain but also enable social action ...while opening up the space for questions about power

<sup>32</sup> The main scholars who tended to reside in these "constraint" camps were Clifford Geertz, Eric Wolf and Claude Levi-Strauss. Each argued that to a certain extent human beings are organized (and shaped) by external structures. Their focus was a theory that did not give credit to human agency, or how humans could influence the very structures that constrained them. A reaction against this type of constraint based theory occurred, led by Erving Goffman, and a group of individuals who posited a theory of "interactionism" as an alternate. Their theoretical position focused almost entirely on the interpersonal reaction of human beings and tended to ignore the structural constraints that people had to deal with in their daily lives. Interactionism did not achieve the influence that the constraint based theory held but it helped to open up an area of opposition. For information on constraint-based theory, see Clifford Geertz, "The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of the Mind"; Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History*; Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*; Erving and Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays in Face-to-Face Behaviour*.

and equality”(135).<sup>33</sup> Practice theory emphasizes the relationship between the dominant ideologies of the time and individuals’ negotiation and reshaping of their world; it asks scholars to be attentive to how people actually lived as opposed to focussing solely on theoretical approaches that define how people “should” have lived if a dominant ideology or official discourse were truly all-encompassing.

In short, practice theory allows us to look at how everyday practices, such as the request by William Popley for assistance in placing a man, were at odds with the functioning of the formal social system—in this case, the Parliamentary Act that stated only official channels should be used for such placements. Everyday practices such as these informal petitions illustrate that individuals who might be perceived to have little political agency could actually make advances in, or even transform aspects of, their social structure. When I use the term “agency” here I draw from Ortner’s twofold definition of the concept. First, agency involves the idea that individuals have “intentionality” and the “pursuit of culturally defined projects,” but agency is also power – it is individuals “acting within relations of social inequality [whether] operating from above as domination [or] from below as resistance.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, although every project contemplated or pursued operates within a society rife with inequalities, the individual has the power/agency to work within the larger power structures of his or her world. Both of these components are continually present, argues Ortner, “as the pursuit of projects or as the exercise of or against power”; it is never one without the other (143-44). While those in positions of power have the greatest degree of agency, it is not all encompassing; the marginalized always have some capacity, and sometimes a surprisingly large capacity, to exercise influence over the ways in which events unfold. Thus, the dominant group – in the case of Tudor society, those men in power who make the laws, accumulate wealth, have official magisterial positions as judges, lawyers, and

<sup>33</sup> I rely heavily on Ortner’s book *Anthropology and Social Theory* as it explains practice theory and her idea of “serious games”.

<sup>34</sup> The idea of the serious game, as proposed by Ortner, captures simultaneously the following dimensions: “that social life is culturally organized and constructed, in terms of defining categories of actors, rules and goals of the games, and so forth, that social life is precisely social, consisting of webs of relationships and interaction between multiple, shiftingly interrelated subject positions, none of which can be extracted as autonomous agents; and yet at the same time there is agency, that is, actors play with skill, intention wit, knowledge, intelligence” (*Making* 12).

councillors – are those who control official political discourse. But they do not work in a vacuum or have unlimited power: they too are influenced and challenged by others and must, at times, modify their goals or pursuits, make strategic alliances, and return gestures of goodwill in kind.

Formal structures do not reveal who influences those who wield power or how their influence may alter societal structures and reshape ideology.<sup>35</sup> If, as Ortner claims, life is socially organized in terms of “culturally constituted projects that infuse life with meaning and purpose” then people will use every tool at their disposal to attempt to influence individuals in order to obtain their valued projects (145). The dominant group may have the most clout, and use it in an attempt to ensure the social reproduction of norms, but that domination is never absolute. Ortner uses the idea of “serious games” to explain that power is fluid, and expressed through relationships between individuals that are not static but ever changing.<sup>36</sup> She presents life as a strategic game whereby the rules of the game are set by society (the patriarchal structures like the church, the courts, the privy council etc.), but in which one is nonetheless a free agent who can negotiate one’s relationship to the rules. Likewise, there is never only one game being played and, therefore, not one monolithic set of rules – there are as many games as there are contexts within the broader social structure. Multiple games are always being played, with overlapping webs of individuals who may suddenly change sides, or even games, depending on the stakes and the shifts within each individual game. Players are

<sup>35</sup> Ortner argues that many theoretical models (primarily early structural-determinist models) insist “that human action is constrained by the given social and cultural order ...but there is also an insistence that human action *makes* ‘structure’ – reproduces or transforms it, or both” (*Making* 2). Practice theory provides a framework that is flexible enough to include the strictures against female involvement in the socio-political world alongside the actual practices of women who were involved in the socio-political world without insisting that their involvement was a subversive attempt to upend the hierarchical patriarchal system of the time. Yes, women could strategize against the social structures but this “strategizing is part of a socially complex system, not a simple case of conscious intention”, as the relationship between the individual and social structures is extremely complex and far beyond the limiting view of binary theories (133).

<sup>36</sup> Foucault, like Ortner, views power as always changing never static, always shifting and changing. More importantly “power originates in competing sections of the hierarchical structure and servants as well as masters are an integral part of the perpetuation of forms of social control” (95) see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, An Introduction*, tr. Robert Hurley, Harmondsworth, 1990.

never wholly autonomous agents; even if they have official positions of power, they still must engage with others to achieve their ends and this, in turn, opens up opportunities for others. Individuals must play with “skill, intention wit, knowledge, [and] intelligence” if they hope to “win,” and the key is utilizing all the tools at their disposal. Thus, the letter can be understood as a crucial tool in the bid for influence in the Tudor world (*Making* 12).

What is important about practice theory for my project is that it suggests that agency is not stagnant – it is fluid and constantly changing depending on the factors at play. By using the lens of practice theory to examine the Lisle Letters, I will demonstrate that the relational aspects governing individuals’ agency, characterized by ever-changing variables – friends, kinship groups, societal knowledge, status, and so on – are what allowed aristocratic women (and men) such as Lady Lisle to exercise influence. I will argue that women’s involvement in the socio-political world was a perpetual process of negotiation and adjustment within a web of imbricated relations, and that mastery of this diplomatic process could put considerable power in a woman’s hands. The complex form and techniques of the epistle are a recorded expression of Ortner’s theory of the fluidity of power. Power, as laid out by Ortner, is a system of individual actions occurring within complex overlapping systems with agents at the centre playing these games. The epistle, with its underpinning of obligation, its various styles, and its discursive conventions, allows us to study how power works along a spectrum and how aristocratic women were able to access it.

Through an examination of the epistle we will come to a more developed understanding of how women manipulated networks in order to accrue influence. We need to understand that aristocratic women were not limited to only informal networks of influence but how the privileged genre of the epistle allowed women to access formal power. I will not only demonstrate that the letter is a mechanism that opened up avenues of influence for women, but that it allows us to gain insight into the intersection of informal and formal power structures, and how intelligent, politically shrewd aristocratic women like Lady Lisle could use a variety of mechanisms in order to further their agendas.

## The Epistolary Tradition

The epistle is an important genre for examining the lives of women and their strategies for negotiating influence. Since this dissertation places letters at the centre of analysis I will begin with a consideration of the nature and status of this genre in the era. Alan Stewart states that letters were “the single most important genre of the Renaissance...the very glue that held society together” and were historically the most widely written and read texts during the period (10).<sup>37</sup> Today, letters do not hold the exalted place they once did, but they are significant as they allow scholars to gain insight into the past and study a relatively under-examined genre that was utilized by even the most marginalized literate individuals or those with access to literate scribes. Letters may offer scholars a glimpse into history, but they also constitute a complex and rich narrative in their own right, embodying an understanding of rhetoric, persona, audience, and tone – in other words, the identical elements we consider in all other literature.<sup>38</sup> Literate early modern women, well versed in the epistolary form, could use letters to open up spaces for social, familial, and political mobility and use them as a means to

<sup>37</sup> Alan Stewart and Heather Wolfe posit that in early modern England, letter writing was the principal form of non-verbal communication; it was the means by which men and women received news, made requests, jostled for position, did business, pledged their love, pleaded for mercy, established contact, extolled their faith, arranged their marriages, and simply kept in touch (12).

<sup>38</sup> The art of letter writing gave rise to a vast body of theoretical works explaining what letters were and how they were to be written. Proof of how important a genre the epistle was in the Renaissance comes from the large number of letter anthologies and manuals in circulation. Many epistolary anthologies were available in England, mostly translations of Italian; Fulwood's, *The Enemie of Idlenesse*, (1568), went through 10 editions; Fenton's *Golden Epistles* (1576) and Angel Day's *The English Secretarie* (1586) were also incredibly popular – see Clements xiii.



obtain increased power and control through the command of rhetoric.<sup>39</sup> Letters were a mechanism that allowed women to express themselves and engage in literary practice and, in part due to the well-defined culture surrounding letters in the Tudor period, an opportunity to accrue and exercise influence through mastery of a distinct literary genre.

This dissertation will apply Ortner's idea of the fluidity of power, along with what Bakhtin calls the epistle's "internal politics of style" the rhetorically persuasive combination of – subject matter, tone, salutation, conclusion, and scripts – to the Lisle Letters, recognizing how the ever-changing external socio-political world, in turn, could affect the author's ability to garner influence.<sup>40</sup> In order to examine *The Lisle Letters* and how women negotiated influence across a spectrum of power, I must first discuss some of the practices of early modern letter writing that are central to my argument – in particular the epistle's obligatory nature, the blending of the more formal *ars dictaminis*

<sup>39</sup> Educational practices and traditions ensured that while some women were taught to read, most women were not taught to write, and this frequently raises the question of whether works written by others could accurately be said to convey their thoughts and voices. James Daybell, in a survey of letters written by women, found that a significant proportion of women's letters during the early modern period were in fact written by secretaries – or at least bear the signs of having been written by more than one person – put together with assistance from family members, friends, or a secretary (See "Ples Acsep" 208-9). Does this somehow mean these letters were not authentic, that they were not the work of the signatory, and that they did not record an individual voice? Malcolm Richardson, Deborah Stott, and Susan Broomhall all answer with a resounding "No" to the question. Each of these scholars has ascertained that the individual "voice" of their given subject emerges quite clearly through the secretarial product. In the cases of Elizabeth Stonor and Cornelia Collonello, Richardson and Stott find a "unity of voice in spite of using a variety of scribes" (CC 9), and in the case of the women of Tours, Broomhall finds there are "distinctive voices for different women in letters written by the same scribes within a formal legal context" (CC 9). Men, although often better educated, also tended to use scribes for both business and family communication – Lord Lisle, Thomas Cromwell, and Henry VIII are just a few examples of men who had scribes write most of their correspondence. Having scribes write on one's behalf did not imply that the words, meaning or intent were not that of the sender. In the early modern period, letters were often created, or "authored," in more collaborative ways than modern scholars generally recognize as "authorship", but the letters themselves were considered to be written, created, or voiced by the individual who verbally or mentally composed them, rather than the individual who put pen to paper.

<sup>40</sup> See Michael Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (284). The epistolary manual of Alberic of Monte Cassino included the five parts of the letter which would become standard in medieval Europe: the salutatio (epistolary greeting); the benevolentiae (proverb or quotation from scripture); the narratio (statement of particular purpose); the petitio (argument); and the conclusio (5). See Cherewatuk and Wiethaus who examine the *ars dictaminis* in their book *Dear Sister*.

with the more informal *familiar* style, as well as the means by which epistolary conventions helped women to garner influence.<sup>41</sup>

## Obligation and Reciprocity

Letters had a social obligation or reciprocity built into them (a letter sent meant that a reply was expected) and this feature aided women in their ability to have a political voice and accrue influence. We see this in Thomas Betson's letter to his future mother-in-law, Elizabeth Stonor, when he writes that he is annoyed with his betrothed: "I am wrothe with Katerynn by cause she sendith me no writtynge; I Haue to hir dyuerse tymes, and ffor lacke off answere I wax wery".<sup>42</sup> His irritation regarding her lack of correspondence suggests that there is an obligatory nature to this genre – if someone writes a letter, as Betson had to his betrothed, the recipient is obliged to respond (and speed is also crucial), and reciprocity is expected. Thus, for letter writers, the societal expectation of response insisted that they engage in this genre on a continuous basis – that they create narratives of daily life, impart news, air their concerns, and sometimes impose their voices in dialogues that may not have been wholly their domain.<sup>43</sup> The epistolary genre demands reciprocity, as part of the courtesy of the genre, which makes it an ideal tool for initiating dialogue about subjects the author is formally barred from engaging with. If a woman was to make an inquiry about a position for a favoured clergyman, as Honor did, even if Cromwell did not want her involvement, he had to

<sup>41</sup> Women were to be chaste, silent, humble, and obedient according at least to certain traditions/publications; since writing was considered a noisy and lewd activity, women were not encouraged to write or express their opinion (Krontiris 10). In *Women's Letters Across Europe, 1400-1700*, Jane Couchman and Ann Crabb argue that women letter writers used the art of persuasion to "bring about some action or reaction on the part of the person to whom" their letters were addressed (10). They examine a number of women's letters and argue that although women were theoretically supposed to be silent and accept the authority of the men in their lives, women instead "found ways to speak [their mind[s] and to argue for what was important to [them]" (CC12). See Tina Krontiris, *Oppositional Voices*; Mary Ellen Lamb, *Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle*; Margaret Hannay, ed. *Silent but for the Word*. Kent: Kent State U.P., 1985; and Pearl Hogrefe *Women of Action in Tudor England*.

<sup>42</sup> See *The Stoner Letters and Papers* 185.

<sup>43</sup> Women could use letters to "open up spaces for social, familial, and political mobility" in avenues that were not necessarily considered their sphere claim Jane Couchman and Ann Crabbe (12).

respond to her query if only to turn her down. Take for example John Husee, the Lisle family's most trusted agent, who wrote to Lord Lisle that he must hurry and respond to a number of influential courtiers who had assisted him with a project. Husee wrote "write immediately upon receipt of this my letter," adding that he "trusted [his] lordship will make haste, that they may say their gentleness is not forgotten" (Vol. 5 #1179). Husee suggests that not only is a reply obligatory but that a swift reply is essential if one hoped to maintain influential ties; response is a key component of the genre. Thus a woman could address a request to an important individual on a subject that may not necessarily be accessible to her in a face-to-face setting and still receive a response because there was an epistolary obligation to do so, and the receiver was duty-bound to respond. As we saw in William Popley's letter, Lady Lisle could be chastised for "intermeddl[ing] much in my lord's business," but at least she received a response to her letter, and knew that her concerns were being heard (Vol.2 #268). Reciprocity, or obligation, is one of the "rules of the game" or structures, which letter writers of this period were able to exploit.

The obligation of a response creates a complex interaction between two or more parties, with the addresser often having intimate knowledge not only of his or her own worth, but also of the expected or hoped-for response of the recipient. How well an author knows the recipient and how much confidence an author has in her/his own self-worth are crucial factors in the game of negotiation, because they may help determine the author's ability to persuade or manipulate the receiver.<sup>44</sup> Bakhtin suggests that letters are not monologic, a one-way communication "arriving at their destination as the 'direct words' of their authors" (*Dialogic* 45), but rather, "dialogized in the sense of being

<sup>44</sup> Craig Muldrew argues that the "ability to profit and to exert one's will or influence depended upon reputation, and such reputation was fundamentally based upon reliability because it was the foundation of trust" (149). If the purpose of the letter writing endeavour is, as Bourdieu suggests, "not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished" (648) then women letter writers used the epistle to construct themselves in such a manner that their construction commanded results – action taken which affected the familial, social, communal and political realms.

adapted to specific recipients” with an expectation of a response (Delany 177).<sup>45</sup> Each time an individual pens a letter, she or he participates in an exchange, addressing the self to a specific audience with a specific intent. The letter becomes a site for a dialogic exchange in that the author writes in anticipation of the reaction of the audience and writes her/himself into the dialogue to best meet that reaction. The letter writer does not randomly broadcast without any awareness of audience or understanding of the intent of her/his own discursive output. Rather, she or he crafts language to create and recreate her/himself for each individual recipient and situation with the intention of commanding action.<sup>46</sup> A woman who strives for power and influence must be aware of her worth, or symbolic cachet, capably using epistolary language to rhetorically enact power relations to elicit specific responses, to command action; she must craft her “self” to reinforce obligation and ensure further action occurs.<sup>47</sup> She must use rhetorical strategies to affect the reception of her letters by others – set the scene and characters, and utilize

<sup>45</sup> See Bourdieu’s model of linguistic exchange. He “regards linguistic skill as only one among other forms of symbolic capital affecting how an utterance is received in any field”. He argues that the amount of control or influence an individual will have is not dependent on the “objective” worth of the linguistic product that this individual produces, but rather on the “socially defined site from which it is uttered” (657). In his account, “language in practical contexts will be worth what those who speak it are deemed to be worth: its price will depend on the symbolic power relation between the speakers, on their respective levels of symbolic capital” (648-52).

<sup>46</sup> When I use the phrase “commanding action” the action can be something as simple as the recipient writing back, agreeing to a request, sending a gift, requesting an item, or disagreeing with the author. The idea of commanding action simply means the author has an expectation that her or his words on a page will make some kind of event happen.

<sup>47</sup> Lynne Magnusson states that the written expression was an exhibition of the power relations between writer and addressee. She draws from Angel Day’s *The English Secretarie, or Methods of Writing Epistles and Letters* (1599, as Day illustrates how scripts illustrate different power positions. Day argues that one should not simply use any script in a letter but understand the vast array of scripts and the power relations that they imply. For example, a script of humility and entreaty implies a power position of subordination to that of the superior while a script of supposal and assurance will imply one of superiority to that of the subordinate (19). See Magnusson “A Rhetoric of Requests: Genre and Linguistic Scripts in Elizabethan Women’s Suitors’ Letters”.

language to persuade the receiver to take action on her side.<sup>48</sup> Knowledge of one's own status and reputation helps the letter writer to control her/his discourse and ensure a favourable response.<sup>49</sup> As a result, women who strive for agency must be aware not only of the recipient's life factors but of their own symbolic cachet, a value based on many intangible factors including class, education, kinship, friendship ties, and force of character, and must be able to put forth a variety of personae to elicit specific responses in order to command action from different recipients.<sup>50</sup>

## ***Ars Dictaminis* and the Familiar Letter**

The style of one's letter, whether largely formal or more relaxed and familiar, also affects one's ability to accrue and wield influence. Initially, letters followed a very specialized hierarchical form of rhetoric known as the *ars dictaminis* that required a great deal of formal training, but by the early Renaissance, the conventions began to change, as Humanist scholars disseminated new ideas that would ultimately replace the formal, hierarchical mode with a style that was much easier to use, the more relaxed "familiar

<sup>48</sup> In other words, an utterance, whether verbal or inscribed in a letter, is worth what the speaker is worth, or what a speaker is perceived to be worth. For example, a British aristocratic male's utterance will have greater value and impact than that of a British male commoner's utterance or an aristocratic female's utterance, by the very fact that their "socially defined site" (an inferior class, or in the woman's case a supposed inferior gender) will work to dis-empower them (Bourdieu 43). Anyone can issue an order, make a request, or attempt to influence others, but she/he will only be listened to if the status of the individual matches the linguistic command: "an order can work only if it is backed up by the order of things" (Bourdieu 74-75). Therefore, if a woman is upper-class, educated, and suitably married, then her "worth" will be greater than a bourgeois male who is lower-class, uneducated, or badly married. Alternately, if a woman is able to so fashion herself in the dialogue to accord with what the recipient regards as worthy of attention (as Honor Lisle was skilled at doing), then she too may increase her worth.

<sup>49</sup> The language of a letter owes part of its properties to "practical anticipation of the reaction which it is likely to excite, a reaction which depends on the language itself and on the whole social person of its user" (Bourdieu 656). Anyone can issue an order, make a request, or attempt to influence others but they will only be listened to if the "order" or status of the individual fits the linguistic command; "an order can work only if it is backed up by the order of things" (Bourdieu 43, 74-75). In his account, "language in practical contexts will be worth what those who speak it are deemed to be worth: its price will depend on the symbolic power relation between the speakers, on their respective levels of symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 648-52). In other words an utterance is worth what the speaker is worth, or what a speaker is perceived to be worth.

<sup>50</sup> The idea of symbolic cachet is also discussed by Craig Muldrew in *The Economy of Obligation: The Culture of Credit and Social Relations in Early Modern England*.

letter” (Stewart 21).<sup>51</sup> With humanists such as Erasmus, Jan Luis Vives, and Angel Day studying and circulating examples of the familiar letter (with model scripts) among the elite, soon, the more accessible form – “a conversation between absent friends, relative equals who preferred to emphasize friendship rather than honor and rank” – became the dominant mode of epistolary discourse (Cross 8).<sup>52</sup> Erasmus says that in the familiar letter it is as if “you were whispering in a corner with a dear friend,” and that because of this (to some extent illusory) privacy, individuals “commit many things to letters, which would be shameful to express openly in public” (11).<sup>53</sup> The illusion of privacy in the familiar letter encourages a greater intimacy of tone, an openness of subject, even a more elaborate exhibition of personae.

The “illusion” of privacy is significant, as it allows individuals to believe that what one says in a letter will be read and retained only by the intended recipient. Thus it allows for more latitude of expression (no matter how false the illusion of privacy is). When the Goodman of Paris wrote a book of instructions for his young wife at the end of the fourteenth century, he included advice on letter writing with an emphasis on privacy and secrecy:

And I counsel you that you receive with great joy and reverence the loving and private letters of your husband, and secretly and all alone read them unto yourself, and all alone write again unto him with your own hand, if you know how, or by the hand of another very privy person.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> See Desiderius Erasmus, *De Conscribendis Epistolis* [1522]; also see *The Correspondence of Erasmus*. Many members of the humanist community wanted to abandon the formality of *ars dictaminis* permanently. Erasmus, however, opposed those who would “confine the genre within the limits of the familiar letter and purge humanist epistolography of all vestiges of the *ars dictaminis*” (Henderson 331), perhaps realizing that a combination of formal and informal would allow for more individualized expressions of creativity – the familiar letter and the dictaminal approach coexisted for many years. Angel Day’s *The English Secretarie* clearly followed Erasmus’ model of scripts and divisions of letters.

<sup>52</sup> Erasmus, Jan Luis Vives, and Angel Day circulated examples of the familiar letter, along with model scripts, for individuals to follow. See Desiderius Erasmus, *De Conscribendis Epistolis* quoted and translated in Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus* (151 and 267).

<sup>53</sup> See Desiderius Erasmus, *De Conscribendis Epistolis* [1522], in *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, Literary and Educational Writings 1 and 2, Vols. 23 & 24.

<sup>54</sup> Eileen Power (106).

The Goodman of Paris makes reference to issues of privacy 7 times in the span of one sentence – using the words “private,” “secretly,” “unto yourself,” “your own hand,” “all alone” (twice), and “very privy person” – suggesting that the letter he sends her and the one she writes back will be sheltered as a personal discourse. While the Goodman of Paris may have perceived his letters as private and asked his wife to read them secretly, there is very little evidence of privacy at all in the early modern period, let alone in the reading and writing of letters. His very request that his wife seek out the help of “another very privy person” (a scribe, a friend, a family member) to help in writing her reply demonstrates the reality of the situation and the broad notion of privacy at the time: someone else will read their personal and “private” correspondence.<sup>55</sup> Renaissance ideas of “privacy,” then, differ significantly from ours in the twenty-first century where “private” entails confidentiality or seclusion from others; even if letters were considered private then, they were not, but the “illusion” was important in order to allow latitude in epistolary address.<sup>56</sup>

Allowing individuals to believe that what one says in a letter will be read and retained only by the intended recipient, argues Levant Clement, allows a much greater latitude of expression, one that permits individuals to convey things they would not

<sup>55</sup> Although letters were “public” there was still a desire for privacy, and people could do a variety of things to ensure some confidentiality. Individuals could fold and seal their letters to keep prying eyes from witnessing the contents, they could have the letter conveyed by a trustworthy messenger, they could include written or oral instructions as to who should read the letter or they could encrypt or code portions of a letter. Ultimately though, the chances were likely that a letter could, and would, be read by others than the intended recipient. Linda Pollock argues that part of the apparent need for privacy is a concern to keep matters relating to business, reputation and honour secret, as we see when Arthur writes to Honor about his negotiations with Cromwell: “I will not write, but refer the same till our meeting” (Vol. 5 # 1541). See Pollock, “Living On the Stage of the World.” Also, see Alan Stewart and his section on letters and privacy, and chapter five of James Daybell’s *Early Modern Women’s Letter Writing*.

<sup>56</sup> Even intimate love letters between a husband and wife, or two lovers, might suggest a moment of absolute privacy but the letter, or letters, would most likely be kept and stored away in a drawer to be read and reread later on and possibly stumbled upon by someone else, and read and perhaps even published posthumously. In the medieval letters of Heloise and Abelard, we have what is supposedly meant to be a series of private love letters between a scholar and his gifted young student, yet they were made public a hundred years after their deaths and published (Burge 299).

readily articulate in public.<sup>57</sup> When Husee writes to Lady Lisle that he was with her friend the Lady Sussex when she read Honor's letter, he says that Lady Sussex would not make "her husband privy to all the contents of your ladyship's letter, but she read the most part to him" (Vol. 4 #874). Lady Sussex, although quite willing to read most of her letter to her husband, was able to obtain some privacy through her request for privacy. However, even if one's family, or spouse, in this case, accepted a request for privacy, there was nothing to prevent others from reading it later on.<sup>58</sup> In a bid for secrecy, individuals could also make requests for letters to be burned. Honor Lisle writes to her husband beseeching him to "keep my letters close or burn them; for though I have sorrows, I would no creature should be partaker."<sup>59</sup> Obviously, the letters were not burned, nor kept "close", as we the readers can attest. Like Lady Lisle, individuals of the time understood the essentially public nature of the supposedly private letter, a fact that might bring ruin to an individual or a family but they also believed that their epistles had a "private" element.<sup>60</sup> The familiar letter's illusion of privacy, argues Lisa Jardine, is predicated on ideas of "intimacy, trust, and mutual service," and rife with expectations of warmth and affection (380) and thus can open a space for marginalized individuals, such

<sup>57</sup> See Levant Clements who argues that letters allowed for great latitude of expression. He states that the idea of a private letter was misleading because most letters were intended for a public audience. They might be read aloud to members of the immediate family or to a group of friends. Yet, even so, there was still a desire for privacy, and a belief that the letter was a private moment between individuals, thus loosening up hierarchical and subject matter restrictions. He also shows how individuals could ensure some confidentiality. They could fold and seal their letters to keep prying eyes from witnessing the contents; they could have the letter conveyed by a trustworthy messenger; they could include written or oral instructions as to who should read the letter; and they could even encrypt or code portions of a letter. The Lisles wrote letters about their reputation, and about sensitive business and family matters (Vol. 5 # 1541). See Pollock, "Living On the Stage of the World: the Concept of Privacy Among the Elite of Early Modern England", in *Rethinking Social History: English Society 1570-1920 and its Interpretation*, ed. Adrian Wilson (78-96). Also see Alan Stewart and his section on letters and privacy, and chapter five of James Daybell's *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing*.

<sup>58</sup> Letters were considered to be legal documents and thus it was standard practice for a secretary to fold the letter, inscribe the date, the name of the sender, and perhaps a brief summary of the contents on the top, then file it in a bundle for quick retrieval if need be (Stewart 181-85).

<sup>59</sup> See Alison D. Wall, letter 22, p. 11. Also, see *LL* Vol. 5, # 1298, p. 319.

<sup>60</sup> When John Donne wrote to Sir Henry Goodyer, he alluded to the idea of the afterlife of the letter. He wrote that his letters are permanent "for in them I may speak to you in your chamber a year hence before I know not whom, and not hear my selfe" (304).



as women, to step beyond the boundaries and strictures ordaining their normative place and to foster relationships that go well beyond conventional practises.

This dissertation will examine correspondences both to and from Lady Lisle in order to demonstrate how the epistolary genre, with its variety of discourses and discursive strategies, enabled her to achieve some measure of socio-political agency. It will further argue that the manipulation of epistolary conventions was an important mechanism of persuasion that allowed women to access the imbricated spheres of formal and informal power to bring about action in their world, an exertion of female will otherwise considered unfeasible or impossible according to the official social and political rules of the time. Through the letter she was able to access not only informal avenues of power but was able to tap into the formal power that was commanded by a small group of well-positioned men, and, in theory, inaccessible to women. Her epistolary dialogue is, therefore, a legitimate form of public intervention that illustrates how she accrued agency through the epistle in order to make changes in her world.

Chapter One of this dissertation, “Mistress and Servant: the Familiar Letter,” will examine the relationship between Lady Honor Lisle and her manservant John Husee. Although Husee was a worthy servant to Lord Lisle, I will argue that his correspondence to Lady Lisle illustrates that he was *her* utmost devoted servant and often worked in collusion with her against her husband to advance her projects – they were a unit that acted mutually to advance the family. There has been very little work on mistress and servant relationships in the Tudor period and I will add to it by showing not only how crucial servants/agents could be to their mistresses but how the epistolary tradition provides an opportunity to examine how power could work in a fluid way across both gender and class boundaries. I will examine Husee’s familiar letters to Lady Lisle, which exhibit two primary discourses: the rhetoric of patronage and the warm language of a friend. These letters illustrate a language of devotion and commitment, allowing Husee to act not simply as the bearer of news or handler of transactions for the family, but Honor’s confidant, working with her to augment the Lisle’s social position and his own as well. Husee’s familiar letters to Honor show a relationship crossing both class and gender boundaries to allow them to work together in a position of mutuality.

Chapter Two, “French Women and English Court Women: Creating and Maintaining Influence Via the Epistle,” examines Lady Lisle’s letters of petition to, and from, influential women of the French aristocracy and the English court, to show how she manipulates language to create and maintain influential ties with the goal of obtaining prominent positions as Maids-of-Honour for her daughters. Drawing on the work of both Pierre Bourdieu and Renaissance epistolary compiler Angel Day, I will analyze how Lady Lisle and the French Mesdames and English ladies use the language of obligation to create and maintain communities of influence. Honor begins the initial stage of her preferment project by preparing her daughters for court positions through the assistance of an influential community of aristocratic French ladies. By examining a variety of letters shared between these ladies and Lady Lisle—their style of address, their language, and their topics—I will illustrate how they created and maintained a literary community of support through a language of reciprocal obligation. Stage two of the preferment project is recorded in an epistolary campaign to gain favour and counsel from the women of the English court. Lady Lisle’s attempts to solicit support for her causes are at times marred by her lack of court experience, and perhaps even by her own aggressive style, as she sometimes misjudges protocol. Her letters employ several discursive scripts – deference, courtesy, and assurance – in an attempt to navigate the unwritten regulations of the court.<sup>61</sup> Lady Lisle’s adept use of rhetoric demonstrates not only her knowledge of the nature of the power relations between herself and others, but also her skill at fashioning herself in such a way as to have her request recognized and acted upon. These letters illustrate a clear link between the worth of a woman’s utterance and her own estimate of her own power. Lady Lisle shows that while a woman of this time has no official access to power, a highly capable and astute person—man or woman—can use available means and networks to attain desired ends.

In the final chapter, “Lady Lisle and Cromwell: Negotiations with an Official Power Broker,” I will examine how Lady Honor Lisle’s letters demonstrate her thorough understanding of how to negotiate for agency in and amongst the formal power networks of her time. Although her marriage to Lord Lisle gave her ties to the all-powerful Henry

<sup>61</sup> See Angel Day’s *The English Secretorie, or Methods of Writing Epistles and Letters* (1599) for examples of the model scripts for request making (101-102).

VIII and to Thomas Cromwell, it was her own reputation, and her abilities as a female negotiator, that allowed her to use official avenues of influence in an attempt to forestall the loss of her jointure, save her son's inheritance, and negotiate for her husband's annuity. Drawing on the scholarship of both Sherry Ortner and Rebecca Krug I will examine how an aristocratic woman negotiates the male power dynamic – one which presents the woman as a passive object – and demonstrate how Honor refuses this prescribed societal position, and instead fights to have her wishes and desires met. I will focus primarily on her negotiations with Cromwell, illustrating, through Honor's detailed epistolary account to her husband, how both these gentlemen expected her to submit to male authority and surrender her jointure without resistance but she refused to surrender quietly and did her utmost to negotiate a better deal for jointure, inheritance, and annuity than what her husband and Cromwell would have arranged. Through an examination of the discursive practices in correspondence, and her fashioning of herself as the active ambassador of her family's affairs, we will see how she uses the conventions of the letter to reinforce her influence in the eyes of her prestigious fellow negotiator and thus make a claim to just and noble treatment.

Finally, I will confirm that Tudor aristocratic women used the epistolary genre not simply as a way to gain a voice, but also as a way to use literary conventions to increase their own influence within society. The epistle was a powerfully subversive rhetorical device that allowed women a means of making a space for themselves that intersected and crossed societal boundaries. Letters allowed women to use informal avenues of influence to gain access to formal avenues of power and to make use of pre-established networks to increase their influence in society.

## Chapter 1.

### Mistress and Servant: The Familiar Letter

“him that always hath been and so will remain your ladyship’s during life, whether your Ladyship will or no” Husee, from Vol. 3 #815.

The Lisle correspondence, and in particular the letters of John Husee, afford us the opportunity to investigate a little studied area: the relationship between a Tudor mistress and her male servant, and the epistle’s facilitation of surprisingly intimate working relationships among individuals of different classes.<sup>62</sup> I will use Husee’s letters to examine how mistress and servant used the language of the familiar letter to generate ties of friendship, which in turn enabled them to sidestep social strictures based on class and gender in order to work together to advance Honor’s projects. I will add to the scholarly conversation on mistress and servant relationships in the Tudor period by showing not only how crucial servants/agents could be to their mistresses, but how the epistolary tradition exemplifies how power could work fluidly across both gender and class boundaries – to the extent that the line demarcating the respective interests of mistress and servant seems to fade away. I will examine Husee’s familiar letters to Lady Lisle and illustrate how his use of the discourses of patronage and the warm language of a friendship illustrate a language of devotion and commitment, allowing Husee to be not simply the bearer of news or handler of transactions for the family, but Honor’s confidante, working with her to augment the Lisle’s social position and his own as well.

Although Barbara Hanawalt states that Lady Lisle relied upon “various gentlemen servitors” (193) to assist her in her business, and she recognizes that Honor needed her servants to advance her projects, her discussion is tangential to the primary focus of her

<sup>62</sup> Though, only one of Lady Lisle’s letters to John Husee survives, St. Clare Byrne estimates that over 100 were actually written by Lady Lisle to Husee during their seven-year period together.

paper which is to explore her networks (193). Scholar Catherine Mann also touches on the importance of the Lisle's servants when she traces John Husee's involvement in Honor's lying-in, suggesting that his status as an elite servant allowed him to move in an intermediate space "between male and female worlds at court" (153). She argues that Husee "seems to have assumed a sexual invisibility that enabled him to penetrate the gendered aristocratic spaces of his mistress" and thus access avenues that would not necessarily be considered part of the male "domain" (153). I would broaden this argument and suggest that Husee was able to assume not simply a "sexual invisibility," but a near invisibility of all particulars (gender, class, and personhood), one that allowed him to assume the role of a proxy on behalf of Lady Lisle. Servants in positions of trust, especially high level agents such as John Husee, were allowed access to stratified arenas (political, social, familial, and gendered) within which they were privy to insider information that, trading on their low profile, they could garner for the benefit of their employers.

That Honor Lisle relied upon, and worked with Husee to obtain greater access to power (and *vice versa*), is very much in keeping with the ideology of service and obligation that was so central to early modern women and men. Sherry Ortner notes that whatever agency individuals have is, in reality, something that is always being actively negotiated in their web of relationships, overlapping communities of influence that are constantly realigning themselves. Individuals must work within a variety of networks, assume various subject positions, and share their own influence in order to make alliances with those who will assist them in their projects.<sup>63</sup> As a Grenville/ Basset, and as the wife of Viscount Deputy Lisle, Lady Lisle had great influence in her own right, but neither she nor John Husee had absolute freedom to formulate and attain their own goals; they were not operating in a social vacuum. The world of politics, religion, and family surrounds individuals and impinges on them, and makes their freedom always conditional. Thus, individuals worked together towards mutually agreed-upon projects, combining their individual spheres of influence to further their endeavours. Only the King could get what he wanted without collaborating with others, for he alone had near absolute power; all others had to play the game of accruing influence. Although Husee

<sup>63</sup> Sherry Ortner, *Anthropology* (12, 151-52).

was, as the Lord Privy Seal calls him, “Lord Lisle’s good man,” I posit that he was in actuality more Lady Lisle’s “good man” (Vol. 4 #1086). In particular, as I will argue, Husee was a critical ally for Lady Lisle because of his ability to walk, with his eyes and ear open, in male spaces from which she was barred. Through an examination of Husee’s correspondence with Lady Lisle I will illustrate that their relationship was not simply based on terms of employment, but on a relationship of solidarity and mutual interest. I am not suggesting that John Husee was disloyal to Lord Lisle, but I argue that Husee’s first allegiance was to the Lisle household; thus, since Lady Lisle was the shrewder of the two masters, Husee aligned himself more closely with his mistress.<sup>64</sup>

This chapter will begin by briefly laying out some details of John Husee’s life and by considering how the Tudor idea of service was fundamental to the workings of society, most especially in regard to mistress/master servant relationships. Husee’s letters, which often focus on personal subjects, are an avenue to build mutual trust, crossing the borders of gender and class to achieve their goals. Prior to delving into Husee’s correspondence to Lady Lisle, I will examine the ability of the epistle itself to blur boundaries between private and public spheres, detailing how this blurring allows boundaries between class and gender to be traversed. Then, I will discuss Husee’s correspondence with Lady Lisle, with the intimacy of the familiar letter, and his use of the discourse of friendship and patronage, in order to illustrate how the letter demonstrates his allegiance to her.

## **John Husee the Agent**

Although John Husee was known to the world as the servant of Arthur Plantagenet, governor of the English outpost at Calais, his foremost allegiance was to Lady Honor Lisle. He entered the service of the Lisles in August of 1533 and thanks to that employment, a large collection of over 500 letters drafted by Husee has survived

<sup>64</sup> Because Honor’s letters were sent out of Calais to the court or to Husee’s temporary residence at the Red Lion inn, Southwerk, they were not gathered or collected as part of the treason trial.

among the State Papers in the Public Record Office.<sup>65</sup> Very little is known of John Husee other than the fact that he was a soldier and agent, and was likely formally educated.<sup>66</sup> Husee's father was a merchant who traded in wine and a Chamberlain of London who eventually became master of the Vintner's company. It appears that Husee initially followed his father's example as a London merchant, but he soon became a member of the Calais retinue where he stayed until he was presented with the opportunity to become Lisle's indispensable man.<sup>67</sup> Although the Lisles had many servants there were three who acted as their London agents: Thomas Warley, their part-time agent; Leonard Smyth, their full-time agent who moved between Calais and London; and John Husee, their full-time principal agent responsible for every aspect of Lisle life. Husee's responsibilities included almost everything imaginable: shopping for household goods, hiring servants, reminding Lady Lisle and Lord Lisle to write letters and send gifts, advising the Lisles on their children's education, functioning as an advocate for the

<sup>65</sup> A. R. Bridbury states that there are three thousand items in the Lisle collection, which are scattered throughout the *Letters and Papers*. St Clare Byrne has published just fewer than two thousand of the letters. Unpublished are approximately five hundred from Lord Lisle's Flemish and French contacts and five hundred that focus on the administrative problems of governing Calais (574). For biographical information on Husee see David Grummitt's entry on Husee, John (d. 1548) the younger in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>66</sup> There is no record of Husee's formal education but it is likely that as the son of a merchant, he had some schooling, and his letters themselves show a high level of skill. St Clare Byrne indicates Husee did use Latin tags in some of his letters and that he was skilled in epistolary protocols, which suggests some form of education beyond simply reading letter manuals (see Vol.1 38-51 and 351-61).

<sup>67</sup> A retinue is a group of people in the service of, or accompanying a person, esp. a sovereign, noble, or person in authority (*OED*). Viscount Lisle, as Deputy of Calais, had a retinue of thirty-one men to help him with the running and protection of the town. In the *Dictionary of National Biography* entry on "Husee, John", we are told he had become his father's apprentice as a vintner in 1520 and duly entered the company as a freeman in June 1527. In February that year, described as 'merchant,' and 'citizen, and vintner of London', he had taken out royal letters of protection for one year, joining the retinue of Sir Robert Wingfield, governor of Calais. This letter of protection does not indicate that Husee had an early involvement in Calais affairs, as letters of protection gave the bearer indemnity from litigation at common law and were thus eagerly sought after by merchants.

children to their parents, and serving as their personal scribe whenever he was in Calais.<sup>68</sup>

John Husee's role of scribe was central to the Lisle's business transactions. The correspondence of large households, such as the Lisles, or the Pastons, or Stonors, was a huge undertaking, dealing with domestic, religious, political and familial business; thus, the woman and man of the house would have needed the assistance of a trusted secretary such as Husee to accomplish such a demanding task. As well, because many aristocratic men and women were only "partially literate" (they could read at a high level and sign their names, but could not write well enough to do business) a scribe was a crucial member of the household.<sup>69</sup> Lady Lisle was herself partially literate, as she could read and sign her own name, but "she always dictated her letters, even those to her husband" (Byrne 16), and Lord Lisle, although highly literate, primarily used secretaries in the composition of his letters (Byrne, Vol.1, # 25).<sup>70</sup>

Husee, was not only a household secretary but became the Lisle's London agent, a post from which he endeavoured to secure favours or justice for the family in

<sup>68</sup> The Lisle collection contains twelve letters from Thomas Warley (four letters addressed to Lord Lisle and eight to Honor Lisle), twenty-three from Leonard Smyth (nine addressed to Lord Lisle and fourteen to Lady Lisle) and over 500 from Husee (261 addressed to Lord Lisle and 91 to Lady Lisle). Husee wrote over ten times the letters than did the other two, which suggests that he was the primary purveyor of all Lisle business. For specific letters that include details of each of these tasks Husee was involved in see *Lisle Letters*—finding a lady for Honor (Vol. 4 #829), reminding them to write (Vol. 5 #1179), and helping with her pregnancy (Vol. 4 #893).

<sup>69</sup> Literacy, or lack thereof, encompasses total ignorance of the written word, partial illiteracy (the ability to read and sign but not to write), or full and fluent skill in reading and writing, a knowledge of Latin (Thomas 100-101). John Velz suggests that many of the statistical studies on literacy in early modern England are flawed because the research tests for "people's writing literacy, not at all for their reading literacy" (267); and since "the ability to read was much more widely diffused than the ability to write" (Thomas 102), this is what needs to be tested. Understanding the problem of such testing is crucial when looking at the literacy of women particularly because, as Louis B. Wright argues, there has been substantial evidence that women in the sixteenth century were a reading audience recognized by enterprising authors and publishers (43). Partially literate women (women who could read but not write, or write only a little) were often deemed illiterate and yet they were involved in the practice of the exchange of ideas and the discussion and analysis of texts (Wright 43). Couchman and Crabbe concur, asserting that although women had fewer opportunities for education than men did, "by the end of [the early modern period], reading in the vernacular became almost universal in the aristocratic and upper middle classes, as it had not been in the late Middle Ages" (10).

<sup>70</sup> See footnote #40 in the introduction for more information on women and scribes.



their countless lawsuits. As the Lisle's agent, Husee spent most of his time in London, lodging at the Red Lion inn at Southwerk, waiting on his Lady and Lord's suits. His position as "agent" had him negotiating at court on behalf of the family; as the physical representative of the Lisles he was endowed with the power of their name. Husee was an indispensable member of Honor's community of influence, particularly whilst she was resident in Calais. Husee was, in Hugh Trevor-Roper's words, the Lisle' "agent, secretary, universal factotum, and the man who watched [their] interests, [and] served at every turn" (*Abridged* 11). He was their indispensable secretary and court agent, or, to use historian David Grummitt's term for such men, an "extramural household member" (121) – a servant who spent most of his time away from the household but was also a key part of it doing all that he could in service to the family.<sup>71</sup>

## Tudor Service

Service was crucial in the early modern period, especially in regard to how influence was negotiated. K. B. McFarlane and Susan Doran argue that service and good lordship were two sides of the same relationship. Such a notion was essential not only among the nobility and its retainers, but for women and men of lower rank as well;

<sup>71</sup> Roger Chartier defines the term *secrétaire* as "he who is employed by some great lordship to write letters and other things" (61). He provides three classes of secretary that are differentiated by status, by the nature of the work entailed and by the social standing of those who required them to write on their behalf. At the top of the hierarchy was the secretary who worked for the king, next came clerks in the service of some mighty lord--these individuals wrote letters for their masters, attended to their affairs, provided information of meetings and warned them of crisis or change if they were able to do so. On the bottom rung were the poor scribes who wrote for the general populace (62). See David Grummitt, "Calais 1485-1547," who refers to such men as "'extraordinary' members of the household" (111); Kate Mertes, who refers to household members at home and abroad (176); and Alan Stewart & Heather Wolfe (55-78).

service, in fact, could be found at all levels of society (114).<sup>72</sup> P. J. P. Goldberg shows that service relationships imply mutual obligation: they are not one-sided even though the relationships themselves are often very unequal (one party is invariably more powerful than the other). Even so, both parties expressed a sense of loyalty and duty to the other.<sup>73</sup> Although the power division was unequal, the work performed by a servant for his or her Lord or Lady was seen by both as being “symbiotic,” an enabling relationship that worked not just in a top-down fashion but from the bottom up as well.

The service relationship was beneficial for the servant because it provided financial security but, as Susan Broomhall argues, beyond that it could create “social connections” and “forge emotional bonds to other household members (master, mistress, children, kin, other servants) which might pay dividends in the future” (3). These service bonds offered servants the potential for greater involvement in their master’s business, something that might lead to connections with other influential individuals, thus increasing the servant’s reputation or cultural cachet.<sup>74</sup> The master reaped the benefits of good work done by the servant for his family, such as administrative duties, parliamentary activities, and machinations at home and abroad, and the servant increased his/her own reputation by serving an upper-class individual.

<sup>72</sup> Scholars who focus on women and servants in general include: Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, who look at the sharing and exchanging of cloth and clothing and the interaction between servants and their employers to argue that there is both gender and class interaction but focus on the female domain and do not include the male (220-25); Susan Frye and Karen Robertson, who briefly touch on the importance of servants; and Paddy Payne and Caroline Barron, who examine links between Elizabeth Despenser and her servant John Bore and argue that there was no separation or hierarchy between Lady Despenser and him as their letters show an “easy and open style” (143). Scholars who have focused on the Lisle family and servants in any substantial way include: Janelle Day Jenstad, who argues that John Husee was crucial in taking action to acquire merchandise and engage with the ladies of the court to bring Honor news during her lying-in; Linda Pollock, who in “Childbearing and Female Bonding in Early Modern England” looks at the management of pregnancy for the upper classes but does not delve into the importance of servants in the activities that surround pregnancy; and Catherine Mann, who in “Clothing Bodies, Dressing Rooms,” shows how Husee obtained clothing and luxury goods for Honor which allowed him to demonstrate his part “in the reciprocity of the service.”

<sup>73</sup> K.B. McFarlane (124); Anne Curry and Elizabeth Matthew (1-19); David Evett (65-78); see also Linda Levy Peck’s introduction in *Economy of Obligation*, which gives a good overview of scholarship on service in the Tudor period.

<sup>74</sup> The term servant is a problematic one as it has a variety of meanings. See articles on servants and service by P.J.P. Goldberg; P.W. Fleming; A. Kussmaul; and C.M. Woolgar. For more information on servants and loyalty, see Peter Fleming (28-9) and McIntosh (19).

The personal prestige accrued by a servant allowed him to further the interests of his own family, and not just his master's, though typically these were one and the same, as the master-servant symbiosis ensured.

A good example of a trusted servant in the period is Robert Gilbert, secretary to the third Duke of Buckingham. In a series of letters written in November 1520, Gilbert was instructed by his master to deliver various letters, to speak with Wolsey, and all others to whom he took these epistles, and to “determine and affect the recipients’ attitudes to these document’s contents” (Mertes 182). The master’s request that Gilbert “determine and affect” (i.e. evaluate) the recipients’ mind-set suggests a large amount of confidence in this servant’s abilities. The Duke of Buckingham trusts Gilbert to have the necessary skills to determine how the letters affect the receivers – to examine and interpret the body language and facial expressions of the receiver, perhaps construe the tone of voice, and report to his master for further instruction.<sup>75</sup> As a miscalculation on the servant’s part would mean a miscalculation for the master, it seems the Duke has as much confidence in Gilbert’s judgment as his own, as if Gilbert were an extension of himself. A master clearly would have a number of servants working to assist him with his projects, but these might include a few who were perceptive and focused and who would truly benefit him and his family. Upper-level servants such as Gilbert, and, as we will see, John Husee, were generally called secretaries or agents, and were involved in all aspects of their master’s/mistress’s business. They were not simply servants, but envoys – or even stand-ins – for their masters, whose fidelity and competence were rewarded with a genuine stake in the projects they worked to advance.<sup>76</sup>

The John Husee we meet in the Lisle correspondence seems the epitome of the trusted servant/agent. “Lisle entrusted his most complicated legal, financial, and

<sup>75</sup> See Kate Mertes. For other studies of male servants see Richard C. Barnett; see also F.G. Emmison. For more general information about servants and their duties, see Mark Thornton Burnett.

<sup>76</sup> There are many words used to describe the position of a secretary—amanuensis, scribe, scrivener etc.; throughout this paper I will refer to the position primarily as that of secretary or scribe. Husee’s relationship with the Lisle family was not simply that of secretary—his relationship was much closer and intimate than this. The closeness with the family (as I will establish in this chapter) has him appear to be more like a family member, or friend, rather than simply an agent. Therefore I will generally refer to him as the family servant or upper-servant.

personal concerns to [Husee's] care," write Muriel St Clare Byrne, "with the result that Husee was always dealing with people of importance in his endeavour to secure justice or favours for the Lord Deputy and the Lady Deputy" (Vol.1 # 38). This tells us that the Lisles respected Husee's abilities and judgment, and greatly benefitted from his employ. As with most service relationships, this one was not one-sided, and Husee certainly reaped rewards for his devoted service to the Lisles. Initially, he was provided with a position in the Calais garrison as a Constablerie (a type of soldier), which gave him a daily wage of 8d, and a year later "he received a royal grant for life, clearly at Lisle's behest" which entitled him to another 8d a day (Grummitt), a considerable wage for a person of his class. Since many of Husee's duties had him interacting with powerful individuals – the King's ministers Sir Francis Bryan and Henry Norris; the Lord Privy Seal, Thomas Cromwell; and the King himself – his reputation and name as an accomplished and dedicated servant increased throughout his career. Ultimately, this reputation could result in the offer of a more lucrative position with a more powerful household or even a more prestigious position at court. Husee was also rewarded for his dedication to the Lisles by boons from Lady Lisle herself, who at times bestowed upon him illustrious undertakings such as allowing him to present New Year's gifts to the King, which, again, greatly enhanced his profile.

In Husee's correspondence to his employers, we see his delight at being given this prestigious duty:

...as soon as I was in the Chamber of Presence, going to present, my Lord Privy seal smiled, and said to the King's Grace, 'Here cometh my Lord Lisle's man!'; and the King spake merrily unto him again, but what his Highness said I cannot tell. So that, after I had done my duty, his Grace received it of me smiling, and thanking your lordship did ask heartily how you and my lady did. His Grace spake few words that day to those that came. As far as I could perceive he spake to no man so much as he did unto me (Vol. 5 #1086).

Husee's detailed report conveys not only his great joy at performing this esteemed task, but his recognition of the status (and social currency) bestowed upon him by Cromwell's verbal nod and the King's generosity in addressing him individually.

As well as bestowing such prestigious duties on Husee, Lady Lisle also intercedes on his behalf on those rare occasions when Lord Lisle is displeased with Husee's service. In one case, where Lord Lisle feels that Husee has not been attentive to his suits, Honor writes to Husee that she has "peaced my lord's mind therin now, but he was at the first discontented with you" (Vol. 2 #507). Material benefits aside, through such emotional and intangible means, Lady Lisle further ensures that her most trusted manservant remains her most dedicated servant. John Husee was indispensable to the achievement of many of Lady Lisle's projects, just as she was necessary to sustaining his way of life and future prospects; their alliance was essential and mutual.<sup>77</sup>

## Husee's Letters: Formal and Informal Negotiations

John Husee's letters shift from subject to subject, offering glimpses of an extraordinarily complex series of interactions between noble and servant. His letters display subtle and calculated differences in tone and style, depending on which of his employers he was writing to and the subject matter broached. A formal letter tends to emphasize the difference in status between correspondents; the level of formality (a proxy for hierarchy) reveals how the addressee is constructed by the writer, and will in turn dictate the addressee's response to any pleas or petitions in the letter.<sup>78</sup> Thus, while Husee was a good servant to Lord Lisle and performed his job well, the very formality of address indicates the nature of the relationship: Husee constructs himself as a loyal servant, but as no more than that – the status differences remain in place. His more informal letters to Lady Lisle, on the other hand, construct her as a friend and ally.

<sup>77</sup> On the surface, Husee's dual role of family servant and London agent seems straightforward; in reality, they were anything but. Husee's geographical distance from the household (he was primarily in London working on Lisle business, and only returned to Calais occasionally), his gender, and his close relationship with the family served to complicate the situation; yet, it is these very elements that allowed Lady Lisle and Husee to form an intimate relationship that would become a critical part of Honor's community of influence.

<sup>78</sup> See Judith Rice; James Murphy, ed., *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts and Rhetoric in the Middle-Ages*, and Martin Camargo, who does a good job of synthesizing the arguments of scholars specializing in the history of *ars dictaminis*. Camargo lays out the five parts of the letter which became standard in Europe: the *salutatio* (epistolary greeting); the *benevolentiae captatio* (proverb or quotation from scripture); the *narratio* (statement of purpose); the *petitio* (argument deduced from premises established earlier in the letter); and the conclusion.

When a letter writer uses a familiar style, status is no longer the main focus, but rather the bond of solidarity that casts addresser and addressee as allies with mutual interests.

It is in Husee's letters to Lady Lisle that we see evidence of a combination of formal dictaminal style and a more informal, intimate style.<sup>79</sup> This combination is distinct because it permits him to distinguish between whatever business is at hand (which is described more formally, with the understanding that Lady Lisle is the ultimate decision maker) and the overriding context of friendship/allegiance in which the matters are discussed. Despite the understanding that Lady Lisle was still "the boss," so to speak, there seems to have been, even early in their correspondence, a governing sense of intimacy and friendship, primarily due, I would argue, to Husee's involvement in the household sphere.<sup>80</sup> Husee's domestic involvement – tending to the children, assisting with their educational and career placements, hiring servants for his mistress, purchasing clothing for the family, even ensuring his mistress's emotional and physical

<sup>79</sup> Through the Lisle letters we are able to see how Husee functioned not just as a family servant or an extramural court agent, but as a complex blend of both—he was a man who acted on many levels in a variety of roles. We see Husee's role as conveyor of information and advisor, for example, when he writes to Lord Lisle informing him that Cromwell greatly appreciated his gift of wine, but at the same time advising his Master of a better avenue of gifting. Husee suggests that Lisle should not send the boars' heads to Cromwell, as they would be a "goodly present for the King, for my Lord Privy Seal setteth no great store by them" (Vol. 5 #1260). Husee uses his thorough knowledge of the personal likes and dislikes of the major players at the court, information to which Arthur Lisle, ensconced in Calais, would not be privy, to guide Lisle in making the best use of his resources. Indeed, Husee's knowledge of court personalities often sees him take on the role of mentor or counsellor. For example, he counsels Lord Lisle on how to approach King Henry, telling him, "his Grace loveth not to read long letters," that is, that Lisle's long, devotional-style letter is not fitting for the King. This sort of guidance is vital because if Lisle needs support or assistance from the King, the King will need to read the letter, thus, brevity is essential (Vol. 5 #1090). At other times Husee dons the role of tutor in propriety, reminding his Lord of appropriate epistolary etiquette, writing to Lord Lisle, for example, about the help he has received from influential courtiers, and urging him to "write immediately upon receipt of this my letter," adding that he "trust[s] [his] lordship will make haste, that they may say their gentleness is not forgotten" (Vol. 5 #1179). Husee's statement that he "trusts" Lisle will respond quickly, as one does not want to overlook friends in high places, simultaneously flatters him, but also gently nudges Lisle to ensure it gets done; where an overt nudge might give offense, flattery smooths the way, sugaring the insinuation that perhaps timing, or making "haste," is not Lord Lisle's strong suit. Husee is always aware of his position as employee, always mindful of his place, of the differences in their rank and status.

<sup>80</sup> Netting argues that households "are a primary arena for the expression of kinship, socialization, and economic cooperation, where the very stuff of culture is mediated and transformed" (xxii). Close relationships are often formulated within the domestic sphere and carried on and further developed outside the immediate household sphere (relationships like that of Honor Lisle and John Husee).

well-being – allows him to speak as an avuncular, nurturing friend. Bailey and Stretton argue that individuals outside the immediate family unit, such as servants and employees, often displayed affectionate ties to their mistress/master, intervened in the lives of the families they served, and influenced decisions that were made, often bypassing established social norms and class divisions.<sup>81</sup> John Husee’s dual role of trusted servant and court agent allows him to be involved and engaged with every aspect of family life, and thus he is closely linked to the matriarch of the family. I argue that John Husee used the genre of the familiar letter, with its more relaxed discourse of friendship and intimacy, in combination with the formal language of patronage, to build a relationship of mutual trust which, as we will see, is central to this unique mistress-servant relationship. The more a person comes into contact with another and shares confidences (either through the epistle or face-to-face), the more trust can be developed. The epistle was the perfect vehicle for allowing mistress and servant to create an alliance and advance household interests; the fact the Lady Lisle allowed her servant to become so close, and address her so familiarly, reinforced this essential alliance.

## **Illusions of Privacy**

As discussed in the introduction, there was very little privacy in the Tudor period, yet the epistolary illusion of privacy allows for a crossing of boundaries that would be difficult, if not impossible, if individuals were physically present. The epistle, with its quasi-private status, allows for some taking of liberties. Under the guise of privacy, servants can iterate things to a mistress or master that they might never say face-to-face (as we will see, in Chapter 3, when Lady Lisle negotiates with the Lord Privy Seal). The pseudo-privacy and informality of the familiar letter, says Alan Stewart, establishes it as an “extremely affecting genre”, one that provides “an insight into the relationship between writer and recipient,” and allows for more latitude between individuals of differing rank and gender, and thus for rules and boundaries to be broached (21). Although affection is rarely seen as a power device, Susan Broomhall, and Sherry

<sup>81</sup> See Joanne Bailey; see also Tim Stretton “Marriage, Separation and the Common Law in England.”

Ortner both argue that the expressions of affection allow individuals increased agency within their networks of relationships. As Broomhall says “emotions align people with each other within social groups” and emotion, or affect, can itself “create or define power structures” (125). Turner and Stets contend that the very act of arousing positive emotions “can make individuals more committed to partners in the exchange, to the network as a whole, and to its culture” (294). Familiar letters, with their emotive language, and their appearance on paper (thoughts, direction and motivation put into writing) help create an alliance, one that is not so apparent in the more formalized dictaminal letter, because one cannot disavow a written document in the same way as one can refute or dismiss purely verbal claims. Thus, the affectionate rhetoric displayed in the correspondence between Husee and Honor Lisle suggests a solid and confident power structure and relationship based on intimacy and affection, more amenable to internal agency than to external hierarchical social forces.

Along with the chosen epistolary style is the actual language of affection itself which also encodes relations of power. As I discussed above, Husee’s primary discourses used when addressing Lady Lisle tends to meld the formal language of patronage and the warm language of close friendship. The discourse of patronage, where a (male) suppliant begs his (female) patron for a boon of money or professional assistance, allows the woman to lend him the power that comes from her status. Referring to Husee’s discourse that blends two styles, that of friendship and patronage, Douglas Robinson argues that it “implicitly undermine[s] the conventional patriarchal hierarchy according to which men are intrinsically superior to women” (153) and thus disrupts both gender and status hierarchies, allowing Husee to create an epistolary relationship that crosses the boundaries set between mistress and servant and work with her as a friend.<sup>82</sup> As a genre, the familiar letter allows for a language of intense, even extravagant devotion which enables an individual to show commitment to the addressee (Lerer 4). The familiar letter is also, as Robinson argues, a way for individuals to “traverse the contested grounds of social power and gender” (153) and do so without repercussions. Therefore, it was the perfect mechanism for Husee and Lady Lisle to cross boundaries in order to work toward mutually beneficial projects.

<sup>82</sup> Lisa Jardine, 151 and 267.



## On Crossing Boundaries: Mutual Interest or Romantic Liaison?

The affectionate friendship between Husee and Lady Lisle, formed and established through the language of friendship and patronage, did indeed allow them to cross boundaries, but for the modern reader this prompts the question of how far this could have gone. Could the aristocratic Lady Lisle have had a romantic liaison with her bourgeois male agent? Or was their correspondence simply a means to collude over mutually beneficial projects? A romantic liaison was not out of the question, but would be highly unlikely, as the consequences of discovery of a clandestine relationship would have been extremely high, most especially for Honor, as the much earlier story of Heloise and Abelard shows.<sup>83</sup> In cases closer to Lady Lisle's own times, where upper class women did have intimate liaisons with servants, or men of lower status, the results were often equally disastrous. Katherine Howard, the wife of Henry VIII, had an affair with Thomas Culpepper, a gentleman of her husband's Privy Chamber; the allegations were corroborated by several witnesses, the Queen herself confessed, and she was executed for treason. Mary Queen of Scots not only had an indiscreet relationship with Lord Darnley, but the two plotted and killed her husband so they could marry. Both were eventually punished and killed for their actions, not less than for their indiscretion.<sup>84</sup>

One of the most famous cases of mistress servant indiscretion is that of the Paston daughter, Margery, who became secretly betrothed to Richard Calle, the family servant. Although he was from a respectable merchant family, and a well-regarded senior servant, when Margery's mother Margaret discovered her daughter's involvement she wrote to her husband in the harshest terms, "remember you, and so do I, that we have lost of her but a brethel," (Davis #181), that is, "a worthless [girl], a wretch" (*OED*). Margaret also decried her daughter's actions as "lewd", and tried to have the Bishop

<sup>83</sup> Shakespeare highlights the dire consequences of an inappropriate romantic liaison in *King Lear*. He has Edmund (the bastard), doubly woo Lear's married daughters, Goneril and Regan, in order to achieve power, but all ends tragically when the daughters commit suicide and he ultimately dies as well. In this case, the dire results are primarily due to the jostling bids for power by various deceitful and immoral individuals but the impropriety was also not insignificant.

<sup>84</sup> Tracy Borman; Julia Fox; Anka Muhlstein.

dissolve the marriage by having Margery recant the marriage rites. When her daughter refused, Margery avowed that “neither I (her family) nor no friend of hers would receive her” (Davis #86). The entire family disapproved of the match. When they failed to break the marriage, their only recourse was to disown Margery. Ironically, although they did not speak to their daughter again, they eventually accepted her husband back into the household because they needed the skilled services of their trusted manservant far more than they needed a daughter. Of the two, Margery paid an arguably higher price for the liaison because she was an upper-class woman; she lost family, friends, and status.<sup>85</sup>

It is important to note that although Lady Lisle and John Husee’s relationship crosses boundaries (socio-economic and gendered), it seems more likely that their relationship was not romantic. The language and tone of the letters between them certainly seems romantic at times, and as such, it is both important and illuminating to consider the multiple factors, including social sanctions as well as emotional ties, that would argue against a romance, before returning to examine the letters themselves. Considering that the letters were likely to be read by numerous individuals (including Lord Lisle), and not just the intended recipient, Husee would not be so openly affectionate and emotive in his correspondence if he and Lady Lisle were having an affair. Moreover, Husee often puts a postscript at the end of his letters to Lady Lisle, indicating that his mistress, or master, should read the other’s letters, as he has included valuable information that is vital to both. In other words, he not only expects the Lisles to be cross-reading, he actively encourages them to do so. In addition, the age difference, the lack of privacy, and the possible serious loss of status for Lady Lisle suggest theirs was not a romantic affair. The familiar letter with more informal and intimate language was used between them simply because it allowed them to set aside social rules, a necessary pre-condition of their working closely together on shared projects.

An affair becomes even less likely when we look at the correspondence between husband and wife, which suggests a warm, loving bond. When Lady Lisle addresses Arthur, instead of the traditional salutations often used by wives and husbands, such as

<sup>85</sup> See Norman Davis, letters #86, 181, 120, 121,122.

“husband”, “lord” or “my loving husband”, she uses the more affectionate “mine own sweetheart” or “mine own sweetheart root” or “my dearest bedfellow” (Vol. 5 #1284, 1294, 1296).<sup>86</sup> In closing her letters to Arthur she does not use the conventional wifely replies of “Yours faithfully,” or “your wif,” but signs herself as “[s]he that shall not think the time short till I am with you” (Vol. 5 #1290). Her closures are rife with affectionate language as she says to her husband in one instance, “I bid you farewell, even as heartily as the poor heart may, which is oftener with you than with the body” (Vol. 5 #1294). When Lord Lisle goes to London on business she writes to him, lamenting “there is no woman living have thought the time of her husband’s absence longer than I have done yours; and so shall continue unto your return and our meeting” (Vol. 5 #1544). Her affection for her husband was great enough that she encouraged him to be more demonstrative in his own letters, asking him to write a few lines in his own hand, as it would illustrate his affection for her far more than if written by a secretary:

Good my lord, whereas in my former letters I have written to you that you should write to me with your own hand, whereof ii lines should be more comfort to me than a hundred of another man’s hand; my meaning therein is not to require you to take so much pain as to write to me in your own hand in or for all your business or necessary affairs, but only at your own pleasure of sum secret things as it shall please you to advertise me of, and at your convenient leisure to signify unto me part of your gentle hart, which unto me shall be most rejoyce and comfort. (Vol. 5 # 1544)

Honor is quite clear that this request is not one that should cause hardship; she does not expect him to write in his “own hand” in every letter, but to pick “sum secret things” to tell her about—some intimate details, from his “gentle hart.” Her letters show us a marriage not based solely on prearrangement or financial gain, but on affectionate and loving grounds. This example of marital affection illustrates a partnership that is based on love and not just money. In Chapter Three, in which I examine a rift between Lady Lisle and her husband, one due to their divergent goals, it will be important to

<sup>86</sup> James Daybell argues that the term “bedfellow” was neither endearing nor romantic, but rather descriptive. It merely referred to the fact that two people slept in the same bed. Indeed, male servants who shared the same bed were also described as bedfellows. The more usual forms of address at this time was “husband” and “lord”; more endearing was “my swet lord,” “my husband,” and “my own deare lord”. For more examples of standard salutations and conclusions between wives and husbands, see Daybell’s *Women Letter Writers in Tudor England* (205).

remember that this affection exists, even though Honor's machinations do not always accord with her husband's political desires. *The Lisle Letters* are thus also important in terms of adding greater nuance to our understanding of private and individual emotional relations between Tudor aristocratic couples.

Lord Lisle's letters to Lady Lisle tended to be even more expressive than hers to him, demonstrating not only his affection for her, but also his reliance on her in all matters. When she is away in London he writes "[he] cannot sleep the night" and longs for her "as doth the child for his nurse" (Vol. 5 #1300, #1292). When Honor is dealing with family issues at court he writes that he trusts her absolutely and will "remit wholly to [her] discretion", letting her know that whatever decisions come out of her negotiations, he has confidence in her decision-making prowess (Vol. 5 #1292, #1274). "For my part," says Arthur in another letter, "I never loved none so well, neither thought so long for none since I knew a woman"; his rhetoric is one of commitment (Vol. 5 #1267). These letters suggest that they were a devoted couple and that Arthur had great confidence in his wife.<sup>87</sup> So while Erasmus, in his *De conscribendis*, places amorous letters under the heading of "the letter of friendship," implying that the language of love and friendship is interchangeable, in the case of Husee, his intimate letters are used to establish an intimate but not romantic and to further familial business and projects.

## **Husee's Letters to Lady Lisle**

Although St Clare Byrne estimates Honor Lisle wrote over six hundred and fifty letters, only forty-one are preserved in the State Papers, and only one brief letter to John Husee remains. Fortunately, John Husee's ninety letters to Honor Lisle have been preserved. Chronologically, Husee's letters to Lady Lisle illustrate an escalating degree of devotion, yet right from the outset of their relationship, he displays a willingness to use emotive language and delve into the affective realm with his mistress. We see this

<sup>87</sup> Lawrence Stone asserts that there is a high degree of formality in the modes of address between husbands and wives and argues that widespread use of deferential modes by wives indicates wifely subordination in the household (329-30, 198-99). More recently, Ralph Houlbrooke has shown that more personal and informal salutations were often used between couples as a sign of devotion and intimacy (100-101).

discursive practice in one of his initial letters, written in December 1533, just three months into his employment with the family. Husee begins with news of a rough channel crossing:

My duty unto your ladyship premised in my most humble wise. Pleaseth it the same to be advertised that yesternight, I lauded be God, I arrived in safety in this town at viij of the clock at night and I once thought never to have seen your ladyship, for we were in danger of our lives ij times, but God was our friend better than we deserved. (Vol. 1 #107)

He begins with a standard salutation couched in the typical rhetoric of a dutiful, humble servant, but quickly shifts into an emotional outpouring of fear for his life, as if addressed from one intimate friend to another, as he declares that he thought “never [again] to have seen [his] ladyship.” Amidst the dangers of the stormy sea crossing, his greatest fear was not for his life, but that he would not see his lady. Quite early in Husee’s service, his letters to Lady Lisle tend to be expressed not in formulaic salutations and leave-takings such as “your humble servant” or “your very affectionate servant,” but rather in the tones of affection and candour used in the familiar letter, often replete with emotion, and cover subjects of a much more intimate, personal nature. His customary mode of leave-taking in his correspondence with Lady Lisle is “your ladyship’s man” (Vol.3 #893), or “your ladyship’s own man bounden” (Vol. 3 # 1572/73), language that could perhaps be formulaic, but, due to the possessives in his declaration – he is her “ladyship’s” man – as well as the image of his being “bounden” to her, he implies a pledge, a commitment to her, and it is this commitment, this closeness, that has him working tirelessly to assist her in all that she does.

When Husee breaks from the customary mode of leave-taking, and pledges himself to Honor with fervent devotion as “him that always hath been and so will remain your ladyship’s during life, whether your Ladyship will or no” (Vol. 3 #815), it suggests an increase in dedication or allegiance to Lady Lisle. Over time, Husee’s language escalates in intensity, and we see him use the very stylized gesture of devotion where by he binds himself to his mistress: he assures her he is “thinking every day a hundred till I be with you again” (Vol. 3 #794). The wording and tone are extravagant, hyperbolic even, and it is this which tells us that boundaries between mistress and servant have

become secondary and they have become constant friends.<sup>88</sup> When Husee writes he will be Honor's "whether your ladyship will or no" there is an element of determination in Husee's address. Whether she accepts this depth of devotion or not, he says, he will continue to be devoted to her: his commitment is absolute, and the more Lisle knows this, the more their alliance is secure. Thus, his dedication to her is not simply subject to Honor's desire; it simply exists whether she wants it or not. The message conveyed is that he is the one who can be trusted. This is essential, since trust was a pre-requisite to their sensitive collaboration.

## **Advice on Mothering**

A series of letters exchanged between May and August of 1537 gives us the opportunity to look more closely at the rhetoric of devotion and the blurring of both class and gender boundaries. During the spring and summer of 1537, two projects were being orchestrated by Lady Lisle and Husee which dominated their correspondence. The first was to gain favour with the pregnant queen, Jane Seymour, so she would grant one of Lady Lisle's Basset daughters a coveted court position, and the second was to finalize the lying-in preparations for Lady Lisle and the much-awaited Plantagenet heir.<sup>89</sup>

The letters concerning the preferment of the Basset daughters clearly establish Husee's steadfast commitment to Lady Lisle and their mutual trust and co-ordination. Earlier, Husee had written that Queen Jane Seymour was going to send for the two girls so she could assess their suitability for a position at court. At the end of June, Husee writes to Lady Lisle that she must "instruct them [her daughters] motherlike" and that upon their arrival at the court he shall "do the best for them that shall lie in the uttermost of [his] small power" (Vol. 4 # 884). In advising Honor to take on the "qualities of a mother" (*OED* 692), Husee perhaps implies this is not a role Lady Lisle tends to play as she is so involved with the business and politics of the family, but one that will give her

<sup>88</sup> On the rhetoric of love see Anthony Low, Douglas Robinson (154), Gary Schneider (42-49), and Stephen Jaeger.

<sup>89</sup> Chapter four of this dissertation will examine, in detail, the preferment project for the Basset daughters. In this instance I use the letter only to discuss Husee's crossing of boundaries.

greater influence in this situation. More likely, however, Husee is attempting to reinforce for Honor how crucial her role is in preparing her daughters for this first inspection. She must do all that she can to help her daughters, and he, as her friend and faithful retainer, will use his “small power” to assist them as well. The phrase “small power” might be taken to indicate that Husee has very little power to influence the girls, but it seems more likely that here he is playing the part of a deferential servant so as to offset any possible affront in his instructing Lady Lisle on how to “mother.” Husee is pointing out that Lady Lisle is the final point of instruction and, once the girls leave her, they will receive no further preparation; they must be ready, and it is her job to ready them. As Husee’s power really is small, both in comparison to Honor’s influence, and to the powers that will judge the girls at court, he will not be able to intercede on her daughter’s behalf, yet his influence over Lady Lisle is so great he can convince her to change her behaviour. Husee’s language mitigates what could be perceived as overstepping the bounds of his position by emphasizing the importance of preparing the girls for what might well be a rigorous interview. The fact that he, here and elsewhere, consistently risks offending Lady Lisle and enflaming class antagonism when he thinks something is required of his mistress shows that his stake in Lisle affairs goes beyond obsequiousness, hiding in the shadows and waiting for a positive outcome.

On July 17, 1537 Husee receives word from the Queen’s ladies that the “matter is concluded [Honor] shall send them over, for her Grace will first see them and know their manners, fashions and conditions” (Vol. 4 #887). It has taken almost two years of planning to get the daughters to the point of entry to the Court, and now the girls control their fates. Neither Husee or Honor will be there to coach them; thus all motherly advising must conclude, as the girls will either “mak[e]” or “mar[ ] the campaign. Husee writes to Honor that as they

Shall now go upon making and marring, it shall please your ladyship to exhort them to be sober, sad, wise and discreet and lowly above all things, and to be obedient, and governed and ruled by...your ladyship’s friends here; and to serve God and to be virtuous, for that is much regarded, to serve God well and to be sober of tongue. (Vol. 4 #887)

Although this letter is supposed to be an advisory one, Husee phrases it more as a statement of confirmation (“it shall please your ladyship to exhort them”). His

expectation is that Lady Lisle will urge the girls to behave and that his advice will be acted upon. Husee is not tentative; he does not use an interrogative (“if it should please your ladyship”) nor is he merely suggesting a course of action. Rather, he is stating he knows and trusts that she will, upon his request, instruct her daughters to behave in an appropriate manner. There is perhaps a presumptuous belief that Lady Lisle will be of the same mind as he, and will adhere to his counsel. This assumption, that she will do as he asks, seems to go against all propriety, but is apparently deemed acceptable by both parties because of their well-established, trusting friendship. Lady Lisle believes Husee is acting in her family’s best interests; Husee then catalogues a list of characteristics she should attempt to instil in her daughters before they depart: they should be sober, sad, wise, discreet, lowly, obedient, and virtuous in the manner in which they serve God. Each of these traits, of course, is in line with the expected patriarchal rhetoric of the time. An exemplary woman was sober of demeanour and speech, “trustworthy of judgment” (*OED* 354), and prudent, and since Jane Seymour, the Queen, was considered an exemplar of these virtues, it would only be fitting for the Lisle daughters to express the same. Husee also wishes Lady Lisle to stress the importance of social hierarchy and control so her daughters will “be obedient” and content to be “ruled” and “governed” by Honor’s family and friends at court. Husee’s counsel to Lady Lisle reinforces the idea that the girls’ success, and thus the family campaign, depends on their adhering to normative strictures of female behaviour.

Husee continues, explaining to Lady Honor that “if they order themselves accordingly, it shall be to your ladyship’s no little comfort, and all their friends will be glad of them; and doing otherwise, it will be your ladyship’s discomfort and discontentation” (Vol. 4 #887). Here Husee uses social expectations, peer pressure, to reinforce the importance of the coming interview: the entire world will know if the girls fail, and this will hurt not only the Lisle’s cultural cachet, but those of their friends and associates. Husee’s emphasis on family honour reinforces how much is at stake with the girls, but also how much he, a trusted servant and affectionate friend, is invested in the family’s well-being. He goes on:

But undoubtedly a good lesson at their departing and good exhortations of your ladyship’s mouth while they shall remain there, will profit them



more than all others here, although they be their nigh kin. For your ladyship's words will stick nigh their stomachs. (Vol. 4 #887)

He alludes to the language of finance, to encourage Lady Lisle to counsel her daughters according to his instructions, as this is a language she absolutely understands; the "exhortations" from her "mouth" will profit the girls and thereby the family; thus, it is vital she take on the mother role. He also argues that Honor's guidance will do more good than anyone else's, that it will "stick nigh their stomachs" – (a contemporary idiom meaning to make a "lasting impression on the mind" [*OED* 1005]) – suggesting Husee believes one of Honor's skills is her ability to persuade, as well as an ability to manage her daughters.

By instructing Honor on how to mete out motherly advice, Husee is clearly overstepping boundaries; so far as we know, he was never a parent, yet he intervenes in this area because he is invested in Lady Lisle and her projects. Skilfully assessing the situation, Husee pre-emptively apologizes to Lady Lisle for the liberties he is taking:

I trust your ladyship will not take this my meaning that I should presume to learn your ladyship what is to be done, neither that I do see any likelihood of ill appearance in them; but I do only of pure and sincere zeal that I bear to them for your ladyship's sake. (Vol. 4 #887)

Yet at the same time he is apologizing for attempting to "learn" or teach "[his] ladyship." Husee is literally telling her what to say to them, instructing her on the content of her mothering speech. His apology is similar to those he makes in his letters to Lord Lisle, but what is different is the use of emotive language and the intimate subject matter itself (telling a mother how to instruct her daughters). Husee says that he crosses these boundaries out of the "pure and sincere zeal that [he] bear[s]" toward the daughters for Honor's sake, meaning that his affection for and intimacy with Lady Lisle is what causes him to express his heartfelt enthusiasm (his "zeal"). Although he knows his relationship with Lady Lisle is strong, he still uses a familiar trope of apology to avoid potential anger, to ensure that even if Lady Lisle felt he was trespassing, that she would understand that his goal was to assist her and that his presumption is due solely to his dedication and affection.

Although this particular letter focuses mainly on the preferment project, Husee concludes it with a reference to another topic: Honor's apparent pregnancy. He closes by saying that "[i]n my next letter your ladyship shall know more, as God knoweth, who send your ladyship long life with much honour, making the same a glad mother, when time shall be, of a jolly boy". This closing does reinforce the patriarchy of the time (the desire for a male heir), but it is sweet, respectful, and indicative of an intimate familiar relationship. From mid-July 1537 until the end of August, Husee's letters to Lady Lisle illustrate an intimacy of topic and rhetoric of devotion reinforcing the mutuality of their relationship.<sup>90</sup> Husee spends most of those two months at court, working on a series of projects, either wooing the royal couple with some of the finest quail the Lisles can provide, or approaching various nobles for all the accoutrements needed for the lying-in of a lady of Honor's rank (caps, linens, nightgowns, spices, wines, hangings, curtains, and carpets).<sup>91</sup> Husee proves indispensable to Lady Lisle in acquiring these accessories not to mention sending her news about the goings-on at court, and pursuing her various errands to gain favour with others. It is during these intense days of project development that the language of devotion increases in intensity. Husee had been in Calais on July 10, 1537, but shortly thereafter he returned to London, from whence he wrote to Lady Lisle that he was "right loath to depart from [his] ladyship" and that he is "bearing [her] [his]good heart and service, to see [her] ladyship merry and in good health" (Vol. 4 #886). At this point Lady Lisle is reportedly pregnant, so his wishing to see her in good health makes sense; but his use of extravagant language, how "loath" he is to depart from his lady not just because of his "service" to her but due to his "good heart," or affectionate feelings for her, is evident.

Seven days later, on July 17, 1537 Lady Lisle sends Husee and Warley (the Lisle's part-time gentleman servant) each a gift of coat cloth. Warley does not write to thank his mistress, but Husee writes briefly on their behalf: "I humbly thank your ladyship

<sup>90</sup> Arthur Plantagenet, Viscount Lisle, did not have an heir. He had three daughters with his first wife Elizabeth Grey and three stepsons that were Elizabeth's from her first marriage to Sir Edmund Dudley. His second wife, Honor Lisle, had seven children from her first marriage to John Bassett (four girls and three boys), and four step-daughters from John Basset's first marriage – thus they had seventeen children in total between the two of them but not a single child together, and most importantly, no male Plantagenet heir.

<sup>91</sup> See Janelle Day Jenstad (373-403).

for the coat cloth which I have received and so doth Warley for his.” Warley’s lack of response is offset by Husee’s reaction to the gift. Husee continues, thanking Honor with an effusiveness that goes beyond duty: “[t]here is no remedy, I must still be your ladyship’s man, forasmuch as the same bindeth me thereto daily more and more, much more than I shall be able to deserve” (Vol. 4 #888). The rhetorical flourishes are typical of the language of the devoted friend or even the concerned family member: his doubling of the word “more” and his escalation of language to “much more” are clearly meant to suggest his devotion to his Lady. This language speaks of a relationship between mistress and servant that has passed beyond strict duty, and shows us an attachment between intimate friends who can cross the social limits of mistress and servant; and it is this greater attachment that motivates him, and her, to work harder and be more invested in their shared projects.

## Phantom Pregnancy

We see this intimacy between mistress and servant when Husee writes to Honor after it has been discovered that her pregnancy was a pseudocyesis (supposed pregnancy), and she is beside herself with grief.<sup>92</sup> Husee writes to her on August 23, 1537:

Pleaseth it your ladyship to be advertised that I have received your sundry letters, greatly to my discomfort to perceive and see that your ladyship should take such ways of lamentation and sorrows (and causeless), as my full trust in God is, for your ladyship is not the first woman of honour that hath overshot or mistaken your time and reckoning. But I doubt not but your ladyship, by the Grace of God, shall speed as well as ever you have done time past; and therefore good madam, in the honour of God, be not so faint hearted, ne mistrust not yourself. For I hope assuredly all is for the best; but I admit that it might chance otherwise (which God forbid), yet should not your ladyship take so earnestly, but refer all unto God. ...And yet, though your ladyship should chance to miss of your purpose, you should not be the first noble woman that hath been so by God’s work visited. For it be his pleasure he spareth neither Empress, Queen, Princess ne Duchess, but his handiwork must

<sup>92</sup> Janelle Day Jenstad suggests Honor’s pregnancy was a false pregnancy—where a woman so desperately wants to be pregnant that her body takes on the signs of pregnancy although there is no fetus. Mary Tudor (Mary I) was later known for suffering from such a condition.

be suffered and his mercy abiden; and whatsoever is said or thought by any creature, God's works cannot be withstand. (Vol. 4 #893)

We do not have Honor's letter to Husee but it is quite clear she has repeatedly told him of her troubles via her "sundry letters," and that these letters contain "lamentation and sorrows." Further, he has heard from other people that she "weepeth and sorroweth without comparison" (Vol. 4 #893). Although we do not know who informed Husee of this state of affairs, the question that might come to mind is why he, officially merely a household agent, is being informed by others of Lady Lisle's intimate emotional state. Susan Broomhall points out that "intricate webs of relationship were established through [early modern] households, in part through the subtle emotional interactions of its members. Some of these experiences may have been intensely private, but their ramifications were not, the emotional life of a domestic unit rarely remaining limited to its walls" (16). Although Husee is not in Calais, and he is neither husband nor kin, as I have been arguing he is a central member of the household and, more importantly, an intimate friend who has influence with Lady Lisle.

This apparently private moment of grief is something Husee would need to know about for a number of reasons. First, he handles Lady Lisle's financial and land transactions, and thus he has to weigh whether certain requests or behaviour may be irrational, because of her state of mind. Second, he was also most likely informed because he was known to be her intimate friend; thus, other individuals believe he can be of some support to her. It seems likely, too, that Lady Lisle's "sundry letters" outlined not only her emotional pain, but also perhaps even a sense of inadequacy. A noble woman, like Lady Lisle, would be on public display as the world watched for the Plantagenet heir. People have also been, at Husee's prompting, supplying the necessities for her expected lying-in and would therefore know purportedly that she was pregnant. Therefore people such as Cromwell, who sent messages waiting to hear that "your ladyship had a boy," would also witness her shame (Vol. 4 #887). Her confiding in Husee about her pregnancy (a very female domain) and her emotional state indicates that she knows he genuinely cares about her well-being. In turn, Husee's poignant, carefully-crafted response indicates that Lady Lisle's trust in their relationship is reciprocated. Husee cares enough to broach the subject of his dear friend's misery and provide comfort and counsel.

What is unusual about this letter is that it very much breaks from Husee's typical pattern. In most instances Husee will begin a letter to Lady Lisle with a few paragraphs about general business, and from there move on to anything that might be construed as "personal" – concerns with the children, worries about obtaining new servants, his own requests for payment – anything that might cross over into the realm of delicate or "sticky." But here, instead of following his usual pattern, Husee launches directly into two full paragraphs of emotional discourse. If it is the case that, as Cross suggests, "personal letters are inscribed in very specific codes of form and structure at the start and finish but allow a free form within" why would Husee's letter not only so drastically deviate from the standard epistolary model, but also from his own typical pattern (Cross 5)?<sup>93</sup> I would argue that what this letter suggests is that Husee's anxiety about Honor's state of mind has supplanted all other concerns, concerns that, as her household agent, should be foremost in his mind, but which, as her affectionate friend, are replaced by worry for her well-being. In this letter we can see how Husee's relationship with Lady Lisle transcends mutual advantage and strategic alliance and presents a clear example of a personal friend (regardless of class or gender boundaries) attempting to help and console another.

Husee's letter is highly sympathetic, but it also shows him trying to use his intimate knowledge of his mistress, as both a staunchly devoted Catholic and a highly influential noblewoman, to ease her misery and gently nudge her toward a calming restorative frame of mind. In the first paragraph of this letter Husee, a man who appears to have been only moderately religious, refers to God eleven times (either directly as God or indirectly as his or he).<sup>94</sup> The first reference to God is used to indicate to Lady Lisle that Husee himself has "full trust in God," and, thus, that she too, as a good Christian woman, should put her faith in God. Husee suggests since all things are permitted by "the Grace of God," by "[God's] pleasure," or by God's "work," devoted

<sup>93</sup> Maire Cross and Caroline Bland, Chapter 1.

<sup>94</sup> Husee does not appear to have been unusually religious, although he would have been at least nominally a Catholic or Protestant. Much of their correspondence occurs when there were huge changes occurring with religion—a break with the pope, a new Church of England, the dissolution of the monasteries. Husee stayed on top of the changes so he could warn his master and mistress of the Catholic rituals to avoid. There are letters written by Husee to Honor and Arthur cautioning them in their religious practice.

Christians must make sure everything they do in life is for God. Husee implies that a Christian who does not place her trust in God, who spends her time mired in sorrow and lament, is questioning the Almighty's "handiwork". But Husee is also letting Honor know that the false pregnancy is by no means her fault; it is God's work, therefore she should not question it. Honor should not be "so faint hearted" nor "ne mistrust not [her]self," but put her trust in God who has always taken care of her in the past. Initially, then, Husee's strategy is to call on her as a good Christian to trust in God's benevolence, and if, as Husee suggests, "it might chance otherwise" (she might never have the Plantagenet heir), then it is "for the best." Husee does not simply promise all will be well: he prepares her for the worst. If it is God's great plan that she have no more children, he says, she must accept it, just as other noblewomen have before. Husee goes on to compare Honor's circumstances with those of other great noble women, as she is not the "first noble woman that hath been so by God's work visited" and that these women, "Empress, Queens, Princesses ne Duchess" (all of higher in status than Lady Lisle), have submitted themselves to God's will; thus she too may have to follow their example. Husee uses her roles both as a good Catholic and as an aristocratic woman to remind her of her duty.

If none of these rhetorical strategies should work to end her grief, Husee calls upon Lady Lisle's affection for him (and his for her) to stem the tide of her sorrow. Husee begins the letter by telling Lady Lisle her letters have caused him "discomfort" as they allow him to "perceive and see" that she has taken "such ways of lamentations and sorrow." He wants her to know her pain and suffering also affect him and that it "[g]rieve[s] [him] no less than it were [his] own mother" (Vol. 4 #893). He uses his own emotional state to try to convince her to abandon her grief. She is so important to him, he says, that her sorrow affects him as if she were his own lamenting mother. Husee concludes his letter by letting Lady Lisle know her sorrow is so upsetting to him that, although he has done a good deed for Lord Lisle and managed to get a bill signed, "the signing of my Lord's bill hath not been to me so much comfort as the sorrows your ladyship doth take hath been and are discomfort, as God best knoweth, who send your lady long life and much honour, and a most fortunate hour when his pleasure shall be" (Vol. 4 #893). Although he has a professional accomplishment that should give him great satisfaction, he feels neither comforted nor satisfied, because of his ladyship's sorrows.

He harkens back to her affection for him, and lets her know that as long as she sorrows, all will not be well in his world. It is vital to note that the depth of intimacy between Lady Lisle and Husee, her sharing her emotions with Husee and his response to her anguish, illustrate the trust that has been established between the two, a trust that was essential if Husee were to undertake projects on behalf of Lady Lisle and engage in delicate negotiations as her proxy at court.

Husee's letter of consolation over Lady Lisle's false pregnancy is not the only one to illustrate the cherished friendship between them, but it is a letter that shows clearly that their relationship is not simply one of mistress and servant, but one of mutual friendship, concern, and trust. The letters between Honor and Husee provide us with unique insights into the fluid boundaries that existed between mistress and servant, delineating the delicate balance of power inherent in such a relationship. Though there are still clear boundaries within their relationship, those related to class and gender principally, these are altered and influenced by the relationship itself. Since, as Ortner argues, individuals can "never act outside of the multiplicity of social relations in which they are enmeshed," they must use their agency to work in relations of solidarity with various individuals, family, friends, kin, spouses, and in this case faithful servants, who have varying degrees of power. Understanding Lady Lisle and Husee's relationship properly, as demonstrated through their letters, will allow us to grasp more clearly that he is vital to her subsequent projects, most especially in her negotiations with court ladies for the preferment of her daughters, as well as with her husband and Cromwell, as she attempts to disrupt the traditional patriarchal power-brokering of the time, to express her voice, and realize her goals.

## Chapter 2.

### French Women and English Court Women: Creating and Maintaining Influence via the Epistle

“Madame, my Lady Deputy, as humbly as I may recommend me effectually to your good grace.” Husee, from Vol. 3 #604.

While “officially” Tudor women may have had little power, like aristocratic men they accessed a variety of “unofficial” communities of power and built ties of “good ladyship” based on loyalty and the economy of obligation. This chapter analyzes Lady Lisle’s correspondence as she plans and strategizes on behalf of her daughters, Anne and Katherine, aiming to secure them court positions as Maids-of-Honour that would provide them with high status in their own right strengthening their family’s reputation. If one desired upward mobility, it was necessary to have long-term plans and strategies in place, and it was through the use of a multiplicity of ties and connections, both horizontal and vertical – in a word, communities of influence – that such advancement would occur. Bourdieu argues that such communities are not a given, but rather the result of a painstaking effort, “the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term—at transforming contingent relations, such as those of neighbourhood, the workplace, or even kinship, into relationships that are at once necessary and elective” (249). Lady Lisle used letters, gifts, and visits to cultivate a network with both the French Mesdames and the English court ladies that was based on the language of “political friendship,” a form of alliance that, as James Daybell observes, “promised repayment of favours in kind, assured the friendship of themselves and husbands and mobilized alliances of family and friends” (*Rhetoric*).<sup>95</sup>

<sup>95</sup> See James Daybell “Rhetoric and Friendship in Sixteenth-Century Women’s Letters of Intercession.”



This language of mutual obligation, though seen by contemporaries as “exclusively male” and based on “social status, material power and influence,” was nevertheless marshalled by women, and was suggestive of “a high level of confidence and authority [in] the women who used it” (258).<sup>96</sup> Lady Lisle built her own communities of influence by shrewdly utilizing the economy of obligation to her advantage, building contingent relationships and creating new alliances in order to benefit her family.

This chapter examines the long-term investment strategies of Lady Lisle, and the relationships she used and fostered through her epistles, to create networks of obligation that offered “material and emotional” support (249).<sup>97</sup> The correspondence shared between Lady Lisle and the French madams and the ladies of the English court broadly illustrate the power which women exerted and the agency they accrued for the advancement of their projects. The first half of this chapter will lay out the parameters of Lady Honor’s preferment project: what it is, why it is important, whom she chooses to engage, and how she strategizes to ensure action is taken. The letters exchanged between the French aristocratic ladies and Lady Lisle will illustrate how women formed and maintained international ties to advance their families, and how virtual strangers became cherished friends through the language of mutual obligation. The latter half of the chapter will examine how Lady Lisle established ties of obligation between herself and a group of influential women of the English court. More specifically, through an examination of two of Lady Lisle’s miscalculations – choosing a daughter who is too

<sup>96</sup> See James Daybell *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*. Early Modern correspondence Daybell explains, was a form of ritual gift giving: “the process of composing and sending a letter was in itself an act of gift-giving, the gift of a missive delivered from letter-writer to addressee” (159-167). Also see Louis Montrose (433-61), Alison Scott, “Marketing the Gift: Jonson, Multiple Patronage, and Strategic Exchange” (135-59), and Patricia Fumerton, “The Exchanging of Gifts: The Elizabethan Currency of Children and Poetry”. The only scholar to discuss the Lisle letters and the French letters is David Potter, who provides a narrative of the Lisle family and their friendship with the French families to outline the events. I will illustrate how these letters of seemingly nothing more than friendship are part of a strategic plan by Honor Lisle to advance her daughters in the political world of the court.

<sup>97</sup> See Pierre Bourdieu, “The Forms of Capital”, D. Paul McLean, and Barbara Harris “Sisterhood, Friendship and the Power of Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550.” Harris states that “female alliances, while not exclusive, were useful to women in many ways, and many women assiduously maintained links. Female contacts were useful in placing girls either at court or in aristocratic households, and in arranging marriages. They also provided material and emotional support during legal disputes, and offered material and emotional support during pregnancy and childbirth” (197).

young and incorrectly calling on official rather than unofficial avenues of power – I will illustrate how the guidance of her “very friends” would prove invaluable for mitigating damages, navigating the unwritten practices of the court, and advancing the Lisle family’s interests.<sup>98</sup>

## The Preferment Project

For upwardly mobile families, marriage and placement at court were two routes that offered significant rewards, but the pursuit of such placements, whether for men or women, was difficult and time-consuming.<sup>99</sup> Placing a daughter at court in the position of Maid-of-Honour or Lady-in-Waiting would increase a family’s proximity to the royal ear and often provided that family with an increase in status through prestigious posts, money, land, and gifts from the king.<sup>100</sup> Being privy to conversations in the private halls of royal palaces or engaging in face-to-face contact with the king was an avenue for women to obtain unofficial power. Moreover, court positions were a boon for the young women themselves, supplying them with a “non-familial source of income, perks such as clothing, livery, and living accommodations, and upon retiring or leaving the court. . . receiving an annuity or pension making them financially secure in the future” (*Early Aristocratic Women* 210).<sup>101</sup> A court position was often more lucrative than a prestigious

<sup>98</sup> Husee uses the term “very friends” in a letter he writes to Honor. This letter will be examined later in the chapter.

<sup>99</sup> Although all power emanated from the King, there were two focuses of influence [in the Henrician court]: the administration, which centred on the Privy Council, and Henry’s household or Court, which travelled with him wherever he went. The first axis of power was official but distant, open only to men, based in Westminster and focused on policies and administration. The second site of power was unofficial but intimate, open to men and women and based on the influence of individuals who used their close proximity to the king to advocate for their personal interests. Domestically the court was the residence of the king and queen, a suitable place for young girls to serve the royal couple, but politically it was a source of power, a site of council meetings, formal audiences, diplomatic exchanges, and the place for administering the crown’s patronage. Through pursuing a position for a daughter, a family could gain great political influence. See David Starkey *The English Court*, Stephen Medcalf, “The Age of the Household”, John Fortescue, D.A. L. Morgan, G. R. Elton, and David Loades, *The Tudor Court*.

<sup>100</sup> See Ch. 5 of Shulamith Shahar; see also chapter 3 of H.S. Bennett 44.

<sup>101</sup> See Harris and Denny; both claim court positions gave advantageous opportunities for families. I will refer to *English Aristocratic Women* as *EAW* from this point forward.

marriage, but the one did not preclude the other, and the majority of women who held court positions eventually married.<sup>102</sup>

Most of the prestigious families of the Tudor period sought such positions for their daughters: the Boleyns, the Seymours, and the Greys all placed their daughters in court positions and eventually married them to influential and powerful men.<sup>103</sup> Given Henry's well-known susceptibility to young women's charms, placing a daughter in his proximity was a gamble worth taking; after all, both Anne Boleyn and Jane Seymour became queen. As James Daybell argues, "in the political system of early modern England preferment and favour rested on personal relations with the monarch, [and] government officials"; thus, a daughter's placement with the queen had incalculable benefits: favour and prestige for the family and a more financially secure future for a daughter (2006, 160).<sup>104</sup> Lady Lisle's second marriage to Lord Lisle placed her and her children in the realm of the aristocracy, and she used this elevation of status to groom her daughters to fit in with the upper echelons of society and gain positions at court. In order to obtain these positions, Lady Lisle would have to understand the currency of the time, what attributes were absolutely essential for her daughters to have, and how she might best train them for these positions while being stationed in Calais.

<sup>102</sup> In their studies, Starkey, Gunn and Goff did little to show the importance of women's service in the royal household and for the most part ignored them or simply viewed them as having very little impact at the court. See Starkey, *English Court from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* 1-7 & 71-118; Steven J. Gunn "The Courtiers of Henry VIII" 35-36; and Lady Cecilie Goff.

<sup>103</sup> See David Starkey, *The Reign of Henry VIII*; Eric Ives (5); and Leanda De Lisle.

<sup>104</sup> Barbara Harris states "virtually all those who held office in the royal household married before, during, or after their appointments" (*E.A.W.* 210).

## Calais and All Things French

Calais was a strategic post for the Lisles, given Henry's estimation of its international links.<sup>105</sup> Calais' distance from London was offset to some extent by its links to the French aristocracy: continental networks could offer lucrative opportunities for

<sup>105</sup> Historian Glenn Richardson notes that, from the beginning of his reign, "Henry VIII's principal personal desire was for international renown" and the strategic land of Calais was one possible means to achieve such recognition (Currin 7). Susan Doran argues that the conduct of relations with France was of fundamental importance to Henry VIII and came before all else in the field of foreign policy (Richardson 45). Henry's ambition focused primarily on winning territory in France or, if that proved impractical, then at least commanding the respect of the French king, Francis I, either through war, or through staged events and connections that would cement Henry's position as a major player in the international community. The Venetian ambassador Giovanni Michele reported that, without Calais, the English "would not only be shut out from the continent but from the commerce and intercourse of the world" (Nichols XXV). For Henry, having a foothold in the larger world was crucial, so, as Richardson notes "Calais was of great value to England both as a centre for diplomacy and as a military base" and to a King who was intent on being an international player, it provided him with a connection to the French King, and thus part of the continental world (8). As an English bastion in continental Europe, Calais needed to be managed by a trusted associate, so, when Henry VIII, in 1533, appointed his bastard uncle, Lord Lisle, to the position of Deputy of Calais, it was seen by the Lisles as a great boon.

those who were shrewd enough to utilize them.<sup>106</sup> All persons of importance were sent abroad on diplomatic missions, and these individuals would be housed, or at least welcomed, by Lord and Lady Lisle, as Calais was the starting point for all English international travel by land. This allowed for Lady Lisle's children not only to meet the upper echelon of English and French society, but also to have the opportunity to see and be seen, thus increasing their chances of lucrative marriages or positions.

France and all things French were the rage at Henry's court; therefore, any family intent on upward mobility would need to train their daughters in French language and etiquette.<sup>107</sup> Aristocratic families like the Boleyns capitalized Henry's obsession by sending their daughter Anne, at the age of twelve, to the household of the French

<sup>106</sup> The Lisle position in Calais offered both advantages and disadvantages to a family intent on upward mobility. It was advantageous in that it was a prestigious post located on the continent in what is today France. Twenty-six miles from the port of Dover, it provided the fastest way to transit from London to the Continent. During the reign of Henry VIII Calais was important, not so much as a defensive post to protect England, but because it was strategically placed between the French and Imperial territories, allowing Henry to join forces with either side should he so chose. Although it was prestigious to become the Deputy of Calais, the appointment also came with a good deal of internal strife—"personal and private jealousies, local and official feuds, and petty squabbles that were the running accompaniment of the task of governing a frontier town" (Byrne, *Abridged* 13). Calais's isolation from the English court was an additional difficulty. Henry VIII was the centre of the court and all power emanated from him; therefore seeking his favour from across the channel was a challenge. Richardson argues, "In a political system where royal approval was the mainspring of the patronage machinery, but where the king himself was not always easy to find, free access to him was highly prized" (152). In some situations, of course, geographical distance may have worked to their advantage. Being far from the court meant that the Lisles were not under the ever-watchful eyes of Henry and his courtiers, meaning there was more freedom from social strictures. This lack of a critical eye may not have been important to Lord Lisle (although with his poor business sense and lax governing style, it may have helped him avoid censure), but it may actually have aided Lady Lisle in her many projects. Since Lady Lisle was the main motivational force in the Lisle partnership, the lack of scrutiny may have allowed her to ignore many of the formal dictates of the patriarchal court, giving her room to manoeuvre through and around the socio-political world that was generally off limits to women. Consequently, Calais, the frontier town with its mixture of French and English, radicals and reformers, and its stew of ideologies and ideas, may have opened up opportunities for Lady Lisle to cross boundaries without being chastised. This autonomy allowed her to delve wholeheartedly into the family and household business, but even more importantly the political, social and economic world of Calais.

<sup>107</sup> For French influence on the English court and culture see Starkey, *The Reign of Henry VIII*; Ives (5-6); Denny (5-8); Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn* (6-9); Harris, *E.A.W.*; Cavendish (29).

Queen, Claude, the first wife of Francis I, for finishing.<sup>108</sup> Not only were all things French fashionable, but there were also many links between England and France that lent importance to the Calais posting. Henry's sister Mary had been France's queen; Henry's new queen, Anne Boleyn, had been brought up in the French court; and his bastard son, the Duke of Richmond, had spent several months in France finishing his courtly education.<sup>109</sup>

Lady Lisle was quick to take advantage of her proximity to France, using it to establish a foundation to network with other families.<sup>110</sup> It was common at this time for aristocratic children to go to school abroad, or to spend time in the household of another noble family being instructed in proper behaviour – correct forms of address, table manners, public conduct and other social graces. She was quick to appreciate the unique opportunity offered by residence in Calais and Arthur's position there as Deputy. In 1534, Lady Lisle's son James (the youngest Basset child from her first marriage), was sent to school in Paris at the College de Calvi under the protection of Guillaume Poyer, the president of the Parlement de Paris, whom Lord Lisle had met as part of a French embassy. Her other son, George, went to Saint Omer in 1536 to study French with a priest-schoolmaster.<sup>111</sup> Lady Lisle set out to place her daughters with various French aristocratic families as a way of establishing them in the Queen's retinue. If a young woman was to gain such a vital position in the court of Henry the VIII, she would need to be an accomplished individual who could speak French, move with grace, ride and hunt,

<sup>108</sup> Anne would stay for almost nine years, learning French, continental manners, and courtly skills such as dancing, polite conversation, and music – all in order to be prepared for a possible English court position.

<sup>109</sup> See Leanda De Lisle for a full explanation of the various young women sent for training in France. See also Malfatti; Ives (6-7), Denny (37-38) and Friedman (50). David Potter suggests that the English nobility were no longer bilingual. Since French began to emerge as a key international vernacular in the sixteenth century, it became more crucial for the nobility to train their children in the French language (Potter 205).

<sup>110</sup> See Linda Pollock, *Forgotten Children: Parent-Child Relations from 1500-1900* ch. 7; also see Kertzer and Barbagli. Both show that it was common for children of the elite to spend time in the service of another noble so as to build up future patronage networks and be properly instructed in gentility.

<sup>111</sup> See Potter (201-07); see also *LL* Vol. 5-- letters 553-54, 559-60, 563, which focus on James's time in Paris.

socialize with courtly etiquette and, most importantly, model a Francophile's ideal of aristocratic feminine beauty.<sup>112</sup>

Barbara Harris argues that physical beauty and presentation were a type of currency; they were a "young woman's primary qualification" for winning an appointment as a Maid-of-Honour at court, because appearance was crucial to the aura of the opulent world of the court. Under Henry VIII, the growth of a more elaborate and sophisticated court culture occurred, imitating France: elaborate feasts, state ceremonies, and masques were put on to display the King's magnificence. The chronicler Edward Hall cites many instances where the loveliness of the ladies of court impressed dignitaries. He describes how Henry the VIII, upon taking Anne Boleyn to meet the French King, Francis I, "removes the masks from the female maskers to show the ladies' beauty to the king and court."<sup>113</sup> Clearly, the court women's beauty was a sign of Henry's prestige.<sup>114</sup> International events like the Field of Cloth of Gold were a chance to add to the King's prestige through jousting and games, and although the tournament was officially a site of male prowess and competition, "unofficially" the ladies were expected, through their beauty, to embody the excellence of the court and to win favour for their king (Ives 39). In June of 1520, prior to Henry the VIII arriving at this event just outside of Calais, Richard Wingfield, his ambassador to France, wrote:

<sup>112</sup> A position in the Queen's inner circle gave an individual regular access to the private apartment where one could glean important information. In Elizabeth I's reign, Maids of Honour and Ladies-in-Waiting could expect to be "paid for a tip-off about the queen's mood, so that petitioners knew when to approach her to ask for favours. Ladies of the inner circle could also try to persuade the queen to grant private audiences to certain individuals, or simply mention someone's name in the royal presence at the right time" (Sims 6). Also see Pollock, *Family Life in Early Modern Times 1500-1789*.

<sup>113</sup> Anne Boleyn's family sent her to the French Court in 1522; she returned so refined and "French" that one observer stated he "would never have taken her for an Englishwoman but for a French woman": she was almost immediately granted a position as a Maid-of-Honour and eventually moved on to marry the King. See Paul Friedman, *Anne Boleyn*, 2 Vols. Macmillan, 1834. pp. 11, 321.

<sup>114</sup> See Edward Hall. Henry had made his international debut as a warrior against France in 1513, but war with France was not something England wanted to be involved in at this time. Since Henry needed to stay a part of the larger international community, "competing with Francis I at events like the Field of Cloth of Gold was Henry's principal means of remaining at the heart of European affairs" (Richardson 45).

Your Grace shall also understand that the Queen here, with the King's mother, make all the search possible to bring at the assembly the fairest ladies and demoiselles that may be found. I hope at the least, Sir, that the Queen's Grace shall bring such in her band, that the visage of England, which hath always had the praise, shall not at this time lose the same.<sup>115</sup>

In other words, if the French ladies were more beautiful than the English ladies, the King of England would lose face, but if the Ladies of the English Court were more attractive, Henry would gain honour. Although the Queen's retinue was of her making, the Maids and Ladies needed to be of the highest calibre so as to increase the prestige of the entire court. Lady Lisle, in deciding which daughter to prepare for such an illustrious position, would need to take into account the desires and interests of the King and Queen and her own cultural knowledge of what was in vogue.

It goes without saying, then, that Lady Lisle needed to be strategic about which daughters should be placed for training in the art of French language and culture; she must understand the currency of the court and properly assess which daughters had the greatest potential to succeed. Honor had four daughters from her first marriage: Philippa (16/17 years); Katharine (15 years); Anne (13 years); and Mary (11 years). She had to decide which of them should be placed with upper class French families, and which should remain with her in Calais. Philippa was already too old. Katharine, the second eldest, was at an appropriate age for training, but was not a purported beauty and consequently would most likely not be chosen. Sometime later, Katherine's sister Anne – after she had achieved her own position at court – wrote to her mother and implied that Katherine's plain appearance may be at the root of her inability to land a place at court. Anne wrote, "and whereas you do write to me that I should remember my sister, I have spoken to the King's Highness for her ... and his Grace said that he would have them that should be fair," the implication being that Katherine was not "fair" and would thus

<sup>115</sup> See the *State Papers* Vol. 6 (56).



never be part of the inner court circle (Vol. 6 #1653).<sup>116</sup> Anne, then, is Lady Lisle's best choice as she was at a suitable age and considered a veritable beauty. Mary, the youngest daughter, is also beautiful, so much so that Peter Mewtas, a gentleman of the King's Privy Chamber, told the King that the Lisle's youngest daughter Mary was "far fairer" than Anne, but she was quite young (Vol. 4 #899). If the King's reputation, both internationally and nationally, is partially built on the splendour of his court, Lady Lisle must provide him with an accomplished beauty; therefore, it was a strategic move for Lady Lisle to send Anne and Mary for French finishing.<sup>117</sup>

## Aristocratic French Friendships

In November of 1533 Honor Lisle sent her thirteen-year-old daughter, Anne Basset, to live with a prestigious French family, the de Riou's, at Pont Remy, where she remained for three years (Abridged 133).<sup>118</sup> Lord Arthur Lisle had met Sieur de Riou, Thybault Rouault, at the Garter embassy to the French King in 1527. The Lisles also likely met de Riou and his wife when they went to Boulogne in 1532, with the King and Anne Boleyn, to meet with Francis I; this would have given Lady Lisle ample time to inspect the family. Sieur de Riou had been a soldier and had seen service under the Constable of France. His ancestors for many generations had been distinguished servants of the French king and his grandfather had been a Marshal of France who had fought against the English. Rouault inherited the Seigneurie of Riou and some properties

<sup>116</sup> Many of the letters exchanged between Honor Lisle and the French Ladies focused on the beauty of the young girls, as attractiveness is an acknowledged currency of power. Both Anne and Mary were extolled as beauties; their French foster families raved about them and debated which girl was the prettier. Madame de Riou writes that Anne, who had been traveling with her in France, has impressed everyone who has met her and has been "esteemed very fair and of good condition" (Vol. 3, #585). Mary is also deemed beautiful; her host, Madame de Bours, claims that Mary is "beloved of all that see her" and that it makes her "a little proud that they should say she is fairer than Mistress Anne" (Vol. 3, #574). This feeling of pride of which Madame de Bours writes suggests that the French foster families also gain prestige from association with the beautiful daughters.

<sup>117</sup> See K. B. Neuschel *Word of Honor: Interpreting Noble Culture in Sixteenth Century France*; see also Neuschel's "Noble Households in the Sixteenth Century: Material Setting and Human Communities."

<sup>118</sup> It was a dangerous time to board children abroad as war had broken out in 1536 between France and the Emperor (Franco-Imperial war) and the de Riou family ended up having to move to Abbeville at one point as they felt it was not safe at home.

situated nearby in Artois, but he was a younger, relatively impoverished son. His marriage to Jeanne de Saveuse made his fortune, not simply because she had an even more distinguished lineage (she was linked to the illustrious French families of Artois and Picardy), but because her father and first husband left her endowed with land and riches. In honour and ancestry, then, the family was a close match to the Lisles, and thus appropriate for Lady Lisle to approach.<sup>119</sup> Soon after Anne's placement with the de Rious, Lady Lisle, on pilgrimage to Amiens, stopped at Pont-Remy to visit Madame de Riou. It was probably at this time that she made arrangements for her eleven-year-old daughter Mary to be placed with the de Bour family – relations of the de Rious, who lived nearby at Castle de Bours, in Artois, near the town of Abbeville.<sup>120</sup>

The placement of her daughters with these illustrious French families was a way not only to “finish” her daughters, but to create ties of mutual obligation between the two families. These French families provided food and accommodations for the girls, but more importantly, they provided training, including French language and writing, manners, proper decorum and music lessons. In short, they were the “finishing school” for the Lisle daughters. The Lisles paid for their clothing and pocket money, but their general upkeep depended on their host families. Lady Lisle, unlike Lord Arthur, kept close track of expenditures and tried to ensure that her daughters were thrifty with their money and dedicated to their studies. Madame de Riou writes that Lady Lisle's servant told her, “I should take note how the gentlewoman your daughter doth employ the three crowns you have sent her. I ensure you, she doth not squander them, but employeth them right honestly for her small needs and in good works, and should I perceive that she doth otherwise I would advertise you thereof” (Vol. 3 # 593). Madame de Riou approves Anne's spending habits and articulates that she, as a responsible host, would see it as her duty to report otherwise. The daughters' finishing is a family investment and

<sup>119</sup> For historical information about the French families see *Dictionnaire de la Noblesse*, Vol. 17 (754); see also *LL* Vol. 3 (133), and David Potter (201-09).

<sup>120</sup> The de Bours and de Riou families were linked through the union of Thybault de Riou's sister, Anne Rouault, who married Nicholas de Montmorency, Seigneur de Bours, in 1512. The two families lived in a concentrated area (as did the Grenville and Basset families who were concentrated in the Devon and Cornwall areas in England). Gamaches, the main area of the Rouault family, lies on the “River k'Heu, twelve miles inland from Le Treport and about twenty miles south of Abbeville and Pont de Remy” See Potter (208-211) and *LL* Vol. 3 (136-7).

Lady Lisle's admonition to her daughters (as a practical Tudor woman engaged in the economy of obligation), is to "please my lord and lady, and so doing I think, the cost of you well employed" (Vol. 3 #602). The daughters play a part in this economy; if they become polished individuals, well-versed in French culture and cherished by the French aristocratic families, they will have been a successful investment of the Lisle time, effort, and money. The concept that the entire family should work together to achieve upward mobility was rooted in the notion of service, a concept that was fundamental to Tudor society.<sup>121</sup>

At one point Lady Lisle writes to Madame De Bours about her concern that Mary is perhaps not being diligent with her studies: "I am content that she play when ye shall command her; but I fear she shall give her mind too much to play. It will come soon enough to her. I would she should ply her work, the lute and virginals, but I refer it all to your goodness" (Vol. 3 #583a). Although the French ladies were in charge of the girls' education, Lady Lisle made sure she was involved in all aspects of their lives, no matter how great the distance. She says she trusts Madame de Bours to oversee Mary's education, but, by letting her know that she feels her daughter is focused "too much to play," she sends a warning that idle daughters are not to be tolerated – they must apply themselves to their training. Another obligation of fosterage beyond academic schooling was that of mutually advantageous association, the introduction of the foster girls to important members of French society. When Eleanor, the French king's second wife,

<sup>121</sup> "Hollybrand defines service as "the social contract, inherited by the sixteenth century from medieval thought, which gives security to the individual by recognizing the concept of order that places all men as equals, superiors, or inferiors. Tudor social system was still basically feudal, hierarchical and patriarchal at this time, and therefore the idea of 'service' was central to it. Service was at once education for life and a way of life". The system says to the boy or girl, "serve your apprenticeship to the condition to which you have been born, learn well you may do better service to your prince, your country, the commonwealth, and help your parents, yourself, and all yours" (*LL* 2). Integral to this idea was the "assumption that personal service to those of noble or gentle birth should be given by their social equals, with the duke's son page to the prince, and the gentleman's son attendant upon the knight, or the esquire" (Hollyband 5). So that besides waiting upon them at the table and helping them to dress, writing letters for them, and being entrusted with confidential business, these gentlemen-serving men – and also the waiting gentlewomen – should be their employers' "companions in their pleasures, and organize the amusements and sports, and be able to take part in them. They have the same tastes and accomplishments: if they have been put to service as children they will have been educated with the children of the house" (Perkins 3). See Hollyband and William Perkins, *A Treatise of Vocations*, 2. Vol. Nos. 1, 2a, 3.

came to Abbeville, Madame de Bours was in mourning for her recently deceased husband and was therefore unable to participate in social activities. Still, mindful of her duty, Madame de Bours arranges for her sister-in-law to take the Lisle girls for an audience with the Queen. Mary writes her mother, “the Queen hath seen the gentlewoman your daughter, and doth find her to her good liking” (Vol. 3 #618 #619). This is no trivial comment; the fact that the Queen seemed pleased with Mary could open up avenues of advantage for the family. The fact that Madame de Bours attended to this matter in a time of mourning demonstrates that she was well aware of its import for the Lisles, and consequently of its mirrored value, in social debt, for her own family.

## Friendship and Favour

It is easy to see the benefits of the fosterage for the Lisle family, but, in spite of the accrual of social debts, the benefits for the de Bours and de Rious are less obvious. Letter after letter is exchanged between the French Madames and Lady Lisle articulating all the pleasant things that have been exchanged between them. Madame De Bours writes, “I thank you for the lanner and the greyhound that it hath pleased you to send me ... ensuring you Madame, that if it be in my power to do you pleasure or service I shall employ myself therein as heartily as any woman in the world. I send you a little pot of preserves of cherries. I understand that ye have non in your parts” (Vol. 3 # 583). The exchange of gifts illustrates the economy that has been established denoting mutual obligation. Madame de Bour stresses that she will provide “pleasure” or “service” for Honor if it is in her capabilities, with the word “pleasure” alluding to something that is done to fulfil fanciful desires, while “service” implies the addressing of real needs; each is part of the economy of obligation. The “pot of preserves of cherries” is a calculated gift; because Lady Lisle has “non in [her] parts” the rarity of the object increases its worth, and by sending this gift she obliges Lady Lisle to respond on a similar level. For her part, Lady Lisle sends pins, sleeves, cypress and cloth, all relatively trivial, but also sends dogs and goshawks (items that are valuable and difficult to get), thus cementing the bonds of friendship in a precisely calibrated reciprocity (Vol. 3 # 574a, 581). But it is in the less tangible exchanges that the letters allow us to examine how, over time, a connection that shifts beyond that of mere duty and to a more concrete alliance between

friends that offers the intangible gains of an economy of obligation – favour and friendship. Even if this currency is never “exchanged,” so to speak, bonds of obligation provide value in the form of a kind of insurance, insofar as they be called upon as needed, not unlike how debts can be collected or unused landholdings sold in the event of unforeseen financial difficulties. For the de Bours and de Rioux, attending to the Lisle daughters was a means to secure social capital; this explains why the exchanges between the families were relatively symmetrical: it was understood that the ultimate “gift” would remain unreciprocated.

Doing “service” is established in the correspondence both covertly and overtly. When Anne first arrives at the de Riou residence, Madame de Riou writes to the Lisles that she has arrived safely and that she

shall cherish her, entreating her every way as she were my natural daughter. And as for the recompense of which it hath pleased you to write to me, neither Monsieur de Riou nor myself desire non other Recompense saving only your friendship and good favour. (Vol. 3 #570)

The letter not only establishes that the family sees it as an honour to foster Anne but that, rather than money, it is the Lisle’s “friendship” and “good favour” that matters – that is, the promise of future reciprocity and mutual benefit. Madame de Bours’s letters articulate similar ideas of reciprocity, couched in the language of honour and duty. She writes, “I humbly thank you for the honorable proposal which you make me. Unworthy as I am, I would fain be so happy as to be able to do your service” (Vol. 3 #574). She calls the fosterage of Mary an “honorable proposal” (in other words, a social rather than an economic exchange) and uses the script of deference (or “unworth”) to emphasize *her* debt to the Lisles rather than the Lisles’s debt to her family, a rhetorical move that accords perfectly with the logic of mutual obligation. The trope of “unworthiness” reinforces the deferential and almost servile position of the de Bour family, yet actually serves to remind the Lisles they are helping them without (yet) being reciprocated in kind.

The word “friend” or “friendship” is often used in these letters to illustrate a community of influence: an alliance of women. As Diana O’Hara argues, friendships or the word ‘friends’ can be understood as “kinship groups, both biological and fictive

groups, that provided a family with advantageous benefits” – counsel, advice, support, assistance, intercession (9).<sup>122</sup> As well, suggests Lorna Hutson, friendship was a code of “faithfulness assured by acts of hospitality and the circulation of gifts through the family and its allies, to that of an affective relationship which might be generated, even between strangers, through emotionally persuasive communication” (2-3). The epistolary language of favour, with its promise of reciprocal benefits, was developed between the families over time, initially by an exchange of letters, then by small gifts and visits, until eventually the French and English families become united by a bond more similar to kin than to acquaintances. Madame de Riou does not need financial compensation because it is tacitly understood that, in the future, greater compensations will be sought, such as intercession, introduction, even counsel.

However, it would be a mistake to interpret these social bonds as purely Machiavellian or cynical. The letters exchanged between the French families and Lady Lisle tell us that the girls did indeed establish intimate relationships with their foster families, that the alliance between the families was not solely out of duty but based on affection as well. The word “daughters,” used by both Madame de Riou and Madame de Bours is intriguing, considering that both had children of their own, girls and boys, and yet when they write to Lady Lisle they indicate the attachment that has developed between them and their charges by calling them “daughters.” “I shall cherish [Anne], entreating her every ways as she were *my natural daughter*” (Vol. 3, #570), says Madame de Riou; similarly, Madame de Bours states, “I love [Mary] as if she were *my daughter*” (Vol. 3 #86, #574). The implication is that Lady Lisle’s daughters are as special to them as their own kin; Madame de Riou even refers to Anne as “my natural daughter,” not simply one that is adopted or fostered, but one that is literally her flesh and blood. The families may not be connected by blood, but their care is that of kinfolk, and thus the debt between the families is greater than that between mere friends. Mary Basset writes to her sister Philippa that she is so happy with her foster family that she would be “content never to return to England” if it were not for the fact that she would miss her mother so much (Vol. 3 #588). Anne writes to her mother that “had I been their daughter they [the de Rioux] could not better nor more greatly have entreated” me (Vol.

<sup>122</sup> See O’Hara, “ruled by my friends”, 9-41.

3 #571). There appears to be genuine affection shared between the French families and the Lisle girls, something that perhaps shows Honor Lisle's skill in balancing her daughters' needs with the social and political concerns of the family. The reality of affection, although difficult to trace, could lead to bonds that are multi-generational – not solely between Lady Lisle and the French Madames, but between the children of both families. More importantly, it suggests that the use of letters, gifts, and visits worked to create familial cross-cultural bonds that could be called upon in time of need. Indeed, the idea of future obligation is crucial, and the French families will at some point call upon the Lisles to return the favour. After all, that is how families tend to operate.

In September 1537, we see a concrete example of the reciprocity of these connections. Antoinette de Saveuses, a nun at Dunkirk, and cousin to Madame Jeanne de Riou, had struck up an epistolary friendship with Honor Lisle. The two women initially began their correspondence over the matter of nightcaps; Lady Lisle desires them in copious numbers, and Antoinette sends her copious amounts. They discuss the fabrics used, flaws in the making, cost, and more importantly, the lives of their kin and friends. They exchange over forty four letters, as a result of which Lady Lisle becomes one of Antoinette's favourite people, "I ensure you, Madame," writes Antoinette, "you are whom I have nearest my heart, you and Madame de Riou, of all those that I love living upon earth" (Vol. 3 177). Perhaps it is this very sentiment, that Lady Lisle is nearest to her heart, that has her petition for assistance, but she also does so because of Lady Lisle's position as an aristocratic woman of influence. Mac Caffrey suggests that there was a strong expectation that noble women would help social inferiors, dependants, acquaintances, friends and kin, and that to "write on behalf of a suitor was to fulfil one's obligation and with less exertion than through dispensing more material forms of patronage." She also argues that when they acted in this way, "women were concerned with personal and family reputation within a wider community of honour" (qtd. Daybell 1991). Thus, Antoinette's letter to Lady Lisle petitioning on behalf of another relative draws heavily on ideas of friendship, reciprocity and noble obligation.

## Reciprocity

In mid-August of 1537, the subject matter changes from night caps to secrets.

Antoinette writes:

Madame, my Lady Deputy, as humbly as I may recommend me effectually to your good grace, humbly beseeching you, Madame, to be recommended to the good grace of my Lord Deputy...My good lady, if you could understand my letters I would write to you of certain secret matters to have some little part of your good counsel; but because, Madame, I cannot either write or speak your language, so it is, Madame, that I most humbly beg you that it may please you to comment to God in your devout orisons of the necessity of certain personages to whom I ensure you, Madame, did the case require it, you would desire to do service and honour. (Vol. 3 #604)

Her letter begins with the language of deference (of *humilitie* and *entreatie*), that of an inferior petitioning a superior. Antoinette, the lowly nun, beseeches and begs for Madame Deputy's assistance. By addressing her as "my Lady Deputy," she pays Honor due reverence as the (unofficial) Lady Deputy of Calais, implying at the same time that Lady Lisle is, in a sense, Antoinette's Deputy, and should fulfil her obligation to Antoinette, just as Lord Lisle should oversee and care for his people in his position as Deputy.<sup>123</sup> Antoinette's language thus addresses Lady Lisle as a kind of "unofficial official." By reiterating the term "Madame" five times, she calls on Lady Lisle not simply as my Lady Deputy, but as an upper-class woman of considerable power, one who can assist her in her time of need. She flatters Lady Lisle by requesting "some little part of [her] good counsel," and by asking her to use her prayers (orisons) to petition God. Antoinette furthers the accolade by elevating Lady Lisle to, in effect, Antoinette's intercessor with God.

Antoinette also uses something of a ruse by alluding to "secret matters" without informing Honor Lisle what these matters are, but rather claiming that if Lady Lisle knew about them she would "desire to do service and honour." Clearly, she hopes to entice

<sup>123</sup> For an explanation and details of variety of social scripts see Angel Day (101-2); for a full discussion of Day's epistolary scripts, see Magnuson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*, pp.80-88.



Lady Lisle – who trades in information – to inquiry, making her curious enough to petition for details and thus commit herself to Antionette’s service. If Lady Lisle does ask for details then her assistance will be assured and Antoinette will have achieved her ends. The good Soeur claims that she cannot give details of this secret because she “cannot write or speak [Honor’s] language,” but this is transparently false as they have already exchanged numerous letters with little or no language barrier. Scribes may have written the letters and read them aloud to the ladies but the women have, prior to the exchange of this letter, communicated with little difficulty. In “secret matters,” however, communication becomes problematic. This is a very calculated manoeuvre as it allows Antoinette to whet Honor’s appetite for details and to utilize the trope of “the lowly” woman who is in need of assistance. Antoinette appears to give Lady Lisle the option of remaining uninvolved, yet the notion of service and the very real obligations of reciprocity work to ensure that Lady Lisle will respond, that she will involve herself and render what assistance she can. So far, Antoinette implies that assistance will be restricted to “counsel,” but if matters were to escalate in severity, Lady Lisle would not easily be able to turn down a request for more assistance.

We see in Soeur Antoinette’s reply to Lady Lisle’s letter, dated Sept 10, 1537, that Honor has accepted the offer: “Madam, my Lady Deputy ... I have received your letter ... you have written to desire me briefly to declare to you the secrets of these poor people, and that you will most gladly mediate therein, for the which your benignity most humbly with all my heart I thank you” (Vol. 3 #604). Lady Lisle has already promised to mediate on Antoinette’s behalf. Antoinette’s acceptance of Honor’s help, and her mention of Lady Lisle’s “benignity” (her “manifestation of kindness and generosity” *OED*), shows her ratifying Lady Lisle’s status as a woman of influence. Likewise, Honor’s agreement to mediate illustrates her acceptance of the reciprocal nature of the relationship: she is who she says she is, and who others believe her to be – Madame Deputy, an aristocratic woman of power.

It is not until Antoinette’s third letter that she explains the “certain secret matters” with which she needs assistance. These matters concern Jeanne de Saveuse, her cousin, and the host of Lady Lisle’s daughter Anne. Reading Antoinette’s tale of woe, we are privy to the work of a woman of some literary skill, who is capable of painting a vivid

portrait of a woman trapped in miserable conditions with nowhere to turn.<sup>124</sup> Soeur Antoinette explains that Madame de Riou (prior to her marriage to Sieur de Riou), was a rich, established, aristocratic woman. Upon the death of her father, she inherited a yearly income of 15,000 livres, and after her first husband died she inherited the Pont-Remy property. Madame de Riou's troubles began when Madame de Bours (Mary Basset's caretaker and the sister of Sieur de Riou), "silly tried to persuade the good widow" to marry her own impoverished brother; it is this marriage that causes such woe. Antoinette claims that "after getting their evil counsel put into execution" all they want is "nothing but enjoyment of her property" (Vol. 6 #604). Antoinette conjures up a nefarious conspiracy of two individuals, brother and sister, who are trying to divest her cousin of her rightful inheritance. She details all the intimate wrongdoings committed against her cousin, how her cousin sees "pitifully wasted the goodly estate that the late gentleman her father left her – so much so, Madame that she made her moan to me that during these twelve years that she had been married to him, he has diminished her inheritance by the value of more than 50,000 livres" (Vol. 6 #604). Antoinette stresses to Lady Lisle that since the money comes from Jeanne's father, the husband is abusing an entire inheritance; perhaps she hopes thereby to touch a chord with Lady Lisle, one of a long line of landowning Grenvilles.

Antoinette provides a vivid description of how Sieur de Riou "broke into a coffer of her late father's which was full of fine vessels, the which he placed on a table and staked at dice to the value of 14,000 livres in one afternoon; not to mention his other follies and the great gifts which he hath made to his own near relations" (Vol. 6 #604). She composes a narrative for a female audience that details a litany of male abuses. Sieur de Riou gambles, destroys a familial heritage, and worse, has no regard for his own children; it is, she says, "as if he wished totally to destroy likewise his own children, of whom he makes as little account as if they were nothing to him. She doth consider the great charge of her six little children, of whom the eldest is not more than ten years old, and that all that they can have cometh from her" (Vol.3 #604). By stressing the role

<sup>124</sup> Erasmus recommended that writers should create images that evoked a reader's pity as a way of enhancing an argument and persuading an individual – "the deepest emotions will be stirred if one gives a vivid picture of the consequences" (81). See Erasmus, *De Conscribendis Epistolis*, 81.

of motherhood, and her cousin's attempt to protect her children, Antoinette emphasizes the mutual connection between Lady Lisle, an active loving mother, and her cousin, Madame de Riou. If Lady Lisle's children were threatened she would defend them, and since Anne is living with the de Riou family, she too, in a sense, is vulnerable, or so it is implied. To add to the poignancy of the tale, Antoinette claims that Jeanne de Riou has been rejected by her own relatives because she married without their approval. Since she can receive from her own kin "neither loyalty nor the aid of good counsel in this cause" she is truly a woman alone, in desperate need of a champion with more influence than Antoinette has herself (Vol. 3 #604). If Honor can be moved to empathize with this female experience, Antoinette may have fashioned an epistolary narrative of great influence that will work to assist Madame de Riou, to whom Lisle is already indebted.

Lady Lisle's response to her letter must have been speedy, as Antoinette's initial request is dated September 10<sup>th</sup> and her next letter to Lady Lisle is dated October 27<sup>th</sup>. We do not have Honor Lisle's letter as it would have remained with Antoinette, but in it she clearly offered her assistance, and through Antoinette's recap of Honor's letter we are made aware of what she has pledged to do. She writes, "I have received your letter ... by the contents of which I perceive that of your grace you have thought good, Madame, to make known to me your intention to put the case of Madame de Riou before the King of France for remedy" (Vol. 3 #606). There appears to have been little hesitation about interceding: Lady Lisle has informed Antoinette that she will advocate for her relative. Lady Lisle is confident of her own influence and feels she has the status and authority to write to the French King, a man who is not her sovereign, who is not her blood kin, or even her friend. Yet as an important aristocratic woman who knows her own worth, she will attempt to extend her influence and effect change.<sup>125</sup>

Antoinette is so sure that remedial action will ensue from Lady Lisle's intervention that, in her next letter, she places a caveat on the parameters of the actions. She writes,

<sup>125</sup> Daybell argues that female petitioners were not restricted to working through family, but could approach government officials on their own (Tudor 234). This observation offers an alternative interpretation of women's political involvement one that goes against the idea that women only worked through male family members. See Helen Payne, "Aristocratic Women, Power, Patronage and Family Networks at the Jacobean Court, 1603-1625". Also see Pauline Croft, *Patronage, Culture and Power: The Early Cecil's 1558-1612* (265-83).

above all, Madame, most humbly I beseech you, inasmuch as you desire to do pleasure to my said Lady de Riou, that this affair may be so discreetly set forth, that the purpose thereof may never be apparent; and I fear lest Monsieur de Riou may perceive that the King's rebuke is not to his advantage but hers, But do that sort as my confidence in you is, Madame, that you will so work therein far better than I can express it to you (Vol. 3 #606).

This letter has a slightly different tone than the first. Although it still uses the language of petitioning (she "beseeches" Lady Lisle), there is also a tone of direction underscoring the language (one that implies she is now an equal, a friend, not simply an acquaintance), suggesting some boundaries for Lady Lisle's intermediation, chiefly that this "affair may be so discreetly set forth." There are two probable reasons that Antoinette sets parameters: either Antoinette is worried Madame de Riou might suffer for her complaints at her husband's hand should he discover their source, or Madame de Riou does not know Antoinette has petitioned her good friend my Lady Deputy, and might become angry with her cousin for involving others. If the King addresses his servant Sieur de Riou about his wastrel habits and the effect on his family, and suggests strongly that he mend his ways, Madame de Riou could suffer retribution from her husband. But, if the King handles it discreetly, not mentioning the involvement of others, couching his suggestions as a concern for these aristocratic children, Madame de Riou should not suffer any backlash. Antoinette probably need not have fretted over Lady Lisle's discretion, since it would be crucial even for Lady Lisle; her daughter Anne was living in the de Riou household, and if Sieur de Riou found out Lady Lisle was interfering he could send her daughter home, upsetting the ties so carefully fostered.

We hear nothing of this matter for many months, but then on May 6, 1538 Antoinette writes to Lady Lisle asking if she interceded with the King on her behalf. She wonders if Lady Lisle "[oo]k the pains to advertise the English ambassador, as before of your grace you did promise me, to alleviate a little by some good means the distress of Madame de Riou" (Vol. 3 # 608). This is, in fact, the first we learn that Lady Lisle had "promised" she would have the English ambassador speak to the French king on behalf of Madame de Riou. Seour Antoinette is only curious to know if Honor made good on her promise because she has heard rumours of great changes in Monsieur de Riou's behaviour. A woman who was at Pont-Remy has told Antoinette, that "Monsieur de Riou

now comports himself altogether in another manner from that which formerly he did, and that he hath now great patience with Madame ... and to show himself entirely full of love for his little children” (Vol.3 #306). This abrupt change in his behaviour could be the result of Lady Lisle’s intercession; Antoinette tells Lady Lisle “if you have been in anywise the cause thereof, Madame, I most humbly thank you for it” (Vol. 3 #608). Seour Antoinette does not know with certainty if Lady Lisle has caused this action – “if you have been ... the cause” – but she pays her homage by giving her credit for this turn of events; she believes Honor has worked on her behalf and achieved results.

## **Court Networks**

Exerting influence and achieving results seems to be an area of distinction for Lady Lisle. Her international networks provided her daughters with knowledge of French culture, the ability to speak and write French, and access to elite families of the French aristocracy. Honor should be pleased that “the cost of [her daughters was] well employed” (Vol. 3# 602). The letters exchanged between Lady Lisle and the aristocratic French ladies document the assumption of reciprocity, and illustrate international female alliances that are an example of a mutually beneficial cross-border relation of obligation. These alliances were the preparatory stage to Lady Lisle’s preferment project and this project increased in intensity when Lady Lisle received word from John Husee that since “Your ladyship hath two nieces with the Queen” (Vol. 4. #847) it was perhaps time to utilize this kinship network on a project with higher stakes. Lady Lisle instantly understands that if her niece Mary Arundell and Lord Lisle’s cousin’s daughter, Eleanor, Lady Rutland, have obtained court positions, it is now incumbent upon Lady Lisle to use

these advantageous links, so she recalls the girls from France to begin the next stage of the preferment project, the launching of her daughters at court.<sup>126</sup>

It is here we begin to see the complex array of strategies Lady Lisle draws upon to place her daughters; again, she makes use of letters, gifts and tokens, but this time she also lobbies a group of influential court women for assistance. Through these women, and their correspondence, we will examine Lady Lisle's attempts to accrue influence and some of her miscalculations (perhaps due to her lack of experience with court protocol, or from her own headstrong nature) as she attempts to both accrue power and bring her projects to fruition. Her desire to place two daughters at court is a challenge, but as we will see her preferment project for her daughter Anne will eventually succeed, only to fall quickly by the wayside when Queen Jane Seymour dies and Anne is left without a placement (though through the beneficence of the King, Anne is reinstated). It is in her determination to achieve success for her daughter Katherine that she miscalculates and attempts to use incorrect avenues of power (official and formal ones) that could potentially fracture the interlocking court networks she has worked so hard to foster. Katherine does not achieve the coveted position of Maid-of-Honour, but through an examination of Lady Lisle's correspondence with the Court ladies we are able to see how the language of supposal and assurance is used by this influential

<sup>126</sup> Mary Arundell, the Countess of Sussex, Honor's niece, was the only daughter of Honor's sister Katherine and Sir John Arundell of Lanherne. Mary became a Maid-of-Honour in 1536, but in January of 1537 married Robert Radcliffe, the first Earl of Sussex, which elevated her to the rank of Countess. This marriage moved her out of the Maid-of-Honor position into the Queen's chamber as a Lady-in-Waiting, opening up a possible position for one of Honor's daughters (see the *DNB* for under Mary Arundell and *LL* Vol. 4 (105) for more details). Lady Eleanor Rutland was Honor's cousin by marriage and was the granddaughter of Sir John Paston and Margery Brews; she became the second wife of Thomas Manners, the first Earl of Rutland who was an influential courtier and a great favourite of the king. Lady Rutland held a senior position at court and was a valuable contact for those wishing to advance into court circles because she had served with Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn and eventually Jane Seymour. For more information see the *DNB* entry for Thomas Manners, first Earl of Rutland by M.M. Norris; also see *LL* Vol. 4 (106). In order to demonstrate how much power the Rutland family had St. Clare Byrne tells us that the Rutland Family married off two of their children in a triple marriage. The Rutland heir Henry (aged 10), married the 10 year old daughter of Lady Margaret Neville; the eldest Rutland daughter Anne married Lord Neville, the Westmorland heir; and Dorothy, the eldest Westmorland daughter, married Lord Bulbeck, the Earl of Oxford's heir. After the ceremony, the King attended the celebrations.

woman to shame her kinswoman, the Countess of Sussex, into working on behalf of her and the family.

For both men and women, pursuing a position at court was difficult and time-consuming. To begin with, there were relatively few positions: Henry VIII's Queens had about thirty to thirty-three members in their household: five to seven Ladies-in-Waiting, married women who had usually begun as Maids-of-Honour; six to eight Maids-of-Honour, of which the Queen had six to eight; and eighteen to twenty gentlewomen servants.<sup>127</sup> While Lady Lisle's daughters had been away in France, she had not been idle; she had been insinuating herself into the affections of a powerful group of court ladies who were part of the Queen's Privy Chamber: women such as mistresses Horsman and Coffin; the queen's sister-in-law, Anne, Lady Beauchamp; ladies of the Queen's Bedchamber, Lady Wallop and Mrs. Golding; and two influential noblewomen, the Countess of Salisbury, and the Marchioness of Exeter. Each and every one of these women held official positions at court, were influential aristocratic women in their own right, or were married to prominent men of the court. Much like modern-day hiring committees, the women who inhabited the inner sanctum of the Queen's Privy Chamber screened potential candidates for positions as Maids-of-Honour, Ladies-in-Waiting and gentlewomen servants. They were the gatekeepers to the Queen, and part of their job was to bring forward names of possible new candidates for positions, dissuade unsuitable candidates from applying, and advocate for favourites of their own. Ladies and gentlemen of the inner court would be inundated by requests from kin and from

<sup>127</sup> For a thorough explanation of how Maids-of-Honour were selected see Harris, *English Aristocratic Women*, pp 219-20, and for more information on their political importance see pp. 210-16, 226-28. Also, see Anne Somerset, *Ladies in Waiting*. For these positions, the route to preferment was to finish daughters with an aristocratic family (preferably in France), send a barrage of letters, gifts, and tokens of affection, enlist the backing of an interconnected group of kin, friends and servants, and apply continual pressure to those in positions of influence. If all this was perfectly done, it might enable a family to obtain a position for their daughter.

friends and it was their responsibility to ensure that only the most suitable applicants appeared before the rulers.<sup>128</sup>

As we have seen, Lady Lisle understood the importance of the economy of obligation and knew how to utilize networks to accrue favour. Although ties of obligation were ever shifting, it was the Lisle kinswomen, “my Lady Rutland” and “Mrs. Arundell”, who were most important in this venture; thus, they deserved not simply gifts, but more meaningful tokens.<sup>129</sup> We hear of these from Husee:

My Lady Rutland thanketh your ladyship for your token, and sendeth your ladyship another ... and likewise from Mrs. Arundell and Mrs. Margery ... And because your ladyship sent her [Mrs. Margery] no token, by the advice of Mrs. Arundell I gave her one in your ladyship's name, a ring of gold (Vol. 4 #863).

Tokens were gifts, but were considered much more intimate; as such, they were gifts that were politically laden. As Barbara Harris notes, “A token was not just a gift, but a far more personal belonging or treasure that was given to demonstrate the owner's special connection to the recipient” (E.A.W.265). One did not grant just anyone a token, and Lady Lisle sent them only to her influential friends and kinswomen. In fact, we know of only one case of Lady Lisle sending a token to a man, Thomas Culpepper, and only because he requested it. Honor wrote: “I do send you by this bearer two bracelets of my colours according to your desires. They be of no value to be esteemed, but only that it was your gentle request to have them; praying you to accept them, for they be the first that ever I sent to any man” (Vol. 4 # 971b). Note that Lady Lisle is clear that the tokens are of “no value,” thus subtracting from the implied intimacy of such an exchange. As well, Lady Lisle's statement that he is the first so gifted might suggest she is slightly embarrassed to be giving a man an intimate token, but that his request is something she felt obliged to fulfil as he is a friend of the family.

<sup>128</sup> Barbara Harris argues that the Queen's servants had “considerable power within the inner circle of court families.... Since the queen's ladies favoured the daughters of their friends and kin, this method of recruitment reinforced the tendency of established court families to perpetuate their power in the household” (E.A.W. 219). Also see Denny who claims that court positions allow for advantageous opportunities for families.

<sup>129</sup> According to St Clare Byrne, Lady Rutland and Lady Sussex were a monumental force in bringing about the successful advancement of Honor Lisle's daughters (Vol. 4 106).



Outside of the above exception, Lady Lisle sent tokens to women with crucial ties to power: Lady Mary, the King's daughter; Lady Beauchamp, the Queen's sister in Law; and Mrs. Coffin, lady of the Privy Chamber and wife of a senior member of the King's household. Each one was a potential ally, and in these cases the relative valueless of the tokens served as a reminder that their value lay elsewhere: in political alliance.<sup>130</sup> Husee's reports to Honor provide detailed accounts of who received what, and how they appreciated it, but more importantly, he supplies her with vital information of the goings-on at court and his attempts to assist his Lady. In one letter, he says that in her barrage of gifts and tokens, she had forgotten to gift the Queen's lady, Mrs. Margery, and failing to remember anyone of influence at the court, no matter how minor a player, could potentially damage any advancement plans. Thus, Husee makes the decision (through first seeking counsel of Honor's niece Mrs Arundell) to give Mrs. Margery a ring. Husee consulted Mrs. Arundell, because presumably, as Lady Lisle's kinswomen, she would be more committed to the Lisle project than a mere friend who would likely have rival family alliances competing for similar favour.

This consultation between Husee and a trusted kinswoman at court illustrates (as did the letters examined in Chapter One) how essential Husee was to Lady Lisle's projects, and how complex and layered the entire process of preferment was. Although Lady Lisle was very shrewd, she was not raised as an aristocrat, and subsequently was not wholly familiar with the unwritten practices of the court. This is why influential ladies, bred to the intrigues of the court, were essential in launching a successful promotion; in effect, these women could prove invaluable as guides. Which is why Lady Lisle approached Lady Margaret Pole, the Countess of Salisbury (and Arthur Lisle's cousin), to assist her with the preliminary campaign.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>130</sup> On May 23, 1537 Husee writes that "My Lady Wallop sayeth that she delivered your ladyship's tokens to my Lady Mary's grace, my Lady Sussex, my Lady Beauchamp, and Mrs. Coffin, all which hath them unto your ladyship heartily recommended" (Vol. 4 # 880).

<sup>131</sup> Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, was the daughter of George, duke of Clarence, who stood third in line to the throne. She married Sir Richard Pole in 1458 and had five children with him before he died in 1504. Hazel Pierce describes Lady Salisbury as the first woman, apart from Anne Boleyn, to hold a peerage title on her own. Due to her large annual income Lady Salisbury was "one of the top five wealthiest peers of her generation and potentially one of the most influential women in England." For more information see the Margaret Pole entry in the *DNB* by Hazel Pierce.

## Timing and Tactics

Husee writes to Lady Lisle on June 18, 1536 informing her of some of Lady Margaret's concerns:

her ladyship saith that she will do her best to obtain your ladyship's suit for Mrs. Anne; but she saith that it will ask time and leisure, and her ladyship doubts nothing but that Mrs. Anne is too young... and Mr Heneage putteth the same doubt. (Vol. 4 #863)

Although Honor had deliberated carefully before choosing her daughters, Anne and Mary, as the candidates most likely to be placed and sending these daughters to France to be finished, her reading of court protocol turned out to be flawed. Although beauty and French training were required, so too, it seems, was reaching a suitable age, and while Lady Salisbury consents to assisting Lady Lisle in her daughter Anne's suit, she believes "Mrs. Anne is too young," a judgement seconded by Mr. Heneage, a gentleman of the King's chamber. Unfortunately, her second daughter, Mary, was even younger and thus less suitable as a candidate at this time. Planning for this preferment years since, Lady Lisle had under-estimated the importance of this factor and thus had to rethink her strategy.

Husee wrote again, a little later, with more details:

As concerning your ladyship's daughter, herewith you shall receive my Lord Montague's letter [Lady Pole's son], and thereby you shall know both my lady's and his meaning. My Lord [Montague] showed me that the Queen had all her maidens pointed already, and that at the next vacation he would cause my lady his mother to do her best for the preferment of your ladyship's daughter... [I will] show Mr. Heneage that Mistress Katharine is of sufficient age, and do the best I can for her preferment. (Vol. 4 #850ii)

In short, not only is Anne's age a problem, but as with any job, if there are no vacancies there is little one can do to obtain a position. At this point Lady Lisle changes tactics: she considers launching her elder daughter Katherine at court along with Anne as she is a more appropriate age. Although Katherine may not have Anne's beauty, a package of two daughters – one polished and beautiful, the other, an appropriate age – may more easily catch the Queen's attention. Lady Lisle seems to have felt that

inundating the Queen with Lisle girls might make her more likely to choose at least one of them. It becomes clear in the second part of Husee's letter that at some point Honor had rebuked him for over-stepping his position. His response uses the language of apology, but his tone is also defensive:

And where your ladyship is sorry that I made so many speak in it; truly, madam, there spake no more in it but my Lady Sarum [Salisbury] and Mr. Heneage. Notwithstanding, I shewed my Lady Rutland that your ladyship would gladly have one of your daughters with the Queen, and so I showed Mrs. Margery and Mrs Arundell in like manner. (Vol. 4 # 850ii)

Husee seems to feel that enlisting more people to advance the project is the correct way to do things, and he protests that he only added Lady Salisbury and Mr. Heneage. Part of Husee's defensiveness may come from the fact that he did indeed speak to Ladies Rutland, Arundell and Margery, but these three were already involved in the preferment project through Lady Lisle herself; they were trusted allies in this regard. Clearly, Husee feels he is being unjustly rebuked especially as he is alone at court, acting as Honor's representative, and attempting to follow orders as best he can.<sup>132</sup> Husee continues, "And where your ladyship would make a quarrel unto me, I trust the same shall not be in anger, for I perceive the contents of your ladyship's mind" (Vol. 4 #850ii). Here Husee, by claiming that he is privy to the strategic nuances of her project, something that might have been expected from a close intimate friend but not a servant, is probably not something that Lady Lisle would be willing to acknowledge; hence her fabrication of an argument, her attempt to "make a quarrel" with him. Still, he lets her know that he will stand by his actions, comfortable that his open canvassing of court candidates is an appropriate and important strategy to use in the campaign.

Once Husee and Lady Lisle receive the news that there are no vacancies in the Queen's retinue they ease back on actively promoting the girls. However, even as Lady Lisle anxiously awaits word of an opening, she is as diligent as ever in sending gifts,

<sup>132</sup> Bailey and Stretton claim, "Individuals outside the immediate family unit such as servants and employees intervened in the lives of the families they served and influenced decisions that were made, often overstepping the established societal norms". See Joanne Bailey "Reassessing Parenting in Eighteenth-century England," and Tim Stretton "Marriage, Separation and the Common Law in England".

tokens, and letters to all the ladies, and most importantly to Queen Jane herself, who is treated to such delicacies as cherries, jellies, peascods and quails.<sup>133</sup> Eventually, on July 17, 1537, Honor receives the news that all of her hard effort will be rewarded: Husee writes that Lady Rutland and Sussex report that while waiting on the Queen, as she ate the Lisle quail, “such communication was uttered by the said ladies that her Grace made grant to have *one* of your daughters; and the matter is thus concluded that your ladyship shall send them both over, for her Grace will first see them and know their manners, fashions and conditions” (Vol. 4 #887).<sup>134</sup> It is not all that Lady Lisle desired, in that the Queen’s grant is for the placement of “one” daughter, but it is a victory considering the circumstances. Gaining this audience has taken Honor a year and a half of tireless toil, writing, gifting, flattering, networking, cajoling her kin, recruiting new friends, and monitoring connections. This audience with the Queen will now heavily depend upon the “finishing” work instilled in the girls in France, more particularly in Anne.

The girls go to court and reside in the chambers of Lady Rutland and the Countess of Sussex, and shortly after their arrival on September 15<sup>th</sup>, Lady Lisle receives word from Husee:

Mrs. Anne your daughter is sworn the Queen’s maid on Saturday last past and furnisheth the room of a yeoman-usher. I pray God send her joy. My Lady Sussex would fain have preferred both, but it would not be; so that Mrs. Katherine doth remain with the Countess of Rutland till she know further of your pleasure...And as touching any exhortations or good counsel to be given unto your daughters, your ladyship shall not need fear as long as my Lady Sussex is here; and besides that, the gentlewomen are of a good judgment and hath fine wits, so that I trust there shall be no fault found in them. (Vol. 4 #895)

Lady Lisle’s campaign to place her daughter Anne Basset succeeded. Mis-steps notwithstanding, she was correct in her calculations that the beautiful, polished Anne was the best choice. Lady Lisle’s crusade to place her second daughter, however, will not be as easy as the first, and will be fraught with tension. When she intensifies her

<sup>133</sup> See *LL* Vol. 4 # 864, 874.

<sup>134</sup> The word *one* is italicized by me as the fight to have two daughters placed over the Queen’s acceptance of one is a crucial sticking point between Honor and Husee.

campaign to compensate, she makes a serious miscalculation about who to call on for assistance.

Husee writes to Lady Lisle of Katherine's preferment:

[N]either my Lady of Sussex ne other of your Ladyship's friends cannot invent ne compass which way to advance Mrs. Katherine unto the Queen's service. What shall be done hereafter God knoweth. Your Ladyship may be well assured there shall lack no good will in them, but as touching my Lord Privy Seal's help ... I have no comfort that she shall speed that way. For it is thought by my Lady Sussex and other your Ladyship's very friends that it is no meet suit for any man to move such matters, but only for such ladies and women as be your friends. And as touching [Katherine's] preferment unto my Lady Mary, there is plain answer made that her Grace shall have no more than her number. Howbeit, at my coming unto Calais your Ladyship shall know more, for I do partly know both my Lady of Sussex and my Lady Rutland's mind in that behalf. Your ladyship may be assured if it be possible they will help to prefer her. And if not, there is no remedy but your Ladyship must be content. (Vol. 4 # 896)

The "Lady Mary" Husee mentions is of course Henry's daughter by Catherine of Aragon, showing one of the more inventive ways in which Lady Lisle's allies attempted to place Katherine in the royal household; however, these efforts were unsuccessful, as Princess Mary could not have "more than her number." Moreover, in saying that only God knows what can be done to advance Katherine's suit and that Lady Lisle may have to "be content" with an unwanted outcome, Husee is frankly emphasizing to her that she faces an extremely daunting task.

The real issue that arises in this letter, however, is that Lady Lisle must risk petitioning the Lord Privy Seal for assistance in this project. It is not entirely clear whether Lady Lisle has already approached Cromwell, but Husee's language suggests that she has alluded to doing so. Husee is firm in his rejection of this tactic, indicating that her trusted advisors at the court are not pleased by this approach: "it is thought by my Lady Sussex and other your Ladyship's very friends that it is *no meet suit for any*

*man* to move such matters but only for such Ladies and women as be your friends.”<sup>135</sup> By going over the heads of this influential group of court ladies Lady Lisle has shown a lack of respect for both the counsel of her “guides” and Court protocol, according to which only women may be wholly involved in the selection of the Queen’s women; this is their domain, and they guard it protectively. By calling on a man – and not just any man, but one who holds formal, official power, second only to the King – Lady Lisle negates the women’s networks of influence and deprives the ladies of their own sphere of power, at the same time underestimating their capacity to make her regret this impertinence. Her decision to try to pre-empt the Court ladies could suggest either that she was ignorant of the protocol or, more likely, that she did not wish to adhere to it as it did not suit her needs. Their objections to Cromwell’s involvement are likely twofold. First, the ladies feel insulted at the implied disregard of their effectiveness. Although they attempted to “invent” a novel way to advance Katherine, it had not worked, yet they identified it as the last available avenue. Secondly, the ladies may have felt antagonized. They had found Katherine a temporary placement with the Duchess of Suffolk, one that they considered advantageous, but which Lady Lisle had refused, precipitating Husee’s cautionary letter. It is intriguing that, in a society in which women were expected to know their place, Lady Lisle failed to recognize the limits of her standing relative not to powerful male officials, but to a coterie of women in charge of an informal system of power. Her misreading of courtly power dynamics, one might say, parallels scholarly

<sup>135</sup> Italics added. Honor called on influential men of the King’s Privy Chamber such as Sir John Wallop, William Coffin, and Thomas Heneage to use their influence with the Queen and King to advance her campaign for her daughter Katherine. These men belonged to the inner circle of the Court; they were either part of the administrative structure of the Queen’s (or King’s) household, or married to women who had careers within the royal household. Many of the ladies Honor networked were from the Queen’s Privy Chamber who were married to men of the King’s Chamber; thus they often worked in tandem to advance the same people. Mrs. Elizabeth Wallop, and Sir John Wallop, a diplomat and soldier, were close friends of the Lisles, as Sir John Wallop and Lord Lisle were both leading Hampshire landowners. Mistress Margaret Coffin and Sir William Coffin were both senior members of the royal household, Mrs. Margery Horseman was Mistress of the Wardrobe, and Sir Thomas Heneage held the coveted position of groom of the stool and was one of King Henry VIII’s most trusted men. This group of women and men belonged to the inner circle of the court; they had access to the King and Queen and were part of Honor’s community of networks and they often worked together towards the same project; their domain was not the same as Cromwell’s in his official capacity of Lord Privy Seal. See *LL* Vol. 4 (113) and Harris *E.A.W.* (219).

misrecognition of the degree of power these women held, which not even Cromwell could supersede.

Note that Husee calls the ladies “your ... very friends,” that is, your *true* friends (as opposed to Cromwell, who may not be a true friend), and subsequently reiterates that these “Ladies and Women” are “your friends.” By emphasizing the importance of these ladies and their friendship, he warns Lady Lisle of possible repercussions for stepping outside the boundaries of the court and its particular system of obligation and deference. Though not overt, his meaning is clear: if she dismisses their influence and steps outside the bounds of protocol, her friends may forsake her and her work may be undone. The approach to Cromwell then, might endanger her whole campaign, and is best dropped. The Lord Privy Seal may have a formal position, and thus official power, but his realm ought not to cross paths with the more informal realm of the Court (much like a clergyman might think twice about calling upon a magistrate to settle Church matters). Did Lady Lisle ever actually petition Cromwell? We never find out, but it seems that no one at court did either. Either way, her error in judgement does not ultimately result in adverse consequences to the overall campaign, but, as we shall see in the next chapter, Lady Lisle will eventually have to call on Cromwell to fight for her family’s future.

While she did not run afoul of the court, the campaign for Katherine stalls and Anne’s position is threatened when Queen Jane Seymour dies (20 days after Husee’s letter). This event puts Lady Lisle’s concentrated campaign to secure places at court for her daughters in jeopardy because while a new Queen would most likely retain experienced court personnel, the less experienced, such as Anne, might easily be replaced by the new Queen’s favourites. Anne is now potentially without a position, Katherine lacks even a promise of such a position, and Lady Lisle must re-engage her network of influential Court ladies if all is not to be lost. Lady Lisle writes a letter of petition to the Countess of Sussex (her niece, Mary Arundell) in order to plead for her intercession. This letter is intriguing precisely because of the variety of interlocking but contradictory levels of hierarchy in their relationship; Lady Lisle attempts not simply to plead for help, but to assert that her kinswomen should be obligated to assist her family. Honor as Aunt, as matriarch, and as the wife of a man of royal blood is technically the elder and superior of her niece Mary; however, the Countess of Sussex is a titled,

married woman with an influential position at Court who needs Lady Lisle less than Lady Lisle needs her. Thus, Honor strategically employs the social script of “assurance” in her letter, rather than the humble language of entreaty that Souer Antoinette used with her, because that script conveys “authority, confidence and an assertion of social expectations to be met”.<sup>136</sup> Using this script tells us – and more importantly, it tells her niece – that Lady Lisle is determined that her petition will be acted upon and is taking it as a given that her familial relations will support her.

She writes on November 14, 1537:

Madame,

After my hearty recommendations to my good lord and you ... And farther, by the same I perceive my good lord and you have taken my daughter Anne unto you, until such time as chance may become to have place again; the which, God willing, may, when time shall be, through your good suit: if not, I would be sorry I sent my daughters so soon. Nevertheless, madame, if by your suit at the time she cannot obtain, upon knowledge thereof, incontinent I shall not fail to send for her, and to recompense your charges; for I did not send them for that I would put you or any of my kin or friends to charge, but only to have them with the Queen. (Vol.4 #904)

The occasionally tangled syntax here, the stopping and stalling, shows us Honor Lisle attempting to balance her multiple roles – kinswoman, matriarch, aristocratic woman of influence – and using these positions to engage action, to remind her niece of her duty as a member of the family, and to persuade her to once again resume the preferment project. Lady Lisle mingles flattery and rebuke, voicing her displeasure with the Countess for her lack of effort on behalf of her daughter Katherine, but thanking her for taking Anne in until she can secure another preferment. She apologizes for the financial burden this entails and expresses regret for sending her “daughters so soon,” but while her contrition appears genuine, we know from letters exchanged between Husee and Lady Lisle that she insisted that both daughters be at court as quickly as possible. Thus the apology makes use of a standard trope of humility to disguise what is in reality an aggressive entreaty. The reality, one both women were well aware of, is that

<sup>136</sup> For explanation and details of the variety of social scripts see Angel Day (101-02); for a full discussion of Day’s epistolary scripts, see Magnuson, “Shakespeare and Social Dialogue” (80-88).



the girls must be at the Court in order to be in the running for any positions. If the two girls were not at court the risk would be that other people's children would compete for, and land, the position. Better to have her daughters at court than to leave them in Calais far from the eye of the King. Honor's claim that she did not want to "put you or any of my kin or friends to charge" may be true: she does not want to alienate her family, but her desire to "have them with the Queen" supersedes all else, even familial displeasure (Vol. 4 #904). Thus while the letter appears deferential, in fact Lady Lisle is the active individual demanding assistance. In the letter she is the all-powerful "I" – a pronoun she uses six times in two sentences – who will "upon knowledge" evaluate and make the decision whether or not to recall her daughter.

Honor continues her letter with an overt rebuke:

And where ye write, as ye have done often, were not for your great charge of kin and other gentlewomen which ye have promised and is like to have, ye would have had Katherine (but for speech of other, although my lord would, ye will not), Madame, it was never my mind nor intent, I being of your kin, to put you to any charge, whereby any other should speak thereof: yet if I were in England, in case ye sent any to me, if there were iij or iiij, I would have been as glad to accept them and do for them as mine own. And whosoever have mine shall be at no charge with them: heartily praying you to prefer Anne if ye may, when God shall send time, because she was sworn to the late Queen. If that were not, I would desire you to prefer the one as well as the other... (Vol. 4 #904).

In other words, the Countess is at fault and has not done enough for her family. Lady Lisle bluntly says the Countess has made too many promises to her other kin and thereby deprived Lady Lisle's children of their rightful place. We know from previous exchanges between Honor and Husee that the influential Lady Sussex would "not make grant to have her [Katherine] in her chamber" because she "saith that she hath iij women already, which is one more than she is allowed" (Vol. #4 #868a). The "allowance" of a lord or lady at Court was a crucial marker of status, where the interest of the peers (who desired more followers and a larger allocation of space), conflicted directly with that of the King, who desired they had fewer followers as it would result in fewer conflicts and greater overall order. When Lady Sussex claims she was not allowed to have any more ladies in her chamber because the King had commanded "no manner of persons, officers or others, have or entertain a greater number of servants in the court than be

appointed or assigned unto them,” it was probably not the King’s ordinance which led to her decision, but rather the many other placement promises she had made to her Devonshire kin (Vol.4 #870).<sup>137</sup>

Lady Lisle believes that the Countess is afraid of “speech of other[s]”, anxious that other family members would criticize her if she took another Lisle/Basset daughter rather than placing her closer kin. She suggests that the Countess’s husband is willing to sponsor Katherine into the court (“although my lord would”) because, unlike his wife, he has the fortitude to withstand criticism and gossip and do his familial duty.<sup>138</sup> In all this, Lady Lisle’s voice fairly crackles with displeasure, and though towards the end of this letter she reverts to apologetic tones, this is a mere preface to an even more biting criticism. Lady Lisle suggests that if she were in the same position she would not bow down to the gossiping voices that “should speak thereof,” as she has more dedication to the family than the Countess and, she implies, greater strength of character. She uses herself as a righteous example claiming she “would have been as glad to accept them and do for them as mine own” (Vol. 4 #904), echoing the many letters from the French Ladies who took on Lady Lisle’s daughters as their own. Lady Lisle ends the letter by displaying her own generosity in order to guilt the Countess into compliance with her wishes. She says she does not wish to trouble the Countess with her daughters but she, the pregnant woman (“now heavy”), will accept and welcome her niece: “Madam, if my niece will take the pain to come over hither, she shall be as welcome as heart can think.” Once again Lady Lisle portrays herself as the committed family member, one who does all she can to assist her kin.

<sup>137</sup> Although the Eltham Ordinances of 1526 state, “Cap 33: For avoiding excess of servants ... It is also the King’s commandment ... that no manner of persons, officers or others, have or entertain a greater number of servants in the court than be appointed. See Eltham Ordinances.

<sup>138</sup> Honor does have a great awareness of how important a woman’s reputation is and does not take this lightly. Periodically Honor wrote of her own reputation worries; that the court ladies were angry with her, that Lady Sussex and Rutland were “displeased”, and even at one point that she was out of favor with the Queen. In order to ensure that her reputation is intact, Honor queries her friend Richard Dauncy, a member of Queen Jane Seymour’s household to find out information. He responds to Honor’s concerns by reassuring her of her standing at Court: “whereas ye shewed me at our last being together that ye thought the Queen’s grace did not favour you I ensure you Madam it is not so.” Dauncy reassures Honor that the Queen not only speaks of her but that she has missed her, putting Honor’s mind at ease. One’s favor or ability to be liked could add or subtract from one’s status; an individual’s currency of reputation was crucial to garnering prestigious positions.

We do not learn if Lady Sussex changes her mind regarding Katherine. As for Anne, Henry VIII granted her the promise of a placement with his future Queen to be. Husee writes to inform Lady Lisle that “the King’s Grace is good lord to Mistress Anne, and hath made her grant to have her place whensoever the time shall come” (Vol. 4 #1038).<sup>139</sup> Through the King’s grant, Anne Basset remained at the Queenless court until January of 1540 when Anne of Cleves arrived in England to wed Henry. Anne of Cleves was greeted by the thirty ladies Henry had appointed to her household, and Anne Basset was one of these ladies (Vol. 4 139). Anne remained at Court with Anne of Cleves and married Sir Walter Hungerford, a gentleman of the Court, in 1555. Through her use of an array of “unofficial” communities of power, Lady Lisle achieved the goal she desired for one of her daughters and continued to jockey for a better place for the other.

Using the epistle to build ties of “good ladyship” with both the French Mesdames and the English ladies of the Court, Lady Lisle manages to create and sustain ties based on loyalty and the economy of obligation. The latter is a complex system of social capital and mutually advantageous arrangements, a type of “banked” debt of favours to come—insurance with intangible but considerable value—that Lady Lisle was able to access and wield with a considerable amount of influence. Lady Lisle used the epistle to create networks with a vast array of women and these ties were both tactical and sincere among the women who cultivated them. These unique microcosms of power ( that were not necessarily on the “official” grid), were a strategic way that women could create and accrue their own influence through informal arrangements that were autonomous, or semi-autonomous, loci of power that could not simply be “overridden” through appeal to formal power. Lady Lisle acted skilfully as a petitioner, and patron throughout this period of her career, and ultimately secured her interests despite adverse conditions and some missteps.

<sup>139</sup> Anne is thought to have attracted the King’s attention in 1538 and 1539, and is rumored to have later become his Mistress. Anne would have been approximately seventeen or eighteen when Henry was forty seven.

## Chapter 3.

### Lady Lisle and Cromwell: Negotiations with an Official Power Broker

“I said to him [Cromwell] it was your [Honor’s] jointure, and that I would do the best I could with you, trusting that you would be ruled by me”. Arthur, from Vol. 5 #1267.

Whereas the previous chapters have shown how Lady Lisle successfully used the conventions of the epistle and her own networks of influence to further her projects and solidify her reputation, this chapter will primarily examine Lady Lisle’s letters to her husband as she reports on her face to face negotiations with Cromwell, the Lord Privy Seal, for her son’s inheritance, her husband’s annuity, and eventually her jointure. The former two projects (the annuity and inheritance), if not handled properly, could lead to grave economic losses and a devaluing of the Lisle reputation. The latter project, one much more personal to Lady Lisle as it involved her jointure of Painswick, should have had little to do with the first two; however, due to the multiplicity of games that were in play, with their ever shifting rules and positions, the jointure soon became central to her attempt to secure the inheritance and annuity from Cromwell.<sup>140</sup> As we will see, Lady Lisle lost her jointure because of the folly of her husband, Lord Arthur Lisle, and the greed and machinations of Thomas Cromwell, but she was able to save her son’s inheritance and ensure an equitable life annuity for her husband. Her canny negotiations demonstrate how women interacted with powerful men in much the same way as their male subordinates would have done: through calculated manipulation of any and all avenues of power available to them. These letters illustrate that Lady Lisle was able to use a vast array of tools – bonds of obligation, debts of honour, promises, epistolary conventions, and networks of informal and formal influence – to mount a strong defence

<sup>140</sup> A definition of jointure is given in the Jointure and Coverture section on page 146.

of her legal rights, and to resist both her husband and Cromwell's attempts to force her back into her "proper" place, one with no claim to the power she wielded as an influential aristocratic woman.<sup>141</sup>

In order to illustrate the complex situation Lady Lisle finds herself thrust into and the dynamics of the ensuing power struggle, this chapter will begin by describing the intricacies of the Basset inheritance and the Lisle family's relationship with Cromwell. It will then shift into a brief consideration of how Lady Lisle used the epistolary genre to tap into her servant networks, oversee her family's welfare, and manage her financially irresponsible husband. The servants' letters, and those of Lady Lisle's husband, help to establish the parameters of the back room games that occurred in Canterbury, where Cromwell out-manoeuvred Lord Lisle in a move against his annuity and jointure. The letters also illustrate how both these men attempted to navigate around Lady Lisle because they wrongly believed she would be content to "be ruled by [her husband]" (Vol. 5 #1267), the official head of the household, and would accept his ill-advised and short-sighted decisions. My discussion of these proceedings will also help to shed some light on the precariousness of Lady Lisle's position when she began her face-to-face negotiations with Cromwell, and the strategy she used to counter his attack on the family finances and land holdings. Through an examination of Lady Lisle's correspondence – with particular attention to her meticulous reporting of other's speech, her use of a variety of discourses, and her careful self-presentation – we will see how she uses the discourse of the letter to reinforce her social influence in the eyes of her prestigious ally and thus make a claim to just and noble treatment.

## **The Basset Inheritance of the Beaumont Lands**

In order to understand the complex negotiations that occurred between Cromwell and Lady Lisle, it is necessary to explain how the two projects of protecting her son's

<sup>141</sup> Megan Brown and Mari McBride argue that a woman's proper place was often defined by the official and unofficial restrictions placed on them: they were generally denied participation in "government, universities, warfare, science, law, medicine, philosophy, banking and navigation or exploration" (Brown 1). See the introduction to this dissertation for a fuller discussion of a woman's "proper place".

inheritance of the Beaumont/Basset lands and obtaining an annuity for her husband became intertwined with her jointure. In the early years of Lady Lisle's marriage to John Basset, his family was under severe financial pressure to pay for fines on the Beaumont Lands. Because of this need for money, Basset entered into an agreement with Giles, Lord Daubeney. The agreement stipulated that Daubeney would pay all the fines and recoveries on the Beaumont lands on behalf of John Basset, allowing John to claim his inheritance and redeem the lands that had come to him through his grandfather's marriage into the Beaumont family. In exchange, title to the land would eventually be ceded to Daubeney and his heirs, through the marriage of one of John Basset's two daughters to Lord Daubeney's ten-year-old heir Henry (Byrne 312). The proposed marriage between the children would allow the Beaumont/Basset lands to go to a male issue of the Basset and Daubeney marriage, thereby keeping the property in both families. However, Henry Daubeney married neither of John Basset's daughters, and had no male heirs; therefore, the land was supposed to, upon his death, revert back to John Basset's family. Until he did pass away, however, he was permitted to live off the avails of the land.<sup>142</sup> The property provided Daubeney with ample income, but he lived beyond his means and needed more financial remuneration than his property provided.<sup>143</sup> Consequently, he sold trees from the land, and leased portions of the land to other individuals, greatly depreciating its value and displeasing Honor Lisle. Of course, none of this altered the fact that eventually the land would, under common law, pass to Lady Lisle's son John Basset, and so the Lisles let matters lie. All this changed in 1536, when the Statute of Uses was passed and Lady Lisle learned through her attorneys that not only could Henry Daubeney now legally sell the land, but also that he already had a buyer lined up: the King's brother-in-law, Edward Seymour, the Earl of

<sup>142</sup> The indenture stated that if a marriage between Henry and one of the Basset girls did not take place, or it was dissolved, or they did not have any children, then Daubeney's heir was to inherit the land. But, if Henry left no other lawful male issue then "they [the Beaumont/Basset lands] were to revert after death to John Basset and his heirs forever" (Vol. 1 313).

<sup>143</sup> For a full account of the Daubeney affair see M.L Bush; also *LL* Vol. 2 p. 358, 374, Vol. 5, p. 132, 146-8, 189-90; Welbore.(143-149); David Waas; see also "A History of Painswick".

Hertford.<sup>144</sup> Seymour had already battled with the Lises several years previously, when he had attempted (and failed) to obtain some other Lisle property.<sup>145</sup>

To resolve the problem created by the Statute of Uses, the Lises required ready cash so as to purchase the land outright. However, due to Arthur's extravagant spending, the family did not have the financial means to do so. Without the money, they needed either the personal intervention of the King or direct assistance from the King's key power broker, Cromwell.<sup>146</sup> At this particular moment, the King was not the best person to approach for assistance, as Edward Seymour, his new brother-in-law, was in great favour. Thus, Cromwell, who had been a good friend to the Lises during the first Lisle-Seymour land disputes of 1530-1533, seemed the best choice.<sup>147</sup> Initially Cromwell was a strong ally. He had the matter read before the King and his Council in July, and the King stayed the case until the next law term. This was not a permanent solution, but

<sup>144</sup> For more information on the Statute of Uses, see *LL* Vol. 5 pp. 187-89.

<sup>145</sup> There were two major disputes between the Lises and Edward Seymour. The first dispute concerned the estate of Lisle's first wife Elizabeth Grey and the second dispute involved Honor Basset, regarding her son John Basset's inheritance. For a full account of the Lisle-Seymour land disputes see M.L. Bush. Byrne suggests that Daubeney and Seymour were out to "swindle John Basset out of his Beaumont inheritance." She claims that what started out as a slow destruction of the property (selling the woods for quick cash), soon became an intricate business deal where Daubeney tried to lease the lands to Seymour throughout his lifetime, and upon his death have the Beaumont/Basset lands actually pass to Seymour permanently.

<sup>146</sup> The Lisle's financial affairs were in constant disarray and Lord Lisle had many overdue bills, as is evident throughout the correspondence. Tradesmen refused to work for them as they were never paid, and loans went unpaid for years (Vol.5 pp. 645-6). One debt to Isabel Gilbert had been outstanding for thirteen years (Vol. 5 pp. 608) and the King's treasurer, Sir Brian Tuke, constantly wrote to the Lises requesting payment on debts they owed to the King (Vol. 3 #628, 682, Vol. 4 #991, Vol. 5 #1328, 1413, and 1590). Hugh Trevor Roper says Lisle "was always short of cash and lived far beyond his means" (411). A. R. Bridbury states that "money was a perennial problem" for Lord Lisle (578) and M. L. Bush calls Lisle "incapable" and "extravagant" (258). As well, the correspondence between John Husee, Honor Lisle, and Arthur Lisle proves beyond a doubt that their finances were a severe problem, especially when we see instances of Lord Lisle's blatant disregard for financial management. Husee often had to sort out the affairs of a master who signed agreements without taking the trouble to check them, and who admitted that he (Lord Lisle) had "more mind to make banquets and to ride about with my kinsfolk than to apply any of your causes and businesses" (Vol. 3 # 498 pp.493). It is clear that good management was not a priority in Lord Lisle's life and that either Husee or Honor often had to straighten out Lord Lisle's finances.

<sup>147</sup> When Jane Seymour married the King, her brother, Edward Seymour, was elevated to the nobility, and gained royal favour, and thus Lisle lost status with the King. His other acquaintances were now less ready to support Arthur Plantagenet, Viscount Lisle, the bastard son of Edward IV, against the King's brother-in-law. This reinforces the idea of strategic temporary alliances, and their many shifts. See M.L. Bush.

more in the nature of an injunction that temporarily prevented Daubeney and Seymour from completing the sale, giving the Lises breathing space to secure a loan to purchase the Beaumont/Basset lands outright (Vol. 5 #1177). Husee was so pleased by Cromwell's intercession that he wrote exultingly to Lord Lisle that "a like matter had not been seen...that the King should stop the course of his common laws" because of the "means of my Lord Privy Seal" (Vol. 5 #1179). The King's intercession is significant because it illustrates the high regard he felt for his uncle, Arthur Lisle. Still, it was Cromwell's intervention that brought the issue to the King's attention; he was the Lises' good friend and, because of this, Cromwell had great expectations for what this friendship would eventually return to him.

There is clear epistolary evidence that the Lisle family had established a close relationship with this powerful magistrate, and that both the Lises were part of his circle of friends.<sup>148</sup> The acquaintance seems to have begun in the early 1530s when they were all active members of Henry's court; with time and proximity, a friendship or strategic alliance appears to have developed. It seems that the friendship flourished because the Lises saw a powerful man who was in the King's favour, and cultivated the relationship in the hopes that in the future Cromwell could provide them with assistance. Ironically, the opposite is what ended up occurring. Although Lady Lisle and her husband were important allies, they could never be sure where Cromwell's loyalty lay as he played multiple overlapping games with a variety of influential people. Cromwell's political games included everything from trying to dole out prestigious positions in Calais, ridding himself of his adversaries at court, promoting his own brand of religious reform, and reinforcing his indispensability to the King. His official position may have been Lord Privy Seal, the main controller of the King's affairs, but he was also a land speculator. In addition to consolidating his position in court, it was through his prodigious procurement of property that he solidified his power and increased his status.

<sup>148</sup> The Lises and Cromwell shared dinners, exchanged gifts, and corresponded. Lady Lisle herself sent him deer, cheeses, and a variety of other gifts, and never hesitated to write to him on behalf of herself or others, always promising that he should have her "good will and service, glad if it might lie in [her] to do [his] pleasure" (Vol.1 #57). We might speculate that the friendship was founded on both Lord Lisle and Thomas Cromwell having questionable origins (the former a bastard, the latter a commoner), and that each recognized in the other an "outsider" who might never be wholly accepted by aristocratic society.



There is much evidence of Cromwell's early attempts to curtail Lady Lisle's involvement in the political world, and I speculate that this is because of both his own desire to improve his own position and because of Lady Lisle's equally strong, almost transgressive, desire to promote her own family. Cromwell wanted to have influence over Lady Lisle's husband in all respects – over his governance of Calais, his doling out of posts, his implementing of reforms, and his various assets – and Lady Lisle, with her intellect, shrewd business sense, and forceful personality, had the potential to stand in his way. It was most likely Lady Lisle's "interfering" ways that caused her "good friend" Lord Cromwell to, at times, attempt to curb her activities even before the conflict over her family's assets.<sup>149</sup> Early on in their relationship, Cromwell wrote letters to Lord Lisle advising him to keep Lady Lisle in check: "although my lady be right honourable and wise," he flatteringly wrote, "in such causes as longeth to your authority her advice and discretion can little prevail" (Vol.1 #46). In this instance, his criticism concerns Lady Lisle's lobbying for placements, but his wider concern is with the proper position of a woman relative to her husband and the socio-political world.<sup>150</sup> Cromwell takes exception to a woman trying to influence the public domain, but more importantly *his* public domain, and he chastises his friend Lord Lisle for not managing his wife and keeping her insulated from men's affairs.

A few years later Cromwell writes to the entire Council of Calais about Lady Lisle and her attempt to save two priests who were accused of upholding the papacy. He

<sup>149</sup> Lady Lisle, unlike Arthur Lisle's quiet and passive first wife, was a powerful figure in her own right, an individual known for her involvement in all aspects of the Lisle world, and a person whom both men and women could and did call upon for assistance. David Waas describes Arthur's first wife Elizabeth Grey as a woman who "accepted her passive female role in a man's society" as compared to Honor, who was involved in every aspect of Arthur's life and "discussed her husband's affairs, even going so far as occasionally to commit him to policy without his knowledge" (23). A. L. Rowse describes the Grenville family as having a "certain dominant streak..., proud in the extreme, unyielding...forceful, highly strung, bent on action, capable of the utmost devotion, shrewd and above all exciting" (322). Lady Lisle's influence, although partially acquired from her husband's aristocratic familial ties, also stemmed from herself in several ways – her family lineage (influential Grenville/Basset family); regional associations (Devonshire land holder); international affiliations (friend of French aristocrats); and servant connections (trusting relationship with her manservant John Husee and many others) – all of which enhanced and bolstered her reputation as an active, powerful woman.

<sup>150</sup> That Cromwell attempted to block Lady Lisle's manoeuvring is somewhat surprising; he was at the pinnacle of his career as the principal minister of Henry VIII – presumably with more pressing matters at hand – and was furthermore accounted a good friend to the Lisles.

chastises the Council for its inability to keep Lady Lisle under control, as “the prayers of women and their fond flickerings should not move any of you to do that thing that should in any wise displease your prince” (Vol.4 #980). Cromwell trivializes Lady Lisle’s views: they are merely “fond flickerings” that are feminine, trifling, fleeting as a candle flame, and unworthy of a man’s attention. At the same time, he is clearly concerned that those same “flickerings” might influence the council. It is significant too, that Cromwell uses Henry VIII’s position as their “Prince” to reinforce his own position on the matter. Not only does Honor’s intervention displease the Lord Privy Seal, but, according to Cromwell, it displeases the holder of all power, the King himself. He uses the threat of Henry’s displeasure to ensure that neither Lord Lisle nor the Council will be swayed by Lady Lisle. Yet his message remains mixed: each time Cromwell attempts to curtail a woman’s activities – to remind men of women’s political irrelevance – he reveals the knowledge that women do, in many cases, have an alarming degree of power, perhaps even enough to influence formal bodies like the Council. Drawing on established patriarchal narratives that denied the very possibility of women’s power is his weapon of choice in a paradoxical offensive against the threat of a politically active aristocratic woman. As such, Cromwell’s contemptuous dismissal of Lady Lisle actually speaks to her active influence and power. If an individual is indeed without power, then surely there is no need to expend time and effort to fashion letters such as these, especially for a man of Cromwell’s stature.<sup>151</sup>

Cromwell’s attempts to control Lady Lisle became much less overt in September of 1538, when the Lisles went to Canterbury to meet with the King. For some time, the

<sup>151</sup> Thomas Cromwell was the son of a cloth worker, but he became involved with Henry VIII when he became the legal secretary to Cardinal Wolsey. When Wolsey fell out of favour with the King, Cromwell survived his fall and advanced into the King’s service. Cromwell was extremely unpopular; lack of noble birth, desire for power, and reformist tendencies put him at loggerheads with many individuals. Yet this lack of popularity did not matter so long as the King supported him. The Catholic uprisings, called the Pilgrimage of Grace, were a popular uprising in protest against Henry VIII’s break with the Roman Catholic Church and the dissolution of the monasteries, but much of their anger was directed against Cromwell because he was the one who initiated the reform policies. He was abhorred by the majority of the aristocracy because he was not of their class and was an upstart with far too much influence. Robert Hutchinson, *Thomas Cromwell: The Rise and Fall of Henry VIII’s Most Notorious Minister*, Starkey, David. *The Reign of Henry VIII: Personalities and Politics*. 128-133. As well, LL, Vol. 1, p. 692. and [www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/cromwell\\_thomas](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/cromwell_thomas).

Lisles had wanted to meet with the King to persuade him to help them with their many lawsuits, to assist them with some of their bids to acquire property (a piece of property in Calais called the Friars), to loan them more money to pay their many debts, and to establish Lord Lisle's annuity for service to the King.<sup>152</sup> As Deputy, however, Lord Lisle was not allowed to leave Calais without a special dispensation from the King, and Lady Lisle, as a woman, should not have been handling these negotiations; therefore, once Arthur received permission, he had to make good use of the King's time, as he might not have another opportunity for a while.<sup>153</sup> In early September, the Lisles undertook the Channel crossing in order to meet with the King at Canterbury to finalize their business dealings.

It appears that the Lisles were graciously received by the King, as Lady Lisle wrote to her friends that they saw the King "to whom we were right well entreated, insomuch that I can hardly express to you the good entertainment it hath pleased his Majesty to give us" (Vol. 5 #1220). Yet within days of arriving at Canterbury Lady Lisle hastily departed, leaving her husband on his own to negotiate with Cromwell and the King.<sup>154</sup> St. Clare Byrne believes that Honor left because her daughter, Mary, was ill and returned to Calais to tend to her needs. This seems to me unlikely, however, as her daughter's illness had occurred two or three weeks prior to the Canterbury trip, meaning that by this time Mary would have been on the mend. More importantly, the Lisles' business with Henry VIII had not been finalized as there was still no written assurance from him and his lawyers concerning her son's inheritance, and Lady Lisle needed a written decree to prevent others from taking the land. Yet she departed, leaving her imprudent husband in the hands of some of the shrewdest and most powerful men in the Kingdom. This seems irresponsible behaviour for a woman who was involved in all aspects of the Lisle business. What could have made her leave? St Clare Byrne

<sup>152</sup> St. Clare Byrne argues that Lisle had "been unable to live within his means as a private individual; and in Calais, as everyone who knew him had foreseen, his salary and allowances had proved totally inadequate to sustain the Deputy's position and his official hospitality" (Vol. 5 248).

<sup>153</sup> See Trevor-Roper about Lord Lisle's inability to leave Calais except by royal license, 412.

<sup>154</sup> Honor writes to Madame De Bours on Sept. 19, 1538, "I can hardly express to you the good entertainment it hath pleased his Majesty to give us, his Grace having been so good lord to us. ...It is the King's pleasure that my lord shall continue beyond seas; and he hath promised that he shall not lack in anything he may do for him" (Vol. 5 #1220).

speculates that Lady Lisle left because her “presence was no longer necessary at court” (Vol. 5 215, 249). However, it seems likely that it was not so much the case that her presence was “no longer necessary,” but rather that her presence was *not wanted* at court. It is very likely that Cromwell had plans to ask her husband for her jointure and may well have found a way to get Lady Lisle out of the way. Regardless of the reason for her departure, Honor Lisle was not without a plan: she had already established routine surveillance of her irresponsible husband through the letters of her servant John Husee. This epistolary trail would allow her to track her husband, and hopefully to ensure that the business of annuity and inheritance were being dealt with responsibly.

## **Circumventing Lord Lisle: Servant Networks**

Since Mistresses (or Masters) could not be everywhere at once, they often heavily depended on their servants to be their representatives in a vast array of situations and, as we saw in chapters one and two, John Husee was Lady Lisle’s preeminent agent and proxy. Since Lady Lisle could not always be with Lord Lisle, she used Husee as her eyes and ears. It was Honor’s unofficial role to safeguard the family, but this was a problematic role because Lady Lisle was without “official” power as she was not the head of the household.<sup>155</sup> She had, therefore, to be very attentive to her networks to ensure they were vigilant in providing her with the information she needed in

<sup>155</sup> Meg Brown argues that in a sense an English woman never became “an adult under the law but remained a child in relationship to her husband as she had once been to her father” and through a combination of religion, law and tradition women were often forced into subservience in marriage (54-59).

order to uphold the family's interests.<sup>156</sup> Husee, her proxy, was able to observe the Canterbury festivities as Lady Lisle's spy, providing her with important information about family negotiations and attempting (unsuccessfully) to manage Lord Lisle on her behalf.<sup>157</sup> His reports illustrate that an executive servant's allegiance was not necessarily to the master of the household, but to the member who was best able to manage the affairs of the family – in this case Lady Lisle.

It was common knowledge that “with a few words and a present of a penny” a man could have Lord Lisle's good will with little effort, and it was common knowledge, too, that Honor was the shrewder of the two regarding business matters (Vol.2 #282). It

<sup>156</sup> The Lisle collection provides many examples of Lady Lisle's use of the servant network (193). For example, Hugh Leo, one of the managers of the Basset/Grenville estate, wrote to Lady Lisle that her friend Mr Tubbe told him of a secret meeting between “Edward Seymour, the King's attorney, the King's solicitor and six others who were substantially learned in the law” (Vol. 5 #1197). During this meeting, he claims, they examined the indenture and agreed that Daubeney now had the right to take Master Basset's land from him under the new Statute of Uses. Leo closes by requesting, “I must needs pray you that ye disclose not that ye have this knowledge by Tubbe, for I have so promised him of my faith that it shall not be knowen that we have the knowledge by him” (Vol. 5 #1197). Although scholars are not clear about the identity of Mr. Tubbe, a conclusion is that he was one of the Lisle's “fee'd men”—someone in a position of trust within the Daubeney household, who, for a fee, provided information to the Lisles (Vol. 4 61). Tubbe wanted secrecy so that he could remain in the employ of a household that provided him a stable salary but also allowed him to obtain important information. The servant network was one that aided many an aristocrat in their bids for power, and having “privy friends” (spies, in effect) within the homes of influential people was customary. These individuals and their correspondence allowed aristocrats not only to conduct their business but to stay abreast of important news. Therefore when John Husee informed Lord Lisle that people have been punished for “reading and copying with publishing abroad news: yea, some of them are at this hour in the Tower and like to suffer therefore,” he reinforces the idea of how “news” can be equated with treason (Vol. 4 #798). Letters were, in a sense, “published” intelligence that allowed servants, fee'd men, and others, to exchange information with those who were unable to be there.

<sup>157</sup> Servant networks provided Lady Lisle with both warnings and valuable information, and, in the case of Tubbe, helped her by identifying who opposed her, and whom she could call upon for assistance. Henry Monk, a distant Basset connection who provided information services, wrote to Lady Lisle about her son's inheritance, telling her how he had chastised Thomas Seller, (a servant of Lord Daubeney), on her behalf because Seller was not an “honest man” towards her. Monk felt Seller had wronged Lady Lisle, because he failed to inform her that Daubeney “did intend to do Master Basset great wrong in putting away his inheritance from him” (Vol. 5 #1194). Eventually, Monk says Seller told him that, since he was a “true Christian man,” he did the right thing and “open[ed] the whole matter to Master Husee” (Vol. 5 #1194). This instance, indeed, shows us how far-reaching and intricate the servant network was: a distant Basset connection chastises a servant of Lord Daubeney for not disclosing his master's plot, and passes the information on to Honor Lisle, via her servant, in order to warn her. It illustrates how reputation was important not just to the upper classes but also to their subordinates as well.

seems likely then that if Cromwell wanted to negotiate with Lord Lisle, whether over the Painswick property alone or with Painswick as a *quid pro quo* for his assistance with the King, he would also want Lady Lisle out of earshot. Arthur Lisle was known for his inept and lackadaisical attitude towards business, and for his love of a good party; if his wife were present, she might dampen the festivities for him (and the negotiations for Cromwell).<sup>158</sup> Mere days after Lady Lisle's departure, Husee wrote to her, saying, "I have made privy enquiry concerning your ladyship's being here [Canterbury], and there hath been nothing said but that the King and other hath reported our ladyship to be of much honour... if I can learn any further your ladyship shall have knowledge" (Vol. 5 #1218). Husee's words here confirm that Honor has asked him to make enquires on her behalf about what is being said of her Canterbury visit. What could have prompted such a request, if not her own fears? A possible explanation for those fears, given Lord Lisle's character, is that Lady Lisle was well aware of Cromwell's desire to exclude her from any negotiations because it would give the Lord Privy Seal a freer hand in dealing with Lord Lisle, the weaker negotiator.<sup>159</sup>

In Husee's September letters to Lady Lisle he critiques his master's negotiations and warns Honor that her husband is perhaps not being as diligent as he should:

My lord is so entertained with the King's Majesty and Lord Privy Seal especially, and with all others, that he is not like to depart till the King's Highness be removed from Canterbury. His Lordship hath promised to be earnest in his own cause, for if the time be now slacked it is to be doubted when such another shall succeed...I have full hope he will not be remiss in setting forth thereof. I can no more. (Vol. 5 #1217 Sept 8, 1538)

Husee's letter to Honor is openly critical and would be considered grossly imprudent had he not been dispatched by Lady Lisle to provide a frank account of events at Canterbury. Stating that Arthur is "so entertained," not just with Cromwell and the King, but with "all others," Husee subtly but unmistakably indicates that Lord Lisle is too easily distracted from the business at hand, and suggests that the festivities and merriment are perhaps compromising his judgement. Lord Lisle's five line missive to his

<sup>158</sup> See footnote 8 for details of Lord Lisle's inept attitude towards business.

<sup>159</sup> I do feel it is quite possible that Cromwell may have had a hand in encouraging Lady Lisle's departure but I have no concrete epistolary evidence to verify this speculation.

wife (also dated September 8<sup>th</sup>) contradicts Husee's insinuation, as Lisle writes that "the King's Majesty hath given me [£400] a year during my life" (Vol. 5 #1216). Lisle's letter to Honor exalts in his success at achieving such a high annuity, while Husee implies that his master has been "slack" in attending to business. Husee is so worried about his master's lack of diligence that at some point he must have directly discussed his concern with his master – otherwise why would Lisle have "promised" him to be "earnest in his own cause." Husee was not just Lady Lisle's means of obtaining information, but also a proxy in her attempt to curtail Arthur's lackadaisical behaviour (Vol. 5 #1217). As we will see, he was correct in his estimation of his master's lack of business acumen, though ultimately unable to prevent him from making a foolish deal.

Two days later Husee again reports to Honor:

My Lord [Lisle] has lain every night in my Lord Privy Seal's lodging, and was never out of his company but when he went unto the King; so that there is now no fault for attendance to be found in my lord. I am sure my lord hath written unto your ladyship how good the King's Highness hath been unto him, and also my Lord Privy Seal, which hath given him [£400] pension yearly. Further, as my lord showed me, my Lord Privy Seal hath given him during his life the Friar's house, with a land's and others, as well stuff as implements in Calais. But yet I know not where the same shall be paid. ...I have no knowledge of the promises but only my lord's report. (Vol. 5 #1218 Sept 10, 1538)

This letter can be construed in a number of ways. On the one hand, it can be seen as a positive affirmation of Lord Lisle's negotiations given that Arthur is spending all of his time with Cromwell, lying "every night" in his lodging, and never leaving his side.<sup>160</sup> However, of course, this would only be the case if the attendance had to do with business rather than with revelry. Husee reports that Lord Lisle says he has been promised an annuity of £400, but he adds he does not know "where it shall be paid" because he has not seen any signed documents or personally heard any such promises from Cromwell or the King; all he has is Lord Lisle's rather untrustworthy "report." In this letter, Husee is both relaying and casting doubt on Lord Lisle's version of events. These sorts of warnings to his mistress are vital, as they may provide her with the knowledge to

<sup>160</sup> The phrase "lain every night" does not mean he has been sleeping with Cromwell but staying with him (*OED*).

undo any irresponsible promises that her husband, as head of the household, has the right to make but not the good sense to avoid.

We eventually learn that Husee is correct in his low assessment of his master's business abilities. At the end of September he writes to Lord Lisle, upbraiding him for his lack of diligence, as neither the King nor Cromwell appears ready to grant the promised £400 annuity. Husee writes, "Your lordship is to blame of all this matter, for had you been earnest with the King, it was not to be doubted but you might as well have had a [1000] as a [100], for I perceive by my Lord [Cromwell] that you never spake to the King therein" (Vol. 5 #1233). Husee clearly rebukes his master for his inability to close a deal, and the letter openly expresses his frustration at his inattention to the intricacies of business negotiations. Also, Husee indicates that he has spoken to Cromwell, "my Lord," and believes *his* claim that Lord Lisle had not actually spoken to the King about the annuity. Alas, Lord Lisle, unlike his Lady or his court servant, is not shrewd enough to see beyond the merriment and seems to believe that Cromwell will abide by his verbal promise (if any was actually issued) for an annuity of £400. What Lord Lisle fails to realize is that Cromwell is too powerful to be trusted on the basis of his reputation alone. Cromwell was the second most powerful man in the land, and thus could more easily change the rules of the game to his advantage; if it came down to Cromwell's word against the Lisles, he ultimately held the power. Indeed, when it was no longer to his advantage to play the game of mutually advantageous alliances, Cromwell turned his back on the Lisles, thus greatly raising the stakes of the confrontation.

### **Attempting to Rule an Unmanageable Wife:**

As we will see, Cromwell had actually been plotting from the beginning to obtain Lady Lisle's jointure of Painswick, and was willing to use any means to get it, even if it meant causing hardship to his supposed "good friends" the Lisles, or even cutting them loose altogether. Cromwell used his time alone with Lord Lisle at Canterbury to duplicitously cement male economic ties while extracting promises regarding Painswick that would ultimately prove detrimental to Lord Lisle's wife and family. On November 5, 1538, Honor Lisle believed she was on her way to London to oversee her suit for her son's inheritance and to bargain for her husband's annuity. At this point, she had little



idea that her husband was deliberately, or possibly unwisely, working to rid her of her jointure in order to secure his own annuity, nor was she aware that the letter she carried from her husband to Cromwell would compromise her own negotiations.

The letter is worth quoting at length, if only for the obsequious, deferential tone Lord Arthur adopts, and his evident unease at what he suspects will be the outcome of his requests to Cromwell, at least so far as Lady Lisle is concerned:

It may please your lordship to call to remembrance that when I was with you at Canterbury it was your pleasure to move me for Painswick: upon which motion I granted to your lordship to do therein at your request and commandment what that I might do: at which time I was not fully advised that my wife had her jointure therein, as now I have perfect remembrance and knowledge thereof by the indentures devised for the assurance of the same, whereof I send unto your lordship a copy... . And very loath I were to put my said wife from her living in that behalf, considering that I have not whereof to make her a like jointure. Nevertheless I have sent my said wife to your good lordship, beseeching the same to be good lord unto me, to her, and to my son in the suit against the Earl of Bridgewater, *not doubting but that upon some reasonable order by your lordship to be taken she shall be content on the premises to conform herself according to your pleasure, and accomplish your request.* I assure your lordship, there hath been great suit made to my wife for the foresaid lands and like value offered to her by as good assurance as might be desired ... all which she hath refused to this hour. (Vol. 5 #1261; *my emphasis*)

The primary point of Lord Lisle's letter seems to be to inform Cromwell that Painswick is not available to him or to anyone else, unless Honor agrees to it. This particular point, he reminds Cromwell, had already been hinted at when he was at Canterbury, where he had only promised, "to do...what I might do." He had not promised that he would do it, only that he would try. But why remind Cromwell of what he has already been told? The letter hints at numerous possibilities. Since Lady Lisle is now on her way to negotiate for the family suits, her husband may be afraid that Cromwell will broach the subject of Painswick with Honor when he sees her at Court. Cromwell, assuming that Lady Lisle has accepted the "rule" of her husband would be displeased, perhaps, to hear that she has not agreed to this arrangement, that it is not a *fait accompli*. It is also likely that Cromwell has made a fresh demand of Lord Lisle that the property be ceded to him; although Arthur may not have "perfect remembrance" of things, Cromwell does, and has recently reminded him of his Canterbury promise. When

Cromwell calls on Lisle to uphold his pledge to relinquish the property to him, Lisle accounts for his failure to do so by stating that he had forgotten that the property belonged to his wife: “I was not fully advised that my wife had her jointure therein” (Vol. 5 #1261). Did Lord Lisle really not realize that Painswick belonged to Honor, or was this simply a way for him to attempt to renege on the promise? An exchange of letters between Lord Lisle and Husee, almost two weeks earlier than the November 5<sup>th</sup> letter to Cromwell, clearly establishes that Lord Lisle was well aware that the land belonged to his wife.<sup>161</sup> Lord Lisle’s response to Husee, five days later, is unambiguous: “Touching any promise made to my Lord Privy Seal concerning Painswick, it is my wife’s jointure” (Vol. 5, #1258a). In his letter, Lord Lisle does not deny that he made a promise, but simply sidesteps the issue without admitting his guilt. Unspoken here is the fear that Lady Honor will not be moved by her husband to give up the property, and thus Cromwell will have to achieve this on his own, Lord Arthur having done “what he might” to no avail.

## Jointure and Coverture

Here I must pause briefly to lay out both what was meant by jointure and the details of Lady Honor Lisle’s jointure in particular. Jointure cannot be understood except in tandem with coverture. Under the law of coverture, when a woman married she lost control of all her personal property because it was transferred to her husband. However, to mitigate the obvious unfairness that this might entail, a propertied woman could gain some protection through a jointure, which was “a joint tenancy of land by husband and wife, in which the survivor of the two enjoyed the income from the land” when one of

<sup>161</sup> On Oct. 20<sup>th</sup> Husee writes to Lord Lisle warning him that Cromwell believed that Lord Lisle had agreed to convince Lady Lisle to hand over Painswick: “my lord showed [...] that your lordship [Lisle] was at a point with him at Dover and promised to get my lady’s good will for the same [Painswick]” (Vol. 5, #1256).

them predeceased the other (Erickson 238/25).<sup>162</sup> When Elizabeth, Lord Lisle's first wife died, he entered into an agreement with Dudley that not only allowed him to keep the title of Viscount Lisle, but also to enjoy the land and estate of Painswick during the life of his second wife, Honor Lisle, to whom he assigned it as her jointure. This meant that Lord Lisle did not have the right to sell or give the land away, but only to reap the benefits of the property while Honor lived. Lord Lisle was entitled to use Painswick's rents in any way he saw fit, but by law he could not sell it without Lady Lisle's consent. If she did consent to selling the property, he was supposed to provide her with an equivalent payment for giving it over (this was upheld by manorial or common-law courts, but was in fact difficult to enforce).<sup>163</sup> Perennially short of cash, in 1538 Lord Lisle did not have enough money to pay his wife for the land (or offer her another tract of land), and for this reason alone he knew she would be extremely reluctant to hand over her property.

Since a woman had no "legal identity nor was [she] able to sign a contract or sue to obtain credit in her own name," the idea of a woman, such as Lady Lisle, negotiating for property may appear dubious, but wealthy women did do so in practice (Erickson 3). Lady Lisle's jointure gave her the right to receive income from the land after Lisle's death and allowed her to hold this land in trust until her own death. While coverture stated married women had no individual rights, jointure allowed women to exercise some rights and gave them a stable future if their husbands died before them.<sup>164</sup> These conflicting

<sup>162</sup> Lady Lisle's jointure came to her via a complicated route, as it was part of the property held by Lord Lisle in right of his first wife, Elizabeth Grey, widow of Sir Edmund Dudley, who had inherited the Lisle barony in her own right. Upon Lady Grey's marriage to Arthur Plantagenet, he obtained the title Viscount Lisle, together with various "grants of land in Sussex, but these lands were only life grants and the heir to the Lisle estate remained Elizabeth's stepson Sir John Dudley" (Waas 227). This shows that women had some access to power in that they could inherit titles as well as men—Lord Lisle was able to remain Viscount Lisle through his wife's title.

<sup>163</sup> See David Waas pp. 14 and 228. Baddeley notes that the indenture (dated November 22, 1522) was preserved. Because of this we know that the Manor of Painswick and other manors (i.e. Morton Valence and Whaddon) were recovered by what was termed 'Writ of Entry in the Post' against Sir Arthur Plantagenet and Dame Elizabeth, to the use of Sir Arthur and any such wife [Honor] as the said Sir Arthur should have after her [Elizabeth's] decease" (143).

<sup>164</sup> Laws such as equity and ecclesiastical law helped give women a legal position; these laws mitigated the rigid common law stricture of coverture. These two alternate types of law showed how the patriarchal narrative that sought to keep women as non-entities was actually problematic, and these two laws sought to give women some legal standing (Erickson 237).

practices further clarify how Lady Lisle could obtain and use power in a time that legally and officially allowed women none. Officially, as a woman, Lady Lisle was unable to hold a bureaucratic position (or hold land outright), and thus she was seemingly powerless in the public world. However, this is an over-simplification, as I have outlined, and through ecclesiastical and equity law, through an adept understanding of networking, and through her own personal reputation and proficiency at negotiations (both written and verbal), she was able to accrue and wield a great deal of power.

While Lady Lisle had some recourse if her husband promised her property to another, the fact that Lord Lisle sent a letter of forewarning to Cromwell via his wife indicates a lack of concern for her welfare.<sup>165</sup> Lord Lisle's letter provides Cromwell with counsel, or at the very least insider information, about some of the possible problems he might encounter if he broached the subject of Painswick with Lady Lisle. Lisle does make an appeal to pathos, saying that he "would be loath but that she should fare the better by me after my decease" (implying that he does not want to leave her destitute), but this seems a transparent attempt to wriggle out of a difficult situation, one entirely of his own making (Vol. 5 #1258a). Husee does not give the impression that he believes his master, and writes scathingly to him a few days later that "My Lord Privy Seal told me, of his own mouth, that your lordship made him promise that he should have your interest, and further that you would get my lady's assent to the same" (Vol. 5 #1260). Husee explicitly rebukes Lord Lisle, by both asserting that he believes Cromwell's

<sup>165</sup> Philosopher Victor Seidler notes, "The rule of men is simply taken as an expression of reason and normality" so why would his wife oppose his wishes (qtd. by Coleman 7)? "Masculinity as power [is usually] invisible" argues Seidler, thus adherence to their rule is considered so normal that it is incontestable and in fact not even seen as being a matter of masculine domination, so much as simply the way things are.

account of events and by implicitly declaring that Lord Lisle is an untrustworthy source.<sup>166</sup>

In his letter to Cromwell, Lisle says that only now does he have “perfect remembrance” of the fact that Painswick is his wife’s jointure and he “send[s] unto his lordship [Cromwell] a copy” of the indenture (Vol. 5 #1261). Why enclose a copy of the agreement? To give Cromwell and his lawyers a chance to view the legalities of the jointure in order to see if they can find some ambiguity that might authorize Cromwell’s claiming the land? To verify it is lawfully hers and thus confirm that Cromwell must negotiate with Lady Lisle, and only her? I argue that he cites the law in order to save face. He has been unable to “rule” his wife, and this suggests a weakness in him and strength in her; he is the head of the household and should be able to manage his wife. By sending a copy of the legal document he can save face by implying he cannot make her adhere to his will because of the legalities of the actual jointure agreement. Under the impetus of the good times at Canterbury, Lord Lisle may have pledged to do things he was not capable of undertaking, but he suggests that he made no binding promises to Cromwell. In the letter, Lisle uses the language of entreaty to “beseech” a superior for “good lordship,” a standard trope that indicates deference to the dominant individual.<sup>167</sup> He not only asks for this favour “unto [himself],” but also for “her and to my son... not doubting but that upon some reasonable order by your lordship to be taken she shall be content to conform herself according to your pleasure, and accomplish your request”

<sup>166</sup> Keep in mind that Husee, on October 20<sup>th</sup> had already called into question Lord Lisle’s intent with Painswick. Husee had already told his master that Cromwell believed that Lisle had already promised him the jointure property. We know that Arthur prevaricated. His letter to Cromwell proclaims his innocence, but a letter from almost a month earlier indicates that he had full knowledge of the ownership of the land and of Cromwell’s expectations. The general practice of signing over one’s jointure was very imprudent, but often through tactics such as intimidation, bullying, or simply a physical beating, a wife could be impelled to sign over her jointure. Such was the case of Elizabeth Cary, who was coerced by her husband to sign over her property, much to the dismay of her father who proceeded to disown her, and then, upon her husband’s demise, left her to die in poverty mostly due to her conversion to Catholicism. For more information on jointure, see Amy Erickson (25). Also, see discussions in Gabriel Jones (113); and Courtney Kenny (52). For an in-depth discussion of women who signed over their jointures to their husbands, see Buck Ferguson and Wright, eds.

<sup>167</sup> For a breakdown of the power relations inherent in a variety of discursive scripts, see the introduction to dissertation. As well, see Angel Day, *the English Secretorie, or Methods of Writing Epistles and Letters* (101-3) and Lynne Magnusson, *Shakespeare and Social Dialogue*, 80-88.

(Vol. 5 #1261). Notice that when Lisle asks for “good lordship” from Cromwell, he places himself first in line to reap any benefits, while his wife is next and his stepson last. Lisle claims that his wife will obey a “reasonable order by [Cromwell],” which implies that she would not accept this order from her husband, but, due to Cromwell’s position, he should have no trouble bending Lady Lisle’s will. By repeating the word “your” three times, Lord Lisle emphasizes Cromwell and his authority and de-emphasizes Honor’s position; her desires are to have no place in this negotiation – she shall be “content” with the will of the dominant party. The import of the bulk of the letter, then, appears to be that if one male cannot manage “his” female, then he can send her to be managed by another more powerful male. The letter also confirms that, in practice, women did not always abide by their husbands’ rule, and Lord Lisle’s entreaty to Cromwell suggests that in such cases an appeal to a powerful male was perhaps a means of resolving such insubordination, though as we will see Lady Lisle will not be “content” to “conform herself” according to any man’s pleasure.

As we see in the letter excerpt above, following Lord Lisle’s appeal for Cromwell to make Lady Lisle “conform,” he lets Cromwell know that “there hath been great suit made to my wife for the foresaid lands.” Cromwell was indeed not the only man interested; Sir William Kingston, a land speculator and an avid hunter, owned property in the area and was intent on obtaining this rich, well-forested land. By informing Cromwell of other offers, Lord Lisle appears to be trying to gain leverage and favour at the same time; that is, if the property is so coveted, Cromwell should be a “better friend” to the Lisles, one more willing to increase Lord Lisle’s annuity in exchange for ceding a prized property. However, I believe Lord Lisle is also warning Cromwell of the difficulty he will face in his negotiations with Lady Lisle. Unbeknownst to Lady Lisle, the family conflict with Cromwell was transforming into a conflict pitting Lord Lisle and Cromwell against Honor Lisle, who would increasingly stand alone in her defence of the family’s assets.

It is in this compromised position that Lady Lisle would travel to London in order to negotiate her son’s inheritance, resolve the Painswick situation, and sue for her jointure on Arthur’s behalf. Lord Lisle certainly betrayed his wife, whether by guile (as I have suggested) or simply by negligence. But either way, why did Lisle send his wife, whom he was attempting to negotiate *around*, in his stead? Usually lawyers, estates

men, or menservants (such as John Husee) were sent to tend to these intricate negotiations, but legally Honor was the only one who could sign over her jointure to Cromwell, as it was inalienably her property by law. Even if Husee handled the annuity and inheritance, Honor would still have had to travel to London to sign all the documentation. In spite of her desperate situation, Lady Lisle still held this powerful card, one that meant she could not easily be forced to accept the financial ruin her husband's dealings had all but assured.

It is in this context – one in which Honor is desperate, and yet aware of the fact that she retains a modicum of leverage – that we will examine her epistles concerning the negotiations. Through a variety of discourses such as obligation, honour, and past promises, she builds a stronger negotiating hand and fashions herself as an influential ally that Cromwell should not want to lose. As well, we will witness her self-fashioning as a conscientious, influential ambassador of her family's affairs rather than an individual on the brink of ruin. Through her use of the discursive scripts of “deference,” “courtesy,” and “supposal/ assurance,” and her strong declarative statements, we will see how her letters employ her command of epistolary conventions to help minimize the damages of Cromwell's power play. Her letters show how she strategizes to achieve positive results both for herself and for her family against insurmountable odds, even if ultimately she cannot prevent substantial losses.

## **The Art of Losing: Honor and Cromwell**

When Lady Lisle began her voyage from Calais to England on November 6, 1538, it had been five years since she had been at Court. Arriving in London, she was met by John Husee, who would have told her that Lord Lisle's first cousin, Margaret Pole, Countess of Salisbury, her two sons, and his nephew the Marquis of Exeter, were all arrested on suspicion of treason (Abridged 309). Throughout Honor's stay at court, Cromwell and the King's other ministers were busy interrogating the prisoners. This knowledge surely emphasized her precarious position in the world of official negotiations; not only was she at a disadvantage due to her gender, but now, where she could unwittingly embroil her household in the investigations of their relatives and friends, she was doubly disadvantaged. Lady Lisle's trip entailed two main objectives: to

finalize her son's inheritance and to negotiate the rate of her husband's annuity. What Honor did not realize is that now Painswick, through Lord Lisle's ineptness and Cromwell's shrewdness, has been placed on the bargaining table. She was also unaware that the correspondence she carried from her husband to Cromwell could, in essence, help him to best her in their negotiations.<sup>168</sup>

It fell to Husee to break the news to his mistress, and upon hearing it Lady Lisle wrote a blistering letter of reproach to her husband:

My own good Lord, This shall be to advertise you that this day, coming into Canterbury, Husee did meet with me; who sheweth me that my lord Privy Seal is fully bent and determined to have Painswick; and he saidth that at your being at Canterbury ye did not only make him promise thereof but also fully promised to get him my good will therein, My lord, what may I now do herein, your promise everyway considered? I might as well tarried at home but only for this matter . . . I pray God I lose no more.  
(Vol. 5 # 1263)

She does not begin her letter with her usual affectionate salutation of "Mine own Sweetheart," nor does she eloquently wax on (as she often does) about how she misses him; instead she uses the brusque "my own good Lord" to indicate her displeasure.<sup>169</sup> She knows now that Arthur has not been honest about his past negotiations: he has assured Cromwell her jointure. She repeats the word "promise" three times in the letter, reinforcing the importance of this word – not simply a word, but a pledge or bond. If one "promises," as Lord Lisle does to Cromwell, it is a binding oath that guarantees that one will give, or bestow, some specific thing to another individual, usually "implying something to the advantage or pleasure of the person concerned" (*OED* 1453). Not only

<sup>168</sup> Why doesn't Lady Lisle read the letter, especially since letters were public and carried little real expectation of privacy? More than likely, the letter was sealed with Deputy Lisle's wax – if she opened it, Cromwell would know that she had tampered with it. As well, she probably assumes that her husband is on her side – he would want her to negotiate well on behalf of the family – and thus anything he would be writing to Cromwell would be for the benefit of the entire family.

<sup>169</sup> Lady Lisle usually begins her letters to her husband with very demonstrative salutations and tends always to wax eloquently about how much she misses him or says things like "in my most heartiest wise I comment me unto you, promising you I never thought so long for you" (Vol. 5 #1267). Her standard first line tends to be along the lines of "Mine own Sweet heart, even with whole heart and mind I have me commended unto you" (Vol. #5 #1269, #1270). For her not to use one of her usual openings, in my reading, suggests her anger with him.



has her husband bound her to a promise she never made, he has also guaranteed Cromwell her “good will.” The assurance of her “benevolence” or “generosity” also carries with it the idea that this promise was “granted by the seller of a business to the purchaser,” of establishing the seller’s “recognized successor” (*OED* 297). Lord Lisle has taken on the role of the seller – not only of the land, but of his wife’s good will – and if she does not grant it to their illustrious friend and chief ally, it will appear as if she is renegeing on an agreement.

Craig Muldrew posits that in early modern society the “ability to profit and to exert one’s will or influence depended upon reputation, and such reputation was fundamentally based upon reliability because it was the foundation of trust” (149). Thus, if Lady Lisle refuses Cromwell’s request her very reputation may be called into question. More importantly, if she does not give her “good will” (i.e. cede her property) to this very powerful man, one whose friendship her family painstakingly cultivated, he may no longer be willing to assist them with their business. As her bitter last few sentences show, she is now well aware that her husband has placed her in an untenable position. If the family were to have any hope of preserving her son’s inheritance, and receiving a decent amount for her husband’s annuity (the only secure money the family would have to live on), Painswick would more than likely have to be signed over to Cromwell. Even though she asks her husband “What may I now do herein, your promise every way considered?”, she in no way expects him to be able to help. The query simply expresses her own angry realization that she is entirely on her own and has been manipulated by both her husband and Cromwell. Her exclamation of “I pray God I shall lose no more,” indicates her cognisance that she has more than likely already lost her jointure and could possibly lose her son’s inheritance as well.

In his response to his wife’s letter, Lisle states: “And whereas ye writ to me that my Lord Privy Seal is bent to have Painswick, and bindeth me by my promise, I said to him it was your jointure, and that I would do the best I could with you, trusting that *you would be ruled by me*” [added emphasis] (Vol. 5 #1267). Lord Lisle does not actually deny that he promised the jointure, he simply shifts the blame to Cromwell by saying he is “bent” or determined to have the land (*OED* 809). If their good friend Cromwell desired the property, then Arthur cannot be at fault as it is Cromwell who “bindeth” him and

“depriv[eth] [him] of personal liberty” – in other words he has no personal responsibility. More interesting is Lord Lisle’s reminder of his promise that his wife will be “ruled” by him. Here he seeks to appeal to her sense of propriety: she should be willing to curb herself to her husband’s desires and assume the role of the obedient wife. Just as Cromwell “bound” Lord Lisle to his superior will, so too should Lady Lisle be bound to her husband’s. The system of gender subordination – the belief that a wife would be ruled by her husband – is, as Eve Sedgwick argues, a part of the male culture that insists males were to “command the labour/lives of women and thus reinforce their own male privilege” (9). Lady Lisle was never supposed to be a player with real autonomy, nor was she to be a participant in male power games; even she, like those with little power, still had the ability to resist and try to create change.<sup>170</sup>

Immediately upon arrival at Court, Lady Lisle sought to bring about a satisfactory closure to the difficult situation by having Husee set up an audience with Henry VIII to request his aid in her suit. She writes to her husband on November 14<sup>th</sup> that at her meeting with the King she “moved his Grace, and gave his highness thanks for the goodness he shewed unto us and my son; so that, after much communication, his Grace was [a] very good and gracious lord unto you my lord, me, and my son, and willed me to resort once again to my Lord Privy Seal” (Vol. 5 #1269). Although Honor indicates things went well in her talk with the King, we do not get details of what the “much communication” entailed. Also, even though the King does negotiate with her, she must “once again” deal with Cromwell – there will be no escape from him. She continues, “As touching Painswick, I never heard yet of it since my coming; what I shall do hereafter God knoweth” (Vol 5 #1269). Her query about what she will do “hereafter” suggests she

<sup>170</sup> Husee, who is now at Court with Lady Lisle, implies that perhaps change, or at least a chance to stay the Lisle losses, will occur now that Honor has arrived. He writes to Lord Lisle that “now my lady is here, my lord may debate the matter with her ladyship, who I think, of his honour, will not desire her losses....Now my lady is here I shall work by her advice what is best to be done” (Vol. 5 #1265). Husee’s repetition of “now my lady is here” indicates his optimism, based on his respect for Lady Lisle and her negotiating abilities (as opposed to her husband’s) and his belief that Cromwell will be a good friend to them because he will now have to debate with her, a far more formidable force than her husband. Note, as well, that Husee speaks of Cromwell as having “honour,” which should prevent him from “desir[ing] her losses”: Arthur himself did not have either the honour, or the foresight, to prevent or mitigate Honor’s losses, and she is now left to hope for Cromwell’s honour. As well, by clearly letting his master know that he will “work by her advice,” rather than the directives of his master, he reinforces where his confidence lies.

is wondering if she should actually broach the subject of her jointure with Cromwell, or if it will actually be brought to the negotiation table at all. She is left in an ostensibly powerless position, waiting to see if or when it will be dealt with. Whatever strategy she chooses, whether an active open parlay about her jointure, or a more passive position waiting for the subject to be broached, she must realize that all of her negotiations (and future ones too) will have to, at some point, be handled “once again” by Cromwell.

The next day Lady Lisle writes a letter to Arthur and this time begins with her standard warm salutation “Mine own Sweet lord, even with whole heart and mind, I have me most heartily commended unto you” (Vol. 5 #1270). Immediately after this she shifts into a more matter-of fact recounting of events; she claims the King was a “singular lord unto [her] in [her] suits” because he established that “both the lords [Hertford and Daubeney] are commanded no further to meddle with any part of my son’s inheritance” (Vol. 5 #1270). This clearly establishes that her deal has seemingly been reconciled. I use the word “seemingly” because although the King has decreed her son’s inheritance is safe he has left the finalization of the details for her to establish with Cromwell. She indicates that she thought she would meet with Cromwell but “his lordship hath deferred it till to-morrow, and sent me word by Husee that I should be with him to-morrow by vj of the clock, which I will not fail” (Vol. 5 #1270). It is interesting that the King made time to see Lady Lisle, but Cromwell is too busy to negotiate with the woman who holds the property he so greatly desires. While Cromwell could be busy, this strategy of the senior power player keeping the junior player waiting reinforces the authority of the dominant player: Cromwell is the one in charge. This would reinforce to Lady Lisle that she must sit and wait for him: she is at his beck and call. Yet her declaration that she will “not fail” suggests that she is determined that the meeting will occur, and that she, in that meeting, will not fail to meet her objective.

As a male in an official magisterial position, Cromwell has enough power to overrule just about anyone other than the King, so why would he make Lady Lisle wait? Why not meet with Honor and openly negotiate to trade Painswick for the annuity and the inheritance? The likely reason is that Cromwell may not actually have the ability to grant her request for a higher annuity. It is probably that the King has already informed Cromwell that he wants the inheritance protected, but that he has no desire to increase

the annuity. If this were the case, it would be Cromwell's job to run interference for the King, handle the details of negotiations, and confer with Lady Lisle. If he keeps her waiting, which puts-off settling her son's inheritance and leaves her disconcerted and concerned about her prospects for a good deal, she may be more amenable to signing over her jointure. Lady Lisle is cognisant that although the King has agreed to help her with her son's suit, she will still need the "good will" of the Lord Privy Seal (the very same type of "good will" that her husband promised would come from her), to make inroads with Lord Lisle's annuity and to finalize the intricate details of the inheritance.

Although Lady Lisle has not yet seen Cromwell, she writes that one of Cromwell's men, Mr. Pollard, approached her and "partly broken unto me concerning Painswick." Having Cromwell's servant broach the subject warns her that the property will be on the negotiating table and gives her ample opportunity to come up with a negotiation strategy. Alternately, by having his servant raise the issue of the jointure, Cromwell reinforces Lady Lisle's subordinate position; the great man himself is not presenting this to her, but instead sends a lesser individual to handle this trivial affair. Honor tells her husband that she replied "that I trusted so to use me to my lord [Cromwell] that he should have no cause to say that I have been ingrate, trusting farther that my lord would see me no loser"" (Vol. 5 #1270). Her wording is a mixture of both deference and "courtesy." She is deferential, as she does not want to be perceived as "ungrateful" to an important man on whom she is counting for assistance, but she "trusts" that, in the style of courtesy, as an equal making a request, "he would see her no loser." She is both the supplicant asking for assistance and an aristocratic friend who "trust[s]" and is also "trusting" that his decency, or honour, will ensure that he treats her accordingly. Her interaction with Cromwell's servant establishes Lady Lisle as respectful yet not subservient: an individual worthy of his support.

Lady Lisle ends her letter with a surprising admonishment to her husband and a cryptic statement about her negotiations so far:

I have in hope to dispatch my business ere it be long; for fain I would be with you, not withstanding you promised me that after my departing you would dine at X of the clock every day, and keep little company, because you would mourn for my absence. But I warrant you, I know what rule you keep and company, well enough, since my departing, and what thought

you take for me, whereof you shall hear at my coming home. But now to conclude, how the King handled me, and how I was used, although I have written you part, I refer the relation of the rest till mine own coming home.... From London, the XV th of November, by her that is more yours than her own, which had much rather die with you there, than live here. (Vol. 5 #1270)

It is here we catch a glimpse of a different Lady Lisle, not simply the diligent ambassador of Lisle business, but the ruling Matriarch who is quick to reprimand her subordinate. She states that she wishes to be with Lord Lisle (“fain I would be with you”), but also reminds him of the promises he made her before she left for London. He “promised” that due to his missing her he would not only eat at an early hour, but also not associate with certain individuals. She calls him to task for his falsehoods and instead “warrants” or “gives assurance of the fact” that he has upheld none of his promises (*OED*). She does not ask him if he has actually adhered to his promises: she guarantees him that he has not. She uses the discourse of “supposal/assurance,” of a dominant to an inferior, to highlight his lack of adherence to his promises. This discursive script “supposes,” or makes assumptions, of the likelihood of things occurring based on the writer’s superior position. She has been informed (most likely by her servant networks) of his behaviour while she has been gone and threatens him with an earful “whereof you shall hear at my coming home.” Much like a parent threatening a child with punishment, Lady Lisle threatens him with a similar fate. She is certainly not the subordinate wife “ruled” by her husband; while she has been manipulated and placed in this untenable position, she will deal with him, both in the context of a man not keeping his promises, and as a man who set her up to negotiate at a deficit.

Abruptly the tenor of the letter shifts once again, from Lady Lisle as avenging wife, to Lady Lisle besieged by hostile forces. Until this point her letters have appeared fairly innocuous, but her conclusion to her husband indicates that all is not as it seems. Her epistolary conclusions to her husband generally allude to a warm and loving relationship: “[b]y her that is both your and her own,” or even “[b]y her that is more than all your own.”<sup>171</sup> However in this letter, where she indicates that the King has “handled” her and others have “used” her, her fear is palpable. She is too afraid to fully disclose

<sup>171</sup> In order Vol.5 #1262, Vol. 5 #1263, Vol. 5 #1264 & #1269.

the details, but it has been disturbing enough that she indicates that she would prefer to “die with [her husband] there, than live here.” She is negotiating in a climate of fear, with her “gracious Lord” the King, and has yet to deal with the more intimidating Cromwell.<sup>172</sup> Even though her fears are alluded to in her conclusion, she does not expound on them, as she does not know who might see this letter. Undoubtedly, her kin are being executed, and the news of their deaths has reached her, but she does not indicate this in her forthcoming letters and instead applies herself diligently to the negotiations at hand in spite of the ever worsening circumstances.

Lady Lisle’s letter the next day maintains the façade of a pleasant court visit, recounting to her husband that:

I was this morning with my Lord Privy Seal, to whom I declared how good and gracious the King’s Majesty was unto me, and that his pleasure was that I should resort unto his lordship[Cromwell] for the expedition of mine affairs, *desiring him to be good* unto you for your annuity, which he said might be no more the £200 yearly: to whom I answered, that it lay in him to obtain the £400 , and that was his first motion and promise”. (Vol. 5 #1272)

This letter begins with similar wording to the November 14<sup>th</sup> letter, recounting the goodness of the King, but what is intriguing is that she states that she “declared” of his goodness to Cromwell. Honor not only expresses her respect for the King, but insinuates that since he was so gracious to her in their meeting, Cromwell should also be as gracious in the “expedition” of her affairs. She subtly reminds him of her status in the hierarchical structure: the King, the ultimate power, has decreed that Cromwell shall deal with her, his well-favoured kin. Honor’s presentation of her clout – as a relative and friend of the King – reinforces her own currency within this social economy and strategically intimates that she too is a person of influence and should be treated accordingly.

<sup>172</sup> At this point the Marquis of Exeter, Lord Montague, Sir Edward Neville and Sir Geoffrey Pole (kin and friends of the Lisle’s) were imprisoned in the Tower of London and presumed to be put to death.

Lady Lisle's wording, "I should resort unto his lordship for the expedition of mine affairs," articulates to Cromwell that it is the King's desire that Cromwell finalize her affairs, but by including the phrase "desiring him to be good unto you for your annuity," she merges two separate issues: annuity and inheritance. The King did not indicate that Cromwell was to be good about the annuity (not as she recounted in her letters), only that he should expedite her son's inheritance. It was confirmed in the previous November 15<sup>th</sup> letter to her husband that the King had settled the inheritance issue, but Lady Lisle did not recount any discussion of the annuity to her husband. Does she word things so as to suggest to Cromwell that the King wants him to settle the annuity along with the inheritance, and he should be "good", or generous, to her husband? Lady Lisle seems to be deliberately obscuring who is doing the "desiring," as well as what the actual desire is. In my reading, Lady Lisle's strategy is to insinuate that the King wants Cromwell to be generous with the inheritance and the annuity. She has taken a tactic out of Cromwell's play book and attempted to entwine two separate suits into one. If he believes that the King wishes him to be generous, not only in the inheritance, but with the annuity, Lady Lisle will have achieved a major coup.

However, her strategy misfires. Cromwell curtly volleys back that the annuity should be "no more than £200 yearly." He may have a great deal of power, but as the King's right hand man he knows that Henry is never willing to grant exorbitant amounts of money if he can avoid doing so. Lady Lisle's report to her husband states that she challenged Cromwell, recounting, "it lay in him to obtain the £400 and that was his first motion and promise" (Vol. 5 #1272). Honor simultaneously flatters and challenges Cromwell in this statement. This tactic is one that once again comes from a position of equals, rather than inferior to superior. When reporting to her husband about what she actually said to Cromwell, she at times uses the language of deference because she is petitioning a powerful man in a magisterial position. At other times, however, she uses the language of equals, the language of "courtesy" to praise Cromwell and his ability to achieve things: "it lay in him." He has the power to give them a larger annuity, and if he does not she will question his honour or challenge him by invoking his "promise" for the higher amount. She does not identify who told her of this promise, nor does she give evidence to support her claim. Instead, she relies on the notion that a man's word is his bond, and in order to safeguard his reputation he will abide by his "first motion and

promise.”<sup>173</sup> Just as Cromwell previously “bound” Lord Lisle to his promise made at Canterbury, Lady Lisle attempts to likewise push him to abide by his initial promise. He does not fall for this form of blackmail, being confident that his status as Lord Privy Seal will not be tarnished by his reneging on such a trivial matter. As I noted earlier, the more formal power one has in this society, the more asymmetrical one’s relationship is to honour and reputation, even if – crucially given Lady Lisle’s strategy – no one can afford to ignore honour and reputation altogether.

Honor reports to her husband that she tried to hold Cromwell to his initial promise for the annuity of £400. Lord Lisle, of course, does the expected; he writes Honor, “Whereas you write my Lord Privy Seal will not be charge with no promise, you may show his lordship I will not charge him with none... I will never do the thing whereby he shall be displeased” (Vol. 5 #1281). Lord Lisle knows that he did promise away land that did not belong to him and he also knows that he needs Cromwell’s help more than Cromwell needs his so he is not willing to hold him accountable. Furthermore, who knows if the promise of more money was ever made? As Husee writes to Lady Lisle in his November letter, “I have no knowledge of the promises but only my lord’s report” (Vol. 5 # 1218).<sup>174</sup> Yet for all Cromwell’s arrogance and underhandedness, he avers that he is willing to do “the best therein for you and all others that lay in my power” (Vol. 5 #1272). He may have the upper hand in this negotiation, but he also has need of friends

<sup>173</sup> As previously noted, Craig Muldrew argues that the “ability to profit and to exert one’s will or influence depended upon reputation, and such reputation was fundamentally based upon reliability because it was the foundation of trust” (149). Cromwell was the second most powerful man in the land at this time, but if his reputation a reliable ally disintegrated, so too would some of his influence.

<sup>174</sup> As mentioned earlier, in regards to the annuity, Husee had stated “Your lordship is to blame of all this matter, for had you been earnest with the King.... for I perceive by my Lord that you never spake to the King therein” (Vol. 5 #1233).



and informants, and it would not be a good move in the larger court context to lose the Lises' friendship.<sup>175</sup>

At this point Lady Lisle knows that Cromwell will give them an annuity, yet she chooses to stay the negotiation of the amount until the inheritance is taken care of, perhaps because she realizes that since Cromwell is refusing to set a higher amount, she may have to use her property to up the ante. It makes sense that only after she has opened up with her initial salvo that she tries to entice Cromwell through the offer of her jointure. Lady Lisle probably realizes that if she wishes to secure a higher annuity and security of her son's inheritance, she will have to offer a trade: the two are contingent on her jointure. In the end, Lady Lisle is the one to bring up Painswick, perhaps believing that a display of generosity might gain her some of his "good will." She states:

And forasmuch as he moved me not for Painswick, I opened the matter unto him myself; saying that Mr. Pollard had moved me in his behalf for it and how that not with-standing I had refused divers and sundry great offers for mine interests therin, yet forasmuch as I found him always good lord unto me, *and* specially now in my need, I could be content to depart with it unto him, so that he would see me no loser, as I trusted of his goodness he would not, and that his request should not be for Mr. Kingston nor none other, but for himself; to the which he promised faithfully that it would be for no creature but himself; and thus we departed, for he has no more leisure at that time. Howbeit, I trust within a day or two I shall know further of his mind. (Vol. 5 #1272)

Her phrasing is straightforward and matter-of-fact, as she tells her husband how she took control of the situation and established the terms of the negotiation. She presents herself to her husband as an active negotiator who does not avoid difficult subjects. Her six "I" statements reinforce her active position in this transaction: she constructs herself as the dominant player in this encounter, as Painswick is legally hers to dispense with if she is motivated to do so. Cromwell wants her jointure and she is

<sup>175</sup> Lady Lisle recaps to Cromwell how the Earls had bullied her for her son's inheritance, and subsequently Cromwell makes good on his promise to do all in his power for her, stating that "they should undo that was done" and more importantly "that he would be in hand with them for the same"(Vol. 5 #1272). This emphasizes not only how much power Cromwell has (or has the potential to have), but also his ties to the Lises as he is willing to deal with this matter personally. His friendship or "good will" is not something they can take lightly. Lady Lisle may not want to lose her jointure, but she also knows they cannot afford to lose his assistance.

willing to sell it to him because, at this point, “in her need,” he is the only one with the ability to secure her son’s imperilled inheritance. She suggests that if she gives Cromwell her property he will then be in her debt, and use his “goodness” (his influence) to protect the Lisle interests. Lady Lisle does not have the official power to ensure that Cromwell will follow through with his promises, but she is counting on the reciprocal trading of favours to be enough to bind him. She says that she believes that Cromwell “would see me no loser” and that she “trust[s] of his goodness” (Vol. 5 #1272). The word “trust” is crucial in the economy of obligation, and although Lady Lisle will lose a property of great worth for a very intangible promise of “good lordship,” Cromwell is certainly an ally worth keeping. She was not previously “content” to be “ruled” by her husband, but if the Lord Privy Seal makes her promises she is more willing to cede Painswick as a way to tie him to a future obligation. Although this is a risky strategy considering Cromwell’s past duplicity, Lady Lisle realizes it is the best move available to her, as losing Cromwell’s “friendship” and her jointure would be a catastrophic outcome.

She ends her letter by stating she will see the King before she leaves, although she does not know exactly when that will be:

I know not; for my business shall be first at a point, wherein I will use diligence so that I intend to slack no time till I be at a point whereas I have good hope to establish both your affair and mine or I depart and bring your patent of annuity with me and also commission of the Friars. I will assuredly do the best that lyeth me therein and all others” (Vol. 5 #1272).

Her use of the word “diligence” and her determination to “slack no time” emphasizes not only how she wishes to be perceived, but also how she identifies herself. In an earlier letter she stated that she would write her husband from court to “certify” how she shall “prosper and proceed in all [her] affairs and doings”; how she “trust[ed]” that he would not find her “slack,” and that she would instead “use such diligence as one should do” and with “confidence shortly return” (Vol. 5 #1264). Her emphasis on diligence and hard work suggests that, as the active ambassador of the Lisle affairs, it is these qualities that will give her success. Her repetition of the phrase “not slack,” and of her handling not just of her affairs but his, reinforces her self-presentation as the steadfast negotiator of the Lisle family. By articulating that she will bring all of the business documents – the patent of annuity and the commission of the

Friars – she is showing not only her knowledge of legalities but her competence as the Lisle administrator (unlike her husband in Canterbury). She is, and always has been, confident of her ability to negotiate on behalf of her family and her epistles reinforce this image, which is so crucial to maximizing the chance that Cromwell will honour any promises made in exchange for Painswick.

A week later Lady Lisle updates her husband on the negotiations, hinting that things are not going as well as she had hoped and outlining some of her strategies. She writes, “my Lord Privy Seal hath made plain answer that your annuity shall be no more but £200, yet, will I not let to do my best, notwithstanding I dare not speak to the King for his [Cromwell’s] displeasure” (Vol. 5 #1284). She lets Arthur know that she is not willing to simply accept the £200; she will attempt to negotiate a better deal, but she alludes to the fact that she is unable, or unwilling, to approach the King because she fears Cromwell’s anger. If she goes over Cromwell’s head to the King, the Lisle household might benefit if he raises the annuity, but he might not, and, more than likely, he will send her back to Cromwell to finalize the details as an unambiguous enemy. Cromwell would learn of her insubordination, and could retaliate by stonewalling and letting the matter sit for months on end or by lowering the annuity and ensuring that their various suits do not come to fruition. Thus, Lady Lisle’s decision not to go over Cromwell’s head is a strategic one that rests on her gamble that he will adhere to his promise of assistance.

In the same letter, Honor is quick to let her husband know that even after a week of negotiating she has still not fully resolved the issue of Painswick. It is “yet at no determinate point,” she says, primarily because Cromwell wanted her to clear the property of her daughter’s dowry ties (Vol. 5 #1284).<sup>176</sup> Cromwell does not offer any recompense to her daughters and, as Honor reports, feels that he deserves this “for the pleasure he hath done already to you and me, and specially now last concerning my son’s inheritance” (Vol. 5 #1284). From Cromwell’s point of view, the Lisles owe him, not just for favours done in the past, but also for his more immediate assistance with the

<sup>176</sup> Cromwell wanted the land clear of the £1000 total fee it had tied to it. This fee was to provide for the dowries of the Lisles’ daughters. This was not the only dowry that the girls had but it was still a diminishing of their wealth.

inheritance. Lady Lisle is quite clear to her husband that she will be “glad to accomplish my lord’s mind,” but she says her chief desire is that “you [her husband], my good lord, nor I be no losers, which I trust, of his honour, he will not desire.” Invoking the ties of friendship and obligation, Lady Lisle believes that Cromwell will not desire to beggar them, she has faith this negotiation will not leave the family in even greater financial straits (Vol. 5 #1284).<sup>177</sup>

In the end, Honor lets her husband know that Cromwell has pledged that the Earls cannot “sell, tangle, put away or discontinue any of [her] said son’s inheritance.” He has advocated for her cause in a personal and substantial way – the inheritance is finally secure (Vol. 5 #1290).<sup>178</sup>

In November, Lady Lisle signed her land over to Cromwell: “I have acknowledged before a Judge the surrender of my rights in Painswick, which was my jointure” (Vol. 5 #1290). Even though Cromwell agreed to pay the Lisles an annual rent of £120 a year throughout their lives for Painswick, it was still a great loss for the Lisle family and for Lady Lisle in particular. As well, even though Cromwell lent them money to firmly settle their son’s inheritance, they would have to pay him back out of the yearly rent from Painswick; in essence they were not getting a yearly rent so much as a risk free loan (Vol. 5 #1298, P257). As Husee puts it, Painswick was “a large gift to part withal, for services, pleasures and friendships past” (Vol.5 #1285). But I would argue that in many ways this “large gift” was Lady Lisle’s best strategy when dealing with this official power broker. Although she surrendered her jointure, she was able to make substantial headway on several of her other projects. She ensured that her son’s inheritance would remain untouched, that the annuity of £200 was secure, and that

<sup>177</sup> It is when Lady Lisle reports about her dinner with Lord Daubeney that we see Cromwell stepping in to certify that the Lisles are not “losers”. She describes how the King and Cromwell had “so shaken them [the two earls] up for meddling in that, they both hath promised to meddle no farther therein” (Vol. 5 #1284). The phrase Honor uses, “to shake-up”, clearly indicates that the earls were soundly rebuked, and even “threatened with abuse” for their attempts to claim the inheritance: the formal power brokers did not deal kindly with those who have gone against Lady Lisle (*OED*).

<sup>178</sup> M.L Bush says that by September the King has evidently demonstrated his favour towards the Lisles and that by November 15th it was reported thankfully that the King had forbidden Seymour and Daubeney to meddle with Basset’s inheritance. See Bush.

Cromwell would advance them much needed money against future rent and remain bound to them for the foreseeable future (Vol. 5 #1298). More importantly, by signing her jointure over to Cromwell she granted him her “good will” and preserved the “friendship” he had been willing to sacrifice, a commodity that could ensure that future favours would come their way and that he would remain an ally.

In a time where “Cromwellian” negotiations often left people in great jeopardy, Lady Lisle came away reasonably unscathed. Through her epistolary account we witness Lady Lisle’s construction of self as an active, influential ambassador of her family’s affairs and a strong ally to the second most powerful man in the land. Cromwell did acquire the better deal with Painswick, but in an economy where formal and informal connections were paramount in accruing influence, angering the Lord Privy Seal by denying him land (which was most likely promised away by her husband in the first place) would have been very short-sighted in the larger game of upward mobility and self-preservation. Thus, I would argue that Lady Lisle’s “failure” was the right strategic move to make with regard to the long term future of her family. Even if she did not come out the “victor” in the struggle, her negotiations illustrate how the complex nature of power and influence in the Tudor period allowed her to put up some resistance which minimized her losses and at times tactfully defied the Lord Privy Seal himself. Her use of informal avenues of obligation, friendship, and kinship helped her build a stronger negotiating hand and fashion herself as a desirable ally, even after Cromwell had shown a willingness to trade their historical alliance for more money and land. Her letters illustrate that language can not only signify, but also amplify one’s power position, and that knowing how to manipulate established discourses can be a powerful rejoinder to formal political authority. In recounting these events and in analysing these letters I have demonstrated that power is not simply a political mandate, but, as the Lisle correspondence demonstrates, a game in which an infinite number of cards can be played by any player to improve their circumstances.

## Conclusion

Lady Honor Lisle's projects were, for the most part, successful endeavours because she was a strong resourceful woman who used the epistle to increase her networks of influence and negotiate with both official and unofficial power brokers to command action in her world. The *Lisle Letters* offer material evidence of how a Tudor woman used her resources—servants, international friends, kin, official power brokers—to accumulate power and create change within her life and the lives of her family. Lady Lisle used the rhetoric of the letter, to cross boundaries, increase networks, and command action.

In a letter dated November 15, 1533, Lady Honor Lisle writes to Thomas Cromwell, the Lord Privy Seal:

Right worshipful Sir, in my most hearty manner I commend me unto you, thanking you for your special goodness towards my lord and me at all times, which we are not well able to deserve; yet for my part I am so bold once gain to be a suitor unto you ... You shall have my good will and service, glad if it might lie in me to do your pleasure. (Vol.1 #57)

This is an ordinary letter, but in its very ordinariness it offers us a good example of how the economy of obligation operated in aristocratic circles, and is, in fact, emblematic of how Lady Lisle, like many Tudor aristocratic women, worked in and around the patriarchal strictures that were part of their everyday lives, using the rhetoric of the epistle to increase their influence in the socio-political world. The letter – written shortly after Lady Lisle's marriage to Arthur Lisle – exemplifies her reflexive understanding of the hierarchical boundaries that existed in her world, and more importantly demonstrate her ability to navigate around them.

She begins with "Right worshipful Sir," words that flatter and reinforce hierarchical status, and implies that Cromwell's political position is so far superior to her's and her husband's that they are little deserving of his attention. Her positional

stance of gratitude for everything he has done for them uses the rhetorical construction of the undeserving supplicant who “commend[s]” herself to him in order to sue for favour. Her acknowledgement of Cromwell’s extension of “special goodness”, of his granting her and her husband support throughout their association, offers further evidence of the use of the economy of obligation to increase the Lisles’ status in the world, and more significantly of Lady Honor’s ability to use correspondence to enhance this status. At the same time as she flatters, however, she manipulates the language to affirm her worth as an individual (even though she claimed she and her husband were not worthy “to deserve” his attention). Her repeated positioning of Cromwell as their “benefactor” rhetorically signals her deference to his politically superior position, while at the same time acknowledging her own status as worthy of his assistance. She calls her addressing Cromwell “bold”, and yet it is Lady Honor’s very boldness which has allowed her to create and maintain her alliances, and call upon them repeatedly because she understands her “worth”.

The letter thus epitomizes Honor’s awareness of her own social worth, an issue I elucidate in Chapter Two: she too is valuable because she will be able to do “[her] part” and provide “good will and service” to someone as important as Cromwell. As I noted in the Introduction, while Lady Honor’s initial influence may have been due to her own prestigious and influential family, and further enhanced by her marriage to Arthur Plantagenet, Viscount Lisle, it was through her unofficial status as the forceful “Lady Deputy” – and the letters substantiate this – that Lady Lisle was able to secure political power in her own right. Working from this unofficial position, her canny use of the epistle allowed her to create and sustain relationships that assisted her in her bid to secure her family’s upward mobility.

Moreover, the letter to Cromwell underscores Lady Lisle’s refusal to adhere strictly to the class and gender boundaries of her time. As I argue in Chapter One, and reinforce in Chapter Three, Lady Honor transgresses the confines of the mistress-servant boundary in order to create an alliance between herself and her servant John Husee to allow them to work together to palliate the effects of Lord Lisle’s typically imprudent decisions. Her relationship with Husee enables her to extend his duties from those of an upper-class servant to those that engage him as a political ally. In his letters

to Lady Lisle, Husee uses the rhetoric of patronage and of friendship to illustrate his commitment and devotion to his mistress, to become her confidant, and to act as her proxy at events, thereby extending her political reach beyond the confines of Calais. By traversing class and gender boundaries in this way, Lady Lisle is able to develop an unusual mistress-servant relationship that allows her to increase her authority.

Socio-political action in Lady Lisle's world, as I discussed in Chapter Two, was largely prompted by the notion of reciprocity and obligation. After the move to Calais, Lady Lisle used the epistle to create and maintain international networks based on ties of obligation. By examining a variety of rhetorical scripts, we saw how women manipulated the epistle to create alliances, and reinforce previous associations to complete their personal projects. The epistles, both to and from Lady Lisle, reinforce her ties with French aristocrats, with Court friends and kin, and illustrate how she was able to construct and maintain both new and old avenues of influence.

*The Lisle Letters* also offer evidence of how Lady Lisle negotiated with one of the key power figures of the Tudor era, Thomas Cromwell. These negotiations, taking place in the patriarchal domain of the Court, help Lady Honor to achieve economic security for herself and her family, though at some cost to herself. As I discuss in Chapter Three, in spite of a widespread climate of fear surrounding the Court, Lady Lisle defies gender expectations and negotiates with Cromwell for the betterment of her family, doing so even as her friends and relatives are interrogated, and in some cases executed. In my examination of Lady Lisle's letters, I demonstrate that she refutes official gender rules to secure her family's political and economic security. She negotiates directly with Cromwell, an exploit rarely granted to women, manages to settle her husband's annuity, her son's inheritance, and achieve some financial recompense for the loss of her jointure of Painswick.

*The Lisle Letters* demonstrate how a woman manoeuvring through patriarchal society could manipulate a genre such as the epistle in order to command influence. The traditional scholarly view of Tudor-era women like Lady Honor Lisle as merely disadvantaged, inferiors and victims, is at best incomplete, and at worst inaccurate. In practice, these women had both informal and formal power, and through a variety of



social and political manoeuvring, were able to be important political players. This project reconsiders the socio-political position of Tudor aristocratic women, and contends that by examining Lady Lisle's correspondence we can see how women manoeuvred in and around the various networks of power. *The Lisle Letters* are, in short, a source of information that allow us to access an early modern woman's voice, capabilities and personality, a vital supplement to the more commonly examined official historical record. This collection of letters is such a vast treasure trove that they merit a great deal more scholarly attention. Through them, we can see how the epistle illuminates the practical lives of women and thus provide an important counterpoint to purely theoretical understandings of Tudor society. More importantly, this project demonstrates that the epistle provides Tudor women with the ability to increase their influence in most avenues of their world.

## Afterword

The Lisle family's involvement with the King and Cromwell took a turn for the worse in May of 1540, when Lord Arthur was summoned to London, supposedly to discuss financial issues with the King. Unbeknownst to Lisle, he had been summoned on more nefarious grounds. He was seized by Henry's men and sent to the Tower on the charge of treason.<sup>179</sup> St Clare Byrne believes that his arrest was triggered by a number of circumstances: the religious developments in Calais; the treasonous activities of Cardinal Reginald Pole (the king's cousin and Lord Arthur's relative); and the power struggle between Cromwell and his conservative rivals (Vol. 6 #154). In reality, these events had little to do with Lord Arthur, except as an excuse for Henry to mark him as a scapegoat, and throw him in the Tower.

The French ambassador Marillac, upon hearing of these proceedings, wrote to Anne de Montmorency, wife of the Constable of France, on May 21<sup>st</sup> to inform her of Lord Lisle's crisis:

Two days ago, at ten o'clock at night, my lord Lisle, Deputy of Calais, uncle of this King, was led prisoner to the Tower. . . The cause thereof hath not yet been so certified unto me that I can write it for truth; but it is bruited that he is accused of having had secret intelligence with the Cardinal Pole who is his near relative, and of other practices to deliver up to him the town of Calais. Howsoever it maybe, the said Lord Lisle is in a very strait prison, and from the which none escape save by miracle.<sup>180</sup>

In the interim, Lady Honor and the family were placed under house arrest and, says Elis Gruffudd, "the girls were taken from her and put in prison in various places

<sup>179</sup> Lisle believed that he was going to London to discuss with the King the fortification of Arde, (part of Calais). All accounts suggest he had no idea that he was about to be imprisoned. I find it ironic that he should have been thus blindsided, given that this was the identical treatment he gave his wife when he sent her to negotiate with Cromwell about her jointure. See Vol. 6, #1672 and the epilogue.

<sup>180</sup> See Kaulek (184).

through the town” (139).<sup>181</sup> We know very little of what happened to the Lisles while they were imprisoned. Throughout Lord Arthur’s eighteen-month incarceration no letters are exchanged between them, and the chroniclers cease to write of the matter, their attention being taken up by other, more significant proceedings: Cromwell is executed and the King marries Katherine Howard.<sup>182</sup> The Lisles become yesterday’s news.

Eventually, in March 1542, Henry VIII pardoned his favourite uncle, and the Lisles reappear in the epistolary record. Alas, on the day of his pardon, Lord Lisle died in prison of a heart attack. Holinshed’s account states that

the King appointed his majesty’s secretary, to go unto him [Lord Lisle], and to deliver to him a ring, with a rich diamond, for a token from him, and to tell him to be of good cheer, for although in that so weighty a matter he would not have done less to him if he had been his own son, yet now upon thorough trial had, that it was manifestly proved that he was void of all offence, he was sorry that he had been occasioned so far to try his truth, and therefore willed him to be of good cheer and comfort, for he should find that he would make account of him as of his most true and faithful kinsman, and not only restore him to his former liberty but otherwise further be ready to pleasure him in what he could. Master Secretary set forth this message with such effectual words, as he was an eloquent and well-spoken man, that Lord Lisle took such immoderate joy thereof, that, his heart being oppressed therewith, he died that night following through too much rejoicing.<sup>183</sup>

Following Arthur’s death, Henry sent a letter to the Council in Calais ordering them to release Lady Lisle and her daughters, and to restore their jewels and clothing, but little else is known of the family.<sup>184</sup> We know that Lady Lisle, upon her release, returned to Devonshire and lived out her days in Tehidy, a property in Cornwall. This

<sup>181</sup> Vol. 6, p. 139; also see page 401 of abridged edition and the original account in Kaulek (184).

<sup>182</sup> Cromwell was arrested in the Council chamber at Westminster on June 10<sup>th</sup> by order of the King on the charge of heresy and “secretly working against the King’s purposes in religion” and executed July 28<sup>th</sup> (see *Abridged* 405). On the same day that Cromwell was executed Henry privately married Katherine Howard.

<sup>183</sup> See Holinshed (1583). As well see the account written by Francis Sandford (448).

<sup>184</sup> There are letters and notes in the *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England* (P.P.C.) and in the *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII*, showing Lady Lisle’s debts for her imprisonment being paid for, and which tell us that Lord Lisle’s funeral was paid for by special warrant, but there is almost nothing available to tell us what happened to the Lady Lisle and her family subsequently.

property was part of the original Basset-Beaumont inheritance that she had battled to save for her son John Basset from the unscrupulous Lord Daubeney. Significantly, her son bequeathed this land to his mother, a testament to their close relationship, and perhaps, a show of appreciation for all that she had done to preserve his inheritance.

Another stroke of fortune that befell Lady Lisle, one that particularly ties into her negotiations for her jointure of Painswick, is that she actually – eventually – made some money out of the transaction. It seems that, in spite of Cromwell's swearing that he wouldn't, almost immediately after receiving the property from Lady Honor in 1538, Cromwell sold it to Sir William Kingsley (in modern jargon, he "flipped" the property). Once Painswick was sold, the promised rents ceased, until, some twenty years after Lord Arthur's death, Lady Honor received a lump sum payment of £900 and a restoration of her annual rent of £120. The Kingsley's (the purchasers) may not have known of the rental provision, and it is feasible that the Kingsley heirs provided this payment to Lady Lisle because it was the right thing to do. Equally likely, however, knowing the determination and influence of Lady Honor, she took Kingsley's heirs to court. Although she had lost her battle with Cromwell, Lady Lisle eventually received justice through the 1556 legal proceedings. St. Clare Byrne writes – "How pleased John Husee would have been to know it" as he was an active agent and friend who attempted to facilitate Lady Honor in her bid to retain her jointure (Byrne, Abridged 413).

Although Lady Lisle did manage to save her son's inheritance, and secure her husband's annuity, she was unable to save her jointure. For us as readers, her letters illustrate that a woman, in an inferior position could, and did, negotiate with some of the highest powers of the land in order to assist her family. Lady Lisle was able to use her own agency to exert influence in her world and with those around her; she may not have won the battle, but she shows us how an aristocratic woman could and did fight against insurmountable forces for the issues to which she was committed to.

For the rest of the Lisle family too, there is little information, and on Lady Lisle's activities in the remaining years of her life, the official record is silent. We know she never remarried and that she lived for another twenty-four years after her husband's death, passing away quietly in 1566 in Tehidy.

John Husee, Lady Lisle's most-trusted servant, remained in Calais when the family was incarcerated and retained his position as a member of the Calais retinue. The official record does not provide many details, but we do learn that in 1544, during the war with France, he was in charge of supplying wagons with food and gunpowder. He passed away in 1548, having never married.

About Lady Honor's two daughters, again we have little news. Katherine Basset stayed with Lady Rutland until she was finally accepted into the household of Anne of Cleves. She never achieved the coveted position of Maid-of-Honour, but she did marry well (Henry Ashley) and their son became one of Queen Elizabeth's gentleman. The lovely Anne Basset retained her post as Maid-of-Honor throughout the tenures of Henry's last four wives—Jane Seymour, Anne of Cleves, Katherine Howard and Katharine Parr. She, like her stepfather Arthur Lisle, eventually received a lifetime annuity for her services to the King. In 1554, Anne married Walter Hungerford, the prestigious son of a Baron, a man twelve years her junior. The marriage was celebrated in Queen Mary's private chapel in Richmond, an indication of its importance. St Clare Byrne notes that "this was the kind of marriage that was expected to come of all the efforts the Lisles and Husee had put into obtaining her original place at Court" (Abridged 414).

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